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LAUGHING IN CIRCLES: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLITICALLY CORRECT DISCOURSES AND STAND-UP COMEDY IN TORONTO

By MEGHNA GEORGE, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for

the Degree Master of Arts

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LAUGHING IN CIRCLES

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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that Canadian society increasingly promotes a rhetoric of tolerance, through the dissemination of multicultural and politically correct discourses. At the same time, there has been a growth in the popularity of performances that seemingly counters this national image; that of risqué stand-up comedy. This dissertation explores if an institutionalized rhetoric of multiculturalism and "PC", popularized since the late 1980s, is pierced, protracted and parodied within risqué stand-up comedy while remaining confined within spatial and temporal boundaries. Furthermore, this relationship between comedy and multicultural and "PC" discourses illuminates the nature of power circulating within our dialogues about issues of discrimination in contemporary Canadian society. This thesis establishes that both stand-up comic performances and politically correct rhetoric share a carnivalesque nature that while degrades authorial discourses, is ultimately constrained within its self-definition.

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

The following is a declaration that the content of the research in this document has been completed by Meghna George and recognizes the contributions of Dr. Kee Yong in both the research process and the completion of the thesis.

Introduction

A middle-aged man is sitting at his breakfast nook on a grey morning casually leafing through the inky black and white folds of the Sunday paper. The rhythmic rustle of the newsprint provides him with an aural comfort as he lifts his cup of dark roast coffee to his lips and takes a slow sip. The heated liquid slides down his throat, warming his belly and causes the wrinkles on his face to crinkle in pleasure. His smile quickly fades as he is taken by the words that lay in front of him: *Mine Collapse Kills 89, Death Toll Still Rising*. Shaking his head sadly, he allows himself a moment of solace before flipping the page: *24,000 Jobs Lost in March, Unemployment Rate Rises 18%*. He looks upwards briefly, silently acknowledging his fortune in retaining his job at a bank before turning the pages yet again: *Iran and Israel at the Brink of Nuclear War!* The man shrugs his shoulders and continues reading, drifting between a state of engagement with the words on the page and boredom. Finally, he comes across the funnies, one of his favourite sections in the paper. As his eyes gloss from panel to panel, he lets out a throaty chuckle at the recent exploits of young Calvin. With this, his daily trivia has been sated as he folds the paper down onto the table and continues with his day.

Humour rears itself within the intricacies of everyday life. Its form, content, and representation circulates through carefully scripted political satire and punditry, is embedded within self-deprecating jokes in the face of rampant poverty and weaves between the contemporary visual-verbal mimetic units that have carved out a niche within and between particular internet communities. It travels in a highly unpredictable and organic manner while drawing all of us within the depths of what it means to be funny. As Andrews (2011) states in *In the Belly of the Laughing God*:

> ...rather than being static entities the communities are flexible and constantly changing formations that reflect the multiple and shifting relationships individuals and groups have with each other. Moreover humour and irony involve a process of interpretation. But because of the dynamic and plural relations among the text or utterance, its author, its audience and the larger context of reception, neither discursive process can guarantee a single definite response (18).

Thus, humour exists in a zone of transience. Its meaning always changes because of its interaction with both the flexible identities of the actors who engage with it, and with the ever-shifting constructions of space and time that inform and are informed by humour. Its shape is constantly morphing from each minute to the next, always providing reference to the past, acknowledging the present and looking ahead to a future (Madison 2012: 178-179). Therefore, it is not just part of the everyday. It is the everyday.

However, the logics of everyday life are not devoid of topographies of power. For instance, take an individual whose coffee consumption forms an integral part of her morning ritual. She casually strolls down the street, walking past a small independent cafe in favour of the Tim Hortons next door. Today, she is confident that she will win a prize in the Roll Up the Rim contest but if not she knows she will just buy another coffee in a few hours. It can be seen how the "ordinariness" of the everyday is shaped through the interaction between powerful influences. Michel de Certeau (1984) articulates how individuals or groups of people engage in different "ways of operating" as they move through the tangled web of everyday life, as it intersects with powerful discursive and ideological networks (xi-xii). In other words, in our movement through daily life there is a tendency to attribute a sense of innocence to our activities, ideas and discourses. Certeau discusses how these quotidian "ways of operating" are vested with layers of subtlety through their interaction with larger political and social ideologues. It is through this exchange with powerful influences that the meaning derived through every day practices becomes organic as it circulates through society.

Therefore this thesis explores how two aspects of everyday life intersect as a confluence of powerful relationships, namely how the expression of humour converges with influential usages of discourses to shape our contemporary worldview. I traverse the connection between the pervasiveness of multicultural/"politically correct (PC)" discourses in contemporary Canadian society and the growing popularity of allegedly "anti-PC" spaces. Undertaking an explanation of popular comedic performances in Toronto, Canada I explore if an institutionalized rhetoric of multiculturalism and "PC", popularized since the late 1980s, is pierced, protracted and parodied within risqué stand-up comedy while remaining confined within spatial and temporal boundaries. Furthermore, I examine how this relationship between comedy and multicultural and "PC" discourses illuminates the nature of power circulating within our dialogues about issues of discrimination in contemporary Canadian society. In doing so, I introduce both my fieldsite and fieldwork process and frame my research within the current academic literature on humour, performance and the carnival. In addition, I will illustrate the complex yet subtle ways in which stand-up comedy is enacted between the performers and the audience. Finally, I demonstrate how stand-up comedy is shaped through a carnivalesque rhetoric and the implications this may have on its political trajectory.

Multiculturalism and Political Correctness

To begin discussing the relationship between risqué stand-up comedy and the contemporary rhetoric surrounding issues of discrimination in Canada it is necessary to frame how these types of discourses arose. The concepts of both multiculturalism and political correctness are two sides of the same coin. Their histories, political/social trajectories and significations are inextricably linked to one another, as will be discussed further on. It is within the cracks of multiculturalism that political correctness finds its seeds. Kelly and Rubal-Lopez

(1996) find that politically correct rhetoric emerged from the growing development of cultural identities under a single national boundary. As these groups began to compete for resources and recognition, a movement towards political correctness was seen as a way to mitigate what Kelly and Rubal-Lopez refer to as "cultural warfare (119)." PC rhetoric does this by acting as a medium for these different groups to communicate with one another in the hopes of bringing forth equal distribution of resources. However, PC can only accomplish this when the different groups have been recognized as members of society, which is why Kelly and Rubal-Lopez conclude with the idea that multiculturalism brings forth policies designed to highlight the multiplicity of identities. As a result the histories of both multicultural and politically correct rhetoric are connected (ibid). Therefore, political correctness does not circulate as an official policy with overt linkages and legalities, rather its spirit rose as a by-product of the imagery of "tolerance" promoted through multiculturalism in Canada (Scott 1992(a):12). Thus we look to define multiculturalism. The definition of multiculturalism currently being espoused by federal institutions and subsequently popular rhetoric falls under four categories. Marc Leman (1999**)**, a member of the Political and Social Affairs Division in the Library of Parliament of Canada, drafted a "factual" definition of multiculturalism that posits it as one of the following: a sociological fact, ideology, policy or process**.**

A sociological fact refers to the demographic make-up of the Canadian nation through the "...presence and persistence of diverse racial and ethnic minorities who define themselves as different and who wish to remain so (ibid)." The first definition invokes the notion of "presence" and "persistence" as a tangible way of conceptualizing multiculturalism, yet the meaning of these terms remains unclear. There are two possible, albeit not exhaustive, readings that can be taken from these concepts: one, they can be understood as a sense of enumeration and two, they can be

embedded within a sociological perspective. In the first instance, "presence" and "persistence" may refer to a statistically significant group of people who identify themselves as part of the "diverse racial and ethnic minorities," their presence articulated as categorizable identity every five years with each census (Statistics Canada 2012). However, are people's selves so easily categorized in a manner that remains static for the five years in between? In the second case, "presence" and "persistence" can refer to the existence of groups of minorities who press for recognition of their cultural heritage. Multiculturalism then becomes a misnomer as people have created identities of difference for a long period of history before the concept emerged. Take for instance the history of Chinatowns within the city of Toronto. Toronto's Chinatown dates back to the 1870s, over a hundred years prior to the institutionalization of multiculturalism (Yee 2005). These Chinatowns became a segregated portion of Canada's population where it was seen to promote a distinct "Chinese culture" and a space in which this largely immigrant population was able to foster a community that would band together to advocate for group recognition (ibid). If the definition of multiculturalism is to do exactly what Chinatowns have been doing since the 1800s then why did the conceptualization of multiculturalism only come into existence over 100 years later as a new phenomenon?

Multiculturalism as ideology looks at the concept as "...a relatively coherent set of ideas and ideals pertaining to the celebration of Canada's cultural mosaic (Leman)." While this may be the image that Canada uses to suggest an open and tolerant nation it can be noted that this "celebration" is often restricted to particular spaces and times, e.g. the celebration of Multicultural Day in November or the Taste of Danforth occurring in the summer months. The everyday permeation of multiculturalism however is reflected in a different reality, one that disregards the "diverse" education, food, dress, language, religious symbols, and so forth as

being fully included as part of Canadian citizenship. This can be illustrated through the case of Baltej Singh Dhillon, a Sikh RCMP officer who sparked national controversy and inevitably became an "icon of multiculturalism (The Canadian Immigrant 2012)." As part of a traditional Sikh appearance and an expression of religious freedom, Dhillon requested the RCMP to allow him to fashion a turban and beard while on duty, a request subsequently denied. After a legal battle amidst a national debate of divisive opinions, Dhillon won the right to wear his turban while still serving as a RCMP officer (ibid). Thus it is questionable to what extent the identities that supposedly make up the Canadian cultural mosaic are truly celebrated as an integral part of Canadian citizenship, as we see not only through the stark and impassioned rhetoric that this case unearthed but through the RCMP's own policies.

The notion of multiculturalism as policy is used to highlight "...the management of diversity through formal initiatives in the federal, provincial and municipal domains (Leman)." By this Leman refers to how multiculturalism operates through different levels in society as a form of social policy. This is apparent with the institutionalization of the Multiculturalism Act (1988) and its outline on whom and how people should be included within the idea of the Canadian image. This definition assumes a separation between the political or institutional sphere and the social sphere, yet is a more apt acknowledgement of the role of state power in formulating and circulating multiculturalism as a hegemonic discourse. Looking at Foucault (1978), he discusses how the state manages its functioning not only through physically repressive means like violent targeting of the populace, but also through a "positive" approach as well such as allowing people the opportunity to be rewarded. Taking capitalism as an example, it markets the idea that society should strive towards accumulating wealth and consequently people will be rewarded for doing so. This is accomplished through the implementation of capitalist social

policies, such as stimulus packages, to increase purchasing power and the constant reiteration of the "good life" as it underscores an overall social obligation to consume. Foucault's point here becomes evident when considering whether or not the acquisition of wealth provides one with more freedom or with more obligation and ties to a particular set of social arrangements that may be covertly unequal (95-96). Using Foucault, Leman's multiculturalism of the state then become a rewarding social policy, one that is institutionalized through the various levels of government as a way to acknowledge the changing demographics in society and yet a policy that retains obligation to a hierarchical set of social relationships.

Finally, Leman argues the inclusion of intergroup relationships in the formulation of a definition of multiculturalism by way of a "...process by which ethnic and racial minorities compete with central authorities for achievement of certain goals and aspirations... (Leman)." The sense in which minorities "compete" with authoritative discourses and institutions may be constrained by the fact that multiculturalism has a historical and political trajectory purported by and through governance, as extrapolated through Leman's definition of multiculturalism as policy.

While the third definition shows the most promise, it remains incomplete. A more effective understanding would posit multiculturalism in the tangled web of state power and social behaviour. To view it simply as a management policy removes the messiness with which these discourses actually permeate and shape our social imaginaries and assumes a simple passivity that encompasses us all. For example, Mattias vom Hau discusses how state policies moved beyond the realm of the political and permeated the social sphere by looking at how a state institutionalized rhetoric of nationalism in Mexico and Argentina lead to a shift in the perceptions and discourses of the population at large (2007). This occurred primarily through the

historic shift from a nationalism based on unity to a nationalism dictated by the majority. In the 19th century, the Mexican and Argentinean state purported an ideal of a united and strong nation whose success could only be determined by the cohesion of all members of society. Thus, both Mexico and Argentina linked the strength of the state to the co-operation between individuals. This rhetoric moved beyond the political sphere by fostering links between indigenous peoples, Hispanic immigrants and other citizens of the state. Using a similar discourse to that of multiculturalism, or the "melting pot," each person became tolerated within society because of his or her membership within the Mexican and Argentinean nations (8). Through the permeation of this state rhetoric, native groups within these regions were able to garner support from the citizens regarding claims about land or civil rights. Seeing a potential threat to the functioning of state power, the governments of Mexico and Argentina began to alter its own narrative, shifting policy based on a unified nationalism to one that benefitted the majority of the population, the Hispanic immigrants. As a result society became organized through more hierarchal racial lines as the idea of the unified state dwindled, with indigenous peoples now occupying a marginalized position, a sentiment that became perpetuated within their everyday lives (12). In this historical shift in Mexico and Argentina, what becomes illustrated is the permeation of the political sphere into the quotidian relationships that people engage in thereby underscoring the limitedness of viewing policy as separate from social life. Policy is more than simply a management tool relegated to the realm of the political and distanced from everyday social behaviour primarily because we are creatures that do more than receive; we listen, we mediate and we express. Therefore, multiculturalism should be transformed from concept to perspective.

"Political correctness" too circulates as a phantom sign, occupying a seemingly grounded space and temporality and yet its label is applied in a multitude of ways. One usage of PC

rhetoric posits it as a manner of discourse management, censorship or a reflection of the growing attention given to special interest groups. However it is also articulated as a way of reinforcing "appropriate" norms and behaviour through a shared acknowledgement and respect for alternative definitions of self (Dunant 1994). Rather than approach "political correctness" from a categorization based on binaries, I argue that a more fruitful way to think about such discourses is from a framework of performance. "PC" then is an everyday performance embodied and enacted in a multitude of ways corresponding to the personal, social, political and cultural histories, contexts and trajectories of each "self" that engages with it, elongating lines of taboo that are individual and shared in particular moments and spaces. Thus, "PC" becomes important not because of the function it serves but in the ways in which it lives and circulates in our contemporary Canadian imaginary.

The History of Multiculturalism and Political Correctness in Canada

The history of politically correct rhetoric in Canadian society is incomplete without an understanding of how PC discourses first emerged within the United States. In the US the development of PC rhetoric emerged out of a period of social movements. During the late 1960's, the growing discontent towards conservative social norms and US foreign policy became manifested within the emergence of numerous social movements, ideologies and groups.[1] The vocalization of so many marginalized narratives contributed to transformation of racism from being openly disseminated in society to becoming "…less prudent for Americans to espouse racial beliefs in public (Jackson 2008: 69)." In John L. Jackson's work *Racial Paranoia*, he attributes these changes in racist attitudes towards two social phenomenon: first, the framing of racial issues as a problem of morality, as seen through the effects of Martin Luther King Jr.'s

[1] This included feminist, gay-lesbian, Marxist and black activists, to name a few.

words in which he connected love for people to love for a higher power. Second, the technological efficiency of the television allowed graphic images of racial violence to be transmitted throughout people's homes. Jackson states that the power of the circulated image often trumped the state's attempts to disseminate one narrative about social interactions at the time (62-63). With the racial attitudes becoming less open and direct, people became much more aware of their language and discourses, as explained in the following: "Racialist responses were deemed offensive, hostile and insensitive and immediately connected the speakers to those water hoses and police dogs of yore that were set on young, defenseless peaceful, and decidedly Christian black marchers (68)." In an effort to distance themselves from the open racism of the past, American society focused on denouncing rhetoric seen as intolerant, not just within the population at large but within the tenets of scientific inquiry and the political system as well.[2] Thus, from the late 60's to the 80's the US began to adopt an attitude of politically correct rhetoric, although it was not necessarily denoted in those terms. During this period the phrase "politically correct" was used by activist groups as a form of satire (Brickell 2004: 106). In essence, it was meant to criticize activists who were overly self-righteous, humourless and rigid in their approaches to social movements. Furthermore, it was employed as a way to identify social movements that were dogmatic in their ideologies and practices. On the other hand, the phrase "politically incorrect" was used as a positive evaluation in which groups saw themselves as much more flexible in their approaches towards social protest (ibid). This usage of political correctness changed in the 90's largely through the influence of print journalism. Implementing a neoconservative rhetoric, many newspapers reframed the act of being politically correct as a

[2] Jackson describes how scholars such as William Shockley, who focused on racial differences through genetics, were ostracized by other members of the scientific community for being racist during the 1970's and 80's. Furthermore, in 1976 Earl Butz left his cabinet position for making negative comments about African-Americans (68-70).

threat to the "normal" way of life and freedom of speech. In doing so, "political correctness" became reified as a homogenous set of attitudes or groups of people that were antagonistic to the canons of society.[3] Furthermore, this homogenization of PC became intrinsically linked to movements like feminism, pacifism, environmentalism, and so forth, and at the same time rooted within the symbolism of tyranny, Fascism, Nazism, etc (106-107).

