# NEWS REPRESENTATION IN COMEDY SHOWS. CASE STUDY: THE DAILY SHOW - TRAGEDY IN PARIS: THE THREE STAGES OF POLITICAL GRIEF

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*Abstract. Our topic addresses the nowadays video forms of press magazine genre, insisting upon a very good example, The Daily Show, hosted by Trevor Noah. In order to describe this TV show in relation to the genre represented, we have tried to offer a double perspective upon it, from both a journalist and a linguistic viewpoint. Regarding the aim of our research, this is based on the hypothesis that most of the newscasters redefine press magazine in subjective terms, and that this particular genre has been hybridized towards comedy or satire. Therefore, our analysis is based on a new hybrid genre in nowadays journalism that is required to be theoretically framed and properly defined. As follows, we stopped upon The Daily Show which represents indeed a vivid example for this genre fluctuation and our corpus analysis will punctually show portions of this show transcribed and examined in a linguistic and journalistic key. Our demonstration will be carried out with the help of sequential analysis and our case studies will particularly show the transfer from the prototype of press magazine towards comedy and entertainment show.*

*Keywords: humour, press magazine, news, entertainment, infotainment.*

We decided to conduct our study clearly focusing on a specific television program that deals with national and international press in a distinctive manner, combining elements from two genres, clearly proving one of the most powerful characteristics of nowadays press: its heterogeneous nuance. By making use of some indispensable methodological assets such as ***oral discourse,genre*** and ***corpusanalysis*** we are aware of the ambivalence of *The Daily Show*, as we are going to prove later on, as well as on the genre pyramid that we must build based on this analysis:

One consequence of genre mixing which I have already referred to is that it produces a great deal of ambivalence. Genres are associated with particular principles of


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interpretation, so that the interpretation of any given linguistic text will depend upon how it is contextualized generically. When two or more genres are operative, the question arises as to how they are hierarchized. (Fairclough, 1995: 173)

Thus, discussing such a vivid matter in our contemporary society, our topic addresses one of the most visible developments that press is facing nowadays: ***genrehybridization***. How and why media genres are becoming more and more complex highly depends on the inevitable and continuous changes our societies face nowadays, and therefore, the audience`s horizons**.**

## 1. A New Fluid Genre – *The Daily Show*. A Self-Defining Approach

As already mentioned, the example we designated for our research is represented by *The Daily Show*. We considered it a very accurate example of a hybrid genre, mainly because it contains daily news in a satirical manner, but also incorporating different particularities pertaining to different genres, as further analysis will prove later on.

In order to go further with our argumentation regarding *The Daily Show*, a detailed analysis of a chosen corpus seems to be vital in proving our point. Therefore, we extracted a piece from one of the most popular episodes of the TV program discussed, namely *Tragedy In Paris: The Three Stages Of Political Grief*. Likewise, as the title suggests, its topic has been highly present in the international press, due to its debatable nature. The manner in which Trevor Noah chose to build his argumentation into persuading the audience to follow his line of reasoning is also truly impressive, being another pro reason in choosing it.

In order to describe this particular new genre in discussion, we would like to mention that we deal with an oral televisual discourse. Although objective reasons show the TV show`s discourse is obviously prepared ahead, it is also occasionally creating improvised humour effects. We would like to keep in mind here an interesting element about improvisation: is an element of all performance genres that are not prescriptively notated, and is found in the performance genres of a wide range of cultures. (Duranti, 2001: 116).

As a typical oral communication as well as by means of the improvisation effects, the TV show in discussion is also highly flexible and transitory and is very much based on the communication with the audience:


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Oral communication is highly malleable and organic. Oral messages are immediate and ephemeral, so that individuals and groups must keep information in their minds and pass it through speech. Because everyday experience cannot really be separated from the oral medium of transmission, life and knowledge cannot be separated. (Littlejohn, 2002: 306)

In order to establish a clear pattern and an accurate definition for this particular kind of TV show, we would like to remind their Facebook definition which states that they are a comedic TV show dealing with current affairs.[1]

Besides, the very definition is a first hint for the ambivalence we may observe within this broadcast, as they are supposedly discussing current news and affairs - we may classify this as a *seriousdiscourse* (Searle, 1975:329) in a comedic nuance, using irony, satire and therefore creating humour.

