FROM DISGUST TO DELIGHT:
SCHADENFREUDE IN THE CREATION OF LEFT-WING SUBJECTIVITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

The concept of *schadenfreude* in the Oxford English Dictionary is understood as ‘the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others’, understood in this research as a sensation or “pre-cognitive intensity”, which affords the subject a certain self-satisfaction in an automatic, unconscious process. Left-wing, late-night political comedy news shows validate the use of a ‘justice-based’ *schadenfreude*, based on the perceived deservingness of the misfortune of conservative figures, as shorthand to inform and confirm their viewers’ subject position as liberal thinkers.

By focussing on *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, this thesis sets out to claim that *schadenfreude*, both found immediately in *Daily Show* content and in an extended ‘mood landscape’ fashioned via remediation of the original content, operates to become a key signifier of left-wing subjectivity.

Following Benedict Spinoza, this research presents a two-sided vision of *schadenfreude* as an ‘affect’, positing that it entails an equation of ‘disgust’—based on “trajectories of repulsion” from an external affecting body—and ‘delight’, along an axis of conservative misfortune. This project highlights the intersection between mediated *schadenfreude* and Judith Butler’s paradoxical elements of subjectivity; subjection, and becoming a subject. To develop this question further, the thesis turns briefly to right-wing spheres of *schadenfreude*, a secondary location to ascertain the extent of the ‘ephemerality’ of affect as it is placed in media structures.

Through analysis of the show’s semiotic and rhetorical techniques of analogy, intertextuality, and vignette across various video clips on YouTube, and their adoption by secondary media institutions such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, the thesis isolates the manner in which mediated *schadenfreude* works to interpellate the audience and craft a left-wing ‘mood’, using the conservative body and its humiliation as a site to articulate liberal political subjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

This research was motivated by my own affective response to political comedy, in particular *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and, from 2015, *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*. Only accessible to me through YouTube because of my New Zealand geolocation (coupled with my unwillingness to pay for a SkyTV subscription), this bite-sized political content would arrive in my subscription notifications daily. Once an avid consumer of this show's brand of late-night comedy, I took a one-year hiatus, turning my back on what was once a formative tool in constructing my own political identity due to a certain kind of emotional fatigue. There was something about tuning into the constant influx of this particular brand of comedic news that became—to me at least—draining. A formula, undetectable to me at the time, seemed to address me in such a way that my engagement appeared contingent on the creation and closure of a sense of distance between myself and the myriad of conservative individuals I was newly exposed to. After taking this one-year break, I returned to the show, but I had new questions about how it operated as a site of affectively charged infotainment. What part of the process of being informed and, consequently, *produced* as a liberal subject in this comedic manner was exhausting to me and, potentially, to other *Daily Show* viewers?

Upon reflection, my fatigue seemed to stem from the formulaic manner of schadenfreude as it is deployed in this media form, predictably targeting conservatism to boost my (and hence, the liberal viewer's) self-esteem, while seeming to skirt around the serious political issues of the day. This led me to question what the *work* of schadenfreude entails, as someone who identifies with the political Left. This thesis pursues this line of questioning and investigates the work of schadenfreude in political comedy; it is an attempt to understand how schadenfreude works to inform

the creation of what I am calling a ‘left-wing mood’, and how it might structure a modern liberal subjectivity.¹

Schadenfreude is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others”. Popularly considered a negative sentiment, philosophers have condemned schadenfreude for centuries as “proof of moral failure” (Simon 250), naming it a “disguised expression of aggression” (Aristotle), an even more hideous cousin of envy (Kierkegaard), and as ‘harmful to social relations’ (Heider)” (Jaap et.al 215). Despite common histories of, and beliefs about, schadenfreude as being socially inappropriate, the gratifying and affective nature of schadenfreude easily lends itself to the mediated spheres of the Internet and its various platforms, particularly in the realm of politics. In this thesis, I explore how left-wing, late-night political comedy news shows use schadenfreude as an affective shorthand to confirm viewers’ liberal subjectivity. Though laughing at the political opposition has long acted as a mainstay of comedy (Halliwell 295; Mintz 76), a culture of political schadenfreude in modern late-night, left-wing comedy has proliferated in recent years, especially as it is mediated through online platforms.

Schadenfreude’s ubiquity seemingly corresponds to the rise of increasingly outrageous—almost cartoonish and most often right-wing—Western demagogues who permeate the political scene of today. Notable figures such as US President Donald Trump, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and their increasingly visible supporters provide a goldmine of comic material, and thus legitimise schadenfreude as an attractive method for the comic framing of political issues. Considering the newly elevated position of schadenfreude and its prominent use in late-night political comedy, most significantly cohering in *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, this research

¹ In my research, the term ‘liberal’ refers specifically to ‘social liberalism’ or ‘new liberalism’, entailing values of fairness, social justice, critiques of capitalism, and freedom from discrimination and inequality. This is in contrast to ‘modern economic liberalism’ or ‘neoliberalism’ that advocates free market individualism, limited government, and personal responsibility (Corey 127-128; Festini 100; Hayton and McEnhill 135; Ryan 24). I use ‘liberal’ interchangeably with ‘left-wing’ to describe progressive and socially liberal thought in comparison to right-wing, conservative, and traditional ideology.

will address the following questions: *how does mediated schadenfreude operate in political comedy spheres to become a key tool of left-wing subjectivity?* And, *what are the implications of schadenfreude in determining a productive liberal mood?* To explore these questions, my research traces the unique affective capacities of schadenfreude by analysing its production and ongoing effects in the online YouTube political comedy scene, originating in material from *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, a Comedy Central programme known for its comedic take on current events, and, notably, staged as a faux news studio. In tracking a short (and potted) history of this programme online, my research will reveal a trend in which schadenfreude has become streamlined and leveraged in left-wing comedy spheres, with questionable implications for liberal subjectivity. To do this, my project will concentrate on how the modern iteration of the show has operated since Trevor Noah's signing on in 2015, coinciding with the beginning of the 2016-2020 Republican government term, and into the present day. I have chosen to focus on this time period for what I perceive as the increased levels of schadenfreude in the show's content, notably cohering around the affairs of the Trump administration in the US and its subsequent role in a more divisive global cultural politics, and visible in the hugely increased output of media content by *The Daily Show* in its modern multiplatform era.

To date, research on political comedy has focused more on levelling critique at the successes and failures of left-wing satire for democracy and its effect on audiences, with only passing mentions about the affective structures of the media form in the production of satire and political knowledge (Harris 33; Lawrason 18; Peterson 62; Smith 8). While acknowledging this literature as reflecting popular sentiment surrounding late-night comedy, I aim to pivot away from this line of questioning and elevate a theoretical consideration of the role of affect in late-night political comedy. This direction allows me to analyse the context of online spaces and multiplatform distribution, which operate according to different affective networks than traditional media channels (Papacharissi 26). For one, I use the term 'late-night comedy' merely

as a signifier of what type of comedy I am dealing with. In affective modern networks, where content is available regardless of time and space, 'late-night' as a descriptor is ineffectual beyond establishing my media text. Existing literature has also endorsed the notion of comedy as a democratising medium and a space for politically engaged citizens (Becker 161; Young 159). However, this utopian vision for comedy is brought into question as audiences are expanded and globalised, and its power with regards to underpinning democracy is challenged. I aim to counter the established academic view that political comedy challenges the status quo, and argue it is in fact an increasingly naturalised part of it, because of the proliferation of gratifying and affective political media. Additionally, I intend for this research to act as a counterpoint to existing literature on modern right-wing techniques of mediated political engagement and propaganda online (Ekman 80; Jutel 251; Massanari and Chess 525; Nagle 13; Phelan 455). While the digitally enabled rise of the alt-Right and conservative media technologies are undoubtedly a fascinating and necessary area of study, I would like to dedicate my attention to the role of affective media in the much less-criticised, and oft-overlooked, liberal digital sphere, which contains its own unique "structures of feelings" (Williams 128) and sets of social implications.

Methodology

I open my thesis with a literature review of role of comedy in producing political subjectivity and creating politically engaged citizens. To date, literature on the role of schadenfreude, in particular, as it intersects with affective media structures is virtually non-existent, consisting mainly of psychological studies. This will be bolstered in my thesis by forays into affect and emotion theory, drawing from key theorists such as Brian Massumi, Eric Shouse, Sianne Ngai, Sara Ahmed, and Benedict Spinoza, to establish my theoretical framework for the subsequent media analysis. Jodi Dean, Olivier Jutel, Richard Coyne, and Zizi Papacharissi, and their notions of affective networks and their relationship to democratic participation will contextualise my investigation into what I am calling a *political mood*. Judith Butler and

Louis Althusser and their work on interpellation in the creation of subjectivity also play a key role in this research, and I draw on their work to articulate my key concept of mediated liberal subjectivity.

Once I have established my theoretical framework, my media case studies allow me to isolate a particular affective knot, comprising both liberal disgust and liberal delight that, I argue, underpins *schadenfreude*; this is a potent affective combination that is formulaically, repeatedly applied to make light of conservative ideologies. I will argue that a focus on disgust is required in this research as an emotion that is “organised by a trajectory of repulsion rather than attraction” (Ngai 11), since it appears to sustain the nature of *schadenfreude* and ensures its functioning. To understand this unique mediated phenomenon of disgust in *schadenfreude*, a close semiotic analysis of *The Daily Show’s* YouTube clips is warranted. My project aims to trace how elements such as the cadence of the host and his rhetorical strategies of analogy, the responses of the live studio audience, and the strategic intertextuality of media clips within the show work to intensify and entrench the validity of *schadenfreude* as an affective tool for late-night political comedy. The use of the conservative figure as the ‘object’ of laughter is of particular interest to me here, as conservative bodies act as a key site of articulation for liberal subjectivity. I will conduct a semiotic analysis of multiple clips from *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* from the past four years, selecting those with a pronounced element of *schadenfreude*. Noticeably, the video clips with the most views deal with subjects—or rather, ‘objects’—that are highly conservative and likely to incite the most ‘disgust’ for the intended audience, thus providing the most fertile grounds for analysis of ritualised *schadenfreude*.

The research will then seek to discursively unpack how the reliable and heavily used format of *schadenfreude* functions as an affective shorthand in the service of a liberal identity politics. My hypothesis is that *schadenfreude* functions to inform and to confirm viewer self-esteem and leftist subjectivity based on comedic rejection of

right-wing thought; in so doing, I suggest that the conservative figure is positioned as an object of laughter, thus informing a common understanding of what it means to identify as 'liberal'. Similar to Olivier Jutel's notion of the consumption of modern right-wing media fashioning a "branded conservatism" (249), I argue for the affective creation of a *branded liberalism* via *schadenfreude*. Also aiding in this propagation of a certain way of conceiving social issues and values, political comedy's 'infotainment' aspect, by way of its current events 'news' format, is key in the creation of its audience as 'informed' left-wing subjects.

From here, my case studies will shift to a broader digital context, exploring the deliberate framing, titling, distribution, and ubiquity of *Daily Show* clips on the YouTube platform, and how it is remediated in wider liberal news spheres. In particular, I will explore how the circulation of *schadenfreude* from *The Daily Show* operates in affective left-wing networks to denote a contemporary liberal 'mood', where *schadenfreude* acts to alleviate the feelings of disgust specific to the political Left, and is maintained by the proliferation of digestible, sharable, entertaining media. Though it will bolster some of my writing, an analytical focus on tracking elements such as the rate of trending, views, likes, choice of clips, rate of uploads, multiplatform spread, YouTube channel polls, hashtags, Twitter feeds, celebrity endorsements, retweets, and algorithms that provide recommended content will not govern my discussion. Nor is tracking the lifespan of an individual clip and its content my aim in this instance. Such a data-based media analytics approach is a lengthy process that distracts from my intention to understand and dissect affect, and explore the reasons why *schadenfreude* *works*. Content specificity is not of primary importance to this project; indeed, following from Dean's concept of 'communicative capitalism' (26), it is this *lack* of specificity that is what I would like to call into question. Rather, it is what I am calling the 'consonance' and ubiquity of comedic political media across the digital environment that is my main point of interest; I focus on this in an attempt to understand how repetition fashions both a mood landscape and liberal subjectivity.

Finally, I expand my discussion of mood by looking also at the derogatory terminology used to define 'left-wingers', and how right-wing *schadenfreude* operates. This compliments my writing on how *schadenfreude* works affectively in the production of subjectivity, as well as strengthens the suggestion that liberals and liberal mood, as it is viewed from the 'outside', are seen as quite transient and non-specific, focussed not on policy but on emotion.

One of the central aims of my thesis is to unpack the concept of communicative capitalism, understood as the "reduction of politics to communicative acts" (Dean 32), in order to arrive at an understanding of the work of *schadenfreude* in the contemporary cultural politics of the Left. For Jodi Dean, left-wing fantasies of the internet as an open and democratic platform engender a climate that fetishises the participation of its users, and privileges the *circulation* of content over its meaning. In this idealised "emancipatory multitude" (Jutel 2), communication is subsumed by content circulation such that communication does not provide a critical outside. It is part and parcel of the political process, not counter to it. My focus here is on the creation of a 'mood landscape' (or 'moodscape') that arises as a result of communicative capitalism and its vicissitudes, and of what collective notions of 'liberal subjectivity' are established—a phenomenon that seems to me ambiguous and formless. I do not wish to suggest that the use of *schadenfreude* is unique to liberal thought, however. Both historically and in modernity, political *schadenfreude* originating from right-wing thought continues to contribute to real and damaging perceptions of particular social groups, such as the pointed, pleasurable demonisation and humiliation of queer and disabled individuals (Massanari and Chess 538). My aim, while accepting this history, is to quash the notion that only instances of *schadenfreude* and political laughter from the Right towards the Left is worthy of study. Ultimately, this project analyses the Left's gravitation towards late-night comedy shows as a source of information that largely replaces traditional news content, in which a unique strain of *schadenfreude* operates to inform liberal

subjectivity and further the geographic reach of liberal ideas, but not necessarily to endorse their implementation on an effective political level. Though *schadenfreude* may suggest a radical political action, to laugh at those in power and take pleasure in their humiliations, for Jodi Dean, real political engagement requires the hard work of organising and struggle (64). It is important to note that with regards to discrete, personalised moments of self-satisfaction, *schadenfreude* as a self-contained area of psychological study is of little consequence here. However, *schadenfreude* as it mediates public, political arenas is a cause for concern, since an increased tolerance for social *schadenfreude* may signal a troubling, growing desire for its continued existence.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of *schadenfreude* in the Oxford English Dictionary is understood as ‘the pleasure derived by someone from the misfortune of others’. A compound of the German words *schaden*, meaning ‘damage’ or ‘harm’, and *freude*, meaning ‘joy’, it is an experience of delight upon hearing of or witnessing the downfalls or humiliation of an outside individual or set of individuals, which affords the subject a certain sense of self-gratification. This process is experienced as an internalised sensation, or what Brian Massumi calls a “pre-cognitive intensity” (86) that occurs in an automatic, unconscious fashion. The experience of *schadenfreude* is intensified when the object in question appears more deserving, arrogant, unlikeable, or otherwise incompatible with our tastes. In short, the more ‘disgusting’ the object, and the more we distance ourselves from it, the more concentrated the *schadenfreude*.

My language thus far has situated *schadenfreude* tentatively as an object of knowledge. Referred to variously as a ‘feeling’, an ‘emotion’, and an automatic ‘sensation’, *schadenfreude* appears to fluctuate (discursively, at least) between the realms of feeling, emotion, and affect. Given these adaptable parameters, identifying a stable conceptual position for *schadenfreude* is a complex task. This complexity is reflected, too, in the writings of primary scholars on whom I will focus, whose categorisations of emotion, feeling, experience, sensation, and intensity are adaptable and fluid. Though I will demonstrate how *schadenfreude* may be considered an emotion or feeling, ultimately, I aim to place *schadenfreude* in the realm of affect. I argue that affect provides a thorough framework for understanding the structure of *schadenfreude*, accounting for kinds of encounters that I believe are imperative to *schadenfreude*. From this position, I may then bolster my claim of *schadenfreude*’s affective capacity as it pertains to mediated mood and subjectivity. Further, I reveal how *schadenfreude* is modified and even compromised as purely ‘affective’, as the properties of media, of proliferation and of the visual, reconfigure the parameters of affect.

Emotion

Initially, one may see how schadenfreude could be placed in the category of emotion. David Combs et al. suggest that schadenfreude is an “intergroup emotion”. Their research suggests that “emotions are experienced on behalf of the group” (229) rather than the individual, endorsing the notion that schadenfreude is a collective exercise. Sara Ahmed refers to this as the ‘outside in’ model of emotional learning (9). Aside from the pleasure found by audiences at the mistakes of the sporting opposition, Combs et al. refer to the presence of schadenfreude in political arenas, where “events (misfortunes or otherwise) may largely become appreciated for their implications for victory or defeat of one’s own party (especially for those who strongly identify with their party)—even though there may be otherwise negative, undeserved consequences for others” (636). Similar to Sara Ahmed, who argues that emotions have a social function, schadenfreude is also thought to orient the viewer’s relation to politics, helping fashion a political ideology, and formulate an ‘in-group’ or networked identification with other likeminded subjects, as Combs et al. suggest (637).

Schadenfreude may be seen to operate as an emotion when considering that emotions are intentional, ‘about’ something, and inherently require a direct orientation towards an object, as Ngai (20) and Ahmed (7) suggest. Emotions are understood by these scholars as relational, since they “involve (re)actions or relations of ‘towardness’ or ‘awayness’ in relation to such objects (Ahmed 8). For schadenfreude, our (re)action is envisaged in the cringe or recoil of disgust, followed by the laugh, smile or other form of joyful expression at another’s misfortune, modified to the particular level of restraint that is required in our immediate context. In broadcasting a gleeful sentiment, schadenfreude typifies emotion as something that is characterised by a “projection or display of a feeling” (Shouse). The projection of schadenfreude may be classed as an emotive response, a form of the “socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is, from that point on, personal” (Masumi 88). In this manner of projection, alongside being able to identify and fix an object for

a social function, I may arrange schadenfreude as corresponding to the conditions of emotion. Though studio audience laughter at a conservative's misfortune is an undeniable 'projection', one that fulfils the scholarly criteria for emotion, I have no evidence to suggest that this 'emotion' works beyond indexing schadenfreude to the at-home viewer. Does the viewer at home laugh in synchronicity? Do they 'express' emotion, as emotion is wont to do? With this shortcoming in mind, I move to 'feeling' as a potentially more satisfying concept for schadenfreude.