This historical narrative of PC emerges differently within the Canadian context in that it manifests through a long history of French-English relations and the resulting emergence of multicultural policy as governance. I argue that "multiculturalism" is a dialogue of "national survival" that has spanned both Canada's colonial history and its contemporary discussion of tolerance. In 1759 when England annexed New France from the French there were two potential policies that they entertained. First, was the radical adoption of both Protestantism and loyalty to the Queen of England or face exile. Second was to allow minute autonomy to the French, including keeping their religion and language, so long as they agreed to pay taxes to the English empire (Fenwick 1981:199-203). The reason this second option was considered was because when England took over Acadia previously from the French, they exiled most of the population of Acadia to contemporary Louisiana, thereby leaving little in terms of workforce and military strength (Plank 2003:166). Thus, in Lower Canada, due to the shared borders with volatile American colonies, maintaining strength in Quebec was vital. Therefore exiling became a less favourable option and instead the empire preferred to implement a policy of moderate tolerance (Fenwick: 199-203). The formalization of multiculturalism as a policy in Canada traces its origins to the establishment of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Innis 1973). In 1963 Lester B. Pearson created this committee to formally address the status of English

[3] This became most evident in the realm of academia which saw a wave of backlash against feminist, gay or lesbian, and visible minority scholars for challenging established traditions in knowledge production

and French relations across the country (ibid.). It was created in response to the *Quiet Revolution* that had occurred in Quebec between the years 1931-1970 and was seen as a way to help appease French Canadians in Quebec, by not only recognizing the French Canadian as an autonomous identity, but to give them a position equivalent to that of the Anglo Canadian (Gauvreau 2003: 1). After seven years, the commission declared that the Canadian nation was caught in an ideological crisis that threatened to dismantle the unity of its territory. As an attempt to resolve the growing discontent, the Commission made several recommendations, including one that called for the recognition of French and English as official languages thereby transforming Canada into a bilingual nation (ibid.). However, the Commission also made an informal recommendation to alter Canada's policy of assimilation towards a "multicultural" approach (ibid).[4] While there was a notable expression of opinion on behalf of various Native American groups and French-Canadians, Innis noted a large representation of immigrants who were interested in promoting their own heritages including the "Orientals" and Sikh men (ibid). This informal recommendation of multiculturalism laid the foundation for Trudeau, who not only passed the Official Languages Act (1969) that formally called for the equal respect of French and English, but made multiculturalism an official government policy in 1973 (ibid). In the mid-to-late 1980's Canada's birth rate had fallen to under two children per family (Statistics Canada 2012). Thus, as a response to declining population, Canada started implementing fairly open immigration policies. One of the ways Canada was able to market themselves to entice immigrants to come here was through the image of a "tolerant," "welcoming," "equal" and "diverse" nation, firmly entrenched by the adoption of the Multiculturalism Act in 1988 which consists of the following principles:

[4] Hugh Innis, the director of the Commission noted that the process of creating the recommendations was shaped through the culmination of town hall meetings that occurred across Canada, providing people the opportunity to speak about their thoughts on Canadian identity and the state of English-French relations at the time.

> **(a)** recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage...**(c)** promote the full and equitable participation of individuals and communities of all origins in the continuing evolution and shaping of all aspects of Canadian society and assist them in elimination of any barriers to such participation...**(e)** ensure that all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity...**(f)** encourage and assist the social, cultural, economic and political institutions of Canada to be both respectful and inclusive of Canada's multicultural character...**(j)** advance multiculturalism throughout Canada in harmony with national commitment to the official languages of Canada. (1988)

The Multicultural Act called for the enforcement of "respectful" attitudes and behaviors and the "elimination of any barriers to such participation" as a cornerstone of Canadian citizenship.

In summation, politically correct rhetoric came about in the US through a long period of social change marked by the successes of the Civil Rights and feminist movements. This sharply differed from the emergence of Canadian political correctness which arose as response to cultural tensions and changing demographics. Thus, we can question whether these policies of tolerance are motivated by principles of social justice or are part of larger strategies for governing.

The Growth of Toronto's Comedy Scene

Toronto has positioned itself as the epicentre of Canadian comedy with the development of culturally iconic performers and spaces during the early 1970's, a period commonly referred to as the comedy boom. This period saw comedy clubs sprouting up across the city and the amount of performers increase twofold. Some examples include Yuk Yuk's, a comedic space with immense success on the national circuit that was founded in 1976 in Toronto (Axler 2011), or Second City's live performance theatre which was first located in a loft above a fire department in 1972 (Thomas 1996). The type of comedy that became popular was not a slapstick

montage akin to the Three Stooges, but was comprised of jokes and humour that was notoriously "risqué." This referred to comedy that would often offend people's sensibilities by engaging with what many saw as inappropriate, or anti-PC, material including depictions of cross-dressing, sexuality, violence, usage of vulgarity, and so forth. Many notable performers and comedic icons who dabbled in this type of humour included Lorne Michaels, founder of the comedy institution *Saturday Night Live* and resident of the city of Toronto, and members of SCTV such as Rick Moranis, John Candy, Eugene Levy and Dave Thomas. As the city began to grow so did the amount of reputable names, culminating in the 1980's with the establishment of famous comedy troupes such as *Kids in the Hall*, and *the Royal Canadian Airfarce* and coinciding with a fresh crop of famous comedians like Jim Carrey, Martin Short, and John Walsh. On a more contemporary note, Russell Peters is one of the most notable comedians dealing with issues of race and ethnicity. He is often criticized for being extremely anti-PC and simply reinforcing the stereotypes of many groups of people (Tremonti 2011).

It is clear that comedy has become an important creative and expressive avenue of performance in Toronto. Given that Toronto is affectionately coined the "Multicultural City," (City of Toronto 2012) how can we account for the existence and growth in popularity of allegedly anti-PC performances within its borders? To reiterate the purpose of this work, this thesis aims to explore the nature of the relationship between risque stand-up comedy and discourses of political correctness in spite of its popularly imagined dialectical framing. Furthermore, this dissertation will question the impact of this relationship on the contemporary discussions about issues of discrimination in Canada.

Chapter 1: Joking in Hogtown

Toronto

The city of Toronto, Canada is the fifth largest metropolis in North America and is located on the northern shoreline of Lake Ontario. Its area encompasses 641 square kilometres, stretching 43 km east-west and 21 km north-south. The city is enveloped by a suburban region known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) consisting of four municipalities: Durham, Halton, Peel and York, and contains nearly 6 million people. Toronto, having a population of approximately 2.6 million people, is broken up into 4 Community Councils, 44 Wards and over 140 neighbourhoods (City of Toronto).

The city is considered one of the most multicultural cities in the world. In 2006, Toronto held 8% of the national population, 30% of all recent immigrants and 20% of all immigrants to Canada. Between the years of 2001 and 2006, Toronto took in over 200,000 immigrants. Out of the total population of 2.6 million, over half of its residents were born outside of Canada and roughly 1.16 million Torontonians identified themselves as a visible minority. The five most common visible minority groups identified were South Asian, comprising about 12% of Toronto's population, East Asian (11.4%), African-American (8.4%), Filipino (4.1%) and Latin American (2.6%). On the 2006 census, residents of Toronto identified with more than 200 different cultural/racial/ethnic groups. Approximately 47% of the population has a mother tongue in a language other than English or French with the most spoken languages being Chinese, Italian, Punjabi, Tagalog and Portuguese (ibid, Statistics Canada 2006).

These statistical figures have allowed the city of Toronto to display itself as the ideal "Multicultural City." Politicians stand upon the platform of its diversity, as the citizens are encouraged to explore the world for the price of a bus ride with Greece as close as Danforth, India at Gerrard and China right at the heart of Spadina. Going beyond an attempt at encouraging tourism, Toronto as a "Multicultural City" claims to provide an ideal welcoming atmosphere to the immigrant populations that are increasingly settling within the area. There is an agreement that their "culture" will be accepted with open arms and that their beliefs will be embraced by the city and its citizens (City of Toronto)**.** With multiculturalism publicized on the streets of Toronto, the atmosphere within the offices of Bay Street and the Parliamentary buildings of Queen's Park is of a different flavour as this "tolerance" becomes institutionalized and subsumed into policy, better understood as political correctness**.** The policy of political correctness has been described as discourse management used in hopes to curb verbal discrimination of an individual or group based on race, gender or capacity. Its goal is said to promote equality, tolerance and respect towards all members of society through a focus on language and behaviour (Suhr and Johnson 2003). Through political correctness a framework of what constitutes acceptable behavior and speech appears, so that anything that is thought of as being contradictory to these principles would be categorized as being anti-politically correct (Scott: 12). Thus, when a particular social actor like a comedian is deemed to violate these rules through their performances, their acts become demarcated as anti-politically correct.

Methodology

My research was conducted primarily through "participant observation" and discussions at two comedy spaces in Toronto, Yuk Yuk's and Absolute Comedy, during the summer months of 2011. This research included extended visits to these clubs to both observe the spatial context

of stand-up comedy and its performance, as well as to speak with comedians and members of the audience. At these comedy clubs I conducted "participant observation" both backstage and as a member of the audience. Here I refer to participant observation not as a method in which I assume passivity as an observer, rather my role encompassed the active tasks of viewing, listening and being an embodied spectator within the performance itself (Madison 2012: 177, 186). The goal was to gauge the aesthetic form of performance and gain a sense of how performers produce their art in specific temporal and spatial contexts, and conduct in-depth dialogues with comedians as well as people who visit these comedic spaces in order to analyze the performances themselves and how audiences consume them. Through these in depth conversations I focused on the production of social utterances used to frame comic performances and the subtlety at work in the usage of politically correct language; social utterances which not only index comedians and the audience's identities but also the discourse of political correctness which is imbued within their spectacles (Bauman 2005)**.** While at these comedy clubs, the themes that were engaged by both the stand-up comedians and their audiences included: their insight into how comedy is produced and consumed, their thoughts and understanding of political correctness, their awareness of the history of political correctness, their conceptualization of racism (and other discursive ideologies), and their opinions or appreciations of these comedy clubs as a form of expressive resistance, if any.

Yuk Yuk's

Yuk Yuk's is an extremely popular comedy club on a national level, its locations prominent in other cities such as Montreal and Ottawa. In downtown Toronto, it is located on Richmond Street in the heart of the Entertainment District, known for its proximity to major Canadian television channels and performative arts spaces. The age distribution of the

neighbourhood comprises mostly working age adults, largely represented by 25-40 year olds. It has a lower average of both number of visible minorities and immigrants in the area compared to the rest of Toronto. The neighbourhood itself is quite wealthy with a majority of the families earning over $100,000 a year (City of Toronto).

The club stands against the background of a large grey building, its walls rough and scraping against the busy city dwellers as they pass by. On a regular weekday, the club blends into the urban space with the exception of a scrolling marquee against the side of the building. On a weekend, or a special event night, red velvet ropes split the sidewalk allowing for lineups to gather outside the club wall, as they stand bathed in the light of several bright spotlights. Carved into the side of the building is a small ticket booth office, its glass pulled down most of the way with the exception of a small hole into which customers can purchase tickets. Patrons then head through a heavy set of brown doors and almost immediately after entering, directed down a set of dimly lit stairs towards the basement. Entering, one is greeted by the wafting smell of beer and the sight of people bustling around them as they are pierced by the penetrating gazes of many of the club's past performers, immortalized as photographs on the wall. Lining the back of the room are several tall booths that seat four or five people, its path leading to the "green room," a space where the comics sit and wait prior to their performance. The stage is comprised of black wooden floor panels, a wooden stool and a purple wall with the logo of Yuk Yuk's hanging to the side. At the front of the stage stands a tall black adjustable microphone, its wires disappearing into a small hole in the floor. The stage itself quite large, taking up most of the front wall and distinguishes itself as the feature in the room. Immediately surrounding the stage are rows of black tables and chairs oriented strategically to give the room the illusion of length. Beyond this lies additional seating serving to effectively cocoon the stage and the audience in a

moment of intimacy. The decor of the room is very dark, with light coming from wall lamps prior to the performances only to be replaced by the direct spotlights that are attached to the ceiling during the act. In addition, there are black speakers located on a few of the corners of the room that carries the voice of the performers throughout the space. Additionally located on the ceiling near the spotlights, is a set of video recording equipment and the "red light" that comedians see when they are performing, signalling how much time they have left in their act. Often the status of the performer determines how much time one has to perform with more notable professional comedians receiving longer sets than amateur ones.

Absolute Comedy

Absolute Comedy is an independent club that first opened in Ottawa in 2003 and because of its success; it eventually added a second location in Toronto. It is located in an area of the city known as Midtown, aptly named for its distance from Downtown Toronto. Similar to the neighbourhood of Yuk Yuk's, it too consists of predominantly a middle class neighbourhood. However, Midtown represents an older demographic between the ages of 25-59. In terms of "diversity", almost 40% of the neighbourhood houses immigrants, with many of them having recently arrived in Toronto. The income level is similar to that of Downtown Toronto, in which many family incomes register over $100,000 annually (City of Toronto).

Absolute Comedy presents its patrons with a completely different look and feel as compared to Yuk Yuk's. The building itself is quite hidden, located underneath an often crowded bar and surrounded by a mishmash of retail and dining establishments. The clue that identifies the comedy club is a lighted green and purple sign with the icon of a platypus holding a microphone and the words Absolute comedy printed on it. Entering the building it is striking

how different the spatial organization of Absolute compared to Yuk Yuk's, with the biggest difference coming from a separation of a pub/restaurant and the performance space. Within this pub space, there is a notably well stocked bar that lines a corner of the room. During my many visits to Absolute, the bar always served as a more relaxed social gathering spot where I could converse with both the comedians and audience members. The middle of the room consisted of mostly large and small tables as well as a raised area of a pool table and a rack of cues. This spot was yet another place where the members of the audience and performers relaxed and talked after the shows. Walking past those one finally comes to the box office. Instead of it being a tiny room carved out into the side of the building, the box office at Absolute is a slightly bigger room full of pictures, papers, a computer, and of course the manager of the club. Heading down a long hallway towards the "club" space several elements of the room stand out. While the decor is still dark, the wall of the club space is lined with mirrors, giving the illusion of a larger space. The room is also multi-leveled. On the back of the highest level, there are multiple tables and chairs spaced behind a black curtain. This curtain is closed if the show is not completely sold out and left open for additional seating and/or the filming of the stand-up performance. On the very bottom level at the front of the room several small tables, meant for groups of two, surround the stage. These tables are well lit because the comedian always interacts with those sitting in the front seats, as shown in the following example from a stand-up performance I watched:

> Tonight a lone middle-aged man was sitting at the front of the stage, a fact that was pointed out by the comedians during the show. During one of the MC's sets he asked the man at the table if he was here alone tonight. The man flashed a big grin and replied with an enthusiastic yes. The audience gave him a large round of applause as the MC continued to interact with him. The MC told him that the show was going to get vulgar and that he wanted him to do something important. The MC wanted him to keep track of how many masturbation jokes were going to be made during the course of the performance. The man nodded and the MC continued on with his material. As the night went on, the MC checked back in with the man periodically and asked him if he was still keeping track of the masturbation jokes. The MC then pretended as if both of them were completing a check-list of vulgar jokes and asked for the man's opinion on whether they had accomplished this. The audience gave him another round of applause in appreciation.

It becomes an unspoken rule when attending these comic shows, that sitting around the stage gives automatic consent to the comedian to draw you into the act. Consequently both the audience and the performer expect you to engage in this role without spoiling the fun of the performance.

It is necessary to understand the spatial arrangement of these two clubs as having both different and similar elements that foster the illusion of performance that occurs within the spaces. As such, the performative act is never removed from its environment and it is the subtleties of these spaces that give insight into how these performative encounters are derived in temporal and spatial moments.

Literature Review

First, I will draw upon the notion of performance as a mode of speaking, as espoused by Erving Goffman and Richard Bauman. Goffman's (1974) work on frame analysis extrapolated on the ways people come to interpret different situations through the use of a personal archive composed of social, historical and political symbols and consequently how they come to identify the everyday performative encounters that they enter. Building of these principles Bauman's (1977, 1986) work highlights how performance develops an interpretive frame that contextualizes the messages being communicated.[5] Consequently, performance involves a responsibility on the part of the performer to their audience. The performer must display a confluence of subject matter and performative skill in socially appropriate temporal and spatial settings in order for the audience to interpret the messages being communicated through the act. These performances are dependent upon the social roles that people undertake during each

[5] Frame refers to ways of understanding particular messages, thus an interpretive frame suggests that the ideas being communicated through performances are not to be taken literally, but hold deeper meanings which can be teased out by the performer and their audience (Goffman 1974).

encounter, rooted within the mediation between front-stage performances that occur in front of an audience or back-stage identities that occur outside of those performative encounters (Goffman, 1958: 252). The audience is further imbued with the task of evaluating the performer based on their performative competence and whether there was a sense of enjoyment. Therefore, performances based upon utterances can be understood as ways of speaking that remain rooted within both the content and the aesthetic quality of the acts, while drawing a deep connection between those who perform and those who engage (Bauman 2000:3).

Comedy can be understood within this framework of interpretive performances. Comedic performances are imbued with a sense of promise in that the performers are obligated to demonstrate a skill in narrative-telling to their audience in such a way that the content and aesthetics are spatially and temporally appropriate and that there is an enhancement of enjoyment within the performative experience. This is seen in my interview with Geoff, in his response to the role of the comedian:

> Well it's exactly how you just said to make people laugh. That's the goal, if you can do that you can make money, at least consistently. Some comics who I know they're really ignorant or indignant to the audience and they say "Well I'm going to do what I wanna do, I'm not there to please the audience" Well my theory is you kind of are because this club is paying you money and these people are paying money and they don't want some guy yelling about his political beliefs and making them feel like shit just because he's going to be this edgy comic, you know? I think that you have a right, a responsibility to the audience to make them laugh, however you want to do that that's up to you but you have to make them laugh.

Here Geoff identifies that key point to any good comedic performance is to be funny primarily because it is an obligation to the audience. Austin refers to this obligation to entertain as a "felicity" by which he means the utterances and conditions necessary for the entire action to be carried out smoothly (1962:14). Moreover, the audiences in these comedic spaces are given the task of validating comedic performances, either through laughter or jeers. The expectation of appropriate content, aesthetic ability and overall pleasure must be fulfilled in order for the act to

carry meaning as a performance (Goffman, 1958: 248)**.** In essence, for a performance to be successfully identified as such and thereby communicate the message being disseminated through the act, the audience must be placed in a position where they can evaluate the performance in a positive manner or label the act as "good." This can only be done if the performer expresses this message in a manner that the audience finds favourable. Though the illusion of the act can become broken or the act can fail to communicate the messages if the performer uses inappropriate skill and/or content. One example comes out of my fieldwork:

> A young man confidently walks up on the stage, his chest puffed out slightly to mediate the nervousness he must feel as he performs to a room that is almost full. He looks relatively comfortable on the stage as he coolly draws the microphone from the stand and begins to walk around the stage in short, slow circles. Unlike many of the other performers, he does not seem to need a notebook or paper with jokes written on them in front of him. He seems pretty sure he can control this crowd and for the first bit of his set that is the case, his loud, clear voice easily capturing the attention of the audience. That however changes really quickly as he tries to be a little risqué with his material and throws in a quip about Amy Winehouse's death and alcohol (she had just passed away the day prior). Almost immediately the audience shrinks back as if trying to create a bit of distance and their laughter falters. The audience provides a collective "Oooh" that is so harmonious that it causes the performer to chuckle at the audience's reaction. He then decides to try an even riskier joke, one which focused on violently hurting Norway's mass shooter because of what he claimed was Norway's lenient justice system. Almost immediately, the crowd went silent. There was not even a single chuckle throughout the audience. People began to avert their eyes and just stayed quiet for the rest of his performance. The young man tried to bring people back into the performance but after a few minutes of cold silence left the stage with his head hung.