## 2. Validating Press Magazine Genre

We would like to primarily start by offering some eligible proof in favour of the presence of press magazine genre within this TV show. First of all, the fact that we deal with a shared high amount of valuable public information is undeniably true. In this particular case we are now analysing, the main topic is represented by the November Paris attacks from November 2015:

(1) off to the attacks in paris: the war on terror is heating up again and we've just learned something new about the terrorist devious tactics.

Afterwards, another issue that leads to the genre of press magazine is represented by the TV Show`s pattern itself. Hence, if we discuss its discursive architecture, we come to find out that it has a ***thesis*** and a ***setup***: off to the attacks in paris: the war on terror is heating up again and we've just learned something new about the terrorist devious tactics, as well as a series of rationalized arguments, clearly distinguished by means of discourse markers or contextualization cues (Johnstone, 2008):

(2) A1 **for example politicians grieving stage one use the tragedy as an excuse to say what you would have said any way you can say what you want**

[1] https://www.facebook.com/thedailyshow/?fref=nf, *accessed on the 14th of December, 2015;*


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(3) A2 **then you can move to the next stage of political grief breakout and nazi comparisons**

(4) A3 **there's the final stage of political grief focused on how to handle the tide of refugees fleeing Syrian isis this stage is known as just say something really *** and crazy**

Yet, the most pertinent and valuable argument in favour of press magazine appearance it`s definitely related by the presence of reported speech from the daily press. It is also strongly connected to the arguments mentioned before, as we shall see in the examples. The presenter is using public opinions from the medias sources in order to shape and organize it`s speech:

(5) **A1**=>but if they had guns if our people had guns if they were allowed to carry it would have been a much much different situation

(6) **A2=**>secretary clinton here did not want to use the word radical islam in response i think that's i don't understand it that would be like saying we won't go at war with nazist cuz we are afraid to offend some germans who may have been members of the nazi party but were't violent themselves

(7) **A3**=>if we displace people who are used to a dessert climate living in the middle east speaking a language that is not common to america and essentially living in a culture and a midst of religion that is not theat common here we really are creating a disruption if we're serious about wanting to protect them then let's do it in a climate with a language with a culture and with a religion they're more comfortable with

Summing up the main attributes of a press magazine, we underline its fundamental purpose: to take an inventory of the daily press - newspapers, radio and even television (Popescu, 2002: 342, t.n.). Therefore, the main argument in claiming that press magazine is an entrenched genre within *The Daily Show* is that Trevor Noah constantly refers to daily television news by means of reported speech, a sine qua non condition in defining the press magazine.

## 3. Humorous Strategies in a Serious Discourse


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In the book entitled *Humour Theories and the Physiological Benefits of Laughter*, Julia Wilkins argues that: Humour and laughter have long been recognized as central to the human condition (Wilkins, 2009:349) and that laughter serves many functions essential to human survival—a bonding function, a peace making function, and a health-boosting function. (Wilkins, 2009:349). Beyond question, humour is becoming more and more present in daily televisual shows, as we can clearly argue for an inherent change of journalism that is completely connected to the social transformations one is exposed to every day:Journalism, as we know it today has been evolving continuously, sometimes as a result of developing technology, sometimes as a reflection of changes in society (Burns, 2013: 6).

As we already highlighted, *entertainment* and *humour* have a significant importance in shaping this TV show and in offering it a particular kind of charm and attraction. We would like to retain the following definition of *humour*:

***Humour*** is a performative pragmatic accomplishment involving a wide range of communication skills including, but not exclusively involving, ***language***, ***gesture***, the preservation of ***visualimagery***, and ***situationmanagement***. ***Humour***, of all forms of communicative acts, is one of ***the most heavily dependent on equal cooperative participation of actor and audience***. The audience, in order to enjoy humour, must `get`the joke. This means they must be capable of analyzing the cognitive frames presented by the actor and following the process of the cration of the humour. (Duranti, 2001: 98)

In addition, Alessandro Duranti also points out that most of the times; humour is created in four different stages: ***the setup***, ***the paradox***, ***the denouement*** and ***the release.*** (Duranti, 2001: 98). First of all, as we also remarked in the previous lines, the setup is offered from the first lines of the presenter. The main object for our analysis is represented here by the way in which Trevor Noah creates the humorous effects, by emphasizing the absurd behind the fact that ISIS has a helpline. We can even argue that in this particular case the setup and the paradox are overlapping themselves, since the fact that a terrorist group has a helpline may be paradoxical to a certain extent:

(8) off to the attacks in paris: the war on terror is heating up again and we've just learned something new about the terrorist devious


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tacticsS1 counter terrorist officials tell nbc news that isis recently launched a 24 hours helpdesk xxx by a half dozen senior operatives (silence and laughing) isis has a helpline / for terrorists

Of course, an undisputable paradox is the entire false dialogue Trevor Noah is building on the grounds of the setup and the arguments shown. Hence, each times he introduces a public opinion from the public press he is offering in return his comments, creating thus the false dialogue in discussion which is again a very well defined strategy in creating humour:

(9) it these are americans you`re talking to the people will spend millions of dollars a year on diet pills that we`ll make you lose fifty pounds in five days these are the inventors of the tv dinner americans won`t even gra:m unless it`s insta but of the XXX of tragedy

(10) is your answer always more guns it's like saying let`s dig our way out of this hole with more holes sorry the last transformers movie sucked here we`ll fix it with another oneit doesn`t work that way

(11) but still Marco Rubio to say non-radical muslims are the same as non-violent nazist is not quite correct because you see the nazist pretty much know what they were getting in for is not like the vast majority of nazist were in it for non-fascist reasons

Even his own personal comments on the topic also articulate an important source of humour within the entire discourse, due to the fact that he has the audacity to approach this topic as a laughing matter. As a professional comedian, he is imagining some improbable situations as it would be replacing ISIS helpdesk operators with American individuals. In this manner, the broadcaster connects with his audience by stating some common mental representations and values:

(12) *this is insane* and *also a great opportunity for us* because you see *all we need to do now is make sure that none of their attacks ever work again* and a*ll we need to do is secretly replace their helpdesk operators with our guys imagine what we could do if we could infiltrate the system*

Following the same pattern, the presenter subtly guesses the widespread public disdain towards the politicians and so he finely stresses this aspect too in another personal comment about the abnormality of people who run for office:


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(13) *I get it I get it now that`s angerand that`s one of the stages of grief that most people go through if they're normal but I've been seen in the last few days not everyone is normal and most of them are running for office* you see *for some politicians they are limited to the regular five stages of grief denial anger bargaining aaa anger and the department of congress*

Another humour practice we encounter in Trevor Noah`s TV show is by meta-representing his speakers intentions, or the so called mindreading. This humorous strategy is mainly used to build a stronger relationship with his audience, by making again a series of absurd assumptions about some very improbable situations, provoking, thus, laughter. The presenter uses again some imagined dialogues, which are based on the audience`s thoughts:

Comedians usually resort to short stories in their performances. These stories make manifest a number of assumptions, which interact with the audience's own mental representations (e.g. beliefs) in a way which is only partly predictable. Assumptions may be deeply affected during this transmission involving mental representations (comedian's thoughts) turned public representations (comedian's words) and re-transformed as mental representations (audience's thoughts). (Yus: 2002: 13)

(14) yes yeah i'm sorry you're having trouble with your suicide vest yes are you alone in at home by yourself good well have you tried turning it off and back on again (laughing) hello hello next caller

(15) mean yeah look you know I'm all for the boots and the rallys but the violence stuff torture totally not cool yeah

An interesting fact, though, is the permanent communication with the audience by these constant references to the public rationale which are very interesting, especially since one of the main purposes is to attract the audience by using a humoristic key in interpreting it.

## 4. From Entertainment to Infotainment


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Admitting the admixture of the genre we are now analysing on the basis of the arguments presented so far, we can clearly argue its ambivalent nature. *The Daily Show* represents a fluid hybrid genre which easily juggles between the art of entertainment (and having, thus, valuable and interesting strategies of creating humour) and the field of journalism (offering relevant information for the public interest and shaping a pertinent and very well structured discourse).

