REVOEVOLUTION IN THE FASCIST IDEOSIS: THE COMEDY OF BILL HICKS

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REVOEVOLUTION IN THE FASCIST IDEOSIS: THE COMEDY OF BILL HICKS

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REVOEVOLUTION IN THE FASCIST IDEOSIS: THE COMEDY OF BILL HICKS

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Andrew Greer Davis was born July 4, 1978, in Atlanta, Georgia, to Andrew and Margaret Davis. He graduated from Auburn High School in 1996. Andrew received his Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Georgia in 2000. The following years were spent learning the culinary arts, playing percussion, touring as a professional poet, practicing the psychonautic arts, and creating general mischief. Andrew has resided in Atlanta, Georgia; Auburn, Alabama; Athens, Georgia; Oxford, England; and Seoul, Republic of Korea.

THESIS ABSTRACT

REVOEVOLUTION IN THE FASCIST IDEOSIS: THE COMEDY OF BILL HICKS

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Arising from the inconsistencies generated by serious discourse, comedy contains the potential to expose the dominant social logic that imbues cultural forms with meanings and values that perpetuate certain methods of political, economic, and societal control. As communicated through the comedy of Bill Hicks, the dominant social logic in contemporary America represents an advanced form of cultural fascism as enabled by a capitalist economy. By reforming the meanings and values of cultural forms, Hicks provides an alternative social logic rooted in libertarian political philosophy for the purposes of individual and communal cognitive evolution. Utilizing poststructuralist theory and critical methods, this study analyzes the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks in order to facilitate an understanding of the communication of power in American mass culture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

American Psychological Association Style Manual (5th ed.)

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Are you ready to take yourself as an autonomous subject through your own
revolutionary choice, independently of any 'historical mission,' independently of all
'transcendental guarantees' which, between you and me, are a lot of rubbish anyway…?"
- Herbert Marcuse

Bill Hicks

William (Bill) Melvin Hicks was an American stand-up comedian whose career

began in Houston, Texas, in 1978, when Hicks was sixteen years of age. From then until

his death of pancreatic cancer in 1994, Hicks performed and toured relentlessly- in bars

and comedy clubs throughout the United States, at festivals in Montreal and Edinburgh,

in venues in Australia, and theatres across Great Britain. It is estimated that from the mid-

1980s until his death, Hicks performed as a professional stand-up comedian an average of

265 days a year, "sometimes doing as many as three two-hour gigs a night" (Lahr, 1993,

November 1, para. 15). Despite constant touring, eleven appearances on *Late Night with*

David Letterman, and a cult following in Great Britain, Hicks gained only minimal

mainstream recognition in the United States. Only in the years since his death have the

true significance of his work and its influence on American culture begun to garner the

appreciation they merit.

True (2002) and Booth & Bertin (2005) have already written biographies of Bill

Hicks. The following argument is not intended to repeat the biographical information

provided by these sources except as directly relevant to a critical analysis of Hicks's

career and lifestyle. Additionally, Outhwaite (2003) provides an analysis of the political

and metaphysical message content of Hicks's comedy through a historically situated, thematic analysis of Hicks's routines. The following analysis, however, takes a different approach to Hicks's work than does Outhwaite, focusing instead on how the manipulation of the meanings and values of cultural forms (operating as signs) communicates a struggle between opposing manifestations of power.

The following pages present the argument that Bill Hicks (in both his comedy and lifestyle) exposes certain fascist characteristics embedded in American mass cultural forms, while concurrently offering an alternative to the social code advanced through these signs. The alternative offered by Hicks represents a particular strand of anarchist political philosophy- a tactical philosophy that eschews any manner of political representation, hierarchical social structure, or economic exploitation.[1] The communicative resources of Hicks's comedy and the resistance they offer the dominant social code represent a radical, even revolutionary re-creation of meaning, inviting the possibility of unconventional yet more equitable social codes than the one dominant in American mass culture. Moreover, Hicks's lifestyle may serve as an example of micropolitical resistance that does not necessarily need to bring about a change in the social structure in order to perform effectively as resistance. The content of Hicks's comedy and the nature of his lifestyle resulted from (as evidenced in the following pages) his own revolutionary choice to exist as an autonomous subject, independently of historical missions or transcendental guarantees.

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[1] Labeling *anarchism* as a philosophy rather than an ideology is intentional. The reasons for this are developed in a review of the literature.

Theoretical Concerns Regarding Levels of Analysis

Embedded in various theories of power, there exists tension between the oppressive and the resistant- each employing their own internal logic in the creation of competing social codes. On the one hand is a power that seeks to interiorize and control individuals through political, economic, and cultural means. This manifestation of power strives for a dominant social code- a closed structure marked by stratified hierarchies, divisive separation, and the marginalization of discursive communication. It promotes rigidity, conformity, and stagnation in the attempt to totalize itself. Resisting this form of power is an open collective of diffuse and multiple discourses- a fluid dynamism that aims at mutually beneficial associations devoid of repression and domination. This manifestation of power promotes a loose social code based on general ethical concerns and guided by experimentation that is fluid, active, and marked by multiplicity. At the very heart of the struggle between these manifestations of power is the dialectic between their modes of communication- a relationship comprised of the ever-shifting tension between opposing social forces that does not necessarily express the higher synthesis implied by Hegelian interpretations of the term.[2]

For the purposes of the following argument, the communicative modes of these manifestations of power are analyzed through the lens of critical theory as originally

[2] Unless specifically denoted as belonging to a particular theoretical model, terms such as *dialectic*, *ideology*, *sign*, etc., are used according to the definition provided in the *New Oxford American Dictionary*. Such usage is intended to facilitate common understanding while avoiding certain scholarly debates that (while necessary in particular contexts) are not pertinent to the following argument. It should also be noted that *dialectic* as used here refers not to the relationship between dominant and resistant power, but rather to the relationship between the communicative resources generated by these instances of power. The relationship between dominant and resistant power might be more akin to parentage, wherein resistant power results from the inconsistencies generated by dominant power's endeavors towards totality.

expressed by the scholars of the Frankfurt School- particularly Horkheimer (1968/1972b) and Marcuse (1977/1978). Poststructuralist developments- particularly Foucault (1975/1980a, 1975/1980b, 1976/1980, 1977/1980a, 1977/1980b, 1977/1980c), Debord (1967/2006), and Baudrillard (1981)- while rejecting the social-democratic project of human progress as endorsed by the Frankfurt School, provide significant advancements to the concept of power. The very core of this argument resides within the distinction between macro- and micro-level analyses of power. Widder (2004) effectively expresses this distinction, wherein *micro-* denotes the "constitutive level where subjects and meanings are formed and dissolved," and *macro-* denotes the "level where precariously constituted subjects relate to one another, taking up places in a hierarchy of status" (p. 190).

There appears in critical theory a predominance of concern with issues of macro-level significance. While it is true that poststructuralism provides the discipline with the concept of micropolitics, even those works which employ micropolitics as a theoretical basis often do so with an eye toward its use in creating changes on an organizational or societal level, or in regards to issues of identity (e.g. gender, sexuality) that are necessarily delimited beyond micro-level significance. This is not intended to deny the usefulness of a macro-level approach when analyzing phenomena such as economic systems, bureaucracies, ideologies, or social movements. The following argument does, in fact, utilize such an approach when discussing fascism, capitalism, and culture industries. It can be quite inadequate, however, when attempting to formulate within the current historical context a tactical political philosophy of resistance- a most crucial and central concern of critical theory.

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Resistance is often conceived of as resulting from local grassroots movements and culminating in varying scales of mass activist solidarity with some form of centralized leadership- macro-level changes in the power structure being its primary and ultimate goal. This form of resistance does not seek *fundamental* changes in the power structure, however, merely a more equitable distribution of power with the dominant social code effectively preserved (Wolin, 2008). In other cases, resistance is conceived of in revolutionary terms, wherein social actors seek the overthrow of existing hierarchies with the intention of replacing them with an alternative power structure. Although the existing power structure ceases to exist, the resistant potential of revolutionary movements also ceases to exist once a revolution has succeeded, itself becoming a dominant social code (Arendt, 1963).

Referent to certain historical and cultural contexts, these notions do indeed provide useful insight. Such an approach is quite efficacious when examining (for example) the resistance to white racial hegemony in the United States as offered by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, or the resistance to Soviet oppression in Eastern Europe as offered by various student and workers' movements during the 1970s and '80s. It can be argued, however, that state and corporate apparatuses learned valuable lessons from such resistance movements and have been able to adapt, thereby neutralizing much of the threat of future recurrences of a similar nature. The past decade in particular has been marked by an increase in effective police and paramilitary response to potential expressions of mass solidarity, coupled with an overarching media blackout of coverage concerning such events. While the issue of mass solidarity is not necessarily obsolete, current conditions are not amenable to its success as

a form of resistance.[3] Perhaps what is needed for the moment is an approach that focuses on individual resistance as a goal in and of itself.

Macro-level models of resistance represent forms of strategic political philosophy, which, according to May (1994), involves a unitary analysis of power mechanisms that narrows resistance to a singular goal, potentially rigidifying resistance in a totalitarian model that can easily be co-opted by the dominant social code. The micropolitical model of resistance delineated in the following pages represents, however, what May (1994) terms as a tactical political philosophy- one that views power as having no center, thereby requiring a constantly evolving, contextually situated, and readily adaptive multitude of strategies for undermining the dominant social code.

Additionally, with so much focus placed on macro-level models of resistance, critical theory runs the risk of perpetuating and, indeed, strengthening the mechanisms of domination and repression. Reasons for this potential pitfall are embedded within the typical liberal humanist assumptions that there inherently exist any commonality of mindset or unifying will within a population, or that there should be *any* attempts to create a consensus- even when resisting oppression. Reliance on such assumptions transforms solidarity into the critical equivalent of conformity and, consequently, controllability. As argued by Novatore (1921/1993), such solidarity is merely a social abstraction- one that becomes dangerous and humiliating for those purported to benefit

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[3] Such observation is based on my own personal experiences at the protest in Washington, D.C. during the presidential inauguration on January 20, 2001, participation in the anti-war movement from 2002 through 2005, and continued research regarding and involvement in certain forms of activism. In order to avoid self-incrimination or the incrimination of others, these experiences are not discussed in further detail.

from its existence. This makes it a useful tool for the continued evolution and resurgence of that most nebulous and effective macro-level mechanism of domination- fascism.

Fascism

As noted by Payne (1980), fascism is (according to common understanding) ill defined. It is "probably the vaguest of political terms" (p. 4). Rather than weakening the phenomenon, this vagueness actually provides fascism with a source of strength. Because so few have knowledge as to what comprises fascism as a political ideology and cultural practice, it remains possible to argue that fascism ceased to exist with the collapse of Mussolini's regime, with the exception of isolated instances in Europe and Latin America. Fascism has evolved and resurged, however, particularly as a cultural phenomenon in the United States that has evolved with corporate capitalism into (at the present) the dominant global economic/political paradigm. Consequently, a revised understanding becomes necessary.

This lack of common knowledge regarding fascism also enables easy accusation of one's enemies as being fascist without having to provide reliable justification. This tactic is frequently employed in the United States by both liberal and conservative commentators. Regardless of which ideology or philosophy they espouse, these commentators merely serve the cultural obscuration of the true origins and current manifestations of fascism. It is evidenced in the following pages that fascism is neither a liberal nor a conservative ideology, but is instead capable of temporarily borrowing from any point on the political spectrum in the attempt to totalize itself as a social code. The popularity of works (regardless of what ideology or philosophy they espouse) only serves to further obscure the true origins and current manifestations of fascism.

This is not to deny the political philosophy embedded in the following argument. On the contrary, the criticism offered through the present argument does indeed espouse a certain strand of anarchist political philosophy. It is my opinion, however, that theory and perspective should be subservient to and supported by fair representation of facts. Such indiscriminate usage as commonly practiced empties the term *fascism* of any real meaning or theoretical content, thereby allowing for its undetected resurgence in cultural practice (Passmore, 2002). While critical theory, poststructuralism, and anarchism form the methodological, theoretical, and tactical bases for the following analysis, they are suggested by the contextual specificities of historical phenomena (i.e. American mass cultural forms of the 1980s and early 1990s; the dominant and resistant social codes as communicated by Bill Hicks in the capacity of professional stand-up comedian; and biographical anecdotes regarding Hicks's lifestyle). They are not presented as the *only* favorable explanation of contemporary American mass culture. Such an assertion would be essentially fascist.

Anarchism

As misunderstood as fascism is, it is more clearly defined in common understanding than the micro-level manifestation of resistant power discussed in these pages- anarchism.[4] For many, the term *anarchy* means chaos or mayhem. This is, in fact, the false meaning ascribed to anarchy by the fascist social code and further muddled by

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[4] Though not referenced in the following pages, readers interested in the development of anarchism may benefit from reading Mikhail Bakunin, Voltairine de Cleyre, William Godwin, Emma Goldman, and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as histories regarding the Arditi del Popolo in Italy, the Provo movement in Amsterdam, the Paris uprisings of 1871, Taoism, and Sufism. Such a statement is not necessarily an endorsement of any beliefs espoused in such sources.

the actions of some of those who call themselves *anarchists*. The Red Scare of 1917-1920 produced the cultural image of the wild-eyed, bomb-toting madman- creating the misidentification of anarchy as violent chaos. Although certain groups of anarchists have and continue to espouse and engage in violence, violence is not a fundamental (or even necessary) component of anarchy. During the late 1970s, the pubescent, chemical-riddled nihilism of the punk rock movement only served to further this stereotype, due to its devotees' appropriation of an ill-informed, ill-intentioned, and insincere non-reading of anarchism. While certain connotations suggest a reading in which anarchy equates to chaos, *anarchy* literally means (from Greek) "without government" or "without rulers."

Anarchism (as understood here) does not reject social order or ethical modes of conduct.[5] Rather, it rejects the very concept of government, law, or other forms of domination as containing legitimacy. Anarchism is, in many respects, the most advanced form of democracy. It is the rejection of any form of political representation. This is based on the belief that representation imposes meaning on the individual from without, thereby emptying the individual of actual (i.e. self-determined) meaning. While emptying a term such as *fascism* of actual meaning allows for its resurgence in form and practice, emptying an individual of self-ascribed meaning allows for more effective and complete control of the individual. Furthermore, representation relieves the individual of social responsibility by ceding such responsibility to the representative.[6]

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[5] Nor, it should be noted, does it necessarily reject chaos.

[6] As such, may the following pages also serve a peripheral function as an attempt to rehabilitate the concept of anarchy by presenting anarchism as a viable political philosophy of individual choice and responsibility.

Preview of Argument

The first task of the following argument, then, is to provide a precise definition of two key original concepts advanced by this argument- *fascist ideosis* and *revoevolution*. The definition of *fascist ideosis* begins with a discussion of fascism as a contemporary phenomenon that delineates its evolution from the classical form- enunciated by Payne (1980) and Passmore (2002)- into a cultural pathology informed by Eco's (1995, June 22) concept of "Ur-Fascism" or "Eternal Fascism" (p. 12). As already stated, such description relies on a macro-level approach to outlining fascism as a cultural (rather than simply a political) phenomenon, as well as its current relationships with global capitalism (Chang, 2008; Gitlin, 2001; Herman & McChesney, 1997; Klein, 2007) and mass media (Adorno, 1959/1993; Baudrillard, 1991/1995; Debord, 1967/2006; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). For the purposes of this argument, such a relationship is referred to as the *fascist ideosis*- the meaning of which is explained in detail in the following pages.[7]

Pursuant to this objective, the key characteristics of cultural fascism are identified, as well as their interconnection to form a particular social code. Next, the relationship between cultural fascism and global capitalism is explored in order to examine how fascism evolved from its classical political form into the social code existing currently. From there, it becomes possible to examine how the fascist ideosis is

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[7] During the final stages of editing and revision, I happened upon another use of the term *ideosis* by Andrzej Turowski to describe certain cultural conditions in Poland within a historically-specific commentary. During the development of my argument, I had no knowledge of such use. As such, my use of the term *ideosis* to describe the pathological inertia of an ideology in the process of self-liquidation can be claimed as entirely original. My development of *ideosis* as a political concept is solely the product of my research into the historical development of contemporary political and economic realities. Furthermore, my development of the concept of *ideosis* is explicitly linked to fascist ideology. It owes nothing to Turowski.

expressed by this relationship through cultural forms that communicate the dominant social code, with particular focus on mass media and culture industries.

The second task of this argument is to delineate a micropolitical form of resistance that operates in opposition to the fascist ideosis. I term this form of resistance as *revoevolution*.[8] Revoevolution represents the convergence of anarchism (Bertolo, 1999; Bey, 2003; Chomsky, 1970/2005; Gemie, 1994; Widder, 2004) and poststructuralism operating as a tactical political philosophy (Antliff, 2007; Newman, 2007). This convergence is presented in its most developed form in the work of May (1994). It should not be inferred from the following argument that this is the *only* means of resisting the fascist ideosis. It is simply *one particular* method of resistance- one operating in the revolutionary praxis of the creation and communication of meaning. This form of resistance is presented in its most developed form in the work of Bey (2003). When macro-level issues are addressed in regards to revoevolution, they are mentioned peripherally for the purposes of comparison.

In order to develop this mode of resistance in theory, it is first necessary to identify the key characteristics of anarchism by briefly examining the competing forms of this political philosophy- those that express a communitarian model of social interaction, as well as those more focused on individual liberation. Next, the relationship of this political philosophy to the work of poststructuralist theorists is examined, with particular emphasis on the importance of multiple, adaptive, contextually-situated strategies for resistance. From there, it is shown how this relationship creates the potential for

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[8] As with *fascist ideosis*, I developed the term *revoevolution* for the purposes of this argument. I am unaware of any other uses of the term.

revoevolution- a tactical mode of resistant power capable of manipulating the meaning of cultural signs in the pursuit of an alternative social code.

Following the development of key original concepts, a review of relevant literature is offered. The first task of this review is to address certain meta-theoretical issues raised by this argument. The second task of this review is to provide a theoretically informed definition of power as it relates contextually to the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks. This definition of power is informed primarily by Foucault (1975/1980a, 1977/1980a, 1977/1980b, 1977/1980c), Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1986), and Baudrillard (1981). The review of relevant literature concludes with a brief synopsis of certain sociological and political theories concerning the nature of humor and comedy. Such a synopsis identifies key characteristics of humor that are particularly amenable to the aforementioned method of resistance. For this section, primary concern is placed on theories of humor advanced by Schutz (1977) and Mulkay (1988). With such an understanding in place, it is possible to examine how resistance to the fascist ideosis can manifest through humorous discourse.

Concurrent with the metatheoretical stance adopted in the following pages, a localized, contextually bound example of revoevolution is offered by analyzing the life and work of Bill Hicks. Hicks's comedic performances expose the underlying fascist currents of contemporary American culture and offer alternative meanings for specific cultural forms communicating the fascist social code. Moreover, Hicks consistently offers himself as a living example of the aforementioned mode of resistance, though without being entirely conscious of the theoretical developments advanced by this argument.

The resultant analysis is intended to provide a theoretical explanation for a method of resistance that already exists as a revolutionary praxis. Before presenting such an explanation, however, a review of relevant literature is necessary. This review focuses first on the nature of power, particularly the tension between oppressive and resistant manifestations of power. With this understanding in place, it is then possible to provide a detailed description of the evolution of classical fascism into the fascist ideosis as already enunciated. From there, the convergence of poststructuralism and anarchism is discussed in order to flesh out a description of revoevolution- a mode of resistance operating on the micropolitical level. Lastly, several sociological and political theories on the role of humor are examined in order to provide a basis for analyzing a specific example of revoevolution- the life and work of Bill Hicks.

