The truth, unfiltered by rational argument: The multimodal construction of contemporary
political satire in *The Colbert Report*

By

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Abstract

This study investigates the ways in which complex multimodal contemporary political satire, exemplified in *The Colbert Report*, functions as meaningful socio-political commentary highlighting the various failings and shortcomings of satirical targets. ‘Soft news’ programming has gained increasing popularity as a unique discursive site combining formerly differentiated styles and forms of socio-political discussion and commentary. The growing cultural relevance of “soft news” programming deserves critical investigation as a form of socially positive semiotic activity. Using a combination of semantic functional methodologies, this study shows how systemic functional frameworks for analysing multimodal semiosis and semantic theories of script incongruity can be employed in the analysis of contemporary multimodal political satire. Going further, this study explains the ways in which “implied” satirical meaning and the illocutionary intent of political satire is retrievable from specific cohesive mechanisms represented in the lexico-grammar of the incongruous semantic scripts which create humour. An explanation of the various micro-semiotic humour instances and their combinatory illocutionary force exemplifies multimodal contemporary political satire as meaningful and ideologically infused socio-political commentary functioning as socially positive semiotic activity, highlighting the failings and shortcomings of satirical targets to breed socio-political awareness and influence ideological orientation. In this way *The Colbert Report* is a new and unique form of political satire utilizing intersemiotic mechanisms to provide commentary regarding the political and socio-cultural climate of the United States in a humorous fashion.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, a growing forum of socio-political debate has emerged in the form of “infotainment” which has been described as “the merging of the political-normative with the aesthetic-expressive and the increasing prevalence of political content in previously non-political spaces” (Baym, 2007, p.373). Shows like *The Daily Show with John Stewart* and Stephen Colbert’s, *The Colbert Report*, have become increasingly popular “soft news” programs blending traditional forms of news broadcasting with humorous socio-cultural commentary. Some have argued that the increasing prevalence of “soft news” programming threatens the democratic process by trivializing important socio-political issues and downplaying the importance of public affairs (Fallows, 1996; Kalb, 2001). However, others have suggested that “soft news” heightens the socio-political awareness of an inattentive public who would traditionally not follow hard news programming (Baum, 2002). Despite contestation between the two sides, recently viewership of “soft news” programs has grown exponentially. *The Daily Show with John Stewart* for instance has increased its audience by nearly double between 2001 and 2005 reaching over 1.3 million per night. The growing popularity of “soft news” programs like *The Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live*, may be attributable to a number of socio-cultural factors however; the recent eight year presidential term which has been characterised by increasingly controversial public policy and action has elicited new forums of public debate and discussion. The actions of President Bush and his administration have become the prime targets of contemporary political satire in the form of “soft news” programming.

During his Presidential term, George W. Bush experienced some of the most difficult situations in recent history. The catastrophic events of September 11th 2001 and Hurricane Katrina along with massive military efforts in the Middle East exemplify the problematic socio-political situations characterising Bush's presidency. While the policies and decisions of the Bush administration have been met with dwindling public support and growing contestation, the effects of their actions will be felt for decades to come. Above all, the profound, difficult and controversial socio-political situation in the United States has brought forth increasing public attention and concern regarding the actions of the governing body. The explicit praise and support for the Administration's actions by traditionally right wing news media like *Fox News* has been met with equally explicit condemnation in the form of political satire. Most importantly, an increasingly relevant forum of political discussion has emerged with its growing popularity and cultural impact suggesting the need for critical investigation.

The Daily Show with John Stewart and *The Colbert Report* have received increasing academic attention throughout the past six years. The growing cultural relevance exemplified by numerous prestigious awards including multiple Peabody awards for excellence in broadcasting and Emmy awards for both Stewart and Colbert, has fostered increasing awareness of "soft news" as an important component of the socio-political atmosphere. It has been suggested that;

Colbert's show, which, like The Daily Show before it, blends news and entertainment and politics and humor in unprecedented ways . . . has become a media phenomenon of sorts, an increasingly relevant site of political information and conversation in an environment marked by innovation and integration among formerly differentiated styles and arenas of public discourse" (Baym, 2007, p.359).

Furthermore, technological advancements in media broadcasting have enabled contemporary political satirists to create unique intersemiotic constructions characterising a new multimodal brand of political satire. While academics in critical discourse analysis, social semiotics and multimodality have conventionally focused on political discourse and new forms of intersemiotic meaning making, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and other forms of humorous political satire have not received any serious attention. The ideologically infused socio-political commentary characterising numerous “soft news” programs and their increasing cultural relevance would seem to be an enriching site for scholarship regarding ideology and language, intersemiotic meaning making, multimodal meaning making, resemiotization and a number of other socially situated communicative phenomenon, however, the various forms of humorous discursive constructions have been oddly omitted from contemporary work in systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis and systemic approaches to multimodal semiosis.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) refers to a body of research primarily concerned with the articulation of naturalized ideological structures inherent in language and discourse. Based on a foundation suggesting that language is a form of social action which is contextually and ideologically embedded, CDA researchers have attempted to “make more visible [the] opaque aspects of discourse” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258) through critical forms of linguistic analysis. Paramount in CDA’s theoretical foundation is Halliday’s (1978) work looking at “language as a social semiotic” along with the idea that “texts’ features could be systematically linked to those of their social and institutional contexts, as well as to the politics, ‘ideologies,’ or the worldviews that informed and shaped those contexts” (Iedema, 2001, p.31). In other words, language is

not a stratified code for creating predetermined sets of meanings but rather language is socially situated and contextually embedded with many meaning potentials. Endeavours in various approaches to critical discourse analysis gave impetus to an increasing acknowledgment of meaning making practices other than language.

A growing body of literature is emerging concerned with the multimodal meaning making resources which increasingly dominate our socio-cultural landscape. The term *Multimodality* refers to a body of research which is based in contemporary social semiotic theory and stems from Halliday's (1978) principles of *Language as Social Semiotic*. This rapidly growing field focuses on the socially situated multimodal meaning making practices of various institutions. The increasing prevalence of texts which rely on both language and visual representations to construct socially situated meaning has received a wealth of scholarship attempting to explicate this multimodal meaning and solidify a structural methodology for analysing multimodal texts (eg. Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Lemke, 2002; O'Toole, 1990, 1994; Thibault, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2005). While increasing scholarship has been highly diversified regarding the kinds of texts analysed, there have been very few formal investigations of humorous multimodal texts and no investigations concerned with multimodal political satire. This is unusual considering the increasing prevalence and popularity of contemporary political satire functioning as a culturally meaningful socio-political commentary regarding the political climate in the United States.

Humour has always been a pervasive form of socio-cultural argument used to criticize and ridicule social elites, institutions and the cultural climate (Baum, 2002; Baym, 2007; Smith, 1993; Mascha, 2008). Traditionally, the analysis of humour has been

the occupation of literary analysts concerned with explicating the socio-cultural significance of parody, allegory and satire. However, more recently, theoretical work in contemporary semantics and pragmatics has illuminated the possibility of taking a linguistically oriented approach to the analysis of humorous texts.

Since the first issue appeared in 1988, the *International Journal of Humor Research* (IJHS) has been instrumental in solidifying an international forum for humourological research by publishing a wealth of interdisciplinary scholarship both empirical and theoretical. The increasing popularity of the IJHR has signalled the widespread recognition of humorous discourse as an integral form of socio-cultural criticism and political discourse (Dhond, 1992; Smith, 1993; Mascha, 2008). Zijderveld (1983) goes even further in suggesting that “humor belongs to fundamental aspects of human life, comparable to say, religion and language” (p.9). More and more, humorous discourse is gaining recognition as a pervasive social force exemplifying a meaningful socio-cultural and political commentary.

It has been argued that humorous discourse “contains dense layers of meaning for its participants beyond the overt meanings of its language . . . humorous content often means more than what it says on the surface” (Fine, 1984, pp.85-86). These multiple meanings are the elements which underlie humorous discourse as meaningful and purposeful socio-cultural argumentation or critique. Multiple layers of meaning may be constructed in a humorous text regardless of length. In general, first, meanings are constructed regarding the general state of the world exemplified by the lexico-grammar of the text. In other words, the joke must be about something or someone and the narrative exposition must be interpretable to the receiver. Next, a new set of meaning is

instantiated at the end of the joke or punchline often signalled by atypical or incongruous information triggering a reinterpretation of the previous information. Finally, there are higher order meanings which instantiate information regarding the specific target of the joke which is retrievable only if the receiver has the appropriate cultural and situational knowledge to properly decode the text. This level of meaning has been described as the alluded meaning or the implied meaning. However, these meanings *are* retrievable from the lexico-grammar through homophoric reference. Often, singular lexical items or specific logico-semantic patterning homophorically reference other things, people or situations and the specific reference is retrievable if the receiver has the appropriate cultural or situational knowledge. Thus, while the meanings are said to be “alluded to”, the allusions are instantiated in the lexico-grammar.

The Colbert Report, which is the object of analysis in this thesis, utilizes complex intersemiotic patterning to create multiple layers of meaning resulting in a socio-cultural and political critique regarding the actions, ideologies and nature of various satirical targets. *The Colbert Report* carefully uses cohesive, conjunctive, logogenetic and intersemiotic mechanisms to construct a critical commentary highlighting the failings and shortcomings of multiple satirical targets. More specifically, atypical cohesive and intersemiotic mechanisms create semantic incongruity to create logogenetic discord and recalibrate the discursive trajectory of the semiotic construction. This results in the negative characterisation of the media in general, Presidential candidate John McCain as well as President Bush and his Administration. *The Colbert Report* exemplifies a complex satirical construction resulting from the implicit condemnation by the host Stephen Colbert, of the “Republican party he insists he supports” (Baym, 2007, p.359).

Chapter 2 outlines the semiotic, linguistic and humourological research which act as the foundation for the present study. In chapter 3, a thorough description is provided showing how methodological tools from systemic functional linguistics, multimodality and humourology enable the analysis of the complex intersemiotic patterning characterising the contemporary political satire of *The Colbert Report*. Chapter 3 also contextualizes *The Colbert Report* with a description of the two excerpts which are the objects of analysis in this thesis. Chapter 4 provides a thorough explication describing how intersemiotic, cohesive, conjunctive and logogenetic patterning create semantic incongruity in the construction of humour. In chapter 5, a more general discussion shows how incongruous semantic and semiotic patterning along with homophoric reference constructs a complex and humorous socio-cultural argument highlighting the failings and shortcomings of John McCain, President Bush and his Administration. Finally, concluding statements show the need for more critical investigations of contemporary multimodal satire which functions as socially positive semiotic activity solidifying the need for increasing positive discourse analysis (PDA).

There have only been two formal investigations of political satire as a meaningful and socially positive semiotic event (see Boesel, 2007; Hallett & Kaplan-Weigner, 2008) and building on these I hope to show how a combination of methodological tools can enable the analysis of multimodal humour, how contemporary political satire utilizes intersemiotic mechanisms to create humour through incongruity and how “soft news” programming characterised by *The Colbert Report* functions as meaningful socio-cultural commentary about the political climate in the United States. Hopefully, this thesis will

contribute to the groundwork for multimodal humour analysis and encourage the investigation of humour as a meaningful and pervasive element in our social world.

2 Literature Review

Over the past 40 years, a growing recognition regarding the importance of socially situated meaning making practices has emerged. Initiated by M.A.K. Halliday's (1973) *Explorations in the Functions of Language*, which approached linguistics in a semantic-functional manner for the first time, since then a number of academic fields investigate the diverse and socially situated meaning making practices which dominate and constitute our social world. While correlated with one another, social semiotics, systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis and multimodality, each approach socially situated meaning making in slightly different ways. Halliday's tri-functional conception of language as a social semiotic, as applied and extended by the Critical Linguistics group at East Anglia and the application of Halliday's systemic functional framework in the analysis of multimodal texts provide important insights into socially situated meaning making. These allied approaches add insights into the multimodal constructions of our culture and because of this an amalgamation of the various perspectives is integral in the analysis of contemporary political satire. Each offers important insights into the complex intersemiotic meaning making that increasingly dominates our cultural landscape.

This chapter will explain how contemporary social semiotic research distinguishes itself from traditional semiotics by suggesting that context and situation are paramount in any semiotic event. Next, I will look at Halliday's systemic functional framework as "a means to ground . . . social critique [with] a close attention to the grammar of language" (Iedema, 2003, p.30) and as a tool for the analysis of ideology in discourse. Going further, I will look at the political orientation of critical discourse analysis as well as the application of the systemic functional frameworks to multimodal texts. Finally, a discussion of the contemporary humourological research will show how semantic

theories of incongruity have enabled the analysis of humour. The discussion and application of these different perspectives allow for the triangulation of theory and ensure a complete analytical methodology.

The Colbert Report is a complex social semiotic event utilizing multiple mediums to construct meaning. Furthermore, as political satire, the semiotic event is ideologically infused and constructs a socio-cultural argument through intersemiotic means. Thus, systemic functional frameworks for both linguistic and visual semiosis are integral in the analysis of the semiotic event. However, “the notable absence of any serious provision for humorous discourse across the systemic functional work, and for that matter across the critical discourse analysis work that draws on functional linguistics”(Simpson, 2003, p.75), requires a discussion of contemporary humourology to show how semantic incongruity theories can be used in conjunction with the semantic foundations of systemic functional frameworks. The fields of social semiotics, systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis, multimodality and humourology all provide important insights into the socially situated meaning making of contemporary political satire and will therefore be integrated into an analytical model for the analysis of *The Colbert Report*.

2.1 Social Semiotics

Much contemporary work in discourse analysis finds its roots in social semiotic theory.

Social semiotics is a synthesized approach to the systematic investigation of various forms of social meaning making and social action (Halliday, 1978; Lemke, 1990).

Historically, semiotics refers to the study of symbols and signs and the ways in which they are used to communicate meaning. Originally, scholars were primarily concerned

with scientifically grounding the study of language through the investigation of symbolic meaning and sign attribution (de Saussure, 1915; Hjelmslev, 1943). Early semiotic research (often referred to as semiology), concerned itself with understanding the various systems of signs and symbols and the ways in which they were used to communicate meaning. Traditionally, the signifier and the signified were the basic units of semiotic investigations and ‘signs’ were suggested to be the union of the two (Van Leeuwen, 2005). For example, the ‘sign’ of a smiling face, which would be signified through a slight squinting of the eyes and raising the corners of the mouth would signify happiness or contentment. Similarly, a red octagon on the side of the street signifies stop. Signs function as the fundamental elements in the study of semiology.

Social semiotics refers to a social theory of semiotic research which distinguishes itself from previous work in formal semiotics. As mentioned, formal semiotics is primarily concerned with the investigation and understanding of symbol and sign systems themselves, whereas, social semiotics goes further in attempting to understand the ways in which these symbols and signs are used to construct social realities. Thus, social semiotics attempts to combine the study of “meaning-making behaviour (talking, writing, reasoning, drawing, gesturing, etc.), with the study of society” (Lemke, 1990, p.183). Essentially, social semiotics is the study of social meaning making practices. It is concerned with how meanings are made, how meaning is understood and the social elements of meaning construction.

Contemporary social semiotic research extends the concepts of the signifier and signified by suggesting that the meaning of a sign is not predetermined and rather that society and particular situations instantiate meanings in signs. Signs are not inherently

meaningful in any particular way, society instantiates meanings through manifestation and context is paramount. For instance, a man standing with arms flailing overhead could mean a number of different things depending on the particular context of the situation. If standing beside an accident of sorts this could be a call for immediate assistance. If standing on the beach at a popular vacation spot it could signify an invitation to join his company. Moreover, the meaning of particular signs can change through their recurrent manifestations in various situations. Thus, the meaning of any particular sign is meaningful only insofar as the perceiver recognizes the significance of the sign (Van Leeuwen, 2005).

Breaking away from the basic elements of signifier and signified, the term resource has been accepted in social semiotics to describe any observable meaning carrying stimulus. Resources are all the various meaning making objects or artefacts that are used in a social domain to communicate. Most importantly, “semiotic resources are not restricted to speech and writing and picture making” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.4), and can include things like, hand gestures, eye movement, clothing, stance, etc. Any physical manifestation or articulation can carry with it social and cultural meaning regardless of how insignificant it might seem. As Van Leeuwen (2005) describes, an activity as seemingly mundane as walking is laden with social and cultural meaning. Members of different institutions like the army, or the church walk in specific ways which convey particular meanings thus, “different ways of walking can seduce, threaten, impress and much more” (p.4). The term resource is also preferred because it presupposes the concept of semiotic potential.

All semiotic resources (signifiers) have a *theoretical* semiotic potential ascribed by all previous uses of that resource and all possible uses. In other words, the inexhaustible meaning potentials of any observable entity would constitute its *theoretical* semiotic potential. Semiotic resources also have contextually specific *actual* semiotic potential which is understood as the particular meanings intended in a specific situation (Van Leeuwen, 2005). For instance, the pictorial representation of a flame has the semiotic potential of hope, solidarity, danger or flammability, realized from previous instantiations of the symbolic representation in particular situations. It could also potentially mean light, hot or good depending on its use in any particular forum. These possible meanings would constitute *theoretical* semiotic potential. However, the picture of a flame located on the bottom of an aerosol can or the bottom of particular chemical liquids has the *actual* semiotic potential of “flammable” based on past uses of the sign that are “known to and considered relevant to the users” (Van Leeuwen, 2005, p.4). Therefore, while artefacts or any other observable stimuli may have innumerable theoretical semiotic potentials, actual semiotic potential is decipherable through specific relation of the stimuli to its context and situation. In other words, context and situation are paramount in the interpretation of social semiotic events.

Semiotic “potential” is closely related to the term “affordance” coming from the work of Gibson (1979) as cited in Van Leeuwen (2005). As explained in Van Leeuwen (2005), “affordances” are the possible uses of any given object based on their observable properties. Van Leeuwen (2005) explains that “different observers might notice different affordances, depending on their needs and interests and on the specifics of the situation at hand” (p.4-5), thus the affordances of any given object are a product of subjective and

objective influences. Affordances even include meanings which have not yet been instantiated through use nor even conceived in any way. Thus, affordances are the inexhaustible possibilities of theoretical semiotic potential that any one object may have. The concept of affordance is similar in many respects to Halliday's "meaning potential" of linguistic signifiers. Meaning potentials are the various possible semantic interpretations of a particular linguistic signifier based on the signifier's previous manifestations. Halliday (1978) describes meaning potential as "the paradigmatic range of semantic choice that is present in the system, and to which the members of a culture have access in their language" (p.109). Affordance differs insofar as the concept allows for possible meanings based not only in past manifestation but also in the inexhaustible semiotic potential of any resource.

As mentioned earlier, any meaning carrying stimulus or object can be considered a semiotic resource. Semiotic resources can come in many different forms and their meanings are socially constructed which explains why a taxonomy of semiotic resources and their potential affordances is not a practical conception. However, basic semiotic systems are made up of resources of a similar nature and function as relatively closed systems with straightforward meaning realizations. All semiotic systems consist of a "finite set of choices or oppositions" (Eggins, 2004, p. 19) and realization of meaning is a direct result of these choices and oppositions. One example of a simple semiotic system is the use of coloured flags at a race track. In professional stock car racing there is a semiotic system of flags used to impart specific information. There are eight flags in the system and each flag has an associated meaning based on its colour and design. The flags function as a sign system by encoding which action should be performed by the driver.

The content of the green flag encodes the expression “begin the race” whereas the black and white checkered flag expresses that the “race is over”. Any semiotic system exists as the fusion of content and expression or signifier and signified. Moreover, the system functions based on the fact that the green flag does not realize the expression “race is over” and the checkered flag does not express “start the race”. However, there is no natural connection between the checkered flag and “race is over”, the fusion of signifier and signified has been established based on social recognition. If desired, the content of each flag could be re-established to express different meanings.

A general discussion of social semiotics should include an examination of the complex semiotic resource employed in nearly all aspects of human life to accomplish social action, communication and essentially all social behaviour. In the most basic sense, we can look at any system of language as a semiotic resource for the communication of some particular meaning. Discourse, which constitutes socially meaningful texts or utterances, is not an isolated occurrence decipherable through recognition of a specific code. Language occurs in meaningful social situations to accomplish significant actions. As Halliday (1978) suggests, the meanings are nearly inseparable from the social systems in which the exchange occurs and thus, the meanings essentially are the social system and “the social system is interpretable as a semiotic system” (p. 141).

The flags at a race track earlier described function as a two tiered closed semiotic system. Each expression of a particular coloured flag is realized by one specific meaning. Similarly, language is a semiotic system with particular expressions realizing specific meanings; however, language operates as a three tiered system where sounds realize words which realize meanings. Despite variability in the ways in which expressions

realize certain content in any given semiotic system, all systems are similar in that they all express three simultaneous strands of meaning. M.A.K. Halliday, in the seminal collection *Language as social semiotic* (1978) identifies the three specific structural linguistic properties of a semiotic situation which he calls field, tenor and mode.

Field is used to encompass what is actually going on in any semiotic situation. This includes all the material manipulations and references to the immediate environment, the particular subject matter of the immediate exchange or situation. The field is essentially the type of action that is occurring, where it is, who is involved and what is happening. Tenor refers specifically to the role structures and role relationships between the people in the situation. Halliday (1978) suggests that there are two orders of role relations. First order roles, which are defined without specific reference to language and relate to positions within the general social order and second order roles which are specifically represented through language like the questioner or the demander. In other words, second order roles are realized through lexico-grammar in relation to the exchange of information. Mode describes the symbolic forms of the interaction which include medium, organization and through what means the social situation occurs. For example, there may be multiple modes of communication including speech, writing and visual representation. The three structural properties of language as a semiotic system will be expanded upon later in the discussion of the metafunctional properties of visual and linguistic semiotic modes and how they relate to the semiotic strata.

Based in a socio-semiotic theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics is a functional semantic theory of language developed by M.A.K Halliday and his contemporaries as a descriptive grammar for understanding language as a semiotic resource used to construct

meaning. Halliday's most notable contribution in developing a detailed functional grammar for the English language is showing how three different strands of meaning function simultaneously in any clausal structure. Halliday's description of the functional properties of the English language have been extrapolated and expanded upon in many works exploring metafunctional grammar and the relationships between language, context and culture (eg. Halliday & Hasan 1985, Thompson 2004, Martin et al. 1997, Butt et al. 2001, Martin & Rose 2003). A more thorough discussion of Halliday's tri-functional conception of meaning and most importantly his characterization of language as a social semiotic resource will enable a broader understanding of the complex semiotic meaning making accomplished through discourse.

