

# **NEWS & THE POLITICS OF SATIRE:**

## **TV3's *7 Days***

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*It is difficult not to write satire.*

*difficile est saturam non scribere.*

Juvenal, Satire I, 1.30-32

## NEWS AND THE POLITICS OF SATIRE: TV3'S *7 DAYS*

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As New Zealand's favoured satirical television show *7 Days* reconstitutes the week's current affairs and offers up a valuable counter narrative to traditional news media through its remixing of the conventions of news and the panel quiz show. Whilst many academics have studied satirical television in the US and UK contexts very little attention has been paid to the collection of New Zealand television satire and local audiences' preference for satire over other local comedy forms. In comparing the three television systems several characteristics emerge as unique to *7 Days* and New Zealand's satiric tradition; an affinity for self-deprecating humour, the targeting of hubris, and the assailing of tall poppy syndrome; the hailing and sustenance of public feeling, and thereby the nourishment of nationalism and a communal 'Kiwi' identity.

Television satire dealing in news and review is a well-established practice but is often referred to in academia and popular culture as simply a 'genre' when it rather operates as somewhere between a discourse and a genre. Television satire is born of a strong literary tradition but literary criticisms fail to adequately address the functions of contemporary satire; its affective powers, the limits of its uptake, and the ideological footing of its critiques. Examples from US and UK television are considered as precursors to New Zealand satire, and a close analysis of *7 Days* reveals that it is not only the conventions of genre that limit satire's incarnations but also an unstable broadcasting history and an uncertain future.

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# INTRODUCTION

Whilst many academics have examined the state of satire news in the American and British contexts (Atkinson, 2011b; Baumgartner & Morris, 2008; Baym & Jones, 2012; A. Day & Thompson, 2012; Gray, Jones, & Thompson, 2009a, 2009b; Reilly, 2010), little academic attention has been paid to the emergence and varied approaches to it in New Zealand. New Zealand has a rich history of satire production across print, radio, and the on-screen industries. New Zealand television satire has emerged in a highly regulated television industry with a tumultuous history. The New Zealand television industry has been profoundly affected by the drastic changes made to broadcasting legislation under successive governments since television's introduction in the 1960s. In an industry that has been profoundly affected by shifting funding models, a small and erratic marketplace, and inconsistent public service imperatives, satire has appeared to thrive.

From its introduction in 1960 New Zealand television has been heavily influenced by the British telescape; executives initially requiring announcers to adopt a fake British accent to as to seem more authoritative and appealing, and for entertainment programming to mimic the BBC in terms of its familial appeal (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 27). The apparent 'cultural cringe' for anything uniquely New Zealand was quashed by an abundance of foreign content and the familiar BBC style programming; but by the 1970s television executives were concerned with the commercial potential of television news and sought to emulate the success America was having. Programming executives at TVNZ went about employing American news and television consultants to overhaul programming and production, ultimately resulting in the Disneyization and McDonaldization of news (Atkinson, 1994). The McDonaldization and Disneyization of News are achieved through the hybridisation of news formats with other entertainment genres.

## **Disneyization**

Four stylistic changes are imperative to the reworking of the news format in this way, they are referred to as 'Disneyization' for their likeness to Disney's theme park practices – theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and performative labour (Atkinson, 2011a, p. 108). As they pertain to news these themes are: theming of news through parasocial relationships between anchors and audiences; merchandising and branding with anchor and programme promos; hybridising of news as infotainment bite-sized magazine style bulletins; and an

emphasis on the performative elements of news presentation i.e. banter between anchors, phone in polls, and vox pops to connote interactivity with viewers (Atkinson, 2011a, pp. 108–109). The news package is herein ‘redesigned’ and with the intention of making viewers feel good, and provide viewers with a non-critical version of reality that allows them to watch with ease instead of with self-consciousness.

## **McDonaldization**

The McDonaldization of news is in reference to the operating principles of the McDonald’s hamburger chain: efficiency, control, predictability, and calculability (Atkinson, 2011a, p. 105). When applied to news media these directives apply accordingly: efficiency through newsroom downsizing; control through aligning the news agenda with marketing principles; predictability in editing, flow, and overall packaging of news; and calculability through audience ratings and regular focus groups to work as editorial guidelines (Atkinson, 2011a, p. 105).

In straddling the British and American approaches to programming New Zealand television found itself in a difficult commercial environment largely devoid of any local flair. This incited legislative change, and public service imperatives were introduced to broadcasting by way of the Broadcasting Commission, later named New Zealand on Air (NZoA), in 1989. NZoA’s resourceful funding strategies have maximised the opportunities for local comedy production and have allowed programming to respond to changes in public feeling and the wider television industry.

New Zealand satire, and especially televisual satire, has strong links to British and American satire. The satire boom in 1950s-1960s Britain began with shows like *Beyond the Fringe* and David Frost’s *The Week That Was* (TW3), *Not So Much A Programme, More a Way of Life* and *The Frost Report* (Carpenter, 2000). *The Frost Report* also launched the careers of long-time satirists John Cleese, Eric Idle, Graham Chapman, Terry Jones and Michael Palin - collectively known as Monty Python. These shows concerned themselves with the news and politics of the day, mimicking the news format to announce their criticisms. These successful shows inspired satirical programming the world over with TW3 being adapted for both American and Canadian (as *This Hour Has Seven Days*) audiences. New Zealand followed in 1977 with *A Week of It*, “loosely based” on TW3 (Whiteside, 2009) the show was spearheaded by the iconic comedy writing duo of David McPhail and Jon Gadsby. McPhail and Gadsby went on to fortify television satire in New Zealand writing a series of shows from the 1970s to 2000s.

The *TW3* adaptation, often hosted by the British Frost, was the first televisual satire to make it to primetime in America, beating the enduring *Saturday Night Live* by more than a decade. *TW3* readied American audiences for satire, and shows like *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* are seen to have helped “smooth the way” for Lorne Michaels’ *Saturday Night* (later to become *Saturday Night Live*), premiering in 1975 (Marc, 2009, pp. xiii–xiv). Where the original television satires in Britain sought to criticise politics (*Yes Minister*) and the entrenched class system (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*), American television has been decidedly more concerned with satirising itself (*The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *Saturday Night Live*), and most often ‘the news’ is the chosen vessel.

New Zealand television satire owes many of its conventions to the British and American conditions but differs in style and delivery. Recent satire television successes like *Pulp Sport*, *Jono and Ben at Ten*, *Super City* and *7 Days* harness the ‘Kiwi identity’ and use it against itself to deliver critiques of politics, culture, and the media. Reaching its 150<sup>th</sup> episode in 2014, *7 Days* is one of New Zealand’s longest running television satires and is an exemplar of a wider satiric tradition in the country.

Satirical news in its various incarnations blends generic conventions from fictional and factual forms to develop wide-ranging critiques of contemporary public culture. Satirical news takes current narratives about politics and society and rearticulates them so as to expose their inherent hypocrisy, distastefulness, or immorality. Joe Atkinson describes satirical news as “a democratically-oriented resource, critical as well as educative” and fundamentally concerned with deconstructing “the bullshit” (2011b, p. 1). The range of conceptual, aesthetic, and narrative forms that satirical news draws on are far-reaching and provide a framework from which to construct critique. In mimicking existing and stable generic forms satire can open up the space between the said and the unsaid, exposing incongruity and duplicity. Satirical news programmes ride on the established genres of news, late-night talk show, and comedy, to broaden their appeal and subsequent uptake.

Satirical news is a prominent televisual form that has warranted extensive attention by political scientists, communications scholars, and the mainstream media. By honing in on a leading example of satire news its distinctive characteristics as an alternative form of public discourse can be interrogated. TV3’s *7 Days* mixes the genres of television news and the quiz show to reconceptualise the news of the week. *7 Days* employs a spread of comedians each week to

deliver its palatable critiques and has been running for six consecutive seasons on the national free-to-air channel TV3.

Several theoretical, conceptual, and pragmatic **categories** account for *7 Days*' emergence and sustained popularity: the nature of news and its vulnerability to satire; the devices and methods of satire; and the institutional and cultural constraints on television production. Several open questions here need to be addressed:

- What is unique about satire in the New Zealand context?

In order to address this question an examination of the contexts from which it inherited its characteristics must be articulated. As much of the scholarship on contemporary satire comes out of studying the American incarnations of fake television news and to a lesser degree of its predecessor British fake news, these two systems will first be considered as preliminaries and contributories to New Zealand televisual satire.

- What does satire look like in the British and American contexts?

The way in which satire functions bears similarities in these contexts at the most basic levels and thus the following questions will be addressed:

- How does satire function?
- What does satire do?
- Is satire a form of discourse or genre?

Contemporary televisual satire is for the most part concerned with news and the role it plays (or fails to uphold) in democracy. This begs the questions,

- What about the nature of contemporary news makes it vulnerable to satire?
- What role does satire play in political discourse in New Zealand and abroad?

Lastly, the limits of satire will be assessed in relation to satire's ability to establish and sustain counter narratives to public discourse. Specifically looking to answer the question

- What are the limits of satire in the New Zealand context?

## CONTEXT

*7 Days* is part of a wider global phenomenon in satirical news making. In the past decade scholarship on satire and satirical television has proliferated in communications and Media Studies. Scholars have explored the role of satire and ‘fake news’ through reimaginings of traditional journalism and the role of the media as the fourth estate. Satirical discourse has been proposed by some scholars as a narrative to counter the common sense world-views explicated by the mainstream media and political actors. Satire has been reconceptualised as a useful tool in civic and political engagement during elections in particular. The advent of new technologies and the diversification of media outlets has rerouted traditional avenues of information dissemination and given audiences more perspectives than ever before. The creativity of programmers and producers, and their ability to ‘redefine’ genres continues to support the growth of satire television and new programming alike. From this diversification ‘soft news’ has come to the forefront and infotainment style programming has become a part of the fabric of news production. The move towards infotainment and the ‘McDonaldization’ and ‘Disneyization’ of news has facilitated the mainstreaming of satire news and satirical programmes focused on the news and its review. Jones argues that this transition has fostered a “conjoining” of the lines between politics and popular culture and makes for *entertaining politics* in place of *just politics* (2005, p. 8). Satirical programming has begun to directly engage with politics through hosting political figures for debate or ‘roasting’, and implicitly through creating opportunities for new versions of reality. The distinctive discursive and pragmatic features of satire make it a unique source of political information and perspectives. Through the parodying of serious genres like news, satire can provide a reassessment or rearticulation of civic culture, from politics to national identity.

Whilst shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have inspired a great body of scholarly work on televisual satire, for the most part the research has conceived of this satire as ‘fake news’ and as somewhat invested in serious political discourse. Atkinson defines ‘fake news’ as something that while imitating the format of traditional news, “refuses to credit satirists’ with knowing what they are doing” and is concerned with “deconstructing the bullshit” and utilising “deliberative tools” to foster critical thinking about society and systems of power whilst simultaneously adopting the conventions and style of a traditional news show (2011b, p. 1). *7 Days* does not deny its identity as a satire and instead uses it to propel itself and at varying intervals to defend itself with a ‘satiric disclaimer’. This distancing at times

diminishes the show's credibility as a corrective agent, but does nothing to diminish its role as a critic of 'the other side'.

*7 Days* and satire more generally are important tools in the emergence of a counter narrative to traditional news and journalism and are thereby an important force in the resignification of public discourse and in the reformulation of contemporary citizenship. The changing face of news media and its capacity to perform the watchdog and informative functions of its genre have been further exacerbated in New Zealand by an unstable history of broadcasting regulation. *7 Days* will be used to demonstrate the processes of resignification used by satire through the discussion of its theoretical preliminaries – parody and irony – rhetorical devices – humour, authenticity, truthiness – and the unravelling of its methods of employ – pastiche, caricature, wordplay. The approach taken here is dually from the cultural industry (political economy) and textual analysis perspectives.

Paul Simpson's (2003) 'Triadic Model for Satire' in cooperation with his systemic functional framework for satire open up the hierarchical relationships between ideology, genre, register, and lexico-grammar involved in the production of satire. When applied to *7 Days* this model exposes the show's peculiarities and cultural nuances. This evaluative approach to New Zealand comedy and its particular affinity for satire broaches new ground in New Zealand television studies; seeking to isolate some of the motivations for satire-making in New Zealand that make its production a mainstay in the threatened genre of New Zealand television comedy.

## PERSPECTIVES ON SATIRICAL NEWS

The existing scholarship on 'fake news' or 'oppositional news' has highlighted the role of satire in serious political dialogue. The coining of a term like 'fake news' is the bringing together of two conflicting terms. Where **fake** infers imposter, untruthful, fictitious and lying; **news** implies reality, factuality, and truthiness. The term is intrinsically paradoxical and therefore begs further explanation. There are several versions of fake news; where stories have been *misinterpreted by news gatherers*, or *faked* by members of the public, and are subsequently thrust into the mainstream media, later to be 'found out'; where a news outlet or reporter *intentionally falsifies information* to distort and manipulate public perception; the distribution of '*covert propaganda*' by corporations and public relations (PR) professionals; and lastly satire news or what is also referred to as *oppositional news* and throughout this study as 'fake news'.

In revising the existing literature on contemporary satire, Joe Atkinson surmises that ‘fake news’ offers more “dialogical, deliberative and explanatory forms of discourse” whilst fostering more critical engagement by audiences, and is less hypocritical and politically constrained than mainstream news (2011b, p. 2). These elements give ‘fake news’ the ability to contribute to and/or establish counter narratives that work to relieve any tensions carried by the audience through pointing out hypocrisy – or in some cases inciting ironic activism.

#### ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVES ON ‘FAKE NEWS’

The scholarship emerging on satire television and ‘fake news’ is coming for the most part out of analyses of US shows *Saturday Night Live (SNL)*, *The Daily Show (TDS)*, and *The Colbert Report (TCR)*. A variety of terms are used to describe the ‘bent’ representations of news in these studies, including: ‘fake news’ (as outlined above), oppositional news (Baym, 2005), satiric infotainment (Alonso, 2012), news parody (Baym & Jones, 2012), political satire (Colletta, 2009; Young & Hoffman, 2012), political humour (Dagnes, 2012), late-night comedy (Baek & Wojcieszak, 2009), late-night political comedy (Compton, 2011), satire news (Jones & Baym, 2010), soft news (Baum, 2003a, 2003b), and news satire (Sienkiewicz, 2012). Overwhelmingly though ‘fake news’ is used to describe any form of satirical programming that critiques the mainstream news media and politics. It can be seen as an all-encompassing term and its deployment can be entertaining, informative and critical, all at the same time.

*The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have been cited as key information sources for citizens when making when making “informed choices about electoral politics” (Jones, 2005, p. 181). Jon Stewart himself describes his satire as primarily concerned with entertainment over information; “I’m a comedian first. My comedy is informed by an ideological background. There’s no question about that... I’m not an activist. I’m a comedian... What I do is put material through a comedic process, I don’t just sit and narrate” (“Jon Stewart on ‘Fox News Sunday’,” 2011). Stephen Colbert after leaving his position as a correspondent on *The Daily Show* started his own ‘fake news’ show *The Colbert Report* wherein Colbert takes on an amplified conservative persona to analyse current events. Colbert says that where Stewart openly deconstructs the news he does it backwards,

“We deconstruct, but then we don’t show anybody our deconstruction. We reconstruct – we falsely construct the hypocrisy. And I embody the bullshit until hopefully you can smell it” (Strauss, 2009).

LaMarre, Landreville and Beam's 2009 study on the show found that not all viewers took Colbert's performance as satire and some instead took it as reaffirming their existing (usually conservative) beliefs. LaMarre et al found that whilst audiences did mostly understand and 'take up' the humour they did not always see Colbert's political affiliation, ideology, and attitudes (2009, p. 226). Baumgartner and Morris's study supported this further when they examined *The Colbert Report's* effect on young adults, finding that Colbert's persuasive messages were increasing support for conservative politics despite Colbert's intentions being otherwise (2008).

This trend toward assessing the influence of satire on potential voters has generally found that satirical news is as valid a news source as its traditional counterparts, and contributes to the information diet of active consumers of the media as much as the 'serious news'. Other accounts look at the '*Saturday Night Live* effect' and the role that the show has played during various elections, news and political events (Reinhold, 2006; A. Day & Thompson, 2012; Abel & Barthel, 2013). The 2008 Tina Fey/Sarah Palin sketch series by *SNL* has birthed a subset of scholarship on its own.

#### FAKE NEWS – EXAMPLE: PALIN/FEY AND COURIC/POEHLER

John McCain's choice to bring Sarah Palin on board as his running mate in the 2008 US Presidential election race generated a media spectacle, owing to Palin's beauty queen looks and comparative lack of experience in politics as the Governor of Alaska. Palin's viability as a candidate was only further undermined when she partook in a series of interviews with Katie Couric. During the third interview Palin failed to deliver examples of Senator McCain's regulation policies, or names of newspapers she regularly read. *SNL* aired a sketch that spoofed Palin's Couric interview less than a week after the original with Tina Fey as Palin and Amy Poehler as Couric. Fey's portrayal of Palin was as an unintelligent, ultra-conservative, 'hick' politician from Alaska. Fey's striking physical resemblance to Palin only further thickened the caricature. Sarah Esralew and Dannagal Goldthwaite Young explored the phenomenon in relation to agenda setting and priming, finding that Fey's caricatures ultimately had an effect on voter perceptions of Palin (2012). Jason Peifer looked at the spoofs as "reflecting, refracting, and creating political realities" – importantly he argues that the *SNL* parodies of Palin "powerfully informed" the mainstream media's coverage of the "real" Palin (2013, p. 171).

## THE TRUTHINESS OF FAKE NEWS

Media commentators have called television satire more truthful than its serious counterparts. Former MSNBC pundit Keith Olbermann lamented in a 2011 *Rolling Stone* interview that

“Comedians are the only ones paid to tell the truth in public discourse. Everybody else – politicians, news broadcasters, religious figures – we’re all paid to be oracles” (qtd in Binelli, 2011).

In calling themselves comedy, shows like *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and *7 Days* have a type of freedom not given to their traditional news counterparts. Unlike traditional news, satirical news is primarily concerned with entertaining people first and educating and informing second.

*7 Days* creator and producer Jon Bridges says that as a comedy show the comedians can “say anything, and we do” (2014). Uninhibited by the constraints of a traditional news programme - that endeavours to be truthful and sincere – Bridges says that the comedians on *7 Days* “say a lot more things in jest than you could say journalistically... We have pretty good freedom... We’re not really hampered” (2014). This ‘say anything’ operates under the ‘only joking’ disclaimer that comedy is intrinsically afforded and gives satire programming the room to critique and attack in ways the traditional news media is ideologically opposed to.

Whilst Stewart and Colbert both adopt the persona of a newscaster, the panellists on *7 Days* are always comedians. It is this unwillingness to reveal themselves as satirists that propels Stewart and Colbert’s criticism whilst the comedians on *7 Days* are outwardly critical and their jokes do not require as much work by the audience. Unlike the US examples above, *7 Days* does not proclaim to **be** news but it certainly has a problem with it.

## WIDER CONSIDERATIONS

Satire is drawing in diverse audiences, with many choosing satirical programming for their daily news fix over traditional media. Young people are turning to satire as a source of political information and substitute for ‘real’ news, television networks are turning to satire as a cheap means of content production. TV3’s ‘comedy experiment’ for New Zealand television has resulted in a series of (low-cost) in-house productions that highlight the ‘Kiwi’ identity and self-deprecating New Zealand spirit. This approach ultimately works to service the broadcasting strategies of the New Zealand Government under the Broadcasting Act 1989 and the overarching goals of the independent funding body New Zealand on Air (NZoA) – whose

contestable programming funds are imperative to the sustenance of local content. Whilst *7 Days* shies away from the more scathing political reviews of something like *The Daily Show*, it actively incites the ‘Kiwi’ sensibilities of sarcasm, connectedness, community, and tall poppy syndrome to execute critiques of the current news media and political environments.

#### THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TELEVISION & THE CULTURAL TELEVISION INDUSTRY

Communications research into the cultural industries is largely concerned with the construction of meaning through various texts and mediums, and what that production, transmission and reception means for producers and consumers; particularly in terms of resistance or reinforcement of cultural attitudes and systems of power. What is at times neglected, is the fact that these texts operate as a part of a wider setting, a setting that is operating as an industry, with all the restrictions and concerns of economic organisation that “impinge[s] on the production and circulation of meaning” (Golding & Murdock, 1991, p. 17). There is a strong focus on the institutional arrangement of television in New Zealand that underpins the discussions of *7 Days* and satire henceforth.

Television production is a cultural industry, and by its very nature does not subscribe to the features and modalities typical of adjacent industry structures. Whilst television industries are increasingly shaped by the business imperatives required of any industry, the artefacts produced by television, especially, are important articulators of countless discourses that enable consumers/citizens to make sense of the world.

It is useful to employ a political economy perspective to shape a reconciliation between the production, consumption and content of a text as it stands a part of a social order and is subject to socio-political histories and futures. This critical stance engages with the realities of the inception of a text – the tangible, the real, and the consequential all the while historicising it, with specific consideration given to its relationship with late capitalism, “which it defines as both dynamic and problematic, as undergoing change and as substantially imperfect” (1991, p. 17).

#### WHY SATIRICAL NEWS & REVIEW MATTERS

In her 2011 book *A Conservative Walks into a Bar: The Politics Political Humor* Alison Dagnes suggests that satire is useful primarily in times of political dissatisfaction and when the news and punditry is failing us; for “humour is a powerful salve” (2012, p. 3). Dagnes here framed satire as a form of ‘comic relief’ in the face of a failing relationship between the mainstream media and the citizenry. *7 Days* ascribes to these values inherent to ‘fake news’,

but distances itself further by not ever claiming **to be news** and instead positioning itself solely as a satire show **concerned with** the week's news. Nevertheless, scholarship applying to 'fake news' is relevant here for *7 Days* is born of a satirical news tradition – it takes up the conventions of news media, chews 'em up, and spits 'em out. 'Fake news' has mainstreamed, so much so that in some instances it is taken for actual news, and for some consumers it has become a part of their daily news diet. Satirical opinion pieces have begun to appear in the traditional news media, and satirists have infiltrated the mainstream media at various occasions.

In 2010 a little known comedian by the name of Guy Williams was sent on assignment by TV3's *The Jono Project* to infiltrate TV1's *Breakfast* news-entertainment programme. Under the alias Age Pryor Williams purported to be a spokesperson for a pro-commercial whaling group 'Commercial Whaling New Zealand'. Williams as Pryor was interviewed live in-studio by host Paul Henry about his efforts to promote commercial whaling in New Zealand in the face of a massive media storm around anti-whaling activist Pete Bethune's imprisonment following an altercation with a Japanese whaling ship. Williams bandied about populist terms like "at the moment we have a system that is broken" and "we want to make small steps" to convince Henry that his approach to whale conservation was through commercialising whaling ("Breakfast: Interview with Hoax Pro-Whaler," 2010). It later came out that Williams was in fact a comedian and had been trying to expose the low quality of newsmaking rife on New Zealand television. Williams admitted that he had initially tried to get on TV1's current affairs programme *Close Up* or TV3's *Campbell Live* because he was "frustrated by all the crap they do put on these programmes" (Moore, 2010).

*The Daily Show*'s Jason Jones famously interviewed *The New York Times*' executive editor Bill Keller and assistant managing editor Richard L. Berke ("End Times," 2009). The newspaper's willingness to let the show lambast it as a dying trade succumbing to 'end times' was also demonstrating the newspaper's unfearing dedication to truthiness and a dedication to ethical journalism. Jones admitted that his efforts were to point out what a good job the paper were doing when they were amongst a slowly denigrating competitor population:

"I think the point of the piece is, really, if I could be serious for one moment, that without institutions like yours, the news would not exist. I think everyone has a genuine love of your institution here, because it's the first paper that almost everybody reads here in the morning. You guys aren't doing a bad enough job for us to make fun of on a constant basis. Every once in a while you slip up, and then you're lambs to the

slaughter. But you should really be more [terrible]. You're doing too good of a job” (qtd in Itzkoff, 2009).

Whilst the failings or short-comings of modern journalism are frequently lambasted by media critics and scholars alike, satirists too have sustained debate on news forms. It is important to set up the roles and functions that news is expected to perform in society before the role of satire in news criticism can be inspected.

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# SATIRE FORM AND FUNCTION

## DEFINING SATIRE

Historically, satire has been notoriously difficult to define with many surrendering to a ‘we know it when we see it’ definition. As its forms evolve and diversify a definition for the satirical artefact is becoming more problematic. Where satire was once a realm exclusively occupied by literature (namely poetry and theatre) its techniques have now been adopted by newer forms like television, film, and the web series. Satire has been the focus of many disciplines from philosophy to linguistics to Media Studies, but it has historically presented itself most often in the criticisms of twentieth century literature.

## ETYMOLOGY OF ‘SATIRE’

The etymology of the word satire is bound up in confusion between the Greek *satyr-play* and Old Comedy, the half-man half-goat mythological creature known as the *Satyr*, and the modern word *satire* that is derived from the Latin *satura* (Jolliffe, 1956, p. 84). Gilbert Highet (1962) and Humphrey Carpenter (2000) concluded that satire is derived from two unrelated words: *satyr* the half man-half goat creature of Greek myth, and *satura* the Latin word for full or a mixture of things (usually food items). To add to the ambiguity of the term, *Satyrs* (half man-half goat) were also used as comedic characters in Greek tragicomedies. Horace wrote of such satyrs as being the “woodland Satyrs” who “roughly essayed jesting” and were “bantering” (Jolliffe, 1956, p. 85). Satyrs were rebellious and obscene, their behaviours were akin to the literary functions of satire and concerned with defamation and insults. For this reason the satyr and the satire slowly became confused terms (Jolliffe, 1956, p. 95). The meaning of the word *satura* has in fact changed over time, and has come to mean more than simply ‘mixture’ and rather the Latin term *satura* refers to a “form of composition” that focuses on assailing “prevalent follies or vices” with derision and attack (Jack, 1952, p. 97). The *satura* is thus a conventionalised, genre-like, antiquated predecessor of the contemporary term we have come to employ - Satire.

## HORATIAN SATIRE

Horace is credited with consolidating the literary form of satire, owing in part to his fellow Roman and predecessor Lucilius whose poetry is touted as the first to have formalised the *satura*. Horace initially called his works *sermones*, in order distance himself from Lucilius’ *satura* (poetry), but by his second book had adopted *satura* as representative of his writing

(Griffin, 1994, p. 7). This inconsistency of definitions for the genre played out through the Fourth Century when Diomedes gave chase to a generic definition for satire, determining that satire was to be: “a verse composition...defamatory and composed to carp at human vices” – he named Lucilius, Horace, and Persius as exemplary of satire’s form (Griffin, 1994, p. 9). Diomedes and his contemporaries were fixated on satire’s moral function, just as much as they were concerned with its form and frequency. The Greek comedies were a collectively endorsed medium within which authority and institutions could be openly criticised without tangible ramifications. Its intentions however were to inspire reform through recognising a standard of politics that should be attended to by the state and the citizenry. The satirist or comic was the instrument by which the audience was motivated to instigate change, or at least to invoke laughter at the changes they were institutionally prevented from making.

## PARADIGMS FOR SATIRE

Critical discussions around satire have tended to either look at the author of the texts, the parodic nature of a particular text, or the emergence of a text as it relates to turbulent political times. These analyses of satire have emerged as three paradigms for critique; the *apologias*, the *traditional/textual*, and the *critical-theoretical*. From each of these paradigms emerges a distinct definition for satire that ‘butts heads’ with its neighbour - and it is in these tensions that a definition for the term satire is either made too large and all-encompassing or too restrained and reductive.

The *apologias* give critique in themselves, whereby a satirist offers up a self-reflexive assessment of their satiric work. This self-criticism may be a defence, or simply remorse, for their words. Ware and Linkugel characterise the *apologias* as “the speech of self-defense” (1973, p. 273). The *apologias* were most favoured in pre-twentieth Century satire and appear alongside the works of early poets like Aristophanes, and more recently in the works of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. Swift wrote several *apologias* in the form of poems and other written autobiographical musings in an attempt to “control his own reputation with future ages” (Nokes, 1985, p. 206). Or as Barnett suggests Swift’s impetus for writing critical self-portraiture is simply “the desire to leave a record of himself to combat what he describes as ‘Careless and Ignorant Posterity’” (1981, p. 26).

The second paradigm for critical response to satire, more widely deployed in its technique, is the *traditional/textual* analysis. This approach is usually situated in a literary milieu and tends to assume satire as a “distinct form of textual organisation” (Simpson, 2003, p. 49). The

New Critics of the United States and the United Kingdom pioneered this approach to textual analysis, famously ‘experimenting’ with their students by presenting them with poems to be analysed without any preparation or critical guidance. By placing “extra-textual contaminants to the side” students were able to give a range of readings to a text, allowing its true substance to be engaged with without persuasion (Gray, 2006, p. 20). Many of the criticisms of this era have been focused on the poetics and literary genre of satire, and the likes of Highet (1962) and Frye (1970, 1971) proposed theoretical models for satire that are as exclusive and insular as the literary tradition itself.

The formalist theory of the New Critics understands satire as a rhetorical mode that is coloured by dedications to “persuasion or polemic”, an “attack on a real-world target”, as outlining a prospective course of “corrective” action, and “as grounded in an absolute moral code or norm” (Strehle, 1996, p. 147). The New Critics were obsessed with neoclassical satire and its concentration on a moral universality and correctiveness. However the New Critics neglected to address satire’s usefulness in the rearticulation of popular cultural narratives and its role as an instigator of self-reflection. Rosen sees the end of this paradigm as owing to a growing concern that to qualify a text through its abstractions – genre, tradition, tropes et cetera – is to neglect its “contingent circumstances” and thereby bleach it of its “literariness” (2007, p. 14).

The third paradigm for satiric critique is the *critical-theoretical*. This paradigm places the satiric texts within a broader theoretical framework, like that of post structuralism, psychoanalysis, feminism or postmodernism (Simpson, 2003, p. 48). Work coming out of this paradigm is principally concerned with pitting satirical discourse against the “socio-political context of production” (Simpson, 2003, pp. 48–49). This mode of inquiry has been most common in the twentieth and twenty-first Centuries, in part thanks to advances in theories of intertextuality, which began to arrive in the 1960s and 1970s.

#### GOLDEN AGES FOR SATIRE

There are certain periods in which satire is perceived by scholars to have thrived, a ‘Golden Age’ if you will. Dagnes details several thriving periods for satire and notes two key variables: the political climate of the times and the availability of media to disperse the satiric text (2012, pp. 79–80). Dagnes also notes that if a political climate is not acquiescent to humour because of “national fear, sadness, or ennui” then an attempt to invoke laughter will “fall on deaf ears” or more pointedly, perhaps be judged as “socially unacceptable” (2012, pp. 79–80). Arguably then a post 9/11 America would be unprepared for humour, yet as Achter (2008) argues humour

provided necessary relief to a threatened, terror-stricken America. Looking specifically to fake news outlet *The Onion* Achter contends that by reframing news of the terror attack,

“*The Onion*’s carnivalesque meta-discourse created opportunities to address racism, to address fundamental questions about the motives behind the attacks, and to lay out an agenda for learning about the cultures and political histories of the people involved in the war on terror” (p. 298).