Here we see that the performance becomes broken as soon as the performer does something the audience does not like, in this case they become removed from the illusion by what they see as inappropriate content. The performance becomes stripped of the meaning it would have had if it was successful and the message being disseminated through his verbal utterances becomes invisible. A qualification needs to be made in that the failure or success of the performance is not universal. One cannot predict the conditions necessary for an act to be "good" or "bad" because it is shaped through a highly variable set of circumstances including, but certainly not limited to, the audience, political circumstances, etc.

In addition, I utilize Bakhtin's conceptualization of dialogical social utterances to frame comedic performances. In a dialogical approach towards language, meanings are constructed in interactional processes that pay close attention to a temporal and spatial orientation of social utterances (Bakhtin 1981:263,324). In this sense, these interactional processes involve not only authors of utterances, but also the linguistic content and the audience that engages with it. In comedy spaces, performance is dependent upon the interaction between the performer, their subject material and the audience that indulges in these spaces. The stand-up comedian draws upon their individual skill through elements of comic timing and delivery, to borrow concepts from other discourses and then reinterpret them within specific spatial and temporal contexts thereby creating an image of the original discourse. The comedian can discuss local and international topics including politics and social or cultural phenomena. In addition the comedian can draw upon their personal biographies, like sexual orientation or ethnicity, to shape their comedic performances. Moreover, the comedic performer must package their material for audiences that engage with these spaces. The audience that chooses to engage within these comedic activities is not a passive entity but in fact takes active responses towards the comedic performances, either through validating them by laughter or disagreeing through silence or jeers. The essential part of understanding dialogical social utterances is not to view these elements as disparate but as continually conversing (ibid: 314,324,411). The comedian needs individual performative skill to draw upon subject matter and present it to the audience in a manner that would induce an active response from them, all the while paying attention to their temporal and spatial limitations.

The relationship between dialogical utterances and comedic performances stems from these interactional processes and their capacity to connect historical moments to each other in

social life while circulating through society and time (Besnier 1990; Agha 2005)**.** Each performance within a comedic space uses elements of the past as foundational material by drawing out themes, such as events or ideologies, and incorporating their narratives. In other words they use material that has travelled throughout social life in order to obtain a life of their own, one that circulates temporally and spatially. Such a dialogical concept of utterances can also bring into analysis a subject's biographical history that shapes their ability to use and construe utterances to index identities and social phenomenon (Bauman 2005). They also alert us to the fact that all utterances are, to a certain extent, ideologically informed, providing ways of thinking about authority and power in speech and identity (Derrida 1981).

In my examination of comedic spaces and the alleged counter-discourse produced and confined within the comedy clubs, I am also drawing on the notion of the *carnival* as discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984). The carnival is a temporal and spatial suspension of what is deemed appropriate behaviour and language. It is a spirit which supposedly dissolves authoritative discourse and social hierarchies thereby making everybody equal within that space and time through the use of parody (10-17).[6] Viewing them as carnivalesque, comedic spaces seemingly suspend authoritative discourse temporarily where it can become ridiculed and laughed upon. In the case of political correctness, the discourse management that occurs outside of the comedic space is made subject to ridicule by comedians who utilize "inappropriate" words in an excessive display, while engaging the audience to laugh with them. This ridicule dissolves the formal order and allows for the removal of social hierarchies. World leaders, everyday people, and even the comedian are made equal under the comedic gaze through their capacity to be laughed at. Nonetheless, the carnival is demarcated by space and time and thus parody's ability to penetrate

[6] By creating mirror images of the society that the carnival operates within, it manipulates its reflections through parodic mocking and transforms them to become excessive, grotesque and barely recognizable to its original form.

cannot extend out of the carnivalesque space **(**ibid.). Like the carnival, these comedy clubs cannot be seen as a form of counter-discourse – in this case, as a form of frontal attack on political correctness – but rather, as having nothing more than a dialogue with it. It is precisely for this reason that it can only be counterproductive. Hence, it would seem wrong to continue to interpret creative expression as resistance in the romantic language that emphasizes the resilience of the masses (Abu-Lughod 1990) or as a function of the binary oppositions in conventional analyses of movements of indiscipline and revolt e.g. counter-discourse, counter-society, counter-hegemony, "the second society."

Often in anthropological literature, humour has been posited as separate to the tropes of "seriousness" that academic knowledge often puts forth (Carty and Musharbash 2008: 210-212). As such this topic has been given limited consideration, with the few exceptions coming from Radcliffe-Brown (1940) in his discussion of South African "joking relationships," Handelman's (1972) comparative analysis regarding joking activities in Zambia and Basso's (1979) examination of western Apache "wise words" which combine humour and metaphor to provide explanations of the "whiteman." Most of the work on humour comes from outside the tenets of anthropological inquiry, such as Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) work on the parodic nature of carnival and Sigmund Freud's (1916, 1963) work on the strategic implementation of humour as a coping mechanism.

Some of the current understandings of humour emphasize two characteristics: first, the content of humourous narratives are a reflection of the tensions that constitute social life, in other words, often humour occurs when there is a loss of control or a sense of unease about the authoritative discourses that govern our worlds. Thus, it is viewed as a form of expressive

resistance.[7] Second, humour is a shared dimension of social life meaning that people are drawn together in the communicative act (Bauman 1986). In the first sense, my research will move away from framing laughter as primarily reactionary and as a form of resistance. Rather, I wish to emphasize that performers and their performances are actively borrowing from historical moments to create a life of their own, meaning that the reasons for the expression of humour are subtle and dynamic and cannot be reduced to a causal relationship with events. By this I mean that humour is not always a reaction to different situations but can also shape how we interpret different moments and give form to them. I also want to avoid romanticizing comedic acts as forms of "resistance" primarily through a focus on the carnivalesque aspect of these performances. In the second aspect, my research will build upon the understanding that laughter is shared to suggest that the picture is significantly more complex. However, laughter is not just shared, but is filled with tension, fractures and dialogue that brings a deeper level of connections between those involved in the joke. My research will also contribute to shaping the role of humour in anthropological literature. Laughter and humour take shape across the world on many different levels with varying form and content. On a broad sense, humourous confrontation with authoritative discourses circulates, yet it remains exclusively localized, thereby making this a distinctly anthropological line of inquiry. My research will keep in the spirit of anthropological work, like Alexeyeff's (2008) research into Cook Islanders joking as a response to globalization and Dwyer and Minnegal's (2008) self-reflexive examination of the circulation of jokes between anthropologists and the people they work with, in order to highlight the potential an analysis of the dynamic nature of humour can provide.

[7] For example, Meddaugh (2010) argues that the usage of humour within shows like *The Colbert Report* challenge authoritative discourses and makes them subject to public critique.

Chapter 2: A Performance of Laughter

Performance

Performance theory has been influential in the analysis of acts located within theatre and dance such as Puccini's Madame Butterfly to the delicate *pas de deux* of the Black Swan in Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake. Yet the borders of what constitutes the stage, the shape of the acts themselves and the nature of both performer and audience are in a constant state of flux, problematizing the idea of an essence of performance and suggesting new avenues of exploration. While our interest about humour lies pressed within the pages of the classical word or within the philosophical and psychological frameworks of laughter, there nonetheless exists a performance that is rooted within the expression of everyday experience; that of stand-up comedy. This chapter will establish stand-up comedy as a legitimate form of performative inquiry by demonstrating its circulation as an act. Through an understanding of performance keying and framing, I will explore in detail how stand-up comedy's expressive elements are mediated in the ways in which people come to understand the performance as a whole. In addition, I will explore how individuals occupy particular social roles as they enter into the performative encounter and the implications this has for the comic avenue of expression. I will also explore the nature of the verbal utterances that are integral to the success of the stand-up comic act and its circulation through the audience. Finally, I will look at the aesthetics of the performance in reiterating the social force of the verbal utterances.

Theoretical understandings of performance often fall under three camps. First, the framing of performance as experience, which is explained by Turner in the following:

> ...the anthropology of performance is an essential part of the anthropology of experience. In every sense, every type of cultural performance, including ritual, ceremony, carnival, theatre, and poetry, is explanation

> and explication of life itself...Through the performance process itself, what is normally sealed up, inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning, in the depth of sociocultural life, is drawn forth..."meaning" is squeezed out of an event which has either been directly experienced by the dramatists of poet, or cries out for penetrative, imaginative understanding. An experience itself a process, which "presses out" to an "expression" which completes it. (1988: 26)

What Turner is exploring here is the idea that performance becomes an expression of the experiences that occur in our lives (ibid).[8] As we travel through the everyday, every so often certain moments happen that interrupt this normal flow. To fully reflect upon this experience we need to express it, moving it from the realm of the individual to the shared. This perspective is limiting because it constructs a linear relationship between circumstances and the performative action (Madison, 2012). In other words, every performance can be traced back to an articulated event. This conflates the importance and meaning of the subject matter as the root of performance and effectively limits consideration of actors who construct their biographies through their performances, including the comedians and the audience. Thus, rather than being solely rooted within the event, it is possible that performative expression and evaluation by an audience is a necessary part of giving form to experiences.

The second framework views performance as a type of social behaviour, positing that our social realities are constructed and organized through a "metaphor of dramatic action."[9] Through these acts our identities and behaviour are reflected, thereby helping us shape who we are and who we want to be. In addition Goffman (1959) contributes to this framework by exploring individuals' daily interactions, and how people engage within these encounters and as these moments move through particular cultural scripts. He examines how in each daily encounter,

[8] In other words, performance is linked to a combination of aesthetics and the surrounding context, also referred to as the event. Take for example the interaction between a person and their friends in which they are expressing a car accident they were involved with. The act of storytelling falls under the realm of aesthetic expression while the car accident itself circulates as a moment of interruption from the normal day, and is thereby considered the event that gives rise to the performance.

[9] This can be seen through Turner's (1982) exploration of how cultural performances are "...self conscious and symbolic acts that are presented and communicated within a circumscribed space (11).

individuals perform in front-stage and back-stage dramas and that these dramas shape the relationship between the performer and the audience.

The third framework looks at performance and its relationship to language and identity. This perspective looks at how utterances are implicated within the performative encounter and the social force that these words have in shaping a particular reality. Austin is the most notable for his work on how language is made up of performative utterances; words that ***do*** something. Derrida extrapolates upon this by looking at the complex ways in which meanings come to hold the power that they do through his concept of deconstruction.[10] Deconstruction then is the examination of these hierarchical relationships between words and their meanings and a reframing of these totalities as being inextricably linked to one another, as their existence is defined through each other rather than despite it (Derrida 1981: ix).

In essence, the notion of performance that I will be utilizing takes into account the point at which the frameworks intersect in order to explore the circulation of stand-up comedy as an act. I propose that performances are based on two principles of interaction: First, that each performance is imbued with a sense of promise. Whether this is a promise to entertain, educate, or so forth does not necessarily matter because it puts the focus on determining the functionality of a performance. Second, that the promise is received with an evaluatory response, be it a "good" or "bad" performance.

[10] Derrida posits a criticism against Western metaphysics in which he identifies that words and meanings are organized in hierarchical binaries, meaning that each pair is defined as a totality that is either positive or negative. For example, the binary of good and evil can be seen as two distinct conceptions where one is attributed as a positive which is valued over the opposite negative term.

Frames and Keys

The nature of stand-up comedy as a performance has yet to be articulated in the same manner as performances like theatre and dance but perhaps its analysis can draw of an understanding of the act as a social performance. Erving Goffman provides an interesting starting point in the analysis of performance through his development of frame analysis as intellectual inquiry. According to Pickering (2005), Frame analysis is the:

> ...process by which we attempt to make sense of what we perceive in human behaviour given that people are invariably engaged in playing a role of some kind. These roles enable us to negotiate relationships and various kinds of transactions but they only have meaning if they are framed to allow others to read what is going on (93).

In essence, this analysis explores the ways in which we utilize a repertoire of symbols and meanings, developed through our daily social interactions, to interpret a situation that we are confronted with (Goffman 1959). Richard Bauman (1978) further highlights the idea that performance is rooted in the establishment of an interpretive frame in which all the messages communicated are to be understood.[11] Granted, one could question as to what sense the interpretive frame is established through performance? Is it consistent from performance to performance or even within a single performance/encounter? How do individual actors engage with the interpretive frame? Nonetheless, both Goffman and Bauman use frames and keys as individual units to which to analyze performances. Frames are the set of historical, social, cultural and political archetypes that individuals draw upon to make sense of a particular set of messages that are being communicated to them (Goffman 1974). Keys are the signs that

[11] These messages can include insinuation, imitation, translation, quotation and joking to name a few.

transition us from a "real" or literal scenario to a fictional one, an important foundation for understanding comic performances (ibid; Bauman 1978).[12]

Let us take the example of Stephen Colbert and his television show *The Colbert Report*. The show begins with a prelude that encompasses rapid *pun-ditry* before the squawk of an American Bald Eagle. This alongside an emphatic musical opening in which Colbert is seen rotating as a giant American flag frames the background. After greeting the audience, his first segment takes the form of traditional news highlights combining images/news clips from breaking stories with extremely "right-wing" commentary on the issue or interviews with people involved (Boyer and Yurchak 2010). Interrupted by flashy computer generated segments, most of his show consists of interviews with a variety of people including celebrities, politicians, etc. in which he often challenges them in a way that they are often put on the defensive. While this show can be taken as literal, and indeed this sometimes is the case, the show is in fact satirical on all counts. The character of Stephen Colbert is an extreme right-wing pundit who works off sound bites, segments and *shock-tainment* in order to promote the sense of fear and ignorance that traditional media sources rely on in their relaying of the "news." (ibid.) Yet it is generally understood that Colbert is mocking these media outlets because most people interpret the show though an interpretive frame. The messages are understood to be parodic and not literal, because of the recognition of keys that guide the audience to this framing of the performance. The creation of satirical images and texts, voice and mannerisms, a conventionally disseminated understanding of the boundaries of the genre, his overtly bloated ego and emphatic sloganeering, like the title of his bestselling novel *I am America and so can You* (2007) all act as symbolic

[12] Bauman extrapolates on a few of these keys although they are primarily textual features such as: special codes, figurative language such as the construction of metaphor, parallelism through the repetition of particular elements in an utterance to signify a conventional form, special paralinguistic features such as variation on voice or tone, special formulae that allow the audience to identify a particular genre, appeal to tradition through a reference to previously understood tenets of varying genres and the most obvious a disclaimer of performance (ibid).

guides to the audience. When comparing Colbert to the primary targets of his satire, he is able to depict sarcasm by leaving the realm of reason and playing upon the performance of the irrational. On the contrary, his targets project themselves as "serious" by utilizing a trail of "logic" and "facts" to justify their position and ideologies. Where Colbert will reject facts on the account of his gut, the subjects of his mockery will reject facts by manufacturing their own. Thus, the keys that Colbert uses in his performance become easily recognizable to their audience and consequently to the development of a satirical frame in which to take the utterances. This use of keys to frame performance is also visible in live performances like stand-up comedy.

In stand-up performance there are several keys that signify the transition from "reality" to performance and more often than not these keys work together to do so. The transition from the "city space" to the "club space" signifies a change in "reality;" one has entered the performance space and is very aware that they are expected to be a spectator within this demarcated area. However the mere entering of the space does not signify the performance has began; rather this transition is slow and based on the recognition and interpretation of multiple signs, as shown through the following observation during one of my fieldwork encounter:

> This place is also very loud. There is a constant chatter by the audience that sweeps through the room. I pick up snippets of conversations revolving around bad bosses, things on the internet, places to visit in the city and so forth. At this point in time and space, it's a hodgepodge of conversations and personalities. From the corner of my eye I notice flashes, a group of girls are taking pictures of each other. Of course, this is a very noticeable act because I'm sitting in a dim room but I have to wonder if people are performing themselves in this space.

In the comedy club, these spaces cannot hold its noted ceremonious effect without an active performance taking place. This is why there many patrons in the club engaging in social interactions like gossiping, laughing, recollecting, taking photographs, ordering and so forth. Even though a microphone and stool stand in front of a traditional comic brick wall, those keys only pick up partial significance. It is not until the "moving" keys, ones that directly catch

people's attention, are added that social reality appears to be transformed from the literal to performative. Again, from my field notes:

> The room isn't full though and yet I noticed that the people who work in the club had closed the curtains at the back, thereby hiding the empty seats from view and making the space much more intimate. Music starts blaring from speakers placed throughout the room. I recognize the song as Eminem's "Lose Yourself." As the song plays the crowd becomes quiet in anticipation and the room becomes dark except for tiny candle on the tables and a bright spotlight focused against the faux brick wall on stage in the centre of the room, with the focal point being the microphone stand at centre-stage.

Another key appears when the curtains at the back are drawn closed symbolically sealing the audience within the illusion of the upcoming performance. Almost immediately, the conversation in the room starts dwindling as people start moving their chairs towards the stage in anticipation. The playing of the music drowns out any remaining conversation and the transition from "reality" to the performance becomes more apparent:

> An omniscient voice speaks out in a tone that is reminiscent of any late show announcers and introduces the MC for tonight's performance who then bounds up on stage. He begins by introducing himself in a loud, commanding voice. He pumps up the crowd by asking them how they are. When a performer asks the crowd a question it is expected that the question be answered collectively, loudly and often repetitively. Sure enough, this crowd roared with enthusiasm.