Feeling

Though I have reflected on how the definition of schadenfreude might satisfy the criteria for emotion, if I consider the specific requirements of cringe, disgust, delight, and self-satisfaction as 'feelings' in the equation of schadenfreude, emotion as a classification falls short. The literature on emotion does not sufficiently capture the material character of feeling, as Ngai suggests (25). Arguing that emotion literature has long denounced feeling as a "romantically raw domain" outside of materialist analysis (Massumi 90), Ngai sees that feelings are in fact social and infrastructural, while also critically retaining qualities of the personal and the subjective (25). Unlike the crucial "sociality of emotions" (Ahmed 8), a feeling is a sensation that is "biographical", bound and compared to a personal set of past experiences (Shouse). Similarly, in Raymond Williams' words, though feeling "escapes...from the fixed and the explicit and the known" (128), it is not outside culture, belief systems, or previous social encounters. Feelings are not flighty nor intangible, but structural and material, and thus it is possible to find a set of words that describes the contours of a personal experience of a feeling.

To demonstrate, it is likely one will be familiar with the 'feeling' of schadenfreude—a tightening of the chest, the rising of a smile, sometimes quashed, sometimes not, a warmth that spreads throughout the body. Preceding schadenfreude, we may feel a sense of anticipation, one of bated breath, awaiting the

downfall, an undercurrent of animosity, and a physical revulsion that is present when considering the object in question. As I will show, the ‘feeling of’ disgust is intrinsic to experiences of justice-based schadenfreude in particular, for without it, the sensation of self-satisfaction and pleasure has no substantial grounds. The feeling of repulsion towards an object indicates that the object is offensive in nature, thus providing legitimate grounds for an ensuing self-esteem boost that is typified by ‘feelings of’ delight. These feelings of schadenfreude are once again intensified when the object of laughter is oblivious or uncaring of their less-than-ideal reception and misfortune and reasserts their position, repeatedly. When the stupidity or ignorance of the object is plainly visible to the viewer, and yet they stand firm by it, sensations of schadenfreude are sharpened further, as “what makes the object abhorrent is precisely its claim for desirability” (Ngai 335). One might be tempted to leave schadenfreude in the company of “ugly feelings” (Ngai). It is a fair statement that the reputation of schadenfreude is one of shame, and not often a popular sentiment to which to admit.

The fact that schadenfreude involves levels of cognition, insofar as there is a quantification of disgust, may indicate that schadenfreude goes beyond affect. The fact that it is possible to anchor the physical sensations of schadenfreude in signification, too, suggests that schadenfreude falls more convincingly within the definition of a ‘feeling’, something ‘that has been checked against previous examples and *labelled*’ (Shouse). Despite being taken to be “private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating”, feelings become “recognisable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalised, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations” (Williams 132). The ability to ‘fix’ feelings of disgust and delight into media structures will be an idea that I return to later in this thesis.

What motivates these feelings of disgust and delight, however? As Shouse rightly proposes, what is it that makes feelings *feel*? Sensations of schadenfreude do not exist in a vacuum. Thus far, the literature around feeling and emotion fall

somewhat short of addressing the stimuli *motivating* schadenfreude. Emotion and feeling consider the ‘object’ briefly; thus, I see my research as requiring much more discussion of the “affecting body” that works *back* against the subject, either helping or hindering (Spinoza 395), even if the body in question is a mediated one. Here, I move past previous potential classifications for schadenfreude, to arrive at affect as the most helpful framework. I claim that an application of affect will allow me to better understand schadenfreude, and its *function* vis-à-vis political media. As I have suggested—and will further elaborate in this thesis—schadenfreude comprises a particular cluster of disgust and delight, informed by an encounter with an external, motivating, “affecting body” that puts the subject to motion or rest (396). Therefore, I assert that schadenfreude corresponds more closely to the conceptual category of affect, even though, as I will continue to demonstrate, it remains open to articulation across the borders of feeling, emotion, and, as we will see, mood.

Affect

Unlike feeling or emotion, affect denotes a state of in-between-ness rather than an absolute. Regarding the pre-social and potential forces between bodies, affect, or affection, as per Spinoza, is any state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting body (Massumi 16). Whether that latter body is ‘real or virtual’ (Shouse)—that is to say, a physical object or a representation—is secondary to its ability to express its intensity in a particular context and ‘impinge’ upon the primary body. Affect emerges at the moment of this encounter. Certainly, everybody retains the “ability to affect and be affected” (Massumi 16); in my research, however, I focus more on the contact, or impingement, of right-wing bodies on left-wing bodies, in particular.

From here originates Brian Massumi’s claim that affect is “autonomous” (96). Affect acts as the foundation, or the “openness” (96) for all subsequent movement, even if it is not acted upon. It “captures the sum of all possibilities” (Papacharissi 14).

In this way, affect precedes both feeling and emotion. What is called a ‘feeling’ is in fact the movement of affect (Anderson 736), as I noted earlier on when discussing the ‘warmth’ of *schadenfreude*. This warmth, this feeling, acts as an instantaneous assessment of affect, that “always implies the presence of an affecting body” (736). Similarly, emotion is affect qualified, owned, and recognized (Massumi 88), placed into semantic structures that make sense of abstract affect. The autonomy of affect means that insofar as the body “has not yet become” (Kaufmann 104), there is always a potential within affect, “filled with motion, vibratory motion, and resonance” (Massumi 86), that has the capacity to move the body in undetermined and unforeseeable ways.

Massumi’s concept here expands on the work of 17th-century philosopher Benedict Spinoza, who suggests that “the motion and rest of the body must be derived from some other body, which has also been determined to motion or rest by another” (396). Thus, right-wing figures (‘bodies’), shaped and affected as they have been by their own set of external influences, so too exert *themselves* as external influences on others, shaping and affecting left-wing bodies in turn. In this affective equation, the individual is not the adequate origin and cause of the affect; rather, it is an external body that is the active cause of their (political) orientation (395). Spinoza describes a religious or holy body as being the first motivating body in this affective equation. For my purposes in this thesis, I substitute the ecclesiastical motivating bodies for those of mediated conservative figures, ‘virtual’ objects with the ability to determine left-wing subjects’ political motion. The subject-object relation, or ‘first and second affecting body’, described here is vital here to my understanding of *schadenfreude* and its function in the media-political domain.

The presence of external objects or ‘bodies’ is not unique to the category of affect; they are present in some way, shape, or form across the realms of feeling, emotion, and affect, required for the orienting action of all of these states to varying degrees (Ahmed 8). The affecting body Spinoza writes of is here is considered the

‘object’: an external form that interacts, obstructs, contacts, or is otherwise productive to the movement of the individual (the ‘subject’). In this particular instance, the object takes the shape of the conservative Other, with whom the liberal subject experiences an affective, mediated relationship. In this context, I consider the external, affecting body to be, first, the object of disgust and second, the object of laughter. Consequently, the conservative body’s “surface”, as Ahmed describes (10), which is produced as the effect of the contact, is used as the site of affective articulation for the liberal subject. Through close analyses of *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, I will show how encounters with conservative figures—ranging from politicians to TV personalities to everyday voters—establish and expose the conservative body as stereotypical, hypocritical, arrogant, repulsive, and contradictory, acting as a motivating force in the establishment of a liberal subjectivity.

It is important for me to consider the role of this conservative affecting body in my research. Though it is tempting to believe that our actions (including laughter) are motivated by free will, Spinoza suggests that this logic is faulty. It is through the encounter with an external, affecting body that motivates our ‘decree of mind’ and will; will does not exist outside of this affective relationship (Spinoza 397-398). Therefore, even though affect is considered presocial, it is not *asocial*, as Massumi argues: “[affect] infolds contexts...volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated” (91). This is true for *schadenfreude*; the *Daily Show* audience requires some knowledge of the context for why the conservative is disgusting, and also why it is that misfortune is pleasurable. If the audience approaches the subject matter with no previous political volition, though, the show makes sure to account for any viewer’s lack of context or relation, as I will illustrate.

Affect, then—as per Spinoza—denotes an encounter between one’s body and a second, affecting body. In its essence, *schadenfreude* as I understand it adheres to this logic. It is based fundamentally upon the response of an individual that is informed

by an encounter between that individual and a second body—a deserving, ‘disgusting’ body—hence the reasoning for placing it in the category of an affect.

Disgust

I would like to return to the significance of disgust here, and its integral role in the creation of the affective function of schadenfreude. Traditionally and historically understood as “bad taste” or “tasting bad” (Ahmed 83), disgust has largely been considered in relation to the senses of taste and touch in emotion literature. What ‘tastes bad’ is bound up in “notions of familiarity and strangeness”—after all, one can only know what tastes bad through having eaten or consumed it before (82). In relation to mediated affect, I would like to suggest that taste comes to mean moral and political taste. Disgust “brings the body perilously close to an object only then to pull away from the object in the registering of the proximity as an offence” (85).

In this thesis, I build on this literature by considering the influence of disgust not merely in isolation, but how it operates as a key orienting factor *in tandem* with the notion of delight—both indivisible from one another in a way that provides us with a full understanding of the affective equation of schadenfreude. I consider how “the disgusting seems to say, “You want me””, and the manner in which conservative objects impress upon the subject “as something to be mingled with and perhaps even enjoyed” (Ngai 335). Such an unwanted imposition, or ‘impingement’, as I will demonstrate in my various media examples of conservatives proudly pushing their ideology forward, work only to heighten the ensuing schadenfreude at their misfortunes.

Schadenfreude and Political Capacity for Action

I consider schadenfreude an affect also because the body’s capacity is ‘diminished or increased’ by another, which is how Spinoza (395) describes affect. If we are to break schadenfreude into what I view as its two main affective components—disgust and delight, grounded by another’s misfortune—the body’s

capacity initially appears diminished, as we retract from the object. Promptly, this sensation of recoil is passed (as it must be, for without this affective progression we would have not the presence of *schadenfreude*, but disgust exclusively) and the body's capacity to act is increased, as the subject's self-esteem grows at the fact of the object's humiliation. In fact, Spinoza almost explicitly refers to the concept of *schadenfreude* as affective, arguing that "he who imagines what he hates is affected with sorrow will rejoice" (403). As *schadenfreude* is traditionally an instantaneous sensation, however, the mediation of this fleeting, affective moment—and media's role in extending *schadenfreude* into various publics—poses questions for how it might also *diminish* the liberal body's capacity for action and motion. Affect's autonomy means it "works without being consciously invoked" and as a result, "it is unclear in which direction it will lead" (Kaufmann 104). The body is not fixed, but in a process of becoming. After the media intervenes to expose the first, Left body to the second, Right body, how does the media structure our ongoing engagement in politics?

Schadenfreude and Media

Although I have suggested that *schadenfreude* fits well within the theoretical framework of affect, my thesis shows that media draws out *schadenfreude*, visualises its modes and processes and, through multi-platform proliferation, endeavours to make it (politically) actionable. Throughout this thesis, I begin to question the notion of affective autonomy in relation to the specific operations of media and argue for *schadenfreude* to be understood as a *mediated political affect*.

Does media move *schadenfreude* from affect to something closer in nature to an 'ugly' feeling, as Sianne Ngai would put it? As Ngai suggests, we should avoid trying to arrange these phenomena upon inflexible, distinct lines. Following Ngai's approach, in this thesis I am more interested in "the passages whereby ambient affects acquire semantic density and narrative complexity" (Ngai 27). Put differently, I am

interested in exploring how the affect of *schadenfreude* is ‘mopped up’ by discourse (visual or otherwise) and thus made compatible with media circulation. This is possible if one again considers the autonomy of affect, its ability to be directed in multiple assorted and unpredictable ways. An analysis of how *schadenfreude* is deployed, and how its affective state is modified, visualised, fixed, and distributed, is my aim, as media brings *schadenfreude*’s affective function into question.

A question I would like to pose here is towards the notion of autonomy. If autonomous affect is typified by “its participation in the virtual” (Massumi 96), are the multiplicity of real-world media examples that visualise *schadenfreude* changing the definition of affect, as it makes affect non-virtual, formulaic, and even predictable? If, as Massumi proposes, affect is “unformed and unstructured” (107), and it is always prior to and/or outside of conscious awareness, how is one to “invest” in it?” (Shouse). Media products require a narrative structure, of which *schadenfreude*, as an affect, seems incompatible. On the contrary, emotion and feeling appear more able to be inserted into narrative structures or sequences. Affective intensity—or *schadenfreude*, in this instance—would “seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future” (Massumi 86). However, in terms of *schadenfreude*’s ritualised use in political comedy, I explore the notion that “affect is autonomous *to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is*. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect” (91). It is at the very the moment that we “‘make sense’ of a state of being, or more properly becoming, we freeze it, evacuating it of the very intensity that offered the capacity for change” (Hemmings 308).

I see this reading of affect’s ‘formed’ and ‘qualified’ parameters as compatible with the focus on justice-based *schadenfreude* in my thesis. Justice-based *schadenfreude* deals in open matters of politicians and social justice desires that are

events of a public nature and discussed in public arenas (Smith et al. 533). Unlike more discrete moments of *schadenfreude*, hidden pleasures that individuals keep private, public expressions of *schadenfreude* on the other hand can be said to ‘escape confinement’. As *schadenfreude* is embedded in more public, mediated arenas—such as the kind we see in *The Daily Show*—I suggest that *schadenfreude* indicates a capture and closure of affect. Media takes the energy between bodies, liberal and conservative, and visualises it. Understandably, once placed into media, “affect takes a form and sacrifices some of the autonomy of the shapeless. What was once driven by endless potential has now been framed by words or expressions, which essentially transform affect into action” (Papacharissi 18). Precisely because *schadenfreude* is “unformed and unstructured potential” (Shouse), it translates well to the online media environment.

Political comedy shows translate well into the online media space, so much so that their affective transmission now seems to be embedded into their original structure. Likewise, because affect lacks codification and structure, it often appears to be transmitted without clear direction. That is to say, it can be harnessed by any media form, made sense of by any available and indiscriminate media. I will demonstrate this with regards to how *schadenfreude* is mopped up, not only by *The Daily Show*, but by news institutions which remediate the show’s content, crafting what I am describing as a mood landscape around *schadenfreude*. As Papacharissi suggests, “it is in this, the ephemerality of the virtual, that affective claims to the political and power may be imagined, assembled, or suggested” (17).

Does being conscious of what our tastes are, as something that has been sorted and articulated and categorised as something one likes, undermine the pre-cognitive tenet of affect? Or, does *schadenfreude* shape taste and, in this arena, is the affective process of *schadenfreude* structured by the ideology of media? If we can accept that *schadenfreude* is an affect at its core, then mediation does not compromise the tenets of *schadenfreude*, only extend them, as “the body is affected by the *image* of the thing

in the same way as if the thing were present” (Spinoza 402, emphasis added). I will show how the image of the conservative body affectively works on the liberal subject, that is, both on the studio audience and the viewer at home. Via media, the object cannot encounter the subject reciprocally, neither the studio audience nor the at-home viewer. The object’s mediated form, as it is dictated and fashioned by the show’s producers, does not have the ability to respond. Thus, the formula of *schadenfreude* in late night political material may be practised with ease. Any threat of retaliation from the object in question is neutralised. This is always so for the at-home viewer, who sits at a comfortable distance from the object, possessing the capacity to disengage on a human level, experiencing the sensation of *schadenfreude* without the object present. Through mediation, the image of the ‘other’ concretises, establishing it as ‘object’ around which audiences hold less qualms about withholding their laughter. However, building upon this statement, there are also instances where this distance enjoyed by the subjects (including the host, the show’s studio audience, and the at-home viewer) is shortened, either in the shape of on-air interviews or on-field reporting with conservative individuals themselves, and disgust, delight and misfortune are intensified. Closeness—both physically and temporally—to the conservative object in question appears to further reinforce sensations of repulsion and glee. In this thesis, I discuss both kinds of encounter to understand the role of proximity in *schadenfreude* as affect.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate that the affective process of *schadenfreude* is fractured in media, visualised in segments, and deployed. Atomised into a build-up and anticipation first, then the establishment of what is disgusting, the ensuing humiliation, and finally the viewer delight illustrates the lengthening out of *schadenfreude* and a conventional “insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions” (Massumi 88). Here, media intervenes in the process of channelling *schadenfreude* towards an object, tracing a shift backwards from affect, through feeling, to emotion, or at minimum something resembling

emotion, “into narrativisable action-reaction circuits” and ultimately, “into function and meaning” (Massumi 88). Media, I argue, concretises the images of others, the images of our disgust, and how to respond affectively is structured, formulaically and repeatedly.

Mood and Mood Landscape

Within my framework of mediated affect, I will argue that a specific, Left-wing mood is produced, sustained by the proliferation of ongoing, digestible clips that feature schadenfreude-based content; this mood landscape, I will suggest, is fuelled by re-mediated content published by a range of media institutions such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, which appear to extend its affective transmission. Here, I borrow Dean’s concept of communicative capitalism as an inroad to my discussion of the creation of a liberal mood landscape, one grounded in the transmission of schadenfreude. As Dean writes, communicative capitalism “names the merging of democracy and capitalism in mass personalized media”, where networks of mobile phones, WiFi, social media, and ‘mass distraction’ allow publics to circulate their “feelings and opinions in ways that make us feel important, engaged, and political” (Dean). She points to a climate in which communicative capitalism fetishises the participation of its users and privileges the circulation of content over its meaning (26). I view this culture of participation as a vital component of the contemporary liberal mood landscape, or moodscape. Ultimately, my research suggests that communicative capitalism and the privileging of content circulation that acts in place of political action results in the creation of a Left-wing moodscape that potentially obstructs real political change (Dean 22).