Whilst Dagnes fails to acknowledge that satire can have a neighbourly ‘alongside’ relationship to humour, not expressly requiring it to take form, her point about reformulating the discourse around the terrorism is pertinent and demonstrates the corrective potential for satire.

It seems rather that satirical critique becomes fashionable during different periods, owing to the success of particular texts and authors and not necessarily to the cultural climate of the time. The invention of the Gutenberg printing press came in the same Century as Chaucer’s poetry, whilst the success of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* ties in with the industrial revolution in Europe – which produced an increasing demand for rapid communication and increasing levels of literacy. Greater distribution capabilities can here be attributed, in part, to the growing popularity of the texts and their review. Nevertheless, the ‘Golden Ages’ of satire warrant some focus for their role in shaping contemporary satire, specifically the latest ‘Golden Age’.

Two Golden Ages for satire have been seen to emerge in the literary realm. The first of these is the Graeco-Roman tradition and the second, the neo-classicist works of the Anglo-Irish satirists of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. This second Age came out of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century, specifically in the novels of Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Jonathan Swift. Their neo-classicist works made way for a lesser-defined period of satire with these satirists identifying more so as commentators or chroniclers than ‘satirists’ per se.

Pope was concerned with the British upper class and their façade of decorum, famously satirising them in his 1712 poem *The Rape of the Lock* which was later reimagined as a five canto epic (1714). Pope here criticised social context and systems of class through highlighting the falsity of the leisurely high life, speaking of Britain’s statesmen as both powerful and nonchalant, “Dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea”. Swift took a similarly targeted approach, attacking the socio-economic problems of the Irish at the hands of British colonisation through his 1729 essay *A Modest Proposal*. Its full title was ‘A Modest Proposal

for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public'. Here Swift proposed a sensible alternative for mothers "forced to employ all their time in strolling" in that at one year old children should be put to work begging for their own food, allowing mothers to instead work for their "honest livelihood" (1996, pp. 52–53), and that those out of work could be utilised as a food source.

The twentieth century has also provided a great deal of satire, and sometimes through the 'accidental satirist'. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) was written as an allegory reflecting on the Russian Revolution and Stalinism, whilst his later novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* (sometimes written as *1984*) (1949) looked to a dystopian future under a quasi-divine political leader, 'Big Brother'. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) also looked toward a dystopic future, proposing a range of technological advancements that were to reconstitute the human condition. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1919) also messed with dystopic communities to assess the failings and discontent with the socio-political climate of the West - but Wilde's works were not tagged satire until sometime after their initial publishing. Novelists Jane Austen and Charles Dickens are often identified as satirists, using their fiction to play with systems of power and class – but again, their successful attempts at satire were acknowledged many years after their initial publishing.

Much of this literature was popularised prior to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and the body of its scholarly critique is illustrative of common misconceptions about what does and does not constitute satire. The large body of critical work on satire is grounded in presentations of formal verse (poetic) satire and dissections of allegory. The conceptualisation of satire as a literary genre is perhaps to blame for the initial critical neglect (and absent adoration) for those texts and satirists that fall outside the realm of high culture. Shakespeare himself was once considered an icon of low culture and exemplary of an upward shift (posthumously) into high culture. This neglect of the non-literary also tended to exclude those 'accidental' or 'unintentional' satirists whose works enable the rhetoric of satire but do not themselves expressly proclaim to be satirical or set-out to behave in accordance with the literary satiric tradition. Paul Simpson argues that Ernest Hemingway occupies such a space (2003, p. 51), sitting on the fringes of the satire canon but nevertheless utilising its methods.

Scholarly writing on American satire does not emerge until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, largely owing to the fact that American literature as distinct from British colonial literature did

not come to the fore until after the American Revolution and the colonies' separation from the British Empire. Where the Anglo-Irish satire was concerned with divisions of class and labour, American satire of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is characterised by its concern with religion, political abuses, slavery, and the primitiveness of life on the frontier. These criticisms were usually delivered by way of a naïve persona who inadvertently reveals social truths, often employing comic exaggeration to do so (Morris, 2008, p. 377). Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan* first published in 1637 is credited with being the first American satire; Morton showed great disdain for The Puritans, ultimately writing *New English Canaan* to dishonour them (Morris, 2008, p. 378). The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw marked economic and social change throughout America, notably the abolition and women's rights movements, its tumultuous social conditions cultivating great satirical fodder for writers like Washington Irving and Seba Smith. Mark Twain largely consolidated this period of satire by the 19<sup>th</sup> century with famous works like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) (Morris, 2008). Twain's writing has since been adapted by screenwriters and brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with works like the 1993 film *The Adventures of Huck Finn* and the 1949 musical comedy film *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* starring Bing Crosby. Twain's timelessness suggests something about the nature of satire and its ability to strike at sites of ideology.

Like American satire the New Zealand tradition inherits much of its style and influence from the British. Satire first emerged in colonial New Zealand in the prose of settler poets like George Chamier. Writing in the 1800s this writing was for the most part concerned with the politics of settler society and a growing detachment from the motherland. Chamier in particular was concerned with the "moral hell" and irrationality of settler society in New Zealand (Roderick Sturm, 2008, p. 153). The epistolary poetry of James K. Baxter satirised the national character through a dramatic presentation of his own personality revealing a series of painful hypocritical intersections between the political and domestic realms. Baxter's poetry that mimics Twain in the sense that both men sought to target the national character and the irrationalities and inconsistencies of community building in the pioneering era.

Acclaimed writer Katherine Mansfield regularly wrote about class consciousness in New Zealand society, most notably in *The Singing Lesson* (1920), *The Garden Party* (1921), and *A Cup of Tea* (1923). Māori author Witi Ihimaera responded to Mansfield's writing in later years with satire of his own, his book of short stories *Dear Miss Mansfield* (1989) was a re-writing of the icon's most famous stories from a Māori perspective. Using the satiric mode Ihimaera

also dealt with the racial divide in New Zealand in his stories *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995) and *Medicine Woman* (2007). Ihimaera's works have been made into several films, with *Medicine Woman* adapted for the big screen as *White Lies* (Rotberg, 2013).

## OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON SATIRE

The literary-critical attention paid to satire has for the most part confused and broadened its definition, conflating its texts and functions. Interdisciplinary attentions to satire have constantly problematised and renegotiated definitions for satire, leading to the establishment of subsets like 'political satire' and 'literary satire'. Such a lack of consensus raises clear implications for critical workings of satire and what its many purposes are, or what is subsequently referred to as 'satirical uptake'. The latter two of the three paradigms are the most widely drawn on in critical analysis today and often the two can be seen to overlap. With the invocation of satire as literature and as a *genre* of literature prevailing, it is worth considering the abstractions that have so firmly fixed satire as a genre and how it might thence be squeezed or affixed to a modal or systemic framework. Satire now finds itself in a new Age and the satirists of the twenty first century are perhaps to be the most self-reflexive, openly tagging themselves as satirist and using that position to offer resolve in an increasingly problematic political climate.

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# BETWEEN THE DISCOURSE AND GENRE OF SATIRE

## SATIRE AS DISCOURSE

A consideration of satire as a semblance of discourse has been attempted by the likes of Knight (1992), Day (2011), Stewart (2013), and most successfully by Simpson (2003). Knight considers satire as a series of “fictive utterances” as opposed to a “natural” discourse (1992, p. 27). Stewart points out that satire is not always successful, owing to its chameleon-like tendencies to shift and change and to appear “too subtle” or too “ambiguous” (2013, pp. 200–204). Satire is routinely examined as a genre, be it literary, televisual or otherwise. Simpson (2003) makes a convincing case for satire to instead be considered a discursive humour practice which plays amongst several genres of discourse; bringing with it satirical technique, text, and a particular lexico-grammar or language employment. Simpson’s core impetus is to “capture the special discursual and pragmatic features that characterise this pervasive and popular form of contemporary humorous discourse” (2003, p. 1). A consideration of both genre and discourse is necessary here, for the promotion of television satire in New Zealand is largely shaped in terms of television genre, specifically ‘satire’ and ‘comedy’. To best understand the inner workings of satire, and where it comes from as a discursive act of subversion, its consideration as sitting within or alongside discourse becomes necessary.

## ON THE FRINGES OF DISCOURSE - FOUCAULT, DISCOURSE & SATIRE

The term discourse was originally a linguistic concept related simply to the structuring of language through writing and speech, but for Michel Foucault language meant more than just words and he saw discourse as a way of making sense of the world including the relevant concepts and vocabularies to a given field of knowledge (1972). Here discourse limits the way in which a field is constructed and what types of knowledge can be produced. Discourse necessarily incorporates all that is required to form and make sense of it – from physical manifestations and the referencably real, to the immaterial and immeasurable.

Stuart Hall sees Foucault’s discourse as a series of communicative acts that are shaped through their temporal location and with time (1992, p. 291). Discourse represents ways of thinking at particular historical moments, and through language and texts discourse enfranchises a given order. Simpson articulates this relationship as “patterns of discourse [that] are seen not as

symbolising neutrally a “natural” order of things, but rather as a *naturalised* order locatable in prevailing relations of power and predicated upon the particular power relations that are immanent in each discourse event” (Simpson, 2003, p. 84). Stuart Hall further dissects Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse, stating that the subject of a discourse “cannot be outside discourse” because it “must be subjected to discourse” (2001, pp. 79–80). Discourse must submit to its rules and conventions, to its invocations of power/knowledge systems. A subject or text is the bearer of discourse and thus reinforces systems of power intrinsic to its knowledge base - but discourse cannot “stand outside” power and knowledge constructions as its “source and author” (S. Hall, 2001, pp. 79–80). It is here that satire both comes close to and is rejected from claiming its own discourse.

Discourse constructs a topic and defines the ways in which it can be talked about, represented and considered. Discourse ‘rules in’ and ‘rules out’ particular notions and conducts (S. Hall, 2001, p. 73). Foucault argues that discourse is never reduced to one device - statement, text, action, or source - but instead these things exist at the same time (S. Hall, 2001, p. 73). In existing at the same time, discourse is seen to be a living and breathing thing, growing with each use or utterance of a topic within the given framework. Such a process results in the “the impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 122); where a ‘fixity of meaning’ is implausible the realisation of partial meanings or a range of meanings is more likely. A discourse privileges particular flows of meanings and detains differences in order to “construct a centre” (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 12). Building upon this interpretation Laclau & Mouffe question the assumption that meaning is fixed, in the foundational sense, and is instead fluid, at times overflowing with signified incidences; it is here that satire rests – fluid and resisting stabilisation. Sticking with this conception, we can see the discourse of satire and its discursive nature as inherently incapable of a finite and determinable meaning. Satire instead relies on an articulation that is constantly resignified, reiterated, and recited. Satire is fluid and resists stabilisation.

Discourse is made up of more than just language, it incorporates all that is required to form and make sense of it - physical manifestations and the referencably real, to the immaterial and immeasurable. For Simpson, satire is not exclusively a genre of discourse but rather a “discursive practice” that transgresses the borders of various discourses and therefore has “the capacity to subsume and assimilate other discourse genres” (2003, p. 76). Satire is work. Satire asks its audience to recognise existing discourses and genres beyond itself and does not have a

“clear-cut” or “easily digestible” meaning (Gray et al., 2009b, p. 15). Audiences are in constant negotiation with various meanings and ideological sets to decode the satiric utterance.

In situating itself on the fringes of discourse, rolling in and out of ‘parent’ discourses, satire is thusly positioned beyond the bounds of genre or a naturalised discourse of satire. Foucault said that texts deal with and refer to one another, ultimately contributing to a “single figure” that is converged with institutions and practices (1972, p. 118). These texts contribute to and represent a value system of a given era, expressing “the totality to which it belongs and whose limits it exceeds” (1972, p. 118). Satire is not limited in this way for it regurgitates other cultural forms and discourses to come into being. Satire does not have its own codified, institutionalised set of meanings and linguistic structures that informs both it and its consumers. There is no finite vocabulary for satire. Satire does however appear to go through ‘Golden Ages’ where its presence is ‘common to a whole period’ or form.

#### THE EPISTEME & SATIRE’S SHELF LIFE

The same discourse will emerge across a range of texts and will engage with varying institutional sites across a given society; Foucault calls this *episteme* (S. Hall, 2001, p. 74). Foucault’s conceptualisation of the episteme is centred on the idea that knowledge and truth are produced by epistemes and are therefore not ahistorical, timeless, or unchanging (1972). Epistemes are periods of history coloured by their specific world-views and discourses. The episteme is not a single body of knowledge nor zeitgeist derivative but rather a certain perceptible coherence between the “institutions, experiences, and doctrines of an age” that principally condition and organise a culture (de Certeau, 1986, pp. 172–173). It is important to consider the specificities of the episteme of a given culture, for the jokes and cultural texts born of them are very difficult to transpose to another culture. A joke requires the joke-teller and the joke-receiver to both share a collective cultural consciousness and mutual system(s) of referentiality in order for a joke to be understood – whether it results in laughter or not.

Communication through language is a process of reiteration that recites subjects to signify and resignify meanings. Jacques Derrida, who provided the theoretical groundwork on iterability, asserts that every citation, reiteration, or re-utterance of a word is located within a particular temporal and spatial setting that is “necessarily different from former or later citations elsewhere of the same words” (qtd in Vasterling 28). This notion of reiterative resignification can be seen in the incremental shifts around the textual interpretations of satire and what meanings can be made, or enforced by reconceptualisations of a given word or idea in a new

temporal and spatial locale. Satire liberates individuals and relieves their tensions in the face of the hypocrisy and follies of man. But the types of worries concerning a public at any given time are subject to changing ideologies and moral codes. Satire plays amongst these topicalities and thus has a shelf life. In focusing on timely events or ideas, a satire can become redundant as time passes and we shift from one set of cultural norms to another: or, more deeply, from one episteme to the next.

## **SATIRE AS GENRE**

Satire has most often been conceived of as a literary genre. More recent incarnations of satire have tended to be non-literary, notably televisual satire. The word satire is regularly deployed as a casual descriptor of genre for anything from a current affairs program to a sci-fi serial. Television guides throw around ‘satire’ as an adjective alongside the terms ‘comedy’, ‘cartoon’, ‘science-fiction’ and ‘political’. Two realisations of genre thus become important to televisual satire: the first, genre as a theoretical category, and the second, genre as a televisual category.

Genre has been used historically to group together texts that share a common trope, author, character, narrative, or style. Genre is used to group together anything from films (romantic comedy, horror, action, blockbuster), to music (reggae, pop, rock, rap, blues, jazz), to television programmes (comedy, drama, reality TV, current affairs). Genre plays an important role in the categorisation of texts, both on the part of the producer and the consumer (audiences). Genre markings are important to television producers when going after funding for a project, and equally as important for networks when allotting their programming schedules. Intertextuality is particularly influential to the screen industries, with traditional programs paving the way for their contemporaries – another element genre shares with discourse. Much like the definition for satire, a definition for genre often falls unto a ‘know it when we see it’ classification. Genre, like satire, is not simply a text or template from which a text can be grown, but rather a sort of generic grouping takes place over time to help audiences and producers make better sense of a given text. This grouping is born out of certain cultural productions and contexts that are open to interpretation.

Mittell’s (2004) interrogation of genre is decidedly fitting to this study for it considers genre as something beyond the text, something indicative of the wider cultural processes informing and working unto it and serving discourses. By considering genre as a *functional location of discourse* the examination of various texts can be seen as a series of communicative forms

working to constitute a genre with a familiar set of meaning and values attributed to it in a particular historical context. As Mittell surmises, genre is a “conceptual category formed by cultural practices and not inherent to the objects that they seem to describe” (2004, p. 12). Genre thus plugs any gaps ‘missed out’ by any literal expressions, calling upon the other texts that contribute to a genre to inform a reading of a text. Knight aligns with Mittell’s definition for genre when arguing for a sense of genre as the “recurrence of certain discursive properties” also proffering that genre is “institutionalized, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by this codification” (1992, p. 23). Secondly, Knight sees satire as presenting itself “in the guise” of formally recognised genres, convincingly latching itself on to the epic for example (1992, p. 23). These two elements struggle to affix themselves to satire. In mimicking the formal genre conventions of other texts, satire is not wholly submitting itself to the host genre. Satire is identified through its parody and pastiche of other texts and forms, thereby removing it from a conventional understanding of genre – despite its intertextual nature. Knight argues that if the discursive properties of a genre – like speech occasions – are to define it, satire should too be identifiable by its own distinctive speech occasions (1992, p. 23). In these ways satire is not a genre itself but rather an exploiter of other genres, parasitic and at once reliant on other forms to make itself seem familiar and readable.

By framing televisual satire through this invocation of genre, it gives room for wider theoretical critique in terms of satire’s engagement with popular culture, politics, and new forms of media. It also rejects the oversimplification of satire’s workings that it was so susceptible to under the critiques of the formalist approaches mentioned earlier.

#### TELEVISION & GENRE

Whilst genre is decidedly fluid it is a useful classification for film censors, marketers, funding bodies, critics, academics, advertisers, and audiences. Genre constitutes a sort of mutuality between these locations. It is important to consider these participants in the discourse of the genre at hand not to check against the textual conventions denoted as ‘markers of genre’ but rather to include these participants as contributors to the genre itself.

In the competitive television environment genre has been an increasingly important identifier for industry stakeholders and audiences alike. Entrenched categories like sitcom, soap opera, news, documentary, and drama have been used extensively for network branding. Subscriber channels like *Comedy Central*, *MTV (Music Television)*, *Cartoon Network*, *SKY Movies Action* are prime examples of genre branding. Their names are self-identifying and ask audiences to

draw on conventional understandings of genre in order to streamline their channel surfing. The television industries rely on genre to inform their production practices, borrowing from other successful formats with the hope of gaining a better audience share. The pithy example being the spin-off with iconic shows like *Grey's Anatomy* spurring *Private Practice*, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and here in New Zealand shows like *Issues* branching out into *More Issues*.

## INTERTEXTUALITY

The term intertextuality first came about in the 1960s through the writings of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes who both endeavoured to conceive of texts beyond 'the author' as the "originary source of meaning" (Richardson, 2000, p. 96). The rise of this concept was seen to account for the general processes of how audiences constructed meaning, and gave rise to notion of an active audience. The theory of intertextuality did not broach Media Studies as a discipline until Stuart Hall and the reception theories of he and his contemporaries arrived in the 1980s (Gray, 2006, p. 21). This generation of scholars were the first to contend that meaning was constructed out of a relationship between the creator, distributor, and audience of a media text, and from the context in which it was conceived and received. These scholars soon began to notice that film and television shows had begun to quote one another and reference "popular cultural artifacts", and in seeking a better understanding for this approach the term intertextuality was appropriated (Ott & Walter, 2000, p. 429).

The two divergent conceptualisations of intertextuality are subsequently often conflated. Current theories of intertextuality in Media Studies contend that it is the process through which individual texts relate to others and draw their meaning, through that relationship meaning is made and "systems of visible or invisible references...shape an individual text" with all texts referring to others" (Schirato, et al, 2010, p. 43). These references are done in a variety of ways to create multiplicity of meanings, usually self-consciously though sometimes unwillingly or inadvertently. Intertextuality is a system of cross-referencing that accounts for the fluidity possible in media-text-audience relations. Intertextuality is what makes genre happen.

Both abstractions of intertextuality are relevant to satire for the first is centred on authorial intent – that of the satirist – and the second around the genres and systems of codification and context drawn on – both by the satirist to enact their critique and the audience to subsequently decode it. The former is addressed through the ironic phases of satire and the latter by the parodic elements of satire. Intertextuality is a strategy employed by satire to make itself

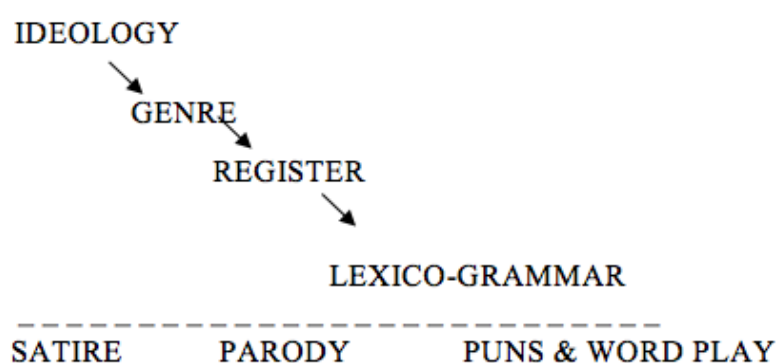
understood, this is often done through the use of pastiche. Pastiche's neutrality gives satire its serious footing.

## A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SATIRE

### SATIRE AS A DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

In order to dissect the discursual properties of satire a sense of how it functions needs to first be established. From Simpson's early work on satire came the SMUT model which considered four core elements for satire; the Setting, the Method, the Uptake, and the Target (2000, p. 245). Simpson reimaged SMUT, coming up with both a triadic model, and a systemic functional framework for satire (2003). Drawing on the tradition of systemic-functional linguistics, Simpson's functional framework for satire arranges discursual properties in a hierarchical scale of connections. The components of ideology, genre, register, and lexico-grammar chart a graduation from the micro to the macro levels of discourse and aid an understanding of the constitutive elements of satire.

The arrows represent directional relationships between the units, with the higher term encoded in the manifestation of the lower (Simpson, 2003, p. 76). Beginning with the left-hand side, ideology is determined as paramount, serviced by genre, which is realised by register, and enacted by lexico-grammar. Beneath the dotted line satire starts on the left and moves to the right to see its favoured device parody, and parody's necessities puns and word play.



*Fig. 1 - Satirical discourse within a systemic-functional framework (Simpson, 2003, p. 76)*

This model is intentionally primitive and does not account for the transferable footings and evolving meanings of the satirical text - but what it does do is locate each of these domains (ideology, genre, register, and lexico-grammar) in a necessary hierarchy to expose a directional

progression or encompassing relationship. Thusly, satire cannot exist without the ignition of the other properties in the framework. Satire is dependent on these functions to take form.

At this point *ideology* stands as something aligning with, yet oppositional to, satire. Ideology is herein deployed in a Foucaultian sense, concerned with “something of the order of a subject” standing in a “secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its... determinant” (Foucault qtd in Simpson 83). Ideology permeates discourse and works to establish a ‘common sense’ or normality as intrinsic to everyday life. Ideology here too includes images and concepts but more so the structures and institutions that impose and construct a public. Ideologies are “perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them” (Louis Althusser qtd in Hebdige, 2007, p. 436). Simpson sees little use in attempting to identify a particular ideology of a satirist or piece of satire for he sees the subject positions of the satirist and the satiree as “somewhat of a movable feast” in discourse terms, and “framed as an interactive triad within orders of discourse” (2003, p. 212). For simplicity’s sake, ideology as it appears in this model for the functionality of satire will be considered as the conscious and unconscious logics by which the subject is informed. Ideology is hailed in the ironic phases of satire and is best exemplified in the connotative functions of irony.

*Genre* as it pertains to Simpson’s model genre is indicative of a context for the subject, citing a culture for the context of the satire. Genre gives purpose to a set of interactions, prescribing a way to go about colouring a subject with a pre-approved or pre-conditioned set of meanings.

*Register* is the servicer of genre. Lemke usefully defines register as “the linguistic (semantic and grammatical) resources specific to a particular discourse formation form a register of the language (a specific distribution of the probabilities of deploying any meaning alternative the language provides” [author’s emphasis] (1993, p. 246). A register therefore has inter-semiotic qualities and should be considered as the realisations or markers of genre that help along the realisation of its context.

The term *lexico-grammar* (or lexicogrammar) was coined by the functional linguist Michael Halliday (1961) and has since been adopted by linguists and the like to explain the unification between the lexical and grammatical environments of a sign (Gledhill, 2011, p. 7). Lexico-grammatical patterns are predictable and share a “stable, coherent frame of reference” composed of lexical or grammatical signs (Gledhill, 2011, p. 8). These lexical and grammatical signs could be anything from intonation and rhythm, to grammatical metaphors and thematic

clauses<sup>1</sup>. Lexico-Grammar is a micro-unit at the end of satire's functional hierarchy and is the linguistic representation of register, genre, and ultimately it conveys ideology. It is developed in language and "registers the way patterns of experience are encoded into text (whether spoken or written)" (Simpson, 2003, p. 73). It sits opposite puns and wordplay for they are manifestations of a given lexico-grammar and often play a vital role in realising satirical discourse. Parody invokes a particular knowledge of the style of a particular text by mimicking or copying its form, or elements of its form.

## **PARODY – A THEORETICAL PRELIMINARY FOR SATIRE**

Parody necessitates an investment in the evolution of a genre or text, and the genealogy of its comeuppance. Parody is inherently concerned with interrogating and destabilising the texts and genres that it critiques whilst simultaneously reconstituting various discourses with which it engages. Pithy definitions of parody, like those of the Oxford Dictionary, define it as firstly a noun: "an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artists, or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect" or "an imitation of version of something the falls far short of the real thing; a travesty". And secondly as a verb: "produce a humorously exaggerated imitation of (a writer, artist, or genre)" or to "mimic humorously" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). Whilst these definitions contribute to a greater understanding of parody as it relates to satire, it requires further interrogation of its imitation and mimicking, for behind any working of parody is intertextuality.

It would be restrictive and perhaps naïve to consider a text in isolation without first considering where it came from, how it came to be, and what it might mean in the now or in the future. As mentioned in the earlier discussion of satire's paradigms, academia and popular culture are at times guilty of a preoccupation with textual analysis and a corresponding tendency to fetishise 'the text' as a "solitary, pristinely autonomous object" (Gray, 2006, p. 19). In the case of parody it cannot be fully understood or 'taken up' until the audience, or reader, already has familiarity with the style of the parodied form. Without familiarity parody can fail and be read simply as incomplete or ill fitting. As Gray so eloquently puts it, "'inter-textuality' prepares us for the text, and prepares the text for us, so that any resulting meaning, power, or effects that 'the text' may be seen to possess are in part a function of the already-read" (2006, p. 26).

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<sup>1</sup> For a full account of the intricacies of lexico-grammar and its metafunctions see M.A.K. Halliday *On Grammar* (2002)

Parody is a *method or mode* of comedy that should be set apart from any definition as a *form* of comedy. Parody draws on aesthetic conventions rather than social conventions (explicitly) to attack a particular form, genre, or text and the way it operates. Like pastiche it replicates and/or repeats, but unlike pastiche it is openly critical. Parody is not only concerned with the redeployment of genre convention and form (as is pastiche) but too the cultural practices from which they emerge. Thus parody purports an evaluative function. Reilly succinctly summarises parody's critical reappraisal in this very fashion; "parody retains an evaluative function (polemical), refers to or "quotes" already existing texts or practices (allusive) through mimetic representation (imitation)" (2010, p. 73). Parody's preoccupation with self-reflexivity and self-criticism is what makes it suitable for the servicing of satire.

#### ALL SATIRE IS PARODY, NOT ALL PARODY IS SATIRE

One of satire's chief characteristics setting it apart from parody is that it echoes a valid form - "the text-internal" - that alerts the audience to the satirist's "satirical footing" (Simpson, 2003, p. 165). This 'footing' is necessary to the satirist's delivery, for without a claim to truthiness or realness with which to contrast its critique the satire is bound to fail. Parody and satire are not one in the same but rather parody can be employed by satire as the two interact to expose particular values about a text or subject. The self-reflexivity of parody has the ability to spotlight its own form {genre, mode, and product} for the purposes of satirical critique. Theories of parody and those of satire often conflate the two, or give them a mutual co-dependency that neglects to define them alone and in their own right. Ben-Porat defines parody as "alleged representation, usually comic, of a literary text or other artistic object - i.e. a representation of a "modelled reality" which is itself already a particular representation of an original "reality" (1979, p. 247). For parody a dialectic component is not necessary, thus parody can exist outside of satire. As Simpson argues, "parody, unlike satire, need not necessarily display an aggressive element" (2003, p. 123). This lack of aggression in parody often leaves it to be categorised as a gentler term - spoof.

#### IRONY – A THEORETICAL PRELIMINARY FOR SATIRE

Irony fosters the relationship between satire and its shadowed discourse, opening up spaces for political dialogue, humour, and correctiveness. Without irony satire would not be possible - that is not to say they are one in the same but rather that an ironic utterance must take form in order for satire to be successful. It is the devices of satire within which irony is enacted. Irony can therefore not be categorised as either a device or discursal location - as ideology, genre,

register and lexico-grammar are – and instead will be argued here to come into being as a necessary disposition and theoretical preliminary for the making and uptake of satire. Akin to satire, a definition for irony is not universally agreed upon because its functions and modes are divergent and its purposes wide-ranging. Irony is often conflated with humour and the two elements mistakenly seen to be mutually dependant. Herein this section it will be argued that irony goes beyond humour and is instead a necessary disposition for the satirist and the satirist.

#### TYPES OF IRONY

Attardo describes two types of irony, the *verbal* versus the *situational*, with the verbal being linguistically placed and the situational being a “state of the world” that is perceived to be ironical “e.g. the fire station burning down to the ground” (2000, p. 794). Attardo’s definition is self-limiting, excluding contemporary enactments of irony through other sensory conceptualisations. An all-encompassing definition is proposed by Simpson and Mayr that identifies several subsets of irony to better ground it in the ‘bigger picture’ (2010). They define irony foremost as:

“[...] the perception of a conceptual paradox, planned or un-planned, between two dimensions of the same discursive event”(2010, p. 78).

The ‘sub-definitions’ account for the measurable aspects of irony:

“[the] perceived conceptual space between what is asserted and what is meant” (2010, p. 78)

“[the] perceived mismatch between aspects of encyclopaedic knowledge and situational context (with respect to a particular discursive event)” (2010, p. 78)

This conceptualisation is useful in making a case for the irony present in satire, as it accounts for the *content within* a satiric text and the *context* in which it is conceived. Irony is realised only when the interpreter recognises the mismatch between the scopes of the *hailed* discursive event and the *lived*. The ironic apposition of the two scopes or dimensions is what makes irony happen. The first of the subset definitions offers the most common perception of irony, that someone says the opposite of what he or she meant. It is also a useful starting point for more elaborate scrutinies of irony.

## HUTCHEON'S IRONY

Linda Hutcheon, in seeking to establish a definition and 'place' for irony within communications, contends that irony is a complex, intentional communicative act that serves both semantic and evaluative goals, irony comes to be through "the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between intentions and interpretations" (1995, p. 13). Hutcheon accounts for the intentional ironist but also the unintentional speaker of ironies, the individual who is subject to interpretation by the persons that they communicate to/with/at. Where an interpreter or audience member might bring to the ironic utterance a reading or framework of reference that does not align with the purported paradox the irony has miscarried, or, the ironist will fall victim to the negative connotations of their inference. Irony is therefore a polarising agent that can potentially frustrate and distance audience members through its lack of truthiness and authenticity.