II. ORIGINAL CONCEPTS

Fascist Ideosis

Before proceeding with a review of literature pertinent to the ideology of fascism,

it must be explained what is meant by the term *ideosis*. [9] For the purposes of this

argument, an ideosis is a code of social logic (ideology) that has reached a pathological

state of inertia in the process of self-liquidation- a condition of inertia characterized by

abnormality or falsity of meaning, as well as communicative malfunction. Simply stated,

ideosis is an ideology that is no longer ideology. Its philosophy and the meanings

generated by that philosophy have been malformed or disowned in order to advance the

code. Communication is reduced to autoregulation operating as "linear nonreciprocal

exchange" (Levin, 1981, p. 19). It is an ideology in conflict with itself and the

malfunction it creates- poetically characterized by Baudrillard (1991/1995) as "two

ghosts locked in vampiric embrace" (p. 46). Through this analogous image, fascism can

be viewed as form and content that feed off each other, eventually leaving each other as

hollow parasites continuing to feed on the illusion of themselves. Both are deprived of

any real meaning- the form a code of domination, the content a collection of meaningless

signs. All that remains is the spectral shadow of false meaning determined by the logic of

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[9] Few of the authors cited in this section employ the term *fascist*, while none of them
employ the term *ideosis*. *Fascist ideosis* is a term suggested by current political,
economic, and cultural practices within the United States. In cases where different
theorists describe similar phenomena with differing terms, both terms are cited. However,
it is shown that all of these terms refer to certain aspects of the fascist ideosis. Any one of
them is therefore inadequate for comprehensively describing the phenomenon.

the code. It is a closed code that imposes itself "as the functional and terrorist

organization of the control of meaning… the locus of an elemental objectification" in the

attempt to reproduce and totalize itself as the universal code (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 163).

But, following Bey's (1994) analysis of capitalism, an ideosis reproduces itself through

negation, separation, and isolation. Such reproduction only serves to guarantee a self-

fulfilling prophecy of falsity and collapse- what Baudrillard (1991/1995) calls

"hyperreality… deterrence of the real by the virtual" (p. 27). As such, the inertia of the

fascist ideosis propels the social body toward a state of existence in which even the

possibility of meaning is no threat (Baudrillard 1994/2001). This is the pathology of

ideosis.

　　　The type of power manifested in this pathological state is akin to Foucault's

(1977/1980b, 1977/1980c) notion of domination, in which multiple social forces

(political, economic, cultural, etc.) are manipulated in order to subjugate individuals

through hostile engagement. The ideology (referred to by Foucault as the *regime of truth*)

of fascism attempts to limit forms of discourse to only those that reproduce the economic

and political meanings acceptable to fascism. As such, it is most effectively transmitted

through consumption of products and cultural signs endowed with the meaning most

conducive to fascism's success.

　　　This success is, according to Baudrillard (1981), dependent on a hierarchical

order of values operating to serve "the *total constraint of the code* that governs social

value"- which, in the final analysis, is a code of commoditization and consumption (p.

66). Acceptance of this hierarchy by individuals is, in fact, the most effective mechanism

of social control because consumption creates value beyond economic or political terms.

Its value lies in meaning, in making commodities and their consumers communicate according to the code. In this way, the code is able to crystallize and solidify into a system of control and domination. As such, consumption represents the key mechanism of oppressive power operating through the fascist code because "all the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems are already present in the internal logic of the sign, as well as those of exchange value and political economy" (p. 163). Through the consumption of signs, individuals interiorize their values and, consequently, the code that determines and communicates those values. This, in turn, socializes individuals, informing them of their own value within the code.

Consumption reproduces oppressive power in other more tangible ways, as well. As discussed later in reference to capitalism, consumption provides those individuals who maintain elite positions within the power structure with a constant accumulation of capital, which can then be invested into other mechanisms of domination (e.g. military technology, political control). As noted by Arendt (1963), there is a direct connection between economic power and political power, wherein the forces of government are determined by the distribution of wealth. The more wealth an individual or group controls, the greater their control within the governmental structure. In the fascist ideosis, where wealth is virtual and the accumulation of capital is constant, "power becomes not only spatially but temporally limitless"- allowing for the evisceration of the individual through the expansion of the power of an ever-narrowing group of elite political and economic participants (Wolin, 2008, p. 71).

With such a self-replicating system of domination in place, the fascist ideosis maintains the ability to control communication. If, as argued by Baudrillard (1991/1995),

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communication is conceived of as reciprocal, mutually correlated exchange marked by individual responsibility, then the fascist ideosis fabricates non-communication. This non-communication closes and striates the social body, stifles intellectual and conceptual innovation, isolates individuals, and regulates their ability to formulate meaning (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1986). This is accomplished most effectively through mass media, not only because of the capital they generate for the fascist elite, but because they allow for what Foucault (1976/1980) refers to (though not in reference to this particular context) as panoptism- surveillance mechanisms that monitor behavior and watch for and punish deviation- particularly through the monitoring and cataloguing of consumer behavior, Internet usage, and communications. This enables the ideosis to not only punish deviating behavior by repressive means, but also by hegemonic responses made possible by mass media. These responses- articulated by Artz & Murphy (2000) as omission, marginalization, trivialization, demonization, polarization, and co-optation- further devalue communication into autoregulation and nonreciprocal exchange. With this system in place, the goals of reducing aberrance, neutralizing resistance, and maintaining control can be more easily accomplished. Not only does ideosis maintain its pathological inertia through its own efforts, individuals are also implicated in their own oppression by controlled participation as consumers (Baudrillard, 1991/1995).

This results in what Baudrillard (1991/1995) refers to as "decentralised [sic] totalitarianism" that progresses in multiple stages toward a level of metadesign through the imposition of an integrative social code of universal value (p. 181). Of course, this indicates a goal or potentiality, not necessarily a completed objective in the current context. As Wolin (2008) points out, this form of totalitarianism "exists as a set of strong

tendencies rather than a fully realized actuality" (p. xvi). It should be noted that Wolin is

not referring directly to Baudrillard's concept of decentralized totalitarianism. The

statement refers to a condition referred to by Wolin (2008) as "inverted totalitarianism"

(p. x). It is asserted here, however, that there is indeed a great similarity between the two

concepts- so much so, in fact, that the latter can be considered as an extension or refined

version of the former.

For Wolin (2008), the end goal of this type of totalitarianism (alternately referred

to as *inverted totalitarianism*, *superpower*, and *power imaginary*) is "a determination to

master the uses of power and to deploy them to reconstitute reality" (p. 3). This form of

power represents the merging of corporate and political power in a form of social control

that demobilizes the individual and loosens power from the constraints of democratic

processes. This form of power lacks legitimacy, but is instead sanctified by the meanings

created through the totalitarian code. It is a rule of predomination- a "strong and

centralized authority, a hierarchical power structure, [and] top-down control" of the

populace by competing groups of elite corporate and political power (p. 145). Individuals

become devalued to the constraint of this form of power through the false meanings

produced by its code.

Viewed in relation to one another, these concepts share characteristics of the

spectacle described by Debord (1967/2006, 1988/1998). The spectacle can be conceived

of as a general cultural manifestation of the fascist ideosis. It is the planned result of

consumption, in which commodities have completely overtaken the attention of the social

body. Simply put, everything is commoditized, with signs as the ultimate commodity.

Such commoditization strips signs of their qualitative dimension, leaving only the

quantitative values of exchange and hierarchical status. Devoid of qualitative value, signs

become divorced from any sense of context, consequence, or history. Without context or

history, signs-as-commodities become inundated with false meaning that reflects only the

fascist code on which the spectacle is founded. This limits signs purely to their value as

commodities, thereby enabling the expansion of fascist/corporate economic power. At

this level, such economic power dominates existence so completely that it can on its own

reproduce the mechanisms of domination that are necessary for its continued success.

Thus, the spectacle is the "*materialization* of ideology brought about by the concrete

success of an autonomised [sic] system of economic production" (Debord, 1967/2006, p.

116).

As the materialization of fascist ideology, spectacle limits the potential of

meaning and, therefore, communication. If all meaning is produced under the constraints

of the fascist code, there is no possibility for discourse. Without the potential for the

discursive production of meaning, critical awareness and community cannot thrive.

Instead, the majority of individual and social activity is directed toward global expansion

of the spectacle in an eternal present with no contextual frame of reference. Such

expansion is coordinated with military and police-state methods of imperial domination,

resulting in an integrated spectacle characterized by conformity, isolation, surveillance,

and "unanswerable lies" (Debord, 1988/1998, p. 12).

Taken together, these various theoretical concepts form the oppressive power of

the fascist ideosis. Wolin (2008) argues that this form of power is already in the later

stages of development in the United States. Although advanced, it is not yet total. The

possibility of resistance still exists. Before examining the particular potential for

resistance with which this argument is concerned, however, these general properties of power as exercised in the fascist ideosis are supported by a proper examination of fascism as a political and cultural phenomenon- particularly its relationship with capitalism and culture industries.

Fascism

>*Classical fascism.*

As noted, fascism is misunderstood in common usage. The popularity of non-scholarly works on the subject has served only to misinform the public as to what actually constitutes fascism. Furthermore, such common usage of the epithet *fascist* for one's adversaries has completely emptied the term of any veridical meaning. It therefore becomes incumbent to reinvest the term with factual meaning so that it may be more correctly understood and more effectively resisted. Before proceeding with this description of fascism, it is important to note that Foucault (1983) counts fascism (along with Stalinism) as one of the "pathological forms" of power- a "disease of power" (p. 209). Such definition further supports this argument's assertions regarding ideosis as a social code that has reached a condition of pathological inertia. It should also be noted that fascism, while historically unique, is not unprecedented. It is a derivative extension of "mechanisms already present in most other societies. More than that: in spite of [its] own internal madness, [it employs] to a large extent the ideas and the devices of our political rationality" (Foucault, 1983, p. 209). Although focusing only on developments of the last century, the following argument recognizes this larger sense of historical evolution while explicitly delineating those connections between individual/group/social rationality and the mechanisms of particular manifestations of power.

A number of political theorists have identified key elements of fascism as a political practice. For the purposes of the ensuing analysis, the works of Payne (1980) and Passmore (2002) prove most useful. Fascism as a political phenomenon began with the rise of Benito Mussolini in Italy in the early 1920s. It is not the purpose of this argument to provide a historical account of Classical Fascism. What is relevant are those elements of fascism that have survived and evolved and are currently embedded as predominant characteristics of mass culture in America. This is not to suggest that the United States is run by an overtly fascist government or that individual Americans are fascists. There are, however, undeniable features of fascism that permeate American popular culture. Due to the totalizing nature of the fascist ideosis, it is important to identify those features in hopes of resisting their manifestation as an absolute and irreversible social code. Specific examples of how these characteristics manifest through American cultural forms are provided in the analysis of Bill Hicks's life and comedy.

One of the core characteristics of fascism is ultranationalism, particularly that form of nationalism that seeks military and economic expansion (Passmore, 2002). This imperial form of nationalism fosters a social body that (generally speaking) is hierarchical, mobilized behind the myth of national unity, and militarized. Underlying ultranationalism is a worldview based on unconscious prejudices- cultish embrace of populist elitism, fear of aberrant behaviors, latent racism and sexism, and hostility towards the political left. This is not to say that fascism is a conservative ideology. It should be considered more as a reactionary ideology, albeit one that obsesses over technological advances and worships action. The seemingly oxymoronic nature of terms such as *populist elitism* and *radical reaction* underscores the fundamental contradictions

of fascism. Through the unconscious prejudices represented in nationalism, fascism appeals to the populace while at the same time undermining their power. Nationalism gives the working class the illusion that they have some stake in the economic, political, and social programs advanced by their leaders, while in reality serving primarily to reinforce the elite value system and hierarchical social structure toward which fascism actually strives. This effect is concurrently reinforced through education, commercialized sport, mass culture, and the rabid embrace of technological innovation.

Ideologically speaking, fascism is anti-democratic and anti-socialist, though (as noted by Payne, 1980) it most often comes to power through democratically elected parliamentary systems with a well-established middle class. It governs through pre-existing legal structures, yet undermines these structures through bureaucratic chaos, arbitrariness of purpose, and a weakening of the public's faith in the efficacy of democracy. The bureaucratic manifestation of fascism seeks to legislate as many aspects of personal and economic life as possible. It is (as noted by Higgs, 2007) a bureaucracy without accountability in which corruption is not aberrant behavior. It is, rather, normative and systemic. Government is inextricably bound to corporate power, culminating in a corporate-welfare state that systematically despoils the public for the sake of military and economic expansion. The public bears the onus of taxation, most of which goes to fund military endeavors and support the rights of corporations-as-legal-individuals. This arrangement plunders the poor and middle class for the further empowerment of the wealthy elite, while also neutralizing the potential for resistance.

Although the public face of this bureaucracy is most often typified by a single charismatic authority figure with a personal style of leadership, the actual process of

legislative interference is the result of multiparty coalitions. Fascism is willing to enter into temporary alliances with supposed enemies in order to achieve totalization. This willingness enables fascism to more effectively undermine democratic power by being at the same time republican and authoritarian. Passmore (2002) points out that fascism as an ideology is actually empty of its own content. It borrows tenets from any point on the political spectrum as long as this co-optation helps solidify fascism as a social code in the attempt to totalize its expansive power. The words of Pynchon (1973) (though expressed in a work of fiction in reference to a vaguely defined techno-corporate meta-bureaucracy) seem particularly appropriate to describing the ideological character of fascism- avoiding philosophical substance, "choosing instead only trivially to revise what matters least, ornament and clothing, going no further than political transvestism" (p. 99).

As noted by Payne (1980), fascism is the direct result of the Enlightenment and its universal principles of philosophical vitalism, metaphysics of the will, positivism, scientific rationality, humanist materialism, and aspirations for a secular utopia. Fascism represents the Enlightenment malformed by the cogs and gears of modernism and geopolitical struggles. This argument is not unique to Payne and, in fact, is more fully developed by the Frankfurt School. Though their contribution to this understanding of fascism is addressed in a later section, the thoughts of Adorno (1982/2002) are particularly relevant at this point. Ultranationalist yet global, idealist while imperial, vital and militaristic- fascism represents "the ultimate unity of the political purpose: the abolition of democracy through mass support against the democratic principle" (p. 133) It is a hollow ceremonial ritual of function and centrality that defines and limits its participants, subsuming individuals to an inherently contradictory code of oppressive

power. For Adorno (1982/2002), fascism represents the end result of organized humanity. While this perspective is certainly debatable, fascism has indeed enjoyed resurgence in contemporary times, albeit in a form distinct from that of Classical Fascism.

Cultural fascism.

Whereas Classical Fascism was an overt political regime particular to its historical and national context (i.e. inter-war Italy), fascism as a cultural phenomenon is not limited by temporal or spatial circumstance. The reasons for this are discussed in greater detail in the following pages. Before such an explanation is possible, however, it is necessary to first examine the characteristics of cultural fascism. Although fascism has no particular ideology of its own- instead temporarily co-opting tenets of other ideologies in order to thrive (Eco, 1995, June 22)- certain key characteristics can be identified. For the purposes of this argument, the works of Payne (1980), Eco (1995, June 22), and Passmore (2002) are especially pertinent.

Cultural fascism retained many of the characteristics of Classical Fascism, while at the same time adapting to changes in historical and geographical context. The characteristics of cultural fascism are: 1) militaristic ultranationalism supported by mobilization behind a myth of national unity; 2) reactionary rhetoric that emphasizes tradition- albeit in a form that embraces technological innovation and often relies on the rhetoric of scientific rationality and positivist materialism; 3) anti-intellectualism that favors aggressive action over considered response to situations (with particular obsessiveness in regards to organized sport); 4) democratically-elected parliamentary or legislative systems reliant on political choreography and empty ritual; 5) government bureaucracy of multi-party coalitions closely allied with business and financial

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institutions and interest groups (none with any actual accountability to the social body); 6) legislative interference in personal life; 7) weakening of democratic structures and processes, combined with outright hostility towards socialism; 8) open hostility towards dissent or analytical criticism; 9) manipulative contrivance of consensus through exploitation of a populace's latent fears (e.g. racism, sexism, xenophobia, rejection of nonstandard sexual behavior, general mistrust of difference); 10) appeals to the middle class through selective populist elitism; 11) mass media forms embedded with "agitprop"- obvious propaganda designed to agitate and arouse the public sentiment in favor of elite values (Safire, 2008, p. 11); 12) manichaean worldview that creates the illusion of national unity through constant rhetorical appeals against an ill-defined and ever-shifting external enemy; and 13) ultimate goal of totalization as a social code capable of determining the meaning of signs for every individual.[10] With this understanding of cultural fascism in place, it becomes possible to examine how fascism was able to survive and evolve.

"Behind a regime and its ideology, there is always a way of thinking and feeling, a group of cultural habits" (Eco, 1995, June 22, p. 12). While the fascist Italian regime disintegrated during the final throes of World War II, these cultural habits survived, largely due to the admiration fascism enjoyed among American and European elites- both conservative and liberal. The fact that fascism was admired by political and economic elites from both sides of the political spectrum explains in part how it could enjoy a cultural resurgence decades after its overt political manifestation ceased to exist.

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[10] Although Eco's (1995, June 22) definition of Ur-Fascism contains additional traits, it is my informed opinion that those traits are subsets of the characteristics described in this section. Consequently, they do not require elaboration at this point in the argument. They are instead addressed in Analysis.

Corporatism.

Another crucial factor in the evolution of fascism can be found in the realm of economics- one firmly rooted in Arendt's (1963) observation that economic power wields political power. So, too, does it wield cultural power. Classical fascism relied on an economic system known as corporatism. Comprehensive analyses of corporatism can be found in Cawson (1986), Wiarda (1997), and Molina & Rhodes (2002). While a detailed overview of corporatism as an economic system is beyond the scope of the present argument, certain principal features must be identified in order to understand the evolution of fascism.

Corporatism is distinguished primarily by the interweaving of business, finance, and interest representation with the state. At the apex of Classical Fascism, this relationship was marked by maximal governmental interference in and control over business. The resurgence of fascism has been distinguished, however, by a reversal of this relationship. Business, financial, and interest representatives now enjoy unprecedented privileged access to public resources through their interference in the legislative process (Molina & Rhodes, 2002). This can be directly attributed to the evolution in the legal status of the corporation as an organizational model for business. In the United States, state governments originally chartered corporations for the purpose of advancing public works projects. As such, they were tightly bound by government regulation. The passage of the 14th Amendment, however, carried with it an unintended consequence. Corporate lawyers perverted the intent of this amendment as the basic rationale for petitioning the Supreme Court for a change in the legal status of corporations. The Court, in turn, granted the rights, freedoms, and legal standing of

individuals to the organizational model that is the corporation (Achbar, 2004). This trend

continued in the last decades of the 19th Century, when corporations were granted

eminent domain- the right to "compulsorily acquire any land needed for their operations"

(Shonfield, 1965, p. 306). This resulted in a massive concentration of corporate power,

resulting in "a general commitment to the view, shared by both political parties, of the

national predominance of private enterprise in the economic sphere and of the

subordinate role of public initiative" (Shonfield, 1965, p. 298).

The expansion of corporate power further enjoyed a dramatic rise during the

administrations of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The fragmentation

of government and concurrent expansion in world trade during this time resulted in a

form of governance dominated by bargaining, to which the hierarchical organization of

the corporate model is especially suited. Such a form of governance alienates the public

from the legislative process, resulting in an expansion of power for those with the

economic resources to have their interests represented. Expansion of such power

naturally favored the organizational interests of corporations, thus instigating a change in

cultural meaning, with group rights and entitlements gaining privilege over those of

individuals. Consequently, the rights and freedoms of corporations superseded those of

individuals and groups without significant access to interest representation, leading to a

shift in the roles of business and government (Cawson, 1986; Shonfield, 1965; Wiarda,

1997).

As noted by Molina & Rhodes (2002), this shift has been marked primarily by the

evolution of corporate power into a different form of state power. This power "emerg[ed]

alongside and then dominat[ed] the traditional party-centered political system" (p. 310).

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The integration of corporate power into the structure and processes of governance-

mainly through government contracts, political appointments, educational exchanges, and

campaign contributions- re-centralized power within the state, coordinating it decisively

in favor of corporate interests. In this system of governance, private interests make

decisions concerning public policy issues (e.g. education, social welfare, healthcare,

environmental concerns), in addition to determining the state's role in finance, business,

and labor relations. Pursuant to this integration came the gutting of social programs and

widespread deregulation of the economic system.