In a nutshell, we argue that this new genre within the audio-visual press is a new hybrid form of journalism that combines relevant information with personal comments and a high degree of subjectivity. We therefore deal with a new form of news program, derived from the genre of press magazine and leading towards entertainment and one-man show. Hence, we would like to introduce here the concept of ***infotainment*** which we believe it`s crucial in defining this new genre mélange:

***Infotainment*** refers to a cluster of program types that blur traditional distinctions between information-oriented and entertainment-based genres of television programming. Primarily a pejorative term, infotainment is often used to denote the decline of hard news and public affairs discussion programs and the corresponding development of a variety of entertainment shows that mimic the style of news. At the same time, however, the early years of the twenty-first century have seen the increasing emergence of programs that more thoroughly blend the content and form of various genres of public affairs and entertainment. This has created a complex spectrum of hybrid programming with a potentially wide range of implications for public information, political communication, and democratic discourse. (Baym, 2008:1)

We have also tried to sum up the main idea of our study (Fig.1), showing the annexation of the two genres in discussion in order to create a hybrid new media product that is highly appreciated within the audience but also deeply complex, if we refer to both its comedic effects and journalistic side:


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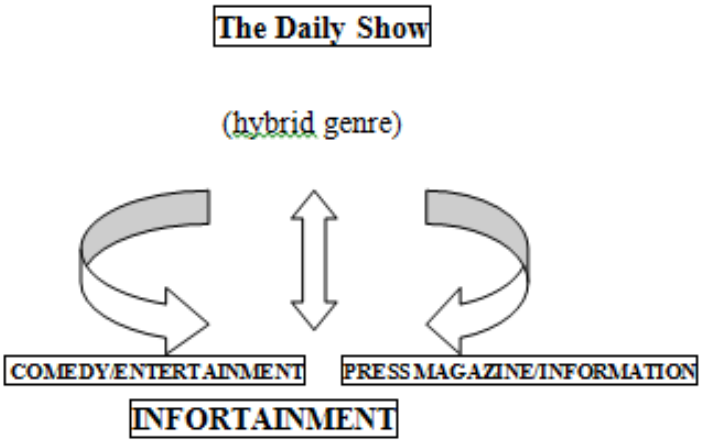



Fig. 1

## 5. Concluding Remarks

To sum up, there are indisputably reasons for further studies concerning the evolution of this particular kind of TV shows. Hence, they will be later detailed in future research activities, as this is the main topic our thesis addresses. Still, after this brief analysis of *The Daily Show*, we can positively argue for the existence of a new genre within the audio-visual press. Several other examples, both from US, but also Romania are proving that this particular kind of TV show is highly spread and popular within the international audience (*The Colbert Show, The Daily Show, În gura Presei, Lumea lui Banciu).*

We can also conclude that by means of this new genre, we can argue for the presence of entertainment, as well as for the informative content of *Last Week Tonight*, making extremely difficult to nominate the purpose of this complex program.

Still, genre mixing is definitely a fashionable trend nowadays, not only in the media, but also in many other fields. By having both the comedic nuance and the seriousness of the press magazine, this new genre is certainly shaping opinions and building beliefs among the public, due to its undeniable attractiveness. Therefore, we consider that further punctual studies and analysis regarding similar TV shown would be truly necessary:

There are many promising areas for future research on these topics. Research is needed on how genres vary on these dimensions: to what degree the dimensions are


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interrelated; their cultural context, to develop a framework that can characterize the shifts in social purpose which co-vary with these dimensions. (…) (Duranti, 2001: 118)

**APPENDIX - CORPUS TRANSCRIPTION**

**KEY**

The setup

Reported speech from the daily press

**Thesis and arguments (A1-5)**

Meta-representations of the Speakers Intentions

*Personal comments*

Discourse markers

off to the attacks in paris: the war on terror is heating up again and we've just learned something new about the terrorist devious tactics S1 counter terrorist officials tell nbc news that isis recently launched a 24 hours helpdesk xxx by a half dozen senior operatives (silence and laughing) isis has a helpline / for terrorists /*this is insane* and *also a great opportunity for us* because you see *all we need to do now is make sure that none of their attacks ever work again* and a*ll we need to do is secretly replace their helpdesk operators with our guys imagine what we could do if we could infiltrate the system* yeah *we just be there like* yes yeah i'm sorry you're having trouble with your suicide vest yes are you alone in at home by yourself good well have you tried turning it off and back on again (laughing) hello hello next caller*but of course getting rid of isis is not that simple which is why president Obama has been facing some really tough questions* S2 i think a lot of americans have this frustration that they see that the united states has the greatest military in the world it has the backing of nearly every other country in the world but when it comes to taking on isis aaa i guess the question is and if you forgive me the language is why can't we take out these bastards oh*first of all kudos to the president for only cussing that journalist out in his head (laughing)* and *secondly CNN's jim accosta*i'm glad you apologized for that potty mouth of yours (laughing) yeah I gotta apologize for these bastards*ohoo somebody's been hanging out with his older cousin* ohoo hey guys are we gonna get this issis knock some heads or what come on they're a buch of jerkquads I'm telling the xxx brains will know what`s coming we gotta give these isis xxx yo ring a dingdingwho are you*luckily the president responded as if the question was actually*