As I will show, what one experiences instead is the presence of a liberal *mood*. Although I will elaborate on my concept of a Left-wing mood later in this thesis, it is worthwhile taking a moment to outline here my understanding of mood, derived for the most part from the work of Martin Heidegger. Heidegger “rather helpfully likens

moods to atmospheres” (Elpidorou and Freeman 664). The suggestion here is that moods, “like atmospheres, are already there and we exist in them” and that “they are not some inner, private, or subjective states of being” (664). This statement is helpful to my conception of mood in two ways. First, it suggests that mood is something that precedes the liberal subject and, therefore, contributes to the formation of liberal subjectivity. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, mood is considered to *also* represent a ‘capture and closure of affect’ illustrating an organisation of affect into a networked yet nebulous structure.

In this thesis, I suggest that the contemporary liberal moodscape—such as the kind *The Late Show* participates in—is constantly updated when new videos are posted, new articles published, new content shared amongst affective social networks. It follows, then, that “the affective flow and affective links remain and resonate with networked publics even after the specific links to content have been shut down” (Papacharissi 10)—or, in this instance, is replaced by newer content.

As I focus on left-wing circles, this ‘affective flow’ might also be thought of as *mood*. Such proliferation of content and, more significantly, the ‘trace’ (Dean 22) it leaves behind, appears to generate an undercurrent of intensity or energy. It is this trace—or, said otherwise, the *resonance*—it leaves behind that aids in the creation of mood, more so than any specific content or video. As Shouse suggests, “the power of media lies not so much in their ideological effects, but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning.” In their sum, the existence of all these uploads, the comments in response, the shares, the articles written on the uploads as seen in newspapers like *The Guardian* or *The Washington Post*, represents a vast quantity of immaterial products that aid in the creation of a liberal mood that appears inextricably linked to the production of a contemporary liberal subjectivity.

Schadenfreude and Liberal Subjectivity

Following my understanding of how schadenfreude is deployed in affective media and its excess as beneficial to the creation of a mood landscape, I then wish to turn to the specific mechanisms by which the liberal subject is produced within this affective equation. To do so, I engage with the ideas of interpellation by studio audience reactions, rhetorical vignettes, and the host's inflections to analyse how left-wing subject positions are 'hailed' or brought into being in opposition to conservative bodies. By drawing upon Althusser's and Butler's concepts of subjectivity, I consider in greater depth the affective structure of schadenfreude and self-esteem, and how it works alongside the dual aspects of subjectivity (as both subject *of* and subject *to*).

In this section of my thesis, I also discuss schadenfreude as it intersects with notions of self-surveillance. Katherine Sender suggests that a certain mediated schadenfreude informs how one is taught to conduct one's self. By nature of these shows entering the home or personal device via YouTube, it signals what behaviours are undesirable and worthy of laughter, thus establishing the parameters for how to act as a good liberal and "adopt the self-monitoring gaze cultivated by the shows" (Sender 81). In repeatedly laughing at what is formulaically depicted as an object of disgust, the liberal subject internalises appropriate ways of being, acting, and thinking. This combination of schadenfreude and self-surveillance follows the logics of affect and affectation wherein the body 'absorbs and infolds contexts' of a second, affecting body—while not necessarily suggesting effective political strategies for liberalism. In this sense, it appears that an enforcement of what *not* to do is not the same as *what* to do. In sum, a¶ deos and remediated content represent what I am calling a 'consonance' of content and affect, which seeks to 'fix' and stabilise liberal subjectivity through repetition to alleviate the specific disgust of the political left.

A Shift to the Right

As part of my discussion of the role played by schadenfreude in the production of subjectivity, I end this thesis with a quick, final turn to investigate right-wing spheres of schadenfreude, particularly in the platform of YouTube. In this section, I find a different object of disgust, popularly termed the *social justice warrior* (SJW), as a common site of schadenfreude for conservative subjects (Phelan 456). Though aesthetically, right-wing schadenfreude compilations cherish a roughly edited meme humour, as opposed to the more organised *Daily Show* brand of schadenfreude, the affective progression from disgust to delight along an axis of misfortune stays consistent and is always ‘capturable’, regardless of political arena. I interpret that the prevalence of schadenfreude across different political spheres indicates its essentially affective qualities. The flawless interchangeability of ‘affecting’ and ‘affected’ bodies in schadenfreude speaks directly to the ephemerality and ‘openness’ of the affect itself, and its ability to be arranged by and into endless media structures, as Papacharissi suggests. In viewing the consistency of self-satisfaction, or the joy of “contemplating ourselves and our own power of action” (Spinoza 419) across both conservative and liberal media, I can strengthen my argument that schadenfreude entails a sense of motion and movement and paints a political ‘other’. However, is the joy of merely contemplating our action, thanks to an unfortunate body, translatable to *actual* action? Does the work of schadenfreude motivate political action, beyond the mere creation of mood?

CHAPTER TWO: SCHADENFREUDE DEPLOYED

It came out last week that Trump’s personal lawyer, Michael Cohen—who is now in deep federal shit—only had three clients. The President, who Cohen helped pay off a porn star who he had an affair with. His second client, a major GOP fundraiser called Elliot Broidy, who Cohen also helped to pay off a playmate who Broidy also had an affair with. And then, Cohen had one more client. Out of seven billion people, who could have also wanted to join this club, and use Michael Cohen as a lawyer? Only one other person did. And this person’s identity had remained a complete mystery—until today. (Trevor Noah, April 17, 2018)

A clip of a CNN breaking news broadcast follows Noah’s words. Threatening her demeanour of professionalism, anchor Brooke Baldwin announces with a look of incredulity that the mystery client has been revealed as Sean Hannity, noted talk show host at Fox News. As the clip ends, Noah presses his palms together, a praying gesture as he looks up and mouths ‘thank you’ to the heavens, accompanied with the studio audience’s sounds of rejoicing. He continues:

You know right now Hannity’s probably on the phone, like, “Hey honey, it’s so weird how I used the guy who pays off porn stars and mistresses to get me out of that parking ticket, hahahah heheh it’s funny, right? Hello...h-hello?” And once you know that Hannity has personal skin in the game, it’s fun to go back and look over his coverage [of the Mueller raids of Cohen’s office].

The show proceeds to display a montage of Hannity’s reports on the Mueller investigation, revealing him getting increasingly agitated in his language and tone of voice (“Cohen’s payment is a *perfectly* legitimate business move...”), much to the delight of the watching audience. “Looking over that, it looks less like a news report, and more like a guy giving himself a pep talk... ‘Buckle up, it’s gonna be a rough ride! Hah!’, as Noah’s version of Hannity inhales an imaginary line of cocaine. Then, “Please, do enjoy”, Noah says, as the audience is treated to a collection of clips in

which Hannity is interrogated on-air by fellow news anchors and guest speakers, revelling in his tight smile as he is humiliated and interrupted in the middle of his sentence to be called out by a range of individuals, some disapproving, some gleeful and broadcasting their own schadenfreude.

I have thus far suggested that while schadenfreude does bear relevance to the concepts of emotion and feeling, its makeup more suitably aligns with that of affect, where the encounters between different bodies motivate a particular (political) movement. While it is noted that a key tenet of affect is its ephemerality, the process of affect can to some degree be drawn-out and visualised in media. *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* uses a variety of techniques to leverage schadenfreude in this way. While “people feel pleasure over another person’s misfortune”, this chapter does not suggest that neither people nor media commonly “desire to sadistically engineer this misfortune” (Smith et al. 543). Instead, the role of media here is to draw closer attention to instances of schadenfreude and dedicate space to pursuing schadenfreude as a way to affectively resonate with audiences and their left-leaning tendencies. Even though whole sections or episodes of content may be structured around a specific humiliation of a topical individual, neither Smith et al. nor I wish to insinuate the media’s malicious intent in these regards. In this chapter, I deal with several clips that employ various techniques by which the show seeks to deploy a particular form of justice-based schadenfreude and structure the audience’s relation to conservative ideology, namely those of semiotic, intertextual cues, and rhetorical analogy as a technique to ‘other’ or ‘objectify’ conservative figures in order to create a political subject position and reinforce unifying group attributes. Here, both media techniques work as distancing devices to create a division and separation from conservatism. To provide the context for these various techniques, my research will encompass the use of a diverse range of clips with an equally diverse range of subjects and individuals. Throughout, I will address the significance of distance and proximity to the potency of schadenfreude, how the progression from disgust to delight is manufactured in

these techniques as the key component to schadenfreude and explain its purpose in political online content.

Justice-Based Schadenfreude

For the affective situation of schadenfreude to arise, it must be preceded by the establishment of what is to be laughed at, and the reasons for why this must be so. As I have mentioned, it appears that justice-based schadenfreude is grounded in something the audience already finds offensive to their political tastes. It is differentiated from other forms of schadenfreude, such as ones motivated by personal moments of envy or rivalry, highlighting “an unsavoury side of human nature, especially when this pleasure seems malicious or gleeful” (Smith et al. 531). This more commonly understood form of schadenfreude is socially understood to be shameful, and something in which one should not take pride, or at the very least, not broadcast. Smith et al. note that in this more interpersonal and secretive equation of schadenfreude, the pleasure felt at a ‘rival’s’ expense explicitly points to a hidden competitiveness between individuals. Seeing a colleague or friend—with whom there is some form of competition, or an undercurrent of envy—experience a misfortune or humiliation naturally leads to a personal gain for the subject, mostly in the shape of an increased feeling of self-satisfaction or sense of superiority (536). Here, I see Spinoza’s notion of the ‘increased capacity’ of the body realised—as our colleague’s work is scored lower, our own is placed higher in comparison, as is our self-esteem.

This chapter investigates *The Daily Show’s* engagement with a different brand of schadenfreude: justice-based schadenfreude. This branch of schadenfreude engages public and political bodies in a space of hypocrisy and repulsion. Finding pleasure in the misfortunes that hypocrites suffer “involve[s] [the person] being caught for the same immoral behaviour that they claim not to engage in, or which they criticize others for performing” (537). Thus, when the person, who has displayed “inconsistency between their statements and their actions, which is distasteful to

others to begin with" (537), is caught, it is both deserved and pleasing in the eyes of the audience. Justice-based *schadenfreude* in this arena creates a 'symmetry', whereby the "immoral action matching the hypocrite's original moral position makes the outcome seem especially fitting and just" (538). It establishes a sense of poetic justice, of a 'karmic retribution', of order and balance restored. It is significant that such a notion of justice provides the added benefit wherein subjects may claim that their pleasure is felt on behalf of the 'greater good', dismissing the possibility that the glee experienced is related to self-interest (539). Though an understanding of this form of *schadenfreude* is vital, my work is expressly concerned with the way in which the liberal format of the show and other similar shows *stretches* and *lengthens* that *schadenfreude* as affect through its media content.

The Daily Show

The Daily Show with Trevor Noah (previously known as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, from 1999-2015, and *The Daily Show with Craig Kilborn* from 1996-1998) is known for its host as 'anchor' delivering the 'news' to its studio audience via satirical monologue. Despite the show's employment of the 'host'—a familiar US television convention (Peterson 66)—it is differentiated from other late-night television comedy of a similar ilk as it makes use of other media, usually derived from news broadcasts, with footage extracted from media news companies such as CNN, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, Fox News, and BBC News. This media bricolage works to contextualise and, effectively, to legitimise the host's coverage of the news, while often fulfilling the dual purpose of setting up jokes. Dealing with topical content and issues, it has a pronounced liberal point of view, often criticising right-wing and Republican ideologies, individuals, policies, and media, though it intermittently deals with a satire of the Democratic Party and Left popular culture. In its current iteration, under the tenure of Trevor Noah, the show has established a YouTube channel, starting in May 2016, which has a current subscriber count of 8.2 million, and 3.1 billion collective 'views'.

The Daily Show, in its practice of borrowing from other media sources, is able to account for potential asynchronicity by including clips of an incident that can be either historical or current in nature. *The Daily Show* often does this by compiling a past history of a conservative figure's statements to assemble an ideological narrative to reinforce their offensiveness to the liberal viewer, as notably demonstrated in the example of Sean Hannity. Insofar as media crafts the situation to elevate the experience of schadenfreude, it is important to note that schadenfreude's two key parts (disgust and delight) are not always bound in an immediate sequence (Greenier 450). That is to say, we can have a former understanding or experience of a person who we find distasteful, and whether it is seconds, days, or years later when witnessing that subject's misfortune, the pleasurable aspect of the affective knot of schadenfreude is invoked.

The use of symbols, words, and media content is useful in fashioning an initial context from which to derive glee. In *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*, this context is established with the choice of clips picked from current news broadcasts that provide legitimacy to the content that Noah is dealing with. However, much like traditional news coverage, it is divorced from a lot of context. Instead, the show centres around the affectivity of soundbites and semiotic image cues, which are condensed and thus more affectively resonant, which work to incite a stronger, immediate sense of disgust. This longer-form technique, where a whole episode is dedicated to the misfortune of a particular individual, provides one context where the importance of semiotics and visuals is important. The other represents a condensed form of schadenfreude. There is no preamble provided by which the offensive object is established as that: *disgusting*.

I would like to turn now to the analysis of one video clip, which addresses both forms of schadenfreude. In the episode, 'Trump visits the UK' (June 2019), the audience is provided some context about Trump's State visit to the UK to visit Queen Elizabeth, at which he discussed the role of American insurance firms in British institutions with former UK Prime Minister Theresa May. After *The Daily Show* reveals

in mishaps by Trump, such as touching the Queen's back (thereby breaking strict royal protocol), the show simply displays a photograph of Trump, in an ill-fitting tuxedo, alongside an impeccably dressed Prince Charles and the Queen. Noah roasts him in various ways:

How can a man have access to the nuclear codes, but not a tailor?

I knew Robert Pattinson was picked to be the new Batman, but now I guess we also know who's going to play the Penguin!

The audience is allowed to take pleasure in the relative incompetence Trump displays at such high-profile events. To cement the point further, the show displays an unflattering photograph of the president as the episode thumbnail, superimposed with 'The Clown'—a reference to popular Netflix series *The Crown*, replicating the show's iconic font for satirical purpose. The use of the thumbnail follows a longstanding tradition of *The Daily Show*, whereby the media team will combine a topical event with a thumbnail and comedic reference to popular culture. This intertextual practice functions as an in-joke to audiences as a way to affirm their cultural knowledge and in-group status, whilst dealing a blow to the object of ridicule for the day.

I take intertextuality to be the "literal and effective presence in a text of another text" (Shakib 1). French linguist Julia Kristeva notes that a text inherently "is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text, in which several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another" (Kristeva 36). *The Daily Show* draws much of its affective power from the use of other media texts in its production. Soundbites and titles for the week are imposed over a choice image (i.e. 'Instigate', a parody of Instagram, with the app icon and image of a Black Lives Matter protest superimposed (December 5, 2014), or 'Agent of S.H.A.D.E', on the topic of US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi coolly ripping President Trump's State of the Union speech behind him on live television, in reference to Marvel's 'Agents of

SHIELD' (February 5, 2020)). These images are often bound to the popular culture of the day. Insofar as these references are topical to the extreme, they date quickly, but in the specific context provide an affective resonance by comparison to an event fresh in the minds and in the current vernacular of the audience.

Intertextuality as a means to affirm an audience's enlightenment has a long history, dating back to Western classical traditions of theatre. For example, it is notable in the work of Aristophanes, with his practice of referring to his other plays as cultural artefacts *during* his newest plays as an inside reference to his audiences' intelligence (Hubbard 17). Noah's wordplay and the show's writers and graphics teams' decisions regarding popular culture references, by the nature of the medium, "tends to be ephemeral and occasion-bound, its effectiveness dependent upon timing and context" (Test 13). Such a combination of texts extracted from popular culture, bound with topical news content, enables the creation of "structures of feeling that reflect the culture, the mood, and the feel of a particular historical moment" (Papacharissi 1). Signs and symbols from pop culture bring the individual into the immediate space, with texts working in conjunction to "amplify the awareness" of a particular intensity (3). The creative use of thoughtful references creates a framework through which the audience structures their engagement with the subject matter. It creates a comedic 'frisson' or some form of affective bodily recognition, where everything associated with the original reference or text unloads back onto the viewer as it is reconsidered in its new context. Crafted so as to highlight certain sentiments, these intertextual references reconfigure and further recontextualise the subject matter in question.

Affective Analogy

Concretising and visualising this movement from disgust to delight is possible with the rhetorical technique of analogy. Given our understanding of how the show sets up the context of disgust with carefully considered symbols and signs to initiate proceedings, they often provide fertile ground for another commonplace technique of

the show: the analogy. Unearthing analogies can be revealing about how we are thinking, and work to establish hypothetical situations. Here, they are used to simultaneously expose and humiliate the object in question.

It is unsurprising that the clip with the most views on *The Daily Show* YouTube channel has one of the most pronounced aspects of *schadenfreude*. In an interview-style format, one of the two main types of the *Daily Show* (alongside Noah's more notable faux news reporting), Noah is placed opposite Tomi Lahren, an American conservative commentator, current Fox News contributor, and a beacon of right-wing ideology. Her show *Tomi* on TheBlaze, owned by Blaze Media (an American conservative media company), was noted for her staunch anti-liberal views and opinions.

The episode begins with the inclusion of one of her clips displaying her typically conservative political notions—namely, her opinion of the actions of Colin Kaepernick, an American football player who infamously knelt during the American national anthem as a means of protest against police brutality in August 2016, reinvigorating the national debate on the Black Lives Matter movement. The broadcast clip of her passionate but irrational response to the event positions her as a staunch reactionary. On protestors, she makes her opinions known, without pause for breath:

It's the same thing time and time again. It started with the Occupy Wall Street brats, moved on to the militant and overtly aggressive Black Lives Matter More crowd, cycled through the [Democratic National Convention] paid violence instigators, and now here we are, November 2016, with President-elect Donald Trump and a crowd of misfit babies formed from every failed movement all sandwiched together to become the largest group of whiners the country has *ever* seen.

Her displays of arrogance and self-righteousness, couched in a performance of nationalistic white womanhood are well set out throughout the course of her

interview with Trevor Noah, which, at time of writing, is the most viewed clip on the channel with 16 million views.

