

Going with Your Gut: A Study of Affect, Satire, and Donald Trump
in the 2016 Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of affect theory and emotional rhetoric in the 2016 Presidential Election, and specifically in Donald Trump's candidacy, first through a series of rhetorical readings of Trump's rhetoric on the campaign trail and after his election. The first section of this thesis focuses on Donald Trump and the various rhetorical spaces he uses to reach his supporters through affectual means. Next, I will apply affect theory to Trump's political rhetoric in order to illustrate how affect is intrinsic to his rhetoric and how he communicates to his audience. I find that utilizing texts by cultural rhetoric critics, namely those which discuss affect theory and the culture of emotion such as Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and culture and rhetorical spaces in Julie Lindquist's *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*, allows us to better understand the underlying cultural impetuses which created the conditions for Donald Trump's presidency. In the third section, I examine how these theoretical frameworks provide an understanding of how fake news contributed to the current American climate of a post-truth media culture. And in the final section, I explore how satirical rhetoric is employed both as a defense against and as a rhetorical utility for Donald Trump, namely in his use of carnivalesque techniques and rhetoric to appeal to his voter's sense of rebellion against and cynicism toward the political establishment. In doing so, I argue that Trump's use of affect, particularly in his targeted approach to appeal to his base's existential, socio-economic, and racial fears, was essential to his success in the 2016 Presidential election.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Watching the coverage of Donald Trump's Presidential campaign and eventual election, one of the most critical aspects not explored in depth by scholarship and academia was his campaign's use of affect and emotional rhetoric. By appealing to his base's passions, fueling dissent and anger against the opposition, Trump was able to incite a populist movement that led him all the way to the White House. This thesis examines Trump's use of rhetorical spaces such as political rallies and debate stages as avenues to stir up the emotions of his base, as well as becoming a mouthpiece for many on the far right to spread their agenda of isolationism and white nationalism. The use of fake news is also explored, particularly in how it was used to spread a far-right partisan agenda to misinform or mislead Trump supporters to vote against their own interests, and in some cases, even incite violence. Finally, through a brief history of the effects of satire on public opinion post-9/11, I argue that Trump uses carnivalesque techniques to appeal to voters' sensibilities, particularly their fatigue regarding political correctness and their ire at their perception of being left behind by government insiders. By viewing Trump's use of affect, I argue that scholars, and the general public, can gain insight as to how not to fall for such emotional rhetorical strategies so that they do not find themselves voting against their own socio-economic and representative interests.

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*Sounded like the truth
Seemed the better way
Sounded like the truth
But it's not the truth today*

--Leonard Cohen

“Populisms are always contradictory, because populism is more an emotion than it is an ideology. And that emotion is anger.”

--Michael Kimmel

“Language has always been important in politics, but language is incredibly important to the present political struggle. Because if you can establish an atmosphere in which information doesn't mean anything, then there is no objective reality... What you wish to be true is all that matters, regardless of the facts.”

--Stephen Colbert

“It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.”

--Mark Twain

Introduction

Michael Kimmel, in his book *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, claimed that “it’s probably never been better to be a person of color, a woman, or LGBT in the United States” (xi). He later clarifies this statement:

Let me be clear: I am in no way saying that we have ‘arrived’ at some postracial, postfeminist, post-civil rights utopia; and even less am I saying that some switch has been thrown and now men or white people or straight people are the new victims of some topsy-turvy ‘agenda.’ I’m simply saying that women are safer today than they have ever been in our society, that LGBT are more accepted and freer to love whom they choose, and that racial and ethnic minorities confront fewer obstacles in their efforts to fully integrate into American society(xi).

Kimmel wrote this in 2013, smack in the middle of the Obama years. Unemployment was dropping. The economy was improving from the worst recession in years. It looked as though America was taking a turn toward tolerance and progress. We were entering or had already entered a world where LGBTQ rights were being defended and expanded, where women could break through the glass ceiling, occupying more corporate administrative positions and were not solely expected to maintain “traditional” family roles, where universities and the military institutions would be communities which would implement policies to prevent and punish sexual assault, and where immigrants, regardless of legality, could be treated with dignity and respect, free from racial and ethnic stigmas and prejudices (xii). Kimmel declared that it was “an end to the era of men’s entitlement, the era in which a young man could assume, without question, it was not only ‘a man’s world’ but a straight white man’s world” (xii). This was how the American cultural climate looked at the time of Kimmel’s writing this book. But that was all before Donald Trump and the 2016 Presidential Election.

Masculinity and gender scholar Jackson Katz wrote this about Donald Trump’s candidacy in his book, *Man Enough?: Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, and the Politics of Presidential Masculinity*:

When Donald Trump exclaimed to a cheering throng in an Alabama football stadium at a campaign rally in the summer of 2015 that ‘the silent majority is back,’ this much was more than clear: appeals to white racial identity and traditional manhood that had been so skillfully employed by Richard Nixon in the early 1970s, and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, still resonate with a significant sector of the electorate... Trump’s candidacy caught fire, however, not because of the substance of his policy proposals, but due to the visceral appeal of his unbridled rhetorical aggression and winning persona as the “blue-collar billionaire” (233).

Fueled by (and in many ways fueling) fear on the Right of issues such as illegal immigration and terrorism, Trump rose not only to take the Republican nomination, but was also elected President of the United States. Trump “tapped a nerve of pent-up frustration and seething resentment among this critical Republican constituency, and while his crude displays of racism and sexism might have horrified more moderate elements within the party, the open contempt with which he dismissed President Obama and most of the political class endeared him to legions of angry white men who believed they had found their spokesman” (Katz 234).

In an election cycle that seemed to have gone on way too long, it appears as though there is no end in sight. Trump’s rise to power is something that scholars are going to be studying for quite some time. And while much has been said of Trump’s appeal to white working-class voters and alt-right leaders with his slogan “Make America Great Again,” a seemingly vague phrase that eventually came to imply that America should go back to a time when America looked a lot more white and male, Trump announced his candidacy by saying “Our country is in serious trouble. We don’t have victories anymore. We used to have victories, but we don’t have them” (*Time*). Trump’s plainspoken, politically incorrect and non-establishment rhetoric coupled with his doubling-down on hyper-masculine, American white nationalism policies of anti-immigration, and American isolationist trade values, made him immensely appealing to a

significant portion of the population suffering from resentment toward the progressive policies put forth by the Obama administration and establishment liberals.

Despite the numerous think pieces from all sides of the political spectrum attempting to read and interpret the current political moment, many of the perspectives explored through the discipline of affect studies in politics have not been considered within the frameworks of the discourse centered around this particular discussion. The first section of this thesis focuses on Donald Trump and the various rhetorical spaces he uses to reach his supporters through affectual means. Next, I will apply affect theory to Trump's political rhetoric in order to illustrate how affect is intrinsic to his rhetoric and how he communicates to his audience. I find that utilizing texts by cultural rhetoric critics, namely those which discuss affect theory and the culture of emotion such as Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, and culture and rhetorical spaces in Julie Lindquist's *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working Class Bar*, allows us to better understand the underlying cultural impetuses which created the conditions for Donald Trump's presidency. In the third section, I examine how these theoretical frameworks provide an understanding of how fake news contributed to the current American climate of a post-truth media culture. And in the final section, I will explore how satirical rhetoric is employed both as a defense against and as a rhetorical utility for Donald Trump, namely in his use of carnivalesque techniques and rhetoric to appeal to his voter's sense of rebellion against and cynicism toward the political establishment.

Trump and Rhetorical Spaces

Julie Lindquist talks about how argument is seen as an event. In her study of bar culture at a local watering hole called the Smokehouse, she writes that argument is “a speech genre that serves a specific function for Smokehousers [frequent patrons of the Smokehouse] as a group: to manage ideological tensions in safe generic space” (124). She also talks about how “giving shit” or joking with someone—giving them a hard time—is a way to “habitually strengthen the bonds between them by implicitly agreeing to stretch the limits of what it is appropriate to say” (125). Anyone who has spent any time with friends or fellow patrons at a bar knows that after some time, and a few drinks no topic is off the table, and literally everyone speaks as though they are an expert. There is a social structure in place that exists entirely separate from the outside world. There is joking, swearing, the discussion of controversial topics and controversial speech that is compartmentalized to only this context. One example of narrative media that illustrates these contexts is comedian and writer Louis C. K.’s web show, *Horace and Pete*, which takes place entirely in a bar. There are various scenes where patrons are talking about current events largely political, Donald Trump, Hilary Clinton, the difference between liberals and conservatives, abortion, bible stories, gay rights, the ethics of sex tapes, as well as perceptions of reality and artificial intelligence. All of the constructs and conditions that Lindquist writes about in her book exist in these conversations, particularly the “telling it like it is” narrative, in which the context of barroom culture gives patrons permission to “reframe events and express authority over the social world...[and] also work as a process whereby individuals can cultivate the social authority that will work as situated ethos” (131). It’s worth noting that academia takes for granted how important the culture of bars and clubs are, particularly from a rhetorical sense. These are

essentially institutions of social interaction—proverbial communication hubs or microcosms—where people go every day to engage socially with others.

Grabhill's work on the "rhetoric of the everyday" is relevant here as well, particularly how it, as he describes, "makes visible the relationships between access and class, between the material and the rhetorical, and between and among other issues of identity" (455). In fact, when he talks about class he quotes Lindquist's definition: "Generally speaking... 'class' can be said to refer to the systemic products of a social hierarchy sustained by unequal access to resources" (457). Grabhill finds that "discursive acts [have] material effects" and "how to trace how the material carries rhetorical meaning and shapes discursive practice" (458).

Both of these critics are able to contextualize why lower-middle class white voters are drawn to Trump. Trump's rhetoric is framed in the everyday language of the politically incorrect lower socio-economic status—the so-called "common man,"—who speaks a vernacular that is largely unfiltered, and in a rhetorical situation which does not require as much attention be paid to the crafting and articulation of the message. It's blunt, ribald, and certainly not the way that a politician is supposed to speak. And it's for that very reason that Trump is popular among this demographic. It relates back to what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "Language of the Marketplace," the rhetoric that was frequently encountered among carnival barkers and entertainers. It is used to get the attention of the audience, to rouse them, to enable them and encourage them. It is language that would typically be seen, presumably, in private, hidden in the recesses of some safe place where the rhetorical stakes are considerably lower. It is noteworthy that Trump labels his misogynistic comments as "locker room talk," implying that within the rhetorical context of the locker room—i.e. among similar groups of white heterosexual men—the brash braggadocio of hegemonic masculinity becomes more normative.

Lindquist was able to observe the same tendencies in her study of the Smokehousers, particularly in the way that they navigate arguments among and between each other regarding controversial topics, such as politics or race. “For Smokehousers,” Lindquist writes, “argument is not merely a way of talking but a meaningful social event” (124). She continues:

arguers do in fact believe that they’re always right, or at least behave as if they do. As the self-referential nature of arguments show them to be about the possibility of reaching truth through dialogue with others, what is always at issue in argument is the conduct of the rhetorical process itself. In arguments, people are free to contest the proper methods, ethics, and applications of rhetoric in a “safe” generic space, that affirms their commitment to the solidarity of practice (Lindquist 123).

Within the space of the Smokehouse, patrons are able to find solutions to problems. There are many similarities to draw between both Trump and Perot’s “common sense rhetoric,” as characterized by the Smokehousers—Perot’s insistence on creating jobs and Trump’s insistence on “building a wall.” (Lindquist 136-139).

As *Salon* writer Amanda Hess observed, one of the ways Donald Trump has proven his mettle for creating an exclusive rhetorical space for himself over other political figures and candidates is through Twitter. Looking at a slew of tweets Trump sent while campaigning, one of which reads “A suicide bomber has just killed U.S. troops in Afghanistan. When will our leaders get tough and smart. We are being led to slaughter!” Hess wrote: “He’s cemented his reputation as a modern social media master by relying on age-old dick moves. Whether he realizes it or not—and he’s tweeted that he has ‘a very high IQ,’ so I’m assuming he does—his most Trump-ian tweets manage to hit upon all three of Aristotle’s modes of persuasion: logos (the appeal to logic), ethos (the appeal to credibility), and pathos (the appeal to emotion)” (Hess “How Trump Wins Twitter”). For an illustration check out Figure 1. Trump’s chosen means of rhetoric is a social media site that allows him to briefly layout opinions and topics he is thinking in real-time.



Figure 1: In one of the many examples of his Twitter rhetoric, Trump uses the three means of persuasion in his tweets to make his point. “Crooked Hillary has ZERO leadership ability...” is an attack on his opponent’s ethos. “As Bernie Sanders says, she has bad judgment...” is using an actual, out-of-context quote by Senator Sanders to damage Clinton’s credibility (logos). “Constantly playing the women’s card – it is sad!” is an appeal to the pathos of his audience who is also fed up with the politically correct culture that gives credence to the concept of “the women’s card.” Plus, you’ve got to love the use of the exclamation mark to drive the point home (Image courtesy of http://www.slate.com/features/2016/01/intQuiz/quizzes/trump_tweets/img/1471292694427-160815_FT_Trump-Tweets-01.png).

While he has been ridiculed for his pervasive use of Twitter, particularly for his use of it revealing his defensiveness and apparent thin-skin toward even the slightest quip or verbal jab, Trump’s commitment to brevity and assertiveness is one of the things that is most uniquely identifiable to him. When we think of Trump’s rhetoric, we think of Twitter. In fact, the nature of the site—its imperative to limit users’ posts to 140 characters or less—seems tailor-made for a candidate in the soundbite era of political media. The fact that Trump can get his ideas across so clearly and concisely plays into his “common sense” policy narrative that is both relatable and lacking enough nuance to be easily understood. It is a rhetorical space where Trump seems to have all of the answers and it provides him with a forum to express those ideas. Not only that, it is a space where Trump can incessantly put down his opponents (and very frequently does), allowing him to wield a specific power that has never been utilized by an American political figure before: ubiquitous contact with his base. Both through the access and behind the

protection that Twitter affords him, Trump has continued to remain present in the discourse of the election behind closed doors, hundreds and thousands of miles away, while also constantly reaching people, friends and enemies alike, through their phones and computers.

Trump’s rhetoric is unpretentious, sounds nothing like other politicians’, and speaks a message that appeals to a base that feels alienated, as though their country has left them behind. By saying that he is going to bring back manufacturing jobs, the coal industry and “law and order,”—in essence, by saying that he is going to “Make America Great Again,”—he is able, as one article in *The Atlantic* put it, to “capture the mission of restoration underpinning [his] campaign” and “touch the pervasive sense of loss among many of his supporters—the belief that the changes molding modern America have marginalized them economically, demographically, and culturally” (Brownstein, “Trump's Rhetoric of White Nostalgia”). This language “allow[s] him to evoke a hazy earlier time when American life worked better for the overwhelmingly white, heavily blue-collar coalition now drawn to him” and “help[s] explain the visceral connection he has established with those white working-class voters, a connection strong enough to survive a concatenation of controversies that might have exploded any other candidate” (Ibid). Lindquist sees the same restless conditions in her study. She concludes by saying:

“The identity crisis that working class whites feel as a result of claiming neither established nor emergent power manifests itself in a ‘rhetorical vacuum’ in which representative voice is forever the subject of negotiation, as Smokehousers’ expressions of political alienation and disenfranchisement demonstrate. What can be read in argument at the Smokehouse, finally, is the story of a particular group of working people trying to create a marketplace for its theory, to construct a safe place where it can explain itself to itself, and to say finally ‘what if’” (177).