2.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics

To better understand the meaning making potential of the English language we must thoroughly examine how lexico-grammatical choices are meaningful. Halliday & Matthiessen (2004) explain that "a language is a resource for making meaning, and meaning resides in systemic patterns of choice" (p.23). The "system network" of language is made up of lexico-grammatical possibilities. The producer of a text selectively and meaningfully makes a series of choices about how to construe experience or communicate their message. Most importantly, the lexico-grammatical choices which become instantiated in text are made in opposition to other possibilities. As previously described, flags at a racetrack function primarily because one flag carries meaning through explicit opposition. In language, the semantic content of the phrase "Get out of here" can be expressed in a number of different ways. One might say, "Go stand in the hall", "Can you please get up and stand in the hall", "Get out of this classroom

immediately”, “Get out” or “Exit this classroom immediately and go stand outside of the door” etc. If there were an unruly student disrupting the classroom, each of these utterances might have the same meaning depending on the specifics of the situation. However, the purposeful choice of one lexico-grammatical construction is made in opposition of multiple others and the choice is not arbitrary. Each variation of the phrase “Go stand in the hall” may realize the same action but the producer’s choice of expression as a command, statement or question, and the specific logico-semantic choices encode slightly different functional meaning.

Paramount in systemic theory is that language is a “system network” and not an “inventory of structures”. Any system of language enables the user to communicate through a series of choices and these choices are instantiated in a text. As Halliday & Matthiessen explain (2004), “when people speak or write, they produce text. The term ‘text’ refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language” (p.3). Halliday’s functional approach to the English language focuses on text as the object of inquiry but also on text as an instrument for social meaning making. In other words, a text constitutes an object in that it characterizes a set of choices made by the producer which are instantiated in the grammar which realizes the functions it is designed to serve in that situation. In addition, a text is an instrument used to convey meaning and construe experience for some particular reason. These two perspectives complement one another and “we cannot explain why a text means what it does, with all the various readings and values that may be given to it, except by relating it to the linguistic system as a whole” (p.3). Thus, the particular choices instantiated in the

lexico-grammar of a text function as the constituent parts which collaboratively operate as an instrument in socially situated and meaningful action.

This concept of functionality underlies every aspect of systemic theory. Halliday's Tri-functional conception of linguistic meaning making and the descriptive grammar he developed help explain not only the lexico-grammatical patterning of a specific text but also how that patterning is related to the function of the text as related to the semiotic situation. Paramount in systemic theory is how language is organized as a system network with various levels. A closer look at the paradigmatic order of language as a system of choice help us better understand how grammatical construction and choices in lexico-grammar realize semantic potential which account for the actual semiotic potential of the linguistic event.

If we take the semiotic meaning of any linguistic situation we can move back to see how the overall meaning is a result of the component parts. The realization of semiotic meaning is a direct result of the semantic meanings and contextual situatedness of the event. The semantic meaning is a direct result of the logico-semantic patterning instantiated in the lexico-grammar. In other words, the specific grammatical choices realize particular semantic meanings correlated and constituted by the context of the event which then account for the actual choices from the semiotic potential of the situation. Thus, in order to explain what a text does in terms of semiotic meaning, we must investigate how the text is constructed in its component parts and Halliday's descriptive grammar helps describe structural choices in terms of semantic function.

Systemic linguistics is thus a functional-semantic understanding of language use suggesting that meaning making practices are essentially social phenomenon realized

as semiotic practices. Furthermore, any social situation has three structural properties: identified as field, tenor and mode. Semantically, language constructs three simultaneous strands of meaning which Halliday calls the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions realized lexico-grammatically through transitivity, clause complex, mood and theme. Thus, any clause construction realizes three simultaneous meanings; meaning about the “real world”, meaning about the speaker/writer’s relationship with the receiver and attitude towards the content, and meaning regarding the organization and construction of any piece of writing or speech. A more thorough examination of Halliday’s descriptive grammar and the constituent parts of the metafunctions is provided in the methodology section.

Systemic theory also describes the ways in which cohesive resources collaboratively function to continually recalibrate the discursive trajectory of a text creating lexical patterns: this is called logogenesis. As a text unfolds, the individual meanings expressed in the lexico-grammar culminate to create longitudinal logico-semantic patterns. In other words, the metafunctional meanings created within an unproblematic text, interrelate and have a particular bearing on the meanings previously instantiated and the rest of the text. In this way, the individual components of a text hang together. For instance, a text describing the desirable qualities of a new museum might discuss location, architecture and exhibits. Throughout the unfolding text, the meanings expressed in any given sentence, function as parts of a continuously constructed whole. Textual patterns exemplified by cohesion and logico-semantic relationships create strands of meaning that run through the text to construct a coherent picture. These textual patterns are collectively known as logogenetic patterns describing the ways in which a

text continuously recalibrates discursive trajectory in the construction of complex meanings.

Using systemic functional theory as an analytic tool allows linguists to systematically investigate social meaning-making practices through the analysis of lexico-grammatical patterning. Systemic functional linguistics is instrumental in research regarding education, politics, discrimination, persuasion, manipulation and various other forms of social discursive practices. SFL is one of the major theoretical foundations dominating approaches to contemporary discourse analysis over the past 35 years. One such approach, developed in Britain in the 1970's (Fowler et al., 1979, Kress & Hodge, 1979) which is closely related to the systemic linguistic theory developed by Halliday (1978; 1985) is called "critical linguistics". Early work in critical linguistics by scholars working at the University of East Anglia sought to investigate the ways in which power and ideology are manifested in language use. This new direction of critical analysis was instrumental in the formation of a new field of research collectively known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

The name critical discourse analysis refers to a body of work "fundamentally concerned with analysing the opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 2001, p.2). In other words, CDA attempts to expose social inequity as expressed through naturalized discursive practices of dominant social groups. Over time, ideological power structures have become naturalized in the discursive practices of social elites resulting in an obscuring of meanings through conventionalized form. Thus, the ideologies of powerful

groups are naturalized and instantiated in their discursive practices. As suggested in Wodak (2001), CDA attempts to critically investigate the discursive practices of dominant social groups in an attempt to expose social inequity instantiated through language as a “medium of domination and social force” (Habermas, 1977, p.259).

The idea that language does ideological work is at the heart of critical discourse analysis with a wealth of scholarship attempting to solidify the concept of ideology and more specifically, how it functions in language use. The most notable contribution comes from John Thompson (1984) who suggests that;

to study ideology is, in some part and in some way, to study language in the social world. It is to study the ways in which language is used in everyday social life, from the most mundane encounter between friends and family members to the most privileged forums of political debate. It is to study the ways in which the multifarious uses of language intersect with power, nourishing it, sustaining it, enacting it . . . To explore the interrelations between language and ideology is to turn away from the analysis of well-formed sentences or systems of signs, focusing instead on the ways in which expressions serve as a means of action and interaction, a medium through which history is produced and society reproduced. The theory of ideology invites us to see that language is not simply a structure which can be employed for communication or entertainment, but a social-historical phenomenon which is embroiled in human conflict (p.2)

Ideology can be understood as a “systematic body of ideas” (Hodge & Kress, 1993, p.6) organized around a particular world view. An ideology can have a religious, moral or political orientation but is essentially an organized conceptual structure exemplifying ones particular view of the social world. Ideologies embody ethical and moral belief systems and function as the foundation for social communication or action. More specifically, ideology for CDA is a major element in the maintaining of unequal social

power relations; thus critical discourse analysis aim to “demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies” (Wodak, 2001, p.10).

Critical discourse analysts are explicitly forthright concerning their purpose to expose the social inequity naturalized in the discursive practices of powerful elites. Racism is a popular area of interest with CDA researchers investigating many different facets concerning race relations. Work has been focused on anti-Semitic discourse and implicit racism (Wodak & Matouschek, 1993) using discourse-historical approaches. Researchers have also investigated the representation of the other and agency in popular British newspapers (Trew, 1979/1990). The “othering” of certain ethnic groups in the popular media has also been exemplified in the analysis of particular Australian reports concerning Vietnamese immigrants (Teo, 2000). A number of further studies have investigated the ways in which specific lexico-grammatical choices function to construe certain groups of people unfavourably through generalization, agency and thematization.

Political discourse has also received a great deal of attention concerning the rhetoric of political speeches and the discourse of war. Many researchers have looked at the ways in which political discourse resembles technocratic discourse (Lemke, 1995; Mckenna & Wadell, 2006) wherein the world is represented in a particular way, thus influencing the receiver the adopt this specific view. Moreover, the lexico-grammatical patterns present the discourse as objective truth without question. Mckenna & Waddell (2006) have shown how this technologizing of political discourse can function to “justify inhumane practices” (p.225) through “classifying people and actions, creating procedures and reducing unpleasantness” (p.226”). The technologizing of political discourse also

functions to remove humanness through the disruption of agency resulting in the treatment of people as technical procedures.

The representation of the “other” has also been exemplified in work investigating political discourse and the categorization of the enemy through ideational patterns in transitivity. Butt, Lukin & Matthiessen (2004) have shown how the enemy is construed as the actor of negative actions through material process clauses. In this case, the enemy is continuously represented as killing, repressing and brutalizing whereas the “response to terrorism is largely construed in indirect and abstract terms” (Butt et al., 2004, p.273) which are typically neutral or positively evaluated actions. This polarization results in the categorization of the enemy as negative and harmful while the United States in this case is characterized as positive and noble. As stated in Butt et al. (2004) “there are many ways to construe any set of events” (p.273) and the meaningful lexico-grammatical choices function to explicitly construct an “us and them” dichotomy where “us” is categorized as “good” and “them” as “bad”. Van Dijk (2006) suggests that this “positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation” (p.373) is a popular manipulative strategy functioning to polarize ideologies.

The wealth of scholarship investigating the powerful ideological structures inherent in various forms of political discourse has sought to expose the manipulative or dominating characteristics in an effort to effect some change. In other words, exposing the manipulation and domination is designed to breed awareness of the inequity laden in dominant discourses and in turn make positive change result. Similarly, political satire functions to expose the manipulative practices and unreasonable actions of various political elites. However, despite correlating moral and ethical orientations, political

satire has not drawn the attention of critical discourse analysis. Political satire essentially turns the dominant discourses on themselves in an attempt to expose the particular failings of political elites. In this way, political satire is heavily laden with explicit ideological orientations and constructs powerful socio-cultural arguments to affect change in the political and social ideologies of its audience. Contemporary forms of political satire, however, instantiate ideologically infused socio-cultural arguments with multiple mediums of communication. Thus, contemporary satirists do not simply turn dominant discourses on themselves but rather turn the dominant semiotic practices of socio-political elites on themselves in an attempt to ridicule and scorn. Growing recognition of the complex semiotic practices that increasingly dominate our cultural landscape has led to a new field of research extending both CDA and systemic functional frameworks in the analysis of multiple medium texts.

2.4 Multimodality

As critical discourse analysis became increasingly popular, a number of researchers in the field recognized the growing production of multimodal texts in which visual representations and compositions accompanied conventional text. While social semiotics, as previously discussed, had gained increasing attention, no systematic theory of visual analysis had been proposed. As early as the 1990's, a number of academics, well versed in critical discourse analysis and systemic functional analysis, began theorizing and publishing work proposing the possibility of a systemic form of visual analysis stemming from Halliday's (1978) discussion of the three structural properties of any semiotic system. Scholars like O'Toole (1990, 1994), Kress & Van Leeuwen (1996, 2001), Thibault (2000), Iedema (2000), Van Leeuwen (2005) and Lemke (2002) theorized,

developed and continue to develop analytical strategies to employ in the analysis of complex multimodal texts. Based in social semiotic theory and stemming from Halliday's (1978) discussion of language as a social semiotic, multimodal analysis and research has become an important new field in the study of human communication and interaction.

The prevalence of textual manifestations incorporating both visual and linguistic meaning making practices created the impetus for the analysis of multimodal texts. While not a new form of meaning-making, multimodal texts have increasingly come to dominate the sphere of social communication. As explained by Iedema (2003), "our semiotic landscape is becoming more and more populated with complex social and cultural discourse practices" (p. 33), wherein linguistic analysis alone is unable to account for the semiotic potential of a given text. The increasing popularity and dissemination of television, the internet and other media sources require a semiotic theory able to account for the multitude of modalities constructing the complex semiotic realizations dominating our socio-cultural landscape.

Initial endeavours to analyse multimodal works with a systemic functional approach began with Van Leeuwen's (1984) study of sound and music. Around the same time, other researchers began applying systemic functional frameworks to visual constructions (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996) and to visual art and sculptures (O'Toole, 1990). In 1990, the first issue of *Social Semiotics* was published and many of the articles focused on exploring the ways in which socially oriented linguistics could be applied to the analysis of visual representation. These attempts to understand socially situated multimodal semiosis have grown into an increasingly important theoretical foundation for the analysis of multiple modalities.

The field is concerned with the analysis of visual communication as a social semiotic in all varying forms. Stemming from and expanding on a systemic functional foundation, multimodal research suggests that visual representation as a form of communication also creates three simultaneous strands of meaning. Different researchers use different names to identify the three strands of meaning, however, the semiotic information they construe is the same. The first strand of meaning correlates with Halliday's ideational metafunction and has been called presentational or representational meaning. This refers to the meanings "which present some state of affairs" (Lemke, 2002, p.304) in terms of processes, participants, relations, events and circumstances. Essentially these meanings present who is doing what to whom or what is generally occurring in the representation. Similar to Halliday's interpersonal metafunction, modal or orientational meanings, "indicate to us what is happening in the communicative relationship and what stance its participants may have to each other and to the presentational content" (Lemke, 2002, p.304). The compositional or organizational meanings correlate with the textual metafunction and refer to the meanings construed through the particular ways in which the visual is constructed. The background, framing and salience of specific people and objects are pertinent in the construction of compositional or organization meaning.

Similar to the theoretical underpinnings of critical discourse analysis, multimodal investigations often seek to understand the complex ideological work visual semiosis accomplishes (Chouliaraki, 2006; Bowcher, 2007; Lock 2003). Like the purposeful composition of lexico-grammar, visual constructions involve purposeful choices which function to construe particular meanings. The specific presentational, orientational and organizational meanings constructed similarly depict an event or entity in a specific way.

As previously discussed, any event or occurrence can be construed in a number of different ways and thus, the choice of specific representation is a meaningful action. For instance, Wendy Bowcher's (2007) investigation of ideational intersemiotic complementarity in an Australian sports magazine explicates the ways in which "the text points to a particular view of 'good guys' and 'bad guys' and reflects an ideology of masculinity that adheres to established hegemonic masculinity in western society" (p.239).

Terry D. Royce (2007) has also investigated the ways in which "visual and verbal modes of communication, within the boundaries of a single text, complement each other in the ways that they project meaning" (p.63). The study explains how a pictorial representation and associated graphs correspond with the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings instantiated in the linguistic text of an article in *The Economist Newspaper*. Royce claims that "visual and verbal modes co-occurring in page-based multimodal text complement each other semantically to produce a single textual phenomenon" (p.103). The article clearly describes how systemic functional frameworks can help explain how semiotic systems interact within a single page-based text; however, there have been few formal investigation (to my knowledge) of how semiotic systems interact in moving real-time semiosis and the effect of the interaction. Moreover, there has been sparse research in the field of multimodality on the moving image in general.

The exception is Lilie Chouliaraki who has been extremely instrumental in the analysis of *moving images* pertaining to atrocity and war. Chouliaraki's (2004) article "Watching 11 September: the politics of pity" suggests that television coverage of September 11th helped shape moral obligation in the public through negotiating spectator

proximity resulting in the development of ethical and action oriented dispositions.

Viewing the seemingly objective rendering of the event and through engagement in the potential suffering, the spectator is inadvertently predisposed to support retaliatory efforts. This televisual mediation legitimizes the schematic rendering of the other as void of humanity, thereby, further polarizing and solidifying negative-other ideologies. She suggests that the ways in which spectators engage in multiple truths whereby our knowledge of major events are “truth effects” shaped by the specific media coverage we are exposed to. Most importantly, Chouliaraki (2005) describes the ways in which media practices can manage to take sides over a controversy without violating principles of objectivity.

The discursive practices and media discourse “on distant suffering . . . operates as a strategy of power in so far as it selectively offers the option of emotional and practical engagement with certain sufferers and leaves others outside the scope of such engagement, thereby reproducing hierarchies of place and human life” (Chouliaraki, 2006, p.157). Chouliaraki’s work exemplifies the ways in which legitimate democratic ideals of broadcasting are laden with naturalized power structures instantiating ideologies through specific semiotic choices. While not as explicitly cited as critical discourse analysis, a large amount of politically oriented multimodal investigations seek to expose or make opaque the naturalized inequity and power infused in social semiotic representations or constructions. In this way, multimodal analyses of politically oriented semiosis correlates with what Martin (2004) calls CDA *realis* which is a deconstructive form of critical analysis aiming to expose inequity, manipulation and power as manifest in social semiotic constructions. He calls this the deconstructive form because the

analysis is concerned with breaking apart language to show the negative social actions accomplished without suggestions or proposals to rectify the situation. In other words, it is an analysis to describe the problems without an offer of solution.

The vast majority of Critical Discourse Analysis, as described by Martin (2004), “is concerned with exposing language and attendant semiosis in the service of power” (p.2). Martin (2004) describes this as CDA *realis*, and suggests that it is “the deconstructive face of CDA” (p.2). He also describes CDA *irrealis* which he suggests is the other face which is primarily concerned with the discourses which function as constructive or socially beneficial. He calls this other side of CDA, Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) because it seeks to understand the discursive practices of social actions which have positive ramifications and that can effect change. He argues that “we need a complementary focus on community, taking into account how people get together and make room for themselves in the world – in ways that redistribute power without necessarily struggling against it” (pp.6-7). This argument for constructive research of progressive accounts of social action describes how researchers can understand how change happens for the better. Martin (2004) claims that “deconstruction is helpful, but not enough on its own” (p.7), therefore, “we need to move beyond a preoccupation with demonology, beyond a singular focus on semiosis in the service of abusive power – and reconsider power communally as well, as it circulates through communities, as they re-align around values, and renovate discourses that enact a better world” (p.24).

Humour and more specifically, political humour has been an instrument of socio-political action for many years. In a diversity of forms, political humour takes aim at the ills and shortcomings of both society and its political figure heads in an attempt to expose

truth and highlight incompetency in governing bodies. The analysis of political satire would thus constitute PDA by enabling the understanding of how discourse can affect positive change.

2.5 Political Humour

Historically, political humour has been a pervasive force in passive revolution against social inequity and domination (Smith, 1993; Whitfield 1988; Mascha, 2008; Dhond; 1992). Whether aggressive, parodic or satirical, ideologically infused political humour has been used as a subversive method to expose the inadequacies or injustices of heads of states, political systems and oppressive regimes (Mascha, 2008). Although many forms of humour are playful and good spirited, political humour, while enjoyable, functions as serious rhetorical action to ridicule in an attempt to discredit or affect ideological orientation. In this way, “meaningful satirical discourse . . . mocks the existing rule and degrades the dominant or ascendant ‘hegemonic’ project” (Mascha, 2008, p.70) functioning as a cultural critique of social institutions. However, political satire is often subversive and critical in an implicit way meaning the socio-cultural argument or critique is not as explicitly signalled as other forms of political humour. Moreover, meaningful political humour has been described as highbrow humour in that understanding and appreciation requires specific cultural knowledge.

The understanding and appreciation of meaningful political satire requires the recognition of complex and specific forms of homophoric reference. Homophoric reference is a cohesive resource whereby receivers retrieve a referent item “from the shared context of culture” (Eggins, 2004, p.34). However, the comprehension of specific forms of homophoric reference laden in political satire requires a specific form of cultural

knowledge. As cited in Kuipers (2006), Bourdieu (1984) suggests that “the appreciation of specific objects requires specific knowledge or ‘capital’” (p.361). Regarding political satire, this type of knowledge or capital refers to the contextual background knowledge of which the discourse relates. For instance, a humorous discursive commentary regarding the apparent incompetency of the Bush Administration in the United States requires a specific form of cultural capital in the form of knowledge about policies, practices and legislation. However, the encoding/ decoding model of Stuart Hall (1980) as cited in Kuipers (2006) suggests that “different forms of cultural knowledge may lead to different ‘decodings’ of the same thing, each gratifying in their own way” (p.361). This suggests that discursive constructions may result in gratifying humour for a number of reasons; however, political satire only functions as a serious cultural critique wherein the receiver recognizes the illocutionary intent by having a specific cultural capital (discussed below). The different possible decodings of the same humorous construction are best described in terms of taste hierarchies (Kuipers, 2006).

Stemming from Bourdieu’s (1984) work describing differences of taste amongst the upper, middle and workings classes in France, Giseline Kuipers (2006) describes differences in comedic tastes as a form of cultural capital or knowledge. She outlines the distinction in the following:

Taste . . . has to be understood not only as a pattern of preference and aversion, but as a form of cultural knowledge. This cultural knowledge is crucial in the perpetuation of taste hierarchies. Knowledge always precedes appreciation: you have to be aware of something in order to like, hate or be indifferent to it. But appreciation also requires the knowledge to decode something: to interpret shows, to recognize genres, to make meaningful taste judgements. To enjoy television comedy, a significant amount of knowledge is needed . . . the nature, as well as the amount, of such knowledge varies between social groups. (p.360)

Most importantly, we must recognize the *differences* in cultural knowledge which enable the appropriate decoding of comedic stimuli. The difference in cultural knowledge or capital bears little on the quality of the humour, but bears heavily on the receiver's ability to recognize, appreciate and understand the illocutionary intent of the comedy. Thus, all humour is heavily socially and contextually situated due to the different forms of cultural knowledge necessary to decode, process and appreciate. With this in mind, we can look at how humour is used as a meaningful rhetorical action in social critique, cultural argument and political action.