Accompanying her questionable statements, *The Daily Show's* studio audiences' murmurs of disgust, disbelief, and rejection of her words are audible:

I go after anyone. I mean, I've never used racial slurs to address someone, I've never looked down on someone because of their skin colour. To me, true diversity is diversity of thought, not diversity of colour. *I don't see colour.*

This final phrase is followed by an audience laugh of incredulity and disgust for a sentiment which, for many, indicates a willingly ignorant person as 'colour-blindness' is called upon to assuage accusations of racism and claim a progressive identity script (Burke 861; Gallagher 22). The pertinent soundbite, 'I don't see colour', acts as a jumping-off point for a sense of disgust towards Lahren. Following her statement, Noah singles out and repeats her position:

You don't see colour. So, what do you do at a traffic light?

Doubling down on her offensive statements through the use of analogy that highlights the impossibility of her ideas; this is greeted by cheers, laughter, encouragement, and a large round of applause from the studio audience, which acts as an indication to the larger audience online. Here, the audience takes pleasure at her tight smile and attempts to explain herself, revealing the illogical (and ignorant) nature of her argument through the questioning from the host.

In this instance, Noah employs analogy as a "method of amplification", whereby "the literal analogy compares members of the same class; two parallel cases or situations categorized in the same order of experience are so presented as to suggest that what is known to be true in one situation is very likely to be true of the other" (Wilcox and Ewbank 1). According to Kenneth Burke, "[analogy] brings out the thisness of a that or the thatness of a this...and to consider A from the point of view of B, is, of course, to use B as a perspective upon A" (2). Here, this is done to put Tomi

in her place, revealing her beliefs for their irrationality and taking pleasure in her ignorance as Noah places himself in the intellectual high ground. It is an example of pleasure that is dependent on Lahren's humiliation and an abasement of her pride as she is "rendered inferior" (Palshikar 5428) through Noah's rhetorical power.

Analogy is expressed in the symbolic model $A:B :: C:D$. Or, stated verbally:

the relationship between A and B has a significant or meaningful resemblance, similarity, or identity to the relationship between C and D. Thus, as analogy (whether encountered in philosophy, art, science, or rhetoric) involves a similarity, resemblance, or identity relationship between at least two ratios (A/B and C/D); it is a relationship or an expression of a relationship between the ratios of a proportion. (Wilcox and Ewbank 3)

Often these analogies are made obvious. After showing the audience a clip, Noah frequently clarifies his point of view with a helpful "That is like saying..." or "It reminds me of...", followed by his analogy. To return to Hannity, Noah uses analogy comedically to highlight Hannity's hypocrisy:

Hannity: To be absolutely clear, they never involved *any* matter, *any*—sorry to disappoint *so many*—matter between me or a third party a third groups at all, and my questions exclusively almost focused on real estate.

Noah: Wow, he really slipped in the almost there, did you hear it? "All my questions are *exclusivelyalmost* real estate". Yeah, he sounds like the guy at the end of medical ad—"Zurnas is *exclusivelyalmost* side-effect free" [Audience laughs] 'Exclusively almost' is not what people want to hear. If someone tells you they *exclusivelyalmost* have sex with adults, they're not gonna hire you to babysit their kids.

This rhetorical strategy provides a helpful shortcut to understanding the logic of a political ideology or conservative figure. Analogies with "known values function to organize or identify relationships and are selected from among various modes of

expression. On the other hand, where the meaning of one of the terms is not known, the analogy fulfils a predictive, heuristic function" (Wilcox and Ewbank 8). Noah's analogies are not heuristic, for the sake of the audience. Noah's analogies operate not to explain to the viewer what these people are saying, but to elucidate their ridiculousness by rephrasing it. It is not so much using analogy as a teaching device, but for the purposes of rationalisation. Rather than fulfilling heuristic terms, Noah's analogies instead organise known values, representing his effort—and the effort of the show at large—to clarify meaning in a comedic manner. Even if distorted in the process of inference that analogy entails, the creation of these analogies is productive in that it resembles a sort of information, fulfils the need for an emotional or rhetorical understanding of a conservative concept, if not a statistical or historical one.

The emotional comprehension that analogy produces, alongside a comedic sensibility and choice of words, is characteristic of the concept of infotainment, within which *The Daily Show* undeniably falls. However, as the analogy is based on the host's and show writers' sensibilities, and is not strictly an objective means of understanding (if one considers the privileging of 'objectivity' in traditional news media (Kuklinski and Sigelman 822; Figdor 154)), the audience is provided instead with a point of identification and sense of community. The 'affective intensity' these analogies create "becomes meaningful when [they elicit] feelings of community and identity" (Papacharissi 13). The analogies function not merely as a means of understanding values in a more familiar way but are crafted with the specific intention of devaluing the initial idea and laughing at it. Analogy here functions to poke fun at conservative ideology, or put a conservative figure down, revealing these things to be fundamentally illogical, irrational, hypocritical or ignorant. In this case, the conservative's 'place' is lowered; by comparison, the liberal audience member's place is elevated.

These analogic, comedic constructions interrogate the original source material for validity (Kreutzenbacher 209). Here, the work of an analogy "is not merely to

present one object or domain in terms of another, but to present it thus filtered and to come to a 'therefore'" (Wilcox and Ewbank 13). 'Therefore' in this case reveals the fundamental illogical nature of the conservative position and, 'therefore', we conclude that 'we' (the audience) are more highly informed and enlightened individuals. Noah offers up the analogy so the audience can immediately reject the conservative argument; the use of this rhetorical strategy also works by placing the object's ideology as outdated, thereby promoting liberal ideology as forward-thinking. Following Spinoza's logic, then, in the act of being exposed to conservative bodies, the liberal viewer is compelled towards an opposing (that is, Left) ideology.

'Power of Action'

Returning to my specific media example, this apparent forward motion is reflected in a part of the interview where Lahren explains her disgust with Kaepernick for protesting during the national anthem. She disparages Kaepernick for the "patriotic reason" that such an action "disrespect[s] the flag" and the people who died for it, and it was the "wrong way" to protest. In response, Noah poses the question:

What is the right way? So, here's a black man in America who says, 'I don't know how to get a message across. If I march in the streets, people say I'm a thug. If I go out and I protest, people say it's a riot. If I bend down on one knee, then it's not...' What is the right way for a black man to get attention in America?

The show's interview-style format allows the audience to derive pleasure as Noah makes Lahren appear incoherent and adamant even as she cannot answer his question, backed into a corner by her own illogical argument. After being asked a second time, she once again eludes the question by bringing up tangential points. Noah's calm, composed, and intentionally somewhat perplexed voice as he asks for a third time—"again, you haven't answered my question of *how*..."—works in contrast to her impassioned, volatile lines of thinking, as the audience laughs at this juxtaposition. Seeing Noah with a level of awareness that she apparently does not

possess—insight that cuts through her ranting; witnessing her floundering; clearly not being able to articulate her politics beyond relying on isolated incidents, as Noah is able to do—is pleasurable, as our “thrill is linked inextricably with the fact of winning over another party” and the audience is made secure in the “knowledge of superior relative performance” (Smith et al. 533). In producing the sense of ‘winning’ or of experiencing a kind of ‘superiority’, comedic moments such as this one echo the fundamentals of affect. Schadenfreude, and self-satisfaction in particular, allows the viewer to contemplate their body’s “power of action” (Spinoza 419) as the viewer is positioned as the emotionally and politically more aware and intelligent. The audience is afforded a form of justice in the face of damaging ideologies, such as the ones propagated by Lahren—at least in a rhetorical sense.

One could argue that much of the tension and laughter created here is of Lahren’s own doing. By merely expressing her outrageous or controversial viewpoints, she paints herself as comedically unaware of her own fatuity, self-sabotaging her own image and public perception with no additional help from ‘external bodies’ required. However, the creation of schadenfreude that is of interest requires that the object come into contact with or encounter a situation, other body, or media environment which provides the possibility of interaction which fashions the conditions for an audience or viewer taking pleasure in misfortune. It is in the encounter between audience and object that she is shown up. When she is on her show alone, she does not experience those points of friction, or fall into an inferior position, as she does on *The Daily Show*. Here, the significance of proximity comes into question. If the subject is too ignorant to realise their own embarrassment, or at a distance which inherently keeps them out of the knowledge that they are being made fun of, is this within the parameters of schadenfreude? Does it have the same potency and function to create in the audience an affective movement?

The Roast

An arena where we might see this notion coming to the fore is the ‘roast’. Dating back to as early as the 16th century, the modern idea of what constitutes a roast originated in organisations and would take place during annual dinners, where the “victims and topics” were sourced from the daily news (Test 12). The concept of the roast, or “ridicule without mercy” (12), relied on the presence of the ‘victim’, who would be able to retaliate at some point in the event. Usually, the roastee is present for their obliteration, as is most well known in the Comedy Central Network’s ‘Comedy Central Celebrity Roast’, where a celebrity fields a host of savage criticisms from various speakers. In the roast format, pleasure is derived not only from the shocking quips constructed for maximum impact with no taboo too extreme, but also the proximity of the victim—their reaction as they bear the brunt of humiliations against their character. A roast, while associated with a gathering, does not necessarily require a celebrity audience or broadcast comedy special—it is possible to expose any individual to heat with a carefully crafted comment that intends to invoke delight by debasing their character. However, where a traditional roast might allow the roastee the opportunity to speak for themselves, the one-way nature of digital content cuts off this possibility of self-defence. After gleefully revelling in Trump’s disappointment at the low crowd sizes for his UK visit, Noah quips: “It’s like he’s dyslexic for crowd sizes...and also for words.” Alternatively, after the President is seen expressing upset at the comparatively large anti-Trump protests, Noah goes in again: “Protests are like Eric—[Trump] just pretends it doesn’t exist.”

Dually working to ‘roast’ or ‘own’ Eric Trump, building on popular urban tales of the President’s dislike for his own son, this exercise in roasting speaks to a more unabashed glee, and ‘no holds barred’ form of entertainment, with no threat of retaliation. Roasting, as it is conducted in a mediated space such as *The Daily Show*, removes the reciprocity traditionally associated with the practice. As such, an element of schadenfreude and self-satisfaction arises in the very fact that the object is not there

to defend themselves. Both analogies and roasts continue the sensation of *schadenfreude* that is conjured via the primary media event as it is represented through aural and visual means. Often, the two are compounded, wherein the analogy that provides distance and moral political education is collapsed with ridicule, constituting the main form of affective currency that the show ritualises. With these techniques, the audience appears to be learning not foreign political concepts, but an emotional and political maturity. The show presents new processes, techniques, and colourful choices of words by which to demean and put in place conservative thought and identify the holes in conservative ideology. The techniques of analogy, intertextuality, and roasting act to exacerbate and endorse a particular rhetorical way of approaching conservative ideologies and arguments.

Conclusion

It appears the creation of distance achieved within *schadenfreude* echoes that of the increasing distance between political identities at large. Whether investigating video clips that cement a reprehensible ideology or hypocrisy, analogy as a technique to objectify a political identity and reinforce unifying group attributes, or roasting a far-flung figure, all work as distancing devices to create a division between Left and Right. Movement *away* from certain objects and *towards* certain others is the common thread between the semiotic and rhetorical techniques employed by *The Daily Show*. Moreover, the programme's privileging of short, episodic uploads requires that such rhetorical and visual techniques create distance effectively and with haste—so much so that the entire landscape of the show appears transformed for best affective transmission. I view a fundamental sense of political movement as underpinning each and every upload. It is in this very movement, pleasingly shifting away from conservative bodies of disgust along an axis of conservative misfortune, that sustains what I argue is a liberal mood and 'moodscape'. Placed in semantic and semiotic sequences, the satisfactory creation of distance from bodies of conservatism is ripe for spread across online environments.

CHAPTER THREE: MOOD, MIMESIS, AND REMEDIATION

‘Late Night’s Vote for Best Picture: Trump’s Windswept Tan Line’ (*The New York Times*, February 2020).

‘Trump and the Republicans Had a Terrible Weekend, and Late-Night Hosts Are Delighted’ (*Slate*, October 2019).

‘Trevor Noah: Trump realises ‘all the cool kids are laughing at him’ (*The Guardian*, December 2019).

‘As Trump Squirms Under Impeachment Threat, Trevor Noah Dubs Him a “Joker Understudy” (*Vanity Fair*, October 2019).

“‘Who did Sean Hannity have sex with?’: Late-night hosts have a blast at Fox News host’s expense’ (*Salon*, April 2018).

‘Have Trump Supporters Read the Transcript?’ (*Mother Jones*, December 2019).

‘Ivanka Trump Got Jeered in Germany, and Late-Night Joins In’ (*New York Times*, April 2017).

Drawing from the original source material of *The Daily Show*, the articles above are some of many in which the aim is the re-presentation and remediation of affective political content. Following these titles, the articles all borrow the imagery, language, and affective moment of schadenfreude from *The Daily Show*, remediating it through the principles of news media, re-making visible the primary text in all its schadenfreude. In this chapter, I argue that the practice of picking up political content that originates in the platforms of YouTube and television extends its affective reach. That affective video content centred on schadenfreude has a presence in publications like *The Guardian* or *The Washington Post* is of great interest to me in this next step of my research. While some scholars like Jodi Dean might interpret this phenomena less kindly—as symptomatic of a novel flaw in news media wherein “mainstream outlets consider reporting on social media to be journalism”—I argue that it speaks to a much

more complex affective politics. Instead of conceiving them as merely faux attempts at reportage, the spread of *Daily Show* schadenfreude across media outlets might point to the ongoing creation of a liberal *mood*, leveraging the affect of schadenfreude to develop a left-wing *mood landscape*. Whilst some might use the term ‘echo chamber’ or ‘filter bubble’ to describe this phenomenon (Dubois and Blank 730; Flaxman et al. 299; Matakos et al. 1481; Pariser 6), I seek to develop the *affective basis* of such a landscape, exploring how mood is captured in a consonance of titles and content. My aim here is to understand the process by which the affect of schadenfreude is fixed in media structures and patterns, forming a left-wing moodscape.

A significant amount of the literature on affective networks attempts to measure mood in media analytics and audience research, in ‘liked’ tweets, retweets, or in shares, based on data mining and discovering patterns or trends (Bakshy et al. 1130; Garrett 269; Matakos et al. 1492; Procter et al. 470;) Insofar as they do capture a mood, “such techniques tend toward the mean, a levelling of feeling across a community, an amplification of the average” (Coyne 97). This differs slightly from what I conceive as mood, and my examples that I use in this chapter demonstrate how, in conjunction and in succession, they work to ‘paint’ a particular affective landscape through the use of language and remediation. I want to first map out what I call a ‘cinematography’ of schadenfreude in different publications, all originating with material from *The Daily Show*, to establish a mood landscape. In what follows, I am not concerning myself with the analysis of one video in particular, not lauding one title above any other; instead, I explore how various content of a schadenfreudistic nature ends up colouring particular areas of the online liberal space through a process of remediation. I will be looking at the political subject in detail in the next chapter, where I will deal with the individual who is in part produced by the mood that surrounds them, mirroring Coyne’s notion that “mood is a social phenomenon before it is individual” (13); thus, a prior discussion of mood itself is warranted.

In what follows, I argue that an emphasis on *schadenfreude* is productive for mood in its shareable, clickable nature, and creates a sense of community and shared values; however, because it is geared towards creating this sense of community, progress beyond this mark is prematurely halted. While acknowledging *schadenfreude*'s ability to consolidate a particular in-group liberal mood, this chapter argues that *schadenfreude* is not truly politically actionable as an affect. Rather, I suggest that it creates a sense of community through the *foreclosure* of political action, as the mood of *schadenfreude*—of disgust and delight—circulates in lieu of something else—something that might motivate real political change.

Schadenfreude at Large

Alongside more noted institutions such as *The Guardian*, *Daily Show* content is regularly picked up by a range of Internet sites. Take, for example, the article 'Jordan Klepper is back on the election trail, and his first Trump rally was a doozy' (Harvey). Here, the liberal news aggregator and blog, *HuffPost* appropriates and responds to a *Daily Show* video that comprises *Daily Show* political correspondent Jordan Klepper and his interrogation of conservative voters in Republican majority states. Klepper is noted in the article as "known for his popular reports from Donald Trump rallies during the 2016 campaign and will hit the road again to provide a "deep dive" on "issues that matter the most to Americans"" (Harvey). The article references a particular stretch of *Daily Show* videos, in which correspondents interview conservative individuals on a variety of topics, and in doing so consistently reveal fallacies in the interviewees' rationales for their policies by cornering them into a hole of their own logic, subsequently leaving them floundering and backtracking, much to the delight of viewers.

In this article, the video in question covers a series of particularly egregious ideologies from the mouths of conservative voters, drawing sounds of disgust from the *Daily Show* viewers, before being replaced by glee as the more informed Klepper

traps the interviewees, all the while sneaking in digs at the oblivious voters. While the article does not explicitly allude to a particular notion of *schadenfreude*, the provocative title beckons the reader and promises an exciting read, which, as its main course, offers the video clip. Equally, the article revels in the comeuppance, encouraging its readers to ‘buckle up’ as they are offered ‘mind-blowing insights’ into the psyche of American voters.

From an economic perspective, the presence of *Daily Show* content in secondary news sites highlights the reliance of news media on aggregation. Though it functions as a safe financial move, this ‘remediation’, or “the representation of one medium in another” (Bolter and Grusin 44), additionally works to sustain an ongoing liberal mood. Bolter and Grusin initially suggest that practices of remediation often denote some form of competition, as the older medium, “is highlighted and represented in digital form” (45) improved upon and made superior. However, in the context of ‘late’ new media, “much of the current World Wide Web also remediates older forms *without* challenging them” (46). Both *The Daily Show* and *The New York Times*, for example, co-exist digitally, as they moved online—to YouTube and an independent website, respectively. Important to note, too, is that *The Daily Show* often cites *The New York Times* in its in-show practice of extracting from ‘traditional’ news content. It is less a competition between them than a media symbiosis, with both sites functioning “in a constant dialectic” (50). Neither one of them threatens the other. It is by this logic—of remediation with risk removed—that a mood is created. The remediated text exists alongside the original, expanding on its content, reconfiguring the contours of *schadenfreude* in a different digital realm.