Irony rests in favour of the implied, often reaffirming attitudes of disdain and contempt. Hutcheon professes that "as with puns and other wordplay, irony might simply signal to some people a desire to amuse" (1995, p. 39). But it reaches beyond that always and at once remaining evaluative. The consequences of irony's evaluative function are anywhere between mild bemusement, sympathy and tolerance. Hutcheon sees irony as "less mean" than a direct assault, or perhaps even slander, and thus works to "mute any attack" (1995, p. 41). Irony is not simply saying the opposite of what you believe, or deem to be true, but rather it exposes the ground between what is implied and what is expressed, often passing judgement.

Irony is what gives satire its critical edge. Irony is what sets up a satire in opposition to an existing narrative, cemented in ideology, and allows it to challenge and undermine authority and the dominant ideologies that have been otherwise naturalised. Colebrook supports this notion arguing that "irony is the resistance to a single fixed point of view" (2004, p. 80). Irony is therefore the political agitator of satire, and the 'stirrer' of fixed representations. Or what Northrup Frye tenders as "intellectual tear-gas that breaks the nerves and paralyzed the muscles of everyone in its vicinity, an acid that will corrode healthy as well as decayed tissues" (qtd in Ayre, 1989, p. 183).

## THE ECHOIC, THE OPPOSITIONAL & THE CONFERRAL

No matter its form irony is overwhelmingly concerned with creating space between the said and the unsaid. Simpson calls this "conceptual space" where the intertextuality of the ironic utterance is realised and carves space for a new form of discourse (2011, p. 39). This 'echoing'

that Simpson speaks of will be further unpacked using Hutcheon's 'Sliding Scale' for the functions of irony (1995). The functions of irony are charged with enacting each of Simpson's three phases. These phases can be seen to emerge quite distinctly in satire. In fact, when it comes to their actualisation in a satiric text, their placement and delivery is essential to the success of the satiric text. If there is no echo, no hailing, the satire then has no foundation from which to grow. If no opposition is set up then a conceptual paradox 'ripe for satire' has not been laid bare. And if not for conferral the corrective functions of satire are not versed.

### THE ECHOIC

The *echoic mention* "creates a space in meaning between it and the un-ironic *use* it echoes" (Simpson, 2011, p. 39). Sperber and Wilson, who developed the initial use-mention model, simply define this phase as where "USE of an expression involves reference to what the expression refers to; MENTION of an expression involves reference to the expression itself" (1981, p. 303). It is this echoic mention that activates satire, giving it an initial premise from which to work from and an intertextual quality that services parody. Also key to the echoic mention, is the interpreter's recognition of the speaker's attitude for which the ironic utterance is meant to represent. Sperber and Wilson's model, which draws extensively on linguistic theory, is useful to the examination of satire in that it calls for a repositioning of the initial speaker as soon as the ironist makes their claim, "there is some masking of the genuine originator of the text from the ersatz discursive position adopted by the text" (Simpson, 2003, p. 93). There is intentionality to this irony, whereby the speaker is calculated in their intent rather than spontaneous or opportunistic.

### STANDARD 'OPPOSITIONAL' IRONY

The standard or oppositional irony is emblematic of the commonsensical understanding of irony wherein a linguistic or conceptual opposition is set up aurally or visually. This opposition employs a discursive "twist", achieved through implicature or through "some broader incongruity-generating strategy" (Simpson, 2003, p. 94). It is also the type of 'twist' that Humorologists call *script opposition* (Schank and Abelson 1977). This particular phase of irony is often recognised to be sarcastic, an aggressive oppositional form of irony. With sarcasm there is a clear target and a deliberate attempt to act as aggressor.

### THE CONFERRAL

The conferral stage of irony is concerned with the uptake of the ironic utterance – the way in which its audience understands its meaning and deployment. This phase is necessary to satiric

composition, for without conferral by a satiree the satirist is distanced and fails to do ‘good’ satire. This particular phase can be realised independent of the echoic and the oppositional phases and is often neglected by those offering up definitions for irony – just as the echoic and oppositional phases can be realised without becoming satire.

#### IRONY’S AFFECTIVE CHARGE

Scholarship on irony has assessed its corrective, destructive, and decorative aspects - these elements are what make satire work as a site for critique. Hutcheon convincingly reconciles these approaches toward irony, and creates a ‘sliding scale’ by which to procedurally examine the various connotations of an ironic utterance (1995, p. 46). The functions at the bottom end of the scale are deemed to offer “minimal affective charge”, in other words they generate little affective power within the interpreter of the ironic text (the audience) and tend to do little more than entertain or reaffirm existing attitudes. The functions atop the scale have “maximal affective charge” and the power to interpellate counterpublics – or what Hutcheon outlines as inclusionary and exclusionary communities (1995, p. 47). To the left of the scale are the positive connotations of the function, and to the right the negative.

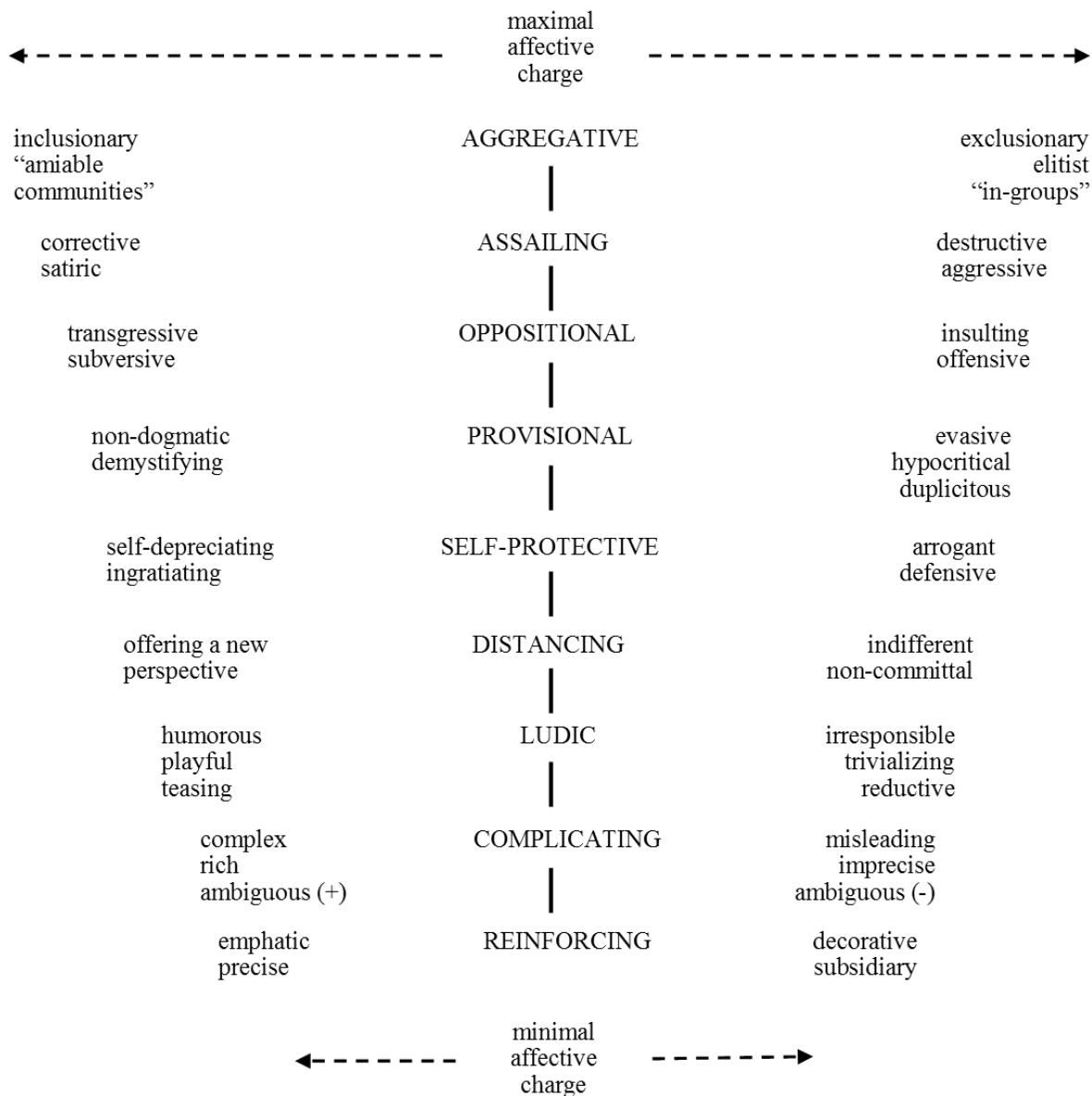


Fig. 2 - *The Functions of Irony* (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 45)

As with the reading of any text or performance, an interpreter (audience member) is going to bring with them their own framework of referentiality, and their own scripts from which to draw upon. The **reinforcing** function of irony is thus to reinforce the existing attitudes of the interpreter, or to enhance a reciprocal knowingness between the ironist and the interpreter. Halliday elaborates on this decorative side of linguistic reinforcement more generally as being an effort to prove communicative competence to “the meaning potential that is inherent in the social system” (1974, p. 101). The positive reinforcement connotation is thus a celebratory ‘brothers in arms’ notion whilst the negative reinforcement connotation is more of a ‘showing off’ or ‘I told you so’ exercise of knowingness.

The ***complicating*** function of irony is when it works as “verbally or structurally” complicating (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 48). Such a complication is layered in all works of art and performance, where performance by its very nature is interpretive, calling upon both the performer and audience to interpret meaning. The positive connotation for such an utterance is to delight in this process of interpretation, making meaning from something that is expressed but not finite. But on the flipside of this function is the misunderstanding that can come with complication and imprecision. The negative connotation being a misinterpretation by the interpreter, due to a lack of transparency of the ironic utterance, and thus a disrupted decoding of the utterance, provoking irritation for “those who feel or are made to feel that they have “missed” ironies” (1995, p. 49).

The ***ludic*** function of irony is the first in this list to invoke humour. The ludic function manifests as a playful teasing which can tear apart the solemnity of an issue, whilst remaining light and lively. This playfulness can, however, undermine the significance of an issue, and reduce it to little more than triviality. Dyson warns that such banter can “degenerate into a mere gesture of superiority, superficially polished and civilised, but too morally irresponsible to be really so” (1965, p. 1).

The ***distancing*** function of irony serves to either offer up a new or alternative perspective on the mimicked discourse within which it is anchored, or, to further distance the interpreter from the established or intended rhetoric of the ironist. The latter working can put distance between the ironist and the interpreter when the interpreter does not side with the ironist and their evaluative judgements.

The ***self-protective*** function can be self-deprecating and humorous, but when the self-deprecation is feigned, simply a ‘put on’, the interpreter can take it to be arrogant self-promotion; which, dependent on the culture the irony is moored can be a major turn off and reason for irony’s misfire. This ironic function positions the ironist inside or alongside (not necessarily opposite) the interpreter or target.

The ***provisional*** function of irony is what Hutcheon calls the “sense of always offering a proviso, always containing a kind of built-in conditional stipulation that undermines any firm and fixed stand” (1995, p. 48). Without a fixed stand the ironist is free to address every angle without fixing himself a judgemental position nor positing a dogmatic truth. Consequently the ironist is of ‘no fixed abode’ and cannot be held to account, for “neither participant will be able to hold the other responsible for what has been understood” (Goffman, 1974, p. 515). The

positive connotation is that a rigid position of truthiness is not assumed, making room for alternate presentations and interpretations. The negative connotation of course is that the ironist comes across as cynical and with no sincere proposition; such an utterance calls up “those emotionally charged terms of hypocrisy, duplicity, or equivocation” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 49).

In his seminal text *Laughter* Henri Bergson specified what he called “inversion” as one of the prime comic methods:

“Picture to yourself certain characters in a certain situation: if you reverse the situation and invert the roles, you obtain a comic scene... Thus, we laugh at the prisoner at the bar lecturing the magistrate; at a child presuming to teach its parents; in a word, at everything that comes under the heading of “topsyturvydom” (2008, pp. 48–49).

Bergson’s inversion is a prime example of the oppositional utterance working favourably for an ironist. Setting up an *oppositional* utterance requires the ironists to position themselves within, alongside, or barely outside of a dominant ideology. When positioned within the dominant ideology, critiquing it can come across as destabilizing and comforting, or outright aggressive and disconcerting;

“...such a contesting might be seen as abusive or threatening; for those marginalized and working to undo that dominance, it might be **subversive** or **transgressive** in the newer, positive senses that those words have taken on in recent writing about gender, race, class, and sexuality” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 49).

For minority groups, akin to the above discussion around self-deprecation, the function of opposition can empower. Levine notes that this phenomena is known by many other names, notably ‘universe changing’, ‘deviations from institutionalized meaning structures’ and most commonly, and ‘incongruity’ – ultimately the “trivialization or degradation of ideas” (1977, p. 300).

The negative charge of the *assailing* irony is that the ironic utterance is realised as a bitter, destructive attack, failing to perform a corrective function and instead coming off as little more than sneering. The positive charge however, is for the utterance to correct or offer an alternative perspective by which the isolated injustice is resolved. It is the impetus of irony, and the satire it often services to function in a corrective manner, to “assume[s] standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (Frye, 1970, p. 223).

Irony is *aggregative* in the sense that when you ‘get’ the irony, you become part of this elitist group and simultaneously exclude those who do not. Irony by way of its exercise is known to include and exclude – there are those who get the joke, and those who do not. In this way irony can fuel elitism; “[h]ere, the ironist is always figured as on top, and the comprehending (attributing) interpreter not far below, be it in rhetorical or in romantic irony” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 51). The danger here, for the ironist, is that the audience is lost through adopting a position so far outside of their ideology that they are no longer with him – they have been distanced and made an out-group and likely to react with “anger and irritation at being “excluded”” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 52).

#### IRONY’S EDGE & THE AFFECTIVE POWERS OF SATIRE

Whilst functions at each interval on the scale are in one way or another reinforcing attitudes and contributing to the establishment or sustenance of a community, their delivery and the weightedness of their delivery is what differs. Hutcheon coins this steady recital ‘irony’s edge’, noting that it:

“...unlike incongruity or juxtaposition, irony can put people on edge; unlike paradox, irony is decidedly edgy...irony involves the attribution of an evaluative, even judgmental attitude, and this is where the emotive or affective dimension also enters-much to the dismay of most critical discourse and most critics” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 37).

Irony’s edge is its affective charge. Irony works on emotion, binding together the audience and the ironist, shaping their relationship to the subject up for critique. Affective power covers two conceptualisations of affect, largely explored by film theorists. The first is affect in terms of cognitive behaviours amongst audience members, specifically those watching fictional films and what is actually felt by those audience members. This conceptualisation of affect is about recognising the “mutuality of emotions and reason” alongside genre expectations and the audience’s imaginative dedication through the viewing experience (Smaill, 2010, p. 7). The emphasis in scholarship on this type of affect is the stimulation of an audience through aesthetic, narrative and stylistic form. The second conceptualisation of affect takes into account those factors that are not fictional but are contextual and ritualistic, recognising the rich history associated with a text’s production and the wider social contexts of representation and reception. In recognising the cultural specificities surrounding the instantiation of a text the nuances of a particular (sometimes alternative or counter) public sphere can be highlighted.

Smaill surmises that aversive emotions like loss, pain and anger can “be transformative” in offering “new avenues of possibility to marginalised subjects” (2010, p. 8). This is satire’s shtick, offering up a sort of counter narrative to reality that is anchored in familiar waters. But in setting up a utopia, a contrasting ideal, satire can homogenise reality and simply maintain the conditions of the status quo. As much of the classical literary theory on satire has found, satire inherently links itself to the status quo by calling out “non-normative behavior, thereby reinforcing existing attitudes” (A. Day, 2011, p. 11) and providing little more than light humour relief. However, in instigating emotions like pleasure, desire and optimism, satire can work towards more liberating forms of representation.

Richard Dyer’s (2005) work on utopia and entertainment provides some useful insight into the affective power generated through the consumption of satirical texts. Popular culture more generally is seen to offer itself as a site for escapism, information and education, identification, community, and entertainment. Its “general thrust” is thus utopianism (2005, p. 20), whereby people want something to escape to outside of the bounds of everyday life. Entertainment utopias are dissimilar to those proposed by Thomas More<sup>2</sup> or his literary contemporaries, rather modern utopic utterances are more concerned with creating a sense of how the world *could be* through an affective code actualised through an established mode of cultural production. Entertainment forms are able to present a range of feeling in a way that makes them seem “uncomplicated, direct and vivid, not ‘qualified’ or ‘ambiguous’ as day-to-day life makes them” (2005, p. 25). To be successful, satire must employ this utopian sensibility and work off the real-world experiences of its audience, exposing the space in between the two. This transparency is what allows satire to ‘ring true’ or indicate itself as valid and authentic, substantiating it as an alternative public discourse.

In generating affective power satire engages the sensibilities of its audience to offer a particular sort of social experience, ‘pleasurable learning’ (Smaill, 2010, p. 62). The expression of incongruities or inconsistencies between a hailed reality and the lived one is a site of pleasure for audiences, and what keeps them coming back for more. Pleasurable learning is focused on the evocation of empathy. In seeing the distress or ridicule of their fellow man, audiences are invited to pass judgment, ultimately agreeing or disagreeing with the satirist’s critique. If they

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas More’s 1516 dystopian novel *Utopia* is hailed as being one of the seminal texts to emerge from literary satire and dystopic fiction.

empathise, the satire is successful, powerful. And when in this mode, the satire has the capacity to intervene, actively, in political and other issues.

#### THE IRONIC ACTIVIST

Affective power is achieved through first grounding an ironic utterance in the audience's assumptions about what is right and what is wrong, and then destabilising that morality by proposing another route. Where a satirist provides alternate interrogations to those of the mainstream media, the audience is afforded a voice they would otherwise not hear. Amber Day sees this type of affective power as a mobilising force through the generation of a counterpublic (2011, pp. 10–11). This notion of a counterpublic is explored at greater length by Day (2011) with specific regard to the ironic activism of filmmakers Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock. Day's conceptualisation of these filmmakers' affective power sees its charge mobilised through "the *consumption of and interaction with* particular popular culture texts" (2011, p. 11) [my emphasis]. Here Day is talking specifically about the powers of documentary filmmaking, but news and current affairs television fulfils a similar role in educating and alerting to specific cultural, societal and political perspectives that would not otherwise be given focus. Day argues that the satiric documentarian in particular, is able to nurture the "creation of oppositional political communities, or counterpublics" which are then sustained by other popular media, the films serving as the original site of identification and "energizing those who already share similar opinions and functioning to shift some of the terms of debate within the wider public sphere" (A. Day, 2011, pp. 99–100).

#### A TRIADIC MODEL FOR SATIRE

The below model constitutes the triadic discursive relationship between a satirist, the satire, and the satirised. Superficially **the Satirist** (A) can be the author, creator or convenor of a satiric text. The Satiree is the intended audience for the satire (B). The Satirised is the target of the satire's irony, whether a person or otherwise. The Satirist calls upon a range of subject placements, forms and styles to make its criticisms known. Satire's *impetus* is the bond or tensions between the satirist (A) and the satirised (C), and its achievements are as they are perceived, understood and successfully negotiated by the Satiree (B).

Another arrangement of this triad to consider is one that allows for the shifting of positions during the course of an interaction. Goffman contends that sizeable shifts in the alignment of the 'speakers' and the 'hearers' can force a shift through language activated by a style shift or by code-switching (1979, pp. 4–5). Participants in a conversation, for example, garner a

particular position and are afforded particular interactional rights and responsibilities. Goffman has coined this ‘footing’ (1979). A participant’s footing is predicated, or shifts and changes until it becomes apparent over time. Footing is secured by identifying cues and markers in their various verbal and non-verbal forms. This model firms up the positioning of the three core components of satire and accounts for the satirist’s intent by predicating a shift and impending shortening of space between the satiree and the satirist.

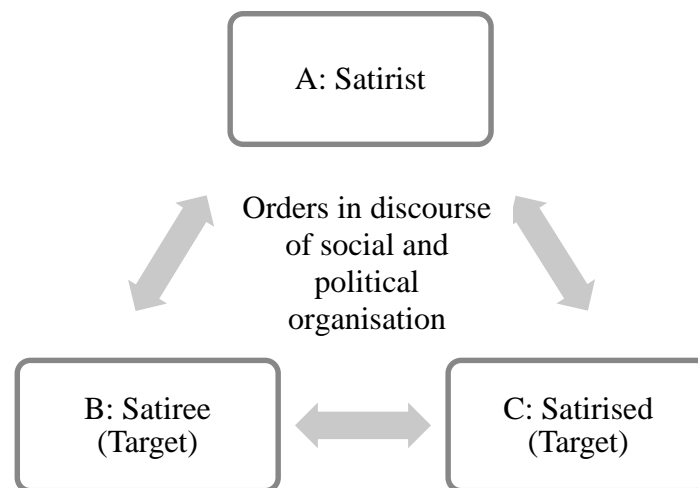


Fig. 3 - Triadic structure of satire as discursive practice (Simpson, 2003, p. 86).

#### THE SATIRICAL TARGET

The satirical target is many and varied. The literary tradition of satirical critique has it founded in the ‘vices and follies’ of man and his wider hypocritical practices. In expanding on this literary understanding of satire it has come to light that satire necessarily deals in systems of knowledge and the ironic ground between a hailed position and its realised one. Without irony or an interrogated politic, a piece tagged ‘satire’ exists simply as parody. Satire thus is inherently concerned with power relations and the politics of morality and sensibility. Simpson identifies four distinct subtypes of satirical target that work to exemplify these overarching themes, he identifies them as the: *episodic*, *personal*, *experiential*, and *textual* (2003:71). These types are here expanded upon in terms of the wider considerations proffered in this study, particular to modern materialisations of satire:

*Episodic* is where the target is a particular event, action, move or utterance that has taken place in the public sphere. The *Personal* wherein an individual is the subject of satirical attack; oft the personality, stereotype or hyperbolised version of these two, or a caricature of an individual’s personality is made the target. The *Experiential* where the target is of a broader

nature, usually aimed at qualities of the human condition as opposed to the specificities of the abovementioned subtypes. And the *Textual* where the “linguistic code” is the central item of attack (Simpson, 2003, p. 71). A textual target is self-reflexive, concerned with criticising the form that it mocks and it is often portrayed through pastiche.

Where satire targets outside of these four types it is bound to misfire and present itself as only parodic. Moreover if the episodic does not appeal to a public event or sensibility it is not satirical. Where an individual is targeted they must be seen as a common person or powerful person to be worthy of attack. To attack a true victim is to misfire. Where the experimental targets the human condition it must appeal to public feeling, to go niche is to go bad. And for the textual, the satirist must be careful to anchor it (footing) in a clear genre or realm of discourse to ensure its effective uptake.

## **SATIRE’S DEVICES – WHAT MAKES SATIRE HAPPEN?**

### COMEDY & HUMOUR

The theoretical preliminaries of parody and irony have already been dissected and positioned as necessary conditions for the production of satire, what has not yet been extrapolated are the lower elements of Simpson’s hierarchical arrangement (2003). The various lexico-grammar and parodic techniques are what make satire happen. The most frequently deployed methods and rhetorical devices used to enact satire are: **puns** and **word-play**, **humour** and **political humour**, **caricature** (parody), **pastiche** (parody), **innuendo** (word-play), **slander** (register/word play), the **ideal** (ideology), the **authentic/inauthentic** (ideology/register).

Deleuze proffered a sensible distinction between irony and humour when he said that writer would prepare their ironic utterance in advance, whereas humour was *to be open to* that utterance (2000, p. 101). Irony ‘flavours’ the discourse with which the ironist taunts and tempts their audience and it is ever the more successful when producing humour and invoking laughter. Humour and wit are not necessary to irony (or to satire) but they certainly help it along. Humour serves a range of functions, none the least of which are the release of tensions and the rehearsing of conflict. Humour often plays a pivotal role in the successful execution and uptake of satire for without the disclaimer of humour it might not be so readily received. Humour’s purposes are wide-ranging with linguists, humorologists, and other members of the social sciences studying its effects on audiences, conflict management, interpersonal communication, and workplace relations.

A wide range of façades, personas or guises can play host to humour - to name but a few of its sub classifications:

- gallows (the crucified criminals singing “Always Look on the Bright Side of Life in *Monty Python’s Life of Brian*)
- dark or black humour (M\*A\*S\*H, *Six Feet Under*)
- cringe (*It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *The Office*, *Girls*)
- screwball (Clarke Gable in *It Happened One Night* (1934))
- oddball (*Bridesmaids* (2011); *Waiting* (2005))
- conservative (Stephen Colbert)
- liberal (Bill Maher)
- religious (Benny Hill)
- scatological or ‘toilet’ (Sarah Silverman)
- bawdy (*Jackass*)
- camp (*bro ’Town*; *Skitz*; *The Topp Twins*)
- slapstick (*Jono and Ben at Ten*)
- political (*The Daily Show*; *The Colbert Report*; *7 Days*)

Whilst satire does not always utilise humour it is certainly a useful treatment by which to mechanise the critiques of the satirist. In generating humour, satire gains affective power to reinforce or realign existing attitudes. Humour is able to deal with serious issues of power (politics) and incur subtle changes through the expression of “sublime criticism” (Munder, 2007, p. 212) and its positive character.

#### POLITICAL HUMOUR

Political humour is usually produced by members of politics (to belittle their adversaries, members of the news media e.g. political commentators, or by everyday citizens bearing criticism. Political humour is seen to surface in both political and non-political settings, and often when the conditions would usually dictate serious political discourse (Tsakona & Popa, 2011, p. 5) – for example in the debating chamber of Parliament. Political humour requires an engagement with, and knowledge of, contemporary politics and current affairs. It is usually ‘of a time’ and ‘contratextual’; contratextual is here separate from intertextual in that it echoes “the words and ideological stances of the opponent with a view to fulfilling a mocking and *discrediting* function (Vasta qtd in Tsakona & Popa, 2011, p. 5). Owing in part to a proliferation of television satires since the latter part of the twentieth century, political humour research has

become a burgeoning area of academia. Contemporary political humour research, for the most part, has focused on audiences and their affinity for television satire (Hmielowski, Holbert, & Lee, 2011); audience perceptions of political humour and its uses (Hariman, 2008; Beam et al., 2009; Feltmate, 2013; Holbert, Tchernev, Walther, Esralew, & Benski, 2013; Abel & Barthel, 2013); and its potential as a source for political information or ‘enlightenment’ over traditional news outlets (Young & Hoffman, 2012; Young, 2004, 2013). Political humour is intrinsically built into satire and ‘sugar coats’ its biting attacks on ideology.

#### PASTICHE

Pastiche complicates notions of parody even further, for they strongly resemble one another in a theoretical sense. Pastiche is best considered simply as a special kind of imitation that is ‘monotextual’ and connotes similarity rather than difference (Hutcheon, 1985, p. 33). Commonly deployed by film scholars, pastiche is a useful term when needing to identify markers of a genre or, more usefully, of a specific text. Pastiche is often characterised as ‘blank parody’, meaning pastiche is akin to parody but devoid of cultural weightings and histories – it is parody without the humour or the gravitas. For Frederic Jameson, pastiche is “parody that has lost its sense of humor” and ultimately results in the loss of history (qtd in Connor, 2004, p. 48). Pastiche can be used to invoke the style of particular texts and genres without giving any critical perspective. Pastiche is a way of ‘quoting’ other texts without implying their same meaning(s). Pastiche can often be unintentional in its hailing and simply offers a ‘send-up’ of an original style.

#### CARICATURE

Caricature is a mimetic tradition that has historically been most associated with cartoon. Caricature takes an abnormal physiology or ideology belonging to an individual and hyperbolises it. Caricature as an art form did not develop or become commonplace until late in the sixteenth century due to political censure and legal restrictions. Caricature still finds itself censored by politics. Cartoonists have repeatedly characterised politicians by their abnormal or unique physiologies. Caricature is also metonymic, whereby one aspect of something is said to stand for the whole. Just as ‘Hollywood’ stands in for the entire US film industry, or ‘Kiwi’ stands in for the identity of a nation’s inhabitants, caricature highlights one element of a subject to represent it conceptually.

## SLANDER

Slander is typically a legal term used to refer to an act of defamation or libel. Lusher's definition for slander is "a false and unprivileged publication, orally uttered...[tending] directly to injure [any person] in respect to his office, profession, trade of business" (1994, p. 1766). Building on this sense of a 'false verbal utterance intended to harm', Price's understanding of defamation and slander is "the publication of a statement about someone that lower him or her in the estimation of right-thinking members of society generally, where no defence (usually truth, opinion, or qualified privilege) is available" (2009). Slander is often deployed in satire to gain laughs, draw attention to the failings of a particular figure of authority, or to set-up an oppositional irony. For example, the characterisation of Gerry Gergich (later Larry) in *Parks and Recreation* as unlikeable and unsuccessful despite his prosperous employment with the City Parks Department, his beautiful home, and his happy blonde nuclear family. Each incidence of hate speech toward Gerry is juxtaposed by his obviously calm and accepting demeanour, thereby neutralising the slanderous satiric attacks.

## SATIRICAL UPTAKE - POLITICAL IDENTITY & PUBLIC FEELING

In satire a text goes through two ironic phases: the first is the establishment of a prime - a space that is occupied by the satire - and the second is the destabilisation (dialectic) of that space. The primal space is established as real or true or familiar, whilst the destabilisation phase calls into question the realities of that ratified space. When the prime is not validated or recognised by the audience or reader the satire can fail or lead to a satirical "defooting" (Simpson, 2003, p. 165). *When it fails* satire has not provided adequate indicators of the prime. And secondarily, when a satirical text sets up a limited or faint opposition from which to contrast with destabilising events, then the text is likely to misfire and be read literally/truthfully. Habermas' notion of universality and the investment in universal validity claims becomes worthy of consideration here. Habermas suggests that anyone participating in debate is inclined to take normative action based on a set of acceptable judgments or norms and that this contributes to a preferred moral centre (1990, p.121). Should one attempt to argue outside of this preordained path of "moral development" they would be "doomed to failure" in their moral judgments lacking any claim to "universal validity" (1990, p. 121)." Humour and satire making is no exception to universal pragmatics for they too require moral judgments in order to work. Validity claims establish a reality through language usage. By adhering to the values of truth, sincerity (truthfulness), and appropriateness (rightness) a speaker can claim, or call up, a reality (Habermas, 1979, p. 68).

## TELEVISION ADAPTATION, PUBLIC FEELING & THE CASE OF *THE OFFICE*

Despite the global success of television formats like the sitcom or single-camera comedy, these genres operate in very different ways depending on their geographical locale. The institutional arrangements of a television industry alongside the cultural considerations of a given context, ultimately shape and fuel particular narratives about identity and what constitutes ‘funny’. Television adaptations have often been met with market failure, especially when that adaptation is of another television show borne of another cultural context. Television scholars have assessed the adaptation phenomenon in terms of articulations of national identity and the ability of a show to ‘link in’ with its new context, contending that pronunciations of national identity and markers of a shared culture are vital to the successful uptake of a show (Beeden & Bruin, 2010; Reijnders, Rooijakkers, & van Zoonen, 2012). The adaptation has worked for many genres, particularly reality television with the likes of the Netherlands’ *Big Brother* being successfully adapted for the Australian, Canadian and French markets amongst others. But comedy in particular is less transferable to other markets owing to diverse cultural sensibilities and linguistic nuance. As such, format adaptation only ‘works’ when there is an effort to incorporate the new context rather than copy the old one.

Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant’s *The Office* saw great success in Britain, spawning two six-episode series and two Christmas specials through 2001-2003. The show inspired a spin-off, also entitled *The Office*, and was adapted for American audiences by Greg Daniels, a writer for iconic satires like *The Simpsons* and *Saturday Night Live*. *The Office* [USA] ran for nine seasons, totalled 201 episodes, and both Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant acted as executive producers for the show’s run. The American version of *The Office* resembles the original in terms of its ensemble cast, setting, mockumentary style, and a narrative progressed through conflict and disruption; but its presentation is different, owing predominantly to the characterisation of the core characters.

Mills suggests that the British sitcom deploys characters who the audience can laugh *at* whilst the American sitcom creates characters audiences can laugh *with* (2005, p. 41). Whilst both incarnations of the sitcom deal with the problems of daily life, the cause of narrative conflicts is different. Mills points out that American sitcoms see families and colleagues as support networks (i.e. *The Mindy Project* and *Parks and Recreation*) that demonstrate a sense of community, and afford their characters “a degree of self-awareness” about their situations that British sitcom characters overwhelmingly appear to lack (2005, p. 67). Mills also contends that

British sitcom focuses on characters who are “incapable of communicating” and whose characters find familial and romantic relationships “problematic and stifling” (2005, p. 41) (i.e. Bernard in *Black Books*, and Miranda and her Mother in *Miranda*).

*The Office* is exemplary of these trends when looking at the characterisation of the main characters. The office managers David Brent (UK) and Michael Scott (USA) are both in positions of institutional power but wish to be seen as likeable and entertaining. David’s embarrassing and cringe worthy attempts at humour is deployed with the sense that he has a right to inflict his opinions on his colleagues for they are ‘beneath’ him. His humour is usually met with disdain and disapproval, reinforcing the notion that the British David will not find solace in his community. David comes off as pathetic and a bit of a try hard; relieving his colleagues of the anxieties they might feel around him being in charge. Michael on the other hand is not concerned with exerting authority over his colleagues but rather with entertaining them in the hope that some kind of bond or community is formed.

Satire is anchored in ideology and is successful when it somehow manages to destabilise or question its naturalness. To attempt to define the ideological set belonging to a nation would be naïve and undermine the very concept of ideology, but what can be unpacked is the notion of ‘the nation’ and ‘national identity’ that so service ideology. Satire’s involvement with calling up aspects of ideology is never more obvious than in the television adaptation and the deployment of humour.

Both versions of *The Office* call up culturally specific humour devices that play to particular national sensibilities and utilise a unique lexico-grammar. For *The Office* [UK] the references to popular culture are non-deployable in *The Office* [USA] for they carry different connotations. Humour is about script opposition and the cultural scripts being drawn on in each of these programmes is very different. Where *The Office* [UK] makes regular reference to the Territorial Army and the Royal Family, *The Office* [USA] instead refers to sheriffs and political figures like Hilary Clinton or Abraham Lincoln. Beeden and de Bruin further unpack this idea, suggesting that class is “the central social issue” in UK version whilst the USA version calls up cultural anxieties around race and ethnicity (2010, pp. 15–16). New Zealand comedy also bears its own patterns of representation, and is overwhelmingly concerned with mirroring contemporary cultural representations and reflecting familiar versions of national and communal identities.

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# NZ TV INDUSTRY CULTURE NZoA COMEDY

The New Zealand television system is unique in that it does not always mimic its foreign counterparts, owing largely to the country's smallness and its sensitivity to change. This sensitivity is never more marked than upon the introduction of new operators and funders to the relatively small televisual landscape. Owing largely to its geographical position and relative smallness in terms of size and population, New Zealand is a useful test culture to assess the wider effects of introducing new communicative technology and its impacts on policy making, entertainment, business economy, and civic engagement.

Near a decade on, Roger Horrocks' justification for New Zealand television as a case study of unique proportions, still rings true:

"The New Zealand television system... is small enough to be seen as a whole. At the same time, the system is not typical in the sense that its very smallness has specific effects. Its elements are concentrated, closely interconnected, and therefore highly sensitive to change... a small island nation open to whatever weather sweeps in from the rest of the globe. The waves produced by "the storm of progress" in Walter Benjamin's (1970) phrase may splash against large countries and modify their landscapes, but there is no danger of submersion. For New Zealand, the same wave becomes a tsunami" (2004, p. 56).

By examining the unique historical trajectory and the tumultuous regulatory changes inflicted upon the television industry in New Zealand, one can see how New Zealand comedy has come to be a prominent but endangered feature on the telescope. A history such as this evaluates the changing social and political values of a postcolonial nation and the impact these advances have had on the institution of television, and more specifically – on comedy.

In its short history New Zealand has managed to operate one of the most highly regulated broadcasting systems in the world. Beginning with the Wireless Telegraphy Act in 1903, successive New Zealand Governments have sought to gain and sustain a monopoly on broadcasting, regulating anything from content, to sound waves, to local production, and programming. This chapter will examine the tumultuous nature of television broadcasting in New Zealand, and in particular, the ecology of public television.

Whilst its larger international counterpart the USA can rely wholly on a commercial model to fund its efforts, the New Zealand ecology of television is distinct in that it is and always has been a commercial environment, yet it cannot survive without Government funding. This unique condition makes the New Zealand television industry a bartering point for successive Governments and their often polarising agendas. Television in New Zealand has been subject to continuous changes in policy and regulatory directives since it was introduced in the 1960s. The constant swinging between commercial and public service broadcast imperatives is reflective of the constant renegotiation of cultural attitudes around television, and what it should or should not be, as well as the overzealous dispositions of successive governments who have swung between upholding public service and neo-liberal objectives for broadcasting. The Lange Government of the 1980s sparked radical social and legislative changes through economic restructuring.

## **TELEVISION IN NEW ZEALAND**

In 1949 an Inter-departmental Committee on Television was set up by the Minister of Broadcasting to look at the limitations on establishing a television broadcasting network in New Zealand. Given New Zealand's geographical position, it was relatively isolated from "stimuli and assistance" from neighbouring countries, their networks and programming ("The New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1964"). A lack of infrastructure, both in terms of production and broadcasting further compounded these issues. Perhaps the most frustrating were the problems born of New Zealand's undulating landscape that created its own transmission problems, disrupting signals and coverage. The costly realities of importing content were weighed up, and in 1958 the Minister of Broadcasting and the Post Master General jointly announced their approval for the purchase of technical television equipment in order to establish a multi-line television broadcast network. In 1958 exploratory investigations into potential transmitter sites and a coverage plan were initiated, and an experimental television station soon followed in 1959 ("The New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1964").

New Zealand television began with a single channel in 1960, controlled by the New Zealand Broadcasting Service (NZBS). Much of the early broadcasts were made up of foreign imports, as well as locally produced news, talks and information programming. New Zealand audiences could find programme listings in the weekly publication *The New Zealand Listener* which was granted the sole rights to publication of the schedule. After successful broadcasts of only two

hours weekly, the station grew to ‘telecasting’ seven nights per week and made way for the introduction of mainstreamed broadcasting (“The New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1963”).

#### THE NZBC

The 1961 New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation Act replaced the NZBS with the state-owned New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) and by 1962 the NZBC was established as a state owned trading corporation and charged with developing radio and television throughout the country. The NZBC’s primary task was to expand coverage and thereby the amount of television sets and viewing hours across New Zealand homes - programming came second. The NZBC were successful in increasing coverage, helped along by viewers societies. Viewers societies facilitated the construction of temporary transmission stations in the absence of NZBC projects, garnering the national network a near 90% saturation of the population by March 1968, well in advance of the NZBC’s coverage projections (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 37). As the NZBC’s coverage began to penetrate these rural areas, they bought back the viewers societies’ transmitters, closed down their operations, and replaced them with their own technology (P. Day, 2000, pp. 53–54).

The payment of a public broadcasting fee (PBF) by owners of television sets to the NZBC was vital to its survival, in cooperation with income from advertising. Advertising was a part of television in New Zealand from the beginning, but it aired under restriction with advertisements only allowed air time on certain days. Advertising was originally prohibited on Mondays, Fridays and Sundays (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 38) but increasing pressures for commercial returns and a lack of funding through the stagnant PBF (successive Governments had not increased it with inflation), meant that advertising restrictions were progressively relaxed through the late-1980s.

The average cost of a 23 inch black and white television set cost £131 in 1966 – roughly \$4,500 in today’s scaling (Statistics New Zealand, 2010) – a significant outlay when you consider the wage for full-time employees was £375 per year (“The New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1966”). This expensive household purchase came to infer class and status and ultimately television was an enabler of the developing mid-twentieth century mass consumer society. Ellis dubs this time an “era of scarcity” for there was very little in the way of alternative media to compete with it, and thereby television was the dominant purveyor of tastes (2000, pp. 40–41). The average cost of a television set has seen marked reductions since the 1960s. In 2009 the average price of an LCD flat screen television set was \$1,400 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010)

and similar sets cost about \$590 in the December 2012 quarter (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). This decrease in purchase cost has seen an upward trend in television ownership in the past 50 years, with many homes having multiple sets, and with the introduction of superior digital platforms like Freeview, High Definition (HD) and Three Dimensional (3D) television this trend is likely to continue.

In 1973 the Third Labour Government set about reinvigorating television by tendering a second channel warrant and ushering in colour transmissions, just in time for the 1974 Commonwealth Games held in Christchurch. The Government afforded the contract for a second channel to the state-owned NZBC despite an application from an independent network (Independent Television Corporation). The decision to grant the state broadcaster a monopoly on New Zealand television broadcasting was to have massive ramifications for the future of television in New Zealand. The Broadcasting Act 1973 introduced a new structure for broadcasting. The existing NZBC was to be separated into three corporations - Radio New Zealand, Television Service One, and Television Service Two – and a Broadcasting Council of New Zealand was to be established alongside them to coordinate any inter-corporation relations (P. Day, 2000, pp. 179–180). This was to effectively dismantle the NZBC by late-1973.

Whilst TV1 remained the NZBC's flagship channel, the aptly named TV2 found its own contemporary identity through the telethon. TV2 brought the telethon to New Zealand in July 1975 when it launched a 24 hour effort to raise funds for St John's Ambulance (Boyd-Bell, 1985, p. 40). In a bid to further distinguish themselves from TV1, TV2 renamed itself South Pacific Television (SPTV) in 1976 (1985, p. 42). SPTV was responsible for uniting the national audience in a way that had not been done on TV1. The telethon created widespread participation in television, from performers to audience members, and reinvigorated the television scene. TV2 continued to carve its own niche, and eventually a complementarity evolved with TV1 targeting the older demographic and TV2 the younger. TV1 came to be, and still is, home to a lot of TVNZ's information programming (news, current affairs) and local drama, documentary and comedy; whilst TV2 has stuck to more commercial or 'light entertainment' programming, of which a majority is imported or made for children. This complementarity helped TVNZ prepare for the new competitive environment that was to exist upon the entrance of the privately owned TV3 in 1989.

By the 1970s television broadcasting had become so successful that the existing production facilities could no longer support the growing needs of the industry, and so a major television

studio project began with a new studio complex being built at Avalon just outside of Wellington in the early 1970s. Avalon was purpose built for TVNZ and opened in March 1975 boasting state of the art studio facilities that were to become home to some of New Zealand's most iconic productions (Avalon Film & Television Studios, n.d.).

In 1976 a new National Government was to reintegrate the three broadcasting corporations, and the Broadcasting Council, back into a single entity and rename it as the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand (BCNZ). The reunification of the corporations came under the Broadcasting Act 1976 which also set out the establishment of the Broadcasting Tribunal. The Broadcasting Tribunal's primary task was to hear applications on broadcasting warrants and to decide whether to grant the five year license to applicants, though their jurisdiction was limited with the BCNZ only allowed to grant new radio licences whilst any new television warrants were to be granted at the discretion of the Minister (P. Day, 2000, p. 223).

The next election saw a Fourth Labour Government in power and a raft of economic changes known as 'Rogernomics' were swiftly introduced, not the least of which was the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) Act of 1986. One of the guiding principles of the Act was that each state owned enterprise was required to be "as profitable and efficient as comparable businesses that are not owned by the Crown" (sec. 4) - it was to be only a matter of time before broadcasting was re-imagined.

In 1985 the new Labour Government launched a Royal Commission of Inquiry that looked at New Zealand's broadcasting and related telecommunications to assess the existing regulatory framework. The findings recommended a tightening of the existing regulations and further controls on programming. The report also recommended a quota system, similar to that of Australia's points system, to increase the amount of local content on air. These suggestions were not expressly rejected, but the new Lange lead Labour Government chose to quietly ignore them and instead went about deregulating broadcasting, one of the most brutal regulatory reforms the industry was to see during its riotous history. Labour won a second term in 1987 and in September 1988 Richard Prebble, Minister for State-Owned Enterprises, announced an overhaul of broadcasting that would look to introduce more competition by simply applying the neo-liberal economic reforms of the forestry, electricity and telecommunications industries to the delicate broadcasting industry (Prebble, 1988). Prebble's deregulation package was promoted as a friend to productivity, cost-effectiveness, high outputs and broadcasting quality but in actuality it meant auctioning off broadcasting frequencies to

the highest bidder; abolishing the BCNZ; the transferral of non-commercial objectives from the broadcasters to the Broadcasting Commission (Prebble, 1988).

The Labour Cabinet agreed that broadcasting should “reflect and develop the New Zealand identity” and should be accessible to minority audiences (Cabinet Minute, 1988 qtd in Norris & Pauling, 2012a, p. 11). Ultimately these social objectives were not written in specie to the new Act and instead the newly established New Zealand on Air (NZoA) was charged with gatekeeping such objectives. As for TVNZ it had no prescription in regards to programming, but it was required to consider the *State-Owned Enterprises Act*’s directive for all SOE’s to be commercially viable and to also acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi. The loose wording of the aforementioned Acts left broadcasters open to interpret what an ‘accurate reflection’ of New Zealand culture and identities was to be, and what adhering to the Treaty actually meant.

After a failed claim with the Waitangi Tribunal to recognise Te Reo (Māori language) as *taonga*, Māori took their case to the Privy Council in London to have the Crown recognise the value of Te Reo, and thus the necessity to provide for it under broadcasting (and other) legislation. NZoA was solely responsible for Māori programming until the establishment of Te Māngai Pāho (TMP) in 1993, whose founding was a direct outcome of the Privy Council hearing. NZoA made the Treaty of Waitangi and representations of Māori and Māoridom a part of their overarching mission statement from the beginning:

“To develop the distinctiveness, variety and quality of New Zealand broadcasting that reflects the culture and identity of all New Zealanders under the Treaty of Waitangi”  
(1990, p. 3)

For the first time the Treaty of Waitangi was expressly addressed by New Zealand broadcasting and it was to predominantly be through NZoA funded programming. The cultural identity obligations outlined by the Broadcasting Act were to be exclusively delivered through local content and as such a mechanism for funding such productions was imperative.

Likening the creative broadcasting industries to the routine economics of forestry was perhaps rather naïve given the unique conditions the television industry was facing. The Labour Government were driven by the principles of the free-market; the move towards a competitive television industry was foreshadowed earlier in 1987 when the Labour Government endorsed the Broadcasting Tribunal’s recommendation to introduce a third television channel. TV3 won the bid for a third television licence, and by the time it was ready to air in 1989 they were met

with an even more testing commercial environment that they were initially faced upon their conception (Norris & Pauling, 2012b, p. 11). The aforementioned pieces of legislation meant the responsibility to facilitate public television in New Zealand were reassigned to this new funding agency. By passing the public service ‘buck’ on to NZoA, TVNZ was to a degree relieved of the public service broadcasting objectives it had fulfilled under the old regime.

#### TV3 COMES TO THE PARTY

After being granted a broadcasting licence in 1987, it was not until 1989 that the privately owned TV3 finally went to air. Due to the broadcasting reforms announced only a year earlier, TV3 found itself launching at a time of increased commercial pressures. Committed to delivering 27.4% local-content, as per their licensing agreement, TV3 required more funding than its advertisers and existing New Zealand investors could supply – they had overcommitted.

Foreign ownership was allowed under the Broadcasting Act 1989, subject to investment restrictions of up to 15% in the instance of television (or up to 25% for radio). Investment from the American NBC network kept the channel afloat – to a certain extent thanks to a cash injection - but this relationship also meant TV3 could access and import high quality foreign content with relative ease (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 118). This relationship was to light a fire under TVNZ who were already anxious about competition from TV3.

TV3’s problems continued into 1990 with TV3 delivering lower ratings and audience-share than its investors were expecting, NBC pulled out, and TV3 entered receivership in May 1990 (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, pp. 118–119). This once again put television at risk of a TVNZ monopoly and rumours of the Government bailing out TV3 began to surface (Sadlier, 1990). Wanting to foster competition without expressly providing capital, and at the hands of intense lobbying by TV3 and its investors, the Government revised the 1989 Broadcasting Act and without wider public consultation they removed the regulations restricting foreign ownership of New Zealand media in 1991. This gave Canadian company CanWest the opportunity to heavily invest in TV3. Initially CanWest’s investment was at 20% with Westpac having 48% and the receiver 32% (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 12) but with the relaxed laws CanWest soon took hold of 100% of the company by 1996 (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 119).

In 1996 CanWest introduced a sister channel to TV3, the entertainment based TV4. Commandeering TVNZ’s strategy for two-channel complementarity, CanWest engendered TV4 as a youth and young adult channel with no information programming, unlike its big sister

TV3 which had a strong focus on news, current affairs, documentary and sports (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 119). The station was initially broadcast from 10am through to midnight, 7 days a week and its schedule largely relied on imported American youth programming. In 2003 TV4 was rebranded as C4 and was expressly targeted at a teen-youth market; the channel screened a great deal of video-jockey music shows, and was low-budget.

Some critics saw CanWest's ownership of TV3 as a threat to the promotion of local content, despite assurances from CanWest owner Izzy Asper that local content would continue to be a driver in the programming schedules (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 26). Asper's assertion was not supported by NZoA's local content reports that saw TV3's local content hours at a low 192 between 1997 and 1999, increasing to 1483 in 1999 largely due to an increase in sports programming (Television Local Content Group, 2001, p. 7). Up until 2000, TV3 was screening only 10 hours of new first-run Drama and Comedy, making up a meagre 13% of its total programming – though this was a slight improvement on their 9% in 1999 and 10% in 1998 (Television Local Content Group, 2001, p. 10). By 2000 TV3 had failed to grow local content, despite some success with Māori children's programme *Pukana*. Sister channel TV4 only further cemented TV3's position as a neglecter of local content by airing only 5.3% local content in 2000 (Television Local Content Group, 2001).

In 2004 CanWest reconfigured its New Zealand assets, creating CanWest MediaWorks New Zealand, branded as MediaWorks. MediaWorks held on to 70% of the company and floated the remaining 30% on the share market (Rosenberg, 2008, p. 13). In 2007 CanWest sold MediaWorks to HTMedia, a subsidiary of Australia's Ironbridge Capital (CanWest MediaWorks (NZ), 2007).

After failing to deliver ratings under former owners CanWest, TV3 rebranded itself under MediaWorks in 2009, becoming the home of local comedy and a cheerleader for local content. In their 2014 programming line-up announcement MediaWorks TV Chief Executive Paul Maher said that this commitment to local content is "what makes MediaWorks different" and that their focus on local content has "paid great ratings dividends for TV3 in 2013", with a wealth of branded content propelling an array of local programming ("MediaWorks TV announces new and returning shows for 2014," 2013). TV3's 'branded content area' boasts such ratings successes at *The Block NZ*, *7 Days*, *Cadbury Dream Factory*, *The Great Food Race*, and *X Factor NZ* which, often less than seamlessly, integrate advertising into their programming. TV3's focus on local content complimented by high-end international shows

has seen a 5% growth in the channel's 25-54 year old target audience in the course of 2013; TV3 and sister channel FOUR were the only free-to-air channels to grow their audiences in 2013 ("Best of Local, International & Event Television Coming to TV3 2014," 2013). Facing sale in 2014, MediaWorks and TV3 have reduced their proportion of expensive international shows and increased their proportion of local content. With the week night prime time slots – 7pm to 10pm – made up of around 40% local programming (TV3, 2014b). Television programmes that would perhaps never have been produced under the former network era are given room and attention in TVIII.

#### THE HOME OF NZ COMEDY: TV3

In 2009 TV3 began to strengthen its local programming. After the success of animated comedy *bro'Town* (2004-2009), comedy-drama *Outrageous Fortune* (2005-2010) and workplace satire *The Jaquie Brown Diaries* (2008-2010), viewers were beginning to turn to TV3 for local comedy, and programmers were keen to ride their wave of success. *Rove* had been the channel's flagship Friday night show for some time, and producers were looking for something local to follow.

The Downlowconcept had been on National Radio for two years with their successful satirical comedy news quiz show "Off The Wire"; the team reworked their concept for television and put it forward to TV3 as *7 Days*. The timing was particularly good for The Downlowconcept in that TVNZ's Friday night stalwart panel show *Game of Two Halves* (1999-2008) had just finished a decade long run and TV3's long-running skit comedy *Pulp Sport* (2003-2009) was also finishing up - there was now a comedy void in Friday night prime time. TV3 liked The Downlowconcept's proposal and brought veteran broadcaster Jon Bridges on as a producer. Having already worked on "Off The Wire", *Away Laughing* (1991-1992), *Ice TV* (a magazine TV show that featured satirical spots, 1995-2000), and the stand-up comedy circuit, Bridges brought a wealth of industry knowledge and comedy connections to the project. Bridges says that the initial idea behind the show was to make it one that would "last forever...just keep going, the same way that [BBC satire] *Have I Got News For You* stuck around – we want to be an institution on the television landscape and provide a bit of satire" (2014). With its 150<sup>th</sup> episode airing April 18<sup>th</sup> 2014, and spurring multiple live national tours, it appears the show has done just that.

## **PUBLIC TELEVISION & THE ADVENT OF LOCAL CONTENT**

Radio was previously the go-to for public information, particularly during the World Wars, but television built on radio in that it denoted modernisation and progress. Murdock sees television as an essential factor in the development of contemporary citizenship for it “offers a flexible and universally accessible space for communal cultural explorations” (1997, p. 12). The NZBC’s public monopoly on television broadcasting meant their programmers did not have to be all too strategic when it came to the programming schedule. Television sets were scarce and in the early days of television broadcast groups of people would even gather outside retailers to watch sets in the shop window (P. Day, 2000, p. 54). And as for the content, that did not bear as much weight as it does now; the novelty of television was such that people would watch whatever was on simply because it *was* on. Former television announcer for the NZBC, Julie Cunningham, said that “it didn’t matter what you did, people found it entertaining...If you made mistakes they enjoyed that also” (2000, p. 55). The NZBC’s public monopoly however also meant more freedom to experiment with local programming formats without the threat of losing ratings. This experimentation usually ended up as news, current affairs and sports programming.

The 1973 Adam Report delivered policy directives to eliminate deficiencies in the existing broadcasting legislation. The report spotlighted the undeniable importance of fostering local content on New Zealand’s airwaves in the face of an oversupply of foreign content and proposed that public funding be specifically allocated to support and sustain such goals:

“The continued preponderance of imported material could bring uncertainty and instability to a society even when it is as homogeneous as New Zealand’s...The danger of a New Zealand ghetto must be realised and guarded against. There must be a will to assist and foster the New Zealand consciousness. There must be a recognition and acceptance of the money this will involve. There must be operators’ policies which are publicly stated and publicly examined” (Adam Report, 1973, p. 8)

The recommendations of the Adam Report were later fused into the Broadcasting Act 1973 and for the first time local content was given room to flourish. As a direct outcome of the new Act the PBF was increased, boosting TV One and SPTV’s local production coffers. During the early years of the two channel structure (1975-1977) local television saw great expansion and was able to offer a full range of genres – drama, soap, sitcom, sketch comedy, anthologies – produced locally and regularly airing in prime time slots (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 41).

In 1964 estimates by the New Zealand Television Quota Committee put local content at 20.39% (*Chapman Report*, 1986, p. 205). This number increased to 25.05% by 1975, in part thanks to the introduction of the second channel. Whilst local content was increasing, television was still straddling both public service and commercial imperatives. Television's public service efforts were only further constrained by the shrinking PBF revenue. Policy had not caught up with inflation and the PBF staying the same meant its end-game contributions to local production shrank from 42% in 1974 to 16% by 1985 (Smith, 1996, p. 17).

Within their bids for the third broadcasting licence in the late-1970s, channel warrant applicants included draft programming schedules that showed a strong commitment to local content. Jeff Bennet, one of the original founders of TV3, told the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Broadcasting that:

“[A] steady diet of imported programmes soon palls and the audiences [sic] demands quality indigenous programming with which it can identify... [and that] competition and the need for commercial viability will demand high quality local programming” (*Chapman Report*, 1986, p. 206).

The new channel, TV3, proclaimed its vested interest in local content, but struggled to deliver due to the commercial constraints on the industry. The cost of producing local drama and comedy was, and still is, high in comparison to foreign imports. As Roger Horrocks puts it:

“[A] one-hour episode of a popular American or British drama series that has cost, say \$3,000,000 to make will be available for \$25,000.... New Zealand primetime drama will be made on a much lower budget – say, for \$500,000 per hour – but this is still twenty times more expensive than buying an overseas product” (2004, pp. 272–273)

New Zealand programming was initially funded by both the television licensing fee and advertising. Television viewers paid a licensing fee of \$71.50 per year that went straight to the BCNZ who then channelled the funds into radio and television production, as well as the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (Norris & Pauling, 2012b, p. 10) The fee was increased in 1989 to \$110 per year, giving the BCNZ more than \$77 million to play with, \$31 million of which was allocated to television (2012b, p. 19)

Audiences had two channels to focus on by the mid-1970s, and the state broadcaster enjoyed “unrivalled access to the national audience” (Dunleavy & Joyce, 2011, p. 45) until TV3 came to the party more than a decade later in 1989. However due to the mixed model it was operating

in public television in New Zealand was persistently reliant on commercial revenues and did not prioritise public service objectives. Public service ideals were floated about from the outset, but were regularly reduced to simply the ‘level’ of programming made *in* New Zealand. Though what constituted ‘made in New Zealand’ was persistently up for debate. The Broadcasting Rules Committee defined a New Zealand content as a programme which “has not been purchased from overseas in a finished form”, which the BCNZ interpreted as including compilation programmes like *Foreign Correspondent* that included both foreign and national current affairs items (*Chapman Report*, 1986, p. 203). The New Zealand Film Commission offered up an alternative definition of local content; one that is “distinctly New Zealand in content and character and uses the services of New Zealanders in its production and presentation” (*Chapman Report*, 1986, p. 204) – A definition more akin to the services the local content production objectives of NZoA today.

The general purposes outlined in the Broadcasting Act 1976 addressed not only the generic requirements for a stable broadcasting infrastructure that could serve the people of New Zealand, but also the directive that broadcasting and broadcasters look to:

“...ensure that programmes reflect and develop New Zealand’s identity and culture; and that programmes are produced and presented with due regard to the need for good taste, balance, accuracy, and impartiality, and the privacy of individuals” (sec. 3).

Despite this directive, the proportion of local content did not see a marked increase, largely due to the cheap cost of importing foreign content and the comparatively expensive pursuit of producing content locally. As such, the majority of local content took the forms of news and current affairs, sports, and light entertainment throughout the early years of New Zealand television. The existing broadcasting legislation did not prescribe a local content quota per se and it was instead presumed that the public broadcaster’s monopoly would provide public television that fulfilled public service broadcasting needs.

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW ZEALAND ON AIR (NZOA)

The idea for a Broadcasting Commission to administer funds in the interests of social objectives was first floated in a Treasury submission to the Royal Commission on broadcasting which stated that it was

“...unnecessary for the Government to operate publicly owned and operated stations to achieve the objectives, and that, in the interests of efficiency, it would be preferable for

the Government, perhaps through delegated bodies, to use funds from general taxation to buy non-commercial programmes for transmission by commercial broadcasting” (New Zealand Treasury, 1985).

Since the birth of broadcasting in New Zealand there was an air of public responsibility about its delivery, a sort of flailing commitment to deliver public service broadcasting in the face of the perceived threats of mass media and corporate ownership. For the most part, such public service television in New Zealand has taken the form of news, current affairs, sports, and light entertainment. But when the Labour Government began a complete overhaul of the broadcasting system in the late-1980s, public broadcasting was to become a vital component in the new legislation and set to shape New Zealand broadcasting for decades to come. The mixed-model of public service and commercial imperatives has meant television could not commit entirely to public service and hypothetical local-content quotas, for the cost of local productions was immense (as mentioned previously). The new Act stated that broadcasting must “reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture” and it was to do so by “promoting programmes about New Zealand and New Zealand interests” (*Broadcasting Act 1976*). Reflecting on her time as the first executive director of the Broadcasting Commission, Ruth Harley says that NZoA was intent on delivering such content to New Zealanders, but that it was to be palatable by the masses:

“NZ On Air had the potential to intervene...in favour of mass interest NZ cultural product. So I was very in tune with it being a mass interest I was very ambitious for it to be mass interest, which is not to say I wasn’t interested in minority interest projects as well, I was, but I wanted NZ content to be part of everybody’s opportunity and part of everybody’s basic consumption” (qtd in Norris & Pauling, 2012c, p. 17).

#### NZOA’S FUNDING MODEL

NZoA holds an unusual position in the realm of public broadcasting in that it is charged with operating on and distributing a limited amount of funds to foster projects that penetrate and appeal to as much of the New Zealand broadcasting audience as possible. Or as Dunleavy simply puts it, NZoA is responsible for “making a little go a long way” (2010, p. 302). NZoA an independent government agency that positioned between government, industry, and producers, is able to facilitate the production of programming that supports and reflects New Zealand identities by lifting monetary constraints that can stifle innovation and creativity.

Initially NZoA was intended to be a subsidiser of television production, a part funder, to ensure an equal footing by network competitors. As a part of its funding requirements, NZoA dictates that applicants secure a national free-to-air broadcaster prior to an application being submitted (“Television Funding Process,” 2014). This way NZoA can ensure that public funds are going into public programming that will conceivably penetrate a broader national audience. It does however also mean that broadcasters once again have the ball in their court regarding what content is produced and what is not.

NZoA’s funding structure and administration is constrained by the Broadcasting Act 1989 which identifies its primary functions as the reflection and development of New Zealand identity and culture and the distribution of funds to producers, distributors, and archivists of local content (sec. 36). The Act notes that NZoA should provide for the interests of minority audiences whilst at the same time considering “the potential size of the audience likely to benefit from the project to which the proposal relates” (sec. 39). The Act also states that NZoA should “invite competitive proposals for the use of funds made available by the Commission” (sec. 43). This competition for funding has been constrained by NZoA’s arduous funding strategy along with the contestable Platinum Television Fund, established in 2008. Their funding strategy clearly juxtaposes their wish for innovative and diverse programming that reflects all New Zealanders whilst giving them “value for money” (“Our Funding Strategy,” 2014). Here too genre becomes important, for NZoA divide their funding strategy by genre and make reference to “genre priorities” dictated by the Act (“Our Funding Strategy,” 2014).