2.6 Humour Uptake

The concept of rhetorical action is employed to describe the ways in which language does things. Philosopher John Austin (1975) in his book, *How to Do Things with Words*, describes the ways in which words not only mean things but also do things. For instance, even the briefest exclamation of “yes” after a sports team scores functions to express contentment or excitement about the situation. In this way, all utterances do things and he describes an utterance that does something, if only to express a particular state of affairs, as a speech act. Furthering the concept, Austin describes what he calls “felicity” conditions which represent the circumstances that must be met for a speech act to succeed. A common example is the pronouncement binding marriage. The statement, “I now pronounce you man and wife” only functions as an act solidifying union if said by a clergy member or judiciary with the appropriate jurisdiction to make such a statement binding. If the statement was uttered by a construction worker reciting lyrics from his favourite song, the speech act would take on very different qualities.

There are three levels at which all speech acts operate. There is the locutionary act, which describes the actual words uttered in any speech act. Second, the illocutionary act, which refers to the specific act the utterer intends the hearer to understand or recognize. Finally, the perlocutionary effect accounts for how the speech act is taken up, or how the specific act was understood by the receiver. This theoretical description of speech acts and their uptake is particularly important when discussing the decoding and appreciation of humorous speech acts in that meaningful rhetorical action is only accomplished when the receiver appropriately understands the illocutionary intent of the statement. Furthermore, illocutionary intent can only be appropriately understood if the receiver has the cultural knowledge or capital necessary for decoding the message. Thus, if situational and contextual knowledge in the form of what Bourdieu (1984) calls “cultural capital” are not held by the receiver, they may not recognize the specific illocutionary intent of the act. This claim is further substantiated by Paul Simpson (2003) who suggests that “satirical uptake” or “the inferencing strategies used by interpreters to ‘get the point’ of a piece of satirical writing” (p.153) is best described in the Austinian conceptualization of illocution and perlocution. Thus, if the receiver recognizes the illocutionary intent of the utterance, the discourse functions as a rhetorical action in the continuous construction of complex meaning making.

Political satire and other humorous discursive constructions often offer a “serious criticism of society in a humorous way” (Dhond, 1992, p.284). Thus, humour often functions as “a powerful form of social and cultural argument” (Smith, 1993, p.51) with strong rhetorical properties of subversion and persuasion. Satirists and other politically or socio-culturally oriented humourists expose the shortcomings and ills of society through

explicitly outlining supposed absurdities. Traditional social values, morals and structure are often mocked and ridiculed to highlight their apparent foolishness. While much of the time this is playful in manner, these social and political commentaries function as powerful and ideologically infused discursive strategies in the construction of meaningful rhetorical action. The most serious of which is political satire.

Historically, political satire has always flourished due its ability to “slip by” censorship. Subtle and inferential criticisms of oppressive regimes, censorship and other socio-political conditions were often highly intuitive and complex. Many literary works exposing the incompetency of government or damning the socio-political condition of everyday life in oppressive countries were published only because censors were unable to understand the illocutionary intent of the author or at least prove it. One case of misunderstanding is exemplified by Stephen Whitfield (1988) in his discussion of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* which he claims “enlists the repertoire of comic incongruities to condemn the Soviet endeavour to use corrupt and immoral means in extinguishing oppression and exploitation” (p. 196). In other words, Whitfield suggests that this political satire illuminates the negative aspects of the target thereby exposing inadequacies functioning to extinguish practices of oppression and exploitation. However, Whitfield recalls that the “American publisher missed the point, and during World War 2 turned down Orwell’s manuscript because of too small a prospective market for ‘animal stories’” (p.196), thus, exemplifying the subtle and complex nature of political satire.

The counter-hegemonic project of satirical construction is often concealed by the allusion to convention, typicality and hegemony in the guise of dominant discursive

practice. For instance, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* is an eloquent and logical argument to solve the problems of poverty and overpopulation in 18th century Ireland by proposing a plan to consume young children as food. Swift's account is laden with facts and estimates expressed in eloquent prose functioning to expose the absurdity of the insensible acts being carried out by the Irish Government in an attempt to fix the situation. His proposal takes advantage of dominant discursive strategies and elevated logic to explicitly mock and ridicule the foolishness of the government. Most importantly and most explicitly correlated with the political satire exemplified in *The Colbert Report* is the "supposed seriousness" of the discursive construction.

The most prominent form of explicit political humour is the political cartoon. Exemplified in nearly every daily newspaper in North America, the political cartoon has a long history as a form of ideological dissent and passive revolt in the popular media. Political cartoons typically "allude to serious topics" (Mulkay, 1988, p.197) and make serious statements about the socio-political climate of a distinct territory. Political cartoons take elements from the public sphere and transform them in a wide variety of ways and can be light-hearted and modest but can also be extremely radical and edgy. Mulkay (1988) suggests that "each political cartoon conveys its own 'truth' by humorously deconstructing a political claim seriously advocated by, or denouncing a political action taken by, some other party" (p.198). Mulkay also describes the ways in which all political cartoons create complex puzzles wherein the meaning is rarely made explicit and readers are forced to make inferences. Similar to the previous discussion about cultural capital and knowledge, Mulkay suggests that "background knowledge of the political scene, of current affairs and of the conventions of cartoon humour, must be

used to interpret the clues provided in the text . . . as in all humour, the components of political cartoons are organized bisociatively to create semantic oppositions which the reader must decode” (p.203). Most indicative of serious political humour are the ways in which semantic incongruities and oppositions, which are typically expected in humorous discursive constructions, have serious implications when the incongruity is consistent with the actions of powerful political actors in the public domain. Thus, political satire and other forms of political humour typically tend to ascribe to the old adage, “it’s funny because it’s true”. For this reason, political satire functions as meaningful rhetorical action expressing ideological dissent and passive revolt, exemplifying incompetency or absurdity through semantic incongruity.

While theoretical, philosophical and conceptual work looking at the ways in which political cartoons construct humour have been sparse at best, even fewer formal analyses exist specifically identifying the ways in which multimodal constructions create humour. Some informal analyses of a number of political cartoons were highlighted on Jay Lemke’s website but are no longer available for viewing. Efharis Mascha (2008) discusses the ways in which political humour in the form of cartoons played an important role in counter-hegemonic discourse and passive revolt during the rise of fascism in Italy. With some discussion about caricature composition, Mascha’s (2008) work exemplifies the closest thing to a formal multimodal analysis of the construction of political humour. Mascha’s aim was primarily to “discuss the counter-hegemonic project of political satire during Mussolini’s ascendance to power” by examining the character traits and ideologies exemplified in various political cartoons. However, the study was oriented towards the relationship of satire and censorship rather than explaining the complex intersemiotic

meaning making of the cartoons. Thus, there is very little work investigating how micro-semiotic mechanisms account for the actual semiotic potential of contemporary multimodal political satire and the same can be said for political satire and humour in the form of conventional discourse.

2.7 Linguistic Humourology

Critical discourse analysts, social semioticians and multimodal analysts have tended to stay away from the realm of humorous discourse even political humour. As a result, the vast majority of linguistic humourological research has been done by semanticists and pragmatists. Most notably, Victor Raskin (1985, 1987, 1991) and Salvatore Attardo (1991, 1994, 1997, 2001) have been the leading proponents in the study of humorous discourse and their works have created the building blocks upon which most contemporary humourological research is built. For years, literary analyses of humorous texts sought to explain the power and utility of humour as a rhetorical strategy; however, no formal analysis of lexico-grammar ever functioned as the basis of analysis. In 1985, Victor Raskin published *Semantic Mechanisms of Humour* which introduced the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH). The SSTH is a semantic theory of humour through script incongruity which is based on philosophical and psychological incongruity theorizing (Koestler 1964; Kant, 1790; Paulos, 1980; Suls, 1972). The SSTH was the first semi-structured formal theory of humour, describing the ways in which humour operates in single joke carrying texts. Furthermore, the SSTH identified the most integral element for the realization of humour in the concept of semantic script incongruity or opposition. However, the limited scope of the SSTH was unable to account for the wide variations in context, situation, language and structure of a joke carrying text and in 1991,

Raskin and Attardo published *Script Theory Revis(it)ed: joke similarity and joke representation model*, which is still the most comprehensive semantic theory of humour.

The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) developed by Attardo and Raskin (1991) maintains the essential proposition of the (SSTH) in that humour primarily results from the juxtaposition of two incongruous or oppositional semantic scripts. However, the GTVH differs from the SSTH in the explication of the six knowledge resources (KR) which account for the situational variability of any joke carrying text. The first KR is the parameter of Language (LA) which includes “all the choices at the phonetic, phonologic, morphophonemic, morphologic, lexic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels” (p.298) that account for variability between jokes. This parameter also accounts for the specific location of the punch line in a single joke carrying text.

The second parameter is known as the Narrative Strategy (NS) which accounts for variability in, obviously, the narrative strategy of a joke. Jokes employ different narrative strategies in their production or execution and the NS parameter describes the different possible narrative constructions of a joke carrying text. The third parameter is the Target (TA) which describes the identifiable target of the joke. Joke targets vary depending on the nature of the joke. Targets can be people, philosophies, ideologies, actions or a multiplicity of the aforementioned. Targets are identifiable from the semantic scripts instantiated in the text but also from the varying types of homophoric reference exemplified in the lexico-grammar. Situation (SI), the fourth parameter, relates to the Halliday’s (1978) concept of field and describes the variability in situation. All jokes are about something and this parameter accounts for the specific goings on of a particular joke or what is happening to whom in the most general sense. The fifth parameter, the

Logical Mechanism (LM) describes joke variability in terms of typified structures established through recurrent production. In this way, the LM essentially relates to the generic structure of joke carrying texts like role reversals and false priming or ‘garden path’. The LM thus, accounts for the typified structures wherein the opposition or incongruity of scripts is realized by conventionalized means. Finally, Script Opposition (SO) is the last KR and suggests that essentially, all joke carrying texts juxtapose two identifiable semantic scripts creating incongruity through atypical rhetorical construction. As Attardo and Raskin (1991) explain “the text of a joke is deliberately ambiguous, at least up to the point, if not to the very end . . . the punchline triggers the switch from the one script to the other by making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning” (p.308). They identify the overarching macro script opposition as “real to unreal or factual reality to an imagined one” (p. 308) and expand by suggesting that on a lower level of abstraction, actual/nonactual, normal/abnormal, possible/impossible, account for all possible script oppositions.

While there are discrepancies between researchers regarding the applicability of all six knowledge resources, the application of the GTVH dominates the humourological landscape and has been applied in varying forms (see Brock, 2004; Tsakona, 2003; Attardo, Hempelmann & Di Maio, 2002). On the other hand, researchers have also attempted to refute the application of the GTVH to authentic joke carrying texts. John Morreall (2004) suggests, (and I agree), that it is “risky to draw conclusions about all verbal humour from studying prepared fictional jokes, just as it would be risky to draw conclusions about all insects from studying fruit flies” (p.394). Morreall explains the

varying ways in which verbal humour occurs without the incongruity of semantic scripts and without flouting the Gricean maxim of bona fide communication. He cites a number of examples discussing both the breaking of pragmatic rules and how the combination of “sounds in unusual ways, by excessive alliteration, for instance, or unusual rhymes” (p.397) as exemplified in the tales of Dr. Seuss can create humour. Morreall makes clear that the semantic script theory of humour does not apply “straightaway to situational verbal humour [and] . . . script switching models are not adequate to cover all verbal humour” (p.399). However his work provides evidence not refuting the general premise of the GTVH but rather refuting the existence of a taxonomical theory of verbal humour. In other words, Morreall suggests that the GTVH does not account for *every* form of verbal humour.

Other humourologists have substantiated Morreall’s claims through their investigation of the markers of irony and sarcasm. Attardo et al. (2003) describes the ways in which multimodal markers in the form of facial expression and intonation account for the production of sarcasm and irony. Their study suggests that “blank face”, compressed pitch patterns, pronounced pitch accents and strong within-statement contrast exemplify sarcasm and irony in multimodal work better than contrasting or incongruent scripts. Thus, it has become increasingly clear that the GTVH cannot account for all forms of verbal humour; however, at this point in time it is still the most thoroughly articulated humourological theory in the field.

However, the difficulties faced by humourologists remain widespread. It is extremely challenging to succinctly articulate all the various forms of humour considering differentiation in style, mode and scope. Humour has many faces and the

current trend in research is to investigate the various forms in isolation from each other. As just mentioned, sarcasm and irony in multimodal texts has been an area of inquiry along with purely linguistic instantiations of ironic utterances (Attardo, 2000). Bucaria (2004) has been instrumental in describing how lexical and syntactic ambiguity can create humour through disjunction in processing exemplified in the study of a corpus of humorous newspaper headlines. However, few attempts have been made to describe the ways in which micro-oriented linguistic and multimodal constructions of humour connect with the macro-oriented discursive meaning making of longer texts. The most notable contribution to the field in this specific area comes from Paul Simpson (2003) in his book *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a stylistic model of satirical humour*, in which he attempts to combine linguistic, philosophical and literary scholarship to explain the entire scope of satirical discourse. Simpson provides a very thorough discussion of the linguistic research in the field as previously outlined while simultaneously maintaining that satirical discourse must be understood in terms of the ideological work it does through proposing the possibility of looking at satirical discourse within a systemic functional framework. As mentioned, this is difficult “given the notable absence of any serious provision for humorous discourse across the systemic functional work, and for that matter across the critical discourse analysis work that draws on functional linguistics” (Simpson, 2003, p.75). However, he makes a good case for the investigation of satire through a systemic functional framework.

Simpson claims that satirical discourse could be placed on the functional taxonomy exemplifying realization relationships between the units of ideology, genre, register and lexico-grammar as described by Martin (1985, p.250; 1986, p. 227) and

Eggs (2004, p.112). Simpson claims that satire as discourse relates most importantly with ideology whereas the micro-linguistic instantiation of humour which constitutes a satirical text correlates with genre, register and lexico-grammar. In other words, satire is the result of a complete discursive construction whereby multiple instantiations of humour exemplified in the lexico-grammar, culminate in a meaningful rhetorical action. However, Simpson does not provide a specific analysis combining theoretical frameworks as he admits:

*A further issue raised . . . [is], not so much the theoretical compatibility (or otherwise) of the individual scholars whose ideas have influenced this study, but the theoretical parallels between particular categories in linguistics, pragmatics and humorology which have been built into the model of satire. A wide variety of approaches in discourse analysis have been pressed into service over the course of this book, although the intersections between these approaches have admittedly neither been developed as fully as they might nor been synthesized into a over-arching typology of discourse. For instance, a question might be asked as to how the core tenants of the SSTH-GTVH (chapter 2) can be reconciled with the models of irony developed in later chapters. Such reconciliation might result in a more effective composite model which would have power to deal with a broader range of forms of verbal humour. **Although there is to the best of my knowledge no existing study of this sort, such a synthesis would represent an important advance in linguistic humorology** .(2003, p.214, Emphasis Added)*

The various fields previously outlined each offer unique perspectives in the explication of political satirical discourse as a meaningful rhetorical phenomenon functioning to express ideological dissent and passive revolt. An amalgamation of theoretical frameworks would best capture the dynamic nature of satirical discourse as suggested by Simpson (2003). The shared functional semantic nature of the SSTH, the GTVH and a systemic functional approach to social semiosis, exemplifies the compatibility of the frameworks and the possibility that one can complement the other in discursive analysis.

The SSTH and GTVH thoroughly outline how semantic incongruity creates humour in single joke carrying texts; however, the frameworks provide no systematic way to analyse longer multi-joke carrying texts. Whereas, the systemic functional approach to social semiosis provides a framework for analysing semantic patterning but not in relation to humorous discourse specifically. Therefore, a combination of the two semantically-oriented approaches can enable the analysis of longer, intersemiotic humorous constructions. Systemic functional analysis enables the identification of various semantic patterns and the SSTH/GTVH can help explain how the patterning creates humour through incongruity.

Contemporary political satire must be understood as an ideologically-infused complex social semiotic wherein multiple modalities create meaningful rhetorical action to expose the shortcomings, absurdities and incompetencies of socio-political targets. In this way, satirists play upon typified rhetorical conventions in an attempt to invert powerful and dominant discursive strategies thereby expressing ideological dissent or contestation. Furthermore, satire results from the instantiation of multiple lexico-grammatical humorous constructions continuously recalibrating the discursive trajectory. The late night comedy special, *The Colbert Report* exemplifies one form of increasingly influential contemporary political satire and for this reason it is the analytical subject of this thesis.

3 Methodology

My methodology results from a synthesis of humourological theories rooted in semantic script incongruity and systemic functional frameworks. As previously discussed, the best known analytic frameworks in contemporary humourological study are the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). The GTVH is an extension of the SSTH accounting for situational variables in a much more generalized fashion but both theories are inherently associated with incongruity-based theories of humour. The SSTH introduced by Victor Raskin (1985), and the GTVH outlined in Attardo and Raskin (1991) as I indicated in chapter 2, both suggest that humour is essentially a result of semantic script opposition or incongruity realized through logical mechanisms of association. While both theories are extensively outlined and thoroughly elaborated, unfortunately, they are not easily applicable to authentic contemporary humorous discourse. The SSTH and the GTVH can not definitively account for the creation of humour through longer sections of discourse, whereby, multiple meanings are constructed through interconnection and logogenetic patterns. The GTVH developed from the analysis of short prepared fictional jokes and does not describe how to account for complex longitudinal patterning in authentic discourse wherein the incongruent scripts may be separated by long sections of discourse. Therefore, a synthesis of semantic script incongruity theories and a functional-semantic approach to multimodal analysis allows for a more comprehensive understanding of humour creation through elaborate logogenetic patterning and intersemiotic means. Systemic functional analysis enables us to solidify structural relations through systematic analysis rather than through intuition and assumption on which the SSTH and GTVH rely. To extend this idea and further extrapolate how a transdisciplinary approach best

suits the analysis of multimodal humorous semiotic events, it is necessary to describe how semantic theories of humour reconcile the atypical logogenetic and semantic patterning of humorous multimodal texts.

Contemporary humourology and more specifically the work of Attardo and Raskin (1987, 1991) explain how incongruity in semantic classification creates divergence from expectation resulting in humour. As explained above, their work developing both the SSTH and the GTVH resulted from the semantic analysis of a corpus of prefabricated single joke carrying texts. In other words, the objects of analysis were short jokes with a single punch line and single target. Therefore, the identification of the juxtaposed semantic scripts was easily retrievable because of the minimal number of scripts triggered by “lexematic handles”. However, longer humorous texts have the ability to trigger numerous scripts into the discourse due to their length and high number of important lexematic handles. Therefore, the identification of juxtaposed scripts becomes difficult. Systemic functional frameworks reconcile this problematic issue by enabling one to model all of the semantic and logogenetic patterning through metafunctional, clause complex, conjunctive and cohesive analysis. Similarly, systemic frameworks alone would fail to extrapolate on how the atypical semantic patterning creates humour. Therefore, by combining the two semantically oriented functional methods, it is possible to, not only outline the complex semantic patterning but also describe how the incongruity creates humour in the construction of meaningful socio-political commentary.

3.1 SFL: Logico-semantics

There are two specific domains within systemic functional analysis which are specifically pertinent to the realization of semantic patterning in this study. The first is the logical part of the ideational metafunction, which is comprised of two specific systems of logical relation: taxis and logico-semantics. The system of taxis describes the ways in which clauses relate to one another through dependency; the system of logico-semantics refers to “the types of meanings that allow adjacent clauses to project or expand on each other” (Eggins, 2004, p.254). Both systems allow systemicists to explicate the ways in which grammatical units are linked together. The term clause complex is used to refer to a cluster of clauses functioning as a single grammatical unit. As Eggins (2004) describes, clause complexes are often realized in written and spoken discourse through full stops. The logical component of ideational meaning allows us to understand the important logico-semantic relations created by interconnecting singular clausal units. Thus, clause complex analysis is necessary to understand the significant and meaningful packaging of information

The second domain which enables the analysis of semantic patterning is the lexico-grammatical resource of cohesion. There are three main ways cohesion is created in English. Reference, lexical organization, and conjunction are the cohesive resources which are paramount in the explication of logogenetic patterning as it pertains to humour construction. Reference is a cohesive resource referring to the ways in which a speaker/writer introduces and keeps track of items and participants throughout the course of a text (Eggins, 2004, p. 33). As participants in nominal groups are introduced in a text, the speaker/writer must indicate whether the information is presented as new or whether the identity is retrievable from somewhere else (inside or outside the text). Three types of

reference are particularly important in my texts. If the identity of an item is retrievable from the general context of culture it is considered a “homophoric” reference. For instance, there is no need to specify in the statement “the moon is beautiful” since as members of this world we know which moon is being referenced. “Exophoric” reference describes information that is retrievable from the immediate context. An example might be, “give me that”, in which ‘that’ refers to whatever it might be that the receiver of the message is holding. “Endophoric” reference occurs when the identity of a nominal group is retrievable from somewhere else in the text whether presented earlier or referring to an entity that has not yet appeared.

Endophoric reference is the cohesive resource that creates texture within the internal organization of a text. While exophoric and homophoric referencing create situational coherence, only endophoric reference creates internal cohesion contributing to texture (Eggins, 2004). There are three main subtypes of endophoric reference describing differences in the location of information retrievable from within the text. Anaphoric reference occurs when the identity of the item is recoverable from an earlier point in the text whereas cataphoric reference occurs when the identity of the referent has yet to appear (Eggins, 2004). Essentially, anaphora points backwards, cataphora points forward. Esophoric reference is similar to cataphoric reference; however, esophoric reference is when “the referent occurs in the phrase immediately following the presuming referent item (within the same nominal group/noun phrase, not in a separate clause)” (Eggins, 2004, p.35). For example, in the phrase “the knights of King Arthur’s court assembled at noon”, we learn which *knights* from the following prepositional phrase, *of King Arthur’s*

court. The systems of reference are extremely important when analysing longer sections of discourse since referent items encode pertinent semantic information.

Lexical organization also functions to encode specifically pertinent semantic information through the cohesive resource of lexical cohesion. As Eggins (2004) describes, “lexical cohesion analysis derives from observing that there are certain expectancy relations between words . . . lexical relations analysis is a way of systematically describing how words in a text relate to each other, how they cluster to build up lexical sets of lexical strings” (p.42). Lexical cohesion can be realized in two different ways; taxonomic relations and expectancy relations. Taxonomic relations refer to a system whereby lexical items relate through either class/sub-class or part/whole constituency. Most commonly, taxonomic relations are expressed in nominal groups; however, verbal operators can occasionally be linked taxonomically such as “spoke” and “said”. Expectancy describes the ways in which lexical items can relate through conventional expectations between various elements realized for example by goalie/save.