Remediation at Work

In December 2019, respected publication *The Guardian* reports on the following: US President Donald Trump is openly mocked by other world leaders at NATO’s 70th Summit in London in late 2019. A video surfaces of Canadian Prime Minister Justin

Trudeau, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte talking and laughing over President Trump's conduct at the summit. The video captures the leaders in question acting "like catty, gossipy bitches" over Trump's mannerisms, his excuses, phrases, and alleged lateness to the event. For all intents and purposes, this is a valid news event worthy of reporting: witnessing world leaders revelling in the US President's mishaps must point to some global tensions, and sense of top-level insecurity, of which the public ought to be informed. The article mentions how Trump, in response, called Trudeau "two-faced" and announced that he would leave the summit early: "It was like Trump was at a sleepover, and all the other kids turned on him. And now he's there like, 'Mom, I know it's a day early, but could you come pick me up from NATO?'"

Such a gleeful analogy seems out of place in one such formal news institution, and upon further investigation, the article is certainly not traditional reportage. Its location under the 'Culture' tab and not 'News' hints at this. Titled "Trevor Noah: Trump realized 'all the cool kids at school are laughing' at him", the article explicitly and openly remediates *Daily Show* content, employing Noah's analogy. The article then goes on to include a thumbnail from the video that showcases the face of Trevor Noah, expressing a sentiment of delight. Bolstering this, the article embeds a tweet from *The Daily Show's* Twitter account, which allows the reader to then play the video in question. After offering these various media accoutrements, the article proceeds to serve up summaries of other late night hosts—Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel—linking to their comedic content, responses in a similar vein to Noah, in a self-proclaimed 'late-night TV roundup', before concluding with other related articles.

Qualities of photomontage and information saturation are standard fare for contemporary webpages and is a media convention instantly familiar to most. *The Guardian's* interface, like many modern interfaces "allows the developer to reorganise texts and images" taken from the original source, but here, "the reorganisation does not call into question the character of a text or the status of an image" (Bolter and

Grusin 46). Despite remediation not challenging the content itself, the content is not simply poured from one medium to the next. Instead, it takes on a different quality as it is re-presented and remediated in its new arena. Simultaneously then, the source content and its remediated format work together to strengthen the sense of a shared liberal view among a public. Unlike other remediated texts such as video games, where the goal is one of 'immediacy' or "a unified visual space" (33), *The Guardian* here does not intend to make invisible the mediation. Instead, news sites' "contemporary *hypermediacy* offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as "windowed" itself—with windows that open on to other representations or other media" (Bolter and Grusin 33-34). This remediation is present in sites such as *The Guardian*, which appropriates the content of *The Daily Show* and furthers the affective reach of *schadenfreude* and contributes to the production of a left-wing mood landscape.

I suggest that a left-wing moodscape is produced through the way that the secondary publications remediate the primary media text as well as, crucially, the manner of engagement with media content that these publications and media institutions themselves are associated with. Digital media technologies themselves are "objects, mediators and repositories of affect" (Kuntzmann 6). While *The Guardian*, *Salon*, *HuffPost*, *The Daily Beast*, or *The Washington Post* regularly provide updates on the *schadenfreude* of late-night politics, their contribution to a mood landscape rests upon a double logic of affect. These institutions as media sites act as 'repositories' of feelings of *schadenfreude* due to their remediation of *The Daily Show's* affective content, which is encoded not only in the content of the articles themselves but "'in the practices that surround their production and reception'" (Cvetkovich qtd. in McBean 285).

Schadenfreude as 'Genre'

In this, media institutions bear many similarities with filmic notions of 'genre'. Lauren Berlant argues that "a genre is an aesthetic structure of affective expectation" (4). As a result, "when we approach a certain genre, we expect to encounter a particular register of feelings—so that there is some advanced expectation of how a certain generic form will make us feel" (McBean 289).

I suggest that a similar logic applies to news media platforms; and here we might acknowledge Marshall McLuhan's notion that "the medium is the message" (8), to some degree. Like a marble statue whose medium inherently imparts a sense of space in its tangibility, or a photograph that inherently imparts a sense of 'truth' in its realism, to a homemade YouTube video that imparts a sense of authenticity in its production quality, news media so too imparts a particular sentiment. A history and knowledge of the medium and its aesthetic nature is relevant when considering how a genre or particular media format structures our approach to its content. Certain reputable, time-honoured names and news mediums, such as *The Guardian* or *The New York Times*, inherently connote and endorse a particular *objective* means of political and affective engagement to any given content in a way that is different from a more glossy, slick or youth-oriented site such as *Vanity Fair* or *Slate*.

Their different strategies are noticeable first off in the particular language used to describe the secondary content, visible in the title. These titles are dually functional in that they "orchestrate the activation contours of the discrete affects both to incite our own bodies into immediate mimetic response, and, in the same moment, by the same movement, to conscript affects into signification" (Gibbs 192). The phrasing of different titles from different sites is not illogical, despite many of their seemingly casual word choices. A common titling trope seems to address the reader lightly, affectively: 'Trump and the Republicans Had a Terrible Weekend, and Late-Night Hosts Are Delighted' (*Slate*, December 2019). Two phases, two expressions, joined together in a reflection of the equation of schadenfreude. Here, there is a direct

acknowledgement of the affective knot of *schadenfreude*, that being the clear progression from humiliation to pleasure that the title makes unmistakable. It reflects Gibbs' notion that whether "an affect is coming or going" it "is information that is then conscripted into semiotic systems of meaning" (Gibbs 191). Unlike a traditional news title, on the same topic, such as 'Trump legal team calls impeachment 'brazen' attempt to overturn election' (*The Guardian*, December 2019), the titling strategy seeks a particular affective response from the reader in line with the *Daily Show* content it is presenting to them. Each 'genre' of media site is governed by a distinct criteria, a characteristic language, and a particular logic behind the remediation of second-party content. Much like different film genres, the idiosyncrasies of different media institutions, with their own histories, architecture, and languages, the different qualities of their *medium* allows them each to develop and ornament the topographical contours of a moodscape that keeps *schadenfreude* as its affective centre.

The Cinematography of Mood

Such reconfiguration of *schadenfreude* to fit into the architecture and form of different publications and sites "creates a kind of mood landscape that nudges [the viewer] in certain directions" (Coyne 38). Even with the media examples I have already discussed, as *schadenfreude* occupies and reaches into the edges of these domains that are not their original context, a particular mood landscape is becoming apparent. The term 'mood landscape' or 'moodscape' in itself suggests a sense of topography or form, an assemblage of structures and content that is making up this panorama—a mediatised cinematography, so to speak, lending itself to Coyne's understanding of mood as "a condition with some constancy" (7).

As it may already be obvious to the reader, it is helpful, when describing mood, to borrow from the language of Film Studies. Much as a director seeks to set a particular mood or 'condition with constancy' via elements of sound, image, language, and scene that work cohesively, such constancy is achieved if we conceive

of mood as not captured in an isolated text or unit, but through a consonance and cumulation of various semiotic cues and media texts, through bodies and interfaces that are “mutually unfolded and enfolded structures” (Gibbs 190). The mood (or aura) is transfigured by the context it is situated in, the images or texts preceding or following it, and draws meaning from its specific placement alongside other texts (Berger 4).

I would like to proffer that this conceptualisation of mood is informed by properties of mimesis. Mimesis has been understood as a “contagious process that takes place transversally across a topology connecting heterogenous networks of media and conversation, statements and images, and bodies and things’ in which affect plays a central part” (Gibbs 187). Gibbs’ notion of thinking across media structures as carving out a particular mood, or sketching a mood landscape, is informed and indeed reliant on the ephemeral properties of affect. It creates an aesthetic environment that fashions subjectivity. It inspires a particular subject position as one that is positioned in relation to the peaks and troughs of the media topography and its semiotic affective contours. It is not the particular following of a text that is interesting, but the mapping out of all of these texts, these titles of a similar build, updated and shared in different media institutions and spheres that contributes to an overall mood—a particular left-wing mood. A lack of object specificity does not hinder this liberal mood; it is merely ‘conservatism’ that is made the target.

Ultimately, a mood is simply “prolonged core affect without an object” (Russell 149). It is objectless: “we don’t have a mood about any one thing in particular but, rather, about everything in general” (Coyne 32). This demonstrates the pitfalls of the mood landscape, something which deals in a mood of *schadenfreude*, but beyond that, is not content or object-specific, aside from corralling *q̄u*

engaged with a variety of affective content and conservative figures, with a central idea of *schadenfreude*, but towards what specific policies and legislation or ideologies

is constantly shifting. A mood landscape designed around *schadenfreude* is defined as 'liberal' because of a general rejection of conservatism, not as 'liberal' because of gravitation towards progressivism. Because there is a creation of distance from conservatism through *schadenfreude*, there appears a forward motion, a progressive motion, a *liberal* motion. The body's motion or capacity appears to be increased, as per the logic of Spinoza's affect, at all stages of *schadenfreude*. *Schadenfreude*'s initial sensation is that of disgust, informed by a "trajectory of repulsion" (Ngai 11) from the object, which establishes itself as intolerable to Left sensitivities. Further endorsing the idea of distance, of motion away from conservatism, is the act of laughter, of pleasure in the misfortune of the intolerable object, that positions the subject in a position of superiority in that immediate instance. There is at once an equation of disgust and pleasure, repulsion and attraction, a "phobic striving "away from" and a 'philic "striving towards" (11).

However, I would like to suggest that the latter half of this equation is imagined. While the object of disgust is obvious and concrete in the moment, the affect of *schadenfreude* does not present an equally obvious or concrete 'philia'. Rather, the pleasure *is* the misfortune, as is the *separation* from the unfortunate. The separation that is present in *schadenfreude* is reflected in its remediated forms, that very sense of separation and distance between Right failings and Left values colouring the titles of articles scattered through liberal publications. In tandem, they suggest an overall movement away from conservatism through the affective means of *schadenfreude*. However, it is unclear whether this motion is productive beyond its role in painting a mood of political disdain, delight and ultimately, distance. I argue that the mood landscape, digitally created through a proliferation of affective content, of articles and titles working together concurrently, reveals this 'mood' to circulate in lieu of democratic discussion. The acts of remediation of the highly attractive and potent affect of *schadenfreude* with its apparent sense of motion works wonderfully with the properties of communicative capitalism, the notion that the message need not be

understood, but simply “repeated, reproduced and forwarded” (Dean 27) in the information economy. While such online media pluralises avenues for civic engagement and political expression, they do not de facto generate democratizing developments (Papacharissi 26). Again, this process is constructive in and of itself for formulating a mood landscape within which a particular ‘branded liberalism’ can flourish but dually exposes the shortcomings of ubiquitous media and imagined fantasies of open democracies (Dean 36).

The Daily Show’s ideology and affective core of schadenfreude is enforced as it is endorsed by reputable left-wing institutions online, a productive enterprise in fashioning what we can understand as a liberal mood centred around schadenfreude. Without overly concerning myself with the task of following a single video clip as it moves from its show to a tweet to publication, before inevitably being overtaken by another media product of the same ilk, my research shows how, through the consonance and remediation of these videos and content over time, a mood landscape is established, motivated by the seemingly forward motion of schadenfreude.

CHAPTER FOUR: SCHADENFREUDE IN SHAPING SUBJECTIVITY

Thus far, I have classified and understood schadenfreude as an affect, informed by the existence of an external (mediated) stimuli to which we respond, and which in turn increases the body's capacity for action. The suggestion of the body motivated by an outer force bears similarities with the logic of interpellation, or the process wherein an external force acts as an influencing body, which brings us into a particular action and orients us according to a particular ideology (Butler 3). Such a connection between affect and interpellation allows me to draw a helpful parallel between the two when beginning my discussion of the liberal subject. In this chapter, I hope to untangle these ideas through a discussion of the political subject and how it is produced and reified through the schadenfreude of *The Daily Show*, and investigate the media that interpellate the individual into a liberal subject position.

In this chapter, I propose that the affective structure of schadenfreude—the progression from disgust to delight that is dependent on the presence of misfortune—is visualised by late-night comedy in a *fragmented process*. In particular, I suggest the concept of the vignette, or set-up, works to establish a sense of commonality between audience members, as well as establishing the conservative figure as an object of disgust. This mechanism, coupled with the host's changing inflections and studio audience reactions, work strategically to emphasise what I am calling an *arc of humiliation* of the conservative object. Further, the media's modes of hailing the audience through schadenfreude works to carve out a stable subject position for the liberal viewer. Finally, this chapter argues that the production of the liberal subject through schadenfreude is not purely confined to the timespan of an individual clip. Rather, it is through the repetition, or what I am calling the *consonance*, of these formulaic videos—over months and years—that contributes to the ongoing production and fixing of the liberal subject position. In this chapter, I draw upon videos reaching as far back as 2016 and encompassing the present day to

reflect the longstanding presence of *schadenfreude* in the *Daily Show* and how it has played a crucial role in the shaping of contemporary liberal subjectivity.

I would like to clarify that my interest here is in political subjectivity, specifically—more so than in political identity. The two categories bear distinction. My ongoing focus on affect is, in my mind, more appropriate to attach to a discussion of subjectivity, and the notion of being ‘produced’ in an ongoing, reflexive process; this is in contrast to the notion of identity as something that is ‘formed’ as a conscious process (Butler 5). Of course, the concepts of subjectivity and identity interweave in numerous and various ways. However, for the purposes of clarity, I will focus here on the role of interpellation in constructing subjectivity, in which interpellation is understood as the process by which the subject is ‘hailed’ and thus produced through ideology (Althusser 771).

In this chapter, and borrowing primarily from Louis Althusser and Judith Butler’s canonical writing on subjectivity, I arrive at the central tension that has followed me since the inception of this thesis: *what does mediated schadenfreude achieve for viewers as liberal subjects?* I am not as interested in the production of subjectivity by methods of guilt, coercion, hegemonic ideologies, heteronormativity, or capital—although I do not intend to dispute the existence of these forms of interpellation in other media texts. However, I ask this of *schadenfreude*: *are there any coercive forms in the way we are interpellated by schadenfreude? Is the presence of laughter in fact working to obscure a kind of violence?*

Subjectivity as a Double-Edged Sword

As I have noted throughout my thesis, it is extraordinarily difficult to draw up clear lines between categories such as interior and exterior, subject and object, and affect and emotion. This is because “there is no one-way causality in this account - each part of the description already anticipates or assumes its other parts, and each is intimately entangled within the other” (Davis 888). Such is true for the distinction

between subjectivity and identity. Without audience research, I cannot make evidential claims about viewers of *The Daily Show* and their fully-fledged political identities, understood as identities that are informed by a myriad of factors (and subject positions), formed over an extended period of time, involving the ideas of autonomy, a “contained soul”, shaped by ‘otherness’, and questions of difference (Bell 215; Brady and Schirato 27; Hall 4; Howarth 227). Subjectivity, which I understand as more microscopic, and of the body rather than the ego (Howarth 226), with more indistinct borders, enfolds more obviously the ideas of affect and encounter—though I aim to complicate these ideas in this chapter. In what follows, notions of identity come into contact with subjectivity in the form of identification—a term that, for my research, acts as a vehicle between the contested ideas of identity and subjectivity, and a term that I hope will allow me to acknowledge the presence of identity without necessitating that I compromise my primary focus on subjectivity.

The individual is always-already preceded by systems of language and signification. There is no instance where the subject can overcome this cultural reality. Subjectivity, for Althusser, arises from existing ideologies (771). Similarly, subjectivity, according to Butler, must be preceded by norms (5). A norm may be said to “exist in advance, to circulate in the world before it touches upon us” (5); this echoes Coyne’s ideas of mood that I have articulated previously, since “mood is a social phenomenon before it is individual” (Coyne 13). Norms—like moods—make an impression on us; that impression “opens up an affective register, act upon a sensibility at the same time as they form it” (Butler 5). Though Butler, Althusser, and Coyne all corroborate the notion that some form of structure or atmosphere anticipates our social existence, for Butler, such norms have a “double meaning”; they both “enable and constrain life” (Davis 886), working to open *and* close the body’s potential avenues and movement simultaneously. Here, I borrow Butler’s definition of subjectivity, pieced together from a selection of her works, as arranged by Noela Davis. Its internal meanings appear incongruous:

[Subjectivity] means both subjection (in the sense of subordination) and becoming a subject. It seems as well to contain the paradox of power as it both *acts upon* and *activates a body*... If the word subjection has two meanings, to subordinate someone to power and to become a subject, it presupposes the subject in its first meaning, and induces the subject in its second. Is there a contradiction here, or is it a paradox—a constitutive paradox? (Butler qtd. in Davis 883, emphasis added)

Insofar as the 'subject' suggests "a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions", so too is it a "subjected being who submits" to an external authority (Althusser 776). This subject is constituted via interpellation, the acknowledgment and identification from an outside source:

The potential of interpellation as the basis for a performative theory of subjectivity lies in its being a naming that *constitutes* the subject it so names. There is no subject before this naming; that is, interpellation does not describe a pre-existing or given subject which then internalises or appropriates its subjectifying conditions. Instead, interpellation gives an account of the genesis of the subject; that is, of the subject as an *already* subjectified, and thus social, being. (Davis 882)

When discussing interpellation, it is vital to assume that there is "something that responds...to answer the hail" (882). However, because it is only *through* interpellation that a subject comes to be, there is not yet the presence of a "who" to do this hearing—not yet the presence of someone *to* respond to the call. In dealing with subjectivity and addressing people as such, as interpellation is wont to do, one is confronted with the fact that we are forced to "refer to what does not yet exist" (883). As a result, one is presented with the complicated task of explaining what or who exactly turns to answer, how "it" recognises that it is being called, and why it turn would turn in the first place (882). My aim with interpellation here is to describe how *The Daily Show* inspires a genesis of the liberal subject, and then goes on to reinforce

this subject position as it repeatedly and formulaically uses schadenfreude as part of its particular brand of satire.