Reading this passage, one gets the sense that Trump’s rhetoric and message would appeal to the Smokehousers, that they are in many ways the audience that Trump is reaching most effectively in this election, and that he is doing so by using the same methods and rhetorical practices that

they themselves respect in the rhetorical space of their bar: common sense, direct language, and a motivation for improving the lives of the white, working-class. Therefore, Lindquist's study of the Smokehousers speaks as much to our time period as it did the political climate of the early 1990s.

Emotions, Affect, and Trump

The thing that ties this discourse together is affect because, if there is one thing which can be said about the 2016 election cycle, it's that it has certainly been emotional. Emotion has been the engine that has powered much of the rhetoric and eventual culmination into political action by way of the election. In the introduction to their book *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth provide a definition for affect:

Affect at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces
 —visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious
 knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us
 toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise
 suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force
 relation, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent
 intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing
 immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as
 much as its invitations (Gregg & Seigworth 1).

Affect attempts to articulate those forces which cannot be articulated. It's about examining the effects of bodies in contact with objects or other bodies—thoughts, feelings, impulses, instincts, passions: all of these are the materials of affect. Affect is largely concerned with emotions. Sara Ahmed claims that “[e]motions are both about objects, which they hence shape, and are also shaped by contact with objects” and that they “are relational: they involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such objects” (7-8). For, she adds, “to be touched in a certain way, or to be moved in a certain way by an encounter with another, may involve a reading not only of the encounter, *but of the other that is encountered as having certain characteristics*” (Ahmed 28, author's italics).

Trump, in his reading of the encounter with the other, was able to strike a nerve, to capture the passions of the white male majority and weaponize it into the machinations of a veritable populist revolution, providing them with the strength to dig in their heels, to say “Enough is enough!” and to take back a country that they felt they had lost. Trump set up a dichotomy between the two sides and made the choice very clear for his supporters. “We,” “me and you” who inhabit this room, this space, this town, this country, the “true” Americans, “we” aren’t the problem—“they” are. To take one example of Trump’s own rhetoric from his candidacy announcement speech: “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re not sending you. They’re not sending you. They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us (sic). They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Time). He sets up the dichotomy of “them” (“When Mexico sends its people, *they’re* not sending *their* best”) and “us” (“They’re not sending you”). “Us” and “them” are, as Ahmed writes, objects that are “shaped by contact” with each other, and they are presented in a way that the contact is overwhelmingly negative. Trump isn’t promoting understanding; he is promoting distance, isolation, and rejection of anything other than the crowd in front of him. “The more we don’t know what of who it is we fear,” Ahmed notes, “the more the world becomes fearsome. In other words, it is the structural possibility that the object of fear may pass us by which makes everything possibly fearsome” (69). Trump is more than a politically incorrect rabble-rousing politician; he is stoking the flames of disenfranchised people who are desperate for a leader, spewing resentment and hate speech targeted at those who aren’t like them (labeling Mexicans, generally, as drug dealers, criminals, “rapists”). Whether it is some ominous existential geo-political threat (“Our enemies are getting stronger and stronger by the way, and we as a country are getting weaker.”) or pointing out the

incompetence and immorality of the establishment (“We have losers. We have losers. We have people that don’t have it. We have people that are morally corrupt. We have people that are selling this country down the drain”), Trump is hammering the wedge between those who support him and everyone else (Ibid). He is playing on the fears of his supporters and provides them with a solution, a kind of reassurance. Trump’s message is clear: America is broken because it has betrayed its traditional white Christian values, and any identity other than that one is not only unwelcome, but is actually detrimental to the nation as a whole.

This is a strategy that has worked for the far-Right for quite some time. Trump’s rhetoric mirrors that of conservative talk radio. For people like Rush Limbaugh or Sean Hannity, “‘we’ is white and male” (Kimmel 41). Kimmel notes that it is a sort of “group therapy for mostly white males who feel politically challenged” (Ibid) and it has proved effective not only to reinvigorate the converted but to energize disenfranchised moderates into a call to action as well. Kimmel further explains it: “When threatened, that sense of entitlement, of proprietorship, can be manipulated into an enraged protectionism, a sense that the threat to ‘us’ is internal, those undeserving others who want to take for themselves what we have rightfully earned. ‘We’ were willing to share,... ‘they’ want it all for themselves” (Kimmel 35-36). Since the system they were living in wasn’t working for them, they looked for someone to blame—i.e. immigrants, Muslims, people of color, feminists, etc. (hooks 50). Ahmed agrees, saying that the “us vs. them” dichotomy, the othering and feeling of being othered, creates negative feelings among the two groups: “It is not difficult to see how emotions are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy: emotions become attributes of bodies as a way of transforming what is ‘lower’ or ‘higher’ into bodily traits” (4). While Ahmed notes that “[f]ear has been theorised not just as a technology, but also as a symptom of modern life” that there is a “culture of fear” that is

perpetuated, she prefers the view that “the language of fear involves the intensification of ‘threats’, which works to create a distinction between those who are ‘under threat’ and those who threaten. Fear is an effect of this process, rather than its origin” (71-72). In a nation where racial tensions continue to be fraught, this is the space where white supremacy lives, where race and class are connected. In his shattering book *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, David Roediger writes about the historic connection between race and class in American politics. One particularly relevant example he mentions springs to mind:

“...when the outspoken racist and former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke won a seat in the Louisiana legislature in early 1989, one expert commentator after another came on the morning news shows to announce that unemployment was high in Duke’s nearly all-white district and therefore the election turned on economic grievances rather than racism. Viewers were thus treated to the exotic notion that, when white workers react to unemployment by electing a prominent white supremacist who promises to gut welfare programs, they are acting on class terms, rather than as working class racists” (Roediger 8).

Duke cropped up during the 2016 election cycle, coming out in favor of Trump, and Trump’s subsequent hesitation to reject his endorsement resulted in a spread of unease among the racial minority population in America and interpreted by white nationalists as an attack on politically correct culture. Each side is feeling pain—economic pain, cultural pain, emotional pain—but Ahmed explains that not all pain is equal: “to read the story of white male injury as the same as stories of subaltern injury would be an unjust reading. Whilst we cannot assume that such differences are essential, or determined ‘only’ by the subject’s relation to power, we also cannot treat differences as incidental, and as separated from relations of power” (Ahmed 33). The pain that Trump supporters are feeling manifests itself as hate masking itself as love: “we do and say this because we love, not because we hate” (Ahmed 42). Trump supporters justify their prejudice not as hate for the other, but as love of their own, based on their interpretation of the American Dream. “Make America Great Again” implies a sense of loss. Love and passion has motivated

them to view the others negatively out of protection for those values and ideals that they want most, or as Ahmed explains “it is the love of White, or those that are recognizable as White, which supposedly explains this shared ‘communal’ visceral response of hate. Because we love, we hate, and this hate is what brings us together” (Ahmed 43). Trump has provided a platform for groups of Americans who had previously had their beliefs subdued due to a culture which had been becoming increasingly more aware of political correctness and attempts to highlight perspectives of other groups who have been ignored, overlooked, neglected, or abused throughout history. He represents a kind of liberation from the perceived tyranny of political correct censorship, which embraces racial and cultural diversity and chooses (or at least attempts to) not to privilege one culture as dominant over another. Trump’s rhetoric, whether unintentionally or not, tells such groups (white supremacists, for example), that their frustration, and hatred for others is justified, that they are in the right. This is certainly not his only audience, and may not be his intended audience, but they are listening to him nonetheless and he is providing them with a platform to act out their frustrations.

Affect in Celebrity, Post-Truth Politics and Fake News

As we continue to look at how Trump was able to manipulate the fragile emotional structure of his base, it seems fitting to reflect on how Neil Postman's book *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, talks about how the entertainment industry (through the medium of television and now, one would conclude, the internet) has bled over into other forms of public discourse such as news, education and politics, and is responsible for, among other things, lowering our collective attention span and tolerance, privileging entertainment over substance, and diminishing the quality of information resources. Postman references two dystopian novels as the framework for his writing—George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, claiming that while the former was more familiar, the latter was a more accurate reading of human nature in today's society:

“What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egotism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared that truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance...In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us” (Postman, xix-xx).

Postman writes that society will deteriorate until nothing of substance will remain, that blurring the lines between entertainment and information is the key contributing factor to bring about Huxley's vision. Donald Trump as entertainer, reality television star and personality, seems to be just the type of figure to symbolize this deterioration. Postman wrote his book during the first term of Ronald Reagan's Presidency. Reagan, of course, was an actor in Hollywood before turning to politics, and this development surely caused Postman considerable uneasiness. Despite what Postman says, however, Donald Trump's fame as a reality television star and media-friendly real-estate mogul was one of his advantages in this election: he was able to bridge the

gap between entertainment and public office. One would be hard-pressed to find a household in America before the election where Donald Trump was not a recognizable face.

In her book, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge*, Liesbet Van Zoonen talks about how the election of Ronald Reagan as President in the 1980s and of Arnold Schwarzenegger as governor of California in 2003, it was evident that “celebrity had become more important than political substance, and people voted on the basis of a superficial Hollywood appeal rather than on a reasonable assessment of policy alternatives” (70). Van Zoonen is able to map the trend of unconventional politicians with a celebrity bent—a group she labels “celebrity politicians”—and she provides a clear illustration of four different categories these celebrity politicians fall under. Utilizing the phrase “Typology of Basic Personae of Celebrity Politicians,” Van Zoonen discovers a means to measure the characteristics of the various combinations of roles which make up this dichotomy. She illustrates this through a figure divided into two axes. Along the X axis is a range of “Politics: insider” to “Politics: outsider” and along the Y axis is a range of “Celebrity: ordinary” to “Celebrity: special” (82). Van Zoonen labels Category I as the “Politics insider/Celebrity ordinary”—“the run-of-the-mill politician appears; he is an insider to the political field and has few private qualities that make him stand out among ordinary people” (for example, Al Gore); Category II is “Politics insider/Celebrity special” which Van Zoonen describes as a political insider “whose title and exuberant lifestyle placed him at a fair distance from any of his supporters and who attracted an excessive amount of media attention for that;” Category III is “Politics outsider/Celebrity ordinary” which is described as “the outsider to the political process who operates as an ‘ordinary citizen’ in the figure of the American independent candidate” (think Ross Perot, Al Sharpton, or Ben Carson); Category IV is Politics outsider/Celebrity special which would be someone like “Arnold

Schwarzenegger, an outsider whose history, marriage, and physique separate him far from his fans” (Van Zoonen 83). A recreation of Van Zoonen’s illustration is provided in Figure 2. She asserts that

“[t]he ultimate celebrity politician, then, is the one who is able to balance the contradictory requirements of politics and celebrity, is located right in the middle of the plot. He or she projects a persona that has inside experience with politics but is still an outsider; his (or, in some cases, her) performance builds on a unique mixture of ordinariness of exceptionality. It is a persona, for that matter, not restricted to any side of the political spectrum: Ronald Reagan was a political outsider when elected governor of California, but an insider when he became president. He thus balanced an inside an outside position. His history as a movie star positioned him as extraordinary: however, through his intimate communicative style, he performed the ordinary guy with ordinary preferences...The appeal of these different types of is contingent upon the prevailing political climate: thus Jimmy Carter’s campaign in the post-Watergate period was framed as meeting the general desire to have an ordinary man untainted by Washington’s dubious morals as president” (Van Zoonen 84-85).

Donald Trump, due to his bombastic personality and successful career as a reality television star, would be placed in Category IV as a political outsider with a special brand of celebrity that is both recognizable and carries with it a sort of credibility which appeals to the average citizen due very much to the fact that he does not have political experience and is therefore not tainted by the corruption of what they see as a broken political system.

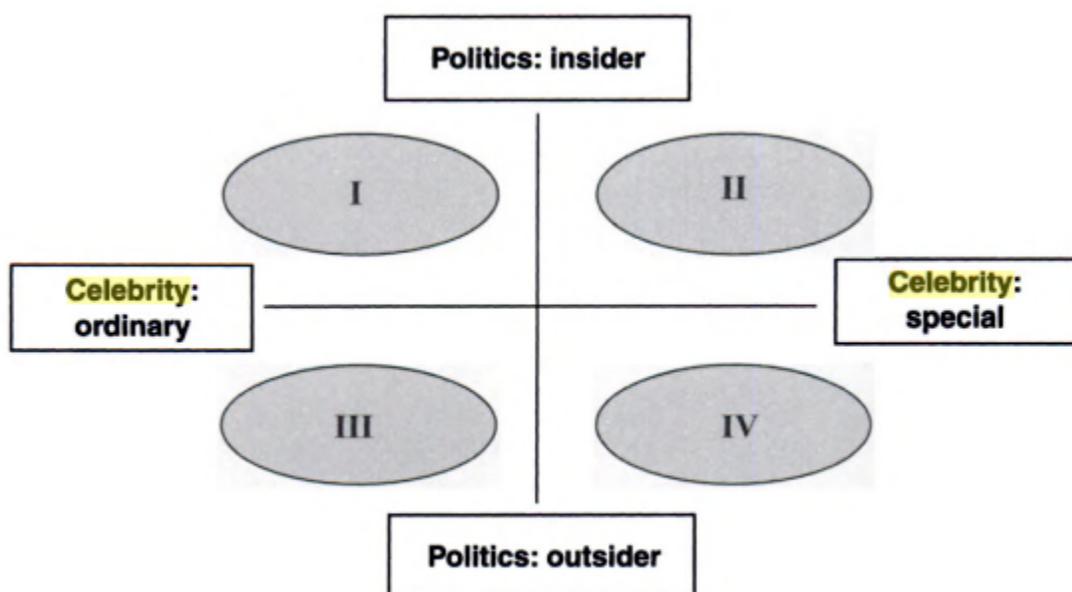


Figure 5.1. *Typology of Basic Personae of Celebrity Politicians*

Figure 2

Politics insider—Politics outsider

Celebrity ordinary—Celebrity special

Van Zoonen labels Category I as the “Politics insider/Celebrity ordinary”—“the run-of-the-mill politician appears; he is an insider to the political field and has few private qualities that make him stand out among ordinary people” (for example, Al Gore); Category II is “Politics insider/Celebrity special” which Van Zoonen describes as a political insider “whose title and exuberant lifestyle placed him at a fair distance from any of his supporters and who attracted an excessive amount of media attention for that;” Category III is “Politics outsider/Celebrity ordinary” which is described as “the outsider to the political process who operates as an ‘ordinary citizen’ in the figure of the American independent candidate” (think Ross Perot, Al Sharpton, or Ben Carson); Category IV is Politics outsider/Celebrity special which would be someone like “Arnold Schwarzenegger, an outsider whose history, marriage, and physique separate him far from his fans” (Van Zoonen 83).