Classification and composition describe the two ways in which words can be taxonomically related. For my purposes, classification is the most pertinent cohesive resource in that classification systematically instantiates meaningful and recognizable semantic associations. The classificatory subtypes of co-hyponymy and class/sub-class realize taxonomic relations with semantic script orientations. Co-hyponymy occurs when two or more lexical items are related by virtue of subordinate membership. For instance, sandals, shoes and boots are all subordinate members of the superordinate class of footwear. The two types of classification function in a similar fashion and can occur simultaneously wherein the superordinate class and multiple hyponymous members are

explicitly lexicalized in the text. In this case, the subordinate members would be co-hyponymous with each other and simultaneously independently hyponymous with the superordinate class.

Conjunction is the third cohesive resource contributing to the construction of logico-semantic relationships creating texture. Conjunctive cohesion helps create the “semantic unity that characterizes unproblematic text” (Eggins, 2004, p.47). There are three main types of conjunctive cohesion: elaboration, extension and enhancement. The three logico-semantic categories can instantiate structural relationships between clauses in the construction of complexes, however, as cohesive resources, they function non-structurally (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In other words, the conjunctive cohesive resources create links between sentences rather than between clauses. They operate by instantiating semantic meaning across sentence boundaries thereby contributing to semantic unity. Thus, cohesive patterns of conjunction contribute to the process of meaning in a text.

Elaboration refers to the conjunctive relation of clarification or restatement whereby one sentence elaborates on the previous sentence by providing an example or further clarifying the meaning. Extension is an additive or variation conjunction in which the meaning of the primary sentence is extended by the next which adds information. Extension can also be realized when the second sentence changes the meaning of the first by presenting contrasting information or qualifying the primary statement. Enhancement occurs when one sentence develops the meaning of the other in terms of time, comparison, cause, condition or concession.

As discussed earlier, the system of taxis is also pertinent to the realization of logico-semantic patterning. Within the tactic system there are two degrees of interdependency: hypotaxis and parataxis. Hypotaxis occurs with the “binding of elements of unequal status” (Halliday & Mattheissen, 2004, p.384), whereby, clausal structures are related through dependency. For instance, the complex “I sweat when I run long distances” does not imply “I run long distances when I sweat”. In this case, the secondary clause is logically dependant on the primary clause. In opposition, parataxis refers to the binding of equal elements in a clause complex wherein both elements are free. The statement, “Today I went to the store and did the laundry” could also be expressed as “Today I did the laundry and went to the store”. Both elements function in a symmetrical relationship since neither is represented as dominant or dependant. Furthermore, the elements are free in that the both the primary and secondary clauses could logically function as a whole. Parataxis is also exemplified in the listing of items since each element is represented as equal. An example might be, “At the store I picked up some milk, butter, bread, eggs and coffee”. No element functions as dominant or is represented as prominent.

3.2 Multimodality

Moving beyond logogenetic patterning, logico-semantics and the tactic system of clause complexing in linguistic construction, multimodal analytical frameworks enable the explication of the tri-functional meanings constructed in visual and verbal semiosis. Multimodal semiotic constructions realize three simultaneous strands of meaning: ideational, interpersonal and textual as in spoken or written language only. Ideational meaning refers to the ways in which language and images represent particular

experiential information. The interpersonal metafunction refers to the meanings “which indicate to us what is happening in the communicative relationship and what stance participants may have” (Lemke, 2002, p.304) to each other and to the ideational content expressed. Textual meaning refers to the ways in which the semiotic resources instantiate ideational and interpersonal information in some tangible construct. The textual metafunction relates to the ways the meanings are conveyed through some representational medium and how those meanings are oriented cohesively.

3.2.1 Presentational Meaning (Ideational)

The ideational metafunction has two primary domains; the logical which realizes logico-semantic relations and the experiential which realizes particular information regarding the way experience is represented. Both verbal and visual language constructs experiential meanings about participants, processes and circumstances through particular grammars. The experiential domain of the ideational meta-function encodes information regarding what the discourse is generally about. Important elements include, who is involved in the situation, what is going on and what they are doing. Verbal and visual semiosis encode similar kinds of experiential information through different forms of representation. An overview of both particular ways of representing will allow us to see how verbal and visual constructions can realize similar kinds of semantic information.

Experiential meaning is constructed in language through the system of transitivity which realizes meanings regarding how actors engage in certain actions with particular goals and circumstances. Participants are realized in the system of transitivity through nominal groups. Participants are the entities that are functioning in the discourse and can be human or inanimate, alive or dead. Furthermore, the participants are typically engaged in actions or states, referred to as processes and are realized through verbal constructs.

There are seven processes which can be represented in the English language: material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential, relational identifying and relational attributive. Material processes are typically about doing or acting in some tangible way. In other words some identifiable thing undertakes some sort of concrete action like throwing a ball or kicking a door. Mental processes are expressions regarding cognition, affection and perception realized through verbs of thinking, feeling and seeing or hearing. Verbal processes are processes expressing verbal action like asking, talking or telling. Behavioural processes generally refer to physiological and psychological actions like smelling, coughing or crying. Existential processes are simply expressions of existence. A typical existential process would be “There is a man”. Finally, relational processes are processes where things exist in relation to something else in terms of attributes or identities. The different kinds of processes involve different types of participants. For instance, the main participant in a verbal process would be the “sayer” whereas the main participant in a material process would be the “actor”.

In visual representations, similar experiential meanings regarding participants and processes are realized but through different means. Participants in visual constructions are the meaningful and prominent elements or objects represented in the field. Once again participants can be human or inanimate. The objects or elements functioning as participants are typically distinguishable through salience resulting from differentiation in colour, prominence, distance and framing. In addition, there are two distinct types of participants: interactive and represented participants. Interactive participants are those involved in some communicative act whereas represented participants typically function as the subject matter of the communication (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.48). Visually

as well, there are conceptual processes which are classificatory, analytical or symbolic; narrative processes involve actors engaged in some sort of activity. The conceptual processes realize meanings similar to those of the existential and relational linguistic processes, the narrative processes on the other hand realize meaning similar to that of the material, verbal, mental and behavioural linguistic processes.

Narrative processes are realized by real or implied linear connections called vectors between participants. Vectors are the real or implied trajectories of specific narrative processes which can be realized by eye contact, a pointing finger, the throwing of a ball, etc. There are various actional realizations depending on how participants are oriented to each other in terms of vectorial connection. A unidirectional transactional action is realized wherein a vector connects two participants, an actor and a goal. Bidirectional transactional actions are realized by two participants connected by a dual direction vector usually connecting interactors. The representation of two people discussing current events would be a bidirectional transactional action exemplified by a dual direction vector realized by gaze or eye direction. In other words, a bidirectional transactional action is one in which two participants are interacting continuously back and forth. A non-transactional action is realized wherein a vector emanates from a represented participant but does not connect with any immediate goal. For instance, the depiction of a runner travelling along a dirt road would realize a non-transactional action where the vector is realized by the direction of movement but does not connect to any immediate goal.

Conceptual processes as mentioned are realized through classificatory, analytical and symbolical representation instantiating meanings of a taxonomic nature. Conceptual

processes typically ascribe particular values to represented participants based on the allocation of attributes and the realization of classificatory membership. Represented participants are usually explicitly posing or in some generalized static form because the experiential content realizes timeless and inanimate attributive or existential meaning. For instance, fashion advertisements often make use of conceptual processes through the representation of participants and the attributing of desirable qualities such as confidence, attractiveness and poise. The attributions become correlated with the participants and therefore the product of the advertisement. Conceptual processes can also instantiate class/sub-class and other forms of taxonomic relations through representing participants in terms of size, location, saturation and orientation.

3.2.2 Orientational Meaning (Interpersonal)

Apart from ideational representation, multimodal texts also instantiate interpersonal meanings about participant relationships and the way ideational content is exchanged.

Linguistically, speakers orient themselves to other people and to the information expressed through lexico-grammatical resources instantiating interpersonal orientations. Approached from a semantic perspective, using language establishes relations of interaction in terms of participants either through demanding, stating, asking or commanding. These speech functions are realized in writing through conventional lexico-grammatical patterns and punctuation whereas verbal realizations often occur through lexico-grammar and prosody. The positioning of the utterer to the information expressed and the receiver expresses valuable information regarding the nature of the exchange, the relationship of the participants and their evaluation of the ideational content. Speakers can offer, command, state, question and the listener can accept or reject, comply or refuse, acknowledge or contradict and answer or inquire. The patterning of the exchange

can reveal important information about the participant's relations in terms of power and structure. Beyond the basic structure of information exchange, there are two other lexico-grammatical resources instantiating interpersonal meanings important in the analysis of humour: modality and appraisal.

Modality refers to a system of meaning dealing with intermediate degrees of certainty regarding propositions and proposals. There are “various kinds of indeterminacy that fall” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 146) between the polarity of yes and no and these degrees are referred to collectively as modality. Modalization refers to the interpersonal orientations in propositions realized by varying degrees of probability and usuality. Modalization exemplified through either modal adjuncts or finite modal operators is an “expression of the speaker's opinion” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.147) in relation to the information expressed. Modulation is a sub-category of modality referring to the varying degrees of obligation and inclination in proposals. Modulation enables speakers to express degrees of prescription and proscription with finite operators like “shouldn't”, “must” and “have to”. Beyond degrees of probability, usuality, obligation and inclination, speakers also employ evaluative lexis to “negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations” (Martin, 2000, p.145).

The term *appraisal* is used to refer to a system within the interpersonal metafunction which enables an understanding of how speakers use evaluative lexis to instantiate specific meanings about emotions, judgements, valuations and engagement. Over the past fifteen years, increasing scholarship has sought to understand how semantic resources instantiate evaluative, attitudinal and emotional meaning (Christie & Martin,

1997; Iedema, 1997; Martin, 1995; White, 2001; Martin, 2001). Similar to the system of modality, appraisal resources range on a continuum with varying degrees of polarity. Speakers orient themselves to the ideational content expressed and to each other through evaluative lexis with different ranges. Interpersonal stance can be constructed through lexical content expressing attitudes and beliefs on a positive/negative continuum or speakers can polarize particular judgements using resources intensifying the interpersonal force of a proposition. There are three general semantic domains within the system of appraisal: attitude, graduation and engagement.

Attitude refers to the semantic resources employed enabling speakers to “pass judgements and associate emotional/affectual responses with participants and processes” (White, 2001, p.1). Attitude is divided into the three sub-systems of affect, judgment and appreciation which all account for attitudinal content in various forms. Affect outlines the grammar and semantics of emotional response and disposition. Judgement refers to the grammatical resources which enable the evaluation of human behaviour as either positive or negative. Typically judgements are made by reference to institutionalized norms or social convention. Appreciation is similar to judgement in its evaluative nature however, appreciation “typically evaluates natural objects, manufactured objects, texts as well as more abstract constructs such as plans and policies” (White, 2001, p.7).

The appraisal sub-system of graduation refers to the semantics of scaling in terms of interpersonal force and focus. Force includes lexical items that would typically be referred to as intensifiers or down-tones including words like “somewhat”, “slightly”, and “really”. Force also refers to the values “which act to measure quantity, extent and proximity in time and space” (White, 2001, p.7). Graduation is also accomplished by the

sharpening or softening of semantic force through broadening or narrowing categorical membership. The third appraisal sub-system of engagement refers to the lexical values which explicitly position propositions and proposals inter-subjectively. Resources of engagement operate to instantiate and naturalize particular inter-subjective positions both in individual utterances and cumulatively through longer sections of discourse.

Visually, interpersonal meaning is represented through modality markers in various coding orientations. As previously mentioned, in linguistics, modality refers “to the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realized) statements about the world” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.155). Similarly, visual modality refers to the ways in which representations range on a scale from real to unreal or fake. However, as Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) point out, “what is regarded as real depends on how reality is defined by a particular social group” (p.158). There are various coding orientations which outline the ways in which texts are interpreted by various social groups. Thus, a schematic diagram of a motherboard in a personal computer may have a higher modality to a computer technologist than a photograph of the mother-board due to specific coding orientations. The detailed technical information characterising a schematic diagram more accurately represents the nature of a mother-board in terms of functionality. In other words, the schematic diagram better represents the components and flow of electricity or information than a photograph.

The most common coding orientation is the naturalistic coding orientation which exemplifies modality in terms of how close representations correspond with how the naked eye would see the represented scene or object. There are eight different modality markers specifically pertinent to the naturalistic coding orientation: colour saturation,

colour differentiation, colour modulation, contextualization, representation, depth, illumination and brightness. Each modality marker ranges on a scale from high to low or maximum to minimum. However, while a highly detailed background under the marker of contextualization would suggest high modality, maximally saturated colour may be hyper-real or too much colour resulting in a lower modality. Thus, in terms of colour saturation, “modality increases as articulation increases, but at a certain point it reaches its highest value and thereafter decreases again” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p.160). The various modality markers instantiate differing levels of modality depending on the specific coding orientation the represented image falls under. For instance, in a technological coding orientation, colour, which is not pertinent to the technical function of the image, would be indicative of low modality.

Interpersonal meanings are also realized through factors of contact, distance and point of view, which “can create complex and subtle relations between the represented and the viewer” (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p.145). Similar to the ways in which lexicogrammatical patterns and punctuation signify interactive speech acts like commanding or questioning, the facial expression, gaze and location of represented participants instantiate similar interpersonal meanings. Often represented participants seem to look directly at the viewer as though engaging the viewer in some sort of exchange. The represented participants can demand with penetrating eyes and strong gesturing or request goods and services with pleading stares and subtle smiles. Represented participants make contact with the viewer in various ways instantiating specific interpersonal relations and roles.

Distance also plays an important role in establishing the interpersonal meanings expressed in any representation. The size of frame and distance of represented participants establish certain social relations. A detailed “close up” portraying distinct facial features often signifies an intimate or personal relationship since this is the way we see close friends and family. A medium shot cutting the body off around the waist typically implies a social relationship or someone who might be an acquaintance. A long distance shot suggests a more impersonal relationship (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p.146). Thus, distance operates as an interpersonal factor establishing certain social relations between represented participants and viewers.

Point of view is another factor establishing interpersonal meaning between participants and viewers. Point of view instantiates important power relations between the viewer and the represented participant. If the represented participant looks down at the viewer, this signifies that the participant has power over the viewer. An eye level gaze suggests equality and the participant looking up and the viewer suggests that the viewer has power over the represented participant. A full frontal view wherein the participant faces the viewer implies a personal engagement because the participant is facing the viewer whereas a profile or rear view implies a certain detachment between participant and viewer (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001, p.136).

3.2.3 Compositional Meaning (Textual)

The third metafunctional property of visual semiosis is typically referred to as the compositional or organizational meaning of any event. The compositional meaning of a visual is similar to the textual metafunction in linguistic analysis. Compositional meaning refers to the ways in which the visual elements are organized and composed into a unified whole in terms of information value, salience and framing. The individual elements of

compositional meanings function simultaneously to instantiate meanings regarding how the visual should be read or understood. As previously discussed, the compositional meanings are not regulated through formulaic rules but rather have become naturalized patterns through continuous representation in a specific culture. In other words, the typical ways in which information value and salience are realized may vary across cultures resulting from typified conventions established through continuous instantiation.

Information value refers to the placement of individual elements within the overall pictorial space. As discussed in Jewitt and Oyama (2001), in societies which use Roman script, the typical reading of any text is from left to right and top to bottom. This left to right structure creates a given-new structure in which given elements are presented before the introduction of new information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). This same locutionary heuristic has been applied to the reading of visual imagery as well. Thus, in the overall pictorial space, the left side typically holds information that is understood as given or something the reader already knows whereas new information is provided on the right. The vertical orientation of information is also pertinent in terms of information value. Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) call the division of top and bottom the ideal and real. The ideal is the idealized or generalized form of any specific object or representation: the real includes the actual representation, more specific information or more practical information about the ideal entity.

Framing refers to how elements are represented as either belonging together or as being explicitly separate. Specific framing techniques connect, disconnect or partially connect elements of a composition together instantiating particular meaning about classification and orientation to each other. Frame lines are conventionally used to isolate

different elements in a composition signifying some particular difference in meaning or classification whereas all elements combined within a specific frame typically share some quality with each other whether it be membership to a group or parts of a whole etc..

Framing can also partially connect elements wherein a specific frame or colour dissipates continuously until two fields of the composition mix and become one. This typically implies that the elements within the individual field are connected to each other in some innate way but also partially connected with the elements in the other field. For instance, different brands of hockey skates in one frame may be framed together but partially connected with another frame containing different styles of gloves. While the individual frames are individually classified as skates and gloves, the partial connection implies that they are both part of the larger class of hockey equipment.

The aforementioned methodologies enable the analysis of multimodal semiotic constructions by solidifying a working framework of conventional social semiotic realizations. Specific systems of clause complex construction and the tri-functional meaning potential of multimodal texts enable the analysis of lexical, semantic and logogenetic patterning, allowing one to systematically outline the visual and verbal characteristics of a given text. The multimodal analytical frameworks enable one to outline patterns of semantic classification, logico-semantic relations and intersemiotic meaning construction allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which a text functions in any specific context. These methodologies are integral in the analysis of semantic associations solidifying a systematic way to model longitudinal semantic patterning. The frameworks produced combined with specific elements of the SSTH and the GTVH enable the analysis of complex humour construction in socio-political

multimodal discourse whereby complex logico-semantic patterns are constructed through long sections of discourse. A thorough outline of the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (Raskin, 1985) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo & Raskin, 1991) will illuminate how systemic functional and multimodal frameworks are integral for the modelling of complex semantic script incongruities in humorous multimodal texts.

3.3 Linguistic Humourology

The Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) introduced the concept of semantic script incongruity as integral for the construction of humour, based on previous sociological, philosophical and psychological scholarship identifying incongruities or inconsistencies as characteristics of joke carrying texts (eg. Beattie, 1776; Kant, 1790; Suls, 1972; Koestler, 1964; Paulo, 1980; Hofstadter & Gabora, 1989). Raskin summarizes his theoretical hypothesis in the following way:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the [following] conditions are satisfied: i) the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (...). The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part in this text (Raskin, 1985, p. 99)

While these preliminary observations provide an introduction of semantic script incongruity theory, the scope of the textual manifestation of humour is limited to a single-joke-carrying-text. This includes only short jokes with identifiable and single punch lines. The shortcomings of a theory for describing single-joke-carrying-texts gave impetus to a revision of the theory keeping with the original hypothesis but expanding to include situational and contextual variability called the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH).

The broadening of the SSTH presented in Attardo and Raskin (1991) called the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) is exemplified by the six “Knowledge Resources” (KR’s) which must be activated in the generation of a joke. There is much disagreement about the importance/existence of all six KR’s, furthermore, certain KR’s are exemplified as problematic in certain situations. Thus, a fuller discussion here will exemplify the ways in which multimodal frameworks can supplement problematic KR’s and are integral to the analysis of complex humorous texts.

As briefly described in Chapter 2, the Language (LA) KR is responsible for the specific wording of the text and for “the placement of the functional elements that constitute it” (Attardo, 2001, p.22). The LA then would be responsible for particular placement of punch lines and the explicit construction of the functional components. The Narrative Strategy (NS) KR accounts for the fact that any joke must be constructed in some form of narrative. Essentially the NS resource simply suggests that any joke must be cast in a recognizable or decipherable narrative. The Target (TA) is the “butt” of the joke. This KR refers to all people, places, things, concepts, stereotypes or ideologies that are recognized as being the target of ridicule or scorn. This parameter is optional since not all humorous constructions necessarily attack something. However, in respect to serious political satire, this is an integral element for understanding the complexity of illocutionary force or rhetorical action. Situation (SI) simply refers to the fact that a joke must be about something. The Logical Mechanism (LM), which is said to be “by far the most problematic parameter” (Attardo, 2001, p.25), refers to the resolution of the incongruous scripts. The LM refers to the use of local logic in an attempt to explicate how the receiver juxtaposes the correct semantic scripts through the unfolding narrative.

The LM and the final KR, Script Opposition (SO) will be discussed in more detail in an attempt to show how multimodal analysis is able to resolve the problematic parameters in the GTVH and provide a systematic framework for the analysis of longer humorous texts.

The logical mechanism describes the specific phenomenon occurring whereby scripts are opposed or incongruous through conventional joke patterning. For instance, role-reversals, analogy, ignoring the obvious and missing link are a few of the known logical mechanisms found in corpus joke research. In other words, role-reversal is one form of typified pattern realized in joke construction. However, there is no systematic framework exemplified in the GTVH identifying how particular scripts can be modelled as opposing or incongruent. Longer texts continually recalibrate discursive trajectory through cohesive mechanisms and logico-semantic patterning. A longer text can construct complex patterns whereby multiple semantic scripts are instantiated throughout the text. The GTVH and the SSTH are unable to account for the ways in which script opposition or incongruity can occur with the intended scripts being separated by long sections of complex discourse. However, multimodal analysis using and extending systemic functional linguistics, as outlined previously, can rectify the issue by explicating the interconnecting patterns constructed throughout long sections of discourse.

3.4 Script Opposition

Semantic scripts which have also been called frames or schemata originally come from psychology (Barlett, 1932; Bateson 1955) and refer to bundles of information. A semantic script is “an organized complex of information about some entity, in the broadest sense” (Simpson, 2003, p.2). In other words, a script incorporates a complex of information related to a specific lexical item. A common example used is the script for

the lexical head “Restaurant” which includes all the items semantically associated with dining at a restaurant. All of the activities, foods, drinks, times and interactions typically associated with restaurant would be elements of the script. The notion of semantic script is complex and “one can never know that a given script is complete, since the next sentence one processes may include a new bit of information that was previously unavailable to one” (Simpson, 2003, p.6). Because of this, scripts are continually reconfigured to include new information about any given script. Most importantly, the lexematic “handles”, which are the specific words that call any script into the discourse, set discursive trajectories similar to the ways in which lexical cohesion creates expectancy relations.