With the arrival of the MC, the harbinger of the act and the first comic utterance, the audience is aware that they are subsumed within a performance and consequently they can identify that they should take an interpretive frame towards the performance.

Roles

One problem with framing analysis is that it views performances as texts, the implication of which suggests that they are penetratable inside and out, essentially readable to the outside observer (Hopkins et al, 1974). Furthermore, there is a potential to reduce the dynamism of performances to a mere reading of the frames and keys within them. While there is recognition of the establishment and shifting of frames in any interpretation of a situation, there is very little attention paid to how frames are internally shifting and invoked as well. Essentially in what ways

do the actors engaged in the interpretation affect the invocation of frames? In the Colbert case, while the idea is to interpret the situation satirically, how does the performer and the audience actually consume parody? Are these predictable within the given conventionality of the frame? I propose that while looking at frames and keys is important, Goffman's other extrapolation on performance gives us a further guide into understanding how stand-up comic performances work. Goffman argues that every person engages in performativity in their everyday lives and therefore all of us are acting in a particular role, albeit these roles are never a complete extrapolation of our identity (1959). Our task as homo *performans* (Turner 1985) is to carry out a variety of performances thereby engaging and negotiating our roles according to the various social interactions that occurs. Each social interaction can be defined as an encounter in which we see the interplay of performing selves. Every actor in the drama engages in both front-stage and back-stage performances of their roles.[13] However each encounter is made up of the interplay of those two performances embedded within the notion of promise (ibid.). Rather than approaching performance from a textual understanding of frames and keys, a more fruitful analysis will look at how the performing self comes to interpret frames and keys. This is illustrated by Dave's comments about heckling in stand-up acts:

> It's usually a drunk individual whose angry at himself or angry at the show or sometimes he's just heckling because he's being a dick and it happens. Sometimes you'll run into somebody where they'll act like you have offended them because something happened in their life, say their girlfriend broke up with them and they're at the show, you say something and they take it the wrong way and they're just yelling at you because of their emotion that they faced that day, so it's really not even at you...

It is easy to discount heckling as mere antics by members of the audience, and certainly this is something that is experienced so often that comics have come to accept it as part of the performance. However, despite whether or not these are antics, the interruption of comic

[13] A front-stage performance occurs in the visibility of an audience whereas back stage takes place beyond the evaluators gaze. Each actor in the encounter promises to fulfill their front-stage roles in a way for the audience to evaluate them positively

performances sheds light on the problem of stating that the audience engages with the act by invoking the same interpretive frame in a consistent manner. Even though the keying of the space often identifies the figurative frame as the appropriate one to use during the comic performance hecklers invoke their own interpretations onto performances based upon the utterances expressed during the show and based on their own individual characteristics; their own enacting of social roles within the performative encounter.[14]

The Utterance

In stand-up comedy the spoken word has a significant presence. It can determine whether a performance is successful or a failure, it can signify the skill of the performer involved or it can turn a performative space into an interactive one. Yet our understanding of comic utterances is reduced to a static play and/or expression of language. In Keith Basso's *Wise Words of the Western Apache* (1979) he criticizes the circulation of one assumption when it comes to understanding these utterances: that the performed word in this comic space and time are to be taken literally. This means that the utterances are taken to be pure and objective descriptions of reality and consequently they can be subjected to the same notions of truth and falsity that "serious" utterances are subjected to. Each word and phrasing takes on a universal meaning, separated from other words and phrasing by pure linguistic construction like syntax and vocabulary (ibid). This play strips the word of its own meaning and yet stands against the backdrop of the performance. The question then becomes, how does one even begin to

[14] In essence, everyone brings their own subjectivities into each of these stand-up shows and as a result they react differently to the material expressed. Even though the comic performances communicate to the audience that they are to take everything as a joke, there are still people that treat the acts less seriously, like hecklers, or people that take it literally, as seen in the cases where people become offended. This in essence means that frames and keys are not interpreted consistently enough to be the only markers of performance.

understand the dynamism of the comic act without then understanding the shifting nature of the spoken word?

Austin understood this nature of a world in which social utterances are portrayed as "statements" in which their entire purpose is to describe the social reality that they encounter. He calls these constantive utterances. However, Austin explored the notion that there were utterances which transcended such limits, and instead focused on the signification of words (6-7). Austin labels these as performative utterances, whose very nature is instrumental in the shaping of an act or a performance.[15] One may feel obliged to state that there is a separation between the words spoken during a performance and those spoken outside it and as a result it is possible to still divide social reality as consisting of two utterances, the constantive and the performative. However Austin notes that this distinction lacks grounding because of the difficulty between distinguishing the two types of utterances (ibid.). Therefore utterances cannot simply be as mere descriptions of reality because of they are always embedded with a sense of performance.

Austin's work on performative utterances is limited on two fronts. First, he creates a distinction between the utterances used by stage performers and quotidian utterances and consciously excludes the former from the scope of his analysis. This can be seen in the following:

> ...as utterances our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect all utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: A performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manor to any and every utterance-a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways-intelligibly-used not seriously, but in ways parasitic

[15] For instance, he states the utterances "I Do" are pivotal to the performance of marriage because of the action conveyed through the words (8).

> upon its normal use- ways which fall on the doctrine of the etiolations of language. All of this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (21-22)

In this passage Austin is making a distinction between what he sees as "ordinary" utterances and those embedded within special circumstances. He views such special performances as being "hollow," "void" and "parasitic" upon what he calls the "normal" use of language. He states they are in themselves infelicities, or ways in which the action can go wrong (14).[16] In essence, he views these special performances as not circulating thoughts, feelings or intentions that are consistent with the verbal utterances being disseminated to audiences. While Austin's extrapolation of infelicities is illuminating, his reasoning for the exclusion of "special" utterances like those that occur during stage performances or poetry become much more complicated when taking into account other examples of performances. Let us take the example of a preacher on a stage at church, who like a one person show is anecdotal, biographical, figurative and literary, all the while believing what they portray is reality. They are performers in that they are taking material and expressing a message in front of an audience. People are drawn in to listen to them speak about their concepts of reality. It is one thing to read the Bible and it is another to watch it performed in front of you, thus the existence of Church. Ideally, this preacher-performer has the thoughts, feelings and intentions that are consistent with the verbal utterances being disseminated, even though they are performing on a stage. Here Austin's limitation on stage performance lacks the criteria necessary to achieve the dismissal that he states. Now, it can be argued that some preachers act contrary to what their proclaimed beliefs are, and this is an important point about the difficulty in assessing intention, feeling and thoughts in both these alleged "ordinary" and "special" circumstances. Furthermore, if one's intentions were revealed

[16] Austin places them in the category of either insincerities and infractions, or breaches which occur when the people engaging in the action do not have the thoughts, feelings or intentions that correspond to the action being performed (39). For instance, an infelicitous congratulation would occur when someone said the words but did not mean them at all.

to be insincere does this automatically void all performances? If for example, a husband cheats this does not automatically annul his vows even if he undertook them with the intention of violating them. A wife may choose forgiveness and continue on with the marriage even though an insincerity was revealed. Therefore, the performance can still ring true in spite of false intentions being hidden or revealed.

The second issue that arises from Austin can best be understood through Jacques Derrida. Austin presents an idea that the entire performance is shaped through the speaking of a performative utterance suggesting that performance is situated in the present; a social reality born of the moment. However, this risks ignoring the way that performance is shaped by other contexts/content and form. Austin says:

> The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act...the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being...the sole thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to be performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions.... (Austin 1962: 8)

Even in this case the "circumstances" and the "actions" are limited to the instances that create the reality in the particular moment of the utterances. Derrida provides a starting point for criticizing such inquiry through his breakdown of the assumption that meanings are fixed, or assigned a definite truth-value, referring to the idea that all other meanings can be linked to an original truth (1981:3-59). Derrida's notion of deconstruction holds that meaning is not static but is in fact in a constant state of flux primarily because language itself ebbs and flows with the dynamic nature of time, space, and the actors who find themselves embedded in these particular moments. He further argues that language is not something that exists in isolation but is always related or "citational." In Derrida's reasoning reality becomes an intersection of tropes, a myriad of social,

historical, political and cultural contexts and not simply fragments of present (viii).[17] Building off this understanding that all definitions are relational, Derrida espouses a strategy of deconstruction in which he calls for a:

> ...consideration of all the related meanings and inbuilt contradictions that become evident [and that we] examine the way in which meanings are structured around a centre and that we concede that meanings cannot be entirely contained but are always likely to diversify and diverge from their centre (64).

By this he expands on Austin's framework dramatically through a transformation of meanings that are rooted within centralized knowledge to meanings that are dialogical, by which I refer to the notion of utterances as a reflection of multiple referential contexts (ibid).

Up to this point Austin's definition gives us the notion that performative utterances are more than just words, they have a social meaning but now we can clarify and state that the utterance is never spoken by itself, its meaning is always referring or related to other contexts that change in each moment and space. Meaning derived from these utterances is built up in an interactional manner (ibid). To some extent Austin noted that utterances are derived through interaction, with his examination of the speech act as it circulates between interlocutors. Austin understood that a performative utterance insinuates a promise to its audience that serves an expressive role, in that the utterance itself is meant to be evaluated by its listener and then responded to (14-15). He emphasizes how performances become evaluated as being good or bad based on how the utterances are disseminated and how they are received by the audience (ibid.). This is done primarily through his conclusion that all utterances are performative and that the

[17] For example take a concept like justice, or the notion of being "just." Normally people assume that such a concept can be defined as if it had its own essence, a clear vision that makes its presence visible and universal. Underscoring principles of a powerful sense of morality, the term is placed on one of two opposite poles, the other one occupied by the notion of unjust, and never the twain shall meet. However, one can only outline principles of being "just" by highlighting what it takes to be "unjust." Each conceptualization informs and is informed by the other.

locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act create an organic interaction between speaker and listener in which meaning becomes derived.[18]

Austin has received criticism for his model, most notably in the question of whether the meaning and the force of an utterance are mutually exclusive (Halion 1989). Yet, this framework is important for emphasizing how the performativity of an utterance can only come from its relationship between the speaker and the listener. As Austin states "...that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be 'explained' by the 'context' in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic relationship (100)." In other words, the meaning of the utterance comes from the dialogue of interlocuters. However Austin's conceptualizations on verbal utterances are still limited to a very literal relationship between action and words. What is needed is to articulate an understanding that penetrates the role of the speaker-listener in a more meaningful manner, underscoring not just the act of speaking and listening but the ways in which the speaker and listener cohabit the speech act together when the utterances take on additional meanings during stage performances. This is important because utterances used in stand-up comedy often blur the lines between literal and figurative, between truth and exaggeration. This is highlighted by something Dave says he likes to do during his act:

> What I like to do is like, I'll ask something about a person in the audience and I'll build a story around that person, I build this whole story and it's all imaginary and about them.

[18] The locutionary act is an utterance that when spoken suggests a certain meaning. The illocutionary act not only has a particular meaning but it is uttered with a certain force. Finally the perlocutionary act is an utterance that has both a meaning and a force that brings about a particular effect (109). Take the example of drawing a cat as an action. A locutionary speech act would be: He said "Draw that" in which there is a basic understanding of how to take the verb "draw" and what it is referring to; the cat. The illocutionary act would be: He asked me to draw that, in which the action of asking provides an additional force to the utterance. He is no longer simply saying the utterance but is framing it as a question in which the listener is to take the phrase. Finally the perlocutionary act would be: He got me to draw that, in which the utterance still has a force and a meaning but now conveys an action completed by the interlocutor.

This imaginary story Dave weaves blurs the reality that we all operate within. The person and their body are real as they sit before the audience to be gazed upon, but the jokes told are not at the expense of the individual because they are obvious exaggerations. Both the speaker and listener are aware of that as the audience member transforms into a caricature.

A useful articulation of such a framework can be seen in the work of Keith Basso (1988). In his examination of a corpus of metaphorical statements put forth by the Cibeque, residents of a Western Apache speech community in Arizona, he suggests a literal understanding of utterances ignores many instances of figurative speech that actors engage in (102). He argues that producing and interpreting metaphorical speech is an intense act of creativity that require at some level a shared concept that draws all the actors into a speech community. His exposition of metaphors suggests that figurative utterances are never fixed and can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. The interpretation of such figurative speech is intrinsically linked to the ability to form concepts that bridge all the actors engaged with the particular metaphor. Finally, the concepts needed to interpret metaphors are not simply enforced from above but rather discovered through a shared experience (107).

Thus, looking at the intersectionality of the three approaches towards verbal utterances we can understand verbal utterances within stand-up comedy as being metaphorical speech acts whose meanings are always in a state of flux because they are defined through an interactional process with other meanings, which also change in each moment and space. Furthermore, this interactional process is what draws all the actors engaging with the metaphor into a shared process of negotiation over the meanings and force of the utterances.

In stand-up comedy the entire act is filled with verbal utterances often interlaced with elements of humour and narrative. One approach to understanding these utterances would be to take account of the structural elements that make up a joke; what kinds of syntactical formations make up a punch line, etc.? However, to understand how performances are expressed, as noted by Basso, literal extrapolations of performative words can only get us so far (ibid.). Rather than limiting our imaginaries, the framework espoused above serves as an articulate and creative understanding of how linguistic play can occur through the comic act. Let us take the following joke from one of my interlocutors, Geoff, as an example:

> I am from Ottawa, but I do travel around a lot doing comedy, I was coming back from Toronto a little while ago and I was driving down the 401 and I got pulled over for going too fast and as the cop was coming towards the window I started to think, I wanna fuck with this guy a little bit, not to go to jail but maybe a Super Trooper moment of something like that. So it's illegal to impersonate a person but it's not illegal to impersonate an entire culture, so he gets there and he's like [impersonates officer] Hey there fella, going a little fast werentcha? Do ya know how fast you were going? [In Australian accent] Yeh I dunno mate, 120, 150 kilometres an hour is that right? He's like [cop voice] not from around here are ya? I'm like [Australian accent] Nope I'm from Ottawa, it's about five hours north...So he gets all confused and he's like [cop voice] Wait a minute (repeated) [rubs forehead in confusion] You're not from Australia? [Australian accent] No mate, never been there in my life, I told you I'm from Ottawa [normal voice] So what does the guy do? White mid 20's, middle class male, with an unexplained Australian accent. the justice system is fucked in this country, in many countries. In order to be proven guilty of a crime in this country you have to have airtight concrete factual evidence proving your guilt. Now in order to obtain that evidence someone has to go on a witness stand and testify with their hand on the bible which we all know is full of concrete, airtight, factual evidence, I can't wait to be a witness to a crime, 'I did see that guy rob the bank, yeah, but he got away. He ran across the water onto a giant ark, but then I got distracted by the talking serpent with a fresh apple. You don't believe me? It's in your own book man.'

If we take the utterances posited through these string of jokes then what becomes apparent is a comedian highlighting his experience and simply engaging in a kind of observational quip about the nature of the justice system. However, if we understand that these utterances are indeed metaphorical then there exists a deeper level of metacommunication that is circulated within these words. This is not to suggest that this communication is universal or intentional, but that there is something going on within this linguistic play.

> ...I am from *Ottawa*, but I do travel around a lot doing comedy, I was coming back from *Toronto* a little while ago and I was driving down the *401*...

In this utterance, the comedian begins the joke by mentioning that he is from Ottawa, Canada. While this could be taken literally as a simple introduction this utterance circulates in several capacities within the act. In the first instance it is important to note that stand-up comedic performance often consists of the dissemination of several jokes in a short period of time and that some of the jokes may be linked while others may consist of unrelated topics. However, every joke or block of jokes requires a introductory line that at first seems out of place but later posits itself as a foundation for the rest of the joke: it serves as a set-up. In this case, the fact that he is from Ottawa becomes repeated as part of the punch line later on in the joke. In the second instance, the comedian effectively draws a border around himself by positioning himself as not being part of the "here." As a result an utterance likes this calls on the audience to remember their social/political/historical and cultural trajectories that encompass the word "Ottawa." For instance, whenever the name Ottawa is mentioned, in Toronto comedy clubs, it often results in the audience lightheartedly jeering the performer because of a deep-seeded sports rivalry between the two cities. In this case the comedian shifts the focus of the joke almost immediately to Toronto causing the audience to display a sense of civic pride through loud "whoops" and applause. At the same time, he mentions that he is driving down the 401 serving as a way to draw the audience together by their recognition and experience of a landmark. In this sense, the utterance emphasizes that the experience of two "distinct" spaces and places is intertwined within each other while at the same time drawing those who are engaging with the utterance together through a common basis for metaphorical understanding.

> ...maybe a Super Trooper moment...

Here is another example of the performer trying to draw the audience together in an allusion to popular culture, through the reference to a movie from 2001 (Super Troopers 2001).

However, the drawing of people into the experience is not always equal and in this case only members who have seen or heard about the movie would be given the opportunity to share in the joke whereas a lack of placement towards this reference would break the illusion of the performance and exclude.

> ...he's like [impersonates officer] Hey there fella, going a little fast werentcha? Do ya know how fast you were going? [In Australian accent] Yeh I dunno mate, 120, 150 kilometres an hour is that right? He's like [cop voice] not from around here are ya? I'm like [Australian accent] Nope I'm from Ottawa, it's about five hours north...So he gets all confused and he's like [cop voice] Wait a minute (repeated) [rubs forehead in confusion] You're not from Australia? [Australian accent] No mate, never been there in my life, I told you I'm from Ottawa...