This form of bureaucracy empowers and enriches the wealthy (thereby

neutralizing them as potential resistors), while at the same time placing a disproportionate

share of the tax burden onto the poor and middle-class (thereby further decreasing their

economic power) (Higgs, 2007). The result is a structure in which there is no difference

between economic and political power- a "military-industrial-congressional complex"

wherein business and the state co-conspire in plundering the public, with the majority of

tax revenues funneled into military endeavors (Higgs, 2007, p. 300).[11]

As argued by Bey (1996), such power is not limited to the realms of government

and business. It has the added effect of restructuring the cognitive processes of the

populace, embedding these processes with ulterior meanings and values. This lends itself

perfectly to the unfettered communication, expansion, and totalization of a fascist social

code. Before examining how this code is communicated, however, it becomes necessary

to address the relationship of macroeconomic ideology to the rise of cultural fascism. As

already stated, corporatism as it currently exists is a reversal of its incarnation under

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[11] In order to more accurately reflect economic realities, Higgs' term is henceforth
revised to read *military-corporate-congressional complex*.

Classical Fascism. This shift was due not only to the rise of corporate power, but also to the rise of global market capitalism as the world's dominant economic model.

Global Corporate Capitalism[12]

The Cold War was as much (if not more so) a struggle between competing economic ideologies as it was between competing political ones. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, capitalism became the only economic ideology with geopolitical influence. The problem with this is noted by Wolin (2008):

> Freedom and democracy are clearly subservient to free enterprise, a relationship that… assumes great significance in light of the fact that the economic structures during free enterprise are inherently autocratic, hierarchical, and primed for expansion… and bring in their wake strikingly unequal rewards and huge disparities in wealth and power. (pp. 91-92)

This triumphant economic system remained decidedly anti-socialist while at the same time abandoning the virtues of participatory democracy except as an empty rhetorical tool for bullying other nations that do not subscribe to the model. The resultant global paradigm (while not yet total) continues to favor an evolved form of integrated market corporatism without having to retain any sense of social responsibility.

Global in its triumph and ruthlessly monolithic, capitalism alone offers fascism a conduit for totalization. Because this system provides the economic and political power of the fascist ideosis, it consequently provides the most effective means for the communication of its meaning and its solidification as a social code. This occurs primarily through mass (or popular) cultural forms, the meanings of which are ambiguous

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[12] In the following pages, the terms *free enterprise*, *integrated market corporatism*, *free-market ideology*, *corporate welfare system*, *free market capitalism*, etc., are used to refer to different aspects of the dominant economic paradigm- *global corporate capitalism*. Use of varying terms is designed to draw attention to various structural components of the overall system.

enough to allow for manipulation. Manipulation of this meaning is (by the definition delineated in earlier sections) the exercise of power and results in the cognitive restructuring discussed by Bey (1996). Because mass culture is enabled by modes of production, certain features of global corporate capitalism require examination.

Free-market ideology and policy.

For a discussion of the development and current incarnation of global corporate capitalism, this argument refers primarily to Klein (2007) and Chang (2008). This form of capitalism has been the dominant economic paradigm since the 1980s, but its development stretches back several decades prior (Chang, 2008). The theory underlying this economic system was developed at the University of Chicago in the 1960s by Milton Friedman, whose acolytes experimented with free-market policies by acting as advisors to various authoritarian regimes in Latin America until they could gain enough political clout to see their ideology become the driving force behind American and British economic and foreign policy (during the administrations of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, respectively) (Klein, 2007). This section is not designed to give a thorough account of the development of global corporate capitalism, but rather to highlight essential structural features that have emerged during its development and how these features create an economic complement to the political and cultural characteristics of fascism.

As noted by Klein (2007) and Chang (2008), the ideologues of global corporate capitalism have (through the military-corporate-congressional complex outlined earlier) created an economic structure based on privatization and government deregulation of business and finance; global integration of trade and investment; evisceration of social

programs; and a hierarchical regulatory and policy-forming cabal comprised primarily of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Privatization and government deregulation form the core of the free-market ideology, releasing the corporate business model from substantive public scrutiny and accountability, thereby enabling a system characterized by escalating income inequality and economic instability. Economic integration is achieved through an evolved form of colonialism, wherein free market policies are forced onto developing nations by transnational corporations (based primarily in developed Western nations) through propaganda campaigns and the ever-looming threat of military force and economic sanctions.

Generally speaking, these propaganda campaigns are based upon a revisionist history of global development, wherein: 1) traditionally protectionist nations (e.g. the United States and the United Kingdom) are portrayed as having achieved global dominance through free-trade policies; 2) nations whose free-trade policies led to severe economic collapse (e.g. Argentina and the Philippines) are portrayed as having failed due to overregulation; and 3) economies that have succeeded due to high levels of state regulation and varying degrees of state ownership of business (e.g. the Republic of Korea) are portrayed as having succeeded through implementation of free-market policies (Chang, 2008). Furthermore, there exists the "frequent equation of fascism with protectionism in free trade mythology" (Chang, 2008, p. 56)- another instance of misuse of the term *fascism* allowing for the actual nature of fascism as a phenomenon of capitalism to remain obscured. The rhetoric of free trade is rounded out by the misrepresentation of globalism as the inevitable byproduct of developments in

transportation and communication technologies, when it is, in fact, the deliberate result of corporate-backed policy initiatives. Should propaganda prove ineffective for creating behavioral consensus, there remain the options of military force cloaked in the guise of promoting democracy or "governance conditionalities" imposed as terms accompanying financial assistance (Chang, 2008, p. 33).

Developing nations often acquire loans, aid packages, and debt relief from donor countries (i.e. developed nations) or international financial organizations (e.g. WTO, IMF, World Bank) for the purposes of economic development or in the case of political upheaval or natural disasters. Pursuant to this financial assistance, developing nations are required to agree to certain conditionalities- macroeconomic structural adjustments designed to bring these nations in line with the monetary and fiscal policies favored by the proponents of global corporate capitalism. These adjustments include determination of the structure and disbursement of government budgets, deregulation of domestic markets, limitations on subsidies and trade barriers, direct interference in banking and finance, privatization of state-controlled enterprises, the introduction of market forces into government operations, export requirements, transfer pricing, forced specialization in business sectors with low productivity growth, and managerial control of domestic firms by transnational corporations through foreign direct investment (Chang, 2008).

The net result of such conditionalities is the favoring of corporate interests over public interests. Such policy packages favor already wealthy nations and corporations, forcing open developing markets with no concern for domestic populations. Thus, the corporate welfare system achieves globalization, subverting the democratic process and exploiting the public through economic regulations in which they have no determination

and from which they derive scant benefits. Democracy and free market capitalism are fundamentally incompatible. Being a political construct imposed by corporate ideologues (and not the result of popular consent), the market favors those who already wield political and economic power. Whoever has the most money has the most votes in such a system of economic regulation.

Additionally, Perkins (2006) and Hiatt (2007) identify another method for bringing developing nations into line behind the global consensus. Should a government be unwilling to accept governance conditionalities, corporations employ what are known as "economic hit men (EHM)" (Perkins, 2006, p. xi). These EHM rig elections, tamper with financial and accounting records, and engage in bribery, extortion, and (should the need arise) murder, with the goal of further concentrating wealth into corporate coffers. But, as noted by Perkins (2006), EHM "seldom resort to anything illegal because the system itself is built on subterfuge, and the system is by definition legitimate" (p. xxv). This is not a conspiracy, but rather the structural inevitability of corporate capitalist ideology achieving its logical material end. Thus, the methods employed to bring about free trade reduce the possibility of competing social codes, consolidating ideologies towards further totalization of the fascist ideosis. Moreover, free markets are not free at all. They must be imposed by hierarchical authoritarian measures and have resulted in global destabilization- economic, military, and social.

As noted by Chang (2008), from the time global finance was liberalized in 1971 until 1997, banking crises increased from zero to 17, currency crises increased by 356%, and twin crises involving banking and currency increased 21 times over from the previous two-and-a-half decades (p. 87). Such massive destabilization is not an accidental

aberration, nor is it limited to the economy. It is, in fact, a deliberate structural feature of global corporate capitalism whose destabilizing effects permeate the entire social body. Klein (2007) details the concurrent rise of free-market economic ideology and global instability. Although the result of centuries of philosophical discourse, free market capitalism as an economic ideology was developed by Milton Friedman in the 1960s. Friedman's dream of unfettered capitalism was initially hindered by the fact that "people just didn't seem to vote for politicians who followed his advice… [D]ictatorships… were the only governments who were ready to put free-market doctrine into practice" (p. 133). Friedman even served as an advisor to the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet during the 1970s. From the outset, free-market capitalism has been fundamentally and stridently opposed to democratic societies.

In a capitalist system, desire for profit is the dominant motivating factor. As such, other concerns (e.g. social wellbeing, protection of freedoms, environmental preservation) become subverted to the accumulation of wealth. Klein (2007) further enunciates the factors underlying this arrangement. In fact, the primary factor in the adverse (possibly even inverse) relationship between democracy and free markets is the integration of corporate ideology and the business elite into the legislative process- the "merger of the political and corporate elites… with the state playing the role of chair of the business guild- as well as the largest source of business opportunities, thanks to the contract economy" (p. 316). Through government contracts, large amounts of public money are funneled into private corporations. These contracts are awarded for projects such as development of weapons systems, the service industry, maintenance of prisons, disaster relief, construction and reconstruction, and (most recently) homeland security.

Corporations awarded these contracts are motivated primarily by profit, whatever altruistic or patriotic rhetoric they may employ. When considering this fact, it is important that keep in mind that the most lucrative of government contracts are for weapons systems, homeland security, and overseas construction. These companies' primary sources of profit are war and ecological disaster. It is therefore in their best interest to encourage and exploit economic and political instability. While some may dismiss this as taking a conspiratorial view of history, it is not the purpose of this argument to engage in such futile speculation. What is being argued here is not that a conspiracy exists, but that market capitalist ideology inherently encourages private accumulation of wealth, thus bringing about structural conditions of inequality and instability. This situation is exacerbated by the massive amount of profits generated by war and ecological disaster, as well as the speculation of risk capital through stock markets.

The overall point of Klein's (2007) argument is that global instability is the ultimate culmination of corporate capitalism. Free markets are enabled by military force and political terror. The only constants in such a system are rising inequality, systemic corruption, and the degradation of geographical and social environments. The privatization of government through political appointments and government contracts is bankrolled by speculative debt and subsidized with public funds. This represents "a huge transfer of wealth from public to private hands, followed by the transfer of private debts into public hands" (p. 87), whereby the public pays twice for its own disempowerment. It is a system designed to maintain and expand its power regardless of election results.

The privatization of government provides a decided advantage to wealthier individuals and institutions, which are in a more advantageous position to encourage policy initiatives that favor the expansion of their wealth. Such a system is decidedly corporatist, whose key characteristics are "huge transfers of public wealth to private hands, often accompanied by exploding debt, an ever-widening chasm between the dazzlingly rich and the disposable poor, and an aggressive nationalism that justifies bottomless spending on security" (Klein, 2007, p. 15). Culturally speaking, such an economic system results in a war against competing ideologies and alternative social codes, with the balance of power decidedly in favor of the wealthy. These are the key features of the American political and economic system that was coming into fruition during Bill Hicks's career and whose power has expanded unchecked in the ensuing years. Not only are they defining characteristics of the American system, they are the defining characteristics of the fascist ideosis. As such, the relationship between fascism and capitalism cannot be overstressed.

Communication of fascist ideology through cultural forms.

The consolidation of power within this system is not limited to purely economic or political matters. The political and economic manifestations of the fascist ideosis reproduce its hierarchy of values within the realm of culture, as well. This takes place primarily on the level of meaning, wherein the values expressed by fascism and global corporate capitalism restructure the cognitive processes of individuals to accept the meanings imposed by the dominant paradigm (Bey, 1996). As noted by Baudrillard (1981), it is at this level of the meaning of signs where the real power monopoly resides. By controlling the meaning of signs, the fascist ideosis controls the values of and the

relationships between signs, thus enforcing itself as the dominant social code. As noted earlier, this code invests signs with meanings conducive to its totalization- meanings that are suggested by the work of a number of scholars working in a variety of fields (Baudrillard, 1981, 1994/2001; Bey, 1994, 2003; Newman, 2007; Wolin, 2008). Operating as a social code, fascism imbues signs with meanings that promote or, if necessary, enforce behavioral manipulation and discipline to ensure: 1) unquestioning submission to hierarchies; 2) aggressive competitiveness; 3) political and economic elitism; 4) permanent instability under the guise of security; 5) cultural monopoly of homogenization; and 6) constant consumption as the inevitable and desirable reproduction of scarcity disguised as fulfillment.

It is in this last value- consumption- wherein the fascist ideosis is most successfully reproduced. As noted by Baudrillard (1981), consumption is a strategic method of power operating through the production of signs. By consuming goods (cultural forms being particularly relevant for the following pages), individuals also consume the meanings with which those goods (operating as signs) have been invested. Since goods produced by the fascist system are already imbued with the value of constant consumption, consumption of such goods further reinforces the subservience of the individual and, consequently, society to an imposed hierarchy of values. This manifests most emphatically as fetishism- absorption in and fascination for the social code, which is reproduced by the consumption of the goods it produces. So, "thanks to consumption, the system not only succeeds in exploiting people by force, but in making them *participate* in its multiplied survival… [T]his participation only takes on its whole fantastic scope at the level of signs" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 200). Participation is most fully realized in the

consumption of cultural forms. In order to understand how cultural forms reproduce the fascist ideosis, a discussion of culture industries becomes necessary.

Culture Industries

As already noted, the fascist social code is most effectively reproduced and communicated through cultural forms (e.g. motion pictures, popular music, broadcast news, etc.), which are produced and distributed by culture industries- *culture industry* being an overarching term denoting a variety of industries operating in the global corporatist economic system, involved primarily in the production of cultural forms for reproduction and mass consumption (Bernstein, 2002). Due to the prodigious range and influence of culture industries in contemporary American society, the military-corporate-congressional complex named by Higgs (2007) (and renamed by myself) can be more appropriately termed as a military-corporate-congressional-culture complex.

Original development of the theory of culture industries.

The theory underlying the relationship between culture industries and social control as discussed in the following pages was first advanced by Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994), and later refined by Adorno (1959/1993, 1975/2002, 1978/2002, 1981/2002) and Horkheimer (1968/1972a). More recent works by Herman & McChesney (1997) and Gitlin (2001) have contributed to an understanding of culture industries in light of the changes to the global economic paradigm that have occurred in the years since this theory was first advanced, thereby illustrating its continued relevance and overall importance to any sort of comprehensive understanding of the relationship between fascism and capitalism.

The term *culture industry* refers not only to the process of producing cultural forms, but also to the standardization of content, the rationalization of distribution methods, and (perhaps most importantly) the motivating values and meanings embedded in cultural symbols (Adorno, 1975/2002). As such, Horkheimer and Adorno developed their theory as a means of exposing the "social contradictions underlying the emergent capitalist societies of the time, and their typical ideologies" (Strinati, 2004, p. 47). Concurrent with this goal, they reject several key Marxist presuppositions- foremost among them the belief that socialism is the end result of organized humanity. Instead, Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) argue that fascism is organized humanity's logical end. This premise takes on particular significance when considered in conjunction with their belief in the totalizing power and stability of capitalism.

Whereas Marx predicted that the declining significance of religion as the primary unifying social force- with a concurrent increase in technical innovation and work-related specialization- would lead to cultural chaos, Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) instead perceive of mass culture itself as the unifying force capable of replacing religion and other pre-capitalist institutions.[13] This is possible because of mass culture's ability to establish itself as a primary source of information while at the same time being structurally self-referent- "a system of signals that signals itself" (Adorno, 1981/2001, p. 82). The expansion of culture industries was further enabled by the capitalist economic model, which provided the technological capabilities, administrative and economic concentration, and social structure necessary for integrating customers into a hierarchy of

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[13] In all fairness, it should be noted that religion has not necessarily been subject to as drastic a reduction in social significance as Marx would have desired.

consumption (Adorno, 1975/2002; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). The result is a system of cultural production manipulated to communicate the meanings and values most beneficial to the economic and political elite. As expressed by Debord (1967/2006), mass culture provides capitalism with the mechanisms for recreating the class domination that is necessary to capitalism's survival. For Benjamin (1955/1968), this is achieved because the social transformations and historical circumstances brought about during the initial development of mass culture fundamentally altered "the mode of human sense perception" (p. 222)- a perception manipulated to reproduce and expand the dominance of capitalism.[14]

This recalls another cornerstone of Marx's argument: economics as the motivating factor of society (Bernstein, 2002). Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) reject this, arguing instead that culture is the central source of social cohesion. As argued in the following pages, however, economics and culture comprise the dual loci of the fascist ideosis. Given the fact that the existence of mass culture is entirely dependent on the production processes particular to capitalism, neither can be examined in isolation from the other. The centrality of mass culture to social stability gives capitalism and, consequently, fascism a decided advantage in the determination of meaning. The ability to determine meaning on such a scale solidifies the ideological values of capitalism and fascism into a dominant social code, thereby marginalizing the ability of individuals to determine meanings or assign values independent of the fascist ideosis. It is thereby through mass culture that fascism and capitalism exert the most effective control over the

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[14] Benjamin's (1955/1968) comment concerning the alterations of human sense perception is tentatively offered here as an indirect forerunner of Bey's (1996) argument concerning the manipulation of cognitive processes. A more direct connection between Benjamin (1955/1968) and Gitlin (2001) is offered in later sections.

populace. Moreover, vertical and horizontal integration within the capitalist system allow for the profit generated by culture industries to be concentrated then directed into other industries, allowing for greater possibilities for expansion and control (Adorno, 1975/2002). Consequently, culture and economics must be examined as primary components of the same unified system, rather than as competing phenomena.

Despite its assertions as to the primacy of culture, the analysis provided by Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) does in fact point to the economic developments that enabled mass cultural consumption. While a discussion of the evolution of production processes would provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, it is not essential to the argument at hand. What is pertinent is that the increase in economic prosperity (as well as the subsequent rise in consumerism) brought about by advanced liberal capitalism neutralized the potential for social revolution in Western democracies. A general rise in living standards and increasing technological innovation (especially the advent of television) significantly lessened the probability of radical social change, primarily by providing the working class with increased capital and leisure time. This increase in capital and leisure could then be spent on mass cultural products that (due to the capitalist production of those forms) bear the imprint of the capitalist labor process. Such consumption unifies the public in willing subservience to the dominant social code while ensuring a state of "harmony [that] is a caricature of solidarity" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994, p. 141). These factors, combined with the primacy of scientific rationality engendered by the Enlightenment, produced a stable system of control in which social revolution is, while not impossible, certainly improbable. With the resistant

potential of the working class neutralized by these marginal gains, capitalism enabled the

resurgence of fascism as a stable and readily adaptive cultural phenomenon.

The role of the working class within the fascist ideosis is, in fact, crucial to

understanding the role of culture industries in propagating fascism. Within capitalist

modes of production, the working class is the subordinate object of production, not its

subject (Adorno, 1959/1993).[15] Such a relationship to the production process

dehumanizes the working (and now middle) class, thereby limiting their ability to

determine meaning- barring, of course, a disruption to the particular inertia of ideosis.

This ability to determine meaning is a basic necessity for the creation of culture. "The

contents of culture, via the market mechanism, are adapted to the consciousness of those

who [are] excluded from the privilege of culture" (p. 21). Mass culture provides the

working and middle classes with the illusion of possessing culture, which is in fact

produced materially by the economic activities of the elite. This roots mass culture firmly

in the "praxis of socially useful labor in the pursuit of [the] particular ends" of the upper

class, immutably standardizing class differences (p. 19). With such differences solidified

and predominantly insurmountable, the working and middle classes are denied substantial

opportunities for power or freedom. They are reduced to the objects of a structural

hierarchy of consumerism and domination. The illusion of freedom is, however,

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[15] In furtherance of accurate representation, it should be noted that the valence of
Adorno's statement is dependent on the derivative perspective of Marxism adopted by the
Frankfurt School. Free-market ideologues could potentially nullify the aversiveness of
this statement by simply claiming that the working class *should* be the subordinate object
of consumption because (from their perspective) free markets should be the primary,
preferential subject. Adorno's explanation is provided as the one most suitable for this
analysis, not as *the only* explanation for experiential phenomena. Additionally, this
proposition must be refined to include the middle class as part of the term *subordinate
object of production*, as due to the historical developments discussed in previous sections.

presented as the freedom to choose between brand names, political parties, etc., which are different only in style and devoid of any real differences in content or meaning. This is a hallmark of fascism.