Script Opposition (SO) is the most integral parameter of the GTVH and is central to the SSTH:

The main claim of the SSTH is that the text of a joke is always fully or in part compatible with two distinct scripts and that the two scripts are opposed to each other in a special way. In other words, the text of a joke is deliberately ambiguous, at least up to the point, if not to the very end. The punchline triggers the switch from the one script to the other by making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning. (Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p.308)

This description exemplifies the way humorous texts recalibrate discursive trajectory by signalling the possibility for a different interpretation. Thus, the instantiation of an incongruent script not only creates humour through divergence from expectation but also affects the meanings previously constructed in the text. This type of logogenetic patterning characterizes political satire; multimodal analysis enables the systematic explication of such complex semantic patterning. Without the previously described multimodal framework, the recognition of script incongruity could only be exemplified

through receiver intuition or logic. But, intuition and logic are also better explicated by the analysis of logico-semantic patterning which exemplifies the foundations of the phenomenon. The following section outlines the methodological categories which result from the combination of multimodal analysis and script incongruity theory that appear in the two sections of *The Colbert Report* analysed in this thesis.

3.5 Intersemiotic Incongruity

Any multimodal text with both linguistic and visual elements constructs two different kinds of semiotic potential. First, the linguistic elements construct three simultaneous strands of metafunctional meaning. Second, the visual elements construct the same three simultaneous strands of metafunctional meaning. The combination of both the linguistic and the visual combine in the construction of a collaborative meaning and outlined by Royce (2007), typically “both the verbal and visual modes of communication, within the boundaries of a single text, complement each other in the ways that they project meaning” (p. 63) which he calls intersemiotic complementarity. This occurs when the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctional properties of both the verbal and visual modes complement one another in terms of semantic content. Ideationally, participants and processes are cohesively related through patterns of hyponymy, repetition, synonymy or collocation. The semantic content expressed lexico-grammatically is also instantiated through visual representation. Similarly, the interpersonal and textual meanings expressed in the lexico-grammar are typically congruent with the semantic content expressed visually. Thus, “the relationship is synergistic in nature” resulting in the expression of congruent semantic content through the combination of various modalities.

As previously discussed, the SSTH presented by Raskin (1985), later revised into the GTVH in Attardo and Raskin (1991) are both inherently rooted in humourological theories of incongruence and opposition. The basic premise suggests that humour occurs through the juxtaposition of semantically incongruent information in a joke carrying text decipherable through the logical mechanism. The logical mechanism is said to be the most problematic of the knowledge resources and describes the ways which receivers identify and juxtapose the incongruent semantic scripts through local logic. Systemic functional and multimodal analysis however, adds to that framework and more systematically enables one to identify the specific semantic elements functioning as incongruent through logico-semantic relations in clause complexes as well as by longitudinal and intersemiotic reference chains. Thus, multimodal analysis identifies particular semantic patterning and explains semantic incongruities through this patterning.

It is important to recognize that the cohesive resources and tactic clause complex constructions as outlined above can function multimodally. Depending on the temporal qualities of the multimodal message and the ideational and interpersonal visual message elements (VME's), a visual representation can function as a referent item in endophoric reference chains, a complex lexical item and a conjunctive elaboration, extension or enhancement. The shared tri-functional nature of both language and visual representations suggests that both can be analysed simultaneously in the construction of multimodal meaning. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that both semiotic resources can function as complementary facets or as contrasting ones constructing multiple meanings in a singular and unified semiotic process.

Intersemiotic incongruity occurs when the VME's expressed in the visual representation contrast or function as incongruent to the verbal expression realized through specific conjunctive, tactic or cohesive relationship. A verbal clause could for instance be conjunctively exemplified through a visual representation functioning as semantically incongruent. For example, a verbal clause reading, "next, my graceful dismount from my trusty steed ashes" could be visually exemplified by a horse bucking its rider to the ground. Thus, the "graceful dismount" is exemplified by a violent accident. Similarly, a visual construct could be conjunctively elaborated through a semantically incongruent verbal construction. The relationship can function in a number of different ways; however, it is paramount that the logico-semantic continuity of the multimodal construction is disrupted by the instantiation of semantically incongruent visual or verbal information. The disruption of continuity results in an atypical logico-semantic construction whereby two partially overlapping but incongruous semantic scripts are represented as congruous.

The concept of script overlap is particularly important since any incongruous or opposing script would result in an atypical construction but not necessarily humour. Particularly in serious political satire, the incongruent scripts must share situational relevance resulting in a shift of discursive trajectory. In other words, the incongruity of the two scripts results in the construction of particular illocutionary meaning. The semantic incongruity of the scripts results in an atypical logico-semantic construction causing humour and their situational overlapping functions to construct a specific semiotic realization. The combination of script incongruity and partial situational overlap results in a discursive construction above the level of lexico-grammar creating

ideologically infused commentary regarding the particular subject matter. The atypical logico-semantic meaning created through lexico-grammatical construction results in socio-culturally meaningful rhetorical action.

3.6 Incongruent Co-hyponymy

Co-hyponymy refers to a form of lexical cohesion realized by classificatory relationships wherein multiple lexical items are related through class membership. Co-hyponyms are the subordinate members of a superordinate class. For example, shoes, sandals and boots are co-hyponyms to the superordinate class of footwear. As we've seen, this form of lexical cohesion creates lexical strings which add texture to a text through semantic associations. Cohesion, "creates a context within which certain other words become more likely to occur than others" (Eggins, 2004, p.52). As explained by Halliday & Hasan (1976), "cohesion expresses the continuity that exists between one part of the text and another" (p.299), thus continually recalibrating the discursive trajectory of the text. However, the texture of a text instantiated through various cohesive resources can become problematic if atypical semantic associations are constructed. When intentionally constructed, these atypical semantic associations can function to create humour through incongruent classification.

The taxonomical nature of co-hyponymy as a cohesive resource realizes semantic relationships that are not explicitly gradable. In other words, shoes, sandals and boots are all footwear. No co-hyponym is more or less footwear than any other and thus the relationship is one of equality. Incongruent co-hyponymy occurs wherein a lexical string of co-hyponyms are exemplified through logico-semantic patterning which are semantically incongruent. The result is an atypical lexical string functioning to create

logogenetic discord through incongruent semantic relationships. Thus, the atypical lexical item disrupts the cohesive continuity of the text which “recalibrates its context” (Eggins, 2004, p.52) and alters the discursive trajectory. Moreover, the incongruent lexical item affects the semantic and contextual nature of the other co-hyponyms by virtue of their equality.

As previously discussed, “incongruity is essentially defined as divergence from expectations” (Attardo, 1997, p.398), and this divergence can disrupt the semantic continuity. As Eggins (2004) explains a “text can move forward, gradually expanding and shifting its meanings” (p. 52), and the instantiation of an incongruent co-hyponym shifts the meaning of the unfolding text having an effect on the meanings previously expressed. Once again, the incongruent co-hyponym must semantically or contextually overlap with the other subordinate members in order to have a humorous effect on the situational coherence. Not any incongruent lexical item in a co-hyponomous group will result in a humorous construction in serious political satire. The incongruent member must be situationally, contextually or culturally relevant by nature of semantic overlap or cultural reference. The result is a socio-culturally meaningful rhetorical action functioning as an ideologically infused commentary about the subject matter as will become evident in the analysis.

3.7 Inverse Paratactic Elaboration

Paratactic elaboration is a logico-semantic clausal construction which functions to develop the “thesis of the primary clause, backing it up with some form of explanation or explanatory comment” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.398). Typically, elaboration provides explanatory information to support the speaker’s primary thesis through further

developing the original construct. Elaborations are often explicitly signalled with lexical bundles like “in other words”, “for example”, “for instance”, and function as expository, exemplifying or clarifying, depending on the semantic nature of the secondary elaborative clause. As a logico-semantic category, elaboration refers to the structural relationship between clauses within a sentence; however, expansionary systems also cross the boundaries of sentence under conjunctive cohesion. While it is important to recognize the difference in the structural nature of the system of expansion in clause complexing, both expansion and conjunctive cohesion function in the same semantic manner in the sense that expansionary mechanisms and conjunctive cohesion can realize the same semantic relationships.

Inverse paratactic elaboration occurs when the secondary clause is explicitly signalled as elaborative but does not function to develop the thesis of the primary clause. Instead, it develops the anti-thesis or opposing argument. As previously discussed, this form of atypical construction creates logico-semantic discord altering the discursive trajectory of the text. In other words, the elaborative clause does not do what it is supposed to do. There is no need to expand on the ways in which the semantic scripts must overlap since inverse paratactic elaborations are typically polar opposites or in direct opposition to primary clauses. However, while script overlap can result in the specific construction of illocutionary meaning from the recalibration of context and purpose, similarly, inverse paratactic elaboration has a particular effect on the information expressed previously in any given text.

As Eggins (2004) suggests, “since we typically depart from the familiar to head towards the unfamiliar, the Rheme typically contains unfamiliar, or ‘new’, information”

(p.300). Thus, the theme of the clause complex is generally “given” or familiar information. This given/new relationship is important since it has implications for the ways in which the primary and secondary clauses in inverse paratactic elaboration bear on the overall text and the continual recalibration of meaning. The “new” nature of the secondary clause gives it informative priority. The secondary clause may function to falsify the primary clause through the introduction of new information. The secondary clause can recalibrate the discursive trajectory by providing oppositional information as elaborative resulting in a humorous construction through the falsification of the primary clausal construction.

Conjunctive exemplification can also function atypically creating humour through incongruity. Similar to elaborative exposition, conjunctive exemplification occurs wherein “one sentence is (presented as) a re-saying or representation of a previous sentence” (Eggins, 2004, p.47). Incongruous exemplification occurs where the exemplifying construct is in some way semantically incongruous with the primary construction. A common form of exemplification is the paratactic listing of lexical items as examples. In this case, the paratactic list is often explicitly signalled with the lexical conjunction “for example”. The paratactic exemplification can be incongruous in two different ways. First, the paratactic list can be ideationally incongruous whereby the lexical items do not logically exemplify that which they are presented as exemplifying. Second, the paratactic list can be interpersonally incongruous whereby a graduating element insinuating a minimal list is exemplified with an extensive list or a graduating element insinuating large list is exemplified with a minimal list. While it is necessary to identify the different ways in which exemplification can function as incongruous, the

difference is arbitrary considering that both methods function to create semantic incongruity through the large/small or real/unreal oppositions.

Semantic incongruity can also exist within the paratactic list itself. This paratactic incongruity is similar to incongruous co-hyponymy whereby lexical items are related by classification. In this case, the paratactic list of lexical items includes one member which is semantically incongruous with the rest. Once again, the incongruous member must have situational or contextual relevance through thematic pertinence or homophoric reference to have a meaningful humorous effect. If the member does not overlap in a situational or contextual manner, humour can occur but typically without meaningful rhetorical action or ideological implications. When this happens, the incongruous member can create humour through logogenetic discord; however, it is typically at the level of wordplay. In other words, the incongruous member has no meaningful relationship to the rest of the text and simply disrupts continuity for its own sake.

The methodological categories outlined above describe the ways in which humour occurs through incongruity in *The Colbert Report*. Intersemiotic incongruity, incongruent co-hyponymy and inverse paratactic elaboration each describe particular ways in which semantic information is juxtaposed through intersemiotic, cohesive and conjunctive means in the construction of multimodal humour. Intersemiotic, cohesive and conjunctive analysis enables one to explain how expectancy and classificatory semantic relationships are disrupted by the incongruous information. The lexical chains, logico-semantic patterning and intersemiotic constructs are problematic and recalibrate discursive trajectory. In other words, the texts become problematic due to atypical semantic patterning; however, a more thorough investigation of the problematic semantic

information realizes unique illocutionary force. Thus, the problematic semantic information does not fit with expectancy relations instantiated in the text thereby creating logogenetic discord. The discord leads to a reinterpretation of the text and a realization of the true illocutionary force of the semiotic event.

3.8 Context and Data

The Colbert Report is a satirical version of the increasingly popular political pundit news broadcast. A pundit is conventionally recognized as a popular personality who offers their expert opinion on various issues, most commonly, socio-political issues of popular interest. Some popular programs that gave impetus to *The Colbert Report* are *The O'Reilly Factor* hosted by Bill O'Reilly, *Lou Dobbs Tonight* hosted by Lou Dobbs and *Tucker* hosted by Tucker Carlson. Conventionally, punditry broadcasts incorporate discussions regarding socio-political matters of popular interest along with interviews to explicate political issues in an entertaining fashion. Hosts often comment emphatically about political issues from their own political and ideological orientations. Political pundit shows are primarily running commentaries on popular political issues that intend to sway public opinion towards that of the host since pundits often explicitly align themselves with particular political ideologies.

Shortly after George W. Bush became the President of the United States of America, comedian and actor, John Stewart's *The Daily Show* became very popular. *The Daily Show* is a comedic and uncensored version of the political pundit broadcast with an extremely liberal political orientation. Host John Stewart often discusses political issues that present the Republican Party in an unfavourable manner while explicitly mocking the apparent fallibility of the Bush administration's reason and judgement. Stewart has a

team of correspondents who make appearances based on their specific political specialties. Originally, Stephen Colbert began as a correspondent on *The Daily Show*, playing an extremely conservative character whose ideological orientations typically contended with Stewart's. The popularity of their emphatic debates gave rise to *The Colbert Report* hosted by Stephen Colbert which airs immediately following *The Daily Show* on the Comedy Network in Canada.

The Colbert Report is similar to *The Daily Show* in many respects, however, John Stewart has no explicit character orientation in that he hosts the show as himself, whereas, Stephen Colbert takes on a carefully constructed conservative persona. Colbert's persona is an overtly conservative nationalist who unwaveringly champions the free market, traditionalism, militarism, Catholicism and democracy. Colbert's charismatic and witty conservative persona is maintained with great rigour despite occasional breaks in character resulting from overly humorous discursive material. His persona, while obviously satirizing classical conservatism through parody, is intentionally authentic, serious and honest. Colbert's persona seems to be unaware of the fallibility of his own reasoning and judgement and this authenticity of persona enables the viewer to recognize the absurdity of overtly conservative ideologies.

The Colbert Report has experienced increasing popularity over the past three years. In 2006 Stephen Colbert delivered an incredibly audacious speech at the White House Correspondence Dinner in April receiving explicitly noticeable disapproval from President Bush and his wife. In January of the same year, the American Dialect Society named "Truthiness" their word of the year, which Colbert coined on the premier of *The Colbert Report* in 2005. Ben and Jerry's, a popular all natural ice cream producer, has

released a new flavour called “Stephen Colbert’s Americone Dream”. Colbert has even been granted an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree from Knox College in Galesburg Illinois. *The Colbert Report*, which Stephen himself has described as “the No Fact Zone” claiming to “deliver the truth, unfiltered by rational argument” (Colbert, 2007, p221), has gained increasing popularity amongst celebrities, politicians and academics. His unique brand of satirical humour has been recognized as a powerful discursive force in the attempt to expose the fallibilities of the Bush administration (Baym, 2007).

The Colbert Report is half an hour long and airs on the Comedy Network in Canada at 11:30 pm. from Monday to Thursday. The show is implicitly organized in three distinct sections determined by commercial breaks. The first section includes a brief overview of thematically prominent elements followed immediately by an introductory montage with musical accompaniment. The first section typically has a socio-political issue orientation wherein the host discusses currently popular issues in a monologic fashion accompanied by visual presentations where appropriate. Topics can range from serious political issues like “extraordinary rendition” to unimportant popular culture matters like “the new Smurf’s movie”. The first section conventionally ends with a special feature entitled “The Word”, in which the host performs a monologue based on a particular theme accompanied by a blue box on the right hand side of the screen. The blue box is labelled “The Word” at the top and functions as a textual and pictorial space in which figures and texts are presented during the monologue to add commentary. The first section typically runs from seven minutes to eleven minutes in length depending on the importance and relevance of the topics discussed.

The second section is much more diversified but conventionally focuses on one of many “special feature segments”. Special feature segments include sections like “The Threat Down in which the host identifies in descending order, the five most immediate threats to America. “Tip of the Hat, Wag of the Finger” is a section wherein Colbert praises or condemns various people, institutions and entities while providing support for his judgments. “Alpha Dog of the Week” is a section which praises a specific person for showing outstanding leadership qualities. There are many other special feature segments and each has its own topical orientation however, a thorough explanation of each is not specifically pertinent to this thesis.

The third section features an interview and/or musical guest of some cultural, political or entertainment popularity. The section begins with an introduction of the guest followed by Colbert running, with arms raised while accepting audience applause, to the interview desk. Guests have included Bill O’Reilly, Madeline Albright, Lance Armstrong, Katie Couric, Kevin Costner, Paul Simon and a multitude of other reputable authors, musicians, actors and politicians. Interview topics range dramatically depending on the guest’s background, career and political affiliation. It is normal to find Colbert making accusations about “communistic” folk songs from liberal musicians and damning liberal media figures for their unwarranted and more importantly unpatriotic attacks on the Bush administration. Interviews end in a friendly fashion and Colbert often finishes with one final question, “George Bush, great president or greatest President?”

The data selected for analysis are two clips from episodes that aired in June of 2008. The first clip runs 4:45 minutes between time markers 4:00 and 8:45 on June 18th. The second clip runs a total of 3:10 minutes from time marker 2:55 to 6:05 on June 24th.

The clips were selected from all the episodes that aired in June of 2008 based on their thematic orientation. Since socio-political issues are incredibly diverse, it was important to situate the analysis thematically. I purposely have chosen clips which exemplify the ways in which Colbert belittles the Republican Party and conservative ideology through comedic attacks on both President Bush and John McCain. Indiscriminate random selection was not a viable option in clip selection based on the show's diversity of thematic concentration. The program will often belittle and ridicule athletes or movie stars in a playful manner; however, the humour is rarely meaningful commentary and better resembles slapstick, playful comedy. Discussions regarding popular culture, sports and entertainment, while humorous, would not exemplify the important ideological impact of serious political satire. Furthermore, to extrapolate the complex meanings constructed through logogenetic patterning in humorous discourse requires micro analysis; therefore, longer sections of multimodal data would have been too cumbersome. It is not within the scope of this thesis to compile a taxonomy of humour-creating multimodal devices, nor is such an undertaking possible considering the various forms, types and functions of humorous discourse. Rather, I have chosen these selections to show how political satire functions as ideologically infused and meaningful socio-political commentary.

5 Analysis

The following analysis explicates the ways in which complex intersemiotic and logogenetic patterning disrupts discursive trajectory through incongruous semantic patterning. The excerpts from the June 18th and 24th episodes of *The Colbert Report* characterized by intersemiotic incongruity, incongruous co-hyponymy, inverse paratactic elaboration and the given/new compositional structure, construct meaningful socio-political commentary highlighting the shortcomings and inadequacies of multiple satirical targets. A thorough analysis of the intersemiotic constructions enables the identification of satirical targets and reveals the true illocutionary intent of the discourse. Semantically incongruous information signals a shift in discursive trajectory by creating logogenetic discord. Furthermore, the incongruous elements homophorically reference culturally-situated information clarifying the illocutionary force of the discursive construction. The following discussion provides a thorough explication of the ways in which semantic incongruity in various forms creates individual humorous constructions functioning to construct meaningful socio-political commentary.

5.1 Intersemiotic Incongruity

The thematically prominent element in the video section running from time marker 2:56 to 6:03 is the apparent “oil crisis” occurring in the United States at the time of the clip. This becomes apparent through the host’s introductory exclamative phrase “oil crisis!” accompanied by large flashing red text reading “oil crisis” along with a loud alarm (Appendix 2, Figure 1). The discourse can be further sub-divided into two distinct sections focusing on different aspects of the crisis. The first section discusses the negative events occurring due to the crisis and possible future ramifications if something is not

done. The second section discusses possible solutions and possible actions to be taken by the government to ensure the crisis does not continue.

Following a brief explanation of the negative events occurring which can be attributed to the oil crisis, host Stephen Colbert continues to discuss the problematic future that awaits us if we don't do something to address the issue. Colbert, apparently shocked and outraged by the fact that "people are driving less" and that "GM is saying they might discontinue selling Hummers", says "Folks, this is a nightmare scenario. America needs a wake-up call. So here it is, the dark future that awaits us if we don't reverse this trend". This clausal construction is exemplified through a visual representation that is ideationally and interpersonally incongruent. The intersemiotic incongruity functions to create humour through semantic script opposition but also operates to falsify the initial proposition.

The intersemiotic construction functions as an expansionary clause complex in which two clauses are linked through logico-semantic relations. In this case, the secondary clause, which is realized through multimodal representation, elaborates on the primary clause through exemplification. Exemplification is an elaborative function in which, "the secondary clause develops the thesis of the primary clause by becoming more specific about it, often citing an actual example" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.398). Thus, the visual representation of "the dark future that awaits us if we don't reverse this trend," functions as the secondary clause in the complex and exemplifies the "dark future". However, the visual message elements (VME's) are ideationally and interpersonally incongruent with the verbal meanings that are constructed.

The verbal message is realized through the declarative statement “so here it is”, where “it” cataphorically references the visual message functioning as the existent in an existential process. The reference “it”, also refers cataphorically to the hypotactic elaboration, “the dark future that awaits us if we don’t reverse this trend”. The structural “here” does not receive a functional label since it does not encode any representational meaning in a Transitivity analysis (Eggins, 2004). The “is” signifies the process in the statement realizing the verb “be”. Thus, the logico-semantic relationships created instantiate the cataphoric reference “it”, the hypotactic elaboration, “the dark future that awaits us if we don’t reverse this trend” and the visual realization of the referencing is semantically related through cohesive referencing. It is important to examine hypotactic elaboration which “functions as a kind of descriptive gloss to the primary clause” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 399), since the elaboration encodes semantically meaningful information about the visual message as it functions through cataphoric reference. The important element in the hypotactic elaboration is the nominal bundle “dark future” which encodes literal semantic meaning of “lacking light” as well as figurative semantic meaning insinuating “negative and unfavourable”. However, the multimodal exemplification of the primary complex realizes incongruent ideational meaning creating logico-semantic discord and thus, humour.