The point Van Zoonen seems to be making here is that if entertainment is going to be a part of politics then it is important to know how it functions. This connection between public figure and citizenry, Van Zoonen argues, is crucial to the “everyday culture of its citizens; otherwise it becomes an alien sphere, occupied by strangers no one cares and bothers about” (3).

That being said, while it is necessary that politicians find new and improved ways to reach citizens, some would argue that it comes at a cost. We’ve already explored how Trump has utilized social media to reach his supporters—in a sense, to speak their language. Let’s go back to Postman, who argued that technology changes the way a society thinks—“the media is the

metaphor”—that something as seemingly simple as eyeglasses in the Middle Ages could inspire a society to “not need to accept as final the endowments of nature or the ravages of time” and that such an idea “refuted the belief that anatomy is destiny by putting forward the idea that our bodies as well as our minds are improvable” (14). Compare the impact of such an invention with the daunting potential of television or the internet and suddenly it does not seem unlikely that a culture’s worldview and means of understanding itself and the world it inhabits would be affected by these media. In a sense, Postman is pointing out that it seems inevitable that a candidate like Trump—who utilizes and whose persona is complemented by the pace and rhetoric of entertainment culture—would emerge from a society immersed in a steady diet of television news and social media.

Postman also argued that every generation has a city that is the cultural apex, a symbol of the achievement and character of the time. Paris, at one time, was this symbol for Europe; some could argue that New York or Los Angeles could be the symbol for America today. He thinks differently, claiming that Las Vegas is this generation’s “metaphor of our national character and aspiration...[for] Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment” (3). Postman is writing about the human tendency to satisfy our basest desires, to attach one’s self onto the aspects of culture that speak most simply to our own beliefs, that re-affirm them, justify them, even if it means eschewing reason, logic, and facts. One group of researchers found that voters are not always the most logical or informed bodies in the political process: “Two of the most robust findings about American voters are that few of them have coherent, detailed ideologies and few know much about politics...[Political scientist Donald Kinder] reports that the ‘depth of ignorance demonstrated by modern mass publics can be quite

breathhtaking’ and ‘the number of Americans who garble the most elementary points is... impressive’... most voters ‘know jaw-droppingly little about politics’” (Bendor, Diermeier, Siegel, & Ting 109). Voter ignorance or downright apathy is something that has been a problematic aspect of elections since the beginning of American democracy. Richard Wirthlin, President Ronald Reagan’s chief strategist talked about what it took to motivate voters back in the 1980s: “Issues are rational. But, I believe if you want to motivate people to vote, or take any kind of action, you’ve got to touch them not only rationally but emotionally...In developing the issues you’ve got to look toward how those issues impinge upon the values of safety, peace of mind, family, and so on” (quoted in Katz 161-162).

This same tendency seems to be encouraged (some would argue perpetuated) by our current media climate. But there seems to be, with the advent of the internet age and social media, an embarrassment of riches in terms of the wealth of information available—the difference between quality information and the quantity of information which allows citizens to create and maintain their own political and social bubble—a trend toward willful voter ignorance that is troublesome not only for some politicians, but as some researchers argue, the entire democratic process. And it is not exclusive to one political ideology. In their book, *Do Facts Matter?: Information and Misinformation in American Politics*, Hochschild and Einstein talk about this disconnect between voters and facts. They are mainly concerned about two groups in particular: the active misinformed—meaning those individuals or groups of individuals who hold incorrect “knowledge” and make decisions or act upon this misinformation (think the anti-vaccination movement or the birther movement)—and the inactive informed—those individuals or groups of individuals who hold correct knowledge but choose, for whatever reason not to act on the information they are given (such as climate change deniers). The authors frame their

analysis as a comparison to the Jeffersonian ideal of a well-informed and politically active populace—meaning not only would voters keep themselves informed, but they would act politically on that information. They write: “Given that the active misinformed can be impervious to persuasion—and, at a minimum, have no strong incentive to change their views—and that their behavior can be destructive to a democratic polity and its residents, we might expect public officials vigorously to combat the use of misinformation. Some do. But many do not, which raises a further obstacle to the attainment of the Jeffersonian ideal of informed activity” (Hochschild and Einstein 101).

This is something that politicians are catching on to, and while some strive to keep the populace informed, others have come to accept or even embrace this lack of respect for facts. During the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, in summer 2016, former Speaker of the House, and Donald Trump supporter Newt Gingrich gave an interview with CNN correspondent Alisyn Camerota that characterized much of what Trump supporters were feeling throughout the election cycle. The transcript reads as follows:

Camerota: Violent crime is down. The economy is ticking up.

Gingrich: It is not down in the biggest cities.

Camerota: Violent crime—murder rate—is down. It is down.

Gingrich: Then how come it’s up in Chicago, up in Baltimore, up in Washington?

Camerota: There are pockets where certainly we have not tackled murder—

Gingrich: Your national capital and your third biggest city.

Camerota: --but violent crime across the country is down.

...

Gingrich: The average American, I will bet you this morning, does not think crime is down, does not think they are safer.

Camerota: But it is, we are safer, and it is down.

Gingrich: Now, that’s your view.

Camerota: Those are facts. Those are the actual FBI facts, statistics—

Gingrich: I just talked to—now—but what I said, what I said is also a fact.

...

Gingrich: The current view is that liberals have a whole set of statistics which theoretically may be right, but it’s not where human beings are.

Camerota: But what you're saying, but hold up Mr. Speaker, because you're saying liberals use these numbers, they use this sort of magic.

Gingrich: Sure.

Camerota: This is the FBI statistics. They're not a liberal organization. They're bipartisan.

Gingrich: No, but what I said is equally true. People—

Camerota: Feel it—

Gingrich: --feel more threats.

Camerota: They may feel it but the facts don't support it.

Gingrich: Hey, as a political candidate, I'll go with how people feel, and I'll let you go with the theoreticians.

Instead of working to inform voters, to provide them with the facts and figures on a given issue (in this case the national crime rate), Gingrich is allowing them to not only continue to live in ignorance, he is arguing that their non-factual feelings are *equally as valid*. This is the latest example of the political culture in America devolving into what many are calling a post-truth or post-fact world, where citizens and politicians can create their own realities, devoid of any semblance of facts, to promote their ideals and agenda. It has also given rise to something that Ira Glass, in a recent episode of *This American Life*, called “patriotic correctness” in which any piece of information that falls out of line with a particular political point-of-view is partisan, and therefore invalid. Using an argument with his educated and otherwise reasonable, Obama-hating Uncle Lenny—who thinks that the current immigration laws are such that Obama “wants to have one country of North America, which is composed of Canada, the United States, and part of Mexico, if not all of Mexico” and is indignant when Glass points out that this is unlikely because Obama has deported more immigrants than any other president in history (2.5 million). Uncle Lenny's response?: “I don't believe that, Ira, for one minute. I don't believe that.” As a further illustration, Glass uses a quotation by conservative talk radio personality Rush Limbaugh to explain:

“The fact that *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and *USA Today* and all these other papers and networks now have fact-checkers is for one

reason. It allows them to fool you. The idea that it is a fact-check story is designed to say to you that it is objective and analytically fair. And all it is is a vehicle for them to do opinion journalism under the guise of fairness, which, if you fall for it, gives it even more power” (NPR, “Seriously?”).

Glass points out that “[t]he presentation of facts is seen as partisan opinion, and then every day a barrage of untruths are presented as truth, and we're just supposed to suck it up. That's the moment we live in. That's our country right now” (NPR, “Seriously?”). According to a Pew Poll 81 percent of voters claim they cannot agree with those on the other side of the aisle on basic facts (CBS Sunday Morning “A Polarized America”). Norm Ornstein, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute explains that the current media environment is one of the biggest contributing factors to the growing divide within the American public: “We would watch network news shows and we would sit there and we would have basically a common set of facts that would emerge from them. As we’ve moved to the new media world, the more have this cacophony of voices, the more you cut through it by basically shock value. And that’s why people now are driven, not by their own attachment to their own parties. They are driven by a hatred for those on the other side” (Ibid.).

When citizens’ emotions are worked up to the point that they begin to eschew facts in favor of reinforcement of their already passionate opinions, the result seems to be something akin to a Trump candidacy. As explored above, Trump supporters feel as though their way of life, and in some cases their safety, is constantly under threat. Conservative talk radio lives for this kind of rhetoric, finding liberals incompetent at best, and destructive at worst, promoting thinly-veiled racist ideals of white nationalism, classifying political correctness as an attack on free speech, and spreading a non-specific barrage of fear and resentment sometimes manifesting into full-blown conspiracy theories. Consumers of talk radio are generally comfortable with this. However, it is only in the past few years that conservative talk rhetoric is being embraced by

mainstream media, given the same amount of broadcast time, and treated with the same immediacy as news of the day. We now live in a world where the President, who lost the popular vote by 3 million votes could tweet, to thunderous support by his voters, that, actually, he did win the popular vote “if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally,” based on no evidence whatsoever, and then reinforced by his press secretary and various other members of his cabinet, and the statement is treated as news by every major media outlet. This is exacerbated by statements made by his press secretary and various other members of his cabinet that reinforce Trump’s claims. The search for objective truth in an increasingly subjective media climate is becoming increasingly difficult. In a world where the 45th President Elect of the United States, merely days before inauguration, stands up before a crowded press room and calls a reporter from a major news organization (CNN) “fake news” to his face because he was displeased with the organization’s coverage of him, where that same President, after being inaugurated, can’t seem to agree with the media, or even photographic evidence, about how many people attended his inauguration, and where White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon, formerly a founding member of alt-right media hub Breitbart, calls the mainstream media “the opposition party” in an interview with the *New York Times*, suddenly, the waters begin to grow foggier every day. The message coming from the administration seems to be clear—the truth seems to be what Trump wants it to be.

This trend didn’t begin with Trump, however. Katz illustrates, in his analysis of the hyper-masculine certainty prevalent in the rhetoric of frothing far-right conservatives like Rush Limbaugh, Bill O’Reilly, Sean Hannity and other talking heads and mouthpieces of the far-right, exactly how conservative talk is symptomatic of this kind of fast-and-loose relationship with facts. The hostility that they display for the mainstream media is not only about fair coverage of a

particular story (that is, agreeing on an objective truth regarding a series of events that occurred), but is rooted in such cynicism toward what they view as an out-of-touch, often feckless, news culture that they feel as though their way of life, their ideology, their very identity is under attack. Looking at one example, when Limbaugh attacked Georgetown law student Sandra Fluke for requesting insurance coverage for contraceptives, the late Al Neuharth, founder of *USA Today*, wrote of the controversy, “the real problem with Rush Limbaugh is that people take him seriously. He’s a clown. If you listen to his radio program regularly, it should be to get your daily laugh” (Katz 126). However, agreeing with Postman, Katz rebuts

“many have not clearly understood that distinctions between entertainment culture and political culture collapsed long ago in our media-saturated society. In fact, talk radio occupies a privileged cultural space in the sense that it provides a wealth of information, misinformation, and political analysis, but ultimately is judged by the values of entertainment...As a result, hosts like Limbaugh can put forth all manner of intellectually shallow arguments and repeatedly say silly things—not to mention grossly misstate facts—and still maintain their standing and popularity (Ibid.)

Talk radio personalities have been able to market to these demographics for years and after pervasive exposure it begins to have an effect on how viewers see their world and their place in it. They instead begin to rely on Limbaugh and company to provide them with reinforcement of their own ideals and beliefs, and eventually it becomes more appealing to tune in to their shows than expose themselves to other more mainstream media. Katz explains: “It hardly matters whether the specifics of their analyses are reasoned soundly or even if they are factually accurate. What matters is that as long as they can maintain their ratings, Limbaugh and company will have the power not only to interpret social and political reality on a daily basis for millions of listeners, but in so doing also to reinforce a narrow and constricted definition of masculinity, with powerful implications for what is considered ‘strong’ presidential leadership” (Katz 140).

Norm Ornstein, in an interview with Ted Koppel of CBS News, characterizes another major concern about our current media climate:

“Now you take conservative talk radio, move that forward to tribal cable television, and then layer on to that email and social media and all of a sudden we live in a world where people can get information and believe it’s absolutely true and not have to get any kind of opposing point of view. And once they believe it, they will always believe it, even if it is utterly false” (CBS This Morning “A Polarized America”).

This attitude is symptomatic of a psychological phenomenon known as “the backfire effect.”

According to a series of studies at the University of Michigan in 2005 and 2006, researchers found that “when misinformed people, particularly political partisans, were exposed to corrected facts in news stories, they rarely changed their minds” (Keohane “How Fact Backfire”). In fact, it was discovered that when confronted with facts, the misinformed people were more likely to double-down on their incorrect beliefs. Brendan Nyhan, the lead researcher of the study, was quoted in an article explaining “‘The general idea is that it’s absolutely threatening to admit you’re wrong.’ The phenomenon — known as ‘backfire’ — is ‘a natural defense mechanism to avoid that cognitive dissonance’” (Ibid.). In a follow-up study, they write “[i]f people counterargue unwelcome information vigorously enough, they may end up with ‘more attitudinally congruent information in mind than before the debate...which in turn leads them to report opinions that are more extreme than they otherwise would have had’” (Nyhan and Reifler 308). Some examples of the misperception these researchers were trying to cull includes the belief that “the 9/11 attacks were an ‘inside job’ aided or carried out by the government” or the “death-panel” controversy regarding the Affordable Care Act (Nyhan and Reifler “The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions”). While in some of the cases people are willing and able to change their minds when confronted with facts, “[t]he backfire effect is constantly shaping [their] beliefs and memory, keeping [them] consistently leaning one way or the other through a

process psychologists call biased assimilation. Decades of research into a variety of cognitive biases shows [they] tend to see the world through thick, horn-rimmed glasses forged of belief and smudged with attitudes and ideologies” (McRaney “The Backfire Effect”). It seems that there is an instinctual prerogative to lean toward emotions over facts, or at least to feel more comfortable with them when dealing with political debate.

Comedian Stephen Colbert has another term for this tendency to value emotions (“feelings,” intangibles, etc.) over logic, reason, and facts. Colbert’s hit Comedy Central show *The Colbert Report*, was a platform for the comedian to point out specific hypocrisies of the conservative right by ironically portraying a conservative pundit in the vein of Bill O’Reilly (whom he modeled his character from). In the very first episode, in what would eventually become an on-going segment called “the WORD,” Colbert introduced the term “‘truthiness’...to express the idea of something that seems to be true, the ‘truth we want to exist’” (Katz 195). For Colbert’s character “[t]ruth...comes from the gut, and the people who subscribe to truthiness know what is true because it simply feels true” (Jones 81) (See Figure 3). Colbert elaborated on the term in an out-of-character interview:

“Truthiness is tearing apart our country, and I don't mean the argument over who came up with the word. I don't know whether it's a new thing, but it's certainly a current thing, to matter is true?... possibly be true.’ There's not only an emotional quality, but there's a selfish quality” (Rabin “Stephen Colbert”).

Media studies scholar Jeffrey Jones notes that “Colbert’s persona (and this performance) is a critique of truthiness—how it is manifest within public rhetoric, as well as the role that media play in allowing it to happen” (83).

Looking back at the Gingrich interview, Camerota tries to insert logic into the debate, but the debate is not one in which logic is useful, or even welcome. Gingrich says that Americans



Figure 3. Stephen Colbert introducing the world to the concept of “truthiness” (Image courtesy of <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truthiness>).