As discussed in previous sections, fascism is in many ways a logical extension of the Enlightenment. In addition to providing a critique of mass culture and a revision of key Marxist hypotheses, Horkheimer and Adorno also expose the role of core Enlightenment values in the rise of fascism.[16] These values- scientific rationality, individual advancement, and technological progress- helped give rise to a new class whose position is based entirely on economic wealth.[17] Through the widespread adoption of Enlightenment principles, the success of the emerging economic elite could then be transmuted into cultural value (which itself contains the potential to structuralize as a dominant social code, particularly when connected to the processes of financial and industrial production). The success of this class suggests that the actuality of autonomy is possible, but the actualization of autonomy is prohibited by the ways in which the economic elite arrange life for the working class.[18]

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[16] This statement should not be taken as a wholesale disavowal of Enlightenment values or as a suggestion that those values are inherently fascist.

[17] Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) refer to this class as the bourgeoisie. However, this term has been rendered obsolete by developments in the global economic structure- primarily the further concentration of wealth, the widening income gap, and the expanding debt structure- that are leading to the disappearance of the middle class. *Bourgeoisie* refers to the middle class in ascendency. Those members of the class referred to as bourgeoisie have mostly been absorbed into the upper class or remarginalized into the rapidly vanishing middle class in decline.

[18] While use of the term "the economic elite arrange" might seem grammatically incorrect, it is, in fact, a deliberate usage to point to the fact that members of the elite do not represent a unified whole, but rather a collection of competing individuals, families,

Adorno (1959/1993) argues that traditional concepts of culture as separate from and opposed to the realities of labor and production were subverted by this relationship. They were replaced by the concept of culture as a set of status symbols dominated by exchange value. This is the essence of pseudo-culture, in which "the commodified, reified content of culture survives at the expense of its truth content and its vital relation to living subjects" (p. 22). Stripped of its truth content and divorced from its relation to living individuals, the meaning of culture could then be manipulated to fit the ideological and economic values of those in control of production processes. Life, then, becomes mere ideology perpetuated by the predominance of pseudo-culture. The original promise of culture as resistance to domination becomes the apology for such domination.

Consumption and commodity fetishism.

The preceding arguments offered by Horkheimer and Adorno highlight the totalitarian and monolithic potential of modern capitalism. Their work stems primarily from Marx's concept of commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism is the phenomenon whereby the use value of an object is trumped by its market value (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994). It is a social manifestation of the dominance of liberal capitalist economics. The consumer, saturated by exposure to mass culture and marketing campaigns, is instilled with the false belief that commodities fulfill some basic need, when they are (in fact) superfluous to existence and indicative of scarcity. Money that could be spent to counteract social inequalities (e.g. poverty, hunger) is instead used in the pursuit of consumer gains. Through mass cultural forms, capitalism employs

corporations, political parties, and alliances. Other instances of this usage occur throughout this argument (e.g. "the upper class are").

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marketing and advertising as means to shape the desires and tastes of the public. The public, in turn, focus their consumptive habits on the pursuit of false needs. Attention is thereby successfully and intentionally diverted from the pursuit of substantive alternatives to the dominant social code. Commodity fetishism results in the further concentration of wealth and the exclusion of genuinely resistant viewpoints. The fascist social code is thereby sanctified by individuals' absorption in and fascination with the logic of exchange value through consumption, which is (according to Baudrillard, 1981) primarily the production of signs. The fascist ideosis achieves through mass culture the "repressive unification" that Classical Fascism achieved through force and coercion (Bernstein, 2002, p. 4). The effects of mass culture are more effective, however, because the meanings and values expressed through mass culture instill in the public the belief that they are being provided with what they need. Thus, any desire to fundamentally alter the system is effectively quelled.

The result is a "circle of manipulation and retroactive need" in which commodities (particularly cultural forms) are produced for the benefit of maintaining a predetermined social hierarchy (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994, p. 121). This is achieved through the homogenization of cultural forms and the subsumption of aesthetics to business. Whereas the tastes and desires of the public inform mass culture, culture industries manipulate these preexisting inclinations in order to consolidate control over the consumer. "The deception is not that the culture industry supplies amusement but that it ruins the fun by allowing business considerations to involve it in the ideological clichés of a culture in the process of self-liquidation" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994, p. 142). This deception is achieved through providing an array of cultural forms on a

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mass-produced and easily reproducible scale. The same set of rules and formats govern seemingly different forms of media. Mass-produced cultural forms are based on a standardized system of interchangeable conventions that are calculated to reify the existing economic and political ideologies while creating acceptance of the social order produced by such ideologies among those who are oppressed by the system. This is further achieved by the interweaving of economic interests- a "ruthless unity" in which (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/1994, p. 123) (for example) musicians are dependent on large corporations for production, distribution and access to the market; radio conglomerates for airplay (which rely on energy concerns for electricity); marketing firms for publicity; petroleum companies for the raw materials necessary to produce records; and any other number of businesses for services necessary to success in the music industry. With the rise of global corporate capitalism, these companies are now often owned by the same parent company in a highly advanced form of vertical integration, thereby further concentrating wealth into the coffers of a select few transnational corporations. Thus is contained the schemata of culture industries.

This is not to say that systems of control came about with the rise of capitalism. Systems of control have existed since (if not before) the invention of money and usury, development of writing, and emergence of state apparatuses and organized ecclesiastical hierarchies. Culture industries are merely one type of control system particular to the 20th and 21st centuries- the adaptation of the elite to changes in the economic, political, social, industrial, and technological environments. Feudal systems of control were no longer relevant. Thus, the upper class had to revise their strategies, methods and tactics in order

to maintain their power.[19] As argued by Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994), the rise of the middle class and the advent of modern technologies provided the economic base for controlling the public through mass consumption of popular culture. "Certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods" (p. 121). This necessitates organization and management particular to capitalist modes of production. Although mass culture is initially indicative of consumers' tastes, the process is reverted onto itself, resulting in the "stereotyped appropriation of everything… for the purposes of mechanical reproduction" (p. 127). Because cultural forms are (like all other commodities) dependent on production monopolies, they become imbued with the meanings and values prescribed by capitalist (i.e. fascist) social code. The use value of such commodities becomes subservient to the commodities' value in perpetuating the total system of production- its sign value for the preservation of the "hedonist ideology of consumption" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 33).

Culture, administration, and capitalist production.

Adorno's (1978/2002) examination of the relationship between culture and administration provides a valuable perspective to this argument. Conditions of exchange in capitalist systems necessitate organizational and administrative hierarchy. The hierarchical nature of administration manifests itself in the tendency to organize, order, and evaluate people, concepts, objects, meanings, values, etc. Corresponding to Weber's

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[19] Again, this is not to endorse a conspiratorial view of history. It does instead posit that those in elite political/economic positions systemically engage in collusion, coercion, and other practices for the purposes of self-aggrandizement. What some might interpret as conspiracy might more accurately be described as the inertial inevitabilities of ideosis as manifest through the actions of individuals and/or groups actively participating in a system of capitalism that has nearly reached the end stages of virtuality.

classical theory of bureaucracy, Adorno sees in this tendency the inevitability of organizational expansion. At odds with Weber, however, Adorno (1978/2002) assesses bureaucratic expansion in a decidedly negative light. Such expansion provides an organizational parallel to the inevitable expansion of fascism through capitalist modes of production. It is precisely the "absolute rationality" of administration that favors homogenous generality over the particularities of culture as traditionally understood (p. 113). Favoring the general over the particular leads to the destruction of creativity "because total planning takes precedence over the individual impulse, predetermining this impulse in turn, reducing it to the level of illusion" (p. 123).

Furthermore, management specialists are given control over areas of art and culture in which they have no training or qualifications. Their purpose is not to further the aims of art or culture (as traditionally understood), but to further the aims of administration in these areas. Culture, then, becomes "measured by norms not inherent to it and which have nothing to do with the quality of the object" (Adorno, 1978/2002, p. 113). It is through this manipulation of meaning and the administrative impulse toward totalization that culture becomes merely another reflection of the capitalist economic model- a subjective illusion used to control and transform the processes of life into conformity with the fascist ideosis.

The preceding argument finds particular support in Benjamin's (1955/1968) discussion about the transformation of art during the modern era. Whereas art was originally a ritual instrument for individual and communal actualization, mechanical reproduction has transformed the "total function of art" to reducing political and economic autonomy (p. 224). The distractions provided by art now constitute a primary

form of covert social control. Benjamin even states the direct connection between this form of social control and fascism in that they both organize the working classes while maintaining the property structure, allow for public expression without having a concurrent substantive allowance of rights, and transform the political process into a purely aesthetic ritual. This is possible because art has always been inextricably connected with other aspects of life, particularly the social and cultural. It is an expression of the inner life, the creative desire "to withstand the plastic surgery of the prevailing economic system which carves all men to one pattern" (Horkheimer, 1968/1972a, p. 273). As Marcuse (1977/1978) further notes, art is (in its ideal form) an act of creation autonomous from politics and economics. It represents a subversion of the dominant social code in an attempt to maintain the sovereignty of the inner life. The social code created by the convergence of fascism and capitalism (through the administrative and profit-driven aspects of culture industries) has rendered this improbable by attempting to nullify the existence of the inner life.

Returning to Horkheimer (1968/1972a), leisure time (dominated now by consumption of mass cultural forms) no longer represents the development of the inner life. It is merely a reflection of the dominance of the production process and, as such, operates as a system of training and refreshing people for their role in this process. Art (as understood in traditional terms) is an expression of the knowledge of human despair. This is one explanation for why high art remains fettered to the yoke of the market. By attaching high prices to works of high art, the upper class deprive the working class of the means of experiencing art in its traditional role and, consequently, reduce their exposure to the message of despair.

With the rise of popular art came the danger of a rise in popular discontent. This danger was averted, however, through the wedding of propaganda and marketable art. Popular art still reflects the despair seen in earlier forms of art, but this despair is masked by the very fact of mass production. Mass production of popular art gives the public the illusion that there exists a real community among them- a "sensus communis aestheticus" (Horkheimer, 1968/1972a, p. 274). Thus, mass production of cultural forms creates a false sense of community while at the same time strengthening the barriers that prevent formation of an actual community capable of determining social meaning independent of the dominant code. It betrays the mechanism by which fascism functions while successfully masking its essence.

Fully understanding this situation requires a return to the issue of commodity fetishism. Adorno (1981/2002) posits that the predominance of liberal (i.e. market) capitalism fosters a demand for false needs among the public. Due to a general rise in living standards and leisure time, the public pursue ways by which to escape the realities of the workplace and stave off boredom while at the same time expending little effort in so doing. The fulfillment of this desire is illusory, however. Beneath the guise of providing escape, culture industries utilize the conventions of mass culture to create reliance on products that ensure the impossibility of escape. This is achieved by constant reference in cultural forms to the processes of industrial and technological production. Consumers (in the pursuit of escape) are constantly reminded of their role in the social order. "Spiritual nobility of soul and sense of fraternity have melted together into slogans for the workplace" (Adorno, 1981/2002, p. 69). The border between mass culture and experiential reality dissolves, thus creating an existence in which the values and

meanings expressed by the dominant social code replace experiential reality through

reproduction and consumption. The demands of this existence are simple: know your role

in the hierarchy of consumerism and adhere to it faithfully. Profit and, consequently,

products become the subjects of reality while human beings are reduced to the objects of

consumerism.

Through this process, art is debased into a mere commodity. While a commercial

facet to art has existed for centuries, the concern for profit became predominant in art

with the development of culture industries. This resulted in a melding of high art and

popular art, whereby high art was robbed of its potency and popular art was robbed of its

revolutionary character in the attempt to create an ideal product for "Mr. Average

Consumer" (Adorno, 1981/2002, p. 69). The upshot is a total alienation of society from

itself- an alienation that society willingly accepts because of the seeming lack of

alternatives to this social code. Due to the convergence of capitalist modes of production

and fascist ideology, the economic elite no longer have to disguise their power.

Acceptance by the public of their own domination is yet another extension of the system

in and of itself. Such is the nature of the hegemonic power of mass culture imbued with

the values of a fascist social code.

Advertising.

Parallel to the development of mass culture is the development of strategies and

tactics used to market mass cultural forms. The role of advertising in expanding the

dominance of the fascist ideosis cannot be overlooked. Advertising contributes to the

process described as hegemonic power by catering to the desire for false needs generated

by culture industries. New products are constantly marketed in reference to earlier

products, furthering the illusion that consumption fulfills needs by perpetuating an eternal present through the false history of product evolution. As noted by Adorno (1981/2002), however, this process is merely one of self-reflecting scarcity in which "elegant, innovative, technological style hides old, decayed content" (p. 65). Cultural products are marketed in such a way as to offer consumers the illusion of having infinite choices while actually providing little to no freedom of options. Through marketing and advertising, the public is led to believe that they are being denied nothing, while they are actually offered very little. With such restriction in regards to actual choice, advertising becomes a substitute for information. This information is the foundation of fascist propaganda "based on psychological calculations rather than on the intention to gain followers through the rational statement of rational aims" (Adorno, 1982/2002, p. 132). Thus, advertising (as a proxy for information) becomes manipulation on the cognitive level- the irrational command for continued reproduction of the code of consumption.

This argument finds particular relevance in regards to the American public's obsession with the phenomenon of celebrity. Movies, magazines and television present celebrities as manufactured ideals to which consumers can aspire while at the same time accepting the reality that they will never achieve this ideal. The ideal (instead of representing a desirable, attainable goal) becomes a counterfactual normative by which culture industries can further inculcate the public with the hierarchy of consumption. Obsessing over and aspiring for celebrity status thus "reinforces in the medium of the image the actual destruction of society proper and the transformation of its members into the mannequins of the society page even as it denies them" (Adorno, 1981/2002, p. 91).

Criticisms.

Not surprisingly, the theory of culture industry has been met with vociferous criticism. Adorno in particular has been labeled as an elitist. Critics maintain that this theory presupposes a public that is ignorantly passive- a homogenous mass of dupes who unwittingly fall prey to the dictates of the economic elite. While an argument can be made that Adorno was an elitist, this argument must be restricted to the preference for high art over popular art, which is a matter of taste and not an essential component of the theory of culture industry.[20] The theory explicitly argues that the public is not ignorant, that it is aware of the transparency of culture industries. "The so-called under-class knows more than academic arrogance is willing to admit" (Adorno, 1959/1993, p. 20). Furthermore, the theory of culture industry is predicated by the hypothesis that individuals are active participants in their own domination through their participation in mass cultural consumption. The problem lies in the fact that the public is offered few real alternatives to the products offered by culture industries. Due to the schema of mass production, alternative cultural forms are marginalized because "whatever is to pass muster must already be handled, manipulated and approved… before anyone can enjoy it" (Adorno, 1981/2002, p. 67).

Critics also charge that the theory of culture industry ignores the fact that mass culture is a result of the tastes and desires of the masses, hence the term *mass culture*. As with charges of elitism, this misconception is the result of a cursory reading of the theory. Mass culture itself contains some elements of the public's preferences, but culture

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[20] As an aside, I reject Adorno's presumption that popular or mass culture has nothing positive to offer. If this were in fact true, an analysis of stand-up comedy would not be worth pursuing.

industries are not concerned with merely actualizing the wants of the public. *Culture industry* as a concept refers to the modes of production, the overriding concerns for profit, and the hegemonic effects that allow mass cultural forms to be implemented as means for control. Though involved in the production of mass cultural forms, the culture industry is not synonymous with mass culture. It is comprised of "products tailored for mass consumption" through the utilization of "contemporary technical capabilities and economic and administrative concentration"- the process whereby the economic elite "intentionally integrates customers from above" (Adorno, 1975/2002, p. 98). Culture industry refers not to mass culture, but to the debasement of that culture in pursuit of maximum profit and control.

Strinati (2004) raises another important criticism in recognizing that in order for communication to occur at all, some degree of standardization is necessary. While this is certainly correct, the theory of culture industry posits that the problem does not necessarily lie in standardization itself, but rather the ways in which standardization is employed in order to produce conformity. By standardizing cultural forms on such a massive scale and for the purposes of maximizing profit and power, the economic elite have malformed the communicative potential of standardization. While some common level of understanding must exist in order for communication to occur, it is precisely the differences in comprehension and expression that more fully enrich the complexity and subtleties of human communication. Standardization has become a tool for constricting and confining meaning to the dictates of the social code of consumption.

A final criticism leveled against Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994) is that the language used to enunciate their theory is unapproachable and obscure, that it divorces

the content from social reality to the level of abstraction. Central to the aims of critical

theory, however, is the potential of theory to provide methods for resistance. This

perspective is addressed in greater detail in Methodology. In regards to the issue at hand,

Horkheimer and Adorno consider language usage as a tactic of resistance. They often

intentionally employ language that can be viewed as inaccessible in order to free their

theories from the oppression about which they wrote. The language of capitalism is one

of domination, control and conformity. By couching theory in language that attempts to

operate outside the norms moderated by the system, that theory contains at least the

possibility of elevating the reader's consciousness beyond those norms. Though by no

means a panacea, such language is an inoculation against the fascist social code. For this

reason, "it may not be entirely senseless to continue speaking a language that is not easily

understood" (Horkheimer, 1968/1972a, p. 290). The significance of this remark becomes

apparent through an analysis of the life and work of Bill Hicks.

Later developments.

While the basic tenets underlying the theory of culture industry remain useful for

the argument at hand, the world has undeniably changed since this theory was first

formulated. Those changes (as pertinent to this discussion) are discussed in the sections

concerning fascism and global market capitalism. As such, they are not recapitulated in

this section. What is necessary at this juncture is to illustrate how these changes relate

directly to the evolution of culture industries into what Herman & McChesney (1997)

refer to as the "global commercial media system" (p. 37). This system developed as a

natural corollary of the ideology of global corporate capitalism. As such, it is structurally

driven by the core values of consolidation, deregulation, and privatization in the pursuit

of profit. As noted by Herman and McChesney, the internalization of these core values by the global media system is not indicative of conspiracy, but rather the collusive power of economics and politics as played out in a system driven by corporate and commercial imperatives.

In fact, the predominance of global corporate capitalism was primarily enabled by the emergence and evolution of culture industries. The enormous profits derived from cultural forms provided corporations with the economic leverage to push for government policies favorable to deregulation and conglomeration in regards to media companies. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the present day, corporate interests have successfully lobbied for communication policies that reflect the ideology of global corporate capitalism. The main features of these polices are an increase in commercialism, the marginalization of public broadcasting and service standards, market-based approaches to resource allocation and organization, government deregulation, and the concentration of media ownership under transnational conglomerates. Furthermore, given the pervasiveness of mass media, mass cultural forms are embedded with the values of corporate domination, "promoting the virtues of commercialism and the market loudly and incessantly through their profit-driven and advertising-supported enterprises and programming" (Herman & McChesney, 1997, pp. 37-38). These factors have resulted in the economic and political dominance of corporate interests with conglomerate-owned commercial media as the center of the global market economy.

Consequently, the direction and content of cultural forms is increasingly manipulated by a small number of transnational corporations operating in a form of

oligopoly maintained by joint ventures, alliances, and collusion. The global commercial

media system provides investment opportunities for other industries in the global market

economy, as well as providing a forum for advertisers who promulgate the values of

consumption and consumerism through noncontroversial entertainment.[21] Such

entertainment displaces the social realm, thereby minimizing the resistant potential of the

public. The results are an increase in the value of consumption and the strengthening of

political forces inextricably linked to corporate power. This system is structurally and

fundamentally opposed to self-determination and autonomy, as evidenced by the

centralization of wealth and informational resources in the hands of the elite.