The ideational meanings of the VME’s are realized through a non-transactional action whereby the actor is engaged in a material process with no vector pointing to another participant or goal. As seen in figure 2, the actor is a young male dressed in light khaki pants, a shirt and a tie. The man is riding a bicycle at a seemingly leisurely pace with no immediate goal in the frame. The participant is not engaged through eye contact

with any other participant and scans the environment as he rides. The camera angle does not change; however, the participant continuously moves closer and closer as he rides. Pleasant music accompanies the ideational VME's, birds chirp intermittently and there is a final ring of a bicycle bell before the clip finishes. The bicyclist is riding on what appears to be a park path with grass cleanly cut lining the path and mature healthy trees dispersed throughout the environment. The colour saturation, differentiation and modulation signify the highest level of modality within a naturalistic coding orientation. The participant, while not directly engaged with the camera angle and thus the viewer, maintains a consistent and pleasant smile throughout the course of the clip. The participant's head is also slightly elevated to suggest that he is engaged with elements of the immediate environment like the trees, grass, air and birds. Also, the colour saturation along with the distinct shadow directly beneath the bicyclist suggest that the sun is shining.

The VME's expressed in the multimodal exemplification are obviously semantically incongruent with the primary descriptive clausal construction. The video clip expresses opposing literal and figurative semantic content thus creating humour through opposition. The structural reference in the verbal discourse suggests that the exemplification will "develop the thesis of the primary clause" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.398), however, the VMEs do not express meanings that correspond with "dark future". The verbal construct is exemplified by a visual expressing opposing ideational meaning with the "sun shining" and opposing interpersonal meaning with a "smiling and happy participant". The visual does not exemplify "lack of light" or a "negative and

unfavourable” future and thus, the incongruent multimodal exemplification is semantically inconsistent creating humour through opposition.

It could be suggested that the illocutionary intent of the cataphoric referencing joined with the multimodal exemplification was specifically constructed to suggest that the trend of “people driving less” would result in a pleasant and favourable future. While this is true, the illocutionary meaning results primarily from the incongruity of the exemplification. While it is logically acceptable to understand the multimodal exemplification as a plausible result of “people driving less”, the humour is a result of Colbert’s cataphoric description of a “dark future”. Furthermore, the incongruity of the visual exemplification functions to falsify the cataphoric reference. It becomes increasingly clear through the incongruent exemplification, that the future would not be “dark” in a literal or figurative sense. People driving less would result in an environmentally positive outcome and would be generally beneficial. A further explication of the incongruity will be provided in the discussion section looking at why “people driving less” might be negatively evaluated from an extreme right wing ideological position.

5.2 Incongruent Co-hyponymy

The three minute excerpt from June 24th 2008 is characterized by cohesive resources that function to realize logogenetic patterns that unfold throughout the discourse. Specifically, the cohesive resource of co-hyponymy which allocates lexical items relating through classification functions to create chains of semantic relationships. As discussed previously, co-hyponymy is exhibited through relationships of superordinate class and subordinate membership. For example, perch, cod and salmon are all subordinate

members of the superordinate class of fish. The “Oil Crisis” excerpt exemplifies a number of complex lexical strings that function to add texture to the discourse through semantic association. One thematically prominent lexical string is realized by the superordinate lexical head “solution”. Solution is first introduced in the phrase “solution to this problem” where “this” cohesively refers to “the oil crisis”. Therefore, the superordinate class can be rendered as “Solution to the oil crisis” by means of cohesive referencing. The superordinate class of “Solution to the oil crisis” is the nominal head of three subordinate members that occur sequentially throughout the discourse.

The first subordinate member is introduced through a radio address from President Bush as “expand American oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf or O.C.S.” which is cohesively referenced throughout the remainder of the discourse by the nominalization “offshore drilling”. The second member is realized through the conjunctive extension, “but what about off porch drilling?” This subordinate member is realized through the interrogative proposition introduced by the host Stephen Colbert. Thus, “off porch drilling” functions as the third subordinate member of “Solution to the oil crisis”. The last explicitly recognized subordinate member is realized through the imperative proposition made by Colbert; “I’m calling on everyone who’s watching to go out, ‘a shootin’ at some food’. From what I’ve gathered from my research, it’s the best way to find a bubblin’ crude”. Thus, “shootin’ at some food” constitutes the third subordinate member of the class “Solution to the oil crisis”.

These are the three explicit subordinate members of the superordinate class “Solution to the oil crisis”. The first is a proposition made by President George W. Bush and two are proposed by the host Stephen Colbert. The first subordinate member which is

“expand American oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf or O.C.S.”, and the nominalization “offshore drilling”, constitutes a solution actually proposed to address the oil crisis. The following two members, “off porch drilling” and “shootin’ at some food” constitute solutions proposed by host Stephen Colbert. While the subordinate members are not single lexical items, Martin (1992a, p. 293) shows how numerous lexical items can function to express only one piece of lexical content. Thus, while the relationship is not lexically simple, the semantic associations still function in the superordinate class and subordinate member fashion.

The classificatory system of lexical cohesion instantiates semantic relationships based on membership to a superordinate class. Subordinate members cannot be allocated as more or less subordinate. Thus, the classification of subordinate membership instantiates specific and simple semantic relationships of likeness; therefore, all subordinate members are essentially equal based on semantic classification. However, the subordinate members of the class “Solution to the oil crisis” express lexical content that is explicitly incongruent. “Off porch drilling” and “shootin’ at some food” are both subordinate members that disrupt the congruency of possible solutions to the American oil crisis. Therefore, the introduction of subordinate members that express incongruent lexical content creates humour through semantic script opposition realized through incongruous co-hyponymy. The incongruent members function not only to create humour through absurd classification; they also function to semantically re-classify the other members of the superordinate class.

Since classification through co-hyponymy suggests that the subordinate members are semantically associated to the superordinate class equally, “expand American oil

production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf or O.C.S.” or “offshore drilling”, “off porch drilling” and “shootin’ at some food”, are equally plausible and intelligible solutions to the American oil crisis. Thus, the incongruity of the last two absurd and unreasonable subordinate members functions to re-classify the first member as equally absurd and unreasonable. The co-hyponymy also creates more subtle evaluative relationships based on participant agency through multimodal representation and the cohesive resource of homophoric reference.

On an even more discrete level, the classification of subordinate members functions to negatively evaluate the solution proposed by President Bush. The final subordinate member, “shootin’ at some food” homophorically references a popular television show of the 1990’s called *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The show follows the lives of a family from rural Texas who strike oil and move to Beverly Hills, an extremely wealthy neighbourhood on the outskirts of Los Angeles California. As the host Stephen Colbert suggests that everyone who’s watching should “go out a shootin’ at some food” because “it’s the best way to find a bubblin’ crude”, simultaneously, a short video clip plays. The clip is a section of the introduction for *The Beverly Hillbillies* and features the father shooting a rifle at an unknown object (Appendix 2, Figure 5). In the original construction, the rifle shot results in a black liquid bubbling from the ground, suggesting that the shot punctures a whole in the ground where oil is located. The clip ideationally complements the verbal expression through the visual message elements (VME’s) which depict a participant engaged in a unidirectional transactional action with a vector realized by the pointing of the rifle and the action realized by the goal of ‘shooting the ground’. The VME’s are ideationally synonymous with the meaning expressed in the phrase,

“shootin at some food” and the result of finding “a bubblin’ crude”. As discussed by Royce (2007), intersemiotic complementarity can occur through cohesive synonymy whereby the VME’s and the verbal message express similar experiential meaning.

The intersemiotic complementarity of the section infers subtle relationships between the participants involved throughout the section of discourse discussing possible solutions to the oil crisis. As previously mentioned, an auditory clip complemented by the visual transcription reading “First, we should expand American oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf or O.C.S.” is a subordinate classificatory member. The solution proposed by President Bush is classified through co-hyponymy as equally important and semantically similar to “shootin’ at some food” which is intersemiotically complemented through the visual representation from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The semantic associations between the two propositions along with homophoric referencing of the Texas born Hillbillies infers possible similarities between not only the semantic properties of the propositions but also the ideational representation of the participants.

The suggestion of similarity between President George Bush and *The Beverly Hillbillies* is realized through the equal semantic classifications of “offshore drilling” and “shootin’ at some food”. However, the classification of propositions is not enough to suggest similarities between participants. The association is only recoverable if the receiver of discourse has the appropriate cultural knowledge. Bourdieu (1984) suggests, as cited in Kuipers (2006) that “the appreciation of specific objects requires specific knowledge or ‘capital’”(p.361) which in this case refers to the liberal media’s suggestion that George Bush is an unintelligible southern ‘hick’. Differences of political ideology

have led members of the liberal media who disagree with certain presidential decisions to make accusations suggesting that George Bush is a southern “hick” insinuating a lack of intelligence, decorum and reasonable judgment. The visual representation of *The Beverly Hillbillies* during the discourse is decipherable as an insinuation of association based on specific cultural knowledge. Thus, the intersemiotic representation along with the co-hyponymy function to suggest that offshore drilling is an equally viable and intelligible solution to the oil crisis as “shootin’ at some food”. Furthermore, it is suggested that the equally viable and intelligible solutions result from two supposedly equally reasonable and intelligible participants.

In the June 24th excerpt discussing the oil crisis, there is another case in which atypical lexical cohesion results in semantic incongruity creating humour. Immediately following President Bush’s proposal to “increase American oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf, or O.C.S.”, Colbert responds with an exclamatory agreement “Yes!” and the declarative complex “we’ll start by clearing away all the old junk we’ve allowed to collect on the shelf like fish and coral”. In this case, the co-hyponymous members are explicitly identified with the paratactic exemplification “like fish and coral”. Thus, fish and coral functions as co-hyponymous members of the superordinate class “old junk”, realized in the primary clause. The logico-semantic relationship is instantiated through both the paratactic exemplification and through lexical co-hyponymy.

The lexical head “old junk” is naturally associated with the semantic script “garbage” implying useless material. However, the subordinate members realized through the exemplification are semantically incongruous and the logico-semantic discord results

in humour. Fish and coral are entities that naturally inhabit the outer continental shelf and their allocation as hyponymous members to “old junk” is logically fallible and semantically incongruent. The obvious absurdity realized in the allocation of fish and coral as subordinate members of “old junk” could be interpreted as the speaker’s switch to non-bona fide communication, however, there are no prosodic or visual indicators to justify that claim. Moreover, the honest allocation of incongruous subordinate members functions to create humour through the receiver’s recognition of authenticity in the speaker’s statement. The incongruity functions not only to create humour through logico-semantic discord, it also functions to suggest that the speaker’s judgement and ideological position are absurd, thereby, suggesting a lack of credibility.

5.3 Incongruent Co-hyponymy 2

The special feature section entitled “The Word” from the June 18th clip leads with the introductory nominalization “Lexicon Artist” which functions as the head of the monologue. “Lexicon Artist” anaphorically references both ‘it’ in the phrase “it’s tonight’s word” and more importantly the phrase “John McCain has found **one way** to put distance between himself and the President”. Thus, the anaphoric referencing suggests that the monologue will explicate **the way** John McCain can manage this. The first section of the monologue is thematically oriented around the declarative statement “language is very important in politics, especially when it comes to war”. Following this declarative, Colbert goes on to explicate the various ways in which language functions in the various descriptions of America’s ongoing conflicts. The section develops the initial thesis which suggests that “language is very important in politics, especially when it

comes to war” through listing the various names used by the Bush administration to describe the “War in Iraq” and America’s ongoing conflicts.

Colbert presents the various co-hyponymous names ascribed to “America’s ongoing conflicts” through a chronological explication;

Folks, Language is very important in politics, especially when it comes to war. For years, the Bush administration used the phrase **War on Terror**, which has been replaced by the phrase **Global War on Terror**. Then, it was the **Global Struggle Against Extremism**, then briefly, it was **The Long war**, before they settled on the new name **Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran**

The various names presented in the section are hyponyms to the superordinate class realized cataphorically in the statement “John McCain has his own word to describe **America’s ongoing conflicts**” which follows the section. Therefore the phrases, “War on Terror”, “Global War on Terror”, “Global Struggle Against Extremism”, “The long War” and “Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran”, function as co-hyponymous subordinate members to the superordinate class “America’s ongoing conflicts”.

As previously discussed, co-hyponymy is a lexical cohesive resource which instantiates taxonomic semantic relationships. All subordinate members function as semantically equivalent in their relationship to the superordinate class. The first four co-hyponymous members realize typical classificatory relations. Each phrase was actually used by the Bush Administration to describe “America’s ongoing conflicts”, however, the fifth co-hyponymous member is semantically incongruent. The phrase “Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran” disrupts the continuity of the semantic relations instantiated through the co-hyponymous lexical string and the logico-semantic incongruity creates humour. The fictitious co-hyponymous phrase presented by the host also functions to comment on

the ambiguities exemplified through the chronological nominalizations ascribed to America's ongoing conflicts.

The first four co-hyponymous members realize increasingly ambiguous ideational content regarding agency. The first member "War on Terror" identifies "terror" as the goal on which an unmarked actor is waging war. The second subordinate member also identifies "terror" as the goal; however there is still no definitive actor. The third member introduces "extremism" as the new goal towards which the global struggle is against. Finally, the fourth subordinate member, "The Long War" is void of agency in terms of an acting participant and lacks any goal whatsoever. Thus, the goal of America's ongoing conflicts becomes more ambiguous throughout the nominalizations until it is then completely omitted in the phrase "The Long War". The continual re-naming of America's ongoing conflicts confuses agency and the identification of a goal thereby resulting in a description of a conflict without any actors or goals.

The final subordinate member introduced by the host is "Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran", in which "we" functions as the actor of the material process where "Iran" is the goal. The actor is realized by the pronoun "we" which anaphorically references "the Bush Administration" from the declarative introductory phrase "For years, the Bush Administration used the phrase". Furthermore, the goal of the final subordinate member is realized as "Iran". The host introduces the fifth subordinate member, "Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran", after the phrase "before they settled on the new name", which is suggesting a resolution to the continuous re-naming. The representation of the fifth subordinate member as a resolution suggests that the previous co-hyponyms are lacking something. Furthermore, the solidification of an identifiable goal in the resolution

suggests the problematic nature of the previous co-hyponyms is the ambiguity of ideational content in terms of lack of goal.

The subordinate member “Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran” functions as semantically incongruous at the level of “real to the unreal, that is, factual reality to an imagined one” (Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p.308), because the administration never actually used the phrase. However, the subordinate member homophorically references the ongoing political discussion in the United States identifying Iran as a possible threat to western civilization. Thus, the chronological account of the various descriptions of “America’s ongoing conflict” which fail to solidify a specific target is rectified by the host’s invocation of the unreal new name “Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran”. The incongruous co-hyponym results in an implicit commentary regarding the absurdity of a “war” with no identifiable or tangible enemy. Also, the informality of the impulsive resolution signalled by “Hey” suggests that the administration impulsively arrives at political decisions without appropriate consideration of the consequences.

5.4 Inverse Paratactic Elaboration

The five minute clip from the June 18th episode is thematically oriented around the introductory declarative, “it’s no secret that one of John McCain’s biggest challenges as a candidate is distinguishing himself from President Bush”. The remainder of the discourse explains the ways in which “distinguishing himself from President Bush” is not beneficial since “he’s so different from President Bush already”, and follows by explaining that “John McCain has found one way to put distance between himself and the President”. The “way” John McCain has found to distinguish himself from President Bush functions

as the thematic focus of “The Word” section with the introductory nominal head “Lexicon Artist”.

Immediately following the thematically prominent declarative “it’s no secret that one of John McCain’s biggest challenges is distinguishing himself from President Bush”, Colbert follows by implicitly questioning the declarative exemplified in the statement “I’m not sure why he’s so eager to spurn the president’s supporters”. The instantiation of the phrase ‘I’m not sure’ functions as a modalization of engagement regarding McCain’s supposed eagerness to spurn the Presidents supporters. The result of the minimized engagement operates to implicitly question the reasonability of McCain’s attempt to “distinguish himself from President Bush”. The graduated engagement explicitly positions the speaker in relation to John McCain’s campaign strategy by implying divergence between the speaker and McCain. This divergence is intensified through the following declarative paratactic elaboration exemplified in the phrase “I mean, that’s walking away from almost 29% of the American electorate and nearly half the Bush Children”.

The paratactic elaboration intentionally functions to provide reasoning behind the strategic divergence represented in the primary construct “I’m not sure why he’s so eager to spurn the President’s supporters”. Conventionally, paratactic elaboration functions to develop the “thesis of the primary clause, backing it up with some form of explanation or explanatory comment” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.398). Thus, the strategic divergence is explained through identifying the particular people John McCain would be spurning. The complexes above operate to first question the campaign strategies by the modalized engagement positioning the speaker in relation to the utterance and further

exemplify the reasons for strategic divergence through paratactic elaboration. This results in a negative evaluation of McCain's strategy to spurn the President's supporters through an explanatory comment clarifying the evaluation.

The paratactic elaboration provides explanatory information to support the speaker's primary thesis insinuating that spurning the president's supporters is a bad thing. However, the paratactic complex of "that's walking away from almost 29% of the American electorate and nearly half the Bush children" functions as an inverse exemplification resulting in logogenetic discord through opposition. The speaker constructs the exemplification as though it would function conventionally thereby further clarifying the primary thesis. However, the lexical content realized in the paratactic complex operates in opposition to the primary construct. The paratactic elaboration suggests that it would be strategically beneficial for John McCain to separate himself from President Bush. The paratactic complex exemplifies information which implicitly evaluates the President in a negative fashion. The paratactically elaborated positive representation of extremely negative lexical content functions as logico-semantically incongruous thereby resulting in humour. The clause complex logically functioning to justify the primary thesis of the speaker actually instantiates lexical content nullifying the proposition.

Immediately following the paratactic complex, the speaker continues by saying, "But he's so different from Bush already", wherein "he" anaphorically references John McCain and "so" operates as an interpersonal marker of graduation. The statement implies that John McCain and President Bush are already extremely different through the graduating element exemplifying intensity. The graduating element "so", "acts to

heighten the intensity” (White, 2001, p.26) of the attribution of difference. The speaker continues to exemplify this attribute of extreme difference through conjunctive elaboration saying, “The only issues they agree on are, education, immigration, Iraq, abortion, Supreme Court judges, social security, tax breaks for the wealthy, wire tapping, trade, health care, the middle east, same sex marriage and Medicare”. Once again the speaker instantiates intensity relations through graduation wherein “only” implies minimization or small.

The conjunctive elaboration of the extreme difference between John McCain and President Bush is exemplified through a thirteen member paratactic list of “issues they agree on”. Logically, the conjunctive elaboration should function to exemplify difference; however, the thirteen member paratactic construction results in the instantiation of oppositional semantic content resulting in logico-semantic discord. The paratactic list functions in opposition to the primary graduated declarative “he’s so different from Bush already” and also opposes the minimizing graduation of “only issues”. The semantic incongruity between the exemplification of difference and an extensive list exemplifying sameness results in an absurd logical construction and thereby humour. Through inverse paratactic exemplification, the typical logico-semantic nature of the discursive trajectory is disrupted thereby resulting in humour through opposition.

The complex logogenetic patterning continues when Colbert conjunctively extends the thirteen member paratactic list with the statement “but they could not be further apart on Catherine Heigl’s feud with her *Grey’s Anatomy* producers”. The conjunctive extension functions to add adversative information to the previous clause complex. However, the semantic orientation of the adversative information operates as

lexically incongruous to the primary complex. The thirteen member paratactic list instantiates lexical relations of co-hyponymy wherein all items are semantically related as “issues”. Moreover, the thirteen lexical items are all hyponyms to the superordinate class “politically pertinent issues”. The adversative extension signalled by the conjunctive element ‘but’ further comments on the “issues they agree on” by representing an issue which “they could not be further apart on”. Thus, “Catherine Heigl’s feud with her Grey’s Anatomy Producers” functions as the fourteenth subordinate member of the superordinate class “politically pertinent issues”.

Grey’s Anatomy is a primetime television medical drama and actress Catherine Heigl plays a resident doctor on the show. Her recent contract feud with producers is a widely known popular culture issue receiving a large amount of popular media attention. The allocation of Catherine Heigl’s feud as co-hyponymous with ‘education, immigration, Iraq, abortion, Supreme Court judges, social security, tax breaks for the wealthy, wire tapping, trade, health care, the middle east, same sex marriage and Medicare’ creates humour through incongruent co-hyponymy. The primary thirteen member paratactic construction exemplifies issues of particular political importance whereas Heigl’s feud exemplifies an extremely unimportant popular culture issue. The incongruous semantic nature of the hyponymous member creates humour through semantic script opposition and also reinforces Bush and McCain’s similarities operating as their only point of contestation. More discretely, the allocation of Heigl’s feud as a politically pertinent issue functions as an implicit commentary about the nature of American political campaigns.

5.5 Given/New: The Word

The 4:45minute clip from June 18th 2008 closes with a section called “The Word” which is a daily feature characterising the end of the first introductory section of the program.

“The Word” is a section characterised by a short monologue accompanied by expansionary textual instantiations located in a separate visual field. The textual instantiations that appear throughout the monologue function in two distinct ways. First, the text will mirror a certain expression, phrase or clause from the verbal monologue by simple repetition. In this way, the visual simply provides a textual example of the verbal construction. Second, the visual text can also expand upon the meaning created in the monologue through expansionary and tactic relations or through the representation of a particular picture or figure. In this case, the text further develops the meaning of the monologue. However, when the visual text exhibits expansionary or tactic relations, host Stephen Colbert is supposedly unaware of the visual manifestation and continues his monologue with no awareness of the visual text. Thus, the visual manifestation of text expands or comments upon the verbal discourse in a separate visual field resulting in the construction of a complex intersemiotic discursive action.

The compositional makeup of “The Word” section is particularly important in terms of framing. As seen in figure 7, the left visual field is distinctly separate from the right visual field distinguished by a sharp frameline and contrasting form. The screen space is separated by a slightly curved horizontal frameline which fades from white to black going from top to bottom. The left visual field contains the host who occupies nearly the entire frame along with a small amount of the set background (Figure 7). The right visual field is characterized by two distinct territories separated by contrasting forms. The bottom third of the right visual frame shows a map of the world in varying

tones of blue while the upper two thirds feature light blue vertical lines transposed upon a dark blue background. While different in form, the rhyming colour scheme creates continuity between the two visual spaces. The visual textual manifestations that function to repeat or expand on the monologue appear in thick white font in the middle of the right visual field. Transposed in the top of the background in the upper right corner is a light blue rectangular box with the caption “The Word” in thick white text. Faded red horizontal lines accompany the rectangular textual box as well. Most importantly, the light blue horizontal box including “The Word” caption extends beyond the thick white and black frameline distinguishing the two fields. This partial merging between frames signifies that there is some relation between the left and right visual fields.