This utterance within the string of jokes does three things. First, it unites the audience as exclusive members who get to share the life experience of the performer. The comic uses a narrative format to bring a sense of "realism" to the act and bring the audience in as if they were experiencing the event themselves. The sole words are not enough to convince the audience of the act, however adding the accented dialogue and gestures and facial expressions that coincide with the scenario, the joke becomes all the more funny because it gains a sense of living through the utterances rather than a simple recitation of an experience. Second, it calls upon a social assumption made between different actors in society. This joke is predicated on the understanding of a particular kind of social interaction that takes place more often than not in contemporary Canadian society; that is the assumption that people who have accents are foreign. The prevailing idea is that "citizens" of Canada do not have accents thereby making it easy to identify the "outsider." In this case, the police officer hears the Australian accent and is ready to waive off their traffic violation based on the assumption that they were not from "around here." Thus if this interaction did not take place in Canadian society, or was not a popularly identified assumption then the joke loses its entire referencing and strips it of its cultural competence. Third through a performance of trickery it goes beyond the assumptions and asks people to reflect on

their engagement with such social interaction while once again uniting people as the punch line, in much the same way as the police officer. In other words, people are forced to questions assumptions they make when they hear accents. The punch line of the joke is the inversion of the assumption, that even with an accent the performer is still from Ottawa and as a result the cop is extremely confused, but the utterance has a social force beyond the words of the joke. The audience members begin to laugh but what they are really laughing at is themselves. They are the representation of the cop because they made the same assumption and are made to look foolish when the punch line takes an unexpected perspective. The utterance of the joke both recalls the social context of the assumption while creating a new one, when the familiar is turned upon its head. Of course this new context can only be derived through the exaggeration of the social context of the original assumption. One can never invert something that does not exist, there must always be a template or a foundation to be poked and parodied. In the creation of this new context, the audience is drawn together as a punchline, they not only share the laughter towards the joke but are themselves the target of the laughter.

Aesthetics

The complexity by which the performative utterances circulate is a critical component of what shapes the beauty of the act. However, it is not the sole element in determining whether a performance is successful or not. In fact, the combination of verbal utterances with the aesthetics of the body in stand-up performances is precisely what gives the performance a force or completely shatters the illusion of being embedded within the performative moment. While the following extrapolations on stand-up performance are not exhaustive, I describe here the three most important aesthetic features to the act: vocality, rhythm, and movement.

Roland Barthes (1982) described voice as the "intimate signature of the actor" and it is an incredibly personal way of communicating with the audience. Voice is an integral part of stand-up comedy's bodily aesthetics and must be understood as an expressive element in its own right (Pavis 1998: 435). Therefore verbal utterances are not simply stated during stand-up performances; they are enacted. However in order for them to be done so effectively and the performance evaluated as good, the performer needs to balance the use of volume, tone and rhythm in a skillful manner so that the utterance is received the way it is intended.

In the first case, one can have a joke fail if it is not heard throughout the performance space. However it can also remove the connection between the audience and the performer if the volume is outrageously matched to the utterance. The joke can be evaluated as a good performance if the volume of the utterance matches with what sentiment the utterance is trying to portray. For instance, a comedian whispering to the audience when the utterance requires a very intimate connection with the audience as if they were being let in on a joke, or yelling loudly if the joke requires the emphases of ridiculousness.

Tone and impersonation are also something used strategically throughout a stand-up comic performance to enforce the utterance. For instance, an utterance that is better enforced through sarcasm requires the appropriate pitch control and inflection to allow the audience to receive the utterance in the intended way. Some people do this by over exaggerating the sarcasm while other performers do this with a perfect deadpan tone so that there becomes no viable alternative than to take the utterance as sarcastic.

In terms of impersonation, if one refers to the joke mentioned earlier in this chapter, would the utterance that highlighted the assumption made about people with accents have been

as effective if the performer did not use an Australian accent? The usage of various dialects in comedy is a form of impersonation and can be looked at as a form of double role play (Pickering 2005). Going back to Goffman's idea that we are all performing particular roles, the front stage drama performed by the comedian takes on an additional layer of meaning when impersonating another character. The audience often becomes so impressed by the skill of the perfomer that they suspend disbelief to let the comic utterance continue.

Finally, aesthetics in stand-up comic performances are extremely rooted in rhythm and timing. "Comic timing" is a temporality associated with the verbalization of humourous utterances that becomes important in achieving its purpose as a joke. This was emphasized to me by Geoff in the following dialogue:

> G: Well, that's the...some comics they're all you know crowd work or they're all...they will improvise a lot. Some of them, like myself...I'm a little more reliant on, cuz I know the beats like of comedy where the timing, whereas if I know if I say this they should laugh at this and so I try to keep a rhythm rather than going off into tangents in the crowd and stuff...
>
> M: So what do you mean by beats?
>
> G: Beats ...[are]... sort of musical dialogue where it's like you say something you go da-da-da da-da and then you get Hahahahaha and then you have to go Da-daDA-dada, Hahahaha. So it's kind of, it's like music but with an audience like responding to what you've just said... the beats are just timing so if you...the way you time something in the delivery is much more important most times than actually what you're saying.

This demonstrates both the existence of comic timing and the fact that comedians are incredibly aware of the subtleties of a temporal organization that frames the joke. They know that even though it is not enough to have the structure of a verbal utterance but to emphasize the force of it in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to the audience, and the more skill the performer has the more intricate the play on rhythm and timing is.

The presentation of verbal utterances is also inextricably tied to the movement of the body during performance. Part of the enhancement of the act relies on the controlled exhibition of appropriate facial and hand gestures as well as body positioning throughout the performance.

Gestures are important non discursive elements that express as much if not more about the performance than the verbal utterance itself (Noland 2009: 7). For instance, a joke that emphasizes a sly look at a situation may have the performer have their hands of their hips, a cocked head with the lips twisted and a look to the left or right, or a performer that uses sarcasm as part of their repertoire may roll their eyes every once in a while to clue the audience in. Some performers use wildly flailing arm movements and wide facial expressions when trying to emphasize a point, e.g. arms thrown in the air in exasperation. Some may shoot the audience a sultry look when talking about themes of seduction or even mimic sexual acts on stage. In all cases, often these non-discursive elements utilize facial and arm gestures to reiterate the utterance and translate the experience to the audience as something authentic. However, these elements are not the only utilization of the body in the comedic act, often times entire body movement can be used to emphasize the utterance of the joke as well. For instance, when a comic performer describes a person going through a process of reasoning they may pace back and forth on the stage rapidly, or if a person is making a joke about dying they may drop the microphone and fall down on the floor. One comedian even hit himself with the microphone as part of his joke!

Therefore, the performative element within stand-up comedy circulates as a promise between the actors involved. The performer is obligated with a task of expressing themselves through skill and cultural competence while the audience is responsible for evaluating their displays in a positive or negative manner. The analysis of performances often focuses on the recognition of keys and frames and how they serve to transition reality from a literative perspective to a figurative one in which to understand the messages being disseminated within these performative avenues of expression. However, in stand-up comedy acts both frames and

keys are dynamic in their invocation. Therefore, an understanding of the engagement of social roles as they permeate these performances is also necessary, for ultimately these acts are as much personal as they are shared. The comic performance is largely shaped through the dissemination of verbal utterances which circulate as metaphorical speech acts whose force and meanings circulate as part of social life. It is through this interactional process that all the actors are linked together within the context of the utterance. Furthermore, these verbal utterances are enacted within the performative encounter through the use of a bodily aesthetics that includes voice, rhythm and movement. It is within the dynamic performance of stand-up comedy that the citational nature of the verbal utterances and the invocation of multiple and shifting social roles by the actors involved become the most apparent negotiation of meaning. It is through these processes that a dialogue begins to emerge, one vested in the grotesque reflection of the alleged "serious" world and the illusion of performance. The importance of viewing stand-up as a performance is to understand the moments in which the acts become successes or failures. It is these conditions that determine whether the carnivalesque illusion is effective or not in its communication between the performer and the audience. Consequently, the play between politically correct rhetoric and stand-up comedy is dynamic in that their subtleties are intrinsically tied to the how the comedic acts are carried out within the space. A successful performer who utilizes risqué comedy may be more apt in carrying the audience into the realm of the taboo whereas a failed performance could make apparent where audiences draw their moral lines. In either case, the elements of what makes a felicitous and infelicitous performance and the metacommunication involved are shaped through the play of each act.

Chapter 3: The Festive Comic

Carnival

Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) is notable for his explication on the aesthetic and social effects of the "carnival" upon folk culture through his focus on the writings on Rabelais. Looking critically at the minute place accorded to laughter in literary analysis, he explores how folk humour developed in Rabelais work is a democratic representation of popular culture that challenges the canonical literary dogma of the time. He argues that folk humour in the Middle Ages and Renaissance composed of three elements: ritual spectacles (carnivals), comic verbal composition (literary parodies) and various genres of billingsgate (curses, popular rhetoric) (2). In relation to stand-up comedy, I am solely focusing on the carnivalesque nature of ritual spectacles.

Ritual Spectacles

Ritual spectacles such as the carnival stood in stark contrast to the realm of the "serious" or "official" and Bakhtin argues that these ritual spectacles create a second world through which occurs a de-centering of authorial knowledge and discourses, one in which everyone becomes an equal participant within the festive space and time. He says that they offer a

> ...different, non-official, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year (4-5).

Bakhtin states that historically ritual spectacle intertwined both the "serious" and the "comic" worlds. However as society gradually became more stratified laughter became accorded an

unofficial place, relegated to a hierarchically lower position in comparison with the more "serious" aspects of life.[19]

Carnival Time and Space

Furthermore, Bakhtin explains how the carnival has a spirit that is all of its own; an occupation of particular spaces and times in which the actors become drawn into a shared festivity that stands distinct from the "seriousness" of everyday life. There are two ways in which to read this extrapolation. The first is that carnival is a metaphorical transition from one perception of reality to another. The second is that carnival occupies a literal space and time of its own. Looking at the former, Huizinga extrapolates this in his theory of play in which the act is not "ordinary" or "real" but in fact a "...stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity all of its own (1950: 11)." By this Huizinga is referring to the sentiment embedded within the act of playing a child's game.[20] This play act is not part of "real" life but it becomes an illusion all of its own, in which members do occupy a distinct spatial and temporal sphere of activity (ibid.). The carnival exists in the same manner in which the actors believe themselves to be stepping out of a "real" life and subsumed within the festivities of the moment and anything that disrupts this illusion spoils the fun of the ritual spectacle.

Stand-up comedy performances function in a similar sense, in that people want to go there to enjoy themselves. They want to laugh or to share in a moment of fun with the performers

[19] It is important to note that the label of "laughter" in Bakhtin does not necessarily denote the action of laughter but implies the act of humour or creation of a communal laughter. Bakhtin says that only when humour became unofficial did it take on an additional metaphorical layer, thereby relegating it to the popular imaginary (ibid.). By this Bakhtin refers to the carnival as disseminating a deeper type of communication, one in which the masses become unified through a freer and more familiar type of dialogue.

[20] Take, for example, the game Cops and Robbers for instance in which the children playing wholeheartedly believe that they are indeed cops or robbers for the duration of the play act. They may have toy guns, hats, badges, or masks and imitate speech that fits the particular role in order to make the game more authentic. The "robbers" will try to steal while the "cops" will try to chase and arrest them, and anything that occurs to penetrate this illusion serves to spoil the fun of the game.

as well as the other audience members. Within their pre-formed separations between the "serious" world and the "leisure" world, they engage in these "fun" moments precisely to leave what they see as the "serious" side of life. Of course the merits of making these two distinctions becomes much more complicated when taking into account the referential content of the material specifically in terms of how the notions of "serious" and "fun" are defined through each other and not in spite of. In addition, the binaries become problematic when looking at how people draw upon their own identities and roles while engaging in such material. For instance, a comedian will view their engagement in the illusion much differently than the audiences; hence we see the varying audiences reactions performed material. This is not to say that everyone who engages in the carnival is subsumed within the illusion of the festivity. In stand-up comedy, the illusion of performance becomes much more apparent in the moments where it is the most fragile; in the moments where the game risks being spoiled. This can be illuminated through an example from my fieldwork regarding a female comic's performance and the audience reaction to her.

> The next performer was a lady in her late 30's. You could tell she had experience performing before, because she eluded with every word. Her stage presence was notable, she paced the stage in a relaxed manner and kept eye contact with the audience. Her material focused on what it was like to be a middle-aged woman residing in New York City and living the comedy lifestyle, including her experiences partying and clubbing. The incident that stood out the most came about when she included material about her racial heritage as part of the act. First off, she stated how her skin colour was lighter than what people expect for someone who is African-American. She also stated that she had some Native American blood in her too, but the biggest issue that she faced was that people never believed her when she said she was black. It was after this joke was made, that hecklers derailed the rest of her performance. One heckler interrupted her as she was explaining this joke and told her that she did not look black. She looked extremely offended, and glanced around the room with wide eyes. Angrily, she tried explaining that she was just talking about her racial identity and that it was her show. Then a second person chimed in about whether or not she looked black. At this point, other audience members came to her defense by booing the hecklers and telling them to be quiet or leave. She attempted to finish her joke but after a while of back and forth between her and the initial heckler, she finished her set early. Many of the other audience members gave her an emphatic round of applause as she made her way off the stage. After her performance the MC came back on the stage, defended her performance, and attempted to call out the hecklers for disrupting the show.

Through this particular performance, the illusion of being encompassed completely within the space becomes shattered by the prevalence of hecklers within the audience. Not only does the

game become spoiled for the performer whose shock is notable, but for many of the other audience members who break away from watching the act to criticize the hecklers. The atmosphere in the room shifts as people move away from being encompassed within the act, to reacting to the break in the performance.

The second way in which to perceive the temporal and spatial distinctness of carnival is more literal, in that carnival carves out a specific place and is often marked out for a particular time. Huizinga (1950) further expands on this idea through his conception of play as exemplified in the following:

> Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration...It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning. Play begins, and then at a certain moment it is "over". It plays itself to an end. While it is in progress all is movement, change, alternation, succession, association, separation.... [But] once played, it endures as a new-found creation of the mind, a treasure to be retained by the memory... [furthermore] all play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course...all are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart. (10)

Huizinga explains idea of a preorganized, or preordained space/time that play requires to take place. On the same note, the carnival also contains "its own course and meaning" in which it has a beginning, duration and an end. In addition, it creates a meaningful space in which to function. Take for example, Toronto's famous *Caribana* celebration. It occurs on a specific route that begins and ends near the shores of Lake Ontario, its path advertised extensively to allow the public the opportunity to join the parade as participant or participant-spectator (City of Toronto). The parade lasts a single day, drawing people together in its beginning and duration and then after that the people go home, stripping off the glittery clothes that marked their involvement in the festival time and space.

Stand-up comedy is very much marked by a spatial and temporal dimension. The audience is able to easily identify when they are entering a space dedicated to the performance of

comic utterances and when they are out of it. In terms of spatial organization, stand-up rarely takes place on a street corner or in the middle of the subway; one does not simply cross any public space and stumble across a stand-up performance. These performances are often thought to occur in small or large comedy clubs, such as Absolute and Yuk Yuk's in Toronto. However, they can also extend to theatres or arenas, lecture halls, bars, or corporate venues, and so forth. The key thing here is that there is a literal separateness of reality into the "serious" realm in which people are engaged in the activities of everyday life and the "fun" space which allegedly transports the audience into the illusion of performance. Furthermore, these performances are segmented in time. The carnivals espoused by Bakhtin (1984) were temporally marked off in relation to seasonal changes in order to worship particular deities. For instance, Saturnalia corresponded to the proximity of the winter solstice and the festivities occurred in order to give thanks to the Roman god Saturn for the agricultural harvest during the year. Stand-up comedy does not necessarily occur in strict correspondence with the calendar, although one will occasionally see special Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Valentine's Day performances in different clubs. However, stand-up comedy performances also do not appear in the moment. They are often the result of careful planning and marketing and as a result the performances can be scheduled to occur on a daily basis but still marked off within particular times. When Dave did his comedy special the "Terrorist Comedy Special" the marketing was extensive:

> When we first did it, it was here [Toronto] at Yuk Yuk's and it was at the time where Lebanon and Israel were fighting. So when it got out we did so much press, we were in the Toronto Star, the Sun, on the National, Sun TV, Jazz Radio, we were doing all of these, we were on MTV for a few minutes too, it was just crazy. So when we did the show it was sold out there was a line up around the corner and they added a second show and the response was amazing, one of the best times I have ever had.

Even with all the planning that goes into these spectacles you can see they are there for only a limited time, two shows and he goes off to the next city, hence the importance of the designated time.

Audience and Performer

Another element of carnival that is espoused by Bakhtin (1984) is the lack of distinction between the performers and the audience as well as between the audience members themselves. In essence, all become subsumed within the same earthly plane during carnival play. In each moment of carnival the authorial categories that create separations between people become degraded to the point where the categories temporally become hidden. Regardless of the borders of class, "race," ethnicity, political view, religion, and so forth that are constantly enforced in the spaces outside the carnival, hierarchies become diminished in the illusion of equality. Everybody can laugh and be laughed at. The carnival allows everyone to share in a particular moment of laughter and parody; a moment in which everyone participates in the degradation and renewal of the "serious" word (15). Furthermore, the performers lose their status as being the sole owner of the act as the carnival moves the audience from passive background to creators and performers of the carnival space themselves.

In Chapter 2, it was noted how Goffman (1959) wrote about the performative encounter as being a collusion between the performer and the audience, that the performance is only successful if the performer fulfills their role in a manner that is meaningful for the audience and that allows them to evaluate it successfully. In the carnival then, the parodic encounter within this performance can only work if the audience is able to engage and evaluate the message being communicated through the carnival act. However, this engagement by the audience only works if the audience is brought onto the same plane of degradation and renewal that the performer and the discourses being parodied lie on (Bakhtin 1984). This can be seen in my fieldwork encounter:

> During one show, one of the comedians notices a middle aged man sitting near the front of the stage and began to pick on him about his age. Since most of the audience that night was younger, the comedian began

> making "old people jokes" to him but rather than being embarrassed about it he beamed with pride and joined in the laughter with the rest of the audience.
>
> In another show one of the performers stated that he liked Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, prompting a collective round of boos and applause from the audience. Despite the mayor being a contentious figure, the comedian broached the topic and made some jokes about his governing style, resulting in a chorus of laughter from everyone in the crowd.

In the moments when everyone is enraptured by the spectacle and the fun that lay before them, it is easy to think that one is in a moment of freedom from authorial discourses. However, even within these fun spaces, the carnival only appears to make these categories invisible.