Although this economic model developed in the United States, the push for

globalization discussed in previous sections rapidly transformed it into the dominant

worldwide paradigm. As noted by Herman & McChesney (1997), "virtually all countries

are moving discernibly toward the U.S. model, and… the process is self-reinforcing" (p.

137). As global media corporations move into emerging markets (i.e. developing nations)

by buying or creating alliances with local media firms, the political power of these

corporations increases. The expansion of commercial concerns reduces the market share

of the public sector, thereby reducing the legitimacy of their claims to public funds. As a

result, they become either marginalized or commercialized. The expansion of the

commercial media model into developing nations represents an ideological assault on

local cultures, replacing their own values with those of market capitalism. More than this,

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[21] Such a statement is made with the acknowledgement that pseudo-controversy does
occasionally appear in entertainment. When what passes for controversy appears, it is
most often mere titillation for the purposes of generating ratings, which in turn increase
advertising revenues. What is considered to be controversial might more accurately be
termed as an *emotionally masturbatory marketing tactic*.

however, it represents an assault on the ability of individuals everywhere to determine meaning outside the code determined by the fascist ideosis- reproduced by global corporate capitalism and communicated through culture industries.

For Gitlin (2001) the global commercial media system is more than just a reflection of the dominant economic and political structures. It is the culmination of our cognitive restructuring. The experience of engaging with mass media has become *the* primary human experience in the current era. As such, it has become the overriding ritual of our time, the significance of which echoes Benjamin's (1955/1968) argument concerning the relationship between the ritualistic origins of art and the transformation of human sense perception. The result of this ritual is the perpetuation of a never-ceasing drama of simulation- simulation of emotion, sensation, representation, action, meaning, and (ultimately) identity. It is a constant "buzz of the inconsequential" in which we exist unconsciously and from which we cannot escape without active resistance (Gitlin, 2001, p. 9). Such mediated experience is ultimately devoid of meaning and reflects only those values of the underlying economic system. Capitalism, after all, reduces everything to the same standard. Political engagement is reduced to a consumer sideshow, information to propaganda, pleasure to trivialized ecstasy, mythology to celebrity, immediacy to mediation, society to impersonal alienation, reality to a sensational spectacle of simulation (Gitlin, 2001).

This is not to say that humans are passive receptors merely accepting whatever purposefully distorted simulation of reality culture industries produce. Nor is this to suggest that culture industries can be viewed as being an entity separate from human experience. Like culture itself, culture industries and the advanced global commercial

media system are entirely the products of human activity. Individuals bear the responsibility for their own oppression and alienation. Furthermore, individuals actively perpetuate the system by allowing it to become the common core of their experience. Where the consequences of mediated reality transcend individual choice and action are in its structural determination by the totalizing power of capitalism in conjunction with a fascist social code. Echoing the arguments presented by Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/1994), Gitlin (2001) points out that the result of mass-mediated reality is fascism- of culture, information, and profit. Human desires and activities have been appropriated, manipulated, and embedded with meanings determined by purely corporate concerns. Though corporations may be legally recognized as individuals, they continue to recreate a reality that oppresses and restricts the dimensions of individual meaning and existence. The end result of such a cultural system is the communication of nothing but the simulation of communication- the habit of living a mediated existence. Although the global commercial media system deceives, restricts, reduces and dominates, the ultimate expression of its oppressive power is that it reproduces the ideology of capitalism into a fascist social code that pathologically strives for totalization. It has become impossible to exist entirely outside the boundaries of mass-mediated reality.

Arguments have been made that mass media and popular cultural forms do not solely produce the negative effects enunciated by Gitlin. Johnson (2005) in particular presents the argument that popular culture has actually led to an overall increase in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores in the American population. This argument is based primarily upon evidence that suggests that forms of popular culture are becoming more sophisticated with greater demands on cognitive engagement. Although not limited solely

to discussions about one form of popular culture, Johnson's (2005) work centers primarily on video games. Video games provide participants' with three-dimensional images and soundscapes, require navigation and control, present interactive narratives, and encourage complex social relationships. They create a simulated environment of open-ended interactivity in which the completion of tasks is essential to advancement. In all, such cultural forms have led to an increase in manual dexterity, visual intelligence, decision-making abilities, the capacity for nuanced exploration, coordination between objectives and tasks, and development of long-term strategies.

While this evidence may indeed be fact, the flaws with Johnson's (2005) argument are embedded within its very claims. First, there is Johnson's claim that average IQ scores have risen due to the influence of popular culture. Bauerlein (2008) highlights the problem with this assertion. Intelligent Quotient tests are notoriously culturally limited, influenced by test-taking situations, and marked by an inability to determine a comprehensive measure of actual intelligence.[22] Furthermore, the increase noted by Johnson only applies to "spatial reasoning"- a learned, not inherent, ability- among those scoring in the lower percentiles (Bauerlein, 2008, p.91). Scores in mathematics and verbal ability have not shown a subsequent increase with the proliferation of popular culture. Even the spatial reasoning scores themselves have not increased among mid- to high-level percentile groups. As such, the attractiveness of even this aspect of Johnson's argument remains open to debate.

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[22] Another charge leveled against IQ tests that is not addressed by Bauerlein is that they are embedded with certain values indicative of the eugenics movement out of which they developed.

While popular culture might very well increase *some* cognitive abilities among *some* portions of the population, it does not provide a concurrent framework for ethical social behavior or the application of increased intelligence. "Game players are not soaking up moral counsel, life lessons, or rich psychological portraits. They are not having emotional experiences… other than the occasional adrenaline rush" (Johnson, 2005, p. 39). Video games reward brain circuitry by increasing dopamine levels, with an accompanying withdrawal. Johnson's own admission is that the withdrawal from such cultural forms is strikingly similar to the process of withdrawal from cocaine or cigarettes, albeit in a less severe form. It is precisely these things that popular culture does not provide that are necessary for individual autonomy and social responsibility. Intelligence is no substitute for a framework of ethical behavior and responsibility.

Furthermore, Johnson (2005) underestimates the capability of mass media and popular culture to transmit core values. While they may not provide an ethical or socially responsible framework, they do indeed transmit values. Because popular culture is the convergence of "neurological appetites of the brain, the economics of the culture industry, and changing technological platforms" (p. 10), it transmits those values inherent to the economic system and its concurrent social code- in this case, the values of consumption, aggression, greed, and submission. As Patton (1995) points out, it is precisely the amorality of signs that allows for their manipulation. Even Johnson (2005) admits that the result of mass media and popular culture is a "society of the image" devoid of "complicated, sequential works of persuasion" (p. 185), though replete with the oppressive power of fascist propaganda as defined by Adorno (1982/2002). Thus, any

increase in intelligence generated by popular culture represents a restructuring of

cognition and sense perception in preparation for the totalization of the fascist ideosis.

Cognitive restructuring and the shared mental environment.

The overarching characteristics of the fascist ideosis have already been discussed.

However, certain key features as they relate to mass media require further elaboration.

This is necessary in order to understand the evolution of cultural fascism from a dominant

social code *in esse* into the finality of ideosis *in potentia*. While the ideosis has already

achieved actual existence, it has not yet realized the finality of total oppressive power.

Alternatives remain. Resistance is still possible. Without understanding the central role

played by mass media in the final stages of pathological ideation, however, the potential

of resistance is in danger of being reduced to a mournful rumination on the wasted

possibilities of yesteryear.

If (as argued here) engagement with mass media is the primary ritual of

contemporary human experience, the mental environment created through this symbolic

performance is of crucial interest. In Baudrillard's (1994/2001) conception, mass media

are more than cultural forms and production processes. Media represent a genetic code

that directs the mutation and evolution of consciousness- in this case directing traditional

reality into a condition reminiscent of the hyperreality of Baudrillard (1991/1995) or the

integrated spectacle of Debord (1988/1998).[23] This code achieves crystallization through

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[23] As noted in previous sections, Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is strikingly
similar to Debord's concept of spectacle. As such, they are both useful for discussions
regarding the shared mental environment engendered by the ritual of participating with
mass media. It should be noted, however, that neither are adequate *in and of themselves*
to describe this environment in its entirety. In fact, such description is impossible. Even a
shared mental environment varies in its particularities from individual to individual.
Therefore, although general characteristics can be described, any attempt to explain this

the production of signs that carry with them the meanings and values of the dominant

economic paradigm and its concurrent cultural/political ideology. In the age of global

market capitalism and cultural fascism, consumption is this process of the production of

signs (Baudrillard, 1981). Therefore, the mental environment that represents the greatest

area of control for the fascist ideosis is created through consumption- active participation

in the ritual of domination through the exchange of capital- "mystical self-abandonment

to commodity transcendence" (Debord, 1967/2006, p. 33). The main features of this

mental environment are suggested by Debord (1967/2006, 1988/1998) and Baudrillard

(1981, 1991/1995). For an explanation of how this mental environment manifests

politically, this argument refers primarily to Wolin (2008).

The mental environment produced by the interrelation of capitalism and fascism

is primarily the result of consumption- particularly consumption of cultural forms as

disseminated through mass media. Because they are the product of resources as employed

by the upper class, these forms are invested with the values most beneficial to the

economic elite. In this way, the upper class are able to consecrate their economic

privilege into semiotic privilege, what Baudrillard (1981) terms "mastery of the process

of signification" (p. 116). This represents the ultimate form of domination precisely

because ideology is bound not to content, but to form (i.e. code). Determination of the

dominant social code allows for the manipulation of meaning, thereby allowing for

indefinite reproduction of that code. Such "abstract totalization" of signs allows them to

function ideologically- "to establish and perpetuate real discriminations in the order of

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phenomenon in its entirety is fundamentally erroneous. The following pages should not
be viewed as a complete and final argument, but rather a detailed sketch of the general
characteristics of the shared mental environment of contemporary human experience as
directed by the dominant social code.

power" (p. 101). Through consumption of signs (materially represented as mass cultural forms), the public accepts and internalizes the values and logic of the dominant social code, thereby assenting to this decisive, fundamental form of control. The dominant social code thereby succeeds more effectively than by force because (through consumption) individuals are implicated by their own participation, particularly their engagement with mass media. This is possible because mass media form (for the most part) a closed, total system of signification. They simultaneously create, articulate, and interpret meaning according to the values of those who control the means of their production. Due to the pervasiveness of mass media, such a system of signification reproduces an unconscious social logic that manifests as a shared mental environment for those who consume mass cultural forms.

With an understanding of how a shared mental environment is produced through consumption, it is now possible to examine certain primary features of this environment as it exists in the current era. Debord (1967/2006) was one of the first to articulate these characteristics in explaining the nature of a society in the throes of spectacle. As the planned objective and outcome of production and consumption, spectacle is a visual reflection of the dominant economic order. It is a state in which the primary determinant of reality has been reduced from existence to possession and, ultimately, appearance. Culture, as the "dead object of spectacular consumption," is the primary commodity (p. 102). Cultural forms disseminate the official dictates of the economic structure through a never-ceasing, one-sided discourse about the system itself. As the opposite of dialogue, such self-contained discourse defines the limits of communication and comprehension, thus defining the limits of critical awareness and community. The supremacy of

appearance represents the application of fascist methods to cultural forms, which in turn transforms perception to fit the economic system.

As such, the spectacle justifies the dominant order by simultaneously reproducing its values and monopolizing the majority of life outside labor through its commodities. Like Baudrillard, Debord (1967/2006) considers signs to be the ultimate commodity. In fact, spectacle represents the stage of social evolution in which the commodity has completely colonized social life through the contemplation of itself in a world of its own creation. Such a state is the logical end result of organized humanity in a capitalist system- a state in which capital has advanced to the point where it is purely speculative and virtual. As a reflection of this advanced stage of capitalism, the shared mental environment is hallmarked by virtual, speculative representation- illusion. Social relations are almost exclusively mediated by the images of the spectacle, and all real social activity is channeled into the global propagation of the worldview materialized by mass media- a single world market representing the totalization of capitalist and, consequently, fascist power. Thus, spectacle is the "*materialization* of ideology brought about by the concrete success of an autonomised [sic] system of economic production" (Debord, 1967/2006, p. 116).

Debord (1988/1998) revised this concept in the ensuing decades to account for the economic realities brought about by globalization. The concept of the integrated spectacle represents a more nuanced form of control, one in which fascism and consumption have reached the apex of consolidation. The principle features of the integrated spectacle are: 1) the merger of state and economy; 2) incessant technological innovation; 3) propaganda, disinformation, and orders disguised as communication; and 4) an eternal

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present divorced from historical context. The shared mental environment produced by the integrated spectacle is marked by the omnipresence of media discourse at the expense of immediate personal reality- a discourse in which nearly everything can be falsified and almost nothing can be verified. The ultimate goal of this spectacle is the destruction of inner subjectivity and critical awareness. Such a mental environment allows for the ultimate unity of economic and political power to remain concealed and obscured by the rhetoric of a global society ruled by conformism, isolation, and surveillance.

Such a mental environment has consequences beyond the purely social or cultural. As noted by Wolin (2008), this form of mass mediated reality serves a political function as well. Media discourse as such carries with it the capability to "eliminate whatever might introduce qualification, ambiguity, or dialogue, anything that might weaken or complicate the holistic *force* of their creation, of its *total* impression" (p. 2). In furtherance of this strategy, commercial media reduce political participation on the part of the public. This is achieved by constantly diverting attention towards cultural and religious issues that are deliberately framed to have no resolution, but instead serve to divide the public into easily manageable, manipulable, and predictable factions. The ultimate political function of such issues is to marginalize and suppress the public by "obscuring class differences and diverting the voters' attention away from social and economic concerns of the general populace" (p. 111). This effectively depoliticizes political engagement, leaving active, consequential involvement in the political process to corporate interests. Besides these methods of marginalization, media represent a form of thought policing through minimal, condescending coverage of dissent. As noted by

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Debord (1967/2006), any choice or meaning determined by means other than those prescribed by the dominant social code is a declaration of war against it.

Ultimately, the shared mental environment produced through engagement with mass media represents a level of hyperreality- "a deceptive world in which an entire culture labours [sic] assiduously at its counterfeit" (Baudrillard, 1991/1995, p. 43). This counterfeit stands as the primary control mechanism of oppressive power because, as Patton (1995) notes, "what matters is to control the production and meaning of information in a given context" (pp. 12-13). As employed through mass media, the production and meaning of information constitute an assault on reality whose primary function is to deter resistance and the formulation of meanings alternative to those supplied by the fascist ideosis. Thus, culture industries (as missionaries of global corporate capitalism and cultural fascism) have resulted in the spectacle (Debord, 1967/2006, 1988/1998), the simulation (Baudrillard, 1994/2001), the hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1991/1995)- the domination (Foucault 1977/1980b, 1977/1980c) of humanity at the hands of the inverted totalitarianism (Wolin, 2008) that is the fascist ideosis.

Conclusions

Discussions on the nature of fascism, capitalism, and culture industries often depict a bleak and seemingly hopeless vision of reality. There is hope, however. As Herman & McChesney (1997) point out, although the commercial media system is in undeniable service to global corporate capitalism, "the global media [are not] completely monolithic, of course, and dissident ideas make their occasional appearance in virtually all of them" (p. 38). Wolin (2008) also takes care to clearly state that oppressive power is

not yet total. In fact, most of the scholars whose works provide the theoretical basis for

this argument acknowledge that the possibility of resistance still exists. If the fascist

ideosis were total- if resistance was indeed futile- there would be no space for arguments

such as the one presented here. The very existence of such theories is indicative of *at*

least the possibility of resistance. As ironic as it may seem (given the decidedly

pessimistic tone of the theory of culture industry), a particular passage by Adorno

(1978/2002) provided the initial inspiration for the argument at hand. As such, it is

presented in its entirety:

> All the suggestions heard thus far would amount to ideas with broken wings, were
> it not for a bit of false logic encountered in them. One adjusts all too readily to the
> prevailing conviction that the categories of culture and administration must
> simply be accepted as that into which they actually developed to a large degree in
> historical terms: as static blocks which discreetly oppose each other- as mere
> actualities. In so doing, one remains under the spell of that reification, the
> criticism of which is inherent in all the more cogent reflections upon culture and
> administration. No matter how reified both categories are in reality, neither is
> totally reified; both refer back to living subjects- just as does the most
> adventurous cybernetic machine. Therefore, the spontaneous consciousness, not
> yet totally in the grips of reification, is still in a position to alter the function of the
> institution within which this consciousness expresses itself. For the present,
> within liberal-democratic order, the individual still has sufficient freedom within
> the institution and with its help to make a modest contribution to its correction.
> Whoever makes critically and unflinchingly conscious use of the means of
> administration and its institutions is still in a position to realize something which
> would be different from merely administered culture. The minimal differences
> from the ever-constant which are open to him [sic] define for him [sic]- no matter
> how hopelessly- the difference concerning the totality; it is, however, in the
> difference itself- in divergence- that hope is concentrated. (pp. 130-131)

The system itself contains the seed of its own resistance. Being the product of individual

action, the system is ultimately contingent on individual action. Resistance is possible

precisely because of the false logic of the fascist ideosis, which seeks to totalize and

centralize power through the disambiguation and reification of meaning. The underlying

assumption of this drive is that power can be reduced to the confines of a unitary system

of analysis or control. As noted by Foucault (1977/1980a), however, power relations cannot exist without resistance. Unitary analyses are simply not representative of the actualities of power. Power relations are exercised through innumerable other relationships. As such, there is no binary or all-encompassing opposition within power. The manichaean perspective propagated through ideosis is ultimately reductionist to the point of falsity.

Furthermore, power has no central location. While power may be concentrated, it is by nature irreducible and lacking of a center. May (1994) notes that while the system of capitalist production has been extended to every aspect of social life, rational calculation supersedes the "dialectical totalization" of ideosis (p. 24). Power is the production of meaning through the manipulation of signs. As such, the critical, rational individual is still capable of producing meaning independent of the fascist social code. Therefore, rational calculation can manifest resistant power. Summarizing Habermas, May (1994) notes that the structure of reason itself can be a means of resistance. As such, communicative activity based on alternative structures of reasoning can potentially serve as "the initial requirement of a liberatory politics of resistance" (p. 29). Such resistance is the focus of the following sections.

Revoevolution

"Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed through the renewal
of your mind…"
- Romans 12:2

Whatever cybernetic "necropolitical" nightmare of shared consciousness ideosis may represent (Pynchon, 1973, p. 59)- whatever its origins, intentions or designs- it is a construct of human consciousness and, as such, is combatable on the micro- (i.e.

cognitive) level. There is no conspiracy, simply structural inevitability- the result of

cognitive evolution imbued with and determined by the malignant ideologies of fascism

and capitalism. As such, confronting the material symptoms (e.g. institutions,

governments, economic systems) of this pathology serves scant effectual purpose. It thus

becomes "more important to change the fabric of society… than to change the structure

of the political realm" (Arendt, 1963, p. 15). The fabric of society is woven by the

communication of consciousnesses. Malign ideas are the actual source of ideosis.

Consequently, individual consciousness serves as the constitutive level of analysis for

determining methods of resisting this manifestation of oppressive power.

If, as argued in the preceding section, capitalism- by enabling a fascist social code

to totalize in ideosis through consumption- communicates a shared mental environment

based on falsity and illusion, resulting in oppression and domination (no matter how

benevolent or legal its guise), resistance to such a system must necessarily originate in

the production of signs- signs representing the communication of meaning and value.

This necessarily situates revoevolutionary resistance in the realm of micropolitics,

summarized by Best & Kellner (1991) as the affirmation of individual values in an

attempt to subvert the dominant code. Micropolitical resistance maintains focus on the

practices of everyday life including lifestyle choices, sexuality, modes of communicating,

and ways of thinking. Because the production of capitalist reality is ultimately imaginary,

resistance to the power generated by such a system necessarily originates from the source

of imagination- cognition. Working from these premises, revoevolution is defined here as

the willful autonomous reclamation of subjective individual sovereignty over meaning

and value in the furtherance of open, polysemous, ethical discourse as the continuously

evolving creation and communication of reality.[24] As addressed in the following section, any enactment of such resistant power is fundamentally an anarchic approach toward the creation of meaning and the ordering of society.