“feel more threats,” and that’s good enough for him. Affect theory scholar Brian Mussumi contextualizes fear as “the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the nonexistent, loomingly present as the affective fact of the matter” (54). “If we feel a threat,” Mussumi adds, “there was a threat. Threat is affectively self-causing...If we feel a threat, such that there was a threat, then there always will have been a threat. Threat is, once and for all, in the nonlinear time of its own causing” (Ibid). For Mussumi, “The affective reality of threat is contagious” and “it is capable of overlaying its own conditional determination upon an objective situation through the mechanism of alarm. The two determinations, threatening and objective, coexist. However, the threat-determined would-be and could-be takes public precedence due to its operating in the more compelling, future-oriented, and affective register. This gives it superior political presence and potential” (58). The idea of “threat,” or some potential, even existential fear is one of the driving forces for Trump’s entire campaign specifically, and of post-truth politics more generally.

Trump is the “prominent practitioner” of post-truth politics and it is implicit in his rhetoric; as one article in *The Economist* stated, “‘A lot of people are saying...’ is one of Trump’s favorite phrases” because it “question[s] the provenance, rather than accuracy, of anything that goes against them,” the response being “‘They would say that, wouldn’t they?’” (“Yes, I’d Lie to You”). Trump seems to use un-truths in three forms: vanity (as in his hair, height, wealth, manhood), denial (claiming that he didn’t say something that he did, in fact, say), and “the lie about democracy itself or climate change, which he calls a hoax” (Egan “The Post-Truth Presidency”). Peter Pomerantsev captured the essence of Trump’s post-truth identity: “when Donald Trump makes up facts on a whim, claims that he saw thousands of Muslims in New Jersey cheering the Twin Towers coming down, or that the Mexican government purposefully sends ‘bad’ immigrants to the US, when fact-checking agencies rate 78% of his statements untrue but he still becomes a US Presidential candidate – then it appears that facts no longer matter much in the land of the free” (“Why We’re Post-Fact”). But how did we get to a world where “reality is endlessly malleable?” Pomerantsev claims that post-truth politics is a byproduct and consequence of post-modernism. Post-modernism, or post-structuralism, in this instance, was a theoretical framework designed to recognize the narratives of disenfranchised groups (people of color, women, LGBT, etc.) to have space within the discourse, that those groups which had been ignored or marginalized had perspectives and experiences which were equally valid to those of whom were oppressing them. It was ‘emancipatory, a way to free people from the oppressive narratives they had been subjected to’ (Ibid). Taken in the context of post-truth politics, the Right would argue that the “liberal media” is oppressing them with knowledge, with facts and, to paraphrase Rush Limbaugh, facts are partisan. Pomerantsev is not alone in his assessment, however. McClennen and Maisel point out that “[i]n the immediate aftermath of 9/11 a lot of that

deceptive use of language was bundled together with ideas of how the post-modern era had ushered in an era of irony and simulation where nothing being said was real. Many scholars considered the complex ways that words connected to meaning in those days when all of the structures of reference seemed to collapse” (*Is Satire Saving Our Nation?* 124). “To make matters worse,” Pomerantsev continues, “by saying that all knowledge is (oppressive) power, postmodernism took away the ground on which one could argue against power. Instead it posited that ‘because reason and intellect are forms of domination . . . liberation must be looked for through feelings and the body...’ Rejecting fact-based arguments in favour [sic] of emotions becomes a good in itself” (Pomerantsev “Why We’re Post-Fact”). Trump “validate[s] the pleasure of spouting shit, the joy of pure emotion, often anger, without any sense. And an audience which has already spent a decade living without facts can now indulge in a full, anarchic liberation from coherence” (Ibid).

Again, it comes back to affect. Trump and the far-Right have been able to weaponize emotion to the point that it is literally changing the reality of their supporters. They have become skeptical of or, often, cynical and hostile toward any media that provides them with information which they don’t agree, and are validated by Trump and company to do so. Anything which doesn’t align with what they already believe is a deceit, a liberal conspiracy meant to continue their suffering. In a long piece in *The New Yorker*, MacArthur fellow George Saunders wrote about the ideological divide between the two “sub-countries” which make up the American political system today:

“In the old days, a liberal and a conservative (a “dove” and a “hawk,” say) got their data from one of three nightly news programs, a local paper, and a handful of national magazines, and were thus starting with the same basic facts (even if those facts were questionable, limited, or erroneous). Now each of us constructs a custom informational universe, wittingly (we choose to go to the sources that uphold our existing beliefs and thus flatter us) or unwittingly (our app algorithms do the driving for us). The data we get

this way, pre-imprinted with spin and mythos, are intensely one-dimensional” (“Who Are All of These Trump Supporters?”).

Saunders points out that not only is there a great divide in the lifestyles of these dichotomous groups, but that the media encourages, motivates, fosters, deepens that divide through isolation from opposition and filtering of narratives that reinforce previously held ideals.

This creates real-life consequences for fake news and post-truth politics. On December 4, 2016, Edgar Welch, a 28-year-old North Carolina man, walked into Comet Ping Pong pizza shop in Washington, D.C. and opened fire because he believed it was a front for a child sex-slave ring. He believed the conspiracy involved Hillary Clinton Campaign manager John Podesta who had corresponded with the restaurant’s manager James Alefantis, and Hillary Clinton and President Obama were among those allegedly implemented in the scandal. When WikiLeaks released Hillary Clinton’s emails which were hacked from John Podesta’s account, a far-right sect of 4Chan’s internet community began to “decode” some messages in them, eventually connecting the phrase “cheese pizza” to “child pornography” and (falsely) alleging that Podesta and his brother, lobbyist Tony Podesta, were involved in the illicit activity, later termed #Pizzagate (Aisch, Huang, & Kang “Dissecting the #Pizzagate Conspiracy Theory”). According to *The New York Times*, rumors arose including “theories about kill rooms, underground tunnels, satanism and even cannibalism” and were circulated “in fabricated stories and on social media” (Ibid). Welch, carrying a military-grade rifle, eventually surrendered after finding no evidence to support the conspiracy. No one was injured.

What is particularly disturbing about this instance is that Welch felt in some way motivated to act with potential violence based on misinformation. This is what Lynn Worsham calls “pedagogic violence” that is “authorized by and implied in education in general; and...that initially organizes the emotional life of the individual,” (221). For Worsham “pedagogy is an

apparatus for creating, maintaining, and perpetuating the legitimacy of the interests of the dominant group across many different kinds of discourse that cultivate "the educated individual" as an ideal type of pedagogical subject who possesses the propensity to consume the legitimate products of dominant culture and is predisposed to be used and consumed according to its interests" (Ibid). Since "dominant pedagogy is always able to accommodate (and subordinate) alternatives in a way that does not seriously disrupt its own authority," the dominant pedagogy is then able to dictate the "words, names and phrases...that construct the social world, the existing world" (Worsham 222). Welch was acting on the terms of the dominant pedagogy of his bubble, a bubble of fake news and conspiracy theories. Welch's intention is no different than Mark David Chapman's or Timothy McVeigh's or that of any number of angry white men moved to violence because of a conspiracy, which, from their perspective, only they themselves are willing and able to act on.

Pizzagate and other recent incidents—including "a woman who believed that the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre was a government hoax [and] was arrested for making threats against the parents of a child who died there" (Adler, "Fake News, Faith and Reason")—happen in part because of the pervasive circulation of fake news by conservative and satirical news organizations. One such organization, *National Report*, as well as dozens of others, is operated by Jestin Coler, a.k.a. Allen Montgomery. His pieces have been circulated and shared by millions of users across the country, and many people believe they are true, when really they are fictional works of satire. In a piece on the satirical news program *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, Mike Rubens sat down with Coler to talk about his work in fake news. Coler explained that the articles he writes are designed to spark outrage by the political Right. In fact, that's where he gets his inspiration. "Any sort of a gun-grabbing story," he explained, "pro-abortion, anti-Obama or anti-

Hillary, anti-Muslim, anything anti-Mexican, or immigrant. This kind of Right-wing red meat.”

Rubens mentioned one article titled “FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide” which ties “a fictitious murder-suicide to the Hillary email scandal, a story that ran during the election that got over half a million views.” Coler’s justification for the creation of these fake news sites is that:

Coler: In 2013, late 2012, early 2013 I became very interested in what is now referred to as the alt-Right. And, ultimately, we were trying to infiltrate these groups and see if they would fall for the stories we were writing in order to publicly discredit them as being factual news sources.

Rubens: Is it ok to shout “Fire!” in a crowded movie theatre, if afterwards you whisper, “Just kidding?”

Coler: No.

Rubens: It’s probably not ok to shout “ISIS!” in a theatre full of heavily-armed Trump supporters.

Coler: Probably not.

Rubens shows some of the comments on these stories to Coler, including one commenter who, after reading a story about a Michigan city instituting Sharia Law, wrote “I will show them what I think of Sharia Law with my 30-aught-6” and another commented “We should form vigilante squads, remove all the Muslims, air drop them into the middle of the Sahara from 20,000 feet.” Coler’s response was “That’s a horrible comment. There’s a lot of angry people on there.”

Because they tap into the emotionally charged aspects of the readers’ personalities and beliefs, because they seem to target readers’ fear and anxieties, and because readers exist in a culture that rewards them for remaining uninformed, these fake news stories are inciting and inspiring *real* violence, in thoughts, words and actions. Coler defends his position, however, stating in another interview with *The Daily Banter*, that he and his staff

like to think we are doing a public service by introducing readers to misinformation. As hard as it is to believe, NR is often the first place people actually realize how easy they themselves are manipulated and we hope that makes them better consumers of content. It only takes a time or two of being shamed by your friends before you begin to look beyond a headline and start to

identify holes that should be dead giveaways for news that is not true (McCay “Interview With ‘Allen Montgomery,’ Founder Of the Hoax Site, National Report”).

When we compare these headlines to similar headlines on right-wing news outlets, such as conspiracy theorist and conservative talk personality Alex Jones’s website Infowars.com, we can see that the rhetoric is similar. Looking at headlines targeting specific talking points framed to outrage a specific brand of conservative voters, ranging from social issues (“VIDEO: Liberals Want Urinals Installed in Women’s Restrooms;” “State University to Inject ‘Black Studies’ Component into Every Major”) to alleged liberal conspiracies (“CIA/Dems Move Forward with Plan to Steal Election from Trump”) to current events and topics (“Bolton: Russian Hack May Be Obama False Flag,” and a personal favorite “War on ‘Fake News’ Part of a War on Free Speech”). The rhetoric and the tones of these pieces are so similar that only subtle differences exist. Even the layout on the page is similar, borrowing a style that looks like any click-bait news website such as *The Huffington Post* or *Buzzfeed*, both of which, while skewing on the side of entertainment, do dabble in news coverage from time-to-time. For a side-by-side comparison of a selection of these websites, see Figure 4.

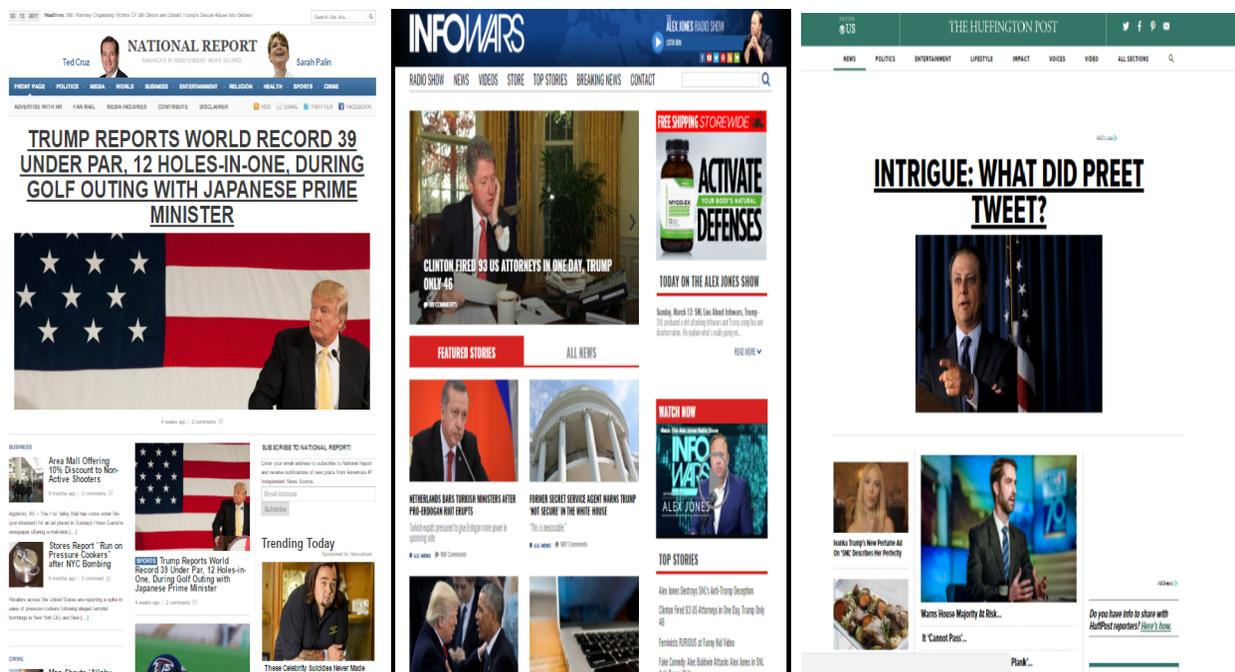


Figure 4: (Left to Right) Screenshots from March 13, 2017 from *National Report*, *Infowars*, and *The Huffington Post*.

Some of the stories on the *National Review* site, self-proclaimed to be “America’s #1 Independent News Source,” have obviously humorous titles including “Trump Vows to be Tough on Clown Crime” and “Trump Receives Honorary Degree from Electoral College,” while others are less obvious such as “Melania Trump to Promote Healthy Lunches, More Exercise as First Lady” (the joke being that Melania Trump is plagiarizing more than Michelle Obama’s speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention this summer, but also her pet cause as First Lady of the United States) and “Man Starts GoFundMe To Pay For Islamic-Americans’ Concealed Carry Permits” which mimics the tone of disdain that many conservative pundits and personalities have for both Millennials and Islam. The site is striving for the ironic parody of other fake news sites such as *The Onion*, but, as the *Casper Star-Tribune* reports, “the website’s Huffington Post-esque layout and legitimate-sounding name could lend itself to reader credulity.” The Wyoming paper investigated the website after a story was circulated that “a local ordinance [tied to Obamacare

was] requiring its government-assisted citizens to be implanted with identification chips.” The town clerk was being flooded by callers from all over the country asking if the story was true. The story was created as a work of satire from *National Report* and many readers had mistaken it for a legitimate news source, and were harassing public officials as a result.