Parody

The carnival is rooted in parody. Bakhtin here understand parody as the creation of an object of representation out of conventional genres, as developed in the following extrapolation of Pushkin's parodic take on Lensky's poetry:

> The poetic metaphors in these lines...in no way function here as the primary means of representation (as they himself); rather they themselves have here become the object of representation, or more precisely of a representation that is parodied and stylized. This novelistic image of another's style...must be taken in intonational quotation marks within the system of direct authorial speech that is, taken as if the image were parodic and ironic. (1981: 44)

In essence, the object of representation becomes a completely different genre and language from the object itself and the two languages only penetrate each other through the parodic encounter. Thus Bakhtin posits the carnival as occupying a world outside of the thing it is parodying, yet still able to penetrate it through the parodic language (ibid.). Take Orwell's famous parody of the Communist Revolution in Russia developed in his novel *Animal Farm (1945)*. The novel played upon the events leading to and during Stalin's reign in USSR between 1924-53. *Animal Farm* mocked the discourses, policies and figures that were prominent during this period by the Communists in Russia. One such example can be seen in the play upon certain rhetoric during the construction of a windmill, a symbolism for Stalin's Five Year Plan. When the idea is first floated about it is originally conceptualized by the opposition leader Snowball, a pig

representative of Leon Trotsky. Through political maneuvering the idea is then proposed by Napoleon, symbolically representing Stalin, after the exodus of the opposition. It is then sold to the populace as though it will make their lives easier. All they would have to do is to work very diligently over a short period of time and the rest of their years will be spent in leisure. Both the windmill and Stalin's Five Year Plan inevitably end in epic failures; the windmill due to thin walls and the Five Year Plan because of inefficiency and corruption (Polanyi, 1966: 13). Finally, shadow of these collapses, the leader cites the former opposition as the root cause of the problem and uses propaganda to make a clear distinction of whom the enemy is. The propaganda machine that promotes the establishment is represented by a pig named Squealer, symbolically standing for the USSR's massive monument projects, pamphlets, posters, newspapers and regular speeches all dedicated towards the promotion of state policies. Orwell's parody creates an object of representation out of the rhetoric, policies and figures of the Communist Revolution. In the creation of this parodic world known as *Animal Farm*, there is the creation of a second language that adopts similar state rhetoric and yet exposes it for the contradictions that lie in it. Not only are the revolutionaries farm animals, the language adopted is clearly marked with a sense of play between the "serious" world and the comic one, evidenced by the famously pointed phrase repeated throughout the novel: All animals are equal.

It is in this interaction between the parody and its subject that Bakhtin finds the creation of a second language and consequently, a second reality. Bakhtin considers the penetration involved in this parodic encounter as a "zone of dialogical contact" in which there exists a conversation between the authors of the different languages (1981: 45). In this dialogism of

parody the comic does not just represent the language of the object, but uses it as well.[21] However as Bakhtin has already pointed out this language is always surrounded by quotation marks for it is not removed from its parodic purpose (ibid.). This dialogic contact allows the audience to see the problems with the "serious" perspective in a manner that stresses the absurd and the artificial. As Bakhtin states,

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. (23)

Parody takes the flaws and contradictions of authorial discourse and highlights it in a way that twists and morphs it into a grotesque figure that is supposed to penetrate and impress upon the folk consciousness. It is important to emphasize these dialogic encounters that make up parody do not simply reflect the laughter in the world but the heteroglossia of it. In this Bakhtin argues that heteroglossia operates in the meaning of any utterance and that at:

> ...any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions-social, historical, meteorological, physiological- that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. (272)

However if we expand this idea beyond the realm of the utterance and build of Derrida's expositions discussed earlier, we can note that the world of the carnival is always referential to the object of its parody (1981). This is because parody is nothing without a subject to target, a mirror in a void of nothingness reflects nothing.

Stand-up comedy is based on the performance of parodic verbal utterances, however it must be noted that the understanding of parody being utilized here is more than just simply a genre or a style. The idea within the comic acts is to mock something, whether it is a dominating

[21] Recall Colbert's satire in which he must nonetheless use the language exhibited by mainstream news organizations in order to effectively parody them.

political system, the performer themselves, or even their daily interactions, thus, each parodic element of humour in stand-up expresses a dialogism that is disseminated through the performance. In doing so it takes an object and reveals it as an image. Let us revisit the earlier ethnographic example represented by Geoff's jokes:

> ...the justice system is fucked in this country, in many countries. In order to be proven guilty of a crime in this country you have to have airtight concrete factual evidence proving your guilt. Now in order to obtain that evidence someone has to go on a witness stand and testify with their hand on the bible which we all know is full of concrete, airtight, factual evidence...I can't wait to be a witness to a crime, I did see that guy rob the bank, yeah, but he got away...he ran across the water onto a giant ark...but then i got distracted by the talking serpent with a fresh apple...You don't believe me? It's in your own book man...

In this particular joke the use of parody appears in a more direct manner; however that is not to say that parody always occurs in this form.

> ...the justice system is fucked in this country...

The comedian begins by illuminating the context in which the parody is to occur and highlighting that particular object that is to be ridiculed, in this case the notion of the justice system. If the joke did not have this introduction, the parody would fail because the audience would not be able to recognize the object of parody.[22] However in order for a parody to be expressed and evaluated as such, then it needs to make clear its reference to particular social norms and discourses, which are generally understood. The comedian knows that an utterance such as the one above automatically makes the audience draw upon their own experiences with the justice system in order to evaluate the joke. His skill as a performer to express his observations on such systems and the receptiveness of the audience within the illusion of

[22] Imagine for a moment that one is in a casual conversation with another person and all of a sudden they utter the words "It's because he had no guts!" Awkward silence might ensue followed by a raised eyebrow, but in essence one has absolutely no idea how to perceive the statement just expressed. Now, if the interlocutor asked "Why couldn't the male skeleton ask the female skeleton out to the dance?" then all of a sudden the interchange makes sense.

performance will determine if the parody can highlight the contradictions that may be prevalent within the object of parody.

> I can't wait to be a witness to a crime, I did see that guy rob the bank, yeah, but he got away...he ran across the water onto a giant ark...but then i got distracted by the talking serpent with a fresh apple...You don't believe me? Its in your own book man...

In the construction of this parodic utterance the repetition of phrasing that is often used as descriptors of the "serious" world exemplifies the dissemination of heterglottic utterances. When people talk about the justice system they attribute its functioning to the inclusion of "airtight, concrete, factual evidence." The rule of justice is absolute because of its alleged removal of bias, its attribution of a truth-value to every artifact or person involved in the system, its entire reliance on the collection and expression of empirical data and facts. In essence, the social dimension of life has very little place in the justice system unless it is quantifiable. This popular imaginary and rhetoric of the justice system, disseminated through the courts, the government, the police, and so forth is exposed for its inconsistency in including symbols that hold meaning in a very prominent aspect of social life; religion.[23] The inclusion of a contentious book shaped through narrative and given meaning through the social bonds created through the Christian faith become presented to the audience as occupying a ridiculous place in the justice system, made more obvious through a sarcastic attribution of the phrase "airtight, concrete, factual evidence" to the bible. In essence the parody degrades the "serious" word of both the justice system and religion to points of folly thereby making them open to the laughter of the audience. The performer further emphasizes parody through an act of mimicry in which he attempts to re-enact a moment as if he was called to testify in a court of law, but exaggerates it a sense of incredulity through the usage of both a legal language as well as the metaphorical narratives taken from the Bible. In the first instance, he acts as if he were going to take the stand, going through the key act

[23] In 2001 83% of Canada's population identified with a religious denomination (Stats Canada 2012)

of swearing on the Bible and proceeding to give "testimony." He then combines this with a brief comic reinterpretation of the stories in the Bible to the point where it not only makes the intersection of religion and law seem silly but also the narratives themselves seem ridiculous as well. He then concludes the joke with an utterance that is embedded in the illusion of the mimicry. This serves as the "lesson" of the joke thereby almost asking the audience if they can see the contradictions that lie in these acts.

Spectacle

Ritual spectacles such as the carnival are most often identified by part of its namesake; the spectacle. In the previous chapter, I had discussed the nature of verbal spectacle in relation to the stand-up performance and currently have touched upon the nature of linguistic play within carnivals. However, there is one more aspect of spectacle that is yet to be discussed; that of the grotesque image. It is within the play of the carnival that the body finds a centered position. However in contrast to the canons of the "serious" realm in which flesh and blood are considered grotesque, taboo and constrained, the focus on the body within ritual spectacle takes a positive approach. Contrary to popular imaginations of the body, Bakhtin's exploration of grotesque realism in the carnival moves away from a focus on the individual and biological explanations of the self, to how the self moves through temporal and spatial dimensions as a collective (1984). This means that within the carnival, no one exists in their singularity, rather, each self becomes embedded in the performative illusion together. They laugh together, cry together and are offended together. The most important extrapolation of the body in the carnival is its metaphorical expression of the excess. The carnival espoused by Bakhtin is filled with a sense of grandeur, every element within its festivity pushing towards the extreme. Once again take Toronto's famous *Caribana* held in the city during the summer. The eyes are met with a

spectacular array of vibrant colours. Each costume adorned with glistening stones and topped off with colourful masks outlined in gold and silver alongside disproportionately large feather headpieces, floats intertwined with human bodies decorated to resemble monarch butterflies, suns or masked figured and the crowd enmeshed within a sea of streamers and beads. Their ears are pushed to their limits and stretched beyond as the loud melody of soca is accompanied by rhythmic drumming, chanting and exultations of glee bringing the shared bodies within the space together in song and dance. Flesh rubs against flesh within the communal spirit as the nostrils and tastebuds are permeated with the aromas and flavours of fresh jerk chicken, curried rice and mouth-watering roti. The carnival then becomes this moment of overabundance, standing in stark contrast to the realm of everyday life; a moment in which the self becomes defined not by constraint but shared within a sense of indulgence. The question then becomes: for what reason does this carnival encourage this feeling of excess? The carnival, as espoused by Bakhtin, is also predicated on the cycle of degradation and renewal, a theme most often attributed to the idea of the grotesque. Bakhtin describes it as the following:

> The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level...To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. To degrade also means to concern oneself with the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs...[it] digs a bodily grave for a new birth: it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. (21)

Bakhtin argues that part of the nature of the carnival is to take elements assigned to the realm of "serious" and to degrade them, to break them apart by revealing their grotesque form, not to create a sense of utter chaos but to build upon the foundation of the ugliness left behind. Akin to a fun house mirror that warps the image of the person before it, pinching their head or expanding their waist illuminating flaws which may not have been visible before the subject's caricature. In

doing so, this degradation changes the temporality that authorial discourse finds itself embedded in and adds to it a sense of dialogism in which the meaning derived through the ritual spectacle becomes connected through historical moments and the intersection of identities. This means that the carnival diffuses the authorial homogeneity of history, identity, and space, and replaces it with a deeper conversation that takes place between the people and their everyday lives. It is through this relationship with the "serious" that we see how parody functions in the ritual spectacle.

When looking at how taboo and the grotesque influence the stand-up space, one needs to understand the "seriousness" that it prods at in its parody. The spectacle of stand-up lies more in verbal banter than in a visual representation of the grotesque. This banter takes elements of "serious" discourse and attempts to exaggerate it, moving it away from the realm of the sacrosanct and down to the earthly plain. In this context we are referring to the discourses of multiculturalism and PC as they attempt to promote a certain "appropriate" rhetoric and as they correspond with the insurgence of risqué comedians in stand-up comedy.[24] It has actually become so common that when an "ethnic" comedian takes the stage there is an expectation of them to address their race, something Dave talks about when speaking about how the audience reacts when he spends most of his time talking about his life in Canada as oppose to growing up in an Arab household:

> You come and hear me talk about being Arabic for 10 minutes and the rest I'm being me, I'm just like every other person, I don't talk about my culture all day so some people walk away angry, like man, he didn't talk about being middle eastern. Why? Do you want me to do that for an hour? That's not who I am, you know what I mean? I'm just like the white kid or the Filipino kid, it's just a culture.

Part of the reason that stand-up comedy is often thought of as "politically incorrect" is because it is seen as an intersection of performance with grotesque imagery. The utterances within comedy

[24] Some examples include Dave Chappelle, Carlos Mencia, George Lopez, Louis C.K, Russell Peters etc.

play upon these "serious" words and stretch them in a manner that may be excessive, vulgar and violating, precisely to degrade those words into the contradictions that hide within themselves. As a reflection of the dialogism of parody, they utilize the same taboo language or engage in the restricted behaviour in order to illuminate the issues with them. Their language is deemed "inappropriate" within the sphere of everyday life and consequently relegated to the position of the unofficial. Bakhtin mentions this when discussing how the carnival creates its own language, utterances that are imbued within the grittiness of the popular performances. This newer, deeper type of communication was excluded from "official" speech and labeled as taboo precisely because in its parodic form it refuses to fit into the categories of socially acceptable behaviour. Needless to say, these extreme utterances may push against the sensibilities that people have and make them uncomfortable and can risk reiterating the social hierarchies that the taboo communication seeks to reverse. Take the following set of jokes from Dave:

> I like to say, I come from a Middle Eastern background...I'm only saying it because no one knows what race I am. I gotta fucked up face, I dunno how to describe it. Like, I'm sick and tired of it...it's like my dad put his dick in a globe and nine months later I came out. Like its mostly cuz I can't handle the racism I get about other cultures anyways that's how frustrating...like I can't bear that in my chest...people come up to me and say racist shit about other people...it's like an awkward situation. It's like hey you lazy Puerto Rican and I'm like...I can't help you because I'm not Puerto Rican. You know what im sayin, its like its awkward, it's like when you tell a girl you like her and shes like I wanna be friends. Its awkward...i'm like you can come back with the proper shit to say and the weirdest part about it was after 9/11 the worst thing is that I finally knew that I was Middle Eastern. I didn't know that before I thought my dad had an accent or would eat falafels, thats all I thought...I mean my dad's weird he talks like [makes garbled sound] and I though thats all it was right? Whats up with this shit...and relatives would go [makes loud piercing yell with hands in the air] and I was like thats a horrible sound, don't ever do that again...thats creepy, freaky shit right? And I was in Detroit and i'm on stage and theres a black dude in the back and hes kinda pacing right [paces] and im like either this dude likes me, or he wants to kick my ass, two situations which are bad right? So i get off and he just runs up to me and he goes "You Arabs, you the new black people" and he runs away...it's like this guy passed me the baton of struggle ya know, here you go you take that shit...The weirdest part about it is I tried speaking Arabic at a Tim Hortons and instead that got me in trouble...I mean nothing dangerous happens at a Tim Hortons right? I go [re-enacts a scene where he is speaking Arabic to his cousin] and they [referring to the Tim Horton's workers] go Whoa! And he starts backing up...what shitty terrorists would go to a Tim Hortons, order something and then blow it up...theres no terrorists that are like no no no, before I kill the infidels I want the strawberry [?] right there you fuck, gimme the white ones, the chocolate ones and don't screw me over like last time...it doesn't happen, terrorists are smart they don't do that shit. First of all, terrorists aren't coming to Canada, it's a bad thing to do, it's not good business it's like robbing a poor house, you're not doing nothing, youre not getting anything...it's like pushing a handicapped kid down the steps, youre not going to get nothing outta that. People are like "what the fuck did ya do that for man? Thats the dude that brings the Skittles to work and mops the floor you

> asshole...when they had their terrorist meeting as to what country they'll blow up...one of the terrorist guys is like "okay everybody we're going to be debating okay, you got your chips and your pop its great and well open the floor, the first country? 'Finland! Oh we'll destroy Finland, we'll fuck them up yes!' Then he's like' Sweden! Oh yeah we don't like the flag, well kill them all!' And one guy at the back's like 'Canada! Who the fuck said that, you come to the front right now. I take my family to Canada's Wonderland every year and I wait for the [dolphin?] to come out of the water and it calms me down!'

To begin with, the use of expletives permeates many of the jokes within Dave's act thereby giving the comic act a sense of vulgarity, a seemingly marked difference from the politeness of the "serious" word that is disseminated outside the carnivalesque spaces and moments. As Bakhtin notes, this type of communication circulated through the stand-up performance "...[leads] to the creation of special forms of...speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times (1986: 10)." During the expression of these utterances, this use of linguistics becomes transformed, moving away from the crude and the negative to a more positive one in which it acquires a spirit of laughter. Though this is not always used within stand-up comic performances, for risqué comedy is an individual comic's style and depending on their imagination it will affect how the utterances are to be perceived. Geoff talks about this when he is considering his personal material prior to going on stage:

> Well I will [write] some things that are very funny that are extremely, not racist because I am not racist, but that are funny but involve race, I know if I said this on stage, having my stage persona, where I talk about observing things most of the time, if I said this joke it would ruin the show.

For Geoff his stage presence would make it difficult to tell the jokes Dave tells, but in Dave's scenario, the material is received extremely well because the use of expletives adds a layer of passion to the words in conjunction with the rest of his performance on stage. The use of expletives in shaping this particular stand-up performance is not to be separated from the expression of certain topics that would be considered inappropriate outside these spaces in its particular framing. Much of the material is exaggerated to the point where it is expressed as grotesque imagery in order to make the "normative" social behaviour seem ridiculous. In

contemporary North American society the rhetoric towards Arabs and Muslims has been largely rooted in the circulation of stereotypes and paranoia; a cycle fuelled by nationalist sentiment and the media machine, and while the entire population does not necessarily buy into this rhetoric, these sentiments are nonetheless made apparent (Akbarzadegh and Mansouri 2007:24). Thus in this set of utterances, Dave parodies these normative discourses by stretching them to exaggerated proportions in the hopes of drawing out the flaws in these lines of thinking. In the first joke, he centers himself as part of the utterance by making fun of the way he looks in order to make apparent the assumptions that people may make based on physical appearance. While he could have straightforwardly stated that people make judgments based on the way he looks, the audience was able to connect with the performer and receive the message through this particular method of parody; self-deprecation. He also talks about the fact that people will say racist things about him under the assumption that he belongs to a particular "race" which he does not identify with. Under the rhetoric espoused by political correctness one would think that Dave's response would be to take immediate offense, however he brushes it off as an awkward interchange comparable to that of being rejected by a girl. In this then we see how our assumptions about offense are actually negotiated by each actor in those particular spaces and moments, thereby calling into question this understanding that engaging in racial speak necessitates a predictable response of being offended. The joke that follows, regarding his understanding of the identity of being Muslim, still has a message that pokes at the popular labelling and stereotyping that occurred after 9/11 and continues to this day, encouraging people to re-think the perspectivism inherent in an identity. Of course, whether this message is internalized and carried out of this space remains to be seen. Instead of simply re-stating the stereotype, he utilized the same sort of language brought up within the rhetoric of 9/11 to parody it. This is exemplified by techniques

such as: his imitation of Arabic in a manner that is garbled combined with the alleged "militant" yell, placed against the backdrop of a family living their day to day lives simply eating falafels. He utilizes the language of stereotypes purported by post-9/11 rhetoric regarding Arabs while depicting the family as regular people, making the stereotypes seem ridiculous by contrasting this language of violence with something as benign as eating falafels.