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*coming from an adult* S3 we are gonna continue to pursue the strategy that has the best chance of working even though it does not offer the satisfaction i guess of aa aa a neat headline or an immediate resolution i'm sorry president Obama this non-immediate resolution stuff is just not going to cut it these are americans you`re talking to the people will spend millions of dollars a year on diet pills that we`ll make you lose fifty pounds in five days these are the inventors of the tv dinner americans won`t even gra:m unless it`s insta but of the XXX of tragedy I understand that impulse that we just want to get revenge you know *I get it I get it now that`s angerand that`s one of the stages of grief that most people go through if they're normal but I've been seen in the last few days not everyone is normal and most of them are running for office* you see *for some politicians they are limited to the regular five stages of grief denial anger bargaining aaa anger and the department of congress* A1 **for example politicians grieving stage one use the tragedy as an excuse to say what you would have said any way you can say what you want**but if they had guns if our people had guns if they were allowed to carry it would have been a much much different situation what why is your answer always more guns it's like saying let`s dig our way out of this hole with more holes sorry the last transformers movie sucked here we`ll fix it with another oneit doesn`t work that way**and once you worked through the first** A2 **then you can move to the next stage of political grief breakout and nazist comparisons**secretary clinton here did not want to use the word radical islam in response i think that's i don't understand it that would be like saying we won't go at war with nazist cuz we are afraid to offend some germans who may have been members of the nazi party but were't violent themselves*hmm that's not exactly the same thing* you see because *islam is a religion it is open for violent interpretation and is open for peaceful interpretation just like how Christianity can accomplish both the Spanish inquisition and the little old lady in church who keeps talking to you about her cats diabetes medicine so basically torture either way* but but still Marco Rubio to say non-radical muslims are the same as non-violent nazist is not quite correct because you see the nazist pretty much know what they were getting in for is not like the vast majority of nazist were in it for non-fascist reasons I mean yeah look you know I'm all for the boots and the rallys but the violence stuff torturely totally not cool yeah (applause) you see you see*what`s happening here is some democrats for instance Hillary Clinton think it is unwise to use the term radical islam to describe these terrorists now because of that some republicans for instance most of them are accusing democrats of not genuinely wanting to defeat isis* they are more interested in


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protecting the image of islam than they are in protecting americans tucker if these were militant methodists extreme xxx bad boy baptists do you think we would be afraid to say that no we would not be afraid to say that because bad boy baptists is an awful name for a terrorist group but a great name for your Christian soul rock one man base only album yeah yeah my personal favourite track three bless it on the funky *but going to my cxxx we need to recognize our desperate situation*the ones who are ready to cut our heads off the one that are boiling up people in paris and all over the world just happens that they are all radical muslims we`d better wake up and smell the falafel *now there are a few things wrong with that statements number one falafel is not a breakfast food number two it doesn`t really smell like anything and number three the racism I really should have xxx with the racism I know I know* then **A3 there's the final stage of political grief focused on how to handle the tide of refugees fleeing Syrian isis this stage is known as just say something really *** and crazy**if we displace people who are used to a dessert climate living in the middle east speaking a language that is not common to america and essentially living in a culture and a midst of religion that is not theat common here we really are creating a disruption if we're serious about wanting to protect them then let's do it in a climate with a language with a culture and with a religion they're more comfortable with *you know mike Huckabee makes some good points can you imagine if people start coming to America from all over the world bringing their different languages cultures and religions mixing and changing the culture that's already here until it becomes something totally new what kind of country would this be but* you know what mike huckabee I I understand you as someone whose family has been here for generations as a I guess as a native American you can say I can see why this idea would frighten you

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