Reaffirming Widder's (2004) definition of micro- as the "constitutive level where subjects and meanings are formed and dissolved" (p. 190), revoevolution is a resistant form of micropolitical power operating as the revolutionary evolution of consciousness. It is an arsenal of tactics for meaning creation and sign manipulation to counteract the expansion and totalization of the social code crystallized in mass consciousness through the fascist ideosis. Although an eschewal of traditional ideological approaches to politics, revoevolution is presented in this context as an ethics-based philosophy of political behavior. Working from the arguments of Stirner, Antliff (2007) notes that the hierarchical, oppressive division of society is ultimately founded upon the metaphysical and binary modes of thinking that undergird typical notions of absolute truth. The binary manichaean model of absolute truth as a struggle between diametrically opposed forces of good and evil creates the milieu for political, social, and economic inequality. As such, resistance depends upon the rejection of "all habitual subservience to metaphysical concepts and social norms" begat by such a worldview (p. 60). Because oppressive power formations essentially depend upon individual subservience to abstract principles, liberation from oppressive power requires each individual to become self-determining in

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[24] Although not contributing to the argument at hand, the enormous debt owed to Robert Anton Wilson's *Quantum Psychology* for my understanding of a *revolutionary evolution of consciousness* must be acknowledged at this point. *Quantum Psychology* serves here in the capacity of a meta-methodology- informing my choices regarding language usage, word choice, logical construction of argument, and overarching approach to information. As such, may the following section serve in a secondary capacity as a tribute to the late Robert Anton Wilson.

the creation of meaning and value. This necessitates a refocusing of micropolitical

attention to the level of individual consciousness and meaning formation, which may

have potential as an antidote against patho-ideological inertial illusion.

Revoevolution operates akin to Hall's (1985) notion of ideological struggle, in

which the moment for political radicalization arises from the interruption of "the

ideological field" by attempts "to transform its meaning by changing or re-articulating its

associations" (p. 112). As with ideological struggle, revoevolution operates from the

hypothesis that meaning is not the exclusive domain of a particular group, state

apparatus, or economic ideology. As such, "disarticulating [meaning] from its place in a

signifying structure" is to contest the process of social reproduction as manipulated by

the dominant social code (p. 112). Contestation of the dominant social code amounts to

Baudrillard's (1981) notion of unraveling the form of ideology, a revolutionary approach

to counteracting the abstraction and reduction of the symbolic into the materialization of

ideology. This approach "stands or falls in its ability to reinterrogate radically the

repressive, reductive, rationalizing metaphysics of utility" and sign form as determined

by the fascist/capitalist social code (p. 139). Successful reinterrogation restores the

possibility of response, what Debord (1967/2006) terms as "active direct communication"

(p. 68) facilitated by "the fusion of knowledge and action… effected within the historical

struggle" (p. 46). Such an approach allows anarchism to operate as a political philosophy

rather than as ideology. Whereas ideology endeavors toward universality as a

precondition of success, anarchism operates as a form of a-systemic political resistance

operating at the level of meaning that appears within the discontinuous internal

contradictions of the dominant social code brought about by the ideological striving for

universality (Walzer, 1987; Widder, 2004). Thus, revoevolution represents a radical

revolutionary theory that situates practical organization within the cultivation of critical

consciousness.

Distinctions between Revoevolution and Revolutionary Theory

This is not to suggest that revoevolution resides within the traditional notions of

revolution or revolutionary theory, however. The problems with traditional revolutionary

theory are equivalent to the problems with other forms of mass-movement resistance

discussed in previous sections. Revolutionary movements, regardless of their varying

incarnations, invariably rely upon some degree of solidarity and vanguard representation-

two conditions that are fundamentally incompatible with anarchism as properly

understood within this context. Another crucial problem with revolution (in the modern

sense of the term) is that it seeks to replace the existing order with yet another

political/economic system. Revolution merely changes who is in power without actually

altering the structure of power (Antliff, 2007; Arendt, 1963). To understand radical

revolutionary theory, it is necessary to look beyond the modern (i.e. traditional)

conception of revolution, examining instead revolution in its original context. As noted

by Arendt (1963), the modern concept of revolution as dealing with political and social

affairs is entirely alien to its original connotative associations. Originally, revolution

referred to the process of liberation in a religious or spiritual context. Radical

revolutionary theory reflects this original context (rather than the traditional) by positing

revolution as the process of individual cognitive liberation that is more akin to spiritual

freedom than freedom enabled by or against a political system. In this sense,

revoevolution is more revolutionary than revolution by contextualizing freedom as a biological or cognitive necessity rather than as a construct of ideology.

This amounts to what Antliff (2007) describes as insurrection- the refusal of subjugation and domination, the assertion of individual consciousness as a legitimate perpetual anarchic state of being. Within this context, power can remain fluid and ever-creative in its manifestations without relapsing into centralized, oppressively authoritative enactments. The need for insurrection rather than revolution lies in Marcuse's recognition of the problem with spontaneous liberation as espoused by revolutionary theory (Levin, 1981). Understood within the context of revolution, such liberation fails to transcend the values and meanings derived from the system against which liberatory political philosophy strives. According to Marcuse (1977/1978), primary self-liberation is rooted in individual subjectivity and intelligence, which requires education (by the self and by others), as well as a sense of self-discipline that the spontaneous liberation of revolution lacks. Liberation requires a sea change in human consciousness rather than vanguard representation that presumes unequivocal preferential status.

For Marcuse (1977/1978), inner subjectivity is the key to radical liberation because it allows the individual to escape the relations of domination through a shift from the values and processes of capitalism to the inner resources involved in the production of meaning. If the exercises of power ultimately manifest on the individual level, it is in the individual production of knowledge (i.e. the determination of meaning and value) wherein lies the potential for liberation. This form of liberation ultimately represents the process of insurrection, the radical otherness of transgression through the reclamation of

inner subjectivity. Insurrection, then, is founded upon the development and perpetuation of critical consciousness.

For Horkheimer (1968/1972b), the struggle between oppressive and resistant manifestations of power (termed as "the advanced sectors of the class and the individuals who speak out the truth concerning it") is an interactional process by which awareness develops (p. 215). This process serves as the basis for critical theory, which, through the passage of time, necessitates a continuous alteration of judgment in a "conscious relation to the historical practice of society" (p. 234). As such, critical consciousness manifests operationally as what Walzer (1987) terms "connected criticism" acting as dissent or resistance (p. 39). Within this context, connected criticism serves as a discursive form of social criticism whose arguments arise from within, and are based upon immediate and detailed knowledge of, a culture or society. Such criticism is intellectually and emotionally engaged with localized occurrences of general power relations. Ivie (2005) expands on Walzer's explanation, identifying connected criticism as a form of dissent- a "tactical rhetorical technique" (p. 282) operating for the realignment of "prevailing formations of common sense" (p. 277). Understood as such, dissent functions to delimit the constraints of ideology and the oppressive forms of power that become enacted through the ideological striving for universality. This form of resistance operates tactically on the margins of power that arise from the internal contradictions of ideological expansion and totalization. Such resistance resides on the micro- level and gains its strength from detailed knowledge of the cultural, social, political, and economic environment.

For Ivie (2005), dissent is not merely criticism, but the "optimal medium for collective self-rule" (p. 279). Dissent naturally delimits the consolidation of ideology by introducing new critiques that, while a response to the dominant social code, do not represent the meanings and values required by such a code. Connected criticism, then, operates as the communication of critical consciousness- the unity of freedom and self-discipline guided by logic rather than ideology. *Logic* is used here as defined by Debord (1988/1998): "the ability immediately to perceive what is significant and what is insignificant or irrelevant; what is incompatible or what could well be complementary; all that a particular consequence implies and at the same time all that it excludes" (p. 30). As such, logic is the fundamental revolutionary tool because it is capable of providing meanings and values alternative to those mandated by a system that pathologically manifests as illogic. Logic forms the basis for the transformative activity of critical thinking, thus explaining the general suspicion of intellectual independence among society. Those in positions of elite power realize the revolutionary potential of critical consciousness and its consequent threat to their control, while "among the vast majority of the ruled there is the unconscious fear that theoretical thinking might show their painfully won adaptation to reality to be perverse and unnecessary" (Horkheimer, 1968/1972b, p. 232).

In addition to the shortcomings detailed in the preceding pages, traditional revolutionary theory presents other secondary complications as well. First, traditional revolutionary theory typically aligns itself (or at least adopts a conciliatory stance towards) the political left. The problem with this lies in the fact, noted by Newman (2007), that the dominant global economic paradigm is shared by both the political right

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and the political left- "an ideological distinction that has become, at the formal level, largely meaningless" (p. 3). From an anarchist perspective, differences between liberal and conservative political figures in regards to social issues amount to little more than rhetorical posturing for their respective electorates, while their adherence to capitalist economic ideology remains unified. By advancing capitalism, liberals and conservatives alike serve "a system that legitimizes the economic oppression and culturally stunted lives of millions of citizens while, for all practical purposes, excluding them from political power" (Wolin, 2008, p. 23).

Substantive movements for individual autonomy require what May (1994) refers to as "noncooperation with the rituals of capitalism" while "seeking ways to develop different and fulfilling lives in the complexity of the social space that becomes open… through such refusal" (p. 37). May is specific in noting that autonomy requires intervention in the social space, not the realm of political operations. For the offshoot of anarchism represented here, the political left still operates within the bounds of political representation and economic exploitation and, as such, must be considered as merely another enactment of oppressive power.

Second, traditional revolutionary theory promotes a potentially violent confrontational stance towards bureaucratic systems. Ethical and moral arguments regarding the use of violence aside, this stance presents an insurmountable obstacle to implementing anarchism as a viable practical political philosophy. This obstacle arose due to the historical development of global corporate capitalism in the last decades of the 20th Century. Should the state cease to exist in the current age, transnational corporations would become the only entities with economic power considerable enough to wield

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political power (Chomsky, 1999/2005). Abolition of the sate would, at this point, only

serve to totalize the fascist ideosis. Rather than bringing about the ideal aim of anarchism,

the destruction of state power would merely serve to totalize corporate power. In light of

corporate behavior in the current era, total abolition of state power is neither feasible nor

desirable at this historical juncture. Although destruction of state and economic power

remains a long-term anarchist objective, its realization in the short-term could only be

disastrous. As noted by Bey (2003), "absolutely nothing but a futile martyrdom could

possibly result now from a head-on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate

State, the empire of Spectacle and Simulation" (p. 98).

Thus, revoevolution rejects "wasting time on agitation for reform, on protest, on

visionary dreaming, on all kinds of 'revolutionary martyrdom'- in short, on most

contemporary anarchist activity" (Bey, 2003, p. 87). As an anarchic manifestation of

power, revoevolution operates more closely to Nietzsche's assertion (quoted in Bey,

2003) that to advocate abolishing the rules is irrelevant. Only by breaking the rules with

no regard for their existence does the individual assert the will to power. As such,

revoevolution refuses to recognize state power as legitimate but does not require its

abolition to manifest its own power- a stance that reflects Debord's (1967/2006) call for

the criminal appearance of radical theory.

The third and most crucial problem with traditional revolutionary theory is

specifically addressed by Baudrillard (1981). Revolutionary doctrine has shown itself to

be incapable of coming to terms with the exchange of signs as anything other than

pragmatic function (e.g. broadcasting, propaganda). This perspective remains focused on

signs-as-content without being able to recognize signs-as-system determined by code. As

noted earlier, changing content is entirely ineffectual for resisting the enactments or effects of oppressive power. Only by dismantling and replacing the code can resistant power expect to reclaim sovereignty over meaning and value. As a tactical radical revolutionary theory, revoevolution represents the anarchic production of signs-as-communication-of-code. Following Debord (1967/2006), revoevolution employs the meanings of words and cultural forms as revolutionary tools for the improvement of ideals, with individual consciousness as the fundamental weapon. For these reasons, this form of practical revolutionary theory stands in opposition to traditional revolutionary ideology and must recognize and embrace this oppositional perspective.

Political Implications

The concept developed in this section represents a revolutionary approach to cognitive evolution as a legitimate and effective method of political resistance, relying upon "psychological empowerment through the cultivation of a critical consciousness" inscribed by the continual operation of self-interrogation (Antliff, 2007, p. 63). As stated previously, the potential for social revolution has been largely neutralized in the current era. What is needed is a more individual or micro-level approach to resistance. Rather than encouraging resistant rituals such as mass activism or revolution (or participatory rituals such as voting), revoevolution provides a collective of tactics for the strategic enactment of individual autonomy. Based firmly in anarchist political philosophy, these tactics manifest (within the context of the following analysis) in the shamanic ritual communication of signs, which, although subjective and ambiguous, are imbued with meanings representative of the values of individual choice and responsibility. This theoretical delineation of revoevolution may seem diminutive in comparison to the

description of fascist ideosis as offered here. This is due not to a lack of development, however, but to the fact that anarchy (as defined herein) represents a social code that is more open, more plural, and built on an ever-changing discourse as to the meanings and values of existence. It is created through critical thought, communication and action, not by the enactment of an economic ideology in pursuit of a singular dominant political/social structure. As such, any description of revoevolution must remain ambiguous and open enough to accommodate a continued discursive evolution of the concept itself. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide a description of revoevolution that is detailed enough to facilitate an appropriate understanding of the concept, while at the same time remaining open-ended enough to allow for future refinement.

The power manifest through revoevolution can be, generally speaking, likened to Foucault's (1977/1980b; 1977/1980c) notion of anti-disciplinary power that, once liberated from the principle of sovereignty, may act as "subversive recodifications of power relations" (1977/1980b, p. 123).[25] Revoevolution provides such recodification by enabling the detachment of meaning (expressed by Foucault (1977/1980b) as *truth*- "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" (p. 133)) from forms of hegemony or domination. So detached from oppressive power, the production of meaning (as a mechanism of an alternative discursive regime, or social code) constitutes the new politics of truth with which

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[25] The issue of sovereignty takes on an alternative connotation in the work of Bey. Though not entirely incompatible with Foucault's usage, Bey's understanding of *sovereignty* does not adhere to the notion of supreme power or authority implied here. Instead, sovereignty (in Bey's usage) is connotative of self-determination, self-government, and self-control as declared over oppressive forms of supreme power or authority- more in line with Marcuse's *autonomous subject*.

Foucault is concerned. This mechanism occurs on the micro-level and (as such) must be

determined and analyzed in localized practice (Foucault, 1977/1980c). Thus, it follows

that Foucault's (1977/1980b) assertion that "the problem is not changing people's

consciousnesses… but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of

truth" is not entirely accurate (p. 133). The dominant social code (i.e. regime of the

production of truth) is the result of individual consciousness(es), therefore a change in the

regime of the production of truth is *dependent* upon a change in human consciousness.

Such an alteration shares certain characteristics with Deleuze & Guattari's

(1980/1986) concept of the war machine, particularly in the form of an artistic movement

that seeks to express the continuous development of variation rather than seeking

reproduction for the sake of power expansion. As a tactical response against the

totalization of oppressive power, this war machine follows connections rather than

dualities, recognizing that the meaning of the world is constantly changing. This is in

many ways a process of learning to undo things by following the "flow of matter, *tracing*

and connecting up smooth space" in attempts to reopen the limited, striated space of

ideosis (p. 38). The potential for an artistic movement to act as a war machine lies in "the

precise extent to which it traces… a plane of consistency, a creative line of flight, a

smooth space of displacement" in which alternative meanings and values to those

prescribed by the dominant social code can be expressed and explored (p. 121).

This perspective, more concretely expressed by Widder (2004), seeks the political

and ethical affirmation of difference through a willingness to think and act in proscribed

modes, to approach existence with a creative experimentalism that rejects essential

identity. Newman (2007) recognizes such an attitude as a "radical political event that

takes place beyond the grasp of the state" and contains the potential to create forms of communal association that ultimately make the state and economic systems irrelevant (p. 8). Though open to revision, such a radical form of political philosophy must be anti-capitalist, anti-centralist, anti-authoritarian, and anti-institutionalist.

Beyond this, it must also reject the traditional Marxist categories of class and the conservative logic of identity politics (Newman, 2007). This is not to suggest that very real differences and disparities in class or perceptions regarding identity exist. Indeed they do. This is intended, rather, to suggest that the supposedly immutable divisions of class and identity can only be transcended through a rejection of their terms. Radical revolutionary theory must instead insist upon a form of symbolic exchange that relies on mutual recognition as a linguistic strategy for the equitable enactment of power (Baudrillard, 1991/1995). Certain variants of anarchism provide the philosophical framework for just such an expression of power. Particularly apt to this discussion are certain elements of the work of Chomsky (1970/2005, 2005) and Bey (2003). Chomsky (1970/2005) recognizes the need in anarchist philosophy for the lack of a fixed doctrine and the rejection of any specific, unchanging concept of goals. The reason for this perspective is explained by Chomsky (2005) in a later work: individuals and society must be willing to continually question whether or not enough is known about "the effects of introducing institutional structures into human life" in order to plan and limit a society (p. 221). With this question firmly situated at the core of any philosophical perspective, individuals and society must be willing to approach *any* doctrine that presents a comprehensive and far-reaching plan with the same critical skepticism with which oppression and exploitation are scrutinized (Chomsky 1970/2005). The anarchist

perspective developed in the ensuing pages necessitates that society "should be experimental, guided by certain general ideas about liberty, equality, authority and domination and let people explore different ways of working through [life] and see what comes natural to them" (Chomsky, 2005, p. 221).

The particular variant of anarchism expressed in the following section aligns most closely with Bey's (2003) concept of "Ontological Anarchy," which "favors states of consciousness, emotion and aesthetics over all petrified ideologies and dogma" in the attempt to liberate the individual from "false consciousness, illusion, Consensus Reality, and all the failures of the self that accompany these ills" (p. 67). This perspective is based in the belief that the struggle against fascism is within each individual and, as such, requires the negation of ideological forms of politics in favor of a political philosophy of ethical behavior that ultimately hinges on individual choice and responsibility. Herein lies the possibility for the revolutionary choice to take oneself as an autonomous subject, a self with power capable of reasonably and rationally determining the value of meanings.

Anarchism/Anarchy[26]

"Even if we proceed to extract from the history of libertarian thought a living, evolving tradition… it remains difficult to formulate its doctrines as a specific and determinate theory of society and social change" (Chomsky, 1970/2005, p. 118).[27] This is

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[26] This section is written with the acknowledgement that certain strands of anarchist philosophy adhere to the belief that to articulate anarchy- even as anarchism- is to betray the actuality of such a concept. To describe, delineate, to enunciate in pursuance is to ultimately misrepresent the ever-shifting material occurrence of the anarchic essence. With this recognition in place, it still remains necessary to attempt such a travesty.

[27] Libertarian does not equate the American political ideology of Libertarianism. Within this context, libertarian is a general term, encompassing anarchism, which refers to political philosophies that seek human liberation from hierarchy, exploitation, and

due in part to the underlying libertarian supposition that fixed, unalterable doctrines remain antithetical to truly libertarian aims, as well as the multitude of variant philosophies resulting from such a perspective. However, certain guiding characteristics of anarchism can be identified. Simply stated, anarchism strives ideally for human liberation from hierarchies, political and physical domination, systems of authority, bureaucratic and vanguard representation, and economic exploitation, resulting in the primacy of the individual with other individuals in organic communities of self-management (Chomsky, 2003/2005, 2004/2005). This perspective is rooted firmly in Bakunin's conception of liberty (as quoted by Chomsky, 1970/2005)- "the unique condition under which intelligence, dignity, and human happiness can develop and grow" (p. 121). This view of liberty or freedom does not refer to an abstract concept, but rather to the dynamic, sustainable tangible possibilities for the actualization and complete development "of all of the material, intellectual, and moral powers that are latent in each person" put to use for the mutual evolution of society without interference from political, economic, military, or ecclesiastical hierarchies (p. 121).