Affective Structure of Schadenfreude

While paradoxical by necessity, I find that accounts of subjectivity as developed by Althusser and Butler compliment my understanding of schadenfreude as an affect since it, too, comprises a double-sided nature, enfolding both a sense of rejection *and* activation, of disgust *and* delight. The affective movement within schadenfreude, from disgust to delight, appears to me to be a very particular kind of movement that hinges on the humiliation of the conservative figure, and which produces a liberal subject position. As I have argued, I class schadenfreude as an affect for its automatic, precognitive nature, delivering a sense of warmth and satisfaction to the one experiencing it. This affect is legitimised by a prior experience of disgust with the second affecting body, and is expressed at any subsequent offence for which the perpetrator suffers. In liberal media, it is an affect motivated by the body of a ‘disgusting’ conservative in a political realm, and the comeuppance of that figure.

I suggest that the affect of schadenfreude comprises the framework from which we can move away from an unpleasant or offensive situation. Schadenfreude denotes a sense of movement that recalls Spinoza’s definition of the affect of pleasure: “the passion by which the mind passes from a state of less perfection to a state of greater perfection” (Spinoza 399). Thus, schadenfreude is deeply affective, or embedded in the logics of affect, because it acts as the transitional mode from which one might shift from a state of less perfection - in this case, disgust, which individuals experience as they are exposed to these offensive conservative bodies—to one of greater perfection, as subjects experience pleasure via the revealing of a misfortune or humiliation that elevates our self. Schadenfreude is operationalised in the affective passage from the disgusted position to the self-satisfied position. Schadenfreude is the affective plane found within the logic of pleasure.

As “affect is suggestive of not-yet-fully-formed possibilities and potentialities” (Papacharissi 311), schadenfreude works as the political media content ‘hails’ the viewer, placing them (consciously or not) and their body into a liberal subject position. *The Daily Show* represents the ‘capture’ of this affect (Papacharissi 26), both in the immediate text and in remediated arenas. To enable the progression required by schadenfreude to bring the viewer into a liberal subjectivity, *The Daily Show* first establishes the conditions of disgust on which justice-based schadenfreude must be predicated. It brings the viewer into a space of repulsion against the object, which legitimises that object’s oncoming humiliation. From here, the show leads the viewer through the right-wing object’s misfortune, motivating a sense of delight as the viewer becomes both a *subject of* liberalism and *subject to* liberal behaviours. The viewer hence becomes subjectified through a “modality of engagement that is primarily affective” (Papacharissi 310). Thus, it appears to me that the liberal subject position is constitutively structured by schadenfreude’s two modes: disgust and delight. I see this structural support for liberal subjectivity as fashioned in tandem with the two constitutive elements of subjectivity, as I demonstrate below.

“Yes, it is me!”/“No, it is not me”: Becoming a Liberal Subject

The Daily Show’s ongoing forays into both physical and ideological right-wing zones provide plentiful accounts of schadenfreude for the liberal viewer. Jordan Klepper, correspondent for *The Daily Show*, journeys into Republican territories as part of the show’s fieldwork in a recurring segment titled ‘Jordan Klepper Fingers the Pulse’. 2016 marked the first of these instalments, as Klepper investigates the 2016 US Presidential race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, and the ideological tilt of GOP voters present at a Trump rally in a video titled ‘Putting Trump Supporters through an Ideology Test’ (20 August 2016). Noah introduces Klepper’s piece, who then provides a vignette detailing Presidential hopeful Donald Trump’s proposal of an ideological screening test for potential immigrants. This vetting process seeks to weed out individuals with “extreme views about religion, such as its oppression of

women, gays...and non-believers". After the show first provides a montage of the scene—fluttering US and Confederate flags, queues of people bearing 'Trump/Pence 2016'—he encounters a myriad of right-wing political individuals, immediately noticeable for the 'Southerner' stereotypes they embody. One of these quiz-style interviews with a middle-aged white woman, reliably clad in head-to-toe 'Make America Great Again' gear, does well to summarise the type of 'schadenfreudistic' encounter between Left and Right (for the Left's benefit):

Klepper: Can a woman be President?

Woman: The Presidency is a man's job.

K: I have, 'women *are* qualified to be President'.

W: No. A female has more hormones. She could start a war in [snaps fingers] ten seconds. [*Studio audience groans audibly*] If she has hot flashes, whatever, boom!

K: Haven't *all* wars been started by men?

W: ... [silence continues]

[*Studio audience laughs, claps*]

W: ...hmm...yes.

The studio audience's expression of schadenfreude is audible in this mediated exchange. Klepper, in his calm, 'news-reporter' tone, polished demeanour, and simple line of questioning that cut through illogical argument, is positioned as the antithesis of the woman here. In this media clip, the conservative might be considered an object of disgust for the viewer. In this clip, the conservative woman's presence and words reinforce an existing regressive right-wing ideology. The woman's body—notably occupying the stereotype of the 'redneck' as white, reactionary, uneducated, otherwise "anachronistic" and "obsolescent" in their ideology (Jaroz and Lawson 9), replete in brazenly patriotic merchandise—is branded as 'repulsive' through the audience response. The conservative object as one of disgust is "represented as if it

were obtruding itself for our enjoyment”, a representation against which the subject strives (Kant qtd. in Ngai 334). Such ‘striving against’ is noticeable in the studio audience reaction to her initial comments. Outward groans and snickers of disbelief crystallise the notion that this body—the object of conservatism—strays from the viewer’s ideals. Here, there is the presence of an ‘always-already’ subjectified liberal subject, who is privy to pre-existing concepts of the ‘redneck’ or the ‘southerner’. The show nonetheless takes care to remind the viewer precisely of this history via the background of the parking lots with beat-up cars decked out in flags, to address the liberal subject and bring them into the space.

The first studio audience response of disgust, their pained groans and shocked exclamations, precedes the secondary audience response of delight, their claps and hoots spurred by the moment of misfortune that the conservative suffers at the hands of Klepper in front of a camera. Her humiliation is set up. What incenses the laughter and delight even further is the women’s apparent blindness to the fact she is being made to look stupid, without realising this is the case. It is fair to argue that this type of conservative figure is an easy and reliable target for *schadenfreude*, one of many similar bodies edited into the media content with the express knowledge that such shocking, polarising views makes for subsequently amplified studio audience reaction, or ‘good TV’. Nevertheless, the unabashed-ness of their regressive concepts acts as a dynamic space to define liberal subjectivity in opposition to such regression. The audience’s expression of glee at the abasement of the woman’s pride indicates their ‘cooperative response’, in Fiske’s words, thus indicating the audience “is considered to have adopted the assigned or assumed subjective position” (308), and have recognised their position is one that is figured in opposition to the conservative, not partaking or endorsing the ideology or behaviour of the conservative.

Taking into account both the audience’s expression of disgust and delight, the conservative body thus acts as a site of articulation of a liberal subjectivity. More specifically, the right-wing body operates as a space of encounter that encourages the

liberal viewer to engage in a practice of self-reflexivity and evaluation (Sender 83). This is, as Sender suggests, part of the ongoing production of the liberal subject. The clip mentioned above has an affective power in defining the political opposition, reminding the audience of these active Right voters and their 'repulsive' political taste; this works to reinvigorate and reify liberal codes of conduct to the contrary. More persuasive than the groans of aversion, however, is the laughter, which acts as the ultimate arbiter of proper liberal behaviour. The laughter of *schadenfreude* in the conservative's humiliation here acts as "a force of real social potency" for the watching liberal subject, "capable of sustaining values and inducing conformity" (Halliwell 285).

Laughter—arguably more so than disgust—works to establish the parameters for how to act as a good liberal by encouraging a self-monitoring gaze (Sender 100). The laughter is about misfortune and is often seen as a shameful or cruel indulgence. But in terms of justice-based *schadenfreude*, this sense of shame is done away with as the laughter appears to restore a sense of balance, restore justice. In this sense, the laughter is considered 'deserved' since the object of laughter in question is an object of *disgust*.

The veneer of deservingness, I believe, camouflages the fact that a certain kind of behaviour is being suppressed, a manner of behaviour that is articulated via the humiliation of another. As such, "we cannot dissociate ourselves from the brutality of abjection because it is constitutive of our own being. We matter because another does not. The price we pay for our subjectivity is to live as coerced beings with violence at the core of our selves" (Davis 886). Perhaps violence, and its association with more physical forms of injury, abuse, wounding, and damage, is a strong word for what *schadenfreude* constitutes. One could certainly argue that this form of affective 'violence' pales in comparison to something like the violence expressed in conservative ideologies against women, minority groups, involving real and tangible negative harm. The purpose of my writing is not in any way to endorse

these negative or repressive ideologies. However, the presence of violence in one arena does not foreclose it in another.

Necessitating the 'Set-up'

I have discussed the role of analogy before, suggesting that it does not serve a heuristic purpose, but rather a rhetorical and cultural one. Similarly, intertextuality functions to affirm the intellectual knowledge of the viewer through reference to previous texts, marking the viewer as informed, cultured, and well-versed in modern cultural and political content. In their analogic nature, jokes in *The Daily Show* often tend to enfold popular culture references and lived experiences as a shared horizon of meaning for the audience's benefit, whereby the "intertextuality facilitates our interpellation into a particular subject position" (Crinall 21). Interpellation "recruits" subjects among the individuals, or, as Althusser puts it, "transforms" individuals into subjects (Althusser 774) by establishing a common understanding.

In context of *The Daily Show*, it presupposes the individual is reliably informed, emotionally aware, and culturally intelligent, aware of the modern context. The use of the vignette, and analogy within the vignette, achieves this. A video of note details and works to compare former President Barack Obama, a beloved figure of liberal ideology and progressivism, with current President Donald Trump and his public engagement with issues of healthcare and the White House leaks during the 2018 US midterm elections (11 September 2018). The video, "Obama Lights Up Donald Trump", accompanied with a characteristic thumbnail introducing "Democalypse 2018", begins with a vignette by Noah, in which he poses a series of questions; as we will see, the vignette lays the foundation for the ensuing experience of *schadenfreude*:

There are many debates in life that don't have answers. Could LeBron have beaten Michael Jordan? Could Mike Tyson have beaten Mohammed Ali? Could Bert beat Ernie? We know they're friends, but there is some real tension there. And of course,

could Donald Trump have beaten Obama in a race? Not a foot race, we all know the answer to that one. [*Studio audience laughs*] No, a campaign one.

The 'set-up', both as a comedic technique and an interpellative one, with its fundamentally intertextual nature, functions to bring the audience into a shared space of knowledge. It acts as a foundational layer, a platform to proceed, acknowledging the audience as culturally well-rounded. Dually, the vignette works to ensure that those who may not understand the format are welcomed into the environment of the show via reference to popular culture. Acknowledging and naming people accepts that they "are always-already interpellated as subjects with a personal identity... it interpellates them in such a way that the subject responds: 'Yes, it really is me!'... it obtains from them the *recognition* that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence" (Althusser 297, original emphasis).

The media content in *The Daily Show* provides a space in which the liberal subject may enter, and so "performatively produces this subject as this name and as occupying this position in the world" (Davis 179). This subject is politically informed and in possession of a level of rhetorical intelligence that is able to recognise the intentions of comedic analogy. More significantly, the subject is constituted as embracing the fact that this is his or her *rightful* subject position, as indicated by well-placed laughs. But, for Davis, the "demand and compulsion are so subtle that we apparently do not even recognize their force, and in fact seem to welcome them. What chance, then, do we have to resist their positioning of us?" (Davis 891).

With the audience successfully interpellated into a shared horizon of meaning, the show formulates an equation of disgust and delight. Rather than playing out in a purely chronological manner over the course of a face-to-face interaction, the components of disgust and delight are configured in a direct comparison between two discrete individuals. The show organises Obama's eloquence alongside Trump's childish manner of speaking in a back-to-back placement, using coverage of their respective speeches to their supporters:

Obama: By the time I had left office, household income was near its all-time *high*, and the uninsured rate had hit an all-time *low*. Wages were *rising*, and poverty rates were *falling*. I mention all this, just so that when you hear how great the economy is now, let's just remember when this recovery started. [*Long studio audience cheers*]

Trump: So, I have a list, and the list goes on and on, it's four pages, of things that the Trump administration has accomplished, in a short period of time [holds up papers with visible lists]. Each dot is a *thinggg*, okay? [*Studio audience laughs, hoots*] And some of those *thingggs*, are very big *thingggs*. And then I have three more pages, two more pages, *just like this, look!* Okay? And isn't this much, isn't this much more exciting than listening to President Obama speak? [*Studio audience boos*]

With Donald Trump established as the object of derision (admittedly, due the most part to his own doing), Noah acknowledges, "Trump may have beaten Obama on the entertainment side". However, when both Obama and Trump commented on a secret figure of the White House, who published an op-ed in the *New York Times* detailing internal turmoil, Noah suggests "it is safe to say that Obama beat Trump on the English part", as the clip leads into a final comparative proof of the incident:

Obama: There are people, inside the White House, who secretly aren't following the President's orders! That is not a check. They're not doing us a service by actively promoting ninety percent of the crazy stuff that is coming out of this White House, and then saying, 'Don't worry, we are preventing the other ten percent'.

Trump: The latest act of resistance, is the op-ed, published...in the failing New York Times... [*Starts mispronouncing*] by an *anonomiss* [*Studio audience starts laughing*], really an *anonymish*, gutless coward. [*Studio audience cheers, whoops*]

Noah, too, joins in on the breathless laughs. The liberal audience is 'activated' as a subject (to recall Butler's words), as the President's gaffes and humiliation in

front of his supporters works to “enhance the fate” of the liberal viewer’s own political ideology by way of comparison (Smith et al 533). Noah doubles down on the gaffe by comparing the word pronunciation to something akin to the lyrics of a track by Migos, an American hip hop trio culturally understood to produce ‘mumble rap’, a derogatory term designed to distinguish a particular form of slurred or incoherent contemporary rap (Angrisano). From the ‘set-up’ to the ‘pay-off’, there is a creation of an interpellative arc, one that provides structure to the single *Daily Show* episode, and furthermore establishes the conditions for audience movement into a liberal subject position.

Inflections and Interpellation

Noah’s manner of delivering content accounts for a significant proportion of information to interpellate the viewer into a liberal subject position. Alongside his particular aptitude for accents, impressions, and ‘code-switching’, “language alterations” that appeal to diverse audience subjectivities in globalised media (Hall and Nilep 598), the stresses and inflections in his voice when introducing or denouncing a conservative work to prescribe to the viewer a means of engaging with such figures within the margins of disgust and delight. I find another object of *schadenfreude* detailed this way, in the form of Fox News anchor and “concerned face drawn on a balloon” Tucker Carlson, in the video “Tucker Carlson Takes a Sudden Vacation Following his Hot Take on White Supremacy” (August 2019). Noah comments, “even though most people in America have acknowledged the threat [of white supremacists], there is one person who *still* isn’t convinced...Tucker Carlson.” Introducing his name with a defeated, yet still accusatory tone, Noah indexes to the viewer a sense of disbelief and frustration in this stubborn persistence of such backward ideology. The show evidences the presence of such an ideology as it segues into a clip from Carlson’s Fox News programme covering his opinions on white supremacy:

The whole thing is a *lie*. If you were to assemble a list, a *hierarchy* of concerns, of problems that this country faces, where would ‘white supremacy’ be on the list? Right up there with Russia, probably. It’s actually *not* a real problem in America. The combined membership of every ‘white supremacist’ in this country would be able to fit inside a college football stadium? “White supremacy, this is the problem” —this is a hoax.

In response, Noah restates his comments, offended, with the confusion in his voice evident:

Wait, what? White supremacists aren’t a threat because they can *only* fill a college football stadium? My man, those stadiums hold a hundred thousand people! We shouldn’t have enough white supremacists to fill a *golf cart*, that’s how many we should have.

His tone conveys his disgust, or a “recoil from the object”. The viewer is brought close to the conservative object via mediation, “only then to pull away from the object in the registering of the proximity as an offence” (Ahmed 85). The direction of this ‘pull’ as modelled by Noah’s inflection, suggests the viewer ought to move away “with urgency” (84), especially with such a topic as abhorrent as white supremacy. Such a ‘disgusting’ ideology makes the ensuing *schadenfreude* rewarding and deserved. This deservedness is stated as objective, and only right, as Noah informs us coolly of how Carlson’s comments resulted in several major advertisers pulling out of his show, to more controlled and appreciative studio audience cheers, and a notable lack of laughs.

More pleasurable, though, is a second humiliation. Noah’s tone takes on more glee as he segues into another clip, dealing with Tucker Carlson having to tell his viewers on screen that “oh, and also, I will be having a nice few days off” as a result of the advertisers’ decision. Seeing him having to admit some kind of defeat on air, while trying to make it seem as offhand as possible to try and offset his discomfort,

is wholly pleasurable to the liberal viewer. This enjoyment is imparted in Noah's jokes, with laughter in his voice that directs and corroborates the liberal viewer's delight. Again, there is the affective creation of distance between the conservative object and liberal subject in his humiliation. The audience laughter is crucial, wherein the "enjoyment confirms the starkness of the difference between us. It is proof that in at least one respect (this very sensation of satisfaction)", the viewer can accept that "I am nothing like you" (Simon 252).

And all Together? Content Consonance

On top of the individual strategies of interpellation and subjectivity—studio audience reactions, vignettes, inflections—that each of the clips constitute, I propose that we must read these discrete clips, and the myriad of others which I do not have the space to analyse, in *consonance*. Reading them in consonance allows me to examine how the liberal subject is produced through *schadenfreude* over time. In its traditional news factor origins, consonance means "the uniform or similar tendencies in reporting" (Noelle-Neuman and Mathes 404). At its most simplistic, consonance refers to a "similarity of media content" (404), analogous to the literary concept of consonance, the repetition of like consonant sounds in neighbouring words, or that of musical consonance, the placement of notes in pleasing harmonic intervals. Whether it is the progression from letter to letter, note to note, or video to video, the expression of movement inherent to consonance creates a "relation of resolution" (Cazden 5) that makes the texts stable.