The Platinum Television Fund however, is primarily concerned with funding programming that is difficult to make or requires a high level of investment (the two are often mutually exclusive). Projects funded by the Platinum Television fund to date have predominantly been high-end one-off tele-features, long-form documentary programmes, specialist current affairs programmes, and special event programming (Quirk, 2012, p. 4). By funding in this way, NZoA is able to support the ‘threatened genres’ and those susceptible to ‘market failure’. In requiring support from broadcasters during the funding application process, NZoA has created a transparent and reliable process for productions that provides some accountability for producers, networks, and audiences.

Despite marked changes in technology and programming since NZoA was established, it continues to have success in contributing to the reflection of New Zealand identities on screen.

Without NZoA it is conceivable to think that the New Zealand television landscape would be riddled with cheap foreign content and devoid of quality local content, especially in prime time.

#### PUBLIC TELEVISION

The basic features of public broadcasting have been discussed at length by Alan Peacock in his report on the state of broadcasting in the UK (1986), Tracey (1997), Scannell (1990), and Comrie and Fountaine (2005); however it is Murdock's (1997) summation that works so concisely to tie these varied perspectives together. Murdock outlines the six driving principles of public broadcasting as: Autonomy; Universal Access; Programme Diversity; Innovation; Mainstreaming; and Access (1997, pp. 17–18). Autonomy: in the sense that public broadcasting need distance itself from institutionalised powers - be that political, corporate or otherwise. Access: to the technologies that deliver public broadcasting should be universally accessible, as should the content it is delivering. Programme diversity: should be such that it portrays diversity and incorporates a broad spectrum of voices. Innovative programming: should look to better an audience's understanding of the evolving world they are a part of. Mainstreaming: that minority experiences and positions are brought into prime time and made familiar. Access: looking to include audience members as participants in broadcasting, not just eyes and ears.

Murdock's (1997) writing on public broadcasting in the commercial era convincingly argues for an understanding of public television as something that marries public service broadcasting with commercial imperatives. Murdock's description of public broadcasting as "The Ghost at the Feast" whose future is increasingly uncertain provides a vivid description of public broadcasting here in New Zealand:

"Public broadcasting is the jilted suitor at the marriage between politicians and privatisers. It stands outside in the cold and rain, peering through the window at the merriment and toasting inside, a forlorn figure, dishevelled and increasingly disoriented. The institutions are still there, if they have not been sold off, but their purpose is continually questioned. Talk of public service or the public good is increasingly suspect. Audiences are now thought of as consumers rather than citizens, members of markets rather than of social and moral communities. Programme have become product and viewers targets" (1997, p. 9)

Until the creation of NZoA, public television in New Zealand was serviced only through 'local content' which was made up mostly of current affairs, news, sports, and light entertainment.

Whilst NZoA has been busy funding projects to show the uniqueness and diversity of New Zealand, the fact remains that they must rely on commercial networks to screen the programming it commissions. As Dunleavy argues, New Zealand television's greatest struggle has been "...reconciling the limitations of a small national audience with the voracious appetites of a relatively expensive medium" in the face of cheap American, British, and Australian programmes for import (Dunleavy, 2009a). Consequently public service television objectives in New Zealand have focussed on maintaining a small but appealing range of local programmes in categories like drama, documentary, comedy, children's, Māori language, arts, and music, but their "commercial fragility" makes them reliant on public funding from NZoA and the like (Dunleavy, 2009a). Other countries with market sizes comparable to New Zealand have had governments expressly concerned with promoting public broadcasting principles through the servicing of independent broadcasting institutions (like the ABC in Australia) but in New Zealand the Governments' pursuit of social broadcasting objectives has been restricted to a purchasing agent, which has "treated broadcasters and programme makers, whether public or private, equally" (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2003, p. 11).

Whilst New Zealand's television culture has significantly since the early years, many of its early characteristics have continued to haunt the industry right into the post-network era. New Zealand's population remains small compared with other television markets globally, and the cost of production local programming is still high compared with foreign imports. As such, New Zealand television continues to be dominated by a heavy reliance on foreign-produced and a deficiency of locally produced content.

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# NZ COMEDY & SATIRE

## NZ'S SATIRE TRADITION

Comedy has an erratic but innovative history in New Zealand television owing to the tight programming controls of the NZBC in its early years, an over reliance on imported programming, and the genre's historic vulnerability to market failure. The NZBC's inaugural director-general and self-described 'Edwardian' Gilbert Stringer took a particularly conservative approach to programming, attempting to mimic the prolific BBC; his paternalistic attitude gravitated toward more conventional programming like news and family friendly entertainment, leaving little room for a daring genre like comedy (P. Day, 2000, p. 56). Despite Stringer's conservative hold over programming some comedy did sneak through and for the most part it took the form of satire.

Drama and comedy have the highest production costs of all locally produced genres and as such have been more susceptible to market failure than their prime time counterparts. Dunleavy outlines three main ways in which these dominating characteristics have constrained the genres of both comedy and drama: a scarcity of local content amidst swarms of foreign productions; the tendency of viewers to judge a locally produced programme against an imported (high investment) one; and the high episode volume of foreign dramas and comedies in contrast with domestic product, effecting commercial performance on New Zealand channels (2012, p. 43). The contestable funding schemes offered by NZoA work to counteract these conditions by subsidising local productions across the genres.

In a 2008 submission to the Ministry for Arts, Culture and Heritage on the future of broadcasting, TVNZ estimated the cost of producing local content to be 10-12 times as much as purchasing foreign content (TVNZ, 2008, p. 20). Unlike their foreign counterparts the UK and US, local programmes are airing to an untested market, which can make advertisers and programmers uneasy – NZoA's subsidies help to alleviate this commercial risk and thereby sustain the development and growth of local content production. Prior to NZoA's establishment there was no such funding subsidy available to networks and producers and this has been reflected in local content figures, particularly in television's early years. NZoA has since been an invaluable mentor of New Zealand comedy since its inception in 1989, despite such a directive not being explicitly outlined in broadcasting legislation.

## THE CONTEXT FOR LOCAL COMEDY

Until the 1970s there was a relative dearth of comedy on New Zealand television. The weekly television schedule was made up by a large percentage of imported programmes alongside local variety shows, panel discussions, and news bulletins. It was not until the series *Town and Around* (1965-1970) debuted that comedy with ‘local flavour’ was given air time. *Town and Around* was a nightly magazine show that covered a range of topics and interest bases; anything from current affairs to regional events to farming spoofs. Its run ended in 1970 but *Town and Around* was to foster the comedy writing talents of industry legends like David McPhail (*McPhail and Gadsby*) and Brian Edwards (*Fair Go*).

In 1969 Roger Hall and Joe Musaphia’s comedy *In View of the Circumstances* went to air. Hall says it was branded a satire by a promotional person “which was the equivalent of giving it a Government Health warning” (2010) and thusly it was a ratings failure and lasted a single season. Ultimately the NZBC hit pause on any comedy ventures until the emergence of its second channel. The introduction of a new channel in 1975 and the NZBC monopoly on television meant programmers were finally able to take some risks. With their public monopoly relieving fears of ratings losses, the younger channel SPTV branched out and invested in home grown comedy. Premiering in 1974 New Zealand’s first sitcom *Buck House* (1974-1975) took a look at the life and times of a bunch of Wellington students; though its vulgar and at times questionable humour received mixed reviews. Somewhere in the background Fred Dagg was dreamed up by comedian John Clarke and was drip fed to audiences through satirical closing spots on the rural farming show *Country Calendar* (1966- ). Fred Dagg was to become a household name in New Zealand and was partially responsible for readying the national audience’s palate for the television satires to come.

1976 introduced New Zealand to the cooking duo of *Hudson and Halls* (1977-1986) whose title hosts remixed the cooking show genre with their camp comedic cookery. 1976 also saw the sitcom *Joe and Koro* (1976-1978), a bicultural tale of two best friends, go to air. Despite accusations of racial stereotyping and political incorrectness it ran for two series, launching the careers of actors Rawiri Paratene and Stephen Gledhill. In 1977 former script-editor for *Joe and Koro* Rosemary MacLeod created a new sitcom *All Things Being Equal* (1978) that had undeniably feminist undertones and looked to subvert the traditional sitcom characters by focusing on a group of progressive women and their sensitive ‘man friend’. This show spawned

the television career of comedienne Ginette McDonald who later went on to star in various variety shows as the Kiwi icon *Lyn of Tawa*.

Another brainchild of Roger Hall's, *Glide Time*, found itself garnering some of the highest ratings known to television comedy in 1978. *Glide Time* was a one-off television adaptation of Hall's successful national touring play and focused on the antics of a complacent New Zealand government department and its paper-shuffling public servants. By the 1980s local comedy had secured its position on the television landscape and sitcoms like *Gliding On* (1981-1985), a revival of *Glide Time*, were thriving.

The 1980s also saw the arrival of the Kiwi comedienne. Kiwi icon *Lyn of Tawa* played by Ginette McDonald - yet another satire - and the yodelling, activist, multi-character, family act The Topp Twins were given their own show in 1996. The Topp Twins found enduring success with their unique blend of political satire, social commentary and gender-bending theatrics. Sketch comedies like the British inspired *Public Eye* (1988-1989) found their feet in the late-1980s and fostered the comedy talents of writers within the fold of the Wellington based Gibson Group. After finding success with *Public Eye* the Gibson Group branched out into sitcom with *Away Laughing* in 1991, and more sketch comedy with *Skitz* in 1994, and magazine shows like *Ice TV* (1995-2001) interspersed satirical spoofs amongst their youth oriented factual programming.

The early 2000s gave rise to a local content charter, and subsequently the presence of local comedy on television increased. *Spin Doctors* (2001-2003) saw a team of public relations experts diving in and out of Parliament to quash any media outrage at the week's politics. The show was filmed in-week, allowing the writers to incorporate the week's politics, with many scenes actually filmed in Wellington in and around Parliament. *Havoc* (1997-2002) featuring radio's Mikey 'Havoc' Roberts and his sidekick Jeremy 'News Boy' Wells saw the duo provide a satirical take on the cultural goings on for the week and the show forged various spin-offs including *Havoc and Newsboy's Sell-Out Tour* (2000). Their 2002 Election Special "Choice!: 2002" (a pun on the Kiwi slang 'choice' meaning awesome) was noted by many media pundits as particularly informative and paved the way for Wells' solo effort *Eating Media Lunch* (2003-2008). This show expressly satirised the mainstream news media and actually sought to locate the 'real news' of the nation; including such minor stories as a Māori language pornography film being shot in the Taranaki. In 2005 Wells launched a new series *The Unauthorised History of New Zealand* which ran until 2009. The show took a closer look at New Zealand's history

and reimagined big moments in history using real footage but an unconventional alternative commentary and voice over from Wells.

#### CASE STUDY: DAVID MCPHAIL & JON GADSBY

The first local comedy to garner both reasonable ratings and praise from the critics was indeed a satire – SPTV’s *Something to Look Forward To* (1976). Later re-imagined as *A Week of It* (1977-1979), the show highlighted the writing and comedic talents of David McPhail and Jon Gadsby and was popular throughout its run. Initially imagined as a live sketch show SPTV shut that idea for being too risky; McPhail says that despite that directive “as it turned out, it was virtually done live because we recorded it about half an hour before it was played... so it was as good as live” (Whiteside, 2009). Gadsby says the show was “breaking new ground” as “that sort of thing hadn’t really been done here. In fact wasn’t, as far as I can gather, being done anywhere else in the world. There had been that show in Britain when I was a kid *That Was The Week That Was* and I think *A Week of It* may have been loosely based on that. We had a lot of fun. But god it was nerve-racking ” (Whiteside, 2010). The show became famous for one-liners like “Jeez Wayne” and their daring impersonations of prominent political figures. McPhail’s recurring impersonation of Prime Minister Robert Muldoon was to become his most notorious. He recalls the apprehension he felt in portraying Muldoon: “the danger with satirising a character is that you in the process of making fun of them you actually legitimise what they’re doing. You make it acceptable” (qtd in Whiteside, 2009). A.K. Grant, a former writer for the show, said that their satirising of Muldoon was an “important public duty” for people tended to forget the way in which Muldoon “cowed the public and the media” (qtd in Elliott, 1997, p. 50).

With the 1979 shake up of the television structure in New Zealand, the pair was shifted to TV One from 1980 and reworked their comedy sketch series, turning it into *McPhail and Gadsby* (1980-1987). As *McPhail and Gadsby* the duo came under heavy fire from religious and political groups for their controversial satirical sketches. The first series of the show saw a succession of episodes centralised on issues from sex, to crime, to religion. The religion episode launched protests the country over. Gadsby recalls “Every official religion in the country was lodging a protest, apart from the Catholics... I think because it was a local show people saw they could have some effect on it, and this did a lot of damage” (qtd in Elliott, 1997, p. 52). Despite the criticisms the duo was some of the most widely watched performers on New Zealand television. According to old ratings statistics near to one and a half million viewers would tune in every episode (Elliott, 1997, p. 54). In terms of legitimate political discourse, the

show not only sparked protest but MPs saw their caricatures as a badge of honour. Gadsby said it got to a point where even MP's press secretaries were phoning them to give them a head's up about Ministerial blunders (Elliott, 1997, pp. 54–55).

The dynamic duo was again re-matched for a special episode in 1997. McPhail and Gadsby also went on to write *Issues* (1990) and follow up *More Issues* (1991) once again putting their satirical bent on current affairs. In 1994 they teamed up again for the sitcom, and later theatre tour, *Letter to Blanchy* (1994). As two of New Zealand's most prolific satirists, McPhail and Gadsby were to pave the way for successful contemporary satires like *Skitz* (1993-1997), *Spin Doctors* (2001-2003), *Jono and Ben at Ten* (2012- ) and *7 Days* (2009- ). Without their risky 'nearly live' sketch series, audiences would have been without local comedy until much later in the picture.

#### CASE STUDY: BILLY T JAMES

Māori comedy legend Billy T James was also thrust into the spotlight on *Radio Times* (1980-1983) and then with his own comedy sketch series. Billy T's caricatures of typified Kiwi men were immortalised in his sketch show *The Billy T James Show*, premiering in 1981 the show lasted for six seasons. By the fifth series there was a marked shift in Billy T's comedy style, from merely joking to performing satirical critiques on race relations and the post-colonial anxieties felt throughout New Zealand. In 1990 Billy T jumped channels and reformulated his comedy into a sitcom, under the same name. Tony Holden directed the new show and notes the impact Billy T's comedy had on the New Zealand public,

“I think what a lot of people forget about Billy is that at the time he was relevant there was a different attitude towards race socially. He was at the forefront of change until the Labour government came in and started effecting law changes. We were a very racist society. Maori were not entitled to a lot of things they are now. Billy's ability to release Pākehā guilt, which is what he did, was unique in making that territory firm for Labour to go in and say “OK we're going to have anti-discrimination laws”” (qtd in Elliott, 1997, p. 81)

Billy T was a talented impersonator who was particular adept at mimicking accents and used this skill to impersonate various Kiwi archetypes, his most famous the 'wifebeater' singlet wearing, gumboot footed, workshy Māori endures today.

## LOCAL COMEDY & CONTEMPORARY BROADCASTING

The first comedies to hit New Zealand screens were satires, of one format or another. The conventional ‘fourth wall’ sitcom was slow to convince audiences of its capacity for laughs, and the prevailing forms of locally produced comedy have tended to be those requiring less financial investment and more ‘localness’. The comedy forms robust enough to last in the small New Zealand market have most often been: scripted sketch series, magazine series, stand-up comedy, and single-camera sitcom. But others like the animated sitcom (e.g. TV3’s *bro ’Town*), comedy verité (e.g. *Wayne Anderson – Glory Days*), and one-off scripted comedy specials and/or mini-series (e.g. TVNZ’s *The Unauthorised History of New Zealand* and *Visual Symphonies*) have also found success, albeit at less frequent intervals.

The viability of parodic comedy and satirical news shows has been nurtured by the emergence of the post-network era. Television has undergone dramatic changes since the 1980s with the advent of cable television, subscriber services, as well as satellite and digital technologies, shaping the way we watch and consume television. Regulatory changes to the industry, especially in New Zealand, have altered its practices and affected the motivations behind production. Dunleavy and Joyce, borrowing from Rogers, Epstein and Reeves, have called this era the “TVIII” phase (2011, p. 249). TVIII follows on from TVI the golden monopolistic ‘broadcast only’ era for television, and TVII’s focus on expansion and the recognition of a mass audience for the first time (p. 248). TVIII is a post-broadcast era characterised by the expansion of television platforms has diversified the range of plausible relationships between providers and viewers, facilitating “the potential for more direct economic relationships between TV providers and viewers” (p. 249). NZ On Air’s impact in the TVIII era should not be ignored; since introducing the Digital Media Fund in 2012/2013 they have invested in 14 web-based projects at a cost of \$3.2m s (NZ On Air, 2013, p. 71), and have also amended their funding regulations to now require all funded content to be available online for a period (p. 21). These comprehensive shifts in production and delivery have changed the ways in which viewers watch television, and thus the way that producers and advertisers conceptualise their audiences.

Jeffrey Sconce emphasises how this change has culminated in the narrative techniques of television; “Cable’s fragmentation of the network audience, the growth of “reality television,” and the concurrent reduction of more expensive narrative-based programming has created an environment of increasingly specialized narrative vehicles, allowing smaller audience groups

the potential for targeted and intensive narrative investment” (2004, p. 96). The wealth of programming options for viewers in the post-network era has seen an evolution in cultural styles and tastes that make room for more adventurous or unconventional programming to become successful. Under the TVI and TVII phases, programming diversity was scarce in New Zealand thanks to the BCNZ monopoly and the two channel complementarity established by the early TVNZ. Where once television viewers’ eyes were feasting on the same products they are no longer, dissipating the traditional connected audience that once facilitated a national culture through a shared temporal viewing experience. Now audiences are divided by taste and modes of access or as Spigel puts it, “the postnetwork system does assume a culture that is deeply divided by taste, not one that is unified through national narratives” (2004, p. 256). Spigel takes this assertion further, contending that this new environment is ripe for satire owing to the television savviness of the postnetwork audience: “the actual cultural styles in these new narrowcast media markets are increasingly based on irony, parody, scepticism, and ‘TV-literate’ critical reading protocols” (2004, p. 256). Television, and audiences, have been increasingly more self-aware and self-reflexive in the post-network era, with most of the new audience having grown up with television, and the enviable 18-24 demographic also having had the internet entwined in their everyday lives. This disposition is incredibly welcoming to satire for there is an intrinsic knowledge of television and its workings that was absent from the early generations of television viewership, and the Internet embellishes the viewer experience with exclusive extras.

Another fortuitous characteristic of TVIII to contribute to the successful expansion of satire programming is the simplicities of editing in the new digital era. Toying with the news media has become a rite of passage for satirists and satirical programming, with a lofty majority of satirical programming having always been dedicated to news and current affairs. The incorporation of real news clips and other media into *7 Days* for example is easily facilitated by the network’s licensing agreement with APRA, photo-sharing deal with Getty Images, and the cross-platform nature of MediaWorks who own several radio stations (*RadioLIVE*, *The Edge*, *More FM*, *Mai FM*, *George FM*, *The Sound*, *Kiwi FM*, *The Breeze*, *Radio Sport*, and *The Rock*) as well as their own news (*3News*, *Firstline*) and current affairs programmes (*Campbell Live*, *The Nation*, *60 Minutes*, *The Paul Henry Show*, *The Vote*). Lifting footage from the above

programmes requires no costly licensing agreement to be made, and the footage can be cut and pasted into *7 Days* with relative ease thanks to advances with in-house editing technologies<sup>3</sup>.

## 7 DAYS & GENRE MIXING

The importance of television genres to the development of new programmes is that networks rely upon previous triumphs to hint at what may be successful in a newer market. This reliance may take the form of *imitation* or *recombination* (Gitlin, 1994; Dunleavy, 2009b). Imitation is where a show would perhaps borrow a format (e.g. fourth wall sitcom), a setting (e.g. the family home) and dynamic (e.g. Mum, Dad, and the three rambunctious children), and add a new element (e.g. stepfather/stepmother, the sassy teenaged girl/boy, the annoying neighbour) to ‘shake things up’ and set the new programme apart from its predecessors or competition. Recombination is the mixing or ‘borrowing’ from televisual history to ‘refresh’ a tried and true format or story arch, or as Gitlin puts it, “this with a touch of that, a hint of the other” (1994, p. 79). Recombination would likely incorporate the aforementioned ‘spin-off’ and ‘adaptation’ also. Genres are constantly reworked by producers and reinterpreted by audiences, rendering genre a malleable and shifting marker of cultural tastes. Such reinterpretations are tagged by Mittell as ‘genre mixing’ (2004). Generic mixture blurs the boundaries between genres, reappropriating a conventional genre by blending it with another. Contemporary programming is rife with generic mixing: the satire/sitcom of something like NBC’s *Parks and Recreation*, the satire/science-fiction/drama of *Black Mirror* and the satiric news/talk show hybrid of the likes of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*.

*7 Days* mixes the quiz show, panel show, improvisational comedy, and news programme to create what its producers call a “a Friday night comedy satire show” with a “cutting weekly dose of satire” (“About *7 Days*,” 2014). The show’s basic premise is similar to that of the BBC’s *Qi* and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* in that it puts two teams of comedians up against one another with the same team captains taking the reins each week and leading their team through a series of current events based quiz games. The teams are kept in line by the show’s host comedian and broadcasting personality Jeremy Corbett, who offers his own perspective on the week’s current affairs through his opening and closing monologues and intermittent banter with the panellists. Corbett’s delivery is akin to Charlie Brooker who hosts the BBC’s *Charlie*

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<sup>3</sup> *7 Days* producer Jon Bridges has stated that the only limits on news content have been; time, and the ability to gather items from news outlets and secondly, a strained relationship between TV3 and Fairfax meaning the show actively avoids any commentary on Fairfax outlets (including major metro papers like *The Dominion Post* (2014)

*Brooker's Weekly Wipe* (a satirical talk show that investigates the week's politics and technology). There are several 'games' within the show that each play to the different comedic comforts of the cast; these games having changed in popularity and frequency throughout its time on air. Members of the public are also invited to become a part of the studio audience with tickets to the tapings available through the TV3 website. The 'live laughs' give a sense of liveness to the show despite its recording taking place on a Wednesday night and it being heavily edited before going to air on Friday night.

## **7 DAYS DEBUTS**

*7 Days* debuted on TV3 in the 10.30pm time slot on the 21<sup>st</sup> of August 2009. The show makes fun of the week's headlines and pokes fun at all things quintessentially 'Kiwi' – from the nature of our politics to the 'two degrees of separation' that we experience in a nation of under 5 million. Filmed in-house by TV3, *7 Days* is made on a budget comprised largely of NZoA funding. Now into its sixth season, *7 Days* has celebrated 100 episodes in 2012 and in 2014 reaches 150. The show opened to rave reviews from critics, with *The New Zealand Herald* likening it to the American *Whose Line Is It Anyway* and the UK's *A Week of It*, albeit "a bit vile" (Grant, 2009). Initially the show was a part of a comedy block to follow the successful one-hour 'tent pole' variety talk show *Rove*, but by *Rove*'s departure from TV3 in late 2009 the show had already become appointment viewing for many in its audience. *7 Days* was nominated for a Qantas Media Award in 2010 for 'Best Comedy Programme or Comedy Series' but was narrowly beaten out by *The Jacquie Brown Diaries*. *7 Days* went on to scoop the award for 'NZ On Air Best Comedy or Comedy Series' at the newly named Aotearoa Film & Television Awards the following year. The success of the show has spurred several national tours. The have taken the team of comedians through both rural and urban centres of New Zealand. Some shows were filmed and a select few went to air on TV3, notably its Christchurch show filmed on 13 November 2013.

## **THE TALENT**

The show began with long time radioman Jeremy Corbett as host, 'Billy T Award' winning comedian Paul Ego as the team leader of team 1, and the equally prosperous Dai Henwood as the leader of team 2. The crew are ably led by their producer and broadcasting stalwart Jon Bridges who has been with the show since its inception. The teams, each made up of three comedians, change week to week but preference is given to local talent. In 2014 *7 Days* announced its season regulars as Ben Hurley, Jesse Griffin, Josh Thomson, Jeremy Elwood,

Urzila Carlson, and the return of Corbett, Henwood and Ego. Known as ‘The Crew’ the comedians are proven *7 Days* guests and also take part in their live national tours.

When The Downlowconcept first sold the idea for the show they knew the talent they wanted to use, drawing on proven talents from “Off The Wire” and comedy friends. Producer Jon Bridges says that they never sought out to foster stand-up talent, rather they keep an eye out for people “who’ve got the right sort of thing” whether they are actors, comedians, or otherwise (2014). In more recent years the producers have gleaned new talent from the local Auckland Comedy Club ‘The Classic’ which hosts irregular live versions of the show to groom new talent. *7 Days* regulars Rose Matafeo (formerly of *Dai’s Protégé Project*), Vaughan Smith (of radio station *The Edge* fame) and Urzila Carlson were discovered at The Classic and have become panel regulars.

#### JEREMY CORBETT – HOST

Host Jeremy Corbett is vital to the construction of *7 Days* as a working site of political critique. He controls the mood, and moves things along when they become too bawdy or base, irrelevant, or off-topic. Corbett has hosted every episode since the show’s pilot and thus provides some continuity to the show which lacks an overarching narrative or plot. Corbett is seasoned broadcaster, having regularly featured on New Zealand radio and television.

#### PAUL EGO – TEAM 1 LEADER

A twenty year veteran of the New Zealand comedy scene, Ego is a broadcasting stalwart, having featured on breakfast radio (*The Rock* and *More FM*) for many years. Ego cut his comedy teeth on the London stand-up comedy scene in the mid-1990s, before finding his feet 20 years later when he jointly won the Billy T Award with Mike Loder in 2000. Ego, real name Paul Jones has been the leader of team 1 since the show’s beginning. His comedy tends to play off his role as an ‘incompetent Dad’ who wears colourful shirts, and he fulfils the role of the ‘blokey’ and insensitive Kiwi male. Ego’s deadpan delivery emulates the cliché BBC newsreader style the older New Zealand audience is so familiar with - adding to the overall parodic efforts of the show.

#### DAI HENWOOD – TEAM 2 LEADER

Henwood is a seasoned comedy performer, having joined the New Zealand stand-up circuit in the late-1990s, and going on to win the prestigious Billy T Award in 2002. Trained in Theatre and Film at Victoria University of Wellington Henwood is adept at physical comedy, and uses his small stature to propel many of his jokes. Henwood’s often crass gesticulations are

somewhat neutralised by the fact he holds the position of team leader, in a way sanctioning his lewdness. This type of physical comedy also harks back to the Athenian satyr-plays mentioned in earlier chapters, where physical comedy was a necessary part of theatrical performance. Henwood's physical humour subverts the polite decorum of the news genre wherein anchors wear designer suits, boast polished BBC-like accents, and strictly adhere to a fine-tuned script. The ways in which he, and fellow captain Paul Ego, introduce their team mates plays to this subversion also. At the beginning of each show the team captains are harangued by host Jeremy Corbett and subsequent team member introductions take the same tact.

#### URZILA CARLSON – FEMALE REGULAR

As is symptomatic of the wider comedy genre<sup>4</sup>, women appear on the show less often than their male counterparts. With the exception of ex-pat South African Urzila Carlson, who was introduced as a regular member of the *7 Days* 'crew' in 2012, women are largely outnumbered on the panels. Comediennes Madeleine Sami (*Super City*), Cal Wilson, Michelle A'Court, and Rose Matafeo (*Jono And Ben At Ten*; *Dai's Protégé*) can also be seen to frequent the show but none have been made a permanent fixture.

### THE GAMES & THE CONVENTIONS OF NEWS PRODUCTION

Information reaches the newsroom predominantly through press releases, press conferences, tip-offs, wire services, or from reporters out on their particular 'news beats' – for example the parliamentary press gallery, court, defence force and so on<sup>5</sup>. This practice of newsgathering tends to result in a preferentiality of elite sources and contributes to the conundrum of top-down communication. This quick turnaround required of journalists does not always allow for the thorough vetting of sources that a long-form documentary or current affairs news programme would. As such, in place of expert or elite sources, a reporter may look to the 'man on the street' to survey public opinion and the range of responses to a contentious issue. The 'vox-pop', as it is commonly known, has come to be a key component of television news; particularly when it comes to weather stories or local politics. The vox-pop is used to give a public voice to an issue, often without offering anything more politically suggestive than an outright complaint. Often vox-pops are given equal air time to their expert source counterparts;

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<sup>4</sup> See Christopher Hitchens' investigation into women and comedy ("Why Women Aren't Funny", 2007); Alessandra Stanley's assessment of funny women ("Who Says Women Aren't Funny?", 2008); and Maureen Ryan's piece on female television and comedy writers ("Why Is Television Losing Women Writers? Veteran Producers Weigh In", 2012)

<sup>5</sup> For an exhaustive list see Tony Harcup's book *Journalism: Principles and Practice* (2009)

a tendency which has worried the BBC enough to include in their editorial guidelines that “we must not imply the [vox-pop] samples are representative and we should be explicit in describing their purpose and limitations” (BBC, 2014). The risk of a reporter ‘going native’ and developing a certain affinity for their sources and institutional ties, has the potential to end in a reporter becoming a political actor, having influence over the tone of a report (Harrison, 2006, p. 143). *7 Days*’ games play off this non-expert, non-elite deployment of sources, and other news conventions to conduct their critiques.

*7 Days* is made up of a series of games, each with their own particular take on the news and current affairs. Games go in and out of favour, and new games are regularly introduced to keep the show fresh and entertaining. Some games have become stalwarts, such as:

- ‘Answers’, teams are given a short (written) answer and must identify the news story
- ‘Caption That’, where a photograph of a news item is shown and the panellists have to name the story
- ‘Drunk News/Drunk Reporters’, a film crew hit the streets during the wee hours to get drunk adults to recount elements from a recent news story
- ‘My Kid Could Draw That’, where school children draw news stories for the panellists to guess
- ‘My Professional Opinion’, a video clip plays of interviews with people from a given profession (i.e. firefighters, lifeguards, hairdressers) and they give their opinion on a recent news story, which the teams then have to guess. The teams must guess what the professionals are talking about and after submitting their final guesses a subsequent clip is shown, with each professional stating “that was my professional opinion on {x} story”. More often than not, the professionals giving their ‘professional opinion’ are in no way related to the story’s subject.
- ‘Slice of 7’, a musician (usually a New Zealander) re-works the lyrics to a famous song to deliver a vague commentary on a news story which the teams must identify
- ‘What’s the Story’, news footage is shown and the panellists must name the story. The panellists offer up alternative commentary during the screening and if their team cannot guess the story then points may be awarded to the opposing team if they can.
- ‘Yes Minister’, where a politician is brought on to be questioned by the panellists, and must not ever answer ‘yes’

Each of these games parodies various elements of the news genre. ‘Answers’ is usually the show’s opening game, as is used as a sort of warm up to locate the show in the news of the week. ‘Caption That’ toys with the news media’s tendency to favour the sensational over the factual (read: boring) elements of current affairs, the teams offering up scandalous and hilarious captions for news items. ‘Drunk News’ and ‘My Professional Opinion’ both parody the news’ obsession with fairness and balance that so often results in presenting conflicting opinions even when there is a consensus. The television news’ tendency to rely on vox pops and opinions from on the street in place of expert sources or key stakeholders is parodied by ‘Drunk News’ especially, indicating that the value of vox pops in a political or social debate is about as weighty and worthy of attention as a drunk’s inebriated thoughts. ‘My Kid Could Draw That’ exposes the agenda setting and framing functions of the news through the eyes of ‘innocent children’. Where news items often fail to give lengthy background oftentimes the meanings behind a story are lost. Often in this segment a kid will draw trivial components of a story, highlighting or embellishing minor elements to distort the overall ‘picture’. ‘Slice of 7’ plays to the celebrification of the news but also works to locate the show in the New Zealand context. The musicians and songs being sung are mostly by Kiwi musicians, and some humour is found in the parodying of these iconic songs and figures. ‘Yes Minister’ is a nod to the British TV series of the same name, and presses politicians to give answers despite the common assumption that ‘a politician will never give a straight answer’.