As a libertarian philosophy, anarchism specifically refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of government. This is based on the belief that legal and political institutions are enacted because they stabilize economic systems that fundamentally foster exploitation and inequality. As such, forms of political and economic power inevitably undermine individual liberty and social equality (Carter, 2000). Such a position is founded on the conviction that "despite [the] many theories justifying government

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authority. Conversely, Libertarianism espouses an ideology rooted in dismantling or limiting governmental forms of control for the sake of free market capitalism. As such, anarchism (as properly understood) must remain firmly opposed to Libertarianism as antithetical to the aims of any actual libertarian philosophy.

because its activities produce benefits to its citizens, no government was ever established to produce those benefits. Governments were created by force to rule over people and extract their resources from them" (Holcombe, 2004, p. 328). Whatever benefits societies derive from governments, those benefits are essentially provided to protect those governments' source of income- the productive capacity of the citizenry. Moreover, those benefits are not the product of government at all. They are and remain the byproducts of society's productive capacity and, as such, do not require enactment through state or economic structures. Because of their superior organization and monopolization of legality, governments' predation upon their citizens is more effective than that of thieves or organized crime. This does not mean, however, that government is any more legitimate than a protection racket (Holcombe, 2004). Government only ever arises from the capacity of its members to force their rule onto society.

Anarchy is not (despite popular belief) a rejection of social order. *Without rulers* does not translate into *without rules or structures* (Carter, 2000). Anarchy is instead a rejection of legal/governmental control. This rejection is based on the belief that such control arises and is perpetuated and refined for the purposes of expanding and totalizing the power of those in positions of economic and political privilege at the expense of the vast majority of humanity, thus disabling the potential for actual equality, self-determination, and empowerment. Even when laws and government regulations provide social benefits, they do so only for the hegemonic expansion of oppressive power. As such, legal, governmental, and even economic control ultimately paralyze social order for the sake of the military-corporate-congressional-cultural complex. Instead of relying on external structures of control for the determination of rules, anarchy advocates accepting

"only the rules and values which really make sense to you… but also, make an effort to understand where others are coming from, and evaluate their actions by your own standards, not according to some standardized norm" (CrimethInc. Workers' Collective, 2001, p. 125). The origins of this perspective are found in the earliest anarchist writings, among which Bellegarrigue offers succinct insight.

For Bellegarrigue (1850/2002), government represents the affirmation of political authority at the expense of humanity. The affirmation of political authority is fundamentally founded upon individual dependency to a hierarchy of class supremacy based on inequality and antagonism, resulting inevitably in the perpetuation of war. Anarchy, by contrast, is the affirmation of people through the negation of political authority. The negation of political authority forms the basis for a social order rooted in individual liberty and the sovereignty of each, which provide the actual foundation for cooperative equality. In this understanding, government equals war, instability, and oppression. Anarchy is the source and foundation of order.

These arguments concerning the oppressive and authoritative nature of government apply even to democracies, further separating anarchism (as a libertarian philosophy) from liberalism. As noted by Bertolo (1999), representative democracy is more closely aligned with authoritarianism than libertarianism. Representational governments merely serve as a relatively more humane and rational guise for the perpetuated artificial division between rulers and the ruled. "Even Fascism was in its way a representative democracy" (p. 319). Though unaccounted for by most commentators, antinomian grassroots movements played a significant role in the American colonial and

revolutionary periods.[28] As noted by Porter (1993), "large-scale anarchic tendencies [are] an important legacy of American political tradition" that run counter to the accepted representational republican history of the United States (p. 175). As do anarchists now, antinomians in revolutionary-era America denied the legitimacy of representational government, believing instead that power is seated in the people rather than being derived from them. Most historical commentaries focus on the disputes between federalists and anti-federalists during this period, all but erasing the contribution of antinomian groups and communes to the formation of the American political tradition. "It is here where cultural censorship has played its role through Orwellian denials of anarchic experience and aspirations during the revolutionary era and through doublespeak glorification of elitist accomplishments- culminating in the federal constitution- as 'democratic' triumphs of the people" (p. 173). This repression of the American anarchist tradition served as a precursor to the disinformation agitprop of the Red Scare (1917-1920) and the stereotyped appropriation of anarchy by the punk rock movement in the 1970s, and continues through to the present day.

Though ignored or dismissed by both the political right and the political left, anarchism remains an essential formative constituent of the American democratic tradition. By advocating abolition of the state, anarchism represents the most fully advanced form of direct democracy by moving decidedly beyond representation. As a tactical philosophy, anarchism (within the current context) does not limit its critique to

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[28] In this context, *antinomian* means "against law" (Wilson, 1993, p. 102) and does not necessarily reference the religious connotations typically associated with the term. *Antinomian* is used here instead of *anarchist* because at the time, anarchism had yet to be advanced as a specific political philosophy. Antinomianism represents a precursor to anarchism as a definable political philosophy.

the state. Domination, as the manifestation of constantly asymmetrical power relations, is the primary object of resistance. Any paradigm of domination, be it political, economic, etc., is to be resisted. The collective organizational functions of society can exist without relying on hierarchical conceptions of reality. Such an assertion is based on two interdependent presuppositions: 1) the question as to how society should be organized is too crucial an issue to be determined by a single individual or elite/vanguard group; and 2) owing to the multitudinous, contextually variant manifestations of communal organization, there may in fact be no overarching mode of organization that is capable of operating on the societal level. As a resistant form of power, anarchy manifests as communitarian individuality operating "more in the realm of philosophy, ethics and aesthetics than of politics" (Bertolo, 1999, p. 315). As hinted at by McLaverty (2005), anarchism inherently implies the rejection of capitalist economic ideology in favor of communitarian self-ownership.

Rejecting competitive, market-oriented economic systems, anarchism is based in the belief that cooperation is essential to survival. Each individual is invariably a social product and thereby requires interaction with other individuals (Bertolo, 1999). Anarchist society ideally represents a social order whereby each individual is empowered without allowing for centralized power or decision-making (Carter, 2000). For Gemie (1994), this includes a rejection of privilege, focus on community instead of class, and reliance on ethical rather than sociological commitments ultimately aiming for individual and collective self-realization. Radical revolutionary activity is ultimately the assertion of community as a process of demystification for the liberation of reality from spectacle and simulation. As a revolutionary activity, this liberation represents the open emergence of

individual realities that have been developing through micropolitical tactics of meaning

creation outside the control of domination (Gemie, 1994). Within this understanding,

community becomes the locus of social order- order based on mutuality with "people

freely forming associations that are inclusive, internally egalitarian, and which operate in

a cooperative spirit towards meeting shared needs" (White, 2005, p. 12), in furtherance of

"the common project of forming a society without private property and without

representation" (May, 1994, p. 58).

Poststructuralist anarchism.

The guiding principles of anarchism are particularly well suited to the theoretical

underpinnings of poststructuralism (Antliff, 2007; May, 1994; Newman, 2007).

Philosophically, both arise from the belief that individual reflection serves as the starting

point for discovering ethical modes of conduct, and that individuals should be permitted

"to effect by their own means or with the help of others… to transform themselves in

order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality"

(Foucault, 1988, p. 18). Both reject the outmoded concept of class as possessing limited

empirical value, excluding alternative subjectivities and struggles, and ultimately

perpetuating oppressive power (Newman, 2007). Anarchism in particular emphasizes a

more heterogeneous understanding of the struggle between subjectivities (as opposed to

identity), enabling the tactical development of poststructuralism's concern with multiple,

localized, and irreducible strategies for the more equitable communication of power.

Additionally, anarchism and poststructuralism converge in their rejection of forms of

political representation, believing that representation amounts to the concentration of

power, which is ultimately "an invitation to abuse" (May, 1994, p. 13). Representation

negates the individual's potential for substantive decision making, not just in the political realm, but also in regards to ethics, social interactions, and even cognitive function. This is not to suggest that anarchism and poststructuralism converge only through their mutual negation of current conditions. As noted by May (1994), "liberation arises through the construction of alternatives, not through destruction or reformation of insupportable realities" (p. 48). There exist additional connections that more fully display the positive potential of their convergence.

Both anarchism and poststructuralism provide the milieu for communicative action as the continual interrogation of social constructs. Such a stance represents a critique of oppressive power that is guided by persistent, perpetual questioning, as well as the refusal of ethical or moral absolutes (Antliff, 2007; Newman, 2007). The critique of power offered by both anarchism and poststructuralism arises from their mutual articulation of the discordant tension between reality and ethical ideal without defining too strictly the limits of what ought (May, 1994). Furthermore, the philosophical foundations of both reside in the idea that beliefs should originate from perspectives that put such beliefs in doubt, that continual questioning and reevaluation are more consistent with experiential reality than the striving for concrete, unalterable answers. May (1994) terms this convergence *poststructuralist anarchism*, a tactical political philosophy representing the union of theory and practice through the development and communication of "multiple and irreducible analyses" of the intersecting practices and conglomerations of power (p. 38). While remaining apposite and self-grounding within the context of advanced capitalist culture and its macro-level manifestations, poststructuralist anarchism eschews all-encompassing theoretical discourse, instead

relying upon limited concrete analyses that critique each assemblage of power on its own terms as immanent rather than transcendent and expressing ethical rather than essential values. Herein lies the micropolitical, tactical significance of poststructuralist anarchism to provide for the insurrectionary communication of subjugated alternative social codes that ultimately serve to expand the freedom of ethical experimentation- "alternative practices of self-formation that will create new and unforeseen possibilities for living" (p. 135).

The connection between anarchism and poststructuralism is strengthened by what each contributes to the relationship that the other lacks. As identified by May (1994), there exist three primary shortcomings with anarchism as habitually understood. First, anarchism typically relies on the humanist/naturalist assumption that views people as essentially benign. According to prevailing anarchist logic, human beings would naturally cooperate for the betterment of all should bureaucratic/legal/ecclesiastical control be removed. This essentialist argument does not allow for the contextually situated ethical analysis that is required for an accurate critique of oppressive power. As noted by Foucault, humanism "as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow" cannot account for the actual realm of freedoms possible in human existence (Martin, 1988, p. 15). Furthermore, it offers an overly idealistic view of humanity that lacks empirical support. As argued previously, removal of governmental control in present circumstances would only serve to totalize corporate power. Individuals contain the *potential* for altruism and cooperation but do not necessarily contain these qualities as essential characteristics. A paradigmatic shift in human consciousness is necessary for this potential to become realized.

Second, anarchism contains an element of internal illogic by relying on the assumption that power is inherently oppressive. If, as argued by anarchism, power resides with individuals and individuals are inherently benign, it logically follows that power would automatically and exclusively produce positive (i.e. non-oppressive) manifestations. Besides being logically inconsistent, the view that power is innately oppressive is simply not factual when viewed from the theoretical perspective of poststructuralism. Again, this type of essentialist argument cannot account for varied, multiple, localized manifestations of power as immanent. Oppression is merely one process by which power is enacted. Poststructuralism excels in recognizing that power can be productive.

Third, anarchism tends to focus too narrowly on power as enacted through government bureaucracies and political hierarchies. Such a perspective cannot account for the diffuse character of power. Additionally, this perspective provides a limited, centralized analysis and in so doing replicates the centralization of power against which anarchism strives. "Just as power and oppression are decentralized, so must resistance be" (May, 1994, p. 54). Poststructuralism rejects the a priori anarchist assumptions regarding human nature and power, as well as the centralized analysis enabled by typical anarchist fallacies and inconsistencies. In so doing, poststructuralist anarchism forgoes the grand narratives of anarchism and allows for the recognition that power, represented as knowledge, is embedded with values whose valence is reliant on context. The analysis enabled by this perspective allows for resistance not only on the macro-level represented by economic systems and state apparatuses, but also "on the epistemological, psychological, linguistic, sexual, religious, psychoanalytic, ethical, informational (etc.)

levels as well" (May, 1994, pp. 94-95). Such is the contribution of micropolitics to anarchism.

As noted by May (1994), however, micropolitical analyses cannot serve as a substitute for macropolitical research. "They must stand alongside such studies, not merely as additions but as integrally interwoven into them" (p. 100). Anarchism contributes to poststructuralism a macro-level understanding of economic and political processes, with the perspective of such an understanding based in the belief that ethical commitments reside on the level of practices, not as part of any normalized moral code. In this way, the micropolitical analyses offered by the poststructuralist anarchist perspective can contribute beneficially not only to the understanding of macropolitical institutions and practices, but also to individual resistance against oppressive power as enacted through such institutions and practices. Poststructuralist anarchism, then, represents the enactment of ethical commitments as discursive communicative action. The perspective offered through this tactical political philosophy recognizes that economic, political, social, and individual enactments and effects of power are the result of mutually reinforcing intersections of knowledge, the evaluation of which requires macro- and micro-level analyses in which "no values are immune from scrutiny" (May, 1994, p. 144).

Ontological Anarchy, Temporary Autonomous Zone, Poetic Terrorism.

While providing a philosophical and ethical framework for resisting oppressive power through communicative action, poststructuralist anarchism requires further refinement in order to account for the actualization of theory as the practice of revoevolution. Though not self-defined as a form of poststructuralist anarchism, the work

of Bey (2003) provides such refinement. Three primary and interdependent concepts emerge from this work- Ontological Anarchy, the Temporary Autonomous Zone, and Poetic Terrorism. In a basic sense, the relationship between these concepts can be described in the following way: the Temporary Autonomous Zone represents the tactical enactment of Ontological Anarchy as revoevolutionary power through strategic modes of Poetic Terrorism. In order to understand precisely what this implies, it becomes necessary to explain each of the primary terms in greater detail.

Ontological Anarchy serves as the fundamentally decisive movement beyond revolutionary theory as a political philosophy into radical revolutionary theory-as-evolutionary-practice. This is achieved because Ontological Anarchy serves not as an analysis of power, but rather the realization and enactment of liberation from oppressive power. In practice, Ontological Anarchy is the continual insurrection against the illusory and repressive consciousness engendered by capitalism's enactment through mass cultural forms embedded with the values of fascist ideology. This insurrection is, practically speaking, "the systematic cultivation of enhanced consciousness or non-ordinary awareness [and] its deployment in the world of deeds [and] objects to bring about desired results" (Bey, 2003, p. 22). Such insurrection requires simply the breaking of accepted regulations of ordered perception in order to arrive at direct experience, the meaning and value of which is determined by the individuals involved in such experience.

Like Baudrillard, Bey (2003) recognizes signs as the fundamental carriers of meaning, knowledge, and control. Representing a particular enactment of revoevolution, Ontological Anarchy utilizes cultural forms (operating as signs) as weapons against

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malign ideas (interoperating as a dominant social code) in the "individual equivalent of war in order to achieve the becoming of the free spirit" (p. 86). This is possible because, as noted previously, such cultural forms are the artifacts of ideas, the alteration of which requires a change in social code, not a change in content. This form of anarchy (having moved decidedly beyond anarchism) utilizes the manipulation of signs in order to alter reality, the alteration of reality initially requiring a revolutionary psychological nomadism that already operates as if oppressive power (be it political, economic, cultural, etc.) did not exist. As revoevolutionary power, Ontological Anarchy does not require the destruction of oppressive power in order to enact self-liberation. This is the revolution of everyday life operating on the premise that anarchy (represented as chaos) is "the essence of all becoming" (p. 135). The enactment of freedom through liberation represents a process of cognitive and "spiritual anarchism" (Wilson, 1993, p. 103), the aspirations of which aim for no more than individual autonomy in communities of "festal sodality" (Bey, 1994, p. 6) and the actualization of which requires simply individual consciousness of such a state of being (Debord, 1967/2006).

Tactically, Ontological Anarchy manifests through what Bey (2003) terms as the Temporary Autonomous Zone- a "psychospiritual state or even existential condition"(p. x), the enactment of "personal mythscape" (p. 10) capable of providing an alternative to economic and political ideologies through "successful raids on consensus reality" (p. 113). While describing such a condition as *psychospiritual* or *existential* might at first glance appear to situate it entirely within the realm of utopian ideal or critical heuristic mechanism, a Temporary Autonomous Zone requires temporal/spatial enactment enabled by certain material prerequisites. The first of these is the individual condition of

psychological liberation. Again, this liberation involves a return to the original connotation of revolution as a spiritual insurrection, "not the revolution of classes and powers but of the eternal rebel, the dark one who uncovers light" (p. 41). This distinguishes Ontological Anarchy from utopian anarchist philosophies in that a Temporary Autonomous Zone provides present individual or communal enjoyment (however fleeting) of the anarchist societal ideal while also negating the necessity of revolution in the modern context.

Second, a Temporary Autonomous Zone requires that alternative information related to "concrete goods and services necessary for the autonomous life" be available, practical, and beneficial for individual communalism (Bey, 2003, p.131). Without utile information for living and thriving outside the dominant social code, theoretical concepts such as the Temporary Autonomous Zone contain little to no potential for manifesting, developing, or communicating resistant power. The third primary condition that must be met for the formation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone is that government and economic systems must continue on their current path of inertial devolution into ideosis, which mistakes its mediated cultural representations for reality. As ideosis strives towards totalization, the gaps and inconsistencies in its power become more evident and exploitable. It is within these margins of error that Temporary Autonomous Zones can exist as microcosms of the anarchist ideal that require no revolution, no martyrdom, no direct confrontation, and no passage of time.

While this explanation may seem vague or even naively obtuse, such ambiguity is necessitated by the very nature of the condition, the enactment of which requires

experimentally various manifestations for different contexts. As noted by Bey (2003), there is no panacea:

> We're not touting the [Temporary Autonomous Zone] as an exclusive end in itself, replacing all other forms of organization, tactics, and goals. We recommend it because it can provide the quality of enhancement associated with the uprising without necessarily leading to violence and martyrdom. The [Temporary Autonomous Zone] is like an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the State can crush it. Because the State is concerned primarily with Simulation rather than substance, the [Temporary Autonomous Zone] can 'occupy' these areas clandestinely and carry on its festal purposes for quite a while in relative peace. (p. 99)

As such, the Temporary Autonomous Zone might best be described as an epiphanic, self-ordering insurrection that manifests as an "art of life in continual rising up" and whose existence resembles the organization and conviviality of a dinner party (p. 132). Bey's use of the term *art* is significant for a number of reasons. Though this significance is addressed in more detail in Methodology, certain aspects as they relate to Ontological Anarchy and the Temporary Autonomous Zone require elaboration at this point.

If, as posited for the purposes of this argument, the Temporary Autonomous Zone represents the tactical enactment of Ontological Anarchy as revoevolutionary power, it becomes necessary to identify the strategic concerns connecting goal and tactic. For Bey (2003), this strategy is Poetic Terrorism- enacting forms of public art that actively operate for "changing the structure of reality by the manipulation of living symbols" (p. 39) through aesthetic shock, excess, and abundance, divorcement from "conventional structures for art consumption" (p. 5), and the "sabotage of archetypes" (p. 33). This often includes the use of themes, images, and/or metaphoric actions that are conventionally perceived as obscene, frightening, or illegal. Whereas conventional

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terrorism utilizes violence in order to achieve political goals, Poetic Terrorism strikes at

malignant ideologies in the attempt to inaugurate connected criticism as direct action

within the context of an anarchic social philosophy.