My use of the term 'consonance' here is deployed in an attempt to understand how the formulaic use of *schadenfreude*, the repetition and reiterations of these affective clips, and the news articles they spark, work together to naturalise and stabilise a particular manner of engaging with conservative ideology for liberal subjects. While these affective attachments for the liberal subject fashioned overtime "may self-propagate a movement to generate community", I argue that the liberal

subject position produced by repeated *schadenfreude* instead “entraps people in a loop of sustained spectatorship” (Papacharissi 311). Here, I depart from Frederic Jameson’s anxieties around repetition as ‘volatilising’ or otherwise constituting a ‘loss’ of the original text (Jameson 137); the repetition I am dealing with in my research does not reduce me to the “student of mass culture with no primary object of study” (139), as there is no ‘original’ text that is copied with *The Daily Show*’s format of *schadenfreude*. In fact, the term ‘format’ inherently requires repetition, an adherence to some consistent conventions.

Rather, I suggest, it is only through repetition of the text that the affect within the text can persist. *Schadenfreude* is rendered consistent and ‘stabilised’ via repetition, quite contrary to the idea of volatility. The liberal subject internalises, via repetition from the rate of uploads and studio audience reactions, appropriate ways of being and acting and thinking in a liberal manner and in opposition to the humiliated conservative figures derided in the show. However, over time, the specific object in question, whether that is a Republican voter, a right-wing news anchor, or a conservative political leader, falls away. There is, in some way, a ‘loss’ as Frederic Jameson would describe. Though the “textual referent” disappears (Jameson 138) with each new upload, and the conservative rally-goer is replaced by a humiliated media figure is replaced by a President, the ‘traces’ of the affect, the residual indexing left behind by the encounter, remain (Massumi 92-93). The expectation, “if not yet the appetite”, for the “*repetition and variation of the impingement*” (Massumi 93) comes to define the audience’s relationship with *schadenfreude*.

Ultimately, the “affect is the same whether the image be that of a past, present, or future thing” (Spinoza 402). The conservative object gives form to *schadenfreude*, a place for the affect to reside. Conservative bodies act as temporary sites through which the affect of *schadenfreude* is incrementally legitimised for liberal subjects as a way of engaging with conservatism, as the “affective traces persist and bind networked publics long after the initial events that called them into being”

(Papacharissi 310). Counter to Jameson's notions of repetition and reification, *The Daily Show*—through its constant reprisal of schadenfreude—appears to render the many separate objects of conservatism abstract. They become a series of problematic actors in a grander, overarching concept of 'conservatism'. It is against this, the broad idea of conservatism, which the liberal subject must rally, while reifying schadenfreude by capturing it in mediation and remediation, concretising it as a means of engagement for liberals.

Conclusion

Perhaps the repetition of liberal schadenfreude in late-night political comedies is a response to the fact that conservative leaders no longer seem to be affected by their public humiliations, instead shielding behind the unwavering support of their followers. The 'post-truth' ability to cast aside unfavourable presentations or actions as 'fake news' indicates that conservatives' public misfortunes are of lesser consequence to them in a way that previous politicians and leaders would have fretted over, in fear of their public image. It appears that "contrary to the once-held belief, the laughter of satire does not serve as a deterrent or corrective for the fool or knave" (Test 19).

Who is to make fun of these politicians' pitfalls? Who is to derive a sense of political identity from the blunders of leaders, if not the supporters of the leaders, nor the leaders themselves? Herein, we can argue that the mantle—even the imperative—to endorse schadenfreude as constitutive of subjectivity is strengthened and normalised as a form of political engagement, leaving us to steadily disassociate schadenfreude from its history as a 'shameful' sensation that one ought to keep secret.

There is space for debate as to whether schadenfreude as a means of liberal—and particularly Western—subjectivity has flourished due largely to the unabashed personalities of President Donald Trump, and to a lesser extent, Prime Minister Boris Johnson. It is no coincidence that my research on schadenfreude coincides with the

impact of these men. Also noticeable, too, is that the other targets of schadenfreude I have analysed all display tangible links with the President—whether his ardent supporters, or the conservative anchors at Fox News, with whom he is locked in a well-documented feedback loop (Pettypiece and Smith). At this stage, it is unclear whether schadenfreude as a prominent affective strategy of liberal subject formation will persist, come the results of the US November 2020 election. Regardless of political outcomes, however, I interpret liberal ideology as having fundamentally, affectively shifted, to the extent that there appears to be fewer and fewer qualms about endorsing schadenfreude as a means to engage with conservatism.

CHAPTER FIVE: SJWS, SCHADENFREUDE, AND THE YOUTUBE SPHERE

TOP DEFINITION

SJWs: Proud and fearsome liberal warriors hailing from the ancient ways of Tumblr and BuzzFeed, fighting for the promises of an ever fair and equal society. With their tongues as their swords and their bigotry as their armour, they hunt and readily assault those believing in the evil arts of masculinity and white pride.

By **ViridianSky**, *Urban Dictionary*, August 10th, 2019

One particular arena appears to hold no such qualms about the overt practice of schadenfreude. In keeping with the aim of my research to understand the role of affective schadenfreude in political subjectivity and the proliferation of political mood, I propose a turn to another, not so distant sphere in which schadenfreude flourishes. Found on YouTube, the ‘social justice warrior’, or ‘SJW’, as it is deployed in right-wing affective media, implies a “kind of ‘monstrous feminine’, a woman who is unwieldy and out of control” (Massanari and Chess 525). This SJW is the target of right-wing schadenfreude. Repeatedly, these feminised, liberal opponents and objects of ridicule are emphasised as having “non-normative, problematic bodies, different brains (ones ruled by emotion rather than logic), and monstrous characteristics” (525). In the vast YouTube landscape, compilation videos known as ‘SJWs owned’ or ‘SJW fails’ represent the capture of the affect of schadenfreude, dealing once again with the affective knot of disgust and delight, reconfigured for the purposes of right-wing subjectivity.

I bring right-wing schadenfreude up as not only a counterpoint to my area of interest, but to demonstrate the affective capacity of short video clips to inform subjectivity and shape communities. Though the negative caricature of feminists and social rights activists is not new (Massanari and Chess 528), its intersection with contemporary media that accentuates and thrives on affect re-emphasises my point

that schadenfreude is thoroughly entrenched as a means of political engagement, and subsequently, shapes our experience with the political 'other' as part of subjectivity.

What is 'Social Justice', Anyway?

Sparked by events surrounding the Gamergate controversy in August 2014, the term gained significant popularity. Critics of the infamous harassment campaign against women in the video game industry were "disparaged as 'social justice warriors', motivated by a political desire to destroy the perceived masculine norms of video game culture" (Phelan 460), and furthermore, Western culture in general. Seen as enemies to traditional values of gender, race, sexuality, free speech, and capitalism through a practice of 'political correctness', the 'social justice warrior' acts as "a potent element in the articulation of far-right political identities" (Phelan 456)—an idea that I wish to develop in connection to the function of schadenfreude, in particular.

Despite the fact that both left- and right-wing forms of schadenfreude are enabled by the affective capacity of YouTube and its short video culture, *The Daily Show's* YouTube channel deals with a polished form of schadenfreude. This form of schadenfreude is borne out of a more centralised programme, with higher production values. I figure the programme in opposition to right-wing schadenfreude on YouTube, which captures more successfully the DIY ethos of the platform and its 'user-generated content', typified by various content creators and the embrace of a so-called authentic "aesthetic of amateurism or ugliness" (Carter 10). Right-wing users appear to more thoroughly embody this DIY aspect of YouTube—far more than *The Daily Show*, though both are equally affective forms of engagement, and accessible regardless of location.

Painting the SJW

The search 'SJW' on YouTube reveals a surfeit of affectively charged videos that suggest a rampant culture of right-wing schadenfreude. Bearing unwieldy titles as 'SJW Compilation #1 (Fails and Cringe)', 'WAKE UP! Black Conservative OWNS

SJWs/SJW Cringe Compilation/Instant Karma Feminist Edition’, or ‘SJW Triggered—SJW vs THUG LIFE Compilation 2020 (Episode 22-23)’, these videos highlight a particular ‘monstrous feminine’ in their thumbnail imagery, language, and video content. The SJW figured in this media is a “humourless shrill” (Massanari and Chess 530) or “feminist killjoy” (Ahmed 17), often crystallised in the thumbnail with their mouth open in conversation, and frequently, in a scream or argument.

The substance of their speech is not knowable until the viewer opens the video, but nonetheless it immediately works to communicate the notion of the SJW as an irrational, emotional, and crazed individual. The bodies of these individuals are often unattractive and deviant by traditional standards, with unconventional dress, make-up, and hair styles and colours, ornamented by provocative symbols, and marked as “sexually undesirable and of unknowable gender” (Massanari and Chess 530). The object of disgust in these thumbnails is immediately identifiable for the viewer. A video titled ‘Woke SJW CRINGE Compilation/Virtue Signalling Gone Hilariously Wrong PART 3’ features an ‘unsightly’ person sitting on a bench, apparently dejected or sulking, clad in apparel that “represents the various causes to which the SJW is attached” (531). They are wearing rainbow elbow-length gloves (colours known for their association with the LGBTQ+ movement) and a white shirt bearing ‘BLM’ written in handwritten letters. Of indiscriminate gender, they are also “soft (both physically and metaphorically) and childlike” (531). This image paints a picture of SJW’s as not only unattractive by traditional/conservative standards, but “emotionally dramatic”, where their delusion and immaturity “prevents them from seeing themselves as the world sees them” (Massanari and Chess 533). The humiliation that comes to them as a result of being ‘owned’, or in other words, having a real-world wake-up call’ by a logical and sensible conservative, is vital to this experience of right-wing schadenfreude.

Figure 1. YouTube thumbnail picturing an 'offended', non-normative individual.

Figure 2. The 'soft', 'childlike', and 'delusional' individual.

Figure 3. Two 'performative' individuals.

Figure 4. The 'humourless shrill'.

Of course, as I have demonstrated *vis-a-vis* liberal subjectivity, *schadenfreude* is realised in the movement from disgust to delight along an axis of misfortune. A thumbnail plus an evocative title works simply to pique the interest of the viewer and promise an experience of *schadenfreude* forthcoming. The depiction of the 'humourless shrill' as an object of disgust, a 'politically correct killjoy' makes space for the ensuing right-wing delight at their humiliation. These left-wing bodies are established as any variation on the 'monstrous feminine', a 'triggered SJW', or 'liberal snowflake'. To reasonable eyes, however, they are more often than not figures who

are passionate, but somewhat underprepared and often regrettably hypocritical individuals.

Meme Culture and 'Owning' Snowflakes

The videos themselves typically are edited “in a way that disparages different targets, moving from clips of celebrities to clips of grassroots left activists being trolled on camera” (Phelan 462). Important to consider is the “aesthetic dimension of the media format” in the form of short visual clips (Ekman 96). As the name suggests, the nature of ‘compilation videos’ is to compile various brief examples of SJW’s being ‘owned’ in an edited montage, so as to produce a multiplicity of affective experiences within the one video. By producing clips with an affective intention, right-wing actors utilise aesthetic elements to access experiences and emotions within the audience (Ekman 96)—namely, *schadenfreude*.

A video titled ‘Feminist and SJW Owned Compilation 2017 #2 (Destroyed Edition)’ is accompanied with an image of a professional looking woman in glasses—notably, a departure from the recurrent theme of the monstrous feminine. However, the image of academic women, political commentators, and university students, is consistent too as an emblematic figure of the ‘feminist killjoy’ SJW, whose intellectual inculturation into ‘neo-Marxism’ and identity politics “‘spoils’ the happiness of others” by pointing out social issues (Massanari and Chess 534). This educated woman and her ‘humiliation’ occurs later in the compilation, on top of her role acting as the face for this particular video. The video itself starts with a wildly edited introduction, in line with an alt-right culture that reveres chaotic and transgressive humour (Philips 28). A woman at a protest screaming “Fuck you! Fuck that shit! I’m a professor! How dare you! How dare you protect neo-Nazis! Fuck you!” at an offscreen unknown bystander is cut to the beat of a remixed version of the Star Wars ‘Imperial March’ theme. Accompanying this, the footage itself is notably ‘deep fried’—a popular, surrealist form of meme that is typified by a low quality resolution of an image, one

reposted and screenshotted many times to the extent that it takes on a browned colour, thus resembling something 'deep fried'. The remix quality that typifies meme culture is heightened by the addition of an animated Pepe the Frog, another popular meme that is heavily associated with alt-right forums (Di Placido), who is also edited in, in time with the beat. A banner, bearing the word 'Triggered' is also included, another common meme often attached to representations of SJWs as a means to suggest they are always offended, and to undermine their credibility or outrage. The intertextuality, similar to what I have analysed in left-wing *schadenfreude*, serves to bring the viewer into a shared space of understanding due to the use of familiar memes, establishing the liberal or SJW as an object of disgust, or as it is often termed, an object of 'cringe', as well as setting out the ethos of this particular right-wing YouTube channel. After some relaxing lounge music to suggest that this 'owned edition' video will make for a pleasurable, comforting experience, the video moves into its first of many truncated clips lifted from other videos that keep *schadenfreude* as their affective centre.

The first short clip, dealing in the 'SJW owned' compilation staple topic of gender, provides a breakdown of *schadenfreude* into its affective components of disgust and delight. The character of video clips that are "inflected as humorous" does not need an extended analysis here; even a cursory view of the genre quickly reveals an overtly misogynistic, racist and transphobic tone and rhetoric (Phelan 462). In the first clip of the compilation, the viewer observes the interaction between an unnamed woman at an unknown convention, and Ben Shapiro, popular American conservative figure, and regular personality in compilation videos. The woman's body, again, is one that stereotypically occupies that of the 'SJW'; young, female, soft, outspoken, wearing strong eye makeup, and a black choker. In the context of this clip she is figured as a 'social justice warrior', rendered in opposition to the completely dispassionate, almost robotic Shapiro in his position at the podium. Her tone,

narrowly verging on accusatory, establishes her as the 'offended' SJW in this exchange:

Woman: How can you say that people don't have privilege when you basically said that trans people aren't valid?

[Audience is silent; one person hoots]

Shapiro: Okay, somebody's excited. *[Audience laughs]* I'm not going to modify basic biology because it threatens your subjective sense of what you are.

W: Okay, but you're saying that a kid should not be accepted because they don't fit in either place?

S: "I'm saying that the Boy Scouts have a standard. You must be a biological boy to be a Boy Scout."

W: Where was that written though?

S: In the name 'Boy Scouts'.

[Audience cheers, claps; woman tries to speak over the applause]

Over the audience laughter, the editor places an audio clip of 'Ha! Gottem', a meme often used to demonstrate that a person has been 'owned' by a comeback. She then goes on to try and debate Shapiro on other topics, such as contraception and abortion, only to be shot down each time. The clip ends with a still of her defeated expression, slowly being zoomed into, and overlaid once again with a sympathetic Pepe the Frog, who is animated to caress her face, with his speech bubble stating, 'You got destroyed and it's okay.' Discourses of reproductive health, gender, and transgender issues aside, the SJW here is represented as "a hystericized and illogical figure to be 'owned', crushed, or 'destroyed', in contrast to the reasoned and logical perspective of their (predominantly male and alpha male) critics" (Phelan 462). As various 'woke' identities as come across as performative and preachy (Nagle 51), it is precisely this self-assuredness that is perceived as the point of disgust for conservative

viewers. The sensation of *schadenfreude* and pleasure arises in the interaction wherein the SJW is humiliated, their self-assuredness in their moral position publicly disintegrated as they come up against ‘facts’ and ‘logic’. These complications make sure to highlight the SJW as self-confident and accusatory towards others, reinforcing the existing “perception that the social justice warriors are motivated by a self-interested desire for moral superiority” (Phelan 459). The process of seeing this so-called superiority come undone, often in a room full of individuals and in front of a camera, tracks the affective progression from right-wing disgust to delight.

While these social justice warriors are figured as irrational, emotional and underprepared, instances where the SJW appears to hold their own also are used as targets of *schadenfreude*. Another lengthier encounter, subtitled ‘SJW destroys herself on environmental issues’ in the same compilation, occurs between a man standing on a stage, alluded to as having ties with the fossil fuel industry, and two female university students from the audience, in a Q&A session at an unknown event. Again, a binary is set out between them that figures them as upstart and moral individuals, and him as a voice of reason:

First woman: You’ve recently described yourself as proponent of Shell gas hydrofracking. How can you support this when the Environmental Protection Agency has proven fracking has poisoned hundreds of ground wells?...In September, you spoke at a natural gas industry conference, showing your ties to the fossil fuel industry and your priorities to the corporations, rather than the American people.

[Half of the audience claps and cheers loudly; second woman starts speaking]

Man: No, no, no, wait one at—one at a time.

First woman: Please let us finish.

Second woman: *[Speaking with intensity]* You called Shell gas developers the “pioneers of the future”. But the truth is they’re not the future, *we* are. We’re here to re–

M: *You are?* *[Some audience chuckles]*

W: –present the students and the youth who refuse to live in a world that promotes injustice, environmental degradation–

M: Wait, wait, I just want to know something. I’m sorry, can you tell me something–

W: –and corporate control. I’m sorry, please let us finish.

M: Sorry. *[He looks amused; audience laughs and claps]*

W: I stand with the frontline communities...who have had their land destroyed and water contaminated by destructive industries. *[Audience becomes more restless]*
I’m here to say I don’t think you stand for what’s best for our planet and our future.

M: Okay let me ask you a question, since you’re the future, by your own definition. What’s your energy solution?

W: Locally owned, renewable energy, for the people by the people, not for corporate profits.

M: What kind of energy?

W: Localised wind and solar.

M: So, wind, which kills more birds than any other energy system–

W: *[Laughs under her breath]* That is...inaccurate.

M: *It is?* Would you like to guess how many birds are killed by wind?

W: Please tell me.

M: Enough that the current administration is exempting them from federal laws which would put them in jail for the number of birds they are killing.