## **FRIDAY NIGHT COMEDY**

Programming is strategic and a way of thinking about television in terms of its reception. In each 24-hour television day there are strategic goals and prescribed flows that have been scheduled by expert programmers, armed with audience or ‘market’ research that informs their decisions. When broadcasting regulations changed in the 1980s to favour more commercial imperatives scheduling schemes went along for the ride. The complementarity established between TV1 and TV2 drew older viewers to TV1 and the youth to TV2. In its infancy TV3 was unable to brush itself with an identity distinct from the two and instead went about competing on a programme by programme, or time slot for time slot, basis – beginning with its flagship evening news programme. In more recent years TV3 have set up a complementarity of their own by introducing sister channel FOUR. Whilst TV3 remains the home of information programming for MediaWorks, FOUR is almost exclusively light entertainment programming with much of its schedule dedicated to foreign comedy, drama, and reality programmes.

TV3 has come to be known as the home of New Zealand comedy (Mediaworks, 2014) with its now staple Friday night comedy line-up. In the early 2000s it was *Rove* followed by whatever local comedy needed some airtime. In 2009 *7 Days* was introduced to follow *Rove* and local single-camera comedy *The Jaquie Brown Diaries*. The years that followed have seen TV3 brand themselves as the home of NZ comedy; annually airing the NZ International Comedy Festival, creating *Dai's Protégé* whereby a series of hopeful comedians were put through their paces and mentored by award winning comedian Dai Henwood, *AotearoHA*. In 2014 it's the 'Class of Friday Night' which sees US shows *The Simpsons* and *How I Met Your Mother* followed by the UK's *The Graham Norton Show* anchor the prime time schedule in the 7.30pm to 9.30pm slots; then followed by home grown in-house comedies *7 Days* and *Jono And Ben At Ten* ("Class of Friday Night," 2014).

## **7 DAYS SPECIALS**

*7 Days* has also made a series of 'specials' synchronized with special events. For example the special 'trans-Tasmania' episode NZ vs. Australia ("7 Days: S01E18," 2010) that saw local comedians Paul Ego, Jeremy Elwood and Steve Wrigley (team 1) paired against Australian comedians Will Anderson, Claire Hooper and Tom Gleeson (team 2) in country for the International Comedy Festival – which also finds its home on TV3. *7 Days* have also aired Christmas specials since its launch, with the exception of 2011. In 2012 *7 Days* reached its 100<sup>th</sup> episode and celebrated with a special episode going over the cast's favourite moments from throughout the series. In 2011 the crew did their show live from Christchurch ("7 Days: S03E29") and in 2013 the team aired a Special for the Red Nose Day campaign ("7 Days Cure Kids Special," 2013).

### **CASE STUDY: 7 DAYS VISITS EARTHQUAKE STRICKEN CHRISTCHURCH**

In 2011 the crew went to Christchurch to film a show just nine months after the Canterbury region's devastating earthquake ("7 Days: S03E29," 2011). Team 1 consisted of Paul Ego, Jesse Mulligan and Chopper Reid, and Team 2 Dai Henwood, Urzila Carlson, and Ben Hurley. The show opens with Corbett's usual content warning, and then a brief monologue:

"We're coming to you live from Christchurch tonight, and I just want to reassure everyone that even though we've flown down from Auckland, none of us are in the slightest bit scared"

The panellists then slowly emerge from behind their desks wearing high-visibility fluorescent vests and safety helmets. A pan across the desks reveals frightened but hopeful faces, then flicks back to Jeremy – now with a helmet on – then cuts to the opening credits. In this 25 second opener several ideological sites are hailed through cultural scripts: the sanctioned othering of Aucklanders from anything ‘South of the Bombay Hills’; the national anxiety around the earthquake disaster; and the news media narrative promoting the overwhelming resilience of Canterbury communities.

Auckland, New Zealand’s largest and most diverse city, is often the butt of jokes by non-Aucklanders, but is also the fodder of the south-deprecating Aucklanders. The term JAFA, an acronym for the phrase Just Another Fuckin’ Aucklander, was coined in the latter part of the twentieth century, and is used to describe the stereotypical Auckland dweller that had never needed to leave the city because it ‘has everything I need’. The Bombay Hills, 50km south of Auckland Central is often used as an indicator as to the average Aucklander’s geographical know-how; with phrases like ‘there’s nothing South of the Bombay Hills’ making their way into cultural constructions around Auckland identity. The perceived othering of those ‘South of the Bombay Hills’ by Aucklanders has been fused into the cultural script around Auckland and made natural or common – if not emphatically accurate. Not only that, but the JAFA has been re-appropriated by Aucklanders and deployed sarcastically in self-deprecating humour.

This approach can be observed in this clip. By Corbett recognising that the panellists all hail from Auckland he is inciting all of the cultural scripts associated with that locale. He then contrasts the Aucklanders with the Cantabrians (Canterbury dwellers) in the audience. Canterbury is regularly characterised in mainstream media narratives as rural, farming, and rugby-mad; but ever since the earthquake, new adjectives are thrown around for Cantabrians like ‘resilient’, ‘can-do’, ‘brave’, and ‘undefeated’. The comedy comes from knowing these stereotypes are at play, and that ultimately both the performers and the audience are ‘on the same side’ and are part of the wider national community – serviced by the fact that the Aucklanders have actually bothered to travel South of the Bombays in support of the Southern community.

Where the straight news cannot actively endorse the actions and successes of Christchurch mayor Bob Parker without fear of compromising their core values, the *7 Days* comedians and audience can. During this episode Christchurch mayor Bob Parker guests on the ‘Yes Minister’ game. Where politicians are usually roasted during this segment, Parker appears to be given a

small reprieve owing to the current climate in Christchurch. The segment begins with Paul Ego mocking his role as a ‘lowly’ (when compared to Auckland, obviously) South Island mayor:

Paul Ego: Ah Bob, I’d like to ask you the first question if I may. Before the earthquakes did you have ever anything to do ever?

[After a brief pause Parker pretends to exit the stage]

Ego: You know, like some photocopying maybe, or... Maybe go and have a cuppa tea...

Parker: I was just waiting for the time.

Ego: You certainly rose to it. You did a fantastic job, we’re very proud of you.

Beginning with a typical targeting of the typical politician’s ineffectiveness, Ego soon slips out of character. Ego finishes straight faced, commending Parker for the role he played in stabilising Christchurch in the wake of the disaster. This does two things; firstly it questions Parker’s authority, at the risk of distancing the satirist from his target, exposing the core impetus of satire (to disrupt power, ideology); secondly it acknowledges the role and importance of leadership in community outside of a satiric utterance. Parker’s authority is validated twice over – first in the targeting of him in the first place, and second in the straightness of Ego’s comments - that he did a “fantastic job” and “we’re very proud of you”. Pre-earthquake Parker is worthy of attack – “Before the earthquakes did you have anything to do ever?” – But post-earthquakes Bob is not.

This brief exchange shows the importance of irony to satire. Where Ego targets both ‘incarnations’ of Bob irony is only evident in the former – one day he’s ‘busy’ making cups of tea, and the next he is taking care of business. To have attacked post-earthquake Bob would be slanderous and devoid of any irony. That is to say, to criticise an unenviable man in the midst of a disaster who works all-hours to secure his community’s future would be unwarranted and ill-spirited. Parker was regularly celebrated across New Zealand news media for being an iconic leader following the earthquakes, and was knighted for his efforts in 2014. To have implied a mismatch between Parker’s efforts and his subsequent praise would be to distance Ego from his audience, who are well aware of the lived events and the media’s focused attention on Parker’s supportive diligence. The ludic functions of irony are at play here: Ego is

at first playful and teasing, and then at risk of trivialising Parker's actions (before Ego skilfully strips it back).

Following Parker's exchange with Ego, Jesse Mulligan chips in with a question:

Jesse Mulligan: Parallel Parker, I have a question. Two parts: do you have any nieces or nephews?

Parker: I do.

Mulligan: And is it true to say that Bob's your uncle?

Parker: I haven't got the faintest idea.

This exchange is purely in jest and largely devoid of any obvious satire. The aspect that is interesting here is Mulligan's deployment of the phrase "Bob's your uncle". The phrase is said to have come out of Britain and to be widely used across the Commonwealth (Turner-Lord, 1992). The phrase is decidedly British and re-connects, or rather it maintains, New Zealand's connection with the Mother Country.

Later in the piece Urzila Carlson makes reference to the popularity of Parker's Parka (rain jacket). In the wake of the earthquake Parker would appear on television for various press conferences or city tours adorned in his bright orange and black parka. The parka was culturally symbolic in that it is one of only two belonging to someone outside of Antarctic New Zealand, and it is made by a Christchurch company - Earth Sea Sky ("Parker's earthquake parka pulls the public," 2011). The parka became an icon for both Parker and the earthquake recovery response, and a Facebook group was started in its honour. The Antarctic New Zealand link was made ever more symbolic given New Zealand's history with the continent: sending explorers to the South Pole, running scientific research projects at Scott Base, and the New Zealand navy protecting Antarctic waters. The jacket is a symbol of strength and innovation, rendering Parka ever more the stoic leader. Here Carlson asks:

Urzila Carlson: Is it true that Adidas will now be selling those bright orange jackets called the Parker Parka for \$500 in Christchurch and \$100 elsewhere?

Parker: I haven't heard those reports, so...

Carlson here acknowledges the cultural significance of Parker's Parka both in historic and post-earthquake contexts, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the power of marketing and mass

consumption – represented by sports gear manufacturer Adidas. The target of Carlson’s attack is not Parker, or his parka, but rather the willingness of businesses to capitalise on tragedy to make a ‘quick buck’. The parka is a symbol, or stand-in, for New Zealand-ness here, and to taint it with mass consumption would be disingenuous.

The segment ends in an atypical way. Usually the politician in question gives in to the rhetoric, accidentally answering ‘Yes’ to one of the questions. Parker however swings the ‘give-in’ to his advantage:

Henwood calls Parker “Bob the re-Builder”, drawing on the news media’s common deployment of the term ‘rebuilding Christchurch’ and the popular children’s show *Bob the Builder*. He then builds a rapport with Parker when he suggests that the man who broke into Christchurch’s famous Hotel Grand Chancellor to drink away the abandoned alcohol reserves was worthy of respect. Parker replies with “There are just some things you have to admire aren’t there?” Carlson interjects, picking up Henwood’s earlier characterisation of Parker to state *Bob the Builder* catch phrase “Can we fix it?” to which Parker ceremoniously responds “YES WE CAN!” His losing of the game by saying the forbidden word, yes, is met with great applause from both the audience and the panellists. Where it is usually the intent of satire to undermine and critique authority, here it does something different. It reaffirms Parker’s authority but only on the condition that he has done something good for the public, the community, the satiree.

*7 Days* producer Jon Bridges has said that they often get an elated response from politicians when asking them to appear on the show and many musicians phone them up to get on the ‘Slice of 7’ game (2014). Jon Gadsby said that during *McPhail and Gadsby*’s height MPs took it as a mark of respect to be ridiculed on the show, with some even having their press secretaries phone in their blunders so as to encourage their mockery (Elliott, 1997, p. 54). This power to sanction authority, or at least validate it in some way, is not unique to the New Zealand context.

In 2012 US President Barack Obama sat down with Jon Stewart in the lead up to the presidential election. Obama was not a stranger to *The Daily Show*, having appeared on the show five times previously, this being his second as President. The President was mocked by Stewart for his sub-par performance in the first leader’s debate before Stewart moved on to more serious issues like the US mission in Libya, dissension in Congress, wire-tapping, and the President’s campaign policy directives. Whilst Stewart still offered up jokes, at the expense of both himself and Vice President Joe Biden, his interrogation of Obama was grounded in

discussion of serious politics. White House Press Secretary Jay Carney recently revealed that Obama's appearance on the show was the most challenging interview of the 2012 campaign and that the President's staff had serious doubts about him appearing on the show (Larson, 2014). In a recent talk at George Washington University Carney said that after lengthy consideration over whether it was appropriate for the sitting president to give interviews with "Jon Stewart and others" the answer was ultimately yes because, "... the young voters we were trying to reach are more likely to watch *The Daily Show* than some other news shows" (Schwartz, 2014). Carney then went on to confess that Obama's interview with Jon Stewart was "probably the most substantive, challenging interview Barack Obama had in the election year" (Schwartz, 2014). *The Daily Show's* resonance with youth voters has not gone unnoticed (see Holbert, Tchernev, Walther, Esralew, & Benski, 2013) and nor has the show's ability to engage with real world politics (see Spicer, 2011), but what is interesting here, is the potential risk of *not* going on the show, and just what type politicking that would validate.

In 2013 the *7 Days* team put out a "press release" indicating that they had just had a cease and desist order served to Prime Minister John Key "after months of harassment" by Key in his efforts to get on the show (Bridges, 2013). In actuality the show's producers had made multiple requests (around 12) to his Press Secretary to get him on the show for 'Yes Minister' but had always been refused (Bridges, 2014). Bridges says that the impetus behind the press release was the frustration of not being able to get him on the show because he is "too chicken" and has "got everything to lose and really nothing to gain" (2014). The 'Yes Minister' segment had previously featured Labour leader Phil Goff, Green Party co-leader Russel Norman, Mana Party leader Hone Harawira, ACT leader John Banks, NZ First leader Peter Dunne, Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples, various opposition MPs, and major city mayors Len Brown (Auckland), Tim Shadbolt (Invercargill), and Bob Parker (Christchurch). Bridges suggests that politicians generally enjoy their time on the show because, "they can act like a human being and they come across well" (2014). Key's obvious absence from the show's segment had become a regular joke on *7 Days* and after four years of trying to get him on the producers thought they would take a different tact. The statement notes Key's harassment and mentions that "approximately 30 politicians have appeared in the "Yes Minister" segment of the show. John Key has not been among them". When appearing on the show there is no PR safety net for the politicians, they do not get to exercise editorial rights so they are "at our mercy" says Bridges.

Key's general aversion for serious news outlets has been noted by media pundits like Frank Macasky who argues that Key avoids Radio New Zealand National in light of their unforgiving interviewing and reporting ("Radio NZ: None To Noon - Election year interviews - John Key", 2014). Media stalwart John Campbell has also called out Key on this pattern of avoiding serious media, noticeably during Campbell's crusade against the GCSB Amendment Bill in 2013 where he pestered the Prime Minister for days to come on *Campbell Live* to discuss the dodgy-dealings of the GCSB and the new powers afforded under the Bill. Key's awkwardness and unpredictability in unscripted interviews has landed him in trouble in the past, notably when he told radio announcer Jamie Mackay, "You're going to be nervous when you're lining up on those par threes aren't you. You're munted mate, you're never gonna make it, you've got that gay red top on there"(ONE News, 2012). Key later defended his slanderous deployment of the term 'gay' as common slang. This on air gaffe made its way into reputable international media; with *The Huffington Post*'s John Forde calling the PM's comments "insensitive", "thoughtless", and a "public relations embarrassment that won't go away" (Forde, 2012); and *Lord of the Rings* star Sir Ian McKellen responding to the comments with a post on his personal website:

Nevertheless, Mr Key should watch his language. I'm currently touring secondary schools in UK, attacking homophobia in the playground and discouraging kids from the careless use of "gay" which might make their gay friends (and teachers) feel less about themselves. So even as he supports the proposal to introduce same-gender marriages in New Zealand, I do hope John Key listens to his critics and appreciates their concern. Careless talk damages lives (McKellen, 2012).

Unscripted Key is vulnerable to making on-air gaffes. His power as a leader is not in his public speaking abilities but rather in his strong grasp on economic policy and international relations. For Key to risk his reputation by succumbing to *7 Days*' comedic probes is 'not worth it'. *7 Days* producer Jon Bridges thinks Key avoids their show because he has "too much to lose" and there is "no safety net" (2014). Should Key go on the show he legitimises the show's role in political dialogue, but by staying off it he eliminates risk. Key's opponents, particularly Labour Party MPs, are regular guests on 'Yes Minister' but as members of the opposition they have little to lose in the grand scheme of things; rather by putting themselves in the public eye they are potentially speaking to a wider audience than they would already have, but Key already has the eyes of a nation (and the world) looking to him.

## MIMESIS AND THE REAL

Viewers are clearly not meant to equate *7 Days* with a real news broadcast or legitimate current affairs programme. The structure and form of the show remains clearly in the realm of mimesis, invoking suspicion and appeal simultaneously. Writing on *The Daily Show* Amber Day simply pegs the mimetic act as an “inferior imitation of the real” (2009, p. 87), but to reduce mimesis to only its negative connotations is to neglect its ability to acquire new meaning in the exercise of imitation. Derrida sees the mimetic act as cyclical; where the process was once seen as a linear process (original then the copy), the copy can now generate its own value and meaning; distorting, reconfiguring or eroding the value of the original (Reijnders et al., 2012, p. 212). Mimesis is thus not concerned with replicating another (that notion better lends itself to conceptions of genre) but with consciously and conscientiously generating an alternate. In doing this the original, and the way that it is considered, changes or is reviewed alongside – in this way mimesis is cyclic. This is most evident in instances of parody, thus, mimesis is the primary function of parody, and the relationship between the real and the copy is what matters to satire.

The pleasure in viewing is derived from knowing about and being familiar with the borrowed form and the hailed contextual elements – in seeing the mimesis. *7 Days* is unlike its British and US fake news counterparts in that it does not actively try to be a news outlet, and it openly tags itself satire. Within this parodic world the show actively calls upon the real political world to inform its diegesis, forming a complicated relationship with ‘real news’ and entertainment. *7 Days* hails various ‘originals’ through its games that borrow the tropes of news. The reworking of these tropes points out the flaws in the routinized practices of news, particularly broadcast news. As the host Jeremy Corbett mimics the role of a news anchor and grounds the show with his sometimes serious monologues, objectionable content warnings, or corrections of the panellists. Corbett is always in a suit, whereas the team members are casually dressed, rarely in a shirt or tie; denoting Corbett’s authority over them, his position as game controller, and as more powerful than them. Corbett maintains his composure, often meeting in-show critiques of he and his fatherly demeanour with silence or a stifled laugh. It is thus all the more pleasurable for the viewer when Corbett lashes out at the team members, audience, or in-studio guests. He is seen to destabilise that authentic role he has created for himself and the audience’s awareness of mimesis (and thus the parodied form) is expressed through laughter.

Corbett's positioning as adjudicator firmly locates *7 Days* in the realm of political debate by requiring a mechanism of mediation. Corbett frames the relationship between viewer and news as something worthy, if not necessary, of critique. He is the straight man of the show, directly addressing the camera as a news anchor would, whilst his playful panellists banter with one another, ignoring the camera. Just as a news journalist exercises power in their selection of newsworthy stories and an editor exercises power over content, Corbett controls the flow of the show, Producer Jon Bridges calling Corbett "the spine that the whole show hands off" (2014). Corbett affords points to the deserving teams, deciding which critique is 'right' or 'best'. Thereby legitimising the behaviours of the comedians and more importantly, of their chosen target.

The parodic world of the show is actively engaging with the real political world in several ways. Firstly, *7 Days* relies on real news stories and current affairs as the basis for its criticism as opposed to making up news. Previous televisual satire in New Zealand has tended to favour the artificial construction of news and politics (*McPhail and Gadsby*; *A Week of It*; *Country Calendar*'s Fred Dagg skits; *Public Eye*), with the exception of things like *The Unauthorised History of New Zealand* which reorganised historic cultural moments in the satiric mode. Secondly, the show invites active politicians from local and central government to guest on its 'Yes Minister' spots. Lastly, through vox-pops based segments like 'Drunk News' and 'My Professional Opinion' the show is engaging the opinions of the citizenry.

In the game 'What's the Story' the teams are shown a video of a news story without any audio, the team members then deliberate on what the story is at the same time as delivering a comedic commentary on the displayed event. This segment is typical of the wider fake news tradition; shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* employ similar techniques, narrating the news stories as they unfold on screen. This approach exposes the scriptedness and overreliance on the visual to relay a story. The panellists, more often than not, are able to deduce what story is being covered. The conventional approach to broadcast news editing has become so familiar and overproduced that oftentimes the anchor's dialogue is not vital to the relaying of the key components and the reading of the news becomes as much about intuition as it does about reading.

*7 Days* includes spots for celebrities and political figures to speak about the news. These figures are always aware of the type of show that they are participating in and some actively seek to be there. Through the games 'Slice of 7' musicians, and sometimes other celebrities, are given

a few minutes to deliver a rendition of a song (usually their own, if not then another iconic New Zealand song) that satirises a top news story from the week. The panellists then have to guess the story and provide some comedic commentary.

In September 2011 Jon Toogood, of *Shihad* and *The Adults* fame, performed a rendition of a *Shihad* song that mocked the arrest of TV3 comedians after the lead, Ben Boyce, attempted to evade airport security at Auckland Airport by dressing as a pilot (“7 Days: S03E22,” 2011). Some of Toogood’s lyrics included such subtleties like “If I was in the States, they’d send me, to Cuba, Guantanamo Bay. It’s just a joke”, making reference to the tame airport security of New Zealand airports in comparison to the US in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks. Corbett then ends the segment with another of his monologues stating, “All six staff of the TV3 show *WANNA-BEn* were arrested this week after one of them posed as a pilot, tried to get through Auckland Airport security. Other rejected stunts from that show include: sneaking into a police station dressed as a policeman, and sneaking into an ACT Party Conference dressed as a Māori”. In this brief monologue Corbett manages to trivialise the *WANNA-BEn* crew’s actions as far gentler than previous gags. Following this, panellist Celia Pacquola highlights the irony of the *WANNA-BEn* crew being arrested in light of airport security actually doing their job well, “...really, really made about it, and it’s like, well, they didn’t get in! Like, he tried and failed. The system works. You know. Security going ‘you – made us – look good – at our job. You proved that we’re doing the right thing...you jerks’”. Henwood then follows up by linking Prime Minister John Key to the event, “Got a good response though, how often do you get the Prime Minister calling you a bloody clown? It’s so New Zealand.” Henwood then puts on a rather camp accent, puts his hands on his hips, and shaking his head towards the opposing team, “‘Look, this is unacceptable’ – he’s like Super Nanny. ‘It’s unacceptable, you’re bloody clowns’”. Here *WANNA-BEn*’s indiscretion has been taken extremely seriously by airport security – contrastingly, the same crew impersonated a member of the police force and were not reprimanded. This unusual strong arm of justice is backed up by the Prime Minister who trivialised the event further by calling the team “clowns”. Henwood’s roping in of the Prime Minister’s comments also highlights the smallness of the country, that such an event would become worthy of the Prime Minister’s attention. Not only that, but he was already aware of it. Here the lines between news, satire, and political debate are blurred through the ignition of criticism of the national character and the nature (smallness) of New Zealand politics.

During ‘Drunk News’ a *7 Days* film crew go out to entertainment areas of local towns (usually Auckland) to interact with intoxicated townspeople. The crew give the microphone to

individuals, or sometimes to groups of people, to express their views on a recent news story. In one episode the crew speak mainly to partying students but also manage to connect with musician Aaron Tokona of Fly My Pretties and AHoriBuzz fame (“7 Days: S06E09,” 2014).

Whilst some of the above games can be seen to trivialise politics and the political, at other times these segments service political dialogue rather explicitly. In the lead up to the 2011 General Election *7 Days* were relatively quiet on the major political event given their channel-mate *3 News* was busy winning their target demographics with Decision ’11 special. *3 News* beat out *One News* for the first time with their election special whilst *7 Days* was the highest rating programme across all networks in the election month (“TV3 pleased with growth in 25-54 ratings demo,” 2011). Their episode airing Friday 25 November, one day before the election, did however make some passing commentary on the campaign period. Anna Coddington appeared on the show for the ‘Slice of 7’ segment (“7 Days:S03E31,” 2011). Her satirical song was an ode to National Party candidate and former gardening show host Maggie Barry. A disgruntled member of the public had that week spit at Barry whilst she was out campaigning in her electorate. The panellists of the week made light of Barry’s attempt to gain an electorate seat, criticising her gardening show credentials, and supporting the man’s right to spit on her, Henwood saying “Well this is the bone of contention, people say it was abusive, I say that she was a fiery ginger, he thought she was literally on fire and like any good volunteer fireman would, tried to put her out. Is that correct?” But they also criticised ‘the worm’ - a feature of televised leaders’ debates in the lead up to the election. The studio audience watching the debate were given remotes to indicate their feeling towards the leaders as they spoke. Their opinions were conveyed by a graphic ‘the worm’ onscreen for viewers. The validity of the worm was widely debated by media pundits and political commentators, and here ridiculed by Vaughan Smith and Tom Gleeson:

Vaughan Smith: I think it would be a far more effective way, like, spitting on people to run those election debates too. Like ‘the worm’ is one thing, but imagine having a row of people ready to spit on you if they disagreed with your policy. I think we could all get along pretty happily.

Tom Gleeson: And there would be a bit of anticipation too when it went a certain way and all you could hear was this [hoicking sound].

The segment closed with Corbett saying “It’s the biggest scandal involving bodily fluids in a ginger politician since Darren Hughes left Parliament” - Corbett’s attempt to revive political

balance by offering a critique of former Labour MP Darren Hughes (the oppositional party to Barry's National).

The discussion of the worm, a real world marker of political preferences and favourability, firmly places this segment in political debate. The panellists each challenge the validity of the 'worm' as a barometer of public opinion – and the news media's preoccupation with its value and significance. Through suggesting an alternative 'spit scale', Smith is again reducing the 'worm' to little more than schoolyard politics and through this inversion calls for something more. Amber Day sees this interpenetration of the real (original) and the mimetic (copy) as facilitating an effect on broader discourse (2009, p. 91). This criticism of the worm is now intrinsically linked to the audience's real world conception of it. The original and the mimetic are cyclically linked, and the power of the worm in influencing public opinion is perceptibly reduced.

The relationship between the mimetic and the real in the parodic realm does not always have real or meaningful consequences for the audience outside of pure entertainment. Oftentimes the mimetic act, delivered through parody, is merely commentary on the political world. For example where actors impersonate fellow celebrities on sketch shows or sitcoms, these parodies are clearly restricted to the bubble of that show and located in the realm of pure entertainment (think – Kristen Wiig impersonating Harry Styles of boy band One Direction on *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon, or the famous actors performing as everyday workers on *Jono And Ben At Ten*'s 'Next Actor' segment). However, instances of parody like fake news and televisual satire can load up the mimetic act to exist inside of the real and/or political realm. *7 Days* repeatedly engages with the real through dissecting actual news footage and engaging in interviews with real politicians and members of the public. This is decidedly more politically engaged than were the show to create and script its own versions of current affairs and politics. This engagement is a literal intersection of entertainment (television) and politics (news and satire). Audiences tune in to be entertained and are simultaneously drawn in to thinking about the news and the political role that it serves, or fails to uphold.

## **CARICATURE**

The team members also offer up commentary on current events and the general state of the news media and its politicking through performative caricature and comedic mockery. Team 2 leader Dai Henwood and series regular Madeleine Sami are especially adept at physical comedy (body comedy) and caricature. Henwood uses his small stature to propel or sanction

his often bawdy comedy; whilst Sami, who has honed her comedic skills playing several different characters on her sketch comedy *Super City*, uses accents and hand gestures to take on personalities like former Prime Minister Helen Clark (“7 Days: S03E01,” 2011) and Race Relations Commissioner Dame Susan Devoy (“7 Days: S05E11,” 2013). Paul Ego often takes on different voices to express critique, in doing so he resists the audience misreading his statements as his own opinion; for example when he puts on a ‘gay lisp’ to discuss marriage equality or a deep ‘blokey’ voice to express the conservative views of rural New Zealanders. Team 2 regular Ben Hurley also employs physical comedy from time to time, most notably during a ‘Yes Minister’ segment with Mana Party leader Hone Harawira.

‘Yes Minister’ game calls for a guest politician, be they from local or central government, to sit in the middle of the set facing the audience, whilst the two teams bombard them with closed-ended questions. The guest is not allowed to answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ and must instead concoct unusual off-the-cuff responses. The points go to the team who can first make the guest answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, or gesticulate such. The segment hails the “Yes-No Interlude” in ITV’s radio turned game show *Take Your Pick*, and its name referencing the famous 1980s British sitcom *Yes Minister*. *Yes Minister* was a satire on British politics and government. It was titled after the supposed top-down, one-way relationship between Ministers and public servants, which also mimics the master/butler relationship of upper-class British society. *7 Days* has transposed its meaning by loading the game up with the common supposition that a politician can never give a straight answer, requiring all politicians to have a ‘way with words’ and to direct responses like ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Harawira is from a well-known Maori family, led by matriarch and prominent Maori activist Titewhai Harawira, and is best known for his (often) radical stances on Maori politics and institutionalised racism. When Harawira appeared on the show he sat down on the swivel chair and Corbett reached over for a handshake, he received a double-handed one. Acknowledging Sami as the only woman on the panel that evening, Harawira stood up to greet her with a handshake and hongi. Pretending to be offended, Hurley stood up, crossed the room, and requested a hongi from Harawira. Harawira initially resisted but gave in after giggles from the audience. Harawira was attempting to be courteous and adhere to aspects of Māori protocol, whilst Hurley was highlighting the tendency of high-profile Pākehā to be culturally inept or misread or mis-perform Māori protocol through cultural ignorance or unfamiliarity.

## IMPROV VS. SCRIPT

From its very beginnings the television industry has gone about setting itself apart from cinema. A film is a fervently produced, highly scripted, long-form piece of work created over months if not years, whilst television is high in volume and ‘in the now’. Television, unlike film, can be improvisational, immediate, and live. This immediacy and ‘liveness’ is presaged in the names of its programmes (*Saturday Night Live*, *Campbell Live*, etc.) and genre conventions (talking heads, studio discussions, re-enactments, outside broadcast clips, interviews, live-cross, on-location etc.) The news, tellingly bearing ‘new’ in its moniker, is obsessed with ‘nowness’ and being in the moment. Day suggests that when viewers watch the news there is an understanding that they are getting up to date and factual information as it unfolds; the witnessing of this unloading happens together with a disparate community of viewers who “though this community may be dispersed in space, they are united in time” (2009, p. 93). *7 Days* plays off these same markers to make its parodied genre known and to invite viewers to its comedy not only for laughs but also for topicality and relevance.