In addition, “Coler says his writers have tried to write fake news for liberals — but they just never take the bait,” implying that readers from the Right are more susceptible to fall prey to a joke and provide the emotional reaction that such sites thrive on (*NPR* “We Tracked Down A Fake-News Creator In The Suburbs. Here's What We Learned”). Coler also mentions that his sites have a disclaimer revealing the true intentions of the site. The *National Report*’s disclaimer reads as follows: “National Report is a news and political satire web publication, which may or may not use real names, often in semi-real or mostly fictitious ways. All news articles contained within National Report are fiction, and presumably fake news. Any resemblance to the truth is purely coincidental. Advice given is NOT to be construed as professional. If you are in need of professional help, please consult a professional. National Report is not intended for children under the age of 18.” Obviously, this disclaimer does come clean about the intentions of the site, but in order to access the page, users have to click on it, something that is unlikely to happen if they are incensed or acting in the heat of passion or outrage to share these stories.

Fake news became an epidemic on social media in the 2016 election cycle, so much that politicians had to take time to address it. Hillary Clinton called it “malicious” and “false propaganda” adding that “It’s now clear that so-called fake news can have real-world consequences this isn’t about politics or partisanship. Lives are at risk, lives of ordinary people just trying to go about their days to do their jobs, contribute to their communities. It’s a danger that must be addressed and addressed quickly. Bipartisan legislation is making its way through

Congress to boost the government's response to foreign propaganda and Silicon Valley is starting to grapple with the challenge and threat of fake news. It's imperative that leaders in both the private sector and the public sector step up to protect our democracy and innocent lives" (LIVE SATELLITE NEWS "Hillary Clinton "Fake News" Speech at the Capital Building 12-8-2016). Media outlets have written numerous pieces about it as well, some calling it a controversy, some calling it a hoax. But the point is clear: when news media is motivated by profit and the impetus to be "first" outweighs the need to be accurate, it "produces some chilling possibilities for politics. Once numbers are viewed more as indicators of current sentiment, than as statements about reality, how are we to achieve any consensus on the nature of social, economic and environmental problems, never mind agree on the solutions?" (Davies "The Age of Post-Truth Politics"). Indeed, the answer continues to elude us.

Satire and Carnavalesque in Trumpian Rhetoric

Now that we've explored who the Trump voter is as well as a way of illustrating where their support for Trump is grounded, to the point that any opposition to their support of Trump is viewed as a threat to their way of life. The same is true of satire. Whether such a threat is warranted or not, it seems counter-intuitive to respond to their concerns only with snarky comments, parody, and ridicule. Trump supporters feel ignored and neglected and they are entitled to the attention and representation that all Americans deserve. In this next section, I will examine how satirists have played a significant role in our current media climate not only to thumb their nose at the political establishment, but also to provide a vital service for citizens in a democracy. I am looking at three comparative pieces of satire. The first is Samantha Bee's piece, where she sits down and has a conversation with Trump supporters. Bee's, I will argue, is effective because, while her piece is played for comedic effect, it does not directly insult Trump supporters, and instead attempts to create discourse between two opposing sides. The comedy is generated from the awkwardness of these two sides trying to communicate with each other. The second is Stephen Colbert's *The WORD* piece on *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. In it, Colbert reprises his character from *The Colbert Report* and reinterprets the term "truthiness" to better accommodate the 2016 political climate. He uses Donald Trump's relationship with the media and his supporters to make a point about the nature of political reality—something he terms "Trumpiness." And finally, the third piece, Trevor Noah's comparison of Trump to a stand-up comedian speaks to how Trump's rhetoric is consumed by his supporters. I choose these three pieces because they each show various sides as to how Trump supporters, and the rest of America, view Trump and his affective rhetoric. By examining these pieces, I am able to attempt to understand how Trump's use of emotional rhetoric is such a strong tool of persuasion for his

supporters. I will conclude by showing how Trump, himself, employs satirical strategies to further his own agenda, particularly his use of carnivalesque conventions and rhetoric. But first, it is prudent to provide a brief contemporary history of American satire.

Depending on who you ask, you may receive very different definitions of satire and how it plays a role in public discourse. Jones calls it “a hard-knuckled critique of power, a verbal attack that passes judgment on the object of that attack, enunciating a perceived breach in societal norms or values” (83). McClennen and Maisel characterize satire as “a unique form of comedy” that “depends on creating a cognitive space for the audience that allows them to recognize that things they have taken for granted need to be questioned. As Ralph Rosen explains, satire’s guiding premise is ‘that something is not “as it should be,” and it takes a satirist to set the word straight”’ (7). Harkening back to the work by Van Zoonen and her argument about the importance of the bridge between entertainment and politics, McClennen and Maisel also write: “Where satire plays an essential role in all of this is in its ability to bridge the entertained citizen with the engaged citizen. In complete contrast to cynicism and other forms of negative humor, satire is a form of comedy that inspires the audience to ask questions, resist the status quo, and be engaged” (17). In fact, both they and Jones, as well as several other scholars (Day; Baumgartner and Morris; Baym, etc.), argue that satire provides a necessary service to the citizens of a functioning democracy. Media and satire critic Doris Graber notes that “[p]olitical humor has always been serious business because it can be used to mask the sting of political criticism by making it seem lighthearted, even when that isn’t the intention. Like Teflon coating, the veneer of humor shields the jester from becoming the proverbial victimized messenger killed for carrying an unwanted message. Yet the message still conveys its assessment to audience members who see through its protective covering” (333). For Graber “the most prevalent and

most significant contribution of political humor may not be what information audiences learn from it or what inferences they draw or even what political consequences ensue. Rather, the most significant effect of humorous messages may be that they spur attention to politics and encourage some citizens to become links in the far-reaching chains of political message dissemination” (341).

Political satire has been a steady part of our media for decades, whether it was *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* in the 60s, *Saturday Night Live* in the 70s (and today), or sitcoms like *All in the Family* and *The Simpsons* which tended to be socially conscious representations of the middle-class American family, or groundbreaking political talk shows like *Politically Incorrect*. Political satire underwent a veritable renaissance in the early 2000s, and it mostly starts with the replacement of Craig Kilborn for Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* in 1999. Stewart took a show that was largely focused on parodying and mocking the news and, after the attacks of September 11, 2001 when so much of the rhetoric coming out of the Bush administration became convoluted, even misleading and hostile toward any possible threat of dissention, turned it into a comedy powerhouse that not only led a kind of resistance against the Bush-era rhetoric, but also became a sort of liberal populist mouth-piece, holding both politicians and the media accountable for their actions. Not only was the show funny, it kept its viewers informed about and interested in the contemporary political climate and provided a catharsis to the frustrated citizens trying to parse through all of the misdirection and half-truths coming out of Washington. The show was so successful that in a 2009 *Time Magazine* poll Stewart was named “the most trusted newsman since Walter Cronkite” and, in another study, came in fourth overall behind Katie Couric, Brian Williams, and Charlie Gibson with 44 percent of the vote (McClennen an Maisel 65). How did a former stand-up comedian on a cable network that

featured an animated series featuring foul-mouthed elementary schoolers and puppets who make prank phone calls end up being such a reliable source of news for almost half of the nation? The answer seems to be two-fold: first, his ability to use humor played a role in being able to get people to tune and be invested in the broadcast; and second, he was able to distill the essence of 24-hour media coverage in ways that were digestible for the average viewer. Stewart did something that talking heads on network news programs don't do—instead of just reporting the news, he provided context, explanation, and a point-of-view on the news that made it more accessible to his viewers. This was necessary not only because, like-it-or-not Stewart *was* informing viewers of news in ways that they weren't getting in their other news consumption (Stewart repeatedly denied his intentions to inform his audience, instead explaining that he was a comedian and not a journalist), but also because, due to the nature of the show, in order to understand its humor, the audience must have some familiarity with the news-of-the-day. “The Daily Show is fake only in that it refuses to make claims to authenticity,” Jones writes. “But being ‘fake’ does not mean that the information it imparts is untrue. Indeed, as with most social and political satire, its humor offers a means of reestablishing common sense truths to counter the spectacle, ritual, pageantry, artifice, and verbosity that often cloak the powerful” (182).

Stewart was able to poke holes in the shroud of the post-9/11 Bush administration's political climate, particularly the administration's tendency to rely on misleading or inaccurate information to make political decisions, such as the alleged weapons of mass destruction that led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Stewart also frequently attacked the 24-hour media cycle for sensationalizing or misleading the public with their coverage. One particularly famous example was his interview with CNBC's Jim Cramer, where Stewart accused Cramer and other financial pundits of not informing the public about the coming economic crisis in 2008. In the interview,

Cramer tried to dodge responsibility for his show's handling of the crisis, Stewart confronts him by saying: "Listen, you knew what the banks were doing yet were touting it for months and months. The entire network was and so now to pretend that this was some sort of crazy, once-in-a-lifetime tsunami that nobody could have seen coming is disingenuous at best and criminal at worst" (Jones 138). Stewart's remarks were met with thunderous applause by the studio audience and nearly a decade later, the interview lives in infamy. Jones goes on to contextualize why the show has become such a cultural touchstone:

even though *The Daily Show* is a fake news show, its faux journalistic style allows the show's writers and host to question, dispel, and critique the manipulative language and symbolizations coming from the presidential campaigns, while simultaneously opening up deeper truths about than that offered by the 'objective' reporting of mainstream journalism. By actually showing the high levels of spin and rhetoric produced by the candidates and their campaigns, then offering humorous retorts that cut to the heart of the matter, *The Daily Show* offers viewers particular (and perhaps more useful) information about the campaign that is often missing from 'real' journalist reporters on the news network, and hence, informs its viewers in ways that mainstream journalism rarely does (168).

Another significance of *The Daily Show* was its roster of correspondents such as Stephen Colbert (mentioned previously), Steve Carell, Samantha Bee, Ed Helms, Rob Corddry, Rob Riggle, Jason Jones, Wyatt Cenac, Demetri Martin, Kristen Schall, Larry Wilmore, John Oliver, Jessica Williams and many more—a veritable rogue's gallery of comedians topped perhaps only by *Saturday Night Live*'s staggeringly roster of famous alumni. From this group alone, three other shows were created by former correspondents since leaving *The Daily Show* including *The Colbert Report*, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, *The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore* (cancelled in 2016), and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, each putting their own spin on the topical fake news or pundit show and taking up the mantle left behind when Stewart left the show in 2015 to be replaced by South African-born comedian Trevor Noah.

Looking at the state of satire in 2016 and beyond, we can see that it is thriving, largely due to a media climate that subjects its audience to incessant debates, re-packaged segments, over-saturation of both factual and conspiracy stories and a struggle to remain relevant and credible to a significant portion of the American population. Ezra Klein of Vox.com was able to articulate satire's role in the cacophony of media consumption. Klein points out one of the biggest struggles the mainstream media has had in the 2016 election cycle is figuring out how to cover Donald Trump—easily the least conventional political figure in contemporary American history. Trump consistently makes outrageous or false claims, making it more difficult to cover him due to the constant fact-checking and context necessary to report an ethical story about him. Through the coverage of Trump's claims by cable network news outlets, from bringing in paid Trump supporters or expert government officials to debate and rehash the facts, the falsehoods, and rumors 24/7, it unintentionally legitimizes the claims, something that has been supported by at least one study conducted at Ohio State University. The study found that “[p]assive news reporting that doesn’t attempt to resolve factual disputes in politics may have detrimental effects on readers” and “people are more likely to doubt their own ability to determine the truth in politics after reading an article that simply lists competing claims without offering any idea of which side is right” (The Ohio State University). Another study (2005), published in the Journal of Consumer Research found that “[t]elling people that a...claim was false can make them misremember it as true” a phenomenon the researchers called “the illusion of truth” and found that adults were “especially susceptible” even after being repeatedly told that a claim was false. (Skurnik, Yoon, Park & Schwarz). Klein explains that in the case of news “[the media coverage] takes bullshit way too seriously” and it muddles the truth for viewers (“Comedians Have Figured

out...”). “When we hear these he said/she said debates,” Klein continues, “we are less likely to figure out the truth.” However, Klein claims that satire seems to be the antidote:

“Satire has something that T.V. news lacks—a really low tolerance for bullshit... While 24-news networks fill up their air time with screaming matches, much shorter comedy shows have found time to do in-depth story telling about things like net neutrality and state legislative battles. Satire is powerful because it trains your brain to be skeptical, to think critically about what politicians are saying... Satire isn’t debunking specific falsehoods; it’s encouraging you to look behind the curtain, to recognize bullshit artistry and laugh at it, even when journalists don’t get the joke.”

McClennen notes that while “people think satire is very partisan,” rather “satirists are after good, rational thinking”—while the system may be “faking you out,” satire provides a lens that “opens our eyes” to the truth (Ibid.). The three pieces below are each illustrative examples of how satire does exactly that—how it breaks down the walls of misdirection, falsehoods, and conspiracy theories, to essentially see through the “bullshit” of the Trump administration, and arrive at some semblance of truth.

The first piece is from the show *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*, in which the host puts her own spin on the late-night “fake news” genre of political satire. Bee covers much of the same ground as her fellow satirists, except with a little more fierceness than is typical on cable channel entertainment. She also periodically covers traditional feminist issues such as sexual assault, rape kit legislation, and reproductive rights. In this segment, she interviewed a small yet diverse group of Trump supporters at the height of the 2016 Presidential primary season, when Trump rallies were at their most prevalent. The group was described as “college-educated, bi-partisan, multi-ethnic.” Bee begins by asking what makes Trump “such a delicious target for the media?” The following is a transcript of the conversation:

Supporter 1: He has a simplistic, but like, evocative language that I think speaks to people at almost a limbic or like a primal level”

Bee: So you are acknowledging that he is speaking to our lizard brains?

Supporter 2: I don’t think he is speaking to our lizard brains at all.

Bee (in V.O.): They were intelligent, and thoughtful.

Supporter 1: Trump's moderation of various social issues is actually a great boon, because that means we can concentrate on things that are actually valuable, you know, for improving the country at large.

Bee: So do you agree with him on social issues and disagree on banning all Muslims from entering the country—

All Supporters at once: Temporarily! Temporarily banning Muslims. It's about security, not religion.

Bee (V.O.): And then we talked about Muslims.

Supporter 3: He wants to save our country from terrorism, so allowing for a temporary ban on Muslims—

Bee: On a religious group?

Supporter 4: Yeah, well, let's put it this way. The media is always talking about how Donald Trump is talking about banning all Muslims.

Bee: Well, he talks about it.

Supporter 5: The media has an agenda. Like Huffington Post releases 'Xenophobe! Racist!'

Bee: Can you acknowledge that it is literally impossible, as a member of the media, to ignore a person when they say that they would punch a protestor in the face?

Supporter 1: It's context. It's a context thing.

Bee (V.O.): Maybe I was being too quick to judge.

CUT TO tape of Trump

Trump: He's walking out like big high fives, smiling, laughing. Like to punch him in the face.

Bee (V.O.): Nope. It was in context.

Supporter 2: I've been blessed to be at countless Trump events, and I, myself, have had to remove Black Lives Matter protestors because they stood up and were disrupting the event.

Supporter 6: I think if you enough people together eventually somebody's gonna punch someone else in the face.

Bee (V.O. over footage of retail mobs): Hurray! With President Trump, everyday can be Black Friday!

Bee: Do you think it's wrong for the media to report that half the things he retweeted were associated with white supremacists?

Supporter 1: It's clearly illogical to do this guilt by association thing because we could play it all day long.