W: I'm sorry, but I think you would agree that the American people are more important than birds. *[Audience starts laughing]*

M: Ahh, 'the American people are more important than birds'? *[Audience laughs, cheers]*. I like that, I can't wait to report to the Sierra Club that I have been at Amhurst [College] and had somebody explain to me that 'people are more important than birds.' This is a revolutionary moment! *[Audience cheers]*

Over his last statements and audience cheers, the video edits in the 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' TV theme, often used in meme culture to overlay and accompany moments of 'cringe', humiliation, and awkwardness (Britten), deployed here as the women struggle to be heard over the hoots and applause. The music theme acts as a frame to structure the viewer's engagement with the SJWs. Though the clear use of bad-faith and strawman arguments in this debate is pronounced, and the women appear mostly intelligent and persuasive, the clip nevertheless seeks to fashion these women as emotional, sensitive and overly idealistic individuals. Edits such as zooming in on the man drinking water, moving the women out of frame though their persuasive voice persists, work to suggest his nonchalance in comparison to their irritability. Abruptly ending the clip at the moment of their humiliation removes further context and any possible retaliation.

Separate Spheres of Schadenfreude

It is immediately noticeable how schadenfreude is figured differently from right-wing to left-wing spheres. Where *The Daily Show* clips focus on fully drawing out and visualising both disgust and delight in an extended manner, with one whole episode usually dedicated to one instance of schadenfreude, SJW owned compilations represent a bricolage of affect, with a myriad of subjects all condensed together in one video. On average, one to three minutes is spent on each clip, often in a ten to 15 minute video. This popular format is a point of contradiction against an opposing school of thought on YouTube that regards the supposed 'thoroughness' of right-wing

subjectivity. Long-form video is held in high accord in right-wing YouTube spheres, a genre lauded as “enabling sophisticated, in-depth conversations that are not possible within the superficial conventions of mainstream media” (Phelan 462), and is often configured in contrast to the idea of left-wing commentary as shallow and flighty.

Personified by popular figures such as Ben Shapiro, Jordan Peterson, Joe Rogan, and Dave Rubin, all participate in lengthy podcasts, interviews, and debates. Despite the “internal imaginary” of these talk shows (462) as adhering to modes of discussion informed by Enlightenment values of ‘rationality’ and ‘logic’, they do not account for the majority of right-wing or conservative content available on YouTube. Frequently, these values of logic and rationality are more commonly found scattered in fragments across compilations. In such compilations, that lift the most potent of rational and logical statements to use as weapons against the monstrous feminine, the process of *schadenfreude* is a lot more overt and unsubtle. The compilation’s abrasiveness is borne not only as a result of the aggressive ideology behind its particular right-wing *schadenfreude*, but simultaneously from the *schadenfreude*’s particular mediated form—a confrontational and unabashed presentation of imagery and audio, with equally unabashed SJW characters.

The general offended-ness that these social justice warriors express in tone, appearance, and language, is easily picked apart by an extremely precise question that the interviewer has pre-prepared or heavily researched, or by presenting a straw-man argument that confuses the impassioned liberal object. It is this, a perceived lack of a defined and well-supported argument, coupled with moral position that is not emotional or purely affective, that is what is made the humiliation in these videos—despite the fact that in many instances, and to a viewer not necessarily familiar with this brand of video, the SJW in question appears quite straightforward thinking. While I in no way intend to suggest a direct correlation between *The Daily Show* content as motivating ‘SJW owned’ compilations, I cannot help but identify linkages between the vast and ever-produced concept of conservatism, as articulated by left-wing

schadenfreude that a programme like *The Daily Show* participates in, with what it is that 'SJW owned' compilations use as their target of ridicule—liberals with an ill-defined and broad upset with conservative ideologies *in general*.

Conclusion

Investigation into right-wing spheres of schadenfreude, while not my main area of concern, are nonetheless useful to bolster my main conceptions of affect. The techniques of fashioning both disgust and delight in right-wing spheres demonstrates the 'openness' of affect and its huge potentials of reconfiguration and realisation in imagery and rhetoric. With the same underlying logic as liberal media, schadenfreude videos figure the surface of the liberal object, in an attempt to 'fix' them as bodies of contempt, and motivates the conservative subject in return. Both right-wing and left-wing videos demonstrate how political subjects use an external 'affecting body' as a site of self-surveillance and self-satisfaction, to both check one's own behaviour and to joyfully contemplate their own power of action, as Spinoza suggests (419). Like left-wing subjects, however, the *motion* away from disgusting and humiliated objects does not appear to constitute a political *action*. The gratifying, self-satisfactory motion is self-contained and resolved in the delight at the liberal object's misfortune. Modern right-wing schadenfreude—painted in videos with colourful imaging of dangerous and hysterical women, cool and collected men, overt and promising titles, and chaotic and remixed editing—contributes more so to the aesthetic creation of a right-wing mood online. Much in the same way *The Daily Show* updates conservative bodies of disgust with each new upload, spawning subsequent *Vanity Fair* and *Washington Post* articles, a proliferation of 'SJW's' decorate YouTube and the conservative moodscape.

CONCLUSION: THE WANING OF SCHADENFREUDE?

According to Coyne, “there really is no prevailing mood of a time” (5). At best, the claim to have identified it is a:

convenient fiction, an acknowledged gross generalisation, a provocation, an overstatement to bring into consciousness something strange that would otherwise pass unnoticed. At worst, the idea of the zeitgeist assumes that everyone is in the same condition and that human society is uniform across the planet and drifts from one state of consensus to another. (6)

I find the non-static nature of mood, as articulated by Coyne, a key concept to keep in mind as I draw this thesis to a conclusion. Liberal mood—at least as I understood it—has changed drastically from when I initiated this project in early 2019. As I write this conclusion, in late 2020, it is apparent that COVID-19 has drastically changed the format of shows such as *The Daily Show*, whereby hosts have moved into delivering the show from their homes and studio audiences are abandoned. The flurry of constant updates about COVID-19 that individuals receive on an hourly basis, stretching the already bloated 24/7 news cycle and permanent accessibility of news sites, lends itself to cultural shifts in media consumption, and indeed, media content itself.

Over past months, audiences have seen not only the changing of media production, but how this changing landscape and approach to content modifies subjectivities and wider moods. At once, there is a mood of greater solidarity and division established, wherein subjects’ personal grievances and priorities appear of minor importance in the wake of global death and upheaval. *The Daily Show*, among other liberal news content, communicates an increased annoyance towards ideas of individualism and selfishness; greater swells of allegiance or distrust to government and its measures of large scale social control, and disdain or pride for flouting such

measures; of illumination into societal relationships to science and data as they are subjugated to pressure.

Despite Coyne's claim (admittedly made pre-COVID-19) that there is no prevailing mood of a time, I would argue that he did not write it in a time of true international uncertainty, not least the shadow of a global pandemic. I see this year, 2020, as having provided evidence to support the notion that there is potential to claim a prevailing mood of a time—most certainly, I argue, a liberal one. Though I interpret *schadenfreude* as a perpetual undercurrent of liberal subjectivity and mood, as events have materialised over the early months of 2020 and crystallised as the year stretches on, *schadenfreude* as an affective force seems to have fallen by the wayside. Where previous *Daily Show* material and other American late-night programmes constantly returned to the affective power of *schadenfreude* as a key structural element for their audiences' subjectivity, as of February 2020, when the pandemic took hold in the United States, it seems to have been replaced by something else. Where the shows once provided an affective progression from disgust to delight, hinging on conservative misfortune, now it appears that this affective progression has been severed at its halfway point. Seemingly endless streams of upsetting updates, while not foreign to the enduring news values of shock and death, are less concerned with nudging disgust to delight along an axis of conservative misfortune, and instead nudge disgust to *anger* along an axis of the *public's* misfortune. Perhaps *schadenfreude*—which has become normalised as a way of engaging with the political opposition over the course of the past four years—has retreated as a tool of liberal subjectivity, to be substituted with what appears to be a disgust, sadness, and outrage.

An Output of Outrage

The *Daily Show* with Trevor Noah' has gone from being jokes about the news to, more and more, the news with some jokes. If comedy is tragedy plus time, perhaps this is a natural evolution when we're too close to the second part of that equation to produce a lot of laughs. (Ordoña)

Similar to organised affective schadenfreude, anger is “a strongly intentional or object directed emotion” (Ngai 27). The objects of disgust and thus anger are more organised and socio-linguistically fixed. Important to note, too, is the role of proximity in the process of fixing, as Ordoña’s quote suggests. Where disgust once animated delight for affective schadenfreude, disgust now animates anger. Videos of the one-sided nature of outrage have been appearing with more frequency in recent times due to the events surrounding all manner of upheavals in 2020, primarily cohering around the COVID-19 pandemic and its uncertain outcomes for public welfare, health, and the economy, but including climate change, natural disasters, civil unrests as marked in the lengthy Black Lives Matter protests and related deaths, a heightened division between science and belief, scorn for celebrity and privilege, and increasing upset and allegiance in politics and politicians revealed.

In response, late-night political content has increased output with a vengeance. Objects and events of disgust are presented in insolation, coupled with an increased antagonism. The delight part of the affective equation appears to be increasingly left out; catharsis, in the form of laughter, is increasingly denied. Though *The Daily Show* still remains a comedy programme, and continues to crack jokes, using analogic constructions, intertextuality, and engaging speaking and impressions, they deal more frequently with merely the point of anxiety. A recent example, on the topic of mail-in voting, came with uproar over the Trump administration admitting to sabotaging mail by blocking postal funds and actively carrying out measures to remove post boxes from street corners, citing voter fraud, despite no evidence to the claim (BBC). *The Daily Show*—or as it has been termed since February 2020, *The Daily Social Distancing Show*, with Noah speaking to an audience from his home—proceeds with a clip showing the interaction between CNN anchor Jake Tapper and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows on the topic of mail-in voting:

Meadows: You realise how inaccurate the voter rolls are, with people just moving around, let alone the people that die off, every time you move, or change your driver's license—

Jake: But there's no evidence of widespread voter fraud, though—

M: That's not—there's no, there's no evidence that there's *not* either, that's the definition of fraud Jake.

The clip ends, and Noah chimes in, providing an amusing analogy, though with an undercurrent of annoyance in his voice:

Woowow. I mean once you go into that argument, there's *nothing* you can't claim anymore. I mean sure, I haven't seen any evidence that aliens are cloning humans and making them compete in talent competitions in space, but I *also* haven't seen any evidence that aliens *aren't* cloning humans, and making them compete in talent competitions in space. ('Americans Fight for the Post Office and Obama Speaks out', 17 August 2020)

Various videos on the topic put out by *The Daily Show* describe how many aides of the President and the President himself have been discovered using mail-in voting in the past, and reveal hypocrisies and violations of voter rights ('Trump Attacks Vote-by-Mail and the US Postal Service' (August 13), 'Trump Plainly Admits to Limit Mail-in Voting Each video (August 14), 'The Mike Pompeo Scandal and Trump's Tantrum Over Mail-in Ballots (May 21)). Both as individual texts and in consonance, the videos establish a tone of disgust and anger. The absence of studio audience laughter as an affective component exaggerates this shift in tonality.

Another running topic has been keeping the issue of police brutality and racism open in the videos for months. 'George Floyd, Minneapolis Protests, Ahmaud Abernathy, and Amy Cooper' (May 30), 'America Protests Police Brutality and Systemic Racism' (June 9), 'Cops Meet Police Brutality with More Police Brutality' (June 9), 'Fox News on Deploying Federal Agents 2020 vs 2014' (July 29), 'Breonna Taylor: Who She Was,

How She Died, Why Justice Is Overdue (July 31), ‘Why Did the Police Shoot Jacob Blake?’ (August 26). Each video presents a range of upsetting footage illustrating racialised violence and assault, candid video from phones arranged alongside professional news broadcasts, intercut with Noah’s speech that moves from sombre to incensed, particularly as he addresses federal police attacking demonstrators:

An argument I’ve heard people make is that the only reason police are doing this is because the protestors are looting or being violent. But as happens *so often*, the police’s story *never matches* the actual footage, because for the past weeks, the Internet has been full of videos of police attacking people with no provocation *whatsoever*. Is there anyone not threatening enough that the police would *not* get violent with them? We are finding out that the answer is *no*.

The show proceeds with a montage of disturbing footage, including a police officer deliberately trampling demonstrators with their horse; firing tear gas at journalists live on air; deliberately unmasking peaceful protestors to pepper spray their face; and shoving elderly people before walking away from their unconscious figure. The last clip in particular is striking as an object of utter upset and digest, as Noah makes clear in a quietly appalled voice:

I don’t care how many times I see that video. I will *never* get used to it. ‘Cause it’s bad enough, that these cops push over and old man who’s walking to them, but the fact that they *walk over* him, they walk *past* him, while he’s bleeding out on the sidewalk—like, who are you protecting and serving, if not that old man?

Most significantly kept at the forefront of outrage and disgust is the American handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a whole separate playlist dedicated to ‘Coronavirus Updates’, concepts of economics, health, and mortality leak into the general video stream, working constantly to remind and update the viewer of the failings of the government. In a particularly egregious example, US Vice-President Mike Pence is pictured with a huge crowd of GOP re-election campaign staffers

ignoring physical distancing rules and mask wearing, despite the fact that these are the recommendations of the US coronavirus task force—led by Pence himself.

How do you expect the American public to take things seriously, when you *yourself* aren't taking it seriously?...It's reasons like these that 74% of Americans think the country is on the wrong track. And I don't blame them. Police are beating up protestors in the street. *Millions* of people are unemployed. And Georgia couldn't even hold a primary election without making people wait in line for *hours*. Clearly, American democracy is failing. ('Coronavirus is on the Upswing', 13 June 2020)

Once again, reputable sources and news sites expand the sentiments of anger and annoyance of *Daily Show* content in a proliferation of articles and tweets:

"Some Bake During Lockdown. Trump Bans Immigrants, Trevor Noah Notes" (*The New York Times*, 22 April 2020)

"Late Night Doesn't Feel Much Like Laughing" (*The New York Times*, 2 June 2020)

"Trevor Noah Compares Trump to Bond Villain for Trying to Sabotage Election" (*Vanity Fair*, 11 August 2020)

Figure 5. A *Guardian* article tweet about *The Daily Show*, 28 August 2020.

"Trevor Noah Unpacks Right Wing Media's Racist Attacks on Kamala Harris" (*Huffpost*, 20 August 2020)

“Trevor Noah Tries to Unpack Trump’s Chaotic COVID-19 Executive Actions”
(*Rolling Stone*, 11 August 2020)

In original and remediated news content, audiences seem to be left with huge reservoirs of disgust and outrage. Now, the misfortunes of the people have overtaken the misfortunes of conservatives. Now, misfortunes are present in the everyday life of the populace, with voters’ rights stripped, protestors’ mistreatment at the hands of police, with the global death toll from the pandemic rising as correct or inept political leaders stand by. It is unclear whether this unresolved tension is leading towards real political change, to demanding accountability from politicians. Or whether, on the other hand, it is (simply) creating backlogs of disgust such that when moments of conservative misfortune arrive, there is a vicious delight.

Evidence to support the latter idea is strong. Boris Johnson and Jair Bolsonaro, whose pandemic responses ranged from incompetent to outright fascistic, both contracted the virus, spurring an intense wave of justice-based *schadenfreude* (Desai; Milz; O’Connell). Similar expressions of *schadenfreude* occurred when US Congress members, who argued against health measures, tested positive for the virus. Closer to home, when Australian Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton—whose positions against gay rights, climate change, and immigration have long infuriated left-wing critics—tested positive for COVID-19, the event incited the Twitter hashtag #ThereIsAGod (Zorn). In the current pandemic moodscape, *schadenfreude* is transfigured into that concerning public health hypocrisies.

Is anger more productive than *schadenfreude* in motivating real political action? The affective nature of *schadenfreude* typifies the effortlessness of political expression that communicative capitalism facilitates, where the “thrill of radicality” (Dean 34), of righteousness and self-esteem that is afforded by the act of laughing at the comeuppance of opposing powers might replace the need for actual political action. The multiple daily upload rate of such content embodies Jodi Dean’s concerns that communicative capitalism obstructs real political change by promoting empty,

repetitive acts of circulation (27) as real-world conditions remain the same, or only minimally improved.

On the other hand, the more open ended and less gratifying affective power of anger that *The Daily Show* has proliferated in recent months potentially creates inroads into change. Working in tandem with the more open-ended media affect are the show's newest, ongoing efforts to support charities by creating specific fundraiser videos. Displayed in a side window on select episodes, the audience is encouraged to donate to a myriad of causes, signalling what appears to be a more proactive political motion. Approximately half of new uploads are attached to a fundraiser, among which are the Equal Justice Initiative, The Bail Project, The National Black Coalition, and the NAACP Legal Defence Fund, to support racial justice, the Disaster Distress Helpline, to fund mental health counselling, #FirstRespondersFirst, to provide protective gear for frontline healthcare workers, Feeding America, No Kid Hungry, and most recently, Alliance for Youth Organising, to promote voter rights. Each *Daily Show* video concludes with a 'call to action', reminding the viewers to support if possible. Altogether, the show has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for relief, strategically using its high subscriber count and an undercurrent of anger to advance charity efforts.

Though it appears that taking pleasure in the misfortunes of conservatives has been mostly left behind for the time being, as audiences shift their concern to community, the ferocity of schadenfreude as evidenced in rare instances speaks to an entrenched liberal manner of dealing with the political opposition. Objects of conservatism, so frequently reinforced as deserving of their comeuppance, have ultimately contributed to an atmosphere in which the essential political sensation is that of disgust for the other. Schadenfreude has allowed the liberal subject to move past that disgust. In this way, schadenfreude is actionable. It provides respite. Mood landscapes reflect this desire for reprieve, developing and detailing an atmosphere where justice is *felt* to be served.

In as much, it is not contributing to Dean's ideal of political collective action. Schadenfreude's parameters lie where delight and pleasure is fixed in media, creating reservoirs of feeling. However, I see one way more way schadenfreude increases the liberal body's capacity for action, as Spinoza suggests. A mood built upon schadenfreude is actionable in that makes sure to keep updating the objects of disgust around us, so, that when times of great political change are upon publics, audiences can know which figures and ideologies must first be held to account.

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