Modern improvisational comedy has its roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Italian comedy theatre form *commedia dell’arte*. It has since seen two noteworthy revivals in modern American theatre: the first was during the 1950s when actor/producer David Shepherd founded the theatre troupe The Compass Players. Now known as the Second City Company, Shepherd’s group bounced off the audience and used improvisational dialogues to elongate their performances at the request of their hosting bar who wished to sell more drinks (Coleman, 1991). The 1970s saw this improvisational style naturalised by the likes of comedy sketch show *Saturday Night Live* (*SNL*). *SNL* became known for its satirical punches at political figures and its undercutting of ‘the news’ with its iconic parody news segment *Weekend Update*. As the longest running sketch comedy series on television, *SNL* has influenced the modern television landscape and equipped audiences for satire. Its British predecessor *That Was the Week That Was* (*TW3*) entertained audiences from 1963-1963 and inspired several international versions: one of which was New Zealand’s very own *A Week of It* (1977-1979). The appeal of improvisational comedy is twofold, as Day describes; “the audience takes pleasure in seeing something created on the spot, as the performer comes up with just the right provocations and response to further the scene... drawing on the aura of immediacy and community” (2009, p. 94).

Whilst *7 Days* does have a team of comedy writers working on jokes during the course of the week, when it comes to filming the show the only comedian given a script is host Jeremy

Corbett. Corbett and his fellow comedians are also seen to adlib throughout the show in response to audience reactions and those of his guests. The taping of a show takes around three hours, usually on a Thursday night, and is edited down into a 23-minute show ready to go to air on Friday night. The show's Producer Jon Bridges has said that the show was for the most part improvisational; "let me just say quite clearly that the show is not scripted - apart from Jeremy Corbett's jokes at the end of each story. The best comedy comes from improvisation, and I think it's clear to anyone who comes along to the records that that's what's happening" (qtd in Philpott, 2011). Bridges also said that the panellists are, for the most part, comedians not actors – so to script them would make the satire "too obvious" (2014) and the pleasures gained from viewing would be diminished. Corbett's monologues are scripted so as contribute some factual background to the segments. Corbett also gives a sense of rhythm to the show, and his scripted monologues serve to engage the viewer in more serious criticism than is usually offered by the panellists.

The topics and news stories to be covered are brainstormed by the crew early in the week, and by Wednesday their news stories have been chosen. The writing team then formulate a script for Jeremy which he gets on a Thursday morning, then the team film on Thursday night. The quick turnaround and pre-recording does not allow for the show to cover any late breaking news of the week. Bridges says the crew do not have a way around this, they just have to "cross fingers" (2014).

In operating at the parodic level and employing improvisation techniques *7 Days* creates an acceptable distance between the original forms they mock and thereby brings their audience closer to them.

## **KIWI HUMOUR - THE 'KIWI' ARCHETYPE – PUBLIC FEELING**

The collective affective legacy of New Zealand's colonisation by the British and the forging of a distinct South Pacific identity are used by New Zealand satirists, especially on *7 Days*, to operate emotionality in the audience. Rather than picking at particular emotions (i.e. a horror film with fear and surprise) they instead call up the cultural associations plaguing this post-colonial settler identity. The subjects of attack are formulated through relationships and enunciations that are aligned with "affective states" and "cultural realms" (Smaill, 2010, p. 171). They are demarcated through their cultural associations (linguistic, topical) with narratives of familiarity thereby grounding the ironic juxtapositions of the satirical act. The nature of New Zealand television is that it thoroughly borrows from the British and American

television systems, from production techniques to programming. The New Zealand television landscape is overwhelmingly built up of foreign content and investment, as such the 'New Zealand-ness' of it can become lost. The 'Kiwi' archetype is circulated and reinforced by the media as a particular friendliness alongside a 'can do' attitude. A recent Colmar Brunton survey found that the attributes Kiwis most identified with were "a can-do attitude, proud, easygoing and outdoorsy" and those they distanced themselves from were "artistic, sophisticated, risk-takers, and worldly" (Akoorie, 2014).

The construction of a national 'Kiwi' identity is by no means concrete. Identities emerge through discourse and the repetition of signs and patterns and ways of thinking about 'New Zealandness'. Since the 1980s New Zealand has adopted a bicultural approach to nationalism, incorporating both Māori and Pākehā perspectives in its reimaginings (including amendments to the law, as with the Broadcasting Act) whilst simultaneously 'washing over' a strenuous and bloodied past with colonialism. Ann Cvetkovich argues that "political identities are implicit within structures of feeling, sensibilities, everyday forms of cultural expression and affiliation that may not take the form of recognizable organizations or institutions" (2007, p. 461). Identities move ideology, repeating narratives about 'us' that allow society to "maintain and reproduce itself" (Liu, McCreanor, McIntosh, & Teaiwa, 2005, p. 15). In calling up the national identity a critique or reinforcement of ideas is performed. In the case of *7 Days* targeting their audience's commitment to a national identity is to plug itself as relatable and familiar, and ultimately contributing to the earnings of a ratings war.

## **7 DAYS & NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The economic constraints placed on television production in New Zealand make it a fragile environment, and genres like comedy and drama are extremely susceptible to market failure. New Zealand's audience size would be considered a niche market somewhere like the United States or the United Kingdom. To counteract this handicap producers have tended to frame television content in national terms. These nationalistic frames are constantly being renegotiated and are evolving with every new depiction on our screens. Bell examines the implications of hailing viewers in terms of a 'New Zealand national identity', and criticises the

“conjuring up” of a national community for it so often takes the Pākehā position and masks Pākehā control (2001, p. 27).

As Bell contends, the images ‘we’ see and the stories ‘we’ are told on television are repeatedly telling viewers who ‘we’ are, “what we see on television has a bearing on the way we see the world and the way we act in it” (2001, p. 29). By including national identifiers in their comedy and critiques *7 Days* calls up members of the New Zealand community through ‘positive’ representations of the mythologised archetypal New Zealand (national) identity. Through adhering to these proven representations producers can garner the largest possible audience. This avenue would undermine the very logic underpinning satire, to critique and afflict the powerful. Nevertheless *7 Days* often uses naturalised markers of New Zealand identity to fuel their comedy.

As host, Corbett is not exempt from critique himself, with panellists often ‘paying him out’ on the show. In permitting himself to fall prey to their jibes, Corbett is re-signifying himself as both powerful and powerless. He shifts from the position of a ‘chief’ to victim and in doing so endears himself to the audience. Akin to a politician playing the ‘everyday Kiwi’ line, Corbett repositions himself as ‘one of us’ and allows the audience to see, once again, that those in positions of power are ripe for satire. Corbett functions as a marker of the identity that the audience is meant to engage with. Kiwis should be humble, unsuspecting, self-deprecating, and mildly aware of current affairs.

As Bell explains:

“The daily reminders of national identity on television are inherent in all televisual genres. National identity is a component in television channel call signs, news programming, in local documentaries, in drama, in comedy and in advertising. In all of these we can see the selection, for instance, of icons that are familiar in popular consciousness. They are used to convey a sense of togetherness, as viewers share recognition that does not apply anywhere else, and can only apply here... standard themes are constantly reworked” (2001, p. 24).

There is an overwhelming sense of pride in a New Zealand identity conveyed by the comedians on this show. When former Christchurch mayor Bob Parker guested on the show following the Canterbury Earthquakes, Paul Ego joked that he had nothing to do prior to the disaster occurring. When Parker retorted with “I was just waiting for the time” Ego slipped into a

serious mode saying “You certainly rose to it. You did a fantastic job, we’re very proud of you” (“7 Days: S03E29,” 2011).

New Zealand’s national character is repeatedly imagined as “tough, resourceful” and devoid of femininity (Brady, 2012, pp. 356–357). Carlson is seen to perhaps bridge this gap as her self-rhapsodised ‘dyke’ persona comes off as her being ‘one of the boys’ rather than the ‘unfamiliar’ New Zealand female. Her status as an ex-pat South African also removes her somewhat from the conventional New Zealand identity. However, as Lee Wallace argues, the notion that transgenderism and homosexuality could be a part of the national identity is a not too far removed reality, despite historic depictions of New Zealand appearing exclusively heterosexual and male (2004). Wallace also states that what qualifies as ‘New Zealandness’ is an affiliation that “all New Zealanders know about without being taught” and that this “half – truth” is “hardwired into the national consciousness” (Wallace, 2004, pp. 67–68). Brady notes that the ‘abnormalities’ and ‘inconsistencies’ with ‘New Zealandness’ described by Wallace, like homosexuality, can be reintegrated or “rehabilitated” into the “socio-cultural fabric” of a mediated New Zealand; helping to make up, rather than contrary to, the national character (Brady, 2012, p. 364). Carlson also represents the migrant population of New Zealand, of which now make up a large proportion of the New Zealand population.

## **TALL POPPY SYNDROME & HUBRIS**

Tall poppy syndrome is an oft-cited cultural temperament befalling citizens of New Zealand and their neighbours Australia. A ‘tall poppy’ is someone who is perceived to be successful in their career, earns a great deal of money, or has achieved something notable. A tall poppy’s success will often attract hostility or condemnation from others - this disposition is dubbed tall poppy syndrome. Tall poppy syndrome, as a term, encompasses “the politics of envy, jealousy, and covetousness” (Mouly & Sankaran, 2000, p. 285) in relation to a fellow countryman’s perceived success. Very little has been written on tall poppy syndrome outside the realm of popular culture, but the scholarly writing that does exist seems to unsurprisingly contend that tall poppy syndrome is a reflection of one’s own sense of self-esteem (see especially, Mouly & Sankaran, 2000).

The manifestation of tall poppy syndrome in New Zealand could perhaps be attributed to the postcolonial anxieties of this nation. The settlement of New Zealand as a British colony required a strong sense of camaraderie amongst the early settlers. Should anyone have diverged or shown too much ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, the social order would have been disrupted and the

peace of a community threatened. Unlike Britain's well-established class structure, these early settlements had a sense of democracy and equality about them that was mercy to the slightest of hierarchical change. This conceptualisation has further manifested in New Zealanders' characterisation of their leaders. A great deal of academic attention has been paid to the personal characteristics and biographies of New Zealand's leaders, particularly the Prime Minister (Johansson, 2002, 2009). Frequently, the colour of a Prime Minister's upbringing is highlighted by the mass media to see how it has impacted on their style of leadership.

This inclination to cut down the tall poppies of politics has resulted in recent leaders branding themselves as 'ordinary Kiwis'. Whilst this may get them voters the cultural trappings of such an approach have not always culminated in cultural benefits.

- **Muldoon** - Former Prime Minister Robert Muldoon's leadership was propelled by an idealised image of himself as the 'ordinary Kiwi bloke' (McLauchlan, 2004, p. 175). Upon taking reign as Prime Minister he proclaimed that his goal in office was to leave New Zealand "no worse off than I found it" (McLauchlan, 2004, p. 175). This effort to be 'unremarkable' was to the detriment of the nation, with his reign bringing the New Zealand economy to near collapse.
- **Helen Clark** - Former Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark came to be known for her safeguarding of the arts, her tireless commitment and grasp of her portfolios, all whilst being persistently subjected to a stream of innuendo about lesbianism and her deep 'manly' voice. Clark has a famously deep, monotone type voice; once describing it as owing to her allergies, "and to have something constantly dripping on your vocal cords makes the voice low" (Welch, 2009).
- **John Key** – Despite having earlier had a career as a successful banker and financier in New York, Prime Minister John Key has managed to create a public persona of 'the boy from a state house who became Prime Minister', someone you'd like to have a beer with (Edwards, 2014).

Miller so describes this phenomenon as "the impetus to transform leaders from extraordinary people into ordinary citizens" – a belief that positions a leader in the value pool of potential voters, enhancing a sense of 'one of us', and ultimately fostering a stronger sense of nationhood (2008, p. 255).

*7 Days* regularly lambasts New Zealand's political leaders, especially Prime Minister John Key.

#### PRIME MINISTER JOHN KEY MINCING

In February 2011 New Zealand was preparing to host the Rugby World Cup and Prime Minister John Key was once again trying to portray himself as accessible and 'down for a bit of a laugh' when he 'minced' down the runway at the unveiling of the Rugby World Cup volunteer uniforms. Key took a lot of flak in the mainstream, headlining the nightly news on TV1 and TV3, then subsequently expressing some regret over his camp performance (NZPA, 2011). *7 Days* too went on the attack during their 'What's The Story' segment ("7 Days: S03E01," 2011). Footage of Key walking the runway was shown without audio whilst comedians Jeremy Elwood, Madeleine Sami, Paul Ego and offer an alternative commentary:

Sami as onscreen model: Umm don't do it. Don't do it, I'm telling you Dad...

Ego as Key: No, No, I'm gonna do it.

Sami/Model: [Mock Laughter]. Don't.

Elwood as spectator: Matching outfits. Very embarrassing.

Ego/Key: Watch this. It's gonna be hilarious. Ooh, I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay. Juj [fashion slang]. Turn. And I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay.

Ego: yeah well this is our wonderful PM isn't it? Ah, Mr Key there.

Sami: Just mincing down the catwalk.

Ego: Mincing. Doing mincing. In the new Rugby World Cup uniforms. Is it the volunteers' uniforms...? I think? I think so.

Sami/Elwood: yeah

Corbett: Well done Paul. John Key described his decision to walk the catwalk during the unveiling of Rugby World Cup volunteer uniforms as "a bit stupid". Now Key responded to further criticism by saying "this kind of bitchiness is why I got out of modelling in the first place". Fair enough too.

Elwood: Phil Goff [Labour leader] must just be sitting at home watching every stupid thing Key's done and going "I'm still less popular than this guy?" What has he gotta do?

Ben Hurley: I just think it's inappropriate for a Prime Minister to act like this, I mean you'd never see [former Labour Prime Minister] Helen Clark being feminine like that, would you?

[Audience laughter]

Sami [impersonating Helen Clark]: You most certainly wouldn't.

Hurley: I heard that ever since he heard the Prime Minister was mincing, Gerry Brownlee [Cabinet Minister] has been running round outside his office with a pie crust and a hungry look on his face.

To gain the support of the New Zealand public for a drastic or 'big' policy change a political leader must frame it in such a way that it seems pragmatic, uncomplicated, and plainly necessary. Simplicity is key when making political change; the project should be marked out carefully in stages and made "life size" whilst being wary of "extravagant flourishes" (Bolland, 2004, pp. 94–95).

## **SELF-DEPRECATATION**

Self-deprecating humour is common to socialisation the world over, regularly occurring in both traditional and industrialised societies (Greengross & Miller, 2008, p. 394). Boldly labelling self-deprecating humour as a "universal human phenomena" Greengross and Miller digress that self-deprecating humour boasts "high costs and high failure rates" (2008, p. 394). Self-deprecating, self-protective and the defensive invocations of irony allow for the ironist to acknowledge and reinforce opinions of a dominant culture and allow the speaker to make critiques and engage in the humour making process without "alienating" the public majority" (Walker, 1988, p. 123). But when the ironist 'fakes it', they lose their audience and render themselves boastful. Self-deprecating humour has been most often considered in its frequent use by minority groups to shift or reinforce power relations between themselves and the dominant group (Gilbert, 2004; Pearson, 2005).

Greengross and Miller looked to self-deprecating and other-deprecating humour as factors in assessing the sexual attractiveness of a potential partner, finding that successful self-

deprecation was only achieved when an individual used it to highlight a discrepancy between themselves and that/those of a higher position in the social order – the desired or end-goal position. Greengross and Miller argue that self-deprecating humor is a way of “faking” personality traits to expose any discrepancies between the idealised “high status” traits and the common or ill perceived (2008, p. 404). In executing self-deprecating humour an individual in a lower status or position of power is redeemed whilst self-deprecation on the part of a high status individual can come across as “unjust ridicule or egocentric gloating” and thus less attractive, whilst those of a lower status can “gain status when they mock their superiors” (2008, p. 404)

This notion of status reposition and the overhaul of power structures become even more pertinent when considering the power relations of race and gender. Self-deprecating ‘women’s humour’ has been the subject of much critical attention for it seems to be those of social minorities that employ this type of irony (and ironic humour) most frequently<sup>6</sup>. Whilst women outnumber men population wise, women are deemed a minority group, afforded less social and political power than their male counterparts. Gilbert writes that hierarchy is essential to humour and that women have historically been at the bottom of the social hierarchy, “objectified through humor as in other forms of cultural representation” (2004, p. 156). Levine agrees, suggesting that a longing to laugh is one of humanity’s innermost desires but this wanting exists more often in those who have justified feelings of hopelessness (1977, p. 300).

Nevárez follows this line of reasoning, pointing out that dominant groups that hold ideological power direct their humour at those “socially beneath them” whilst those at the lower levels aim up or target themselves (2000, p. 167). This defensiveness by the minority group (sexual, ethnic, social) is about deflection. It pointing inward there is a deflection of pain, it “deflects the pain of the offensive joke away from itself” (Nevárez, 2000, p. 167). And when a minority group gives rise to self-reflexive humour the resulting effect is empowerment. Whilst Nevárez is explicitly talking about sexual, ethnic and social minorities the same mechanism can be employed at a cultural level – where a dominant culture has a pervasive influence on a minority culture. This phenomenon is marked in postcolonial nations, where the homeland or ‘Mother country’ is seen to be in the superior and the settled realm in the minority positions. Hutcheon describes Canada as exemplifying this trait for in light of a British past and a United States-dominated now, Canadians have “resorted to a **self-deprecating** use of irony as a way of

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<sup>6</sup> See Walker (1988) and Nevárez (2000)

signalling their reluctant modesty, their self-positioning (as marginalized and maybe self-marginalizing), their selfdoubts, and perhaps even their rejection of the need to presume or to assume superiority – especially against such overwhelming odds” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 47). New Zealand, also a Commonwealth country like Canada, is self-marginalized by its neglectful ‘Mother England’ and domineering neighbour Australia. Walker and Dresner surmise that the use of self-deprecating humor by a minority or out-group could be a “defensive reaction of those who feel themselves too weak or vulnerable to attack with impunity the forces that oppress them” (1988, p. xxiii). Narrowing their argument to address ‘women’s humour’ they contend that to laugh at one’s own limitations is a way to overcome them and diminish their importance whilst also being a sort of purging. To cleanse oneself of “pejorative connotations imposed by the dominant culture and, thereby, turning them into strengths” (Walker & Dresner, 1988, p. XXIII). Similarly, the use of incongruity in humour by minority groups is a means to targets the prescribed power relations, according behaviours and sensibilities afforded by a dominant culture or group.

Self-deprecating humour is a regular feature on *7 Days* and in New Zealand comedy more generally. This type of humour is most often deployed to combat any semblance of being a tall poppy. Holmes, Marra and Vine suggest that the deep-rooted value of egalitarianism in New Zealand is what gives rise to a proliferation or affinity for self-deprecating humour (2012). Specifically discussing humour in the workplace Holmes et al observed the acceptance of praise as acknowledgement that an individual has exceeded expectations, “...and this is problematic in a culture where egalitarianism is a paramount concept” (2012, p. 1069). This tendency to play down success is further cemented in Māori culture through the principle of **whakaiti**. Whakaiti is a concept that is cross-tribal in Māoridom. Simply, whakaiti is about humility and respect, and ultimately to be humble and “using deferring terms, in terms of your relationships” (Milroy, 2008, p. 189). The concept is relayed in a common Māori expression: “‘mā roto rā e kata’ which is ‘let the inside of you smile, but be humble in front of the general public until you go home where you can show your joy. Consider the feelings of the others and be humble’.” The bicultural nationalism of New Zealand the embedded duality of deep-rooted egalitarianism and whakaiti has fostered this disposition of self-deprecation.

These principles are best exemplified in the special episode “Australia vs. New Zealand” (“7 Days: S01E18,” 2010). Corbett’s opening monologue expresses New Zealand’s great economic potential in mining in comparison to Australia who have actually harnessed theirs, “Aussie versus Kiwi, green and gold versus the black and white, a land rich with minerals

versus a robust and efficient agricultural sector”. Ego, introduced by Corbett as the “Paul Ego of New Zealand comedy” gently waves a small silver fern flag, and putting on a harsh NZ accent says “Go Niew Ziland”. The first game ‘What’s the Story’ begins to play and visuals of Prime Minister John Key come onscreen, panellist Jeremy Elwood provides an alternative commentary to the clip, and when Key’s name and occupation appear at the bottom of the screen in a ONE News banner Elwood puts on a dopey voice and says “Oh, that’s who I am”, further cementing the notion that self-deprecation is preferable – even when you are the Prime Minister. At the end of the segment Elwood comments that the news story in question actually became the third biggest story on the *India Times* website, “which of course as New Zealanders we’re claiming as our first bronze” - in reference to both the recent Winter Olympics and the nation’s tendency to place high expectations on athletes whilst at the same time celebrating even the most minor of achievements as grand.

In Season 6, Episode 4 during the game ‘Answers’ the answer ‘WINZ office’ is given. WINZ is an acronym for Work and Income New Zealand, the Government department charged with handling benefits and regularly criticised in the mainstream media in relation to ‘dole bludgers’ receiving the unemployment benefit. These criticisms usually have a racial element, and address the high proportion of Māori and Pacific Islanders receiving benefits. Henwood opens up the game by saying “Where will you find the most jandals per square metre”. Jandals are a symbol of Kiwiana but are also seen in popular culture to be the preferred footwear of Maori and Pacific Islanders, owing largely to their casualness and beach appropriateness, two pastimes regularly afforded to these minority groups through stereotyping. Henwood then says “What is the one thing Devonport doesn’t have?” pointing out the affluent suburb’s wealth and ‘whiteness’. Ego retorts in a mocking posh accent “that’s right Dai, in Devonport everybody wins” a play on the WINZ acronym.

## **NEWS AND THE ROUTINE PRACTICE OF ‘BULLSHITTING’**

One of *7 Days*’ characteristic parodic episodes concerned the media’s intense focus on New Zealand’s 2013 local body elections. Whilst the coverage pays a significant contribution to the ongoing political dialogue between political actors and the public and such high levels of coverage can be validated, many of the news items covering the local elections focused on the unconventional (“Rogers, rebels and rascals”, Taranaki Daily News, 2013), the not-so-serious (“Hamilton: Serious issues, not-so-serious candidates”, Lowery, 2013), the ‘sexy’ (“Local

body candidate in sexting scandal”, Mead, 2013), or the unorthodox campaigns of rural candidates (“Meeting the unorthodox mayoral candidates”, Akel, 2013). The stories coming out of New Zealand’s major news outlets were focused largely on the trivial elements of the elections and less on the serious policy issues faced by the regions. Of the 29 local body election stories on *3 News*’ website leading up to the 12 October 2013 election day, only 4 looked at the campaign policies of the candidates, whilst 5 looked at the low voter turnouts across the country, and the rest were assorted stories on who the mayoral candidates were in various cities and who was leading the race (*3news.co.nz*, 22 April 2014).

#### PALINO VERSUS *7 DAYS*

*7 Days*’ approach to the coverage was to invite Auckland mayoral candidate John Palino for an appearance on *Yes Minister* and to question him in a way that highlighted the news media’s dependence on a sensational story (“7 Days: S05E22,” 2013). *7 Days*’ coverage made obvious the facetious way in which the news media depoliticise this superficial approach to politics as natural and common sense. Chopper trivialises Palino’s status by likening him to pop-culture icon Clint Eastwood in his film *Gran Torino* (2008): “Can I just say, I loved you in that film where the war veteran befriended a Asian kid, bonded over the love of your classic car. What was it called? Grand Palino?” In *Gran Torino* American Eastwood plays an elderly racist war veteran, certainly not a persona Palino would want associated with himself or his political campaign.

Here the *7 Days* crew focus on Palino’s heritage and name and place little to no focus on his potential-voters, running-mates, nor policies. The focus, as with the mainstream media’s coverage of his campaign, is usually the fact he is American and ‘not from here’. When Chopper attempts to highlight his foreignness at the beginning of the segment; “Ah now I believe you’re from Lodi?” Palino is quick to play on the Kiwi inclination to make fun of their neighbours Australia, “You’re from Australia aren’t you? That’s about the only thing that saves me here. Is the fact that there’s a lot of Australians here.” Palino swiftly points out that Chopper is Australian as sort of defensive disclaimer. Palino is reduced once again, by Chopper, saying “At least we race our own boats in Australia, when we’re not turning ‘em back and sending ‘em to Indonesia. That’s why they can’t have the America’s Cup in Australia. All the expensive yachts arrive and they’re like ‘no you’. Ah no, you’re from Lodi?”

Near the end of the segment Samoan panellist Josh Thomson undercuts Palino yet again with a reference to Pacific accents, “Mr Palino, Mr John-John Palino, do you understand what I’m

saying or do you need subtitles?” Whilst Palino responds with “Very clear”, the audience’s response is a strong burst of laughter. When Paul Ego asks “Team USA. Will you be cheating in the mayoral race also?” - alluding to the recent failure by Emirates Team NZ (who received a great deal of taxpayer funding) to beat out Oracle Team USA in the recent America’s Cup, Palino is quick to answer “absolutely not” thereby attempting to distance and differentiate himself from his ‘dishonest’ former homeland. This guest spot services the New Zealand national identity by stereotyping Palino as an arrogant, possibly racist, cliché American.

## **7 DAYS & SELF-REFLEXIVITY**

In the wake of media personality Charlotte Dawson’s suicide there was strong backlash from members of the media against the role that social media can play in bullying and depression. TVNZ’s *Breakfast* programme did a spot, which later went viral, wherein television staff read nasty tweets aloud to illustrate the scrutiny they come under as public figures (“TVNZ stars read out their own online abuse,” 2014) – an idea undoubtedly lifted from *Jimmy Kimmel Live*’s ‘Celebrities Read Mean Tweets’ segment. It later came out that two featured stars, news anchor Peter Williams and *Seven Sharp* reporter Dean Butler, had made up their mean tweets after thinking the segment was to be a “light hearted parody” (“TVNZ apologises over fake abuse messages,” 2014). That Friday 28<sup>th</sup> of February 2014 the *7 Days* team aired their own version of ‘mean tweets’:

Jeremy Corbett: Unlike other networks, all of our tweets are real.

[Cuts to pre-recorded clip with Lou Reed’s “Perfect Day” playing in the background]

Dai Henwood: @DaiHenwood, I met you, turns out you aren’t that short

Urzila Carlson: @UrzilaCarlson, the recipe you’re looking for is in the Edmond’s Cookbook [winces]

Ben Hurley: Ben Hurley, you look a bit like a friend of mine, his name is Pete [shakes head]

Jesse Griffin: @JesseGriffin you’re really cool #awesome [scoffs]

Tom Furniss: @TomFurnissNZ, hey bro I think you left your sweatshirt at my house.

(“7 Days: S06E2,” 2014, p. 2)

The sensationalism and emotive affect generated by the mainstream media, in this case *Breakfast*, is the target of the satire here. Corbett again plays up his everyday man persona when it becomes obvious he is not even on Twitter, whilst his crew proceed to demonstrate how well liked and normal they are. Fake sources and inaccurate news stories are nothing new to news media<sup>7</sup> but the *Breakfast* segment's 'accidental' mockery of Dawson's death undermined the credibility of the new outlet and broke all of the strategic rituals of journalism. In breaching this unwritten social contract between journalist and citizen, the core news values of accuracy and sincerity are significantly compromised.

### **WHEN SATIRE MISFIRES - GORDON VS. TVWORKS LTD.**

Since going to air in 2009 the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) – charged with overseeing the broadcasting standards regime in New Zealand – have received multiple complaints about *7 Days*' content with five of these investigated by the authority's board. Of these five the authority upheld only one. In 2010 the Broadcasting Standards Authority received a complaint from Ralph Gordon of Dunedin in regards to TV3's 10pm broadcast of *7 Days* on 25 September 2009. Gordon was particularly concerned about the segment's linking of a young primary school child to adult sex, albeit in the defence of humour. Before closely examining the specificities of this one complaint and the satire's 'misfire', it is first important to contextualise this episode within the frame of satire as a discursive practice.

Firstly, the show was in its first series and this was only the sixth episode. *7 Days* was still finding its feet, and the comedians were testing the boundaries of taste at 10pm. With its AO ratings and pre-show disclaimer - "the following show contains bad language and is for adults only... just a moment... the Prime Minister's overseas, oh fuck it then!" And in accordance with its late time-slot, it would be reasonable for the producers to assume the majority audience was in fact adults. During this episode the teams played the game 'My Kid Could Draw That'. This particular segment parodies the visual aesthetics of the news, specifically the deployment of visuals to give greater authenticity to a story, and the way in which the news only ever presents a select few facts to represent the wider story. Moreover, you are about as likely to listen to a beautiful news anchor as you are a 'cute kid'. The hailed genre markers are weak,

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<sup>7</sup> See Shahira Fahmy's article on the toppling of the Saddam statue ("They Took It Down": Exploring Determinants of Visual Reporting in the Toppling of the Saddam Statue in National and International Newspapers, 2007)

but they are there to a small degree. The topic itself is located in the political realm, clearly locating this segment in the frame of satire.

In the segment a young girl, introduces herself as Raelene from Owairoa Primary School and holds up an A3 drawing. Owairoa is a in the affluent suburb of Howick in Auckland, a far-cry from the prison life depicted in Raelene's drawing.

Raelene had drawn a picture of an unidentified news story and the teams were challenged to decipher her scribbles. After some banter by the teams, team two offered their answer and a clip of the girl explaining her picture was shown: "since the prisons are overflowing with prisoners they've thought of an idea to have all of the prisoners in one bed, oh, two prisoners in one bed, and this is a jail and up here there's already two prisoners sleeping. No money plus a lot of prisoners equals a lot of grossness up ahead". Host Jeremy Corbett then joked about the common assumption that prisoners engaged in sexual relations with one another: "The number of prisoners in New Zealand has reached an all-time high this week meaning some jails are resorting to double-bunking to manage the overflow. Now I'm married, so if I have to share a room with my sexual partner, why shouldn't they?" Team 2's Madeleine Sami then said, "I think the sign should have read a lot of grossness and a lot of head". Team 2 leader Dai Henwood said "I like the fact that when the prisoners went to bed she drew them with little stripy Noddy hats" to which Paul Ego retorted "it's nice that they had their little sleepy hats cos then the big guy comes in and goes 'ooh. Can't bugger him it's nigh-nighs'" and Rove followed with "or, thanks it gives me something to hang on to".

Gordon's complaint was upheld for the BSA agreed that the segment breached standard 1 of the BSA's guidelines: good taste and decency. The BSA said that the segment unnecessarily linked a child to a series of denigrating sexual innuendos and was thus exploitative. TV3 argued that the programme was aired at 10pm and therefore it was unlikely that children were to be watching, and furthermore that sexual innuendo was "common fodder" for comedians (Broadcasting Standards Authority, 2010). Despite upholding the complaint the BSA did not make any orders to TVWorks Ltd on this occasion. Instead, this particular incident was deemed a "novel situation" and the broadcasters simply informed of their breach to thereby provide some guidance toward their future content choices (Broadcasting Standards Authority, 2010).