Bee: You mean, like, with Muslims?

Supporter 1: That was a little condescending.

Bee: Some sweeping generalizations are okay; others are not?

Supporter 4: No, I just think it's unfair. I think how it's portrayed is unfair by the media.

Bee (animatedly frustrated, takes deep breath): Is it cause for alarm when white supremacists love the candidate that you love?

Supporter 7: We all love America. I guess, if there's something we can come together on, that we want this country to be great. I think that everyone can get behind that.

Supporter 4: Everybody matters. All Americans matter.

Bee: Okay. Some Americans are black, some Americans are white, some Americans are gay, some Americans are white supremacists.

Supporter 8: He's trying to bring us together. We are so divided right now.

Bee (contemplating to herself): Okay. Okay. Okay.

Bee (V.O.): Was there anything we could agree on?

Supporter 6: The whole presidential nomination is a big reality show. And he's winning.

Bee: So you like his media whoredom.

Supporter 6: But you're whoring off of his media whoring.

Bee: I'm a whore, too.

Supporter 6: I think you're kind of a trickle-down media whore because here you are just getting the remains.

Bee: So in the big bukkake of media, I'm the one at the bottom of the fuckpile.

Supporter 6: That's an accurate assessment.

Bee: Who feels like a party?

At this point, Bee leads the group into a ballroom where there is a food, a full wait staff, live music, even a masseuse. And she talks to each supporter individually, with a fact-checker in tow to chime in when the conversation begins to skew into speculation or is in need of clarification.

What makes this segment so interesting to me is how it attempts to do something that media news fails to do, that is, put two opposing viewpoint in conversation with each other for the sake of understanding where the other stands and why. There have been various attempts at this sort of programming, most notably CNN's *Crossfire*, but the format is replicated on any 24-hour news show where a news pundit or reporter looks for a panel of talking heads to give their perspective on a given issue. The problem is, there is very little room for nuance and context for this kind of debate and discussion in the speed of television. And while Bee's piece suffers from some of the brevity intrinsic to the medium, she does take herself out of her comfort zone to converse seriously and respectfully (she and her staff throughout the segment go out of their way in attempts to make the Trump supporters comfortable) with individuals to whom she is diametrically opposed. The humor comes from the awkwardness (and often frankness) of the conversation, but is underscored by a genuine attempt to connect and understand her subject's perspective rather than ridicule them or exploit the opposition for the sake of entertainment—

something akin to a verbal wrestling match. Bee is able to navigate the affectual, incendiary discourse that so often plagues civilian political interaction. She is leading by example, telling her viewers that it is important to understand where people who disagree with them are coming from. It's up to them to make the effort to connect rather than ridicule or attack. And while Bee may not find any answers in her attempt, the overall message is one of patience and acceptance, an acknowledgement that the process is on-going. While this segment doesn't have as much theoretical groundwork to support it, like the other two (which I will show briefly), it does touch on many of the satirical methods mentioned above, namely by extending an olive branch to the other side, within the context of comedy, Bee is able to achieve a unique space in the discourse that the media is unable to occupy. She is very humanizing, good-natured, genuinely curious (albeit snarky) about the supporters opinions, and even visibly frustrated at her inability to find some common ground with the Trump supporters or to get them to concede any of their points. While the segment may not offer any profound answers or insight into the mind of a Trump voter, what it does show is that Trump voters aren't merely emotional, reactive racists and xenophobes, but that many of them are articulate, educated, and passionate—essentially that they aren't a fringe group of the population, but, essentially, just like everyone else.

The second segment is from *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. When Colbert left his Comedy Central show, *The Colbert Report*, after 10 years to take over for David Letterman in 2015, many people had no clue what to expect. This was largely due to the fact that many didn't know who Stephen Colbert was, because on his show he rarely played himself on camera. *The Colbert Report* was a parody of conservative pundit shows like *The O'Reilly Factor*, and *Hannity*, in which Colbert played a fictionalized version of himself (modelled after Bill O'Reilly) to illustrate the absurdity, narcissism, and skewed partisanship inherent to those programs. Not

only that, to maintain the illusion, Colbert rarely made a public appearance where he wasn't in character, showing up on 24-hour news programs, testifying before Congress, even running for President—all while still in character.

One of the most interesting segments Colbert maintained throughout his run on *The Colbert Report*, at least from a rhetorical perspective, was called The WORD, in which Colbert would editorialize about a topic that was on his mind, but he would center it around a term (usually made-up) that would embody his idea and perspective on the issue. The interesting sidebar to the gag, was that, while Colbert was editorializing, text would appear next to him to help illustrate his point (something Bill O'Reilly was famous for on his show). The catch was that the text would often subvert, contradict, poke fun at, reinforce, or otherwise comment on what Colbert was saying. Thus, the joke was in the ridiculousness of Colbert's claims, and that even his own program was making fun of him. On the very first episode of *The Colbert Report*, Colbert introduced the world to the term "truthiness" (mentioned above) and the rest was history.

Colbert brought the segment (and character) back on his new program to considerable acclaim, shortly after Donald Trump secured the Republican nomination for President. Colbert begins the segment by walking into the woods and knocking on the door of a shack. Jon Stewart (now retired) opens the door, and Stephen asks him to help with him talk about Trump. After an extended bit, Stewart tells him that he knows someone who would be perfect and Colbert's alter ego appears behind him. Colbert agrees to yield the floor, and the following segment occurs:

[Stephen Colbert enters on a chariot being pulled by shirtless muscular men in Uncle Sam makeup, and surrounded by men and women dressed in colonial military garb playing "Yankie Doodle Dany" on drums and fifes. Colbert is carrying a Captain America shield and a sword from The Lord of the Rings. Thunderous applause turns to chanting of "Stephen! Stephen!"]

Colbert: Nation, right now Americans are angry, confused, and lashing out randomly, and that's just the Republican nominee. (over the shoulder picture of Trump). A lot of people are wondering how America, God's girlfriend, ended up in a relationship with this guy.

Well, shhh! Daddy's here. I know a lot of you are out on a ledge right now. When I'm done, I promise you will be jumping for joy. Because this is just the brave new world of American democracy, and it brings me to tonight's WORD. (CUE graphics: "Trumpiness"). Trumpiness. Folks, let me tell you, people who don't support Donald Trump feel like the world has gone crazy. Well, get in line. Because the people who do support Trump have felt that way ever since the manufacturing jobs started going to China. ("To Make Trump Hats") And remember, elections aren't about what voters think. It's about what voters feel. And right now at least some Americans feel their voices aren't being heard. ("Especially Mike Pence"). Let me tell you, folks, that goes for both sides, whether they be strong conservatives or morally bankrupt liberals. ("Hugging Tree with Reacharound") Think about this—just consider why people stood behind Bernie Sanders. ("His Cute Yoga Butt?") You see, Bernie, he understood their emotions. No one said, 'I think the Bern.' They said, 'I feel the Bern!' ("Then Swallowed Bitter Hill"). Now just to remind you, 11 years ago, I invented a word: truthiness. ("Trademark Viacom 2005, All Rights Reserved") You see, truthiness, is believing something that feels true even if it isn't supported by fact. ("The Rio Olympics Will Be Fine!") Truthiness comes from the gut, because brains are overrated. You know who had a brain? ("The Scarecrow, Eventually") I'll tell you—Adolph Hitler. ("Did 'Nazi' That Coming"). So, naturally, brains aren't good. Naturally, I admire this man (picture of Trump). In fact, I see myself in him. We're both over-the-top T.V. personalities who decided to run for President. ("Both Started as a Joke"). But I admit, ladies and gentlemen, I'm humble enough to admit he has surpassed me now. Truthiness has to feel true, but Trumpiness doesn't even have to do that. In fact, most Trump supporters don't believe his wildest promises and they don't care. (picture of Washington Post article as source). Yes! They don't care if he will keep his wildest promises. ("Like 'Til Death Do Us Part") And if he doesn't ever have to mean what he says, that means he can say anything. ("Except 'I was wrong"). And here's the deal: Truthiness was from the gut, but Trumpiness comes from much further down the gastrointestinal tract. ("Can't Tell You Where on CBS"). I wanna be clear about something. His supporters know this—his supporters aren't dumb. Take the border wall. ("Por favor!"). Just last month after a rally Trump said 'We're gonna build a wall and it's gonna be a real wall.' But one of his supporters at that same rally pointed out 'I think if he strengthens the borders...it will be the same thing as building the wall...the wall can be built even without having to be built.' (picture of Washington Post article as source). Yes, if you can feel the wall, you don't have to see the wall. ("The Emperor's New Border"). I want to be clear about this. These legitimately angry voters don't need a leader to say things that are true or feel true. They need a leader to feel things that feel feels! ("Ya Feel Me?"). And that is why I believe Donald Trump is a leader for our times, an emotional megaphone for voters full of rage at a government that achieves nothing, an economic system that leaves them behind, and politics that elects people unfit for the job. And if you don't share their feeling that you don't recognize your country anymore, trust me, if Trump wins, you will. ("Trumpiness"). And that's tonight's WORD.

I find this segment to be an extremely effective piece of satire, because it, like so many of

Colbert's other pieces, seems to be speaking to both Trump supporters and Trump critics. On one

level, the joke is that Trumpiness is an absurd characteristic for a candidate (and his supporters) to embody. Why would anyone want to support a candidate who was deliberately dishonest, particularly a group of voters who consistently cry foul anytime another candidate is caught saying anything, they believe to be untrue? It is this ridiculousness that drives the satire—the veritable spotlight on hypocrisy, the impulse to get to the truth of the matter, and the transparency of the “bullshit” Colbert’s character is trying to justify, much like the partisan pundits on primetime cable news programs. However, on the other hand, it is also providing a legitimate explanation for Trump’s supporters—that because of their jaded view on politics, they are willing to embrace an unconventional candidate like Trump, and see through his rhetoric to what they interpret is the spirit of his message. They don’t take him literally, particularly his most egregious claims such as building a wall along the Mexican border and making Mexico pay for it. As one supporter interprets here in this segment, that claim may be a characteristic of Trumpiness—believing Trump’s claims to be whatever the supporter interprets them to be. The border wall could be a metaphor for stronger border security legislation. That would be, according to this Trump supporter, a satisfactory solution to curb illegal immigration. Colbert frames the monologue to be interpreted both ways, because even though his character is a conservative political pundit and the piece is written in his voice, Colbert is a liberal and is actually using the voice as a tool to point out the absurdity in the position. Looking at another example from this segment—Colbert concludes the piece with the statement “And if you don’t share their feeling that you don’t recognize your country anymore, trust me, if Trump wins, you will.” This, again, can be interpreted both from the perspective of Trump critics and Trump supporters. Critics will read this line as a threat, that Trump’s win would ensure that the country would be unrecognizable to the present, that the progressive agenda set forth by Barack Obama and

potentially passed on to Hilary Clinton would cease to exist. Indeed, the country would revert back to a much less progressive culture where people of color, the LGBT community, religious minorities, and other less privileged groups would lose the ground they have gained thus far in the 21st Century. On the other hand, Trump supporters who feel as though their country is already unrecognizable and not representative of their values would agree with Colbert's statement—that perhaps it is time that they were recognized and the alienation that they felt during the Obama years should be passed on to the opposing side for a change. Again, we see that Colbert's statement is loaded with rhetorical meaning based on the perspective of the audience. It simultaneously subverts and reinforces the views of whoever is watching it and it encapsulates much of the difficulty in engaging in productive discourse during the 2016 election cycle—that each side is so set in their beliefs that they will interpret any message subjectively. That's the essence of "Trumpiness": that objective truth no longer exists in public discourse because the audience and speaker both craft the meaning of any given statement or idea.

For the third segment, I analyze the work of comedian Trevor Noah. When he took over *The Daily Show* from Jon Stewart, many viewers were curious to see how his personality would change the satirical bite of the show. The result was such that, while Stewart has a snarky confidence in his role as the smartest guy in the room, who was charming and funny, and ultimately firm yet well-intentioned, Noah, a mixed race South African immigrant uses his outsider's perspective to his advantage. Noah has the ability to point out the absurdities of American media and politics in a unique way which Stewart could not. As an immigrant, Noah's satirical criticism of America has a special resonance since, unlike his native-born predecessor, Noah chose to live in America on purpose and he believes his experience growing up in South Africa helped prepare him for Trump's candidacy and eventual Presidency. In a *Time* interview

Noah said about Trump “Americans by their very nature think they’re exceptional...And it’s true: America is an idea that shouldn’t work. But I come from a place where I’ve seen that kind of rhetoric work, where I know people aren’t immune” (Dockterman “The Seriously Funny Comedian”). Noah’s “clairvoyance” seemed to be put to good use on a show that tackles unpredictable events daily, as the nature of the show is to comment on news-of-the-day. The following is a portion of a segment which aired in August 2016 in which Noah, appalled by Trump’s comments and apparent suggestion that “the Second Amendment people...do something” about Hilary Clinton, calls Trump more of a “stand-up comedian” than a candidate. Noah claims that Trump’s comments are only incendiary and disturbing because he is a political candidate and that if taken into the context of a loud-mouth performer who tells-it-like-it-is are meant more to rouse an audience than to incite actual violence. Below is an abbreviated transcript of the piece

Trump: Hillary wants to abolish, essentially abolish the second amendment.

(Crowd boos)

Trump: And by the way if she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do folks... although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is. I don’t know.

CUT TO

Noah (wide-eyed in shock and dismay): Holy shit! No matter how many times I watch that I still can’t believe it. Donald Trump suggested that people with guns “do something” about Hillary...And now after that speech Donald Trump said that everyone in the room understood what he meant. The only problem is: he’s not running for President of that room. And so everyone outside of the room is trying to figure out what the hell he meant.

CUT TO various news footage clips.

CNN voice over: “Misunderstood or out of line?”

Fmr. Sen. Gordon Humphrey: It’s very clear what Donald Trump was implying. Wreak violence against Hillary Clinton.

Fox News Talking Head: He didn’t call for Hillary Clinton to be assassinated.

Talking Head 2: Maybe trying to make a joke.

Talking Head 3: It’s not a joke.

Talking Head 4: You’re not gonna use the joke defense.

Fox News Voice Over: It’s fairly clear.

Talking Head 5: I’m not confused.

Talking Head 6: He wasn’t talking about implementation of policy. He was talking about what would happen if Hillary Clinton were to be elected and he was absolutely right.

Interviewer: (Long pause). I'm speechless because I'm trying to follow your logic here Katrina and I'm having a hard time.

CUT TO

Noah: Well, you see, uh, that's your first mistake. Trying to combine logic with the Trump campaign. You know who doesn't do that? Donald Trump. He just rides the wave of crazy and sees where it takes him.

...

Noah: So, in this situation there's two basic schools of thought: either this was a wry comment about shooting a future president, or it was a call to voter action. And no one can agree.... One of the most basic qualities of a President is that we know what they mean. The last thing you need, the last thing you need is a foreign leader going "Is he nuking us? Is he nuking us? Unless it was a joke, but I mean, no president would ever joke about nukes. Would they? Well, I don't know, better safe than sorry (pretends to launch nukes)...Now normally politicians only need interpreters when they're travelling overseas. But Donald Trump, he needs one for his own country.