Finally, the third stream of jokes revolves around the notions of terrorists, which is usually not separated from the realm of grotesque imagery. However, it is often imbued with a far greater sense of "seriousness" than that of the comic world.. For instance, take Mbembe's extrapolation on the logics of martyrdom in the following: "To deal out death is therefore to reduce the other and oneself to the status of pieces of inert flesh, scattered everywhere, and assembled with difficulty before the burial." (Mbembe 2003: 37) Here, Mmembe reflects the connection of martyrdom with grotesque imagery of the body, through the focus on flesh and carnage. The theme of martyrdom, for all its "seriousness" becomes a topic that circulates primarily through the discussion of grotesque bodies. Which body/bodies have been torn and how many? Does the act connect the innocent with the broken, as we see during images of bloodied children? Whose body/bodies become too grotesque for our national sensibilities as becomes apparent with the rise of Muslim xenophobia? It is these discussions that dominate our contemporary rhetoric of terrorism.[25] Yet, Dave takes a topic that is nonetheless quite taboo for general public discussion and exaggerates it to the point where he has engages in conversations while playing the role of a "terrorist" in an attempt to accomplish several things. One, critique

[25] This can be seen in media depictions of terrorism, like mass shootings, or market place bombings. Take for instance the Aurora movie theatre shooting. An article published on CNN regarding three people suing the movie theatre for lax security opens with the line: "Three people wounded in the July mass shooting at a Colorado multiplex are suing the theater owner, claiming that security was lax the night a gunman opened fire and killed 12 people (CNN Wire Staff 9-22-12)." The media plays upon the violence of a tragedy as a way to generate our interest in other aspects of the story. Thus our contemporary rhetoric on acts of terror is very much consumed with the grotesque.

the overt discrimination sometimes faced by people who speak Arabic in public, by imitating a ridiculous event in which a terrorist is attempting to destroy a Tim Horton, posited as a "sacred" Canadian institution, and asking for donuts before they do so. Two, to allow the audience to see the issues with the Canadian state acting as if they are in a constant state of attack evidenced by the over-the-top enacting of a terrorist meeting in which they discuss the pointlessness of attacking Canada because of its reputation and theme parks. Clearly Dave is able to take a variety of liberties in this space when considering the subject matter. Though this is not to imply that within carnivalesque spaces, one can simply say whatever they want and the audience will be receptive to the push against social norms and discourses.

Often in stand-up performances where the performer decides to use risqué material to get a reaction from the audience it becomes apparent where people draw particular moral lines to indicate their level of discomfort or to signify that there is a firm line that they will not cross. This is best noted through the audience reaction through oohs or silence.

> G: Well that's the...I love Russell...I keep referring to Russell Peters, I dunno why. I haven't seen him that much lately but he does a great thing...he's like that Oooh, that's not a natural reaction…that's not a natural reaction to anything...it's weird the collective unconscious of the audience, the conscious [conscience?] of the audience says it, but I dunno what makes something go...like silence is-when you've done something really wrong or really bad that's when silence happens. When you've done something that's just-you know you stepped over the line maybe...that's when the Oooh's happen. If you're doing well and then you're met with silence you're like...okay I fucked up somewhere...I dunno what happened but I have got to get back on track because you're gonna lose a crowd quick if there's silence.

When an audience oohs during a stand-up performance it is because they are acknowledging that the joke is treading the line between funny and offensive, and it is up to the performer and their skill to ensure that the performance does not go beyond it. If it does they are met with a dead silence signaling a loss of connection between the audience and the performer and often times the end of the performance. These responses can happen collectively in a sort of implicit understanding between people that there is a moral line, something that breaks the illusion of the

comic performance. Though this does not argue a homogeneous audience either, as stated earlier members of the audience can be offended all on their own. What people are offended by and the type of reaction that occurs are not always predictable because it is often shaped by an intersection of many factors, like an individual's social, political and historical background as well as the social context that encompasses the audience as a whole (Bauman 2005). But up until this point, we have emphasized how the parodic encounter is imbued with a sense of dialogism. This is due to the idea that the carnivalesque plays upon the "serious" world in order to create this "second world" in which the audience and performers are drawn together to enjoy the grotesque expression of the social norms. However, this risks reducing the social life of both the carnivalesque and the outside to clashing of worlds, rather than the organic interaction between life outside and within the carnival. Even though Huizinga outlines a distinction between moments that are play and those that are not, he still questions our assumption that there is a stark contradiction between the play world and the serious world. He states the following:

> To our way of thinking, play is the direct opposite of seriousness. At first sight this opposition seems as irreducible to other categories as the play-concept itself...however, the contrast between play and seriousness proves to be neither conclusive nor fixed...[because]...some play can be very serious indeed...Laughter, for instance, is in a sense the opposite of seriousness without being absolutely bound up with play... (6)

Huizinga explores the moments in which the so-called play world intertwines with the realm of the serious to demonstrate how reality is shaped through the permeation of the two seemingly contradictory realms. Even the carnival festivities, seemingly separated into its own reality with parody establishing a link between the two, the performances are never simple because the worlds are never self-contained. They inform and are informed by each other (ibid.). In a risqué style of stand-up comedy the carnivalesque does not flow in one direction. Likewise, politically correct rhetoric often finds their place within the stand-up performance as well. In a few stand-up comedy shows I have seen, there is an phenomenon that seems to run counter to the

encompassing illusion of the carnival, in essence playing upon the audience perspectives of what constitutes "offensive" topics or themes. During my fieldwork at stand-up comedy clubs, there were times where I was seated near the front of the stage, thereby making me a very noticeable person to the rest of the audience as well as to the performer. Sometimes during these performances, I found myself to be the only visible minority in the crowd and consequently when certain performers incorporated any material that dealt with race, culture or ethnicity, which happened often because this type of material was popular, the audience hesitated in their laughter to glance at me to see if I was laughing. Dave comments on this behaviour

> It's fake bullshit, that's all it is. Because if you weren't there they laugh, but they just don't judged. So it happens all the time. It's like if we were sitting around here and making fun of a Middle Eastern person and the Middle Eastern person showed up, we'd be hesitant to laugh because you think you're offending him. That's all it is, it's like when handicapped people are in the room, you're like I can't say anything about them, but like when they're not there I've seen comedians do it for an audience and they're dying but then when you put a handicapped person in the audience then everyone's like, "that's offensive" because they are fake. Humans, I think by nature are afraid, we care too much about what other people think which holds us back in living and really appreciating life. Because the white person doesn't care. You know, I remember doing a joke about that, I'm like "you don't care." I make fun of an Arab, you don't really care, if you cared that much about an Arab person you'd go... I mean it's different if you had on at your house. You raised it or put it in your house, built a room for it and anytime someone offends it you go to battle, over that Arab person. You don't laugh, it's not like the comedian, if he was being degrading and hateful THEN, but if he was just making fun of your ethnicity in a good way and showing that its funny then laugh but they don't. I know that, I've seen it many times.

When they noted that I was indeed enjoying myself, the rest of the room joined in the laughter. This experience was not a fluke, it happened to me during several other performances as well as to other visible minorities in the crowd. Here we see the audience draw upon politically correct sensibilities that are instilled in them as they are disseminated with the utmost "seriousness" as part of Toronto's image. Thus, we can say that the relationship between political correctness and a certain risqué and "ethnic" style of comedy is mutually informed, deriving its meaning through each other and not in spite of it. If the relationship between the carnivalesque spaces and those demarcated as outside of it are not necessarily antagonistic, but in fact do inform each other then how can we re-evaluate the role of political correctness in contemporary Canadian society?

Political Correctness as Carnival

If we work through the idea that stand-up comedy is carnivalesque through its degradation of socially normative discourses and behaviour and that the realm of the "serious" and the "fun" are in fact mutually informed, then what can an understanding of stand-up comedy tell us about "politically correct" rhetoric as it is disseminated within contemporary Canadian society? To restate the context in which risqué stand-up comedy seemingly finds its place, popular imaginary often frames it within an antagonistic relationship with politically correct rhetoric. Furthermore, this rhetoric is itself often factionized with vocally strong opponents predicating their definitions of the word in either of two camps. On the one hand, politically correct discourses are viewed as a form of censorship in which people constantly have to watch what they say so as not to offend what they perceive as special interest groups (Scott 1992(b)). On the other hand, politically correct rhetoric is seen as a way of promoting tolerance and respect of often marginalized groups through the use of appropriate language and behaviours (Fairclough 2003). However, politically correct rhetoric is better thought of as a range of perspectives focused on the usage of language as a way to change a particular social reality. In contemporary Canadian society, especially within institutions, politically correct rhetoric is disseminated as an appropriate strategy to deal with issues of discrimination, and for the most part people are willing to accept the moral good associated with it. This is why risqué stand-up comedy is often thought of as degrading the politically correct rhetoric through the promotion of utterances that appear to be in stark contradiction with the "appropriate" use of language outside these spaces. The point here is not to either demonize or defend comic performers by stating that they either reinforce stereotypes or they do not for that universalizes all the actors involved within the dynamism of the performance. Furthermore, it is also not to say that PC rhetoric is removed from criticism,

nor is it to imply that there is a linear connection between politically correct rhetoric and stand-up comic performances for that reinforces an antagonistic relationship between two totalities. The point is to illuminate how the "serious" world, in which PC rhetoric allegedly lies, in fact negotiates the carnivalesque spirit within its own rhetoric and norms, as will be discussed below. Not only is the carnival infused with seriousness, but seriousness is embedded with a sense of play. In this case, an understanding that the relationship between certain styles of stand-up comedy and politically correct rhetoric illuminates the ways in which the rhetoric is carnivalesque; the ways in which it too degrades the another level of the "serious" world and whether it is imbued with a sense of renewal.

At first glance it seems as if politically correct rhetoric does not necessarily carve out a voluntary space and time in which it demarcates itself from other moments, for it is promoted as a rhetoric occupying all moments and spaces. Stand-up comedy has notable walls, whereas politically correct rhetoric is either embodied as a unifying image or not at all. Yet, there are spaces where this rhetoric becomes institutionalized, permanently marked down as a solid policy to be enforced.[26] Consequently there is a differing in the perspectives and embodiment of politically correct rhetoric dependent on the space. However, this is not to suggest that any of these attitudes are predictable or fixed, but that they are constantly being negotiated and given new social meaning in each moment. This flexibility in the creation of social meaning in different spaces allows politically correct rhetoric to be moved around. There are times where we can see the emergence of these discourses, such as in the variety of ways in which people can be offended within stand-up comedy clubs. The point here is even though attitudes of political

[26] This can be seen in Canada's legislative bodies, as discussed earlier. However, it also makes an impact in the way certain corporations operate, especially in avenues related to image branding, and the academic environment including universities and colleges. This institutionalization creates a different sense of political correctness when compared to being in a general public space or in intimate spaces.

correctness are flexible, in the fact that it carries from space to space, it still is defined and engaged differently in the different spaces, thereby creating slight distinctions between each social context.

Furthermore, politically correct rhetoric is itself imbued with a sense of the carnival. It aims to take aspects of our contemporary usage of language and break them apart, to turn words into grotesque images in what proponents of PC see as an attempt to challenge a discourse of structural discrimination within language (Fairclough 2003). It seeks to point out the hidden contradictions and ugliness hidden behind particular words and phrases. This is why PC can be seen to utilize the taboo in such an essential way. By illuminating the hideous meaning behind certain words, they turn previously socially acceptable terms into monstrous figures. The concept of carnival becomes much looser when we think about it in terms of political correctness, for it creates taboo rather than penetrates it, but these PC discourses still play upon the grotesque imagery or utterances that live within the carnival moments. Often these movements towards political correctness are seen as moving away from grotesque imagery towards "cleaner" utterances and while this is often the case, these movements are reliant on creating a dialectical relationship by reiterating the taboo and the disturbing. Proponents of politically correct rhetoric do not just focus on degrading certain rhetoric, they attempt to engage in a form of renewal by often creating new terminology of phrases that arise from the ashes of the degraded word. Think of the shift from the terminology "mentally retarded." Initially the term was a blending of medical understandings of the body and mind and social attitudes, thereby solidifying a negative opinion of people who had been "diagnosed" as having this particular "disorder." Moving away from such discriminatory language, PC movements attempted to attribute a positive sense to the word. The concept of "challenged" or "disabled" seemed much less stigmatized and were

thought of as viable replacements for the previous term. However, the new utterances were always treated in reference to its grotesque past meaning that it often is illuminated in the moments where people utilize the taboo language. The new concept proposed by PC discourses was a way to pierce the old rhetoric and to turn it into something vulgar or grotesque, to expose the contradictions in such archaic communication and to replace it with a new language that arrives from its destruction. Like parody, this rhetoric has to engage in the language of the taboo to draw people together to critique the previous discourses. Thus political correctness's spatial and temporal limitations and its implementation of the grotesque political correctness illustrate aspects of the carnivalesque which are difficult to over look. What this drives towards though is why it is important to understand stand-up comedy and political correctness under this as being carnivalesque. Thus, PC rhetoric is imbued with the elements of the carnivalesque and the antagonistic relationship between these discourses and risqué comedy is actually intrinsically linked.

Why the carnival

Thus far, it has been established that the carnival functions to dislodge social norms and discourses from their dissemination as fixed truths by stretching these out until the Janus-faced nature of such tropes becomes illuminated. Consequently, stand-up comedy embraces this idea of being fun and carnivalesque through its transformation of everyday elements in society to something grotesque for people to laugh at. However as mentioned previously, Bakhtin's notion of carnival is imbued with a sense of dualism in that it does not simply stretch and degrade, turning ephemeral spirits into flesh but also renews:

> [this relates] to the world's gay matter, which is born, dies and gives birth, is devoured and devours; this is the world which continually grows and multiplies, becomes ever greater and better, ever more abundant.

> Gay matter is ambivalent, it is the grave and the generating womb, the receding past and the advancing future, the becoming... (1984: 195)

Gone are the perfect, complete discourses that one embodies as a member of a particular political, historical, social or cultural group and in its stead stands words; exposed for the social constructs that they are, to the masses that have held them as truths for so long. They become monstrosities to the senses of the audience. Through this assertion of a liberating aspect of the carnival spirit of play, Bakhtin's collusion between denial and affirmation serves to question the nature of power within society. This occurs through the play between tension and release, emphasizing the role of the masses, the popular, the "low" folk culture in informing and piercing the "serious" world. As Ben Johnson (2003) states laughter then becomes a '...subterranean life of transgressive culture thriving on the low element unflinchingly reformed by serious culture (7)." This is evidenced in Bakhtin's assertion that the grotesque within the carnival spirit illuminates the possibility of a "golden age" liberating the masses and allowing them entrance into a "friendly world," one that stands separate from the "serious" reality that surrounds them everyday. In this world, Bakhtin claims the people give themselves fully to this world and are fully aware of their "bodily" participation within another reality; a reality in which indulgence becomes the liberating norm (48)[27]. Bakhtin then argues that the freedom of the people through their engagement with the grotesque comes through the marginalization of "necessity" and he says that "Necessity, in every concept which prevails at any time, is always one-piece, serious, unconditional, and indisputable (49)." In essence, he argues that elements of society portrayed as being integral to cohesive societal functioning always presents itself as fixed discourses. For example, the state presents itself as being inherently serious, its authority unquestionable and its appearance as a unified body with very rigid parameters. The grotesque elements of the carnival

[27] In *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin conceptualizes grotesqueness as more than a focus on bodily destruction and renewal, but also an acceptance of abundance and excess which I am summing up in the phrase "indulgence."

serve to "uncrown" these closed discourses and thereby "...frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities (49)." This carnival spirit allows the people the ability to create beyond their normal societal controls. Bakhtin goes so far as to state that only when a carnivalesque awareness has occurred do sweeping changes to the institution could take place: "For this reason great changes, even in the field of science, are always preceded by a certain carnival consciousness that prepares the way (49)." Consequently, Bakhtin posits the carnival and "necessity" in a permanently dialectical and antagonistic relationship in which the two struggle for recognition and consequently immortalizes the carnivalesque as an integral way to alter powerful circulating discourses. It exists as a way to overturn; as a way to renew from the destruction left in the wake of the carnival moment. Bakhtin's analysis of the carnival serves as an element of counter-culture encompassed by the masses, whose antagonistic relationship and degrading relationship with state power threatens to overturn the hegemonic discourse through an enlightenment of the people.

Now, the point of comparison is not to say that stand-up comedy is a carnival for the dualism between degradation and renewal through the performance can be questioned, but that stand-up is nonetheless carnivalesque precisely because it undergoes this process of degradation. However, the antagonistic nature that is popularly imagined between politically correct discourses and risqué stand-up comedy and whether parody engages in this realm of renewal is certainly an issue**.** When examining stand-up comedy, is the parody stunted at a stage of renewal? Geoff touches on this when he talks about the meaning in stand-up comedy:

> I was an English major and in all of Shakespeare's plays, the fool was always the most knowledgeable character, he knew exactly what was going on, he could prophesize things and everything he told, he would give advice to the kings or whatever and it was always right advice but they never believed him because he was the fool. So that's the way comedy sort of works too, well this guy could be saying the most poignant things, the things that make sense but "Oh he's a comedian, it's just fun and games it doesn't matter."