Here the satire has misfired for Gordon; he reads its truthiness as inappropriate and therefore not set for opposition in the second phase. According to Gordon, the juxtaposition of a young girl with criminals and prison sex is not a claim to seriousness. The BSA however have

recognised both phases of the satire, and read it to completion, affirming Gordon's reading but also the intended target of the satire (the Justice system in NZ, criminals who disrupt the social order). The misfire here is not that Gordon 'didn't get it' but instead that he read the set up as inappropriate and ill fitting. Here Gordon is choosing not to 'get it' because of the distasteful violations this humour invokes, a threat to universal claims of morality is made by this segment when it brings a little girl into graphic descriptions of heterosexual and homosexual sex acts. Here Gordon's claims about appropriateness superseded the intended critique of poor Government funding to the justice department.

As such, it is naïve to suggest that 'not getting it' is always a mis-matching of hailed schema and the audience, but rather it can sometimes be a 'choice', a pointed omission. As Simpson puts it "it is one thing to recognise and redeem the claim of insincerity but another entirely to endorse the claim of appropriateness. Satirical uptake, as the foregoing discussion should underscore, inheres in a structured framework of interpretive positions... Uptake is thus grounded in decisions about whether or not to participate in the pragmatic framework of humour and about whether to allow in or to block the variables which influence and shape humour processing strategies" (Simpson, 2003, p. 174). Satire requires an underlying ironic disposition in order to 'fire', and this depends a great deal on the disposition of the satiree and to what level they will participate in the humour making process. Irony is a pragmatic process that bears many connotations. Here *7 Days*' attempt at satirical discourse is weak and the reception accordingly divided.

## **LAWS FOR/AGAINST SATIRE**

*7 Days* have been known to incorporate footage from rival networks and newspapers (notably *Stuff.co.nz* and the *New Zealand Herald* websites) but are protected under the Copyright Act 1994 which protects the use of copyright materials by non-copyright holders so long as it is deemed to be for the act of criticism, review, or news reporting. To stay protected under the Copyright Act the show must sufficiently acknowledge their role as a critic (sec.42). *7 Days* does this by pegging itself as a comedy show and airing a warning at the beginning of each show where Corbett says something along the lines of "The following show is for adults only and contains bad language that may offend some people" – this warning serves to locate the show in a realm of late night comedy which has conventionally been a realm for bawdy or base humour and under the conditions of liveness. Liveness connotes unvetted spontaneity and purports a sort of comedic disclaimer – don't be offended, 'we're only joking'. Moreover, the

show's TV guide listings tag it a satire and comedy panel show. Being able to incorporate real footage of the week's events into the show results in a stronger empowerment of the satirists/comedians and their critiques. Without the footage, their criticisms would be wholly reliant on an audience having consumed all of the necessary media before sitting down to watch the show. However acts of satire and parody are **not** protected under New Zealand law and there have been several incidences of satirists threatened with legal action for their satire.

#### COPYRIGHT LAW 1994: PROVISIONS FOR SATIRE & PARODY

Currently under New Zealand law there are no protections for satire and parody. Legislation like the Copyright Act 1994 and the Defamation Act 1992 can and has been used to take out lawsuits against satirists, which can ultimately restrict the creative licence of a satirist. There has been a long tradition of criticising politics and public figures in New Zealand, from newspaper cartoons to the timeless caricatures provided by comedy greats McPhail and Gadsby. Green Party MP Gareth Hughes has in 2011 put forward a Member's Bill, yet to be drawn in the ballot, to amend section 41 of the Copyright Act 1994. Hughes wants to make provisions for a reasonable use of copyright material for the specific purposes of parody and satire (NZ Green Party, 2011). There have been several cases in New Zealand where satirists have been punished for their craft under the Copyright Act 1994, the Defamation Act 1992, and more recently under the Electoral Act 1993. Unlike its Commonwealth counterparts Australia and the United Kingdom, New Zealand has failed to legally recognise parody or satire as a reasonable defence to copyright infringement.

The Copyright Act 1994 currently provides for incidental use of copyright works, as well as fair dealing. When considering the likes of parody under fair dealing, satire can become problematic. Fair dealing requires the satire/parody to provide "sufficient acknowledgement" that the new work is: for the purposes of criticism or review, for the purpose of reporting current events through sound recording or film, for the purposes of reporting current events by other means (sec.42). Whilst satire is valued for its criticisms and review, its self-reflexivity and acknowledgement of itself as beyond traditional news and current affairs reporting is not always clearly articulated - nor is a satirical critique found to have only one interpretation. To provide a 'satiric disclaimer' would be to undermine the satirical process itself, and to also suppress the comedic possibilities for which parody and satire are famed. Satire loses its gusto when it has to call itself satire.

## COPYRIGHT (NEW TECHNOLOGIES) AMENDMENT ACT 2008

In 2003 the Helen Clark led Labour Government agreed to review the state of the Copyright Act 1994 in light of the new digital climate. The advent of new technologies, particularly the Internet, would mean that copyright holders were faced with new challenges in protecting their intellectual and creative properties. John Key's National Government passed the Copyright (New Technologies) Amendment Act 2008, which was seen to provide adequate proviso for new media and digital technologies and the accompanying copyright issues. Especially relevant to satire is the section that states: "Fair dealing with a work for the purpose of reporting current events by means of a sound recording, film, or communication work does not infringe copyright in the work" (sec. 22). This is great news for any satire that deals expressly with recorded content but Section 41 of the Act states that the incidental copying of a copyright work is not an infringement when a "musical work, words spoken or sung with music, or so much of a sound recording or communication work as includes a musical work or those words, must not be regarded as incidentally copied in another work if the musical work or the words, sound recording, or communication work is deliberately copied." This does not provide for satire and parody explicitly, for it cannot be considered a literary, dramatic, or musical work exclusively.

A review of the Act was scheduled five years from the date it was enacted, requiring the new Ministry for Business, Innovation & Employment to conduct a review of the Act in 2013. However the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA) negotiations are still underway at the time of writing and Minister of Commerce Craig Foss has recommended that the review be delayed until the TPPA is locked down. The TPPA negotiations began in 2007 and 18 rounds of talks between ministers and negotiators have failed to see an agreement reached (NZN, 2014).

In September 2008 the Associate Commerce Minister Judith Tizard announced that there would be a review on whether to include a copyright law exception for the purposes of parody and satire, stating, "The Copyright Act is currently silent on the issue of parody and satire. With the recent introduction of the Copyright (New Technologies) Amendment Act 2008, there is further need to ensure our legislation remains unambiguous when assessing what amounts to copyright infringement" (Tizard, 2008). The review that followed was interrupted by a change in Government and was never completed, nor made public, despite Tizard's announcement that something would be made public in December 2008.

## THE TPPA

The TPPA is a proposed agreement between ten countries: New Zealand, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Peru, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Vietnam and the United States. Whilst the negotiations are held in secret, a document was leaked in 2011 shows that the United States wants to make changes to New Zealand's copyright laws and force alterations that would ultimately undermine the domestic policy making process. Perhaps the most relevant proposed amendment to this research is the United States' wish to impose further time limits on copyright lifespans. The leaked document shows that the United States wish to impose a copyright lifespan of no less than 70 years after an author's death, or no less than 95 years from the first authorised publication of a work ("Trans-Pacific Partnership - Intellectual Property Rights Chapter - DRAFT," 2011). These copyright lifespans would in some cases more than double existing regulations around copyright lifespan in New Zealand. The implications on New Zealand's Copyright Act under the TPPA have been widely criticised. InternetNZ policy head Susan Chalmers has stated that the proposed amendments to NZ copyright law would endow copyright owners with unprecedented powers of authorisation that could inhibit the flow of "temporary electronic copies... [which] runs counter to an open Internet and therefore could threaten innovation" (2012).

Whilst the United States has a reputation for frivolous and outlandish lawsuits (see *Liebeck v. McDonald's Restaurants*; *Anderson v. Pacific Gas & Electric*) their legal provisions for the employ of parody and satire are remarkably relaxed, and generally a fair use policy applies. As outlined by Wilson Marshall and Siciliano, "The idea of fair use reflects copyright law's careful consideration of First Amendment principles" (Wilson Marshall & Siciliano, 2011). Specifically, the concept of fair use has been identified by the US courts, over a series of court cases, to include such activities as:

"...quotation of excerpts in a review or criticism for purposes of illustration or comment; quotation of short passages in a scholarly or technical work, for illustration or clarification of the author's observations; use in a parody of some of the content of the work parodied; summary of an address or article, with brief quotations, in a news report; reproduction by a library of a portion of a work to replace part of a damaged copy; reproduction by a teacher or student of a small part of a work to illustrate a lesson; reproduction of a work in legislative or judicial proceedings or reports; incidental and fortuitous reproduction, in a newsreel or broadcast, of a work located in the scene of an event being reported" ("Factsheet: Fair Use," 2012).

The adoption of the Copyright laws proposed in the TPPA would restrict satire and parody in a way that is explicitly at odds with the United States' own parody and satire laws.

#### THE LAW VS. SATIRE

New Zealand's Copyright Act 1994 states that a work may be reproduced for the purposes of criticism or review so long as there is "sufficient acknowledgement" of the re-positioning of the work. There is clear provision for this repositioning within the frameworks of news and current affairs, musical arrangement, literary and other artworks, as well as education, but instantiations of satire and parody are not explicitly provided for. Given the lack of consensus on a definition for satire, as discussed in earlier chapters, it seems that 'sufficient acknowledgement' would be hard to garner when it is the very nature of satire that it is almost always ripe for multiple interpretations regardless of its intent. What is 'sufficient acknowledgement' for one satiree, or the satirised, is not for another. The current law, much like scholarly criticism on satire, does not have a definition for satire and thus the copyright law limits its incarnations.

#### COLIN CRAIG VS. *THE CIVILIAN*

*The Civilian* is an online satirical newspaper that was started by Christchurch student Ben Uffindell in 2013. *The Civilian* published a piece on New Zealand's Conservative Party leader Colin Craig and his anti-homosexual stance. A self-identified Christian and family man, Craig had previously stated that he disapproves of homosexuality and de facto relationships; "[Prime Minister] Key might not oppose gay marriage but I do" (Vance, 2012) qualifying his own position by saying that he is "happy to be traditional, I found it worked well for me" (Chisnall, 2011). Craig had also expressed that he was directly opposed to Labour MP Louisa Wall's proposed amendments to the Marriage Act during a Select Committee Hearing on the Bill. Craig provided an analogy in which he likened the segregation of men's and women's toilets to the rights of homosexual and heterosexual partners to marriage: "There are grounds to discriminate on certain things. If you said to me, 'do I think there should be separate toilet facilities when it comes to men and women', 'yes I do'" (Ikram, 2013). Craig's comments were largely met with disdain by the mainstream media and the wider public. *The Civilian* published the story "Maurice Williamson looking pretty stupid after floods" on April 22 and attributed the following fake-quote to Craig:

"Williamson likes to talk about big gay rainbows," said Craig, "but it would help if he understood what the rainbow actually means. After Noah's flood, God painted a giant

rainbow across the sky, which was a message that he would never again flood the world, unless we made him very angry. And we have.”

Just a day after going to press *The Civilian*’s editor Ben Uffindell received a legal notice from law firm Chapman Tripp stating that Colin Craig wished for an apology, \$500 for compensation of legal fees, and a retraction of the quotes wrongly falsely attributed to him (“Chapman Tripp Legal Notice - 23 April 2013,” 2013). This however did not stop *The Civilian* from producing further fake quotes and attributing them to Craig. On the 25 April 2013, just two days after receiving the legal notice, Uffindell’s team published “Celebrity mentions New Zealand” in response to Prime Minister John Key’s spot on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. In the article *The Civilian* noted that not everyone enjoyed Letterman’s shout out, quoting Craig, “I did not say this,” said Craig. “I have never said this, nor do I ever wish to be quoted as having said it” (“Celebrity mentions New Zealand,” 2013). The irony of course being that Craig made these very statements in his legal notice to *The Civilian* and not in response to Key on Letterman. After Uffindell issued a short apology, Craig stopped any legal action against *The Civilian*.

National MP Maurice Williamson actually went on to use the phrase ‘big gay rainbow’ in his own political speechmaking, employing the phrase during his address to The House during the Third Reading of the Marriage Amendment Bill:

“This Bill was the cause of our drought, well if any of you follow my Twitter account you will see that in the Pakuranga Electorate this morning it was pouring with rain, we have the most enormous big gay rainbow across my electorate. It has to be a sign Sir, it has to be a sign, if you’re a believer it’s certainly a sign, and can I finish for all those who are concerned about this, with a quote from the bible [...] It’s Deuteronomy, chapter one, verse twenty nine, ‘Be Ye Not Afraid’” (“Maurice Williamson’s ‘big gay rainbow’ speech,” 2013).

#### THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION VS. JONO AND BEN AT TEN

In September 2013 Mediaworks were reported to the Police by the Electoral Commission for screening a skit on TV3’s *Jono And Ben At Ten* (JABAT). “The School Terminator” skit featured New Zealand First leader Winston Peters lamenting that he could not fix the botched

Novopay system<sup>8</sup>, but that he could certainly criticize it: “Well I could complain about it but if you vote New Zealand First at the next election, we can sure set out to fix it up” (*The School Terminator*, 2013). The skit closed with an authorisation message, emblematic of real election campaign messages, saying that the skit was authorised by Andrew Logan Robinson (a director and producer of the show, not involved in this particular skit). The Electoral Commission reported the programme to the police, stating that it breached the Electoral Act 1993 (sec. 70) for being an election programme broadcast outside of the designated election period (Electoral Commission, 2013). Peters denied it was an outright breach of the Act by saying “[I]t is a comedy show being shown during the Outer Mongolian elections, so how they would be caught by the act is beyond me” (Gulliver, 2013). At the time of writing there has been no ruling on the incident by the Police, nor any further comment made by Peters and his party as the investigation still sits with the NZ Police.

### **7 DAYS – A SATIRE**

*7 Days* is best described as satire for it not only encompasses elements of parody in its aesthetic but it predominantly draws on social conventions and a collective understanding of the New Zealand cultural politic to inform its comedy. Whilst *7 Days* works to subvert power relations through mimicking the genre and aesthetic conventions of television news programmes, it also draws on norms that have been naturalised by television and seeks to expose them as preposterous. The satire here works as advocate at times, but for the most part is consumed with utterances of critique for critique’s sake. *7 Days* flits between genres. Its critics have called it an improvised local comedy (Philpott, 2012) and a satire (Russell, 2012), whilst its major funders New Zealand On Air have placed it simply in the realm of ‘comedy’ (2013). Television scholars have been more *en pointe* calling it a panel series (NZ On Screen, 2010; Dunleavy, 2012, p. 50) which is akin to the descriptor of its creators The Downlowconcept who call it “a comedy panel show” (“7 Days Overview,” 2009).

American television satire, for the most part fits into four categories; comedy verité like *The Office* or *Veep*; sketch comedy like *Saturday Night Live*; animated comedy like *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and *Family Guy*; or fake news like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. *7 Days* differs in that it does not construct its own versions of news and politics using actors, satirical correspondents, comedians, or random celebrities; instead, the show picks apart aspects of real

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<sup>8</sup> A new software system being used by schools to pay teaching staff. The system has been seen as a failure thanks to its regular botching of schools’ payrolls.

world politics by poaching news stories from the mainstream media and deconstructing what *is* there without expressly supposing what should be there instead. *7 Days* is more concerned with what has been happening in the past seven days, and how it came to penetrate and shape the public consciousness that week.

British satire has similar categories to American satire but has popularised another; the magazine show. Shows like Charlie Brooker's *Screen Wipe*, *Weekly Wipe*, *News Wipe*, and *10 O'Clock Live* that review the news and cultural hot spots of the week. Brooker's shows are expressly focused on deconstructing the nature of the news media and the business of its delivery, in front of a studio audience, delivered in a typically British (very sarcastic) mode. British television does the quiz show remarkably well, and many of its shows have been exported to foreign markets or adapted for local audiences. *7 Days* looks and feels a little more like British television; clearly borrowing some of its games from Brit-quiz shows like the music-centric *Never Mind The Buzzcocks* ('Today's Moment in History' mimicking their 'Guess the Musician' segment), and the general knowledge quiz show *Qi* ('Caption That'). *7 Days* producer Jon Bridges said that they set out to mimic the BBC's satirical mainstays like *Have I Got News For You* (1990-) and *Would I Lie To You* (2007-) and the Australian *Good News Week* (1996-) whilst simultaneously remixing it to bring in the entertainment factor of the proven quiz show (2014).

The *7 Days* panellists represent the 'everyday citizen' or what Day calls the "every-person stand-in" (2009, p. 96). Their responses to the news items at hand are used to entertain, to undermine authority, and to provide alternative commentary to the background politics – both governmental and socio-cultural – of the viewership. When engaging with politicians in-studio, the panellists vent the audience's frustrations by mocking these public figures and their political efforts. When watching the *In My Professional Opinion* spots they share in their delightful and familiar apathy, awareness, or general knowledge gaps.

*7 Days* parodies 'the news' and subverts its discourse by remixing it with the quiz show. The host is akin to the newsreader and controls the pace and flow of the show. The comedians are a range of complementary personas (Urzila the 'loud and proud' lesbian, Paul Ego with 'the ego'), just as news programmes draw on a range of reporters and their specialities (weather, international, politics, entertainment etc.) Like a news anchor, Corbett the host reads from a teleprompter, sits behind a desk, and often has papers to shuffle. The screens behind the panellists preview the segment or story just as they would on the nightly news. *7 Days* takes

up a half hour slot on a Friday night and manages to cram the week's current affairs into that small timeframe. This in itself mimics the formatting of television news which selects only the tastiest morsels of current events to fill its one-hour prime time slot, reducing complex histories of international relations into a 30 second sound bite and montage.

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## CONCLUSION

The story of television news satire and its emergence has here been mapped through several theoretical, conceptual, and pragmatic lenses. Firstly the theoretical through promoting a systemic functional framework and triadic model for satire then through the extrapolation of the discursal components of irony and parody as they contribute to it. The discussions that followed explored the preferred target of news and how its practice contributes to political dialogue and how the continual and variable compromising of its value system has led to the McDonaldization and Disneyization of news. The focus then shifts to how news is reimagined by *7 Days* and what constitutes its remediation, the implications for civic culture and audiences is then conceptualised through the games of *7 Days* and the show's ironic reimagining of political culture.

### THE CHANGING FACE OF SATIRE

A shift from the formalist and literary-critiques of satire is necessarily mapped, for it demonstrates the limitations placed on earlier critiques of satire and its forms, and sees a necessary 'opening up' of a definition for satire to include its most recent incarnations, reach, and pleasures. Satire is simply no longer the exclusive fodder of the eighteenth century poets and their high culture critics, it has come to pervade popular culture and become a part of the everyday mediascape and cultural literacies. Satire is a useful component in contemporary political discourse and its popularisation through television's 'fake news' format is worthy of interrogation.

### FAKE NEWS & 'FAKE NEWS'

The polysemous quality of fake news is here considered in all four of its instantiations as ultimately contributing to a proliferation of 'fake news'. 'Fake news' mimics the format and genre conventions of traditional news to ground itself and make itself readable, though it does not wholly submit to its own genre conventions. Instead, 'fake news' reproduces elements of genre across multiple platforms to make its critique wide reaching and broadly appealing. A viable 'in' to discussions of news quality is given by incorporating all layers of fake news. *7 Days*' version of fake news regenerates both the news show and the panel quiz show, for example, to produce its critiques. But *7 Days* also utilises elements of live performance (*Slice*

of 7), improvisational theatre (the unscripted panellists), and the scripted host (Jeremy Corbett) to engage with a wider spread of cultural texts, forms, and conventions.

Whilst these versions of fake news bear aesthetic similarities their intents are very different. The fake news hoax demonstrates the shortfalls of the newsgathering process, and the faking of news by practitioners undermines their claims to truthiness, whilst the propaganda flowing from official sources distorts media representations of reality. But the ironic fake news knows all of this and it seeks, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Colbert, to ‘call bullshit’ on the mainstream media. Where the first three instantiations of fake news are concerned with maintaining a façade of truthiness, the satirical news is concerned with deconstructing it.

Contemporary scholarship on ‘fake news’ has largely been focused on the American televisual instantiations, notably *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *Saturday Night Live*. Whilst many of these investigations have been useful in contributing to understanding the role these programmes can play in American political dialogue, they neglect to address the core elements of satire itself – how and why it works and where it comes from. Discussions on the aesthetic and parent forms of satire are considered at length by many scholars, with some even directly comparing the contents of the nightly news with the weekly satire shows (Roberts, 2008). However the scholarship on ‘fake news’ largely favours this approach over the consideration of satire as its own discursive or generic form.

## **MAKING SATIRE**

In an era of post-network television viewers have become increasingly savvy when it comes to television tropes and style. Televisual satire offers itself as a valuable tool to both audiences and producers in a tightly wound commercial television industry by presenting itself as a self-reflexive critique of the current televisual climate. Television satire, specifically ‘fake news’ enhances the possibilities for audience engagement and entertainment through straddling both the conventions of news and entertainment shows, two genres that have each achieved immeasurable success in their own rights. News comes in to serve the educating, informing and alerting functions of the media, whilst entertainment television provides the escapism that news does not afford.

The popularity of *7 Days* and the wider genre of ‘fake news’ is partially attributable to the blending of the traditional news format with the expressly entertainment formats of the late night talk show and entertainment quiz show. *7 Days* in particular employs strategies of news

practice to appeal to culturally literate audiences that feel some disdain with the current media climate. *7 Days* negotiates the ironic space between the factual and the possible through these intertextual genre instantiations. Television guides authenticate its claims to comedy whilst the employ of real news content and guest politicians grounds it in real political discourse. The relationship between these elements creates a self-reflexivity not born of other genres. The discussion of news content provides a sort of enhancement to real world news and politics and offers up an alternative narrative, a counter narrative, to mainstream political and news discourses.

### **SATIRE'S MUSCLE**

*7 Days* generates affective power through humour, engaging their audience more deeply than is permitted by the traditional news. The show also generates affective power through endearing their audience with markers of public feeling and the Kiwi identity. The self-deprecating tendencies of *7 Days* and its comedians are evidence of a wider cultural sensibility. *7 Days* brings its audience closer to them both literally and figuratively. By offering tickets to its tapings the comedians are able to see just which criticisms work and which do not with laughter as their barometer.

*7 Days'* place in political dialogue is sanctioned by the guest appearance of politicians - particularly the guest MPs from central government. Where it is the role of satirists to endear their satiree with criticism of the satirised, the appearance of a powerful and authoritative target willingly offering himself or herself for critique complicates this process. The appearance of the powerful figure here only further legitimises their position as powerful and enduring through any biting attack whilst at the same time still criticising them. Conversely, to attack someone outside of the elite who does not purport or benefit from the dominant ideology(s) would be to misfire.

### **SATIRE WITHOUT POLITICS IS PARODY**

Satire is an exercise in critique. Through irony and parody it calls up the status quo and juxtaposes it with what could be, or perhaps what should, and in doing so it incites inquiry. Satire is inherently concerned with hyperbolising the ideology of a dominant discourse to expose its weaknesses. Without irony or an interrogated politic, a piece tagged 'satire' exists simply as parody. The upper discursal locations of satire, ideology and register, give satire its political potential. Ideology as a prerequisite to invocations of satire firmly locates the satiric

artefact in the realm of political discourse. Ideology invokes the feeling of the dominant classes, usually hiding in the subconscious of its public. Where news is deployed as a check and balance on the powerful it is simultaneously controlled by them. Powerful elites dominate the sourcing of the news and control its business imperatives, ultimately working to undermine the objective, representative, and afflictive powers of the news media. Ideology's naturalness is destabilised by satire, illuminating a counter narrative that refuses its premises as true and justified. Satire creates ironic space between the lived ideology and a contestable one. In offering an alternative reality satire is reaffirming the lived one as status quo but also promoting a discontent or feeling of injustice with it.

## **SATIRE & DISCOURSE, SATIRE & GENRE**

Satire functions through messing with existing ideology and discourse rather than generating its own. The signs satire invokes are well established for without this satirical footing its uptake would not be so easily accomplished. Whilst satire subscribes to a discourse, borrowing its terminology and historicity, it is ultimately working to undermine it and reject its value systems in some way. Satire does not ascribe to all of the above traits on its own; it borrows from other discourses to enable it. It does not 'posses' its own language or lexicon, but it does 'rule in' and 'rule out' particular targets worthy of its bite. To attack the powerless is to break the rules of satire, to misfire. Satire's targets change and diversify due to the temporal nature and multiplicity of forms of satire, but so too does discourse evolve as a 'living and breathing thing'.

Positioning satire as somewhere between discourse and genre allows for its malleable, parasitic, and pragmatic sensibilities to be examined using existing categories of scholarship without compromising its unique role in contemporary culture.

## **THE BARKING WATCHDOG**

News acts as both a watchdog and a gatekeeper, calling into question the actions of the state and elites. News simultaneously setting the agenda for public affairs by mediating between these groups and the citizenry they are charged with representing. When the news undermines its core values of accuracy, sincerity, location (space place, here/now), and contemporaneousness by succumbing to business imperatives or pressure from elites, the public are denied truthful and authentic accounts of contemporary events. Audiences are becoming increasingly aware of the constraints placed on news, and see its patterns of newsworthiness as sometimes unsatisfying or disturbing. This has given rise to the satirical

news format. News is concerned with informing, educating, and alerting. When it moves toward other territories like entertainment and sensationalism its claims to impartiality and objectivity are severely compromised.

## **THE BUSINESS OF SATIRE**

Residing on TV3 *7 Days* is subject to market pressures to deliver ratings. After TV3 sunk into receivership in the mid-2000s it regenerated itself under the guidance of TV3 Drama and Comedy head Rachel Jean and Director of Programming Kelly Martin to become the unabashed home of local comedy. Capitalising on NZoA's directive to foster local content and promote New Zealand identities through funding public television, *7 Days* pegs itself as 'local comedy' and calls on local personalities to deliver its critiques. Not only that but it promotes New Zealand-ness through employing musicians in its *Slice of 7* game, the everyday man through *In My Professional Opinion*, and political relevance in *Yes Minister*.

*7 Days* is constrained in its satirical undertakings by the Copyright Act, Defamation Act, and the Broadcasting Standards Authority. There are no explicit protections or defences under the existing law to protect the criticisms offered in parody and satire. For *7 Days* to openly criticise an outlet's coverage of an event the producers must ensure their criticism lay plainly in review and are not slanderous, or that the clips targeted are from their own establishment (MediaWorks). This limits its range for attack and critique. When public figures are notoriously difficult to criticise, i.e. Colin Craig, the satirist may divert their attentions for the sake of ease.

*7 Days* is further restricted in its rearticulation of public discourse owing to its position in the commercial television market. The show is required to garner ratings high enough for TV3 to keep it on air and thus a particular type of delivery is privileged – humour – and at times undermines the rearticulation of serious political dialogue.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The affective powers of satire are here examined at their simplest level, as generating some kind of emotional connection with their audience to relieve tensions and to suggest a counterpublic narrative. Brief mention is made of the ironic activism incited by previous incarnations of documentary satire but more work is yet to be done in this area.

Ian Reilly has argued a case for satire as the Fifth Estate, acting as a watchdog of the watchdog (news) (2010) and Amber Day has looked toward the pitfalls of satire and has briefly

considered its role in reaffirming conservative values and reaffirmation of the status quo (2011). Each of these analyses are thorough in their defence of satire as serving the expansion of public discourse but deny any power beyond stimulation of public sentiment, seeing its capabilities only in suggesting change not actually making it happen.

Satire is arguably the most self-reflexive of media forms today. Its role in sustaining debate about news programming and its servicing of the public interest is an important one. New research in this area could perhaps look to examine the role satire has played in reconstituting conventional news. Politicians for example are now eager to engage with satire themselves, seeing its use as a tool to undermine their opponents and to seem more appealing to the masses. Satirical utterances are now making their way into news commentary, with particular attention paid to the likes of Sacha Baron Cohen's ensemble of satirical characters, and Tina Fey's caricatures of Sarah Palin.

The deployment of satire in advertising is also worth considering when you see the success of campaigns like DB Breweries' 'Yeah Right' Tui billboards and Speights Breweries' 'Southern Man' television spots. Taika Waititi's anti-drug driving advertisement 'Blazed As', parodying his successful short film 'Two Cars One Night' (2013) also poses some interesting questions about New Zealand's minority communities and the racial tensions that are so often glazed over by the mainstream media.

Ultimately, satire is concerned with dissent and to shift the Satiree's attention from the said to the unsaid by undermining the dominant narrative of their given locales; be they geographic, political, historical, economic, or otherwise. Without opening up the relationships between the satirist, the satiree, and the satirised to consider such nuances specific to a given text, the subtleties of satire are likely to be missed or simply overlooked. Contemporary satires/satirists are making space beyond oppositional critiques and are moving toward mobilising the counter publics they interpellate through their satire. In multiple incidences satire mobilises its audience, calling upon them to break through structured manufacturing of political discourse to go somewhere beyond the critique, reflection and disdain afforded by conventional news. Ultimately satire can contribute something meaningful to political discourse, engaging citizens (audiences) in critical and deliberative thinking about politics and the state of democracy, but also igniting or influencing avenues for real world change.

Satire is always at risk of being misread or misinterpreted, with its straight meaning simply echoing that of the hailed reality. Satire is work and requires its audience to work at interpreting layers of meaning, laden with irony, to expose something dubious.

The convergence of news and entertainment has produced a disdain for the mainstream media, if not a simple mistrust, and lead academics to suggest that public discourse and the public sphere is under threat. The diversification of the television market and mounting commercial pressures has contributed to the dumbing down of news content. Satire here offers an alternative realm for public discourse that is anchored in mainstreamed communicative acts but sustains a counter narrative that consistently calls into question the validity and truthiness of the mainstream media.

## **LOCAL TELEVISION**

Locally produced television programming is prone to market failure in New Zealand due to its high production costs, comparatively low advertising revenue potentials, and a tempered history of ‘cultural cringe’. Despite these failings, local content is essential to fulfilling the ‘cultural identity’ directives in the Broadcasting Act 1989. NZoA was established to counteract such market failures of locally produced programming by acting as the gatekeeper of public broadcast funds, and charged with supporting locally produced programmes in ‘at risk’ areas. The Act also specified that NZoA pay particular service to the genres of television drama and documentary for their high production costs meant they were, and still are, particularly vulnerable in the New Zealand market.

In reconfiguring news *7 Days* destabilises its claims to authenticity and offers itself as both an attractive alternative and complementary piece to the mainstream news. The programme acts as a filter to current affairs and news commentary, offering a comedic reworking of ‘reality’ to ultimately question its role in supporting the dominant ideology. In this reworking, the mimetic act, the originary form is destabilised and its intended meanings problematised.

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