The spatial orientation of “The Word” section is also important in terms of information value. The host and the repeated or expanded textual manifestations are similar in their vertical orientation; however, their horizontal composition instantiates a given/new relationship between the host’s monologue and the textual manifestations. In western societies which use Roman script, the typical reading of any given text is from left to right. Conventionally, given information or known information is presented before new information. Similarly, visual representations are typically constructed in the same way wherein given or known information is located in the left visual field and new information is located to the right (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Thus, in “The Word” section, the new information presented in the right visual field functions as prominent in terms of information value since it further develops the given information. Moreover, the new presentation also recalibrates the discursive trajectory of

the monologue by constructing illocutionary meaning of which the host is apparently unaware.

The monologue is oriented around the thematic head “**Lexicon Artist**” which the host suggests is the one way John McCain can “put distance between himself and the President”. Colbert begins by announcing that “language is very important in politics, particularly when it comes to war” which is supplemented with the visual presentation of the phrase “**Weapons of Mass Description**” which phonologically resembles the apparent impetus for the War in Iraq, “Weapons of Mass Destruction”. Continuing, the host says, “For years, the Bush administration used the phrase “War on Terror”, which has been replaced by the phrase “Global War on Terror”, which is accompanied by the visual presentation of the phrase “**Bush Loves Nicknames**”. In this case, the new information suggests that the lexical reconstruction “Global War on Terror” is simply a nickname. This suggests that the lexical item “Global” misrepresents the ongoing conflict. The host continues by outlining the various names used to describe America’s ongoing conflicts and then finishes by saying “before they settled on the new name Hey Maybe We Should Bomb Iran” which is elaborated upon with the visual explication “**The ‘Maybe’ Proves They’re Diplomats**”. Here the visual construction insinuates that the administration is playing diplomatic games through their use of a modalization realizing minimal probability. The uncertainty implied by the modalization is classified as diplomatic; however, the ideational content of the phrase “Hey Maybe We Should Bomb Iran”, as previously discussed, is explicitly undiplomatic.

The monologue continues with a short visual montage of clips in which John McCain discusses a “transcendental” threat followed by Colbert claiming that “the war is

now transcendental”. This verbal construct is supplemented with the visual presentation of the phrase “**Transcends Voter Approval**” which is an elaboratory statement using the root of transcendental to comment on the current public opinion about the War in Iraq. Next, Colbert suggests that “there are some questions about McCain’s new buzz word, it’s not entirely clear what he’s trying to say” which is visually extended with the construction “**Another Way He’s Like Bush**”. This extension is in opposition to the thematic nature of the discourse which is a discussion regarding how John McCain is distinguishing himself from President Bush. Colbert continues by saying “Now, does he mean Transcendent? Which, according to Webster’s means ‘exceeding usual limits’ because the war has certainly exceeded the time limit”, which is paratactically extended with the phrase “**And the Constitution**”. This extension homophorically references the questionable nature of the War in Iraq. Technically, the U.S. congress must make a declaration of war according to the Constitution; however, no declaration was ever made regarding the War in Iraq. Thus, the war is unconstitutional. Next the host says, “Or, is he, is he intentionally using the word transcendental, which is defined by Webster’s as ‘of or relating to experience as determined by the mind’s makeup’, in which case he’s saying the war on terror is all in our heads” which is paratactically extended with the phrase “**Along With Cheney’s Buckshot**”. This extension homophorically references a public relations nightmare in which Vice President Dick Cheney accidentally shot a friend in the face with a rifle while hunting for quail. The incident reflected negatively on the administration and experts found it difficult to fathom how such an accident could possibly occur, questioning the competency of the Vice President.

The monologue continues with Colbert suggesting “Now, clearly, clearly transcendental has too many interpretations. John McCain needs to come up with a new word” which is visually supplemented with “**Retirement?**” in the right visual field. This suggested new word homophorically references the old age of presidential candidate John McCain. Colbert continues by saying “You know what, Shakespeare, think of it folks, Shakespeare invented words all the time, he invented over 1200 words including, and this is true, accused, torture and zaney” which is supplemented with the phrase “**From Play ‘Much Abu About Ghraib’**”. This additive visual construction phonologically mimics the Shakespeare play “Much ado about nothing” while homophorically referencing the accusations of prisoner torture occurring at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Colbert ends the monologue by proposing some new lexical bundles which might help the candidate in his presidential running. The new lexical bundles are mirrored by the visual exemplification of the suggestion in the right visual field. Colbert says, “Senator, let me help you, from now on, keeping our troops in the Middle East isn’t just necessary to win the war, its downright ‘**Iraq-rosanct**’”. This lexical item incorporates Iraq into the word sacrosanct which has religious connotations meaning extremely important or sacred. He continues with, “Holding people indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay is ‘**Divine Inter-detention**’” which is phonologically similar to the lexical bundle divine intervention while incorporating detention as the semantic root. Colbert follows by saying, “and secretly sending prisoners to other countries where torture is legal is no longer extraordinary rendition, it’s called ‘**Offshore Drilling**’”. In this case the proposed lexical bundle is more semantically accurate and incorporates a slang word used to describe intense questioning.

Colbert closes by saying, “Now I hope those helped because using language to turn failed policies into ideals that transcend debate is the best way to get people to think of you as ‘**Transcen-Presidential**’” phonologically echoing McCain’s new buzz word “Transcendental”. The verbal monologue is intended to highlight the rhetorical skills of the current administration and republican candidate John McCain while attempting to explain McCain’s new buzz word. However, the tactic and expansionary visual constructions function to question the competency of the candidate while exemplifying the manipulative nature of relexicalization in political discourse. The expansionary constructions disrupt the rhetorical continuity and illocutionary intent of the verbal monologue while simultaneously recalibrating the discursive trajectory to imply incompetence and highlight the manipulative practices of the political figure heads.

Atypical intersemiotic and logogenetic patterning functions to disrupt conventional discursive trajectory through the instantiation of incongruent semantic information. The typical logico-semantic, tactic and intersemiotic patterning characterising unproblematic texts is disrupted by semantically incongruent multimodal representations creating logogenetic discord. Furthermore, the incongruent information recalibrates the discursive trajectory to instantiate new and unique illocutionary intent. The identifiable semantic incongruities function as singular humour instances throughout the discourse, however, the culmination of humour instances have explicit illocutionary force in the way of socio-political commentary regarding the nature of satirical targets. To fully understand the illocutionary intent of the discourse, a more thorough discussion about the ways in which homophoric reference and atypical semantic patterning highlight specific satirical targets is necessary. It is also necessary to explore the ways in which

individual humour instances culminate to construct a complete picture of the satirical targets of the discourse.

6 Discussion

Multimodal analysis has revealed how logico-semantic, cohesive and intersemiotic incongruence can create logogenetic discord upsetting conventional semantic patterning thereby continuously recalibrating discursive trajectory. In other words, the construction of atypical relationships disrupts conventional texture resulting in a humorous discursive construction with various levels of meaning. At the metafunctional level of semiotic construction, unique discursive constructions instantiate momentary semantic incongruence resulting in atypical relationships and thus, humour. These identifiable semantic incongruities continually recalibrate the discursive trajectory of the text. The various humorous constructions, resulting from semantic incongruity function as single, meaningful rhetorical actions whereby the micro-semiotic construct has identifiable illocutionary force. These individual humorous constructions are meaningful in and of themselves; however, the micro-semiotic constructs culminate in the creation of complex logogenetic patterns. The longitudinal logogenetic patterns help create meaningful satirical political discourse exposing the inadequacies of particular people and ideologies through complex intersemiotic meaning making. These complex intersemiotic constructions are highly contextual relying on specific homophoric reference and cultural knowledge or capital for the appropriate satirical uptake.

In, keeping with the foundation of both the SSTH and the GTVH, humour primarily results from the juxtaposition of two partially overlapping semantic scripts therein, “the text of a joke is deliberately ambiguous, at least up to the point, if not to the very end. The punchline triggers the switch from the one script to the other by making the hearer backtrack and realize that a different interpretation was possible from the very beginning” (Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p.308). As previously discussed, the result of script

incongruity can be pleasurable in a number of ways attributable to the logico-semantic discord created by the incongruence. However, the serious discursive commentary characterising political satire is interpretable only if the receiver has the appropriate cultural knowledge or capital to recognize the illocutionary force of the construct. Therefore, the “lexematic handles” which instantiate the realization of script incongruity, also instantiate meaning through specific homophoric reference in the construction of multiple strands of meaning. Appropriate satirical uptake will only occur when the receiver recognizes the incongruity created by logico-semantic discord and most importantly, recognizes the situational and contextual relevance of the lexematic handle. For instance, the lexical items that function as lexematic handles may be relevant to numerous scripts. Realization of the appropriate script or homophoric reference requires specific cultural knowledge or capital. Thus, the illocutionary intent of the discursive construction as a whole requires the appropriate uptake of individual humour instances along with the cultural knowledge to recognize the significance of lexical items and their relation to the macro socio-political targets of the satire.

The complex intersemiotic meaning making exemplified in *The Colbert Report* functions as a powerful, ideologically infused socio-political commentary exposing the inadequacies and shortcomings of Republican ideology, President George Bush and his Administration and Presidential Candidate John McCain. Colbert’s carefully constructed satirical Republican pundit persona functions to invert conventional discursive strategies and turn the discourse on itself to affect the socio-political orientation of his audience. In the guise of a republican pundit unwaveringly supportive of national security, capitalism, nationalism and the commander and chief President George Bush, Colbert exemplifies

the personification of extreme republican ideology. *The Colbert Report* “blends news and entertainment and politics and humour in unprecedented ways . . . [and] has become a media phenomenon of sorts, an increasingly relevant site of political information and conversation in an environment marked by innovation and integration among formerly differentiated styles and arenas of public discourse” (Baym, 2007, p. 359). Most importantly, Colbert’s unique satirical late night news report functions as meaningful rhetorical action providing a serious and critical commentary on the socio-political climate of the United States. In this way, *The Colbert Report*, as a meaningful social semiotic, exemplifies a socially positive discursive construction, redistributing power through the inversion of conventionally dominant discursive strategies. Self proclaimed, he gives “people the truth, unfiltered by rational argument” calling his show the “No Fact Zone” because as we all know “reality has a well-known liberal bias” (Colbert, 2006, White House Correspondent’s Dinner Speech).

Colbert’s unique brand of political satire is simultaneously explicit and ambiguous in the ways in which satirical targets are signified. At times, satirical targets are explicitly signalled through thematic prominence followed by conjunctive elaborations which provide a descriptive gloss regarding the nature of the target. In other cases, targets are implied through the semantic associations created by the logogenetic patterning. Moreover, certain segments can simultaneously critique multiple targets both explicitly signalled and implied.

The June 18th excerpt is characterised by unique logico-semantic patterning wherein the explicitly signalled discursive trajectory of the text becomes problematic resulting from the inversion of conventional conjunctive relationships and incongruent

co-hyponomous classification. Initially questioning John McCain's attempt to distinguish himself from President Bush, Colbert carefully constructs a commentary belittling President Bush and John McCain. The section explicitly states that John McCain is "so different from Bush already" but implicitly outlines only their similarities through inverse paratactic elaboration and continues to explain how both men use "language to turn failed policies into ideals that transcend debate". The section implies that John McCain and President Bush hold the same ideologies while highlighting the failings of the Bush administration in order to persuade the audience of John McCain's shortcomings as a Presidential candidate.

Colbert's shock at John McCain's attempts to distinguish himself from President Bush is conjunctively elaborated with, "I mean, that's walking away from almost 29% of the American electorate, and nearly half the Bush children". The statement explicitly signalled to question the logic of John McCain actually functions to highlight the obvious failings of President Bush. The inverse elaboration exemplifies the dwindling support for the current administration by citing the embarrassingly low approval rating. Going further, the President's own daughter is cited as explicitly opposed to his administration in the newspaper headline reading "Jenna Bush may not vote republican". The conjunctive elaboration explicitly outlines the lack of support for the Bush administration but Colbert continues to question John McCain's logic by explaining that "he's so different from Bush already".

The host follows by outlining the "only issues they agree on", exemplified by a thirteen member paratactic list of politically pertinent issues. The incongruity created by the graduating elements further demonstrates the similarities between President Bush and

John McCain in an attempt to correlate the incompetence's of the Bush administration with the possible McCain administration. The dwindling support for the Bush administration is linked to the ideological and political orientation of John McCain, thereby suggesting that the presidential candidate would continue to govern the country in the same manner that is receiving social condemnation. The classification of similarity highlights the obvious failings of McCain's political platform thereby denouncing the republican presidential candidate. Colbert does however claim that 'they could not be further apart on Catherine Heigl's feud with her *Grey's Anatomy* producers', expressing contempt towards the democratic electoral process.

As previously discussed, *Grey's Anatomy* is a popular television show about resident doctors and their relationships at a Seattle hospital. Catherine Heigl is a film actress who stars on the show and her feud with producers regarding salary was a popular subject of discussion on entertainment shows. The co-hyponomous classification of her feud as a politically pertinent issue causes humour through incongruity and further comments on the nature of the contemporary electoral process. Increasing costs of presidential campaigns and the capabilities afforded by television for mass dissemination of information has transformed the presidential race into something of a spectacle. Candidates solicit the support of movie stars and musicians to get their message to the public. Also, candidates create infomercials often demonizing the opposition and highlighting their failings in what many feel is a derogatory manner. For instance, Bruce Springsteen, a popular musician, explicitly denounced McCain's attack on Barack Obama and outlined his solidarity with the democratic candidate. This type of celebrity endorsing has become quite popular. The increasingly blurred lines between popular culture,

entertainment and politics have received criticism because political platforms are being replaced with popular culture appeal. Thus, Catherine Heigl's feud with her *Grey's Anatomy* producers is indicative of the popular cultural orientation of contemporary presidential campaigns. A celebrity's declaration of support for a specific candidate may have as much political sway as the candidate's platform itself. The incongruent co-hyponymous classification not only creates humour but also highlights the increasingly problematic nature of the Hollywood campaign. Colbert's condemnation of the growing corporatization and pop culture orientation of presidential campaigning was further exemplified by his own October 16th 2007 declaration of candidacy brought to you by Doritos. Colbert's mock campaign and increasing awareness of such by the popular media and politicians further solidifies the denunciation of the contemporary presidential campaign.

The Word section highlighted in the June 18th excerpt is compositionally organized to construct a given/new structure to the information presented in the monologue and the elaboratory statements. However, Colbert's supposed ignorance of the elaboratory statements is paramount in the construction of satirical humour. Satire mimics the attitudes and actions of satirical targets in an effort to illuminate their failings. The host's apparent earnestness while delivering the monologue turns into explicit mockery through the textual manifestations presenting elaboratory information. The intersemiotic event functions to create two strands of meaning exemplified by the verbal monologue and the visual text located in the right visual field. The result is a complex intersemiotic event condemning and ridiculing the actions of the Bush administration,

aligning John McCain with President Bush and explicating the manipulative nature of their discourse.

The verbal monologue suggests that language is an integral element in politics, especially when it comes to war. The host describes the various names given to the War on Terror by the Bush Administration and identifies John McCain's own word to describe America's ongoing conflicts. Following a brief discussion of McCain's new buzz word, "Transcendental", Colbert attempts to help the senator by providing advice about some new words which might help him in his bid for the presidency. The verbal monologue is not explicitly malicious or demeaning in any particular way. The exposition is intentionally constructed as a neutral discussion explaining language as an integral part of politics while providing John McCain with some helpful advice. However, the textual manifestations exemplify the true illocutionary intent of the intersemiotic construction: to ridicule the Republican Party and to expose the manipulative nature of their discourse.

The thematic head of the section is "Lexicon Artist" which is a descriptive term for John McCain. The description of John McCain as a "lexicon artist" must be situated within Colbert's extreme conservative ideological orientation (Baym, 2007). Since John McCain is the presidential candidate for "the Republican Party [Colbert] insists he supports" (Baym, 2007, p.359), the audience should understand that John McCain is an artist of words which is a positive thing. However, the true illocutionary intent of the description comes from the phonological resemblance to the popular term con-artist which describes a person who intentionally manipulates for their own benefit. This illocutionary uptake is further substantiated throughout the course of the monologue ridiculing the manipulative nature of political discourse. Thus, the thematic head of the

section explicitly signals the two opposing interpretations of the monologue; the positive interpretation exemplified in the verbal exposition and the condemning and negative nature of the visual manifestations.

The section continues with Colbert's discussion of the many names used to describe the "War on Terror" creating a chronological co-hyponymous list. However, the visual manifestations signal the ambiguity exemplified in the continual re-naming of the conflict and highlights the manipulative nature of the ambiguity. The visual information and the increasing ambiguity which confuses ideational participants and goals exemplify the unconstitutional nature of America's conflicts while also implying incompetence in the administration. The explicit fictitiousness of Colbert's last co-hyponym, "Hey, maybe we should bomb Iran" further implies the absurdity of America's conflicts which have no identifiable enemy. Also, it correlates the ongoing discussion about Iran as a possible threat to Western civilization to the increasingly problematic situation in Iraq.

Furthermore, the visual information reading **"The 'Maybe' Proves They're Diplomats"**, homophorically references the lack of diplomacy exhibited by the administration before their invasion of Iraq. Thus, the intersemiotic construction includes homophoric reference regarding the manipulative re-naming by the Bush administration and further highlights their blatant disregard for human life through the lack of diplomacy exhibited before invading another country. The exclamative "Hey" also implies the impulsivity of the administration when it comes to mass destruction further condemning their actions. "Hey" typically signals a new idea popping up in one's head and in this case the co-hyponym, beginning with "Hey" implies that the administration does little thinking and acts impulsively. Impulsivity is classified here as an extremely undesirable characteristic

when it comes to diplomacy and especially war. Impulsive actions usually have unexpected ramifications due to the lack of foresight characterising such action. Thus, the section implies that the Bush administration uses discourse manipulatively, does not exhibit diplomacy and acts impulsively even regarding mass destruction.

The thematic orientation of the discourse signalled by the instantiation of “new” information “that is . . . something not yet known to the receiver and hence the important part of the message” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 204), located in the right visual field continues to focus on the Bush administration’s blatant disregard for diplomacy, public opinion and constitutional law. Following a compilation of interview and speech clips in which John McCain describes radical extremism as a “transcendental challenge” or a “transcendental threat”, Colbert agrees claiming “the war is now transcendental”. The visual text appearing at the end of the clause reading “**transcends voter approval**” uses the root of McCain’s new buzz word to anaphorically reference the administration’s dwindling public support further exemplifying America’s dissatisfaction with the actions of the governing body. Colbert continues to question the meaning of ‘transcendental’ claiming that “it’s not entirely clear what he’s trying to say” visually elaborated with text reading “**another way he’s like Bush**”. Once again, the explicit discursive trajectory of the verbal monologue is juxtaposed with elaboratory visual information supporting an anti-thesis. The monologue discussing how John McCain can distinguish himself from President Bush is actually functioning to further exemplify their solidarity in many diverse ways. More specifically, the visual information “**another way he’s like Bush**”, represented as new and prominent implicitly correlates Bush’s lack of rhetorical prowess

and unintelligible register with John McCain's confusing description of America's conflicts.

Colbert's apparently earnest attempt to decipher the true meaning of "Transcendental" exemplified by reference to Webster's dictionary expresses further contempt for the administration as he questions, "does he mean transcendent? Which according to Webster's means 'exceeding usual limits' because the war has certainly exceeded the time limit". This statement is followed by the visual representation reading "**and the constitution**", which highlights the Administration's disregard for the supreme law of the United States. This elaboratory statement not only highlights the criminality of the administration exemplified by the Iraq war but also carefully strings together subtle strands of meaning to realize the true illocutionary nature of the monologue.

The Bush administration's invasion of Iraq explicitly defied the United States Constitution and international law. The invasion of Iraq violated international law through ignoring the UN Security Council's call for peaceful resolution. Furthermore, the United States Constitution claims that a specific declaration of war must be announced by Congress who must authorize military action. Also, the United Nations charter allows the use of military force only to defend against an ongoing or impending attack. The administration carefully flouted the charter through calling their military action a "pre-emptive defence strike". They also defied the United States Constitution because Congress did not authorize or explicitly announce war. The ambiguity of the phrase "pre-emptive defence strike" and the illegality of a war not sanctioned by Congress exemplify the Bush administration's disregard for international law and even more troubling, their disregard for the United States Constitution.

The defiance of international law through the use of the ambiguous and rhetorically meaningless phrase “pre-emptive defence strike” further demonstrates the Administration’s manipulative use of language to justify illegal military action. The thematically prominent head of ‘The Word’ section used to describe John McCain as a “Lexicon Artist” actually instantiates meaning condemning the actions of the Bush administration and their manipulative lexical constructions justifying the mass destruction of property and human life. The discursive trajectory explicitly signalling a discussion regarding John McCain’s new buzz word is disrupted by the instantiation of elaboratory information signified by visual manifestations operating as new and prominent. Thus, the cultural and situational knowledge of the audience enables the realization of the true illocutionary intent of the intersemiotic construction which is a damning commentary regarding the illegal actions of the Bush administration, their use of manipulative rhetoric to justify atrocity and the similarities between John McCain and President Bush.

Furthering this commentary, Colbert offers to help John McCain come up with new Buzz words to help with his presidential campaign. He claims, “from now on, keeping our troops in the Middle East isn’t just necessary to win the war, it’s downright ‘Iraq-rosanct’. Holding people indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay is ‘Devine Inter-detention and secretly sending prisoners to other countries where torture is legal is no longer extraordinary rendition, it’s called ‘Offshore Drilling’”. “Iraq-rosanct” and “Devine inter-detention” are phonological re-workings with explicit theological orientations. The explicit correlation between war and religion exemplified by these terms functions to justify the Iraq War and unlawful human rights abuses through the invocation of God. A

devout Christian, Colbert carefully uses religious terminology to implicitly correlate the actions of the United States with God. This is interpretable in two different ways: America's actions are sanctioned by God or America is playing God by disregarding international law and imposing their will on another country. In both cases, the religious invocation functions to explicitly condemn the military actions of the United States through questioning their justification for war and highlighting their blatant disregard for human rights and international law. Furthermore, the lexical constructions demonstrate the manipulative nature of the administration's political rhetoric related to war.