CUT TO footage of news programs

Talking Head: The Trump campaign responded to the backlash with a statement titled "On Dishonest Media."

Voice over: "It's called the power of unification. Second Amendment people have amazing spirit, and are tremendously unified, which gives them great political power. And this year they will be voting in record numbers.

CUT TO

Noah: Oh, of course, it all makes sense now. The Second Amendment people have an extremely powerful weapon: votes. Which they shoot out of their guns! And you know what? I'm not buying this. I believe Donald Trump was making a joke. Yeah. And then because of the backlash, his team was trying to play it off as something else. But I know a joke when I see one. More importantly, I know a stand-up comedian when I see one. Yeah, because I am a stand-up comedian. Donald Trump is a stand-up comedian. You see it every single time he is on stage. He riffs, he roasts, you know, he does some impersonations. He's a stand-up comedian. It's just you never looked at it that way before.

CUT TO various clips of Donald Trump

Trump: I'm not eating Oreos anymore. You know that. But neither is Chris [Christie]. You're not eating Oreos anymore.

Trump: Anthony Weiner, you know, the little bing, bing, bing bong bong (imitates texting)

Trump: I never attacked him on his look, and believe me there's plenty of subject matter right there.

Trump (yanking on his belt): It moves this way. It moves that way.

Jake Tapper: What would you want your Secret Service code name to be?

Trump: Humble.

Trump: Here's the problem with Rubio: when you sweat that much...the guy walks in and he's soaking wet and sweating. (imitates Rubio) "Hello, Hello, can I have some water?"

Trump (spilling water): It's Rubio! (makes faces, imitates Rubio, tosses bottle)

CUT TO Noah

Noah: You see? You see? (applause) He's a comedian. He's a stand-up comedian. We were all spending so much time focusing on his racism and sexism and xenophobia and threats to democracy that we missed all the jokes! And there's a reason we missed all the jokes—because they weren't in the place where jokes belong. Because if you take the things that Donald Trump has said and you put them in a comedy setting then it makes a bit more sense.

CUT TO footage of Def Jam Comedy audience, primarily African American. Trump is standing on a podium with the stage and audience green screened around him.

Trump: If she gets to pick her judges...nothing you can do folks...(audience screaming and jeering) Although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is, I don't know (uproarious laughter)

CUT TO Noah

Noah (hands raised in the air): Oooooohhhh! You see it works. It works. Although, let's be honest here. There would never be black people at a Trump show, but still it works.

Trump may be a stand-up comedian, the only trouble is, Trump supporters may not be a comedy audience. Because for some reason they think that they've come to see someone who want to run the country, and they are not joking around.

CUT TO footage of Trump supporters

Supporter 1: Fuck Islam! Fuck'em!

Trump: Our president has divided this country so bad.

Supporter 2: Fuck that nigger!

Supporter 3: Seig Heil!

Supporter 4: Get out of here, you fag!

Supporter 5: Hillary Clinton needs to get her ass spanked.

Supporter 6: Hang the bitch!

Supporter 7: Send them bastards back! I'm sure that paperwork comes in Spanish.

Supporter 8: Ignorance and immigrants! They mix together!

Supporter 9: Wooo!

...

Noah: You see, here's the thing people. Donald Trump and his team can say "Those are just words, those are just words." And they're right, they are just words. Like remember the time Trump said these words?

Trump: So if you see somebody getting ready to throw a tomato knock the crap out of them, would you? Seriously.

Noah: Just words, right? And then about five weeks later, somebody said these words.

Reporter: A protester being led out of a North Carolina rally appeared to be suckerpunched by a Trump supporter.

Noah: You see, when you're a presidential candidate with a passionate group of supporters, people tend to listen to you. So here's what I think we need to do with Donald Trump. We need to put him away. We need to put him away in some underground windowless room, right?

Man from audience: Yeah!

Noah: That's what we need to do. (Audience cheers and applause) And then, we need to build a wall. An exposed brick wall with a mic and a crowd, where he can kill, just not people. And you know what? I think if that wall kept him focused on comedy and out of the White House, then that's a wall that Mexico would pay for.

In this segment, Noah's comparison of Trump to a stand-up comedian is a clever use of sarcasm. The joke in this instance is that Trump's politically incorrect speech is absurd for a legitimate Presidential candidate. Only a comedian (a clown, a jester, a fool) would use such speech. However, the reality is that Trump's political incorrectness is rhetorically situated to appeal to audiences and his behavior at his rallies is largely dictated by how people react to him. Much like a comedian's relationship with his/her audience is incumbent upon garnering laughter, Trump's relationship with his audience is similarly motivated. He wants to get a favorable reaction out of them and will seemingly say anything to get it. And like the comedian's stage, Trump's rallies are a rhetorical space with their own rules and conventions. A comedian can make outrageous, offensive statements because the rhetorical space allows him/her too. Trump can make claims to his audience, such as punching protestors, or making fun of handicapped reporters who criticize him, because the rhetorical space of the rally allows him to do so. I am reminded of Lindquist's work with the Smokehousers and how the barroom is a rhetorical space that has separate social conventions which differ to other spaces.

Noah, however, follows this concept to its dire and logical conclusion. Trump may act like a comedian, but he has captured the attention of some very angry constituents who could (and, in some cases, are) motivated by his rhetoric to incite physical and verbal violence against anyone not following the conventions of the rhetorical space, even beyond those confines into more public spaces. Trump had not accepted the consequences of his rhetoric on the populace. It is a clever illustration of Trump's incompetence—his inability to see the risks in careless speech used primarily to appeal purely to people's emotions—but is also a cautionary tale about what such a figure could do in the highest office in the land.

Noah's segment is a good example of Will Kaufman's "comedian as confidence man" framework which he outlines as such:

"Comedians are committed to irony in its broadest sense, keeping open their escape route through the creation of abiding the confidence in the possibility, at the very least, that in the end they are saying one thing and meaning another—in a word, that they are joking. The successful comedian is necessarily a successful confidence man, and he keeps his inscrutable game going through maintaining a web of ironic tension between falsehood and earnestness, play and criticism, defense and attack, balancing his conflicting and simultaneous urges to be heeded and indulgently dismissed (Kaufman, 12).

Kaufman also touches on "the danger of assuming a joke" explaining that the inflammatory rhetoric of conservative talk radio hosts and other charismatic voices not far removed from comedy and the entertainment industry, who are able to appeal to the emotions of their audience ("their mock-hysterical cries about rescuing 'hostages' from federal captivity" or claims that a Washington D.C. pizza parlor is a secret sex slave ring), could potentially be a motivating factor in extremist acts (such as the Oklahoma City bombing or Pizzagate). Kaufman writes "The thought to them would be unbearable (one hopes) as if they had not been heeded at all. But this is the dual risk of irony, which carries with it both the danger of credence and the license to dismiss an utterance of one's peril" (117). Noah and Kaufman are pointing out the same thing: that, in the wrong hands, captured on the wrong ears, sometimes a joke is anything but funny.

Each of these segments illustrated a different aspect of the relationship between Trump and his supporters. Bee looks at what motivates their adamant support for him; Colbert looks at the inherent subjectivity in not only the interpretation of Trump supporters, but all perspectives in 2016's political climate; and Trevor Noah illustrated the dangers of untethered and careless speech when focused upon a specific emotionally vulnerable audience. Analyzing each of these accounts shows that their use of satire is a combination of social critique and a means of illustrating the hidden or unspoken truths in society through the utilization of humor, usually

though exaggeration, parody or the act of mocking a figure or institution in power. Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones, and Ethan Thompson write that “[h]umor may be off the wall, but it makes us laugh at and contemplate the wall, the here and the now” (9). Humor is centered around power dynamics—a comedian or jester addressing an audience and manipulating them, harboring command over them in order to evoke a desired reaction (i.e. laughter). Satire is merely humor with an agenda. Literary critic and satire theorist Mikhail Bakhtin believed as much, writing of “laughter as unique in allowing social analysis, reflection and criticism” arguing that “laughter... allows us to approach any object from a healthy distance, ‘drawing it into a zone where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out...doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it” (Ibid). Bakhtin formed a conceptualization of satire in his text *Rabelais and His World* (1965), where he introduces his well-known carnival theory. In it, he says that “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (10). Bakhtin claimed that the “[c]arnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal” and was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed...all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people, who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age... People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations.” (Ibid). To further contextualize this discovery, Nehama Aschkenasy provides some historical perspective:

oppressed lower and an The	“Bakhtin’s theory of carnival, manifest in his discussions of Rabelais and ‘forbidden laughter’ in medieval folk culture, argued that folk celebrations which allowed for rowdy humor and the parody of authority offered the classes relief from the rigidity of the feudal system and the church opportunity for expressing nonconformist, even rebellious views. carnivalesque spirit, therefore, is a form of popular, ‘low’ humor
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which celebrates the anarchic and grotesque elements of authority and of
 humanity in general and encourages the temporary ‘crossing of boundaries’
 where the town fool is crowned, the higher classes are mocked, and the
 differences between people are flattened as their shared humanity, the body,
 becomes the subject of crude humor. Bakhtin saw in carnivalesque humor a social force
 that allowed a text to enter a sociopolitical discourse, while enjoying impunity,
 and thus bring about cultural transformation” (1).
 Bakhtin was inspired by medieval carnivals where the king’s men and the king’s subjects melded

together in a festival embracing “free and familiar contact” and temporary liberation from
 hierarchical structures which allowed for “the creation of a special kind of communication not
 impossible in everyday life” including “forms of marketplace speech and gesture...permitting no
 distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of
 etiquette and decency imposed at other times” (Bakhtin 10). For a period of the year ranging
 anywhere from a few days to as much as three months every year the kingdom and the church
 did not have authority over its subjects. Carnival was the great equalizer, bridging the gap
 between the high and the low cultures of the day.

Bakhtin claims that due to the rise of capitalism, carnival culture has all but disappeared
 in mainstream culture, but some fragments of the carnivalesque still exist today. Bakhtin was
 largely focused on the presence of the carnivalesque in Russian literature, particularly in the
 works of Rabelais, we can see how carnival manifests itself in contemporary media and popular
 culture in a variety of ways. Today, one fitting example of the carnivalesque is a circus. As
 TheHumanist.com’s Nancy Loudin Gonzales points out, “Carnivalgoers laugh at or are confused
 by comic sexual inversions, holding their breath while watching the performances of trained
 animals and other extraordinary acts that mock, ridicule, and, in general, permit and even
 celebrate behavior and rhetoric otherwise unused and unseen in ‘nice’ (i.e. middle class) society.”
 The audience watching the circus reacts with the same awe, glee, and revulsion, whether they are
 members of the wealthy elite or the working poor.

In his study of semiotics in media, Marcel Danesi identified many examples of the carnivalesque permeating our cultural consciousness: “Flappers, punks, goths, gangsta rappers, Alice Cooper, Kiss, Eminem, Marilyn Manson, strippers, porn stars, and all the other ‘usual transgression suspects are, according to this theory, modern-day carnival mockers who take it upon themselves to deride, confuse, and parody authority figures and sacred symbols, bringing everything down to an earthy, crude level of theatrical performance. They constitute the marked end of the sacred-versus-profane opposition” (147).

Fitting within this description of the carnivalesque is Donald Trump, newly-elected Republican President of the United States. Trump is blunt, crass, at times grotesque, embodying a “tough guy,” no-nonsense image in a political position that traditionally favors nuance and compassion. We look at the candidacy of Donald Trump and we see many of these same characteristics Bakhtin describes, both in his own behavior and persona, his ability to speak to a specific portion of the American population with a sort of neo-conservative populist voice, unconcerned about political correctness, and his reinforcement of many of the concerns of the contemporary working-class, white, Christian male. Trump’s political persona is one of a non-establishment (outsider), businessman, who creates simple solutions for complex problems, speaks in a direct and unpretentious (albeit, largely hollow) manner, appeals to the anger and frustration of the downtrodden and disenfranchised conservative voting demographic, and isn’t afraid to offend those who disagree with him. Trump’s seemingly innate ability to garner passionate and unwavering support by many of these potential voters—who show up in droves, chanting and brandishing signs featuring xenophobic and sexist phrases about the Latino and Islamic communities—speaks to the spectacle of the carnivalesque. Trump, standing behind his podium, becomes a Carnival barker in front of his booth, shouting outrageous statements to an

audience that eats up every word. Indeed, Stewart Prest of the *Ottawa Citizen* noticed that Trump embodied many characteristics shared by a similar kind of outrageous, larger-than-life candidate such as former Toronto mayor Rob Ford (who also had a reputation for being crass, politically incorrect, and having a bit of a wild streak). Prest writes that Trump fits the bill perfectly:

“[Comedian] John Oliver describes Trump as ‘objectively funny.’ His appearances are fun, and the fun has much to do with that anything-is-possible transgressive carnival quality. Through a combination of personal background, style and messaging, candidates such as Trump manage to define their campaigns as existing outside the normal space of politics. [Candidates like Trump] are a particular kind of anti-system candidate, though. Unlike programmatic or ideologically driven politicians with a clear idea of what they would like to change, carnival candidates run with whatever works” (“Trump Typifies the Carnival Candidate”).

We can see this manifest in many ways. I mentioned previously that Trump’s politically incorrect rhetoric was a selling point for many of his supporters. However, some of Trump’s most inflammatory comments have garnered controversy from liberals and conservatives alike. Trump’s “locker room talk” is characteristic of Bakhtin’s “Language of the Marketplace” (154). Bakhtin contextualizes the culture surrounding this type of folk rhetoric, and it is important, for the sake of my illustrative purposes, that I quote it extensively here:

“a world in itself, a world which was one; all ‘performances’ in this area, from loud cursing to the organized shoe, had something in common and were imbued with the same atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity. Such elements of familiar speech as profanities, oaths, and curses were fully legalized in the marketplace... The marketplace was the center of all that is unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology, it always remained ‘with the people.’..... Thus the unofficial folk culture of the Middle Ages and even of the Renaissance had its own territory and its own particular time, the time of fairs and feasts. This territory, as we have said, was a peculiar second world within the official medieval order and was ruled by a special type of relationship, a free, familiar, marketplace relationship. Officially, the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of Church, palace, courts, and institutions. It was unlike the tongue of the official literature or of the ruling classes—the aristocracy, the nobles, the high-ranking clergy and the top burghers—though the elemental force of the folk idiom penetrated even these circles. On feast days, especially during carnivals, this force broke every sphere, and even through the Church, as in ‘the feast of fools.’ The

festive marketplace combined many genres and forms, all filled with the same unofficial spirit” (Bakhtin 154).” (Bakhtin 153-154).