Here Geoff outlines the issue with viewing comedy as a pure carnival. Though he feels comedians can speak about real issues within the space, the degradation has no renewal and the parody is incomplete. Since the comedy space is just for "fun" no matter what the person says one cannot take them seriously.

The limitation of the sense of renewal of carnivalesque spaces like stand-up comedy clubs can be attributed to Lefebvre's notion of transparent spaces. Lefebvre claims that social space is a social product, that this process is concealed by an "illusion of transparency (27-29)." The idea that spaces are socially constructed challenges the popular assumption disseminated through state rhetoric that spaces and discourses are in fact homogenous (10-11). This illusion assumes that space is candid, in that everything can be seen and that there are no hidden interactions within the space, actions have "free reign." This "illusion of transparency" works through the attribution of innocence to these spaces, that is free of traps and pitfalls. In these spaces, meaning is understood never negotiated and "communication brings the non-communicated into the realm of the communicated, the incommunicable has no existence (28)." What is being said is that in a transparent space words and reality have an interdependence that cannot be violated. All ideas, feelings and thoughts can be communicated and once they are disseminated, they are understood. If these cannot manifest themselves into words, then they cannot be understood and therefore do not exist. If words are directly linked to the shaping of reality then these words hold power precisely because they can degrade the principals of hegemonic social consciousness and rebirth it as changes in society. This Lefebvre states is the trap of the "illusion of transparency", in that it results in the vast usage of energy and resources in the recording of words, in hopes to bring about major social transformations. This release of passive text is thought to plant the seeds of grandiose correction (29). In reality transparent

spaces are inscribed with a sense of messiness, becoming ever internally contradictory and tense. Lefebvre points out that ultimately, this focus on the process of constructing spaces will highlight the political character that is inherent in the shaping of the spaces in the first place (8, 26). He states that these transparent spaces are "coded" with imagery or symbols that are produced and reproduced through the objects of power that the spaces hope to degrade and replace and this is how their traps are set (39). Lefebvre's perspective on space as being socially constructed dispels the dialectical positioning and suggests that carnivalesque spaces are imbued with the same political character that allowed for its existence in the first place, ultimately stating that society is not being challenged by these spaces but are being reproduced by them (8).

Stand-up comedy clubs are commonly seen as having "free reign" in terms of the utterances performed in the spaces. The performers believed to be expressing themselves directly to the audience and their audiences are believed to be taking the utterances in a shared manner, with everyone able to understand the force, meaning and intention of the words as they are disseminated. Even though the spaces entertain the grotesque they are nonetheless posited as innocent fun; a homogenous world supposedly distinct from the realm of the "serious." In this positioning of stand-up comedy the acts become textualized, and people believe that they are being brought into the world of the "communicated" through their ability to read these utterances as the direct word. These popular depictions of stand-up comedy clubs and the acts within their walls fall into Lefebvre's notion of transparent spaces in which the subtle interactions that actually do occur within the clubs are reduced to homogenous imaginations of the space. If stand-up comedy clubs can be considered transparent spaces then the actions within them are trapped, for these spaces become reproductions of the political powers that allow for them to

exist in the place. Thus while the comedic spaces nevertheless degrades the "serious" world it is ultimately constrained as a venting space, or release valve.

Similarly, the "free-reign" attributed to PC comes from an understanding of how these discourses play off the notions of marked and unmarked language and how it circulates within the everyday. Thus far, I established that politically correct rhetoric is popularly imagined as occupying one of two positions that are dialectically situated. First, that these discourses are a way of promoting the tolerance and respect of marginalized people within society through a focus on language and behavior. Second, that this politically correct rhetoric is an exercise of control over speech and thought geared towards benefitting particular sectors of society. Borrowing from Chris Brickell's (2004) work on *Travelling Orthodoxies: Sexuality and PC in New Zealand*, the circulation of politically correct rhetoric is embedded in a discursive play that identifies rhetoric as either marked or unmarked. Marked language is rhetoric that is made visible because of its association with an intrinsic political project. Unmarked language is said to remain invisible because it is not attributed to any kind of political scheme. It revolves around a sense of naturalness or normalcy where the language used is innocent of all powerful ideologues.[28] Expanding Brickell's idea into the usage of politically correct rhetoric by both proponents and critics, this play on marked and unmarked language becomes apparent. Taking the general position held by the critics of PC rhetoric, the discourse of political correctness becomes marked as an intrinsically political project. Its values are seen as too visual, or too awkward to fit into a narrative of normalcy, supposedly governed by an unmarked and empty discourse of "free speech." Essentially, political correctness will fail to carve out its own space in

[28] Brickell states that citizens of New Zealand often use this discursive dichotomy to frame issues of homosexuality, where it becomes espoused as a marked political project that threatens the innocent nature of heterosexual normalcy (112-114).

everyday discourse because it is embedded in a political sphere that seemingly stands distinct from the realm of everyday life. Of course, this reification of political correctness and assumption of distinct sphere can be questioned and will be done so shortly, but it also must be pointed out that proponents of PC rhetoric use it within the dichotomy of marked and unmarked language. In this sense, PC rhetoric marks out taboo language, words that are inherently political because they exclude, devalue, and classify different people (112-114). This taboo language does not remain invisible for long though, it becomes most visible in the moments where those words are employed and where the PC society notably identifies it as a threat to their sense of decency. What becomes unmarked is the new politically correct discourse, for in its quest to make inherently political taboo language; it makes itself invisible through a dehistoricized shifting of terms and its justification through the blanket of "tolerance" as a norm of Canadian society. In essence, we become aware of the fact that we should employ particular discourses because its "good" to do so, yet we remain unaware of how these terms came to be and why we are using them in the ways we do. In summation, the circulation of PC rhetoric in Canadian society plays upon a perceived antagonism between marked and unmarked language, and through both the proponents and critics of PC rhetoric there is a performed homogeneity of PC and the discourses that surround it.

It is through this notion that political correctness has roots in the "illusion of transparency." At the same time the fundamental basis in the circulation of PC is its link between words, meanings and actions. By this all words have communicable meanings. If a word is marked as offensive then the person stating or writing this word is also deemed offensive. However, a quick shift of the word to an unmarked rhetoric carries this person out of the zone of offensiveness. In the eyes of PC discourses, discrimination is forever neutered as long as the

rhetoric is an “appropriate” one. Whether this effectively works remains to be seen but if we look at the variety of discourses disseminated in society, the seeds of discrimination grow strong. For instance: the medical opinion that one is five times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia if they are African American than if they are Caucasian is circulated in conjunction with media stereotypes (Neal 2006:286). Furthermore, the police force in Toronto admits that they knowingly stop and document African Americans more often than anyone else (Rankin and Winsa 2012). Despite all PCs efforts” race” and racism are still a part of our everyday lives as they permeate structures of Canadian society. Since PC cannot truly remove the meanings that charge these words, they never accomplish their goals of unmarking the rhetoric and freeing their spaces of nuanced stigma. This focus within PC discourses on the changing of words as a way to deal with issues of discrimination is the “illusion of transparency”.

If the carnival is not necessarily a tool of social change a question arises, why do people participate in it? As Turner (1988) highlights in the performance of ritual social drama, the performances are built through the expression of a particular tension and formulated through its cathartic release; something becomes solved, even if only for a moment. As stand-up comedy allegedly degrades and penetrates political correctness and other “serious” rhetoric, the penetration does not leave the limits of its space or time. The people go and they laugh at the inconsistencies that are seen in their lives but still never leave those discourses and ideologies that shape their everyday. So if they do not go to change why do they go there at all? Because it is fun, it is a release from the tensions that build in their everyday lives. Without these spaces the stresses that are prodded at may bubble over. Instead they are sated in a cathartic release. Stand-up comedy becomes, in essence, one of the venting spaces, a space of cathartic release from the

stress of the "serious" world, a moment of fun allowed by the state precisely because it poses no threat to its functioning and because it serves to distract the people from engaging in truly destructive parody that carries out beyond the space. It is contained as carnival, a space designated as such through the negotiation of meanings and values, as it serves to both allow the populace to release their frustrations and at the same time reiterate the hegemonic discourses it criticizes.

With political correctness, one sees a willingness to quell tension that is derived from social stigmas. This is seen in the shifting of words into the taboo, or the relabeling of groups in a hope to relieve a social stigma. The venting power of political correctness is not just found in their attempt to address discrimination and trying to combat it, but to change rhetoric in hopes to remove the stigma associated with particular phrases. PC movements then attempt to use this distinction between taboo and appropriateness to change attitudes by shifting language. Yet, the meaning surrounding these words remains the same. Thus, political correctness becomes trapped within its own self, fundamentally failing to penetrate the structural inequalities operating in society precisely because it is informed by the political nature involved in the production of spaces and discourses. By taking itself and its targets as homogenous utterances that can be heard and unheard and always framing itself as dialectically opposed to "taboo" language, the effects of politically rhetoric can only scratch the surface, thereby risking a dehistoricization of issues of discrimination in contemporary Canadian society. Yet, this carnivalesque nature of politically correct rhetoric does provide some with a sense of relief against the tension of discriminatory language in society. It is often said that because of the dissemination of this kind of rhetoric we have moved beyond a world in which issues of discrimination circulate our public spheres. Or have we simply painted over a car that has completely rusted. As John L. Jackson suggests in

Racial Paranoia, is it possible that this attempt at dealing with discrimination in society through a focus on language resulted in a tolerance that is always teetering primarily because the structural issues that create intolerance remain willfully ignored (2003:53-81)

These spaces and discourses that can be considered as venting spaces are not neutral and fragmentary. As mentioned earlier, these release valves are a reproduction of the political and social trajectories that shape them. As Lefebvre explains, social spaces are not only a tool to produce but a means of control as well:

> The fact is that these efforts exemplify a very strong- even the dominate- tendency within present-day society and its mode of production. Under this mode of production, intellectual labour, like material labour, is subject to endless division. In addition, spatial practice consists in a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice. In the process these are separated from one another, though this does not mean that overall control is relinquished even for a moment: society as a whole continues in subjugation to political practice-that is, to state power (8).

This interplay of topographies of power reinforce a pressing need to move away from dialectical understandings of how power operates[29], whether it is stand-up comedy versus politically correct rhetoric or this rhetoric versus discriminatory language. It is especially important to examine how these hidden influences of power operate in spaces and discourses that are homogenized as fun or morally good. As Lefebvre connects power in relation to space, he uses the concept of hegemony to analyze these subtle workings of power. He says that hegemony goes beyond a repressive exercising of power. Rather it is exercised through society at large, permeating through elements of our culture, knowledge, ideologies, and actors through " ...both institutions and ideas (10)" In other words, power can also work by rewarding, pleasing and most importantly producing social discourses and spaces.

[29] By the phrase "dialectical understandings of how power operates" I am referring to this idea that power is sometimes framed as occupying two distinct poles, e.g. good vs. evil, authority vs. resistance, etc. I want to emphasize how power operates through various spaces and discourses, rather than despite them.

In summation, Bakhtin posits a theory of carnival whose spirit degrades the "serious" word as it remains marked as a distinct moment in space and time. This carnival employs a dialogue located within the realm of the parodic and grotesque to pierce and protract these authorial discourses, and at the same time seeks to create a better world through the expositions of the carnival. Stand-up comedy can be considered carnivalesque in that it shares some of the features espoused by Bakhtin, namely its cordoning off of a separate space and time and its application of the parodic and grotesque image. Yet none of these featured are applied predictably within stand-up comedy, making its attribution into the realm of the carnivalesque more dynamic. This is most notable in the interplay of the "serious" world and that of stand-up comedy rather than the antagonistic relationship conventionally posited between the two. It is through this permeation that politically correct rhetoric becomes imbued with a sense of the carnivalesque as well, for both it and stand-up are mutually informed. Within the interrelated framework of the carnivalesque, the sense of renewal extrapolated in Bakhtin's carnival becomes an issue that encompasses both stand-up comedy and PC rhetoric. In essence, both of these performances and discourses are ultimately limited within their own carnivalesque nature because they both operate under an illusion of transparency. Both stand-up and PC rhetoric claim to be freeing in their circulation because of their capacity to reveal, to bring all discourse to the surface through their idea that all topics and themes can be communicated. The most important is the popular understanding that the words espoused in each are direct representations of reality but this homogenization risks overlooking how power in fact works through both PC rhetoric and stand-up comedy spaces thereby constraining them as reproductions of society.

Conclusion

At first glance, it seems as if the popularity of risqué style stand-up comic performances are at odds with the growing promotion of politically correct rhetoric in Canadian society. The spaces and discourses are often posited as occupying an antagonistic relationship with one another, with both parties claiming accurate portrayals of social reality and both attributing negative qualities to the other. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to examine whether these two elements of the everyday occupied such dialectical positioning. In essence, I explored the permeation of politically correct rhetoric within the expression of risqué stand-up comedy. Furthermore, I examined the extent to which these PC discourses were pierced within the stand-up spaces and whether or not these illuminations travelled outside the walls of the club. The nature of this relationship provided commentary on the circulation of power within these spaces and discourses about discrimination in Canadian society. It was important to ascertain stand-up as a performance to highlight the subtle and dynamic nature of its expression. The space itself goes beyond a simple dissemination of utterances to an audience. It is imbued with a sense of promise that ties the performer and their audience together in a dramatic performance of social roles in which a metaphorical understanding of humour expression is negotiated. It is shaped through a promise of dialogue that is never removed from its social context. Thus the expression of stand-up comedy as a carnivalesque dialogue highlighted a connection between that of the "serious" world and that of the "comic" one. The utterances disseminated as a function of spatial and temporal demarcation used the parodic and grotesque image to illuminate authorial discourses and expose them for the contradictions within their structures. The risqué comic performances played off politically correct rhetoric through their use of "inappropriate" material, stretching the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable by bringing people together

within the destructive laughter. However, the distinction between the "serious" and the "comic" world becomes thin as we see the interplay of the two so-called realms through moments of seriousness within comic shows. Far from PC rhetoric occupying a distinct circulation, its mutually informing relationship with stand-up comedy highlights its own carnivalesque dissemination. Through its own spatialization and play upon the grotesque its circulation is not as antagonistic as it was originally believed. The question that remained was whether these carnivalesque spaces go beyond its designated space and time. Taking into account both stand-up comedy and politically correct rhetoric it would be problematic to think that they both are effective agents of change, as they both fall under Lefebvre's logic of transparent spaces. Through this designation, both stand-up comedy and politically correct rhetoric become homogenized, or appeared as homogenized, as free spaces whose very nature is apparent to all who engage with them. Furthermore, their linear connection between words, meanings and reality places them within a trap that effectively conceals how power works through these spaces and discourses. As such, both politically correct rhetoric and stand-up comic performances risk being constrained.

This nature of both politically correct rhetoric and stand-up comedy spaces as carnivalesque venting spaces illuminates the idea that Canada is still a nation of anxieties. By this I mean that we are operating in a society that is still struggling with systemic discrimination in terms of "race," language, gender, ability, etc. The reason for this is due to the fact that in Canada, the national discourse shifted from being embroiled in French-English tensions to directly defining Canada as a single national unit that needed managing in such a way. In our quest to deal with the changing demographic Canada promoted an image of "tolerance" through multiculturalism and PC rhetoric that has served to blanket all forms of dialogue within that

narrative. This alleged transformation of Canadian society to an inherently inclusive unit fundamentally sweeps any dialogue filled with fractures and tensions into a more compact communicative package, one that is inherently innocent and unmarked in its distance away from the political sphere. This of course ignores the way power actually circulates within discourses and risks transforming them into static scripts rather than socially interacted performances.

The issue is that these anxieties that circulate cause us to seek "alternative" avenues of expression and this is reflected in the popularity of attending stand-up comedy clubs in Canada. Yet the irony is that these spaces that are supposed to give us a break from these tensions are in fact reproductions of the same power dynamics that exist outside them. This is because they fall into the same trap. In their portrayal of themselves as homogenous they make themselves transparent rather than emphasizing the messy and dynamic elements of play embedded in each space.

The purpose of this dissertation was not to damn comic performers, for some comedians are extremely skilled in their manipulation of verbal utterances and bodily aesthetics during the acts. At the same time, it is not to valorize all comic performers as agents of social change, for it is quite possible for some of them to simply reinforce stereotypes. The point here is that the expression of humour within stand-up comedy cannot be generalized and placed within an antagonistic framework with authorial discourses. At the same time, the aim of this work is not to destroy the work of political correctness movements but to imply that they do not circulate as sacrosanct discourses. Therefore, if the goal of such discourses is to change the structures of inequality that exist through Canadian society, their mediation as transparent rhetoric needs to be addressed.

If both PC discourses and stand-up comedy in Toronto are performed as carnivalesque and transparent spaces then this has several implications for the Canadian dialogue regarding issues of discrimination. First, the national rhetoric of "tolerance" has been appropriated as evidence of a successful transformation to a Canadian society that has moved beyond the existence of discrimination. Consequently when any of these issues arise, such as racism or sexism, we utilize these discourses of "tolerance" like political correctness to frame the debate. In doing so, we risk dehistoricizing issues and removing them from their structural contexts because of this reduction of issues to the focus on utterances (Jackson: 53-81). Second, that some of the alternative negotiations with this rhetoric are moved beyond the sphere of the "serious" world and into realms seen as providing a temporary break from authorial discourses. They do this by penetrating them and turning them into ridiculous monstrosities. All allegedly become "equal" within this carnivalesque performance, separate from the social norms that govern them. What seems an ideal place to penetrate authorial discourses unfortunately cannot get past its very own self-portrayal. Thus, as long as these discourses and spaces are portrayed as free and communicable through their universal association of words, meanings and action then they both will be ultimately constrained as venting spaces that risk reproducing the hierarchies they seeks to criticize. While there are no correct answers on how to address issues of discrimination within the Canadian national imaginary, perhaps a potential place to start would be with the recognition of subtlety and performance inherent in our national discourses and move to a strategy of dialogue that does not posit itself as transparent.

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