The last nominalization "Offshore Drilling" is unique because it more clearly describes the practice of "secretly sending prisoners to countries where torture is legal" than extraordinary rendition. "Offshore" signifies outside of the country or away from jurisdiction while drilling is a slang term used to describe extremely intense and possibly violent questioning. Drilling insinuates the breaking through of something with use of force like drilling a hole in wood or drilling a hole in the earth. Thus, the nominalization instantiates semantic meaning regarding violence while simultaneously highlighting the ambiguity of the phrase "extraordinary rendition". The term offshore drilling and the associated violence semantically instantiated further highlights the human rights abuses of the United States.

The coalition's use of torture which they describe as "enhanced" interrogation techniques and their demeaning and illegal treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay have been international hot topics. Pictures revealing prisoners bound in rope with bags over their heads taken by soldiers became a public relations nightmare. Prisoners at Guantanamo Bay detention centre were not protected under the Geneva Convention

resulting in the use of torture and other interrogation techniques not sanctioned by international law. The nominalization ‘Offshore Drilling’ highlights the violent and unlawful activities of coalition forces further damaging the credibility of the Bush Administration.

The section analysed from the June 24th episode utilizes intersemiotic incongruity and complex incongruent co-hyponymy to create a critical commentary regarding republican ideology, President Bush and his proposal of a solution to the thematically prominent oil crisis. Colbert’s exaggerated fear regarding the apparent oil crisis in the United States is exemplified through the loud alarm and flashing red letters on the screen reading “OIL CRISIS”. Following his claim that “it is time to panic”, he cites a number of examples, including people driving less and the discontinuation of the Hummer SUV as justification for panic. His exaggerated panic and fear regarding people driving less, highlights the logical absurdity of panic regarding the situation. First, the exclamatory remark explicitly suggesting the existence of a crisis implicitly mocks the media and political attentions being paid to the apparent lack of oil. The examples provided justifying his panic further substantiate his mockery since people driving less and the possible discontinuation of high polluting Hummers are inherently good for society, the environment and the very important alternative energy market. Thus, the conjunctive elaborations further clarify his mockery of the existence of any crisis whatsoever through their support of an antithesis.

In an effort to shock the public into action regarding the crisis, Colbert shows a clip exemplifying the “dark future that awaits us if we don’t reverse this trend”. The intersemiotic incongruity constructed in which the cataphorically signalled dark future is

exemplified by a pleasant bike ride through a beautiful city park further clarifies the illocutionary nature of the discourse by suggesting that this apparent oil crisis is inherently beneficial in a number of ways. Following the intersemiotic elaboration, Colbert, vomiting into a paper bag claims that he always gets motion sickness when he sees anything going less than 55mph. The apparent earnestness of his fear and panic is paramount and emphasises the absurdity of the verbal claim.

The explicit seriousness of the host's discursive register is juxtaposed with the implied foolishness exemplified through inverse elaborations and intersemiotic incongruity. Colbert's apparently earnest concern for the oil crisis and associated problems mirrors the media and the Administration's concern. However, the incongruity exemplified throughout the semiotic construction functions to expose the absurdity of honest concern. In other words, Colbert's exaggerated concern for the apparent oil crisis actually functions to mock the government and media's concern for the issue by citing people driving less and the discontinuation of hummers as a crisis situation. The problematic environmental issues faced by the world and theories regarding the real impetus for the war in Iraq, are both related to oil. The burning of oil and other fossil fuels is proven to be extremely detrimental to the earth's ozone layer and plays an integral role in the continuous warming of the earth's atmosphere. Therefore, the trend of people driving less and the possible discontinuation of Hummer SUVs are inherently beneficial to the majority of society.

The semiotic construction signals a number of implied satirical targets. First, the mass media and the Administration's concern about the oil crisis is belittled and mocked. The many socio-economic issues related to health care, education and immigration take

back seat to “people driving less”. The media and Administration’s concern is shown to be nonsensical and thus, the section implicitly questions the competence and ethical orientation of both. This is further substantiated by Colbert’s explicit distrust of the national media; “the greatest threat facing America today . . . is the national news media” (Colbert, 2007, p.152). Also, after vomiting into the paper bag, Colbert intentionally wipes his mouth with the paper bearing the headlines reading “Drivers cut back by 30B miles” further characterizing the media as garbage. It is increasingly obvious that there is no crisis and this situation will result in a favourable manner for the majority of society who could enjoy alternative energy resources and cleaner air.

The apparent oil crisis is further characterized by incongruous co-hyponymy disrupting logico-semantic continuity and again exemplifies the incompetence of President Bush and his Administration. Bush suggests that expanding oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf would rectify the current state of affairs. In agreement, Colbert proposes to begin with “clearing away all the old junk we’ve allowed to collect on the shelf like fish and Coral”. Furthering discussion about the solution of offshore drilling, the host suggests “off-porch drilling” and “shootin’ at some food” as equally viable solutions before commanding the nation to “get out there and shoot the earth”.

Colbert’s exclamative agreement and elaboration proposing clearing away the old junk we’ve allowed to collect on the shelf like fish and coral further exemplifies Bush’s blatant disregard for the environment. Colbert’s explicit allocation of fish and coral as junk and his overt agreement with the proposal of offshore drilling functions to highlight the absurdity of the proposal. His authority is undercut by his absurd proposal to clear

away the junk collected on the shelf. Furthermore, the host's apparent stupidity signalled by the proposition further exemplifies incompetence in President Bush since the two people are correlated by their agreement on the issue. Colbert explicitly marks his incompetence through illogical statements while intentionally aligning himself with the President thereby highlighting the incompetence of the President himself. In other words, Colbert's incompetence exemplifies the incompetence of the President. As Colbert has previously claimed, "we're not so different, he and I. We get it. We're not brainiacs on the nerd patrol. We're not members of the Factinista. We go straight from the gut" (Colbert, 2006, White House Correspondent's Dinner Speech). Thus, incompetence and stupidity exemplified by Colbert implies the stupidity of the proposal and the President.

The section continues with Colbert's propositions to include "off-porch drilling" and "shootin' at some food" as possible solutions to the oil crisis. Colbert suggests off-porch drilling because "those pets you've buried in your back yard must have turned into oil by now". This statement further questions the intelligibility of offshore drilling by implying that the mere existence of oil doesn't warrant the action. The foolishness of drilling for oil in the backyard exemplifies the foolishness of offshore drilling as a viable solution through their correlation as co-hyponyms. The final proposition of "shootin' at some food" comes from the theme song from the television show *The Beverly Hillbillies* which provides background information about how the family featured on the show became wealthy. The theme song claims that Jed was "out one day shootin' at some food, and up through the ground came a bubblin' crude, oil that is, black gold, Texas tea", soon afterwards Jed became a millionaire and moved to Beverly Hills. Colbert's final proposal

further exemplifies offshore drilling as an absurd idea by correlating it with “shootin at some food”, while implicitly commenting on the nature of President Bush.

“Offshore drilling”, “off-porch drilling” and “shootin’ at some food” are represented as equally viable and reasonable solutions to the oil crisis through their co-hyponomous nature. The first proposition is one actually made by President Bush while the following two are proposed by Colbert. His absurd propositions imply that President Bush’s proposal is equally as absurd. Furthermore, Colbert’s suggestion of “shootin’ at some food” and the visual accompaniment draw inferential lines between the President and Jed Clampett (Father on *The Beverly Hillbillies*). The homophoric referencing and the co-hyponymy exhibited in the section suggest that President Bush’s solution is incredibly ignorant while further implying similarities between Bush and *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

As briefly discussed in the analysis, the liberal media have often referred to President Bush as a hick or hillbilly. Both are intentionally derogatory terms used to describe people from the country implying simplicity in both way of life and intellectual capacity. The television show homophorically referenced in the monologue is about the trials and tribulations faced by a wealthy family from rural America who move to Beverly Hills which is a prestigious neighbourhood outside Los Angeles California. The show documents the difficulties faced by the Clampett family as they maintain their “simple” lifestyle in high society. The Clampett family exhibit the stereotypical traits of what might be deemed a hillbilly lifestyle. They are extremely simple and care little about the socio-political situation of the world they live in. They lack any sense of decorum and speak in broken English with a lot of rural slang. The audience is able to laugh at the

families' many idiosyncrasies and the incongruity between their rural lifestyle and the wealthy neighbourhood in which they live. In a number of ways, President Bush can be linked to these stereotypes and the situation of the Clampett family on *The Beverly Hillbillies*.

Bush is also from rural America and his continual retreats to the family farm have been well documented throughout his presidency. Presidential interviews have been characterized by improper grammar, slang and a lexicon not appropriate for the leader of the country. Similarly, his family is extremely wealthy due to their well-known investments in the oil industry. The similarities between the Bush family and Clampett family explicitly signalled by the homophoric reference and co-hyponymy function to suggest that President Bush is as intelligent and reasonable as the "Beverly Hillbillies". Thus, the reference intentionally implies that the degrading stereotypes associated with the "Beverly Hillbillies" are characteristics shared by President Bush. The intersemiotic construction explicitly signals President Bush as incompetent, unintelligible and simple; lack of intelligence and incompetence are explicitly correlated with President Bush.

Finally, the monologue closes with Colbert instructing the public to "get out there and shoot the earth, it's basically what we're talking about", further exemplifying the negative environmental impacts of both offshore drilling and the massive oil consumption exhibited by the United States. The closing statement anaphorically references the actions of Jed Clampett wherein a missed rifle bullet brings forth great fortune from "a bubblin crude" but most importantly exemplifies the inappropriate nature of the President's proposal. The environmental destruction caused by offshore drilling is likened to the damage caused by a gun shot. Thus, the closing statement suggests that

causing irreparable damage to the environment is “basically what we’re talking about” which reaffirms the absurdity of Bush’s proposal. Also, it further classifies President Bush, his administration and those in support of offshore drilling as overtly ignorant capitalists with little concern for the welfare of the general population and even less concern for the welfare of our planet.

The June 24th excerpt is characterised by complex intersemiotic meaning making functioning to critique the media, the President and his administration. The incongruities in the logico-semantic patterning exemplify strategic discursive action to highlight the incompetence of the satirical targets. The discourse explicates the Bush administration’s obvious lack of concern for environmental sustainability by critiquing their proposal to increase access to the outer continental shelf for drilling operations. Colbert explains the failings of their proposal and further questions the competency of the President and his administration by comparing their desired actions to the damages of a gun shot wound. Colbert’s extremely conservative republican persona highlights the failings of the governing republican party through his own fallacious commentary and explicit supposed stupidity. The discourse clearly expresses ideological dissidence and a socio-rhetorical argument against the actions and beliefs of the Presidential Republican Party.

The two excerpts of The Colbert Report analysed in this thesis construct an incredibly condemning commentary about the Bush Administration, Republican ideology and the socio-political climate in the United States. President Bush is characterised as an incompetent, simple minded and greedy southern hick with dwindling public support as a result of the unlawful and atrocious actions of his administration. The commentary not only questions his competence as a head of state, but clearly demonstrates his lack of

concern for the well being of the Iraqi people, international law, the constitution and the environment. The complex intersemiotic constructions create logogenetic discord through atypical logico-semantic patterning and incongruity to expose the failings of the Bush Administration and republican ideology. Humour is second only to the serious rhetorical argument denouncing the actions of the current administration and highlighting their blatant disregard for the rest of society.

The Republican Party and their new presidential candidate John McCain are also attacked through association with the shared political goals and with the political failures of the Bush Administration. It becomes increasingly obvious that McCain and Bush exemplify similar Republican prototypes. The failings of President Bush become indicative of John McCain and more specifically the Republican Party and their political ideologies.

6.1 Conclusion

In closing, the increasing prevalence of infotainment programs discussing socio-political topics in new and unique ways begs for a more critical, unified and transdisciplinary approach to the study of the social semiotic constructions characterising our cultural landscape. Programs like *The Colbert Report* function as serious rhetorical commentaries about the socio-political climate in North America using complex satirical humour to construct culturally situated condemnations of governing bodies and their actions. The semiotic complexity exemplified in *The Colbert Report* requires the development of new methodological strategies to explicate the ways in which satirical humour functions in multimodal constructions. A functional semantic approach to multimodal analysis enables the identification and discussion of complex intersemiotic meaning making and

the ways in which contemporary political satire functions as a meaningful socio-rhetorical argument with identifiable illocutionary intent. While the majority of humour is highly socially situated, the analysis of complex logogenetic patterning and cohesive mechanisms enable one to fully articulate the multiple strands of meaning constructed in Colbert's unique brand of contemporary political satire. This analysis has attempted to clearly show that humour is an integral component, providing serious discursive commentary about the socio-political climate and demands increasing scholarship as one form of positive discourse inspiring socio-cultural change through exposing the inadequacies and shortcomings of satirical targets.

The growing dissemination of complex intersemiotic constructions dominating our cultural landscape requires new methodological rigour in the attempt to thoroughly describe any given semiotic event. Systemic functional frameworks provide a solidified methodology which can be applied to the analysis of multimodal texts. However, in regards to humour, contemporary humourological frameworks are also needed to fully extrapolate the complex logogenetic and intersemiotic patterning creating atypical semantic classifications in the construction of meaningful political satire. The semantic foundations of the frameworks allowed not only the identification of longitudinal semantic patterning, but also helped explain how the atypical patterns created humour through incongruity. The increasing relevance of multimodal texts and prevalence of televised communicative events will require certain ingenuity on the part of researchers seeking to explain these new multimodal and intersemiotic events. Transdisciplinary scholarship and the combination of methodological resources will enrich our

understanding of social semiosis by enabling new and unique approaches to the analysis of socially situated meaning making.

Admittedly, while the two short excerpts analysed in this thesis are indicative of the political thematic orientation of *The Colbert Report*, they do not of course thoroughly represent the entirety of the show. Furthermore, the excerpts analysed were short in length because a micro analysis of an entire episode was beyond the scope of this study. More research is needed looking at the ways in which complex intersemiotic constructions can function as meaningful socio-political commentary. The diversity of semiotic modes utilized in contemporary infotainment and the multiple meanings constructed intersemiotically offer new, interesting and complex avenues of investigation. Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of widely disseminated contemporary political satire has begun to be analysed (eg. Brewer & Marquardt, 2007; Baumgartner & Moris, 2006; Baym, 2007), and should continue to draw the attention of academics interested in the complex intersemiotic meaning making exemplified by shows like *The Colbert Report*. As previously discussed, there has been a “notable absence of any serious provisions for humorous discourse across the systemic-functional work, and for that matter across the critical discourse analysis work” (Simpson, 2003, p.74); however, the increasing use of humour in the public sphere functioning as important socio-political commentary should receive growing attention.

The limited research on the humorous multimodal texts dominating the semiotic landscape leaves open new and exciting avenues of investigation. The limited scope of this particular study leaves much of *The Colbert Report's* semiotic potential unexplained. The introductory segment which frames the program is full of rich and meaningful colour

schemes as well as narrative and conceptual processes which all function to create a more solidified ideological orientation for the show. The set background has a number of characterising objects that function to create a classificatory schema through which Colbert operates. Investigations of this sort would help contextualize the semiotic activity occurring and further enrich our understanding of *The Colbert Report* as a unique intersemiotic event characterising a new form of multimodal political satire. While there have been attempts to investigate the meaningful socio-cultural commentary exemplified by humorous multimodal television programming (eg. Attardo et. al., 2003; Paolucci & Richardson, 2006), researchers have only begun to scratch the surface of the multitude of humorous semiosis and the multiple meanings constructed.

I have attempted to show how multimodal and linguistic humourological methodologies can be used to analyse humorous multimodal semiotic constructions to explicate the illocutionary force of contemporary political satire. I would hope that this analysis can function as a pilot study exemplifying the possibilities in combining various semantic-functional methodologies enhancing the analysis of multimodal humorous constructions. Humour is varied and complex in both mode and style. Continued research and analysis though will help develop a growing inventory of methodological tools. The importance of socio-political humour functioning as meaningful rhetorical action by exposing the inadequacies and shortcomings of humour targets cannot be overstated. The increasing prevalence of contemporary political humour in the public sphere must be recognized as significant and deserves growing attention as “an increasingly relevant site of political information and conversation” (Baym, 2007, p. 359). Most importantly, contemporary political satire functions as socially positive rhetorical action by

exemplifying a form of discourse which “redistributes power without necessarily struggling against it” (Martin, 2004, p. 7). In other words, the analysis of contemporary political satire is an endeavour Martin (2004) would characterise as Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) investigating “how change happens, for the better” (Martin 2004, p. 7), by moving “beyond a preoccupation with demonology, beyond a singular focus on semiosis in the service of abusive power—and reconsider[ing] power communally as well, as it circulates through communities, as they re-align around values, and renovate discourses that enact a better world”(Martin, 2004, p. 24).

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Appendix 1

June 18th 2008,

Nation, nation, it's no secret that one of John McCain's biggest challenges as a candidate is distinguishing himself from President Bush. I'm not sure why he's so eager to spurn the President's supporters. I mean, that's walking away from almost 29% of the American electorate, and nearly half the Bush children. But, he's so different from Bush already. The only issues they agree on are, education, immigration, Iraq, abortion, Supreme Court judges, social security, tax breaks for the wealthy, wire tapping, trade, health care, the middle east, same sex marriage and Medicare. But, they could not be further apart on Catherine Haigle's feud with her Grey's Anatomy producers. Luckily, John McCain has found one way to put distance between himself and the President and it's tonight's word.

“Lexicon Artist”

Folks, language is very important in politics, particularly when it comes to war (Weapons Of Mass Description). For years, the Bush administration used the phrase ‘War on Terror’, which has been replaced by the phrase ‘Global War on Terror’ (Bush Loves Nicknames). Then, it was the ‘Global Struggle against extremism’, then, briefly, it was the long war, before they settled on the new name ‘Hey, Maybe we should bomb Iran’ (The ‘Maybe’ Proves They’re Diplomats).

To prove, to prove that he's his own man, John McCain has his own word to describe America's ongoing conflicts, see if you can spot it;

We face the transcendental challenge of radical extremism. Facing
a transcendental challenge. Transcendental challenge.

Transcendental threat. Transcendental challenge. A transcendental
threat to everything we stand for and believe in.

That's right, the war is now transcendental (Transcends Voter Approval). No surprise, after all, after all, Toby Keith's anti-terrorist lyric, “We'll put a boot up your ass, it's the American way”, originally appeared in Henry David Thorough's *Walden*. Now,

there are some questions about McCain's new buzz word, its not entirely clear what he's trying to say (Another Way He's Like Bush). Now, does he mean, does he mean transcendent? Which, according to Webster's means 'exceeding usual limits'. Because, the war has certainly exceeded the time limit (And The Constitution). Or, is he, is he intentionally using the word transcendental, which is defined by Webster's as 'of or relating to experience as determined by the mind's makeup'. In which case he's saying the war on terror is all in our heads (Along With Cheney's Buckshot). Now maybe, maybe, maybe he didn't mean to describe a transcendental challenge at all, maybe we misheard him because he was having trouble with his dentures (Fixodental Challenge). Now, clearly, clearly transcendental has too many interpretations. John McCain needs to come up with a new word (Retirement?). You know what, Shakespeare, think of it folks, Shakespeare invented words all the time, he invented over 1200 words including and this is true, 'accused, torture and zaney' (From Play "Much Abu About Ghraib"). Now, everybody knows I've coined a couple words myself, Truthiness, Wikiality, Fuckturn, which I cannot define due to a pending lawsuit (And Upcomming Fox Reality Show). So, Senator, Senator, let me help you, from now on, keeping our troops in the middle east isn't just necessary to win the war, it's downright Iraq-rosanct (Iraq-rosanct). Holding people indefinitely at Guantanamo bay is Devine Inter-detention (Devine Inter-detention), and secretly sending prisoners to other countries where torture is legal is no longer extraordinary rendition, it's called Offshore Drilling (Offshore Drilling). Now I hope those helped because using language to turn failed policies into ideals that transcend debate is the best way to get people to think of you as Trascen-Presidential (Transcen-Presidential). And that's the word.

June 24th 2008,

Nation, I don't want to cause any alarm, because it is time to panic, OIL CRISIS! Ok Jimmy, they got the idea. Now I didn't mind when gas hit four bucks a gallon, I just figured I was getting better gas. But then I saw this headline in the U.S.A today, "Drivers cut back by 30B miles." People are driving less and now GM is saying they might discontinue selling hummers. How am I supposed to chase the gofers off my property?

Folks, this is a nightmare scenario, America needs a wake up call. So here it is, the dark future that awaits us if we don't reverse this trend (clip of sunny day and man blissfully biking with birds chirping and pleasant music). (Colbert faking vomit into brown paper bag) I always get motion sickness when I see anything going less than 55mph. Thankfully president Bush revealed the solution to this problem in his weekly radio address.

Bush: "First, we should expand American oil production by increasing access to the outer continental shelf, or O.C.S."

Yes, we'll start by clearing away all the old junk we've allowed to collect on the shelf like fish and coral.

Now, offshore drilling has been banned since the 1980's, back when we didn't need much heating oil because everyone's legs were already so warm. But we the people are fighting back. In the form of we 'the Newt Gingrich', who is circling a petition to lift the ban. I first heard about it on Fox and Friends. Jimmy, gimme a dose of Deucy.

Deucy: you can sign his petition and I think something like close to a million people have already done it then what they're gonna do is they're gonna take it in front of congress and say look, here's a million, 2 million, 5 million people that say we need to drill now"

Wow. Who knows how many signatures they'll get. It went from one million to two million to five million just in the time that it took Steve Deucy to say that it did. Nation, this is a crisis, we can't ignore any areas of exploration. Yes, we need offshore drilling, but what about off porch drilling. Those pets you've buried in your back yard must have turned into oil by now. Of course, there's an even easier way to find oil, that's why I'm calling on everyone whose watching to go out, a 'shootin at some food.' From what I've gathered from my research, it's the best way to find 'a bubblin crude.' Oil that is, black gold, Texas tea. So nation, get out there and shoot the earth, it's basically what we're talking about.

Appendix 2

Figure1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8