Such a setting, being untethered to “the official medieval order,” and “ruled by a special type of [free, familiar] relationship” had its own “special kind of speech...almost a language of its own...unlike the tongue of official literature or of ruling classes” (Ibid). This is not too far removed from Trump’s “locker room talk,” a phrase the candidate used to describe his comments toward soap opera star Arianne Zucker. Bakhtin explains that in carnival culture, destruction and degradation were done simultaneously, that these vulgar displays were done in the name of restoration (50). By placing their support behind Trump, voters are both destroying the established way of speaking and replacing it with someone they feel is more representative of their vernacular and figures of speech. It hearkens back to Bakhtin’s usage of how “familiar billingsgate talk abusive words, especially indecent ones, are used in the affectionate and complimentary sense” (Rabelais 165). For Bakhtin,

“[Simultaneous praise and abuse] is reflected in imagery and is extremely important for the understanding of entire periods of the development of thought. This development has not, as yet, been analyzed, but in a preliminary and rather simplified way we can say that it is based on the conception of the world as eternally unfinished: a world dying and being born again at the same time, possessing as it were two bodies. The dual image combining praise and abuse seeks to grasp the very moment of this change, the transfer from old to the new, from death to life. Such an image crowns and uncrowns in the same moment” (Rabelais 166).

Gonzalez’s work on Trump and the carnivalesque are enlightening as well, as she is able to highlight that many of the conditions which make a Trump candidacy (and Presidency) possible are shared by the carnivalesque environment which harbored such free and familiar discourse. First, she points out, as Bakhtin does, that “both carnival and carnivalesque can be thought of as products of plural societies with a serious equity gap, where forces on each end worry about how to control, if not eliminate, the other.” Trump, she argues, was the candidate

who most embodied the carnivalesque spirit. He is bombastic, lavishly, even ostentatiously wealthy, lowering himself, at times, to appeal to supporters who have considerably less wealth than him, and had not political experience prior to running for President, something that made him favorable in the eyes of the many voters who were jaded by a political system they felt had neglected them. In terms of equality, one of the major issues that has been discussed pervasively over the last several political cycles was income and wealth inequality. This is due largely to the fact that the wealth and income gap has grown exponentially in the past few decades. According to Inequality.org

“Over the past century, the share of America’s wealth held by the nation’s wealthiest has changed markedly. That share peaked in the late 1920s, right before the Great Depression, then fell by more than half over the next three decades. But the equalizing trends of the mid 20th century have now been almost completely undone. At the top of the American economic summit, the richest of the nation’s rich now hold as large a wealth share as they did in the 1920s...The rich don’t just have more wealth than everyone else. The bulk of their wealth comes from different — and more lucrative — asset sources. America’s top 1 percent, for instance, holds nearly half the national wealth invested in stocks and mutual funds. Most of the wealth of Americans in the bottom 90 percent comes from their principal residences, the asset category that took the biggest hit during the Great Recession. These Americans also hold almost three-quarters of America’s debt.

But it’s not just economic disparity. Racial tensions and gender representation continue to be controversial issues with the rise of movements like the controversial Black Lives Matter, who are addressing violence perpetrated against black people as well as various states passing legislation that are discriminatory toward the LGBT community including offering no protections from workplace discrimination and even restricting transgender individuals from entering the restroom of their choosing. All of these conditions are creating a political climate that is contentious at best, and, at worst, generates derision, animosity, and, in some cases, violence.

There are several other specific ways that Trump's 2016 campaign uses Bakhtin's conceptualization of the carnival. For example, according to Bakhtin, "the manifestations of... folk culture can be divided into three distinct forms:

1. Ritual spectacles: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace.
2. Comic verbal compositions: parodies both oral and written...in the vernacular.
3. Various genres of billingsgate: curses, oaths, popular blazons" (5).

We can see these forms manifest in various ways often connected or over-lapping. I had previously characterized Trump's rallies as an example of a rhetorical space. Now, I would like to further characterize them as a carnivalesque space. Looking at the first, ritual spectacles, we can look at any Trump rally, where supporters are likely to chant "Lock her up!" (a reference to their desired fate of Hillary Clinton for her alleged troubled history of war crimes in her career as a public servant) and signs that read "Trump that Bitch!" or other forms of hostile or misogynist rhetoric targeted at his political opponent. Trump will often incite these chants, and certainly will not stop them should one break out spontaneously. His supporters also sell merchandise featuring various slogans as well from t-shirts, pins, or signs. Perhaps the most obvious example of Trump's carnivalistic manifestations is his famous red trucker hat reading "Make America Great Again." It is perhaps the most significant piece of political merchandise in American history both for how recognizable it is and its trademark design which is specifically catered to appear to be similar to a trucker hat. It is a re-appropriation of Appalachian and southern working-class culture—two of the demographics that supported Trump most vigorously. Trump brandishes the hat, and many of his products—most of which prominently feature "TRUMP" somewhere in bold lettering and large font—as though they are a medieval coat of arms, a trademark of not only his success but also his legacy. Trump, a billionaire business man and entrepreneur, who is vain, brash, and constantly concerned about appearances, will often downplay his traditional

characteristic business suit to appear more relatable to his working-class supporters particularly when wearing one of his trademarked hats. He will unbutton his shirt, and remove his tie for a more casual (perhaps working class?) look. This is coming from a man who once said during a 2008 *Esquire* interview that he “always wears a suit” because “looking one's best is good for confidence. High self-esteem is important for effective performance. Dressing well is also a sign of respect, for yourself and for others” (Esquire Staff “Interview with Donald Trump, Clothing Designer”). This is a performance, or in the language of Bakhtin a “comic verbal composition,” a parody of the high and low cultures—a veritable king dressed in peasant’s clothing.

But it doesn’t stop there. For many of his supporters, Trump represents an opportunity for them to elevate themselves. By speaking to them in concrete, frank language, unconcerned with nuance and political correctness, Trump provides them with the illusion that he is raising them up. Here is a politician who “speaks their language,” who is a recognizable figure, both as a celebrity and as the stereotypical idea of “the boss man”—the sort of person many of these voters worked for most of their lives, and who is not only an outsider untainted by the residue of politics, but one who also seems to have an understanding of what their needs and concerns are (economic strife and the loss of employment). This does more than present Trump as a knight in shining armor; it validates his supporters in a way that makes them feel as though, for the first time, they also belong in the kingdom. Trump is able to generate these displays both through language and in surprising displays of public spectacle. For example, Vice reporter Josiah Hesse writes: “This dynamic of making a peasant king for a day would likely be the side of Carnival that President Trump would be down with. When attending the Iowa State Fair last year, Trump didn't put on cowboy boots and munch on deep-fried butter with the rest of the common folk.



Figure 5. Examples of Trump campaign signs:

1. https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.breitbart.com%2Fmedia%2F2016%2F10%2FIMG_5015.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.breitbart.com%2Fbig-government%2F2016%2F10%2F27%2Fprofane-fringes-donald-trump-toledo-rally%2F&docid=MrvCS3fIQZ7HpM&tbnid=pdhSgWaZm-cLJM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgbKAEwAQ..i&w=1280&h=960&bih=662&biw=1366&q=Trump%20rally%20signs%20Trump%20that%20bitch&ved=0ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgbKAEwAQ&iact=mr&uact=8#h=960&imgcr=pdhSgWaZm-cLJM:&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgbKAEwAQ..i&w=1280
2. https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.marydemocker.com%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F05%2FTrump-rally-shirt.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.marydemocker.com%2Fhillary-will-lose-for-reasons-only-trump-t-shirt-hawkers-will-mention%2F&docid=vC9LNK8z_Q6kJM&tbnid=TLHBdQesBQaObM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgdKAMwAw..i&w=800&h=600&bih=662&biw=1366&q=Trump%20rally%20signs%20Trump%20that%20bitch&ved=0ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgdKAMwAw&iact=mr&uact=8#h=600&imgcr=TLHBdQesBQaObM:&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgdKAMwAw..i&w=800
3. <https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.the-pool.com%2Farticle-wheel-images%2Fnews-views%2Flatest-news%2F2016%2Fwk-18%2Ftuesday%2Fhillary-badges%2Ftodays-programme-chfutcpu8aceuhs.jpg&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.the-pool.com%2Fnews-views%2Fpolitics%2F2016%2F18%2Fhillary-clinton-sexist-badges&docid=hZBPu0MEwbBJnM&tbnid=ZUIgl8B6pPcgWM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgpKA8wDw..i&w=1280&h=772&bih=662&biw=1366&q=Trump%20rally%20signs%20Trump%20that%20bitch&ved=0ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgpKA8wDw&iact=mr&uact=8#h=772&imgcr=ZUIgl8B6pPcgWM:&vet=10ahUKEwil0YiZv-7SAhUHw1QKH68DaoQMwgpKA8wDw..i&w=1280>



Figure 6. The famous Trump hat

(Left to Right) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3921876/Mark-Latham-celebrates-presidential-election-Donald-Trump.html>;
https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.sapiens.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2016%2F10%2F01-AP_28201453883.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.sapiens.org%2Fblog%2Fcuriosities%2Fdonald-trump-baseball-cap%2F&docid=F54STEcpCUZKvM&tbnid=0QBTvbC3jCG_KM

[Instead, he offered free rides in his helicopter to giddy children, literally raising them out of a land of poverty, watched in awe by the open-mouthed mortals below.”](https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.salon.com%2F2016%2F03%2Fdonald_trump_red_hat-620x412.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.salon.com%2F2016%2F03%2F15%2Fworking_for_donald_trump_sounds_awful_his_butler_hires_a_bugler_to_play_hail_to_the_chief_when_hes_in_a_bad_mood%2F&docid=ciY9sgSeJmidsbM&tbnid=y7eYzDhcc3kZXM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwgtKBMwEw..i&w=2400&h=1658&bih=662&biw=1366&q=trump%20wearing%20hat&ved=0ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwgtKBMwEw&iact=src&uact=8#h=1658&imgre=0QBTvbC3jCG_KM:&vet=10ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwgtKBMwEw..i&w=2400; https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fmedia.salon.com%2F2016%2F03%2Fdonald_trump_red_hat-620x412.jpg&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.salon.com%2F2016%2F03%2F15%2Fworking_for_donald_trump_sounds_awful_his_butler_hires_a_bugler_to_play_hail_to_the_chief_when_hes_in_a_b ad_mood%2F&docid=ciY9sgSeJmidsbM&tbnid=y7eYzDhcc3kZXM%3A&vet=10ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwhNKCowKg..i&w=620&h=412&bih=662&biw=1366&q=trump%20wearing%20hat&ved=0ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwhNKCowKg&iact=src&uact=8#h=412&imgre=y7eYzDhcc3kZXM:&vet=10ahUKEwiIyJbnwe7SAhXMzFQKHbnCCccQMwhNKCowKg..i&w=620.</p>
<hr/>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

For Bakhtin, carnival shouldn't be “confused with mere holiday, or least of all with self-serving festivals fostered by governments, secular or theocratic” nor should it be considered “an impediment to revolutionary change” (Holquist xviii). No, carnival *is* revolution. The same is true in the current political climate. Revolution only happens in systems that are broken. Ask any Trump supporter why he or she is voting for him and you'll likely hear the same narrative. As explored above, the answer seems to be something akin to “The system is rigged against them and they want to take their country back.” Trump's very motto “Make America Great Again” implies that the current state of affairs for the average American citizen isn't working, and that those citizens are striving for more, for a time in American history when America was indeed great (although, exactly when this “great” time in American history is, has yet to be determined). The most impassioned Trump supporters, and even those from the #BernieorBust and #NeverHillary movements who jumped allegiance to Trump, are only interested in change. They find an outsider appealing, because in their eyes, any change is better than the status quo they have been living. As Humanist.com's Nancy Loudin Gonzales points out: “The values of early modern European and English peasants [those who would be most involved in carnivalesque culture] focused upon success in maintaining their home, hanging onto and increasing their land holdings, and getting a good harvest—which compares to the values many Americans hold as they contemplate their vote in 2016.” The average American constituent is most interested in

getting and maintaining a job, and helping build prosperity for their families and communities. Six centuries hasn't changed human nature so much. This is the platform that Trump promised his supporters—bringing back jobs from industries that President Obama's policies have been phasing out (such as coal mining and other energy jobs), providing affordable healthcare for families, and bringing back a way of life that has been left behind—a “simpler” time when people were more concerned with traditional values.

Trump has been able to walk the line between entertainer and social critic, an attribute, Kaufman argues, which Trump shares with the likes of Mark Twain and Kurt Vonnegut. Trump's entire campaign was a social critique of the state of America, from “We don't win anymore” to his slogan “Make America Great Again.” Satirists reveal that they and Trump are playing the same game, except, the problem is that Trump isn't in on the joke.

I understand that while satire may at times act more as a blunt object than a surgical scalpel, it usually does so only when there is an exigence for it. The satirist is more concerned with pointing out vice and hypocrisy in the establishment than taking a more nuanced or fair and balanced perspective on an issue or a specific candidate, but it is because the need to expose follies outweigh the necessity of equitable or non-partisan treatment of politics. However, as I will attempt to articulate, sometimes the nuance of the scalpel is necessary to navigate the real life concerns that plague those who are struggling. Satire is most effective when it attacks those in power rather than those who have none. Conventional wisdom would say that satire should be able to maintain its bite, without sacrificing its conscience. What I find fascinating is that Trump has laughed in the face of reason and nuance from the start of this campaign season. What he has done is rendered the satirist moot, because he has razed the structures of the political institution and somehow elevated its spectacle. He has, in his own way, flipped the world upside down, and

while that may be his most carnivalistic attribute so far, what is perhaps the more pressing concern is where do we go from here?

Conclusion

While examining the issues of Trump's rise to power and the various tactics that have been used to rouse his base, both in his rhetoric and in the spread of apathy toward misinformation, under the lens of these texts, we may not be able to provide any definitive answers to the question of how Donald Trump was able to win an election as an unprecedented underdog, but we are able to craft a clearer understanding of what makes a political landscape such as our current one so volatile. Studying how someone's rhetoric, albeit unconventional, can endear them to a passionate and active group of supporters can provide us with some insight into our current political moment. It is my hope that my approach has provided a fresh perspective on the exhausting topic of the election. I can only imagine what the Smokehousers Lindquist writes about would have to say about this election cycle, particularly now that the media climate has changed considerably.

There are some clear restrictions in this study, which for the sake of feasibility were unfortunately neglected: namely the role that gender played in 2016 election. Gender and masculinity scholars such as Jackson Katz and Michael Kimmel would have much to contribute to this topic, and while I have touched upon their work here, there is ample room for further discussion on the topic. It would also be pertinent to take an historical perspective on how affect and emotional rhetorics played a role in campaigns throughout an extended period of time. There is more room to discuss the ways in which satire was not effective in shaping public opinion, a topic where the work scholars like Jones, Baumgartner, McClennen, and Day would be exceptionally beneficial. Perhaps, if this study were to be extended (to say dissertation or book length) there would be more time and space to give these topics the attention and detail they deserve.

Academia has a troublesome relationship with affect, because it (academia) is constantly privileging logic and reasoning over emotional appeals in its studies. However, we are living in a time period where emotions are becoming more and more pervasive in decisions of policy and personnel, and the politics of the day require a bit of sensitivity that academia and other institutions of the “liberal elite” need to understand as well. There is a considerable lack of empathy toward opposing viewpoints on all sides, and it is only getting more and more severe as media, technology, news, and our environments become more and more insular, as we each begin to fall further into our individual social bubbles, never reaching out a helping hand, or even showing interest in a diversity of perspectives, backgrounds, and stories. That being said, it is incumbent upon university to continue to strive for an exploration of truth, both factual and emotional. The only way to continue that search is by studying it with the intensity it requires.

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