Recognition of this radical revolutionary potential within art is not limited to the

work of Bey. Gemie (1994) sees in the creative practices of artistic production an

anarchic process that contains "a model for a future libertarian lifestyle" based in

experimentalism (p. 355). For May, the revolutionary potential of art is more crucial than

simply providing a tentative framework for future endeavors. According to May's (1994)

analysis, art remains the only venue for resistance in the current era because it

"constitutes the ethical pole of a strategic thought that constructs its philosophy in the

face of a demonic capitalist totalization" (p. 26). Bey's (2003) development of the

concept of Poetic Terrorism remains, however, the most developed and apposite in

regards to the aims of revoevolutionary activity for a couple of precise reasons. First, as a

strategy for enacting Ontological Anarchy through the creation of Temporary

Autonomous Zones, Poetic Terrorism remains immediate, concrete, and immanent

without becoming distracted by idealistic abstractions or the desire for results on a

societal level. Though long-term, macro-level anarchist goals do (and should) exist,

revoevolution must remain concerned within the current context primarily with individual

cognitive liberation. Second, Poetic Terrorism emphasizes the use of parody and humor

in communicating alternatives to the dominant social code. This strategy is almost

entirely absent from other anarchist perspectives, even those as advanced as

poststructuralist anarchism. As illustrated through an analysis of the life and career of Bill

Hicks, humor contains certain strategic and tactical advantages to serious discourse when

employed for the enactment and communication of resistant power.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Metatheoretical Concerns

Before discussing the theoretical framework that underlies and supports the analysis contained herein, it becomes necessary to address an especially sensitive and problematic issue regarding the metatheoretical stance communicated throughout this argument. There often arises to the surface of academic discourse an implicit presupposition that the theoretical approaches employed by certain scholars are quite incompatible with one another- that they do not, cannot, and will not ever agree. While this perspective is undoubtedly valid in respect to the overall conclusions to be elicited from their arguments and the terms used to express them, many nevertheless contain certain shared traits, the existence of which has been largely overlooked. While the omission of these commonalities does not necessarily pose problems for other areas of inquiry, it can be detrimental to the study of power and its nature, causes, genesis, maintenance, transformation, and effects- in short, the study of the communication of power.

Indeed, power is communicated in a multitude of ways- within state bureaucracies and legislative structures; through financial, corporate, labor, social and/or class relations; by repressive military or coercive force; in interpersonal dynamics; in communal solidarity; by individual lifestyle; through resistance; through consent; through consumption of cultural forms; within and independent of the codes of social logic as expressed through symbolic definition; and by the production of discursive knowledge, to

name a scant few. Attempts to prove that any one of these manifestations exists to the exclusion of any other are not merely erroneous. They are downright dangerous and potentially disastrous. When dealing with the communication of power, it is not a question of "yes or no." It is a matter of "in these instances yes, but not under these circumstances; and in some cases, a combination of these or none at all." Furthermore, "any academic discipline which calls itself The… of anything whatsoever must be suspected a priori of erecting a false *totality* based on dubious absolutes which will serve *only* to mask and reinforce the ideologies of elites" (Wilson, 1995, p. 16).

This is not to deny the fact that there exist between these theories very real differences. On some levels, these differences prove ultimately incompatible. Elements of seemingly incompatible theories found in the following pages are employed because that is what is suggested by an analysis of the life and work of Bill Hicks. It is not to be inferred that the use of those specific elements is an endorsement of any of these scholars or their theories as a whole. Instead, those elements that are germane to the analysis are mentioned specifically. Omission of certain aspects of the following theories is intended to indicate their lack of relevance to this particular analysis. Nor should it be inferred that the scholars whose works are referenced herein would agree with the conclusions offered through this analysis.

Following Foucault (1977/1980a), theory is an instrument, not a system. It is a logic whose role is "not to formulate the global systematic theory which holds everything in place, but to analyze the specificity of mechanisms of power, to locate the connections and extensions, to build little by little a strategic knowledge" (p. 145). The crucial aspects of this point-of-view are specificity, connection, and extension. Each mechanism and

instance of power must be analyzed within its specific contextual and historic milieu. Referent to that analysis, differences between and connections with other mechanisms can be observed. Understanding these connections and differences extends our knowledge of power, thus providing a more diverse and (consequently) comprehensive set of strategies for enacting a more equitable communication of that power. Theory does not indicate that which is important about the situation. The specifics of the situation indicate what is important about theory as an instrument of analysis capable of locating "lines of weakness, strong points, positions where instances of power" are unassailable and where possibilities for transformation exist (Foucault, 1975/1980a, p. 62).

The theoretical assertions contained in the following section are built upon exactly those traits that indicate the unity of the body rather than the dissection of its parts. Power is singularly manifold. It is a wholeness populated by gaps and fractures. It is polysemous, ambiguous, binary, singular, and silent. This is not an assumption on the level of some oblique pseudo-intellectual "pornosophical philotheology" (Joyce, 1922/1992, p. 564). It is a purely ontological concern- a reflection of our ability to conceive of what we designate to be true. This is not to deny the possibility of Truth (should it exist), but (should it exist) this knowledge exceeds the current capacity of conceptual frameworks. Power is understood in a variety of ways because it manifests in a variety of ways. It has different causes, forms, processes, and effects. Despite these cognitive and communicative limitations, theoretical constructs can suggest, highlight and fleetingly comprehend some phenomena of power through analysis that is situational, strategic, and historically informed- a "union of erudite knowledge and local memories" (Foucault, 1977/1980c, p. 83).

This is as much a methodological tactic as it is a metatheoretical strategy. The issues concerning methodology are addressed in greater detail in the appropriate section. For the moment, may it suffice to credit this methodological stance to Foucault (1975/1980b). Though referring specifically to Nietzsche, the perspective and approach advanced by the following assertion is applied more generally for the purposes of this argument. "The only valid tribute [to a scholar's work] is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if the commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful… that is of absolutely no interest" (p. 53). It is of no interest precisely because what is vital and crucial is not the theory itself. What is important is a more comprehensive, representative, tactically utile, and equitably productive understanding of power as dynamic and communicative. Theory underlines but does not define this; thus it must be reformed, resisted or discarded (in whole or in part) should it not fulfill its purpose.

<div align="center">Power</div>

If Foucault (1975/1980b) (a la Nietzsche) is to be believed, the general concern of all philosophical discourse is the power relation- the exercise of power that "creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information" (p. 51). As previously stated, the power relation of concern here is the communicative dialectic between fascist and anarchic manifestations of power. Before elaborating on this relation, however, it is necessary to offer a contextually relevant definition of the term *power*.

Power is (for the purposes of this argument) the active manipulation of signs in the production of meaning. This view of power is informed primarily by Foucault,

Deleuze & Guattari, and Baudrillard. First, there is Foucault's (1977/1980b, 1977/1980c) assertion that power is an active relation of force, existent in the production of truth through discourse. *Truth* as used here is not intended to represent inviolable and unchanging objectivity, rather meaning and logic as transmitted through the reproductive network of power. This network permeates the entire social body, manifesting and exercising itself through individuals as numerous, multiple, and varied productions of truth, which in turn implement particular "rules of right" (Foucault, 1977/1980c, p. 93). These productions of truth and the relations of power resulting from these productions comprise the social body. What is important here is that power is: 1) dynamic and pervasive- it can be employed in the creation of meaning on a variety of levels and from a multitude of vantages; it consists of and can be exercised through multiple mechanisms and practices; and 2) inherently neither positive nor negative- its valence is determined (albeit ambiguously) by the mechanisms and practices specific to particular contexts.

Another facet of power provided by Foucault (1975/1980a) is that "the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals" (p. 55). Any notion of a unifying or consensual will within a social body is fundamentally erroneous. As the individual is the primary product of the exercised multiplicities of power, then the individual must be the central focal element of analyses relating to power, even when examining societal-level phenomena. This is the fundamental concept underlying micropolitics: the individual is central to analyses of power. Maintaining focus on the individual contains the potential to prevent the replication of oppressive power in resistance, due to its eschewal of attempts to

generalize from the micro- to the macro-. Additionally, this focus allows for a tactical

analysis of power in regards to the formation of truth through discourse.

If the individual is the central focal element of analysis, then what creates the

individual and how it is created must be determined. It is already posited that the activity

of power relations creates the individual. In regards to how these relations of power

create the individual, the answer pertinent to this argument is found in the work of

Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1986). Relations of power form the individual (termed as

subject by the authors) through the meaning expressed by signs (content) interoperating

as code (form). These codes form relations of "coexistence and competition *in a*

perpetual field of interaction" that maintain the exercise of power as a perpetual state of

fluctuation (p. 17). While signs may remain the same for each competing code, the

meaning of that content changes according to the logic of the form. Because the

individual is created by power relations that are expressed in the production of meaning,

the individual also remains in flux. Therein lies the potential for resistance to fascist

power on the individual level, particularly in regards to the production of meaning

through micropolitical practices.

Still following Deleuze & Guattari (1980/1986), the logic of each code is

distinguished primarily by either a centered perspective or a fluid perspective. A centered

perspective views signs as being independent of a particular situation. Content is fixed

and unchanging. A fluid perspective, however, considers situational uniqueness in the

production of meaning. Signs are contextually bound. Thus, potential meaning is

determined by the logic of the code through which power is exercised. So, too, is the

individual. As explicated herein, fascist power maintains a centered perspective, while anarchic power attempts to maintain a perspective that is fluid.

When considering the role of social logic in power relations, Baudrillard's work concerning the political economy of the sign provides useful insight. Baudrillard (1981) argues that social logic "transverses all values, all materials of exchange and communication" (p. 78). Like power in the work of Foucault, social logic forms a network that permeates throughout the social body. For Baudrillard (1981), this is ideology- "not a mysterious duping of consciousness; it is a social logic that is substituted for another… thus changing the very definition of value" (p. 118). What is important here is that the production of meaning through signs must be analyzed as ideology. Any single particular social logic is not absolute. It can be challenged and resisted. Moreover, ideology (as a social logic) is bound to code- the form through which signs are endowed with meaning. "It is the code that is determinant: the rules of interplay" between signs and meaning, rather than the signs themselves (p. 146). This allows for the same signs to be endowed with different meanings, depending on the code of social logic (ideology) that is employed. Thus, power relations can be manipulated on the individual level by acceptance of an alternative code that runs counter to the dominant social logic. This alternative code can be communicated to others, thereby reproducing meanings and individuals that resist the oppressive. This is important because, as Baudrillard (1973/1975) points out, reproduction is the order of power.

It should be noted that Baudrillard rejects the efficacy of posing the problem of power in dialectical terms. For Baudrillard (1981), the dialectic has reached a deadlock, one that can only be overcome through transgression and rejection of dichotomized

categories. This is certainly the ideal aim of critical theory as employed here. As noted by

Bey (2003), no issue is defined or limited by only two sides. Any issue must be

conceived of and discussed in recognition of a multiplicity of vantage points, as well as

degrees of possibility and probability. However, present realities preclude such

transgression for the moment. In order to reject the dominant oppressive code, one must

first be able to analyze and communicate its form in its own terms. This requires

continued discussion of power in dialectical terms until such conditions have been met as

to facilitate their rejection. If social logic (in its varied forms) does indeed transverse all

other values, it remains necessary to reproduce codes that resist the oppressive. The real

monopoly of the fascist ideosis is not a monopoly of technical, economic, or political

mechanisms. The real monopoly is the monopoly of communication. Until that monopoly

is dissolved, the deadlock of dialectic cannot be transgressed. This is precisely because

that monopoly is rooted in the accepted manichaean worldview that posits the very

essence of existence as a struggle between diametrically opposing forces.[29] Without a

seismic shift away from this paradigm, transcending the deadlock of dialectic remains a

pipe dream- a counterfactual normative, the discussion of which only evidences its

absence. Furthermore, the fascist/anarchist dialectic is the relationship of interest for the

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[29] Manichaean initially refers to certain dualist religious sects originating in Persia in the 3rd century. As used here, the term refers specifically to the basic tenet of Manichaeism that posits existence as a battle between the fundamentally opposed and mutually exclusive forces of good and evil. As such, this belief moves beyond the specific constraints of Manichaeism as a religious system and operates as a subconscious metaphysical foundation for the notion of absolute truth and, consequently, oppressive manifestations of power. This particular usage is suggested by Antliff (2007). While Antliff's use of the term remains capitalized, it is used here as a common noun in order to illustrate its utility outside the original religious context.

present argument. Other facets of this issue are not germane to the current analysis if it is to remain appropriately localized in scope.

All of this leads to a tentative conclusion that though the individual cannot exist outside of power, the individual maintains the potential and ability (within certain contexts) to transform and recreate power (Foucault, 1977/1980a). Because power does not manifest exclusively in oppressive forms, resistance is possible. Such resistance cannot be converged into a single strategy, but (like the very nature of power itself) relies on the specific context of a particular power relation. It is the interstices of power relations that form the general conditions for the exercise of power through the social body. Thus, power relations are interwoven with other relations (e.g. politics, economy, culture). The interconnectedness of these relations produces various social codes, each with their own guiding logic that communicates the meaning (truth) of signs particular to each code. These meanings are produced by the relations of power exercised at the level of the individual. As noted by Widder (2004), power relations on the macro-political level "rest upon codings and overcodings that have already occurred at the micro-political level" (p. 191). It can therefore be argued that, in regards to competing social codes, power is the active manipulation of signs in the production of meaning. With this understanding in place, it becomes possible to outline certain distinguishing properties of the two forms of power at issue- the fascist and the anarchic.

<div align="center">Humor/Comedy</div>

"The final significance of humour [sic] lies in what it tells us about the serious mode and about the recurrent failure of that unitary form of discourse to cope with the multiple realities which are generated by the basic processes of social life" (Mulkay,

1988, p. 6). As suggested here, humor exhibits certain intrinsic attributes that enable comedy- the artistic performance of humor- to serve as more than light entertainment, distraction, or cultural reinforcement of dominant economic and political ideologies. Comedy is by its very nature a celebration of polysemy, interpretive multiplicity, and ambiguity. It is creatively and productively anarchic.

As noted by Mulkay (1988), serious discourse relies on the presupposition that objective phenomena exist independently of individual experience, that there exists a single, unified social environment. This assumption engenders in serious discourse the capacity to ignore or eradicate whatever might betray the subjective multiplicity of reality, thereby sustaining a social structure (as a patterned production of organized discourse) that reproduces and communicates this critical flaw. It is precisely this disjuncture between the unitary mode of serious discourse and the subjective multiplicity of the social world that is the source of humor. Humor exists because serious discourse is fundamentally incapable of accounting for, faithfully representing, or accurately communicating the actualities of individual and communal experience within the social world. As such, humor involves confrontation with the dominant social code by exposing "its inconsistencies and irrationalities" and revealing the accepted patterns of social life as prescribed by the dominant code to be unnecessary, restrictive, unrepresentative, and ultimately serving to totalize repressive economic and political ideologies (p. 153).

Humor, on the other hand, "depends on the active creation and display of interpretive multiplicity" through the juxtaposition, bisociation, and recontextualization of distinct and opposing yet self-consistent and non-negating subjective possibilities (Mulkay, 1988, p. 4). By requiring ambiguity and multiply opposing subjectivities as

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formal functions, humor enables the expression of serious meanings and values that are considered unacceptable if expressed through serious discourse. The humorous introduction of prohibited topics allows audiences to interact with and in relation to alternative meanings and values that enable the internal redefining of reality in such a way as to undermine the dominant social code brought into being through the limitations of serious discourse. Additionally, the laughter generated by humor serves as an interactional device for the collective appreciation and acceptance of such alternative meanings and values. These characteristics are not merely possibilities, but necessary features of humor- formal characteristics lacking which comedy cannot occur.

Further support for this perspective is found in the work of Douglas (1975/1991), who indicates that jokes (as particular enactments of comedy) are inherently subversive on both the formal and symbolic levels. In regards to form, jokes are subversive because they bring "into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first," thereby evidencing the lack of necessity in regards to any accepted pattern (p. 296). In this way, comedy suggests that any discrete ordering of experience is arbitrary, subjective, and inaccurate. Comedy thus represents the appearance of repressed meanings and values, the upsurge of alternative ideas, the leveling of hierarchy, and the vital assertion of intimate communalism over formality and structure.

This subversion of the dominant social code is replicated on the symbolic level as well. According to Douglas (1975/1991), experience in the social world exerts control over the perception of conceptual patterns whereby "the patterning of social forms limits and conditions the apprehension of symbolic forms" (p. 309). The amusement offered by

a joke allows comedy to function as an intrusion of meaning capable of reordering social patterns through the communication of alternative symbolic patterns. These alternative symbolic patterns provide access to meanings and values that provide consonance between different subjective understandings of reality, the experience of which the dominant social code is incapable of mediating. On both the symbolic and formal levels, jokes can thus provide escape from the patterns of experience ordained by the dominant social code, making comedy particularly effective as a political tool.

Schutz (1977) traces the development of political humor from ancient times through the 20th Century. Out of this historical analysis, certain features of political humor become apparent. The most salient feature in regards to the argument at hand is that political humor is a form of rational, purposeful communication, the focus of which is the external manifestation of common perception- the shared mental environment. Thus, "political humor is often a reaction to the greatest concentration of power in society" and as such expresses a more democratic rationalism in its interpretation of events than does serious political discourse (p. 8). If politics is a "comic drama staged by society to aid in its relevance," then political humor is a serious discursive mechanism for critiquing the oppressive power of political and economic realities while also resisting such power through the communication of alternative ideals (p. 25). In this way, political humor serves to sublimate the individual resentment and aggression brought about by subservience to elite hierarchies. Violence is transformed into cynical wit as a weapon in the struggle against the symbolic manifestations of malignant ideologies. As noted by Speier (1998), the cynicism expressed in much political comedy serves to critique

ideology in such a way that "the raucous laughter of the powerless and the lowly is the raging revolt of nature against culture" (p. 1394).

Within the context of American popular culture, these features of humor take on particular relevance. As noted by Jones (2005), mass popular culture is *the* central social practice in the United States. Performing in this function, popular culture "humanizes, simplifies, and embodies complex issues, concepts, and ideas" in an ongoing, collective yet polysemous discourse (p. 30). As a component of popular culture, political comedy provides a narrative critique of power that is based in the cognitive and linguistic subjectivities of the populace rather than the objective pretensions of elite values. Within this gap between objective appearance and subjective reality, meaningful political participation can occur in comedy that is more relevant, vital, and immediate than legislative or bureaucratic practices. For the audience of comedy, just as for the majority of the citizenry, meaningful political participation occurs through discourse in attempts to resolve the cognitive dissonance created and perpetuated by political and economic institutions. Herein lies the support for Jones's (2005) assertion that comedic intelligence is a refined expression of popular intelligence, one that is capable of turning the words and actions of the political and economic elite into indictments against a system that perpetuates and expands oppressive power. Viewed from this perspective, comedy contains the potential for a return to art as an autonomous communicative activity of meaning creation for the subversion of the dominant social code- a ritual instrument for individual and communal actualization.

The preceding review of relevant literature provides the theoretical and historical

context for a critical analysis of the comedic art of Bill Hicks as both an indictment of the

dominant American social code as manifest through its mass cultural practices and a

possible framework for exploring alternatives to the shared mental environment

engendered by such practices. As evidenced in the analysis, Bill Hicks performed stand-

up comedy not merely to amuse audiences, but to utilize the amusement generated by

humorous discourse for the enablement of cognitive evolution in audiences and himself.

Though Hicks never explicitly used the term *fascist* to describe American society, the

content of his comedic routines displays an understanding of the basic components of

such an ideology and how it manifests through American popular culture forms. Hicks's

critique of American mass culture also displays an understanding of the complex

interrelation between political ideology and the machinations of global corporate

capitalism, resulting in a shared mental environment of spectacular, illusory ideosis.

Furthermore, Hicks offers an alternative to the dominant social code, one explicitly

rooted in libertarian philosophy for the furtherance of revoevolutionary power. In the role

of stand-up comedian, Hicks was able to engage audiences in ways typically prohibited

within serious modes of discourse. Before presentation of an analysis of the life and work

of Bill Hicks, discussion as to the methods employed in furtherance of such an analysis

becomes necessary.

IV. METHODOLOGY

"…like a mattress balances on a bottle of wine…"
-Bob Dylan

Method

In order to determine the communicative potential of comedy to expose and

critique the dominant social code and concurrently offer alternatives to that code, a

critical analysis of the career of Bill Hicks is offered. The method for analyzing this

source material lies in Marcuse's (1977/1978, 1993) arguments concerning the

reformation of meaning through language and the revolutionary potential of aesthetic

form. The source material cited herein was examined in order to locate instances in which

Bill Hicks, through the medium of comedic discourse, reforms the meanings and values

of cultural content in the attempt to expose the essence of reality as communicated by and

within the fascist ideosis. Furthermore, this source material was examined to locate

evidence that the aesthetic form of Bill Hicks's comedy relies upon the use of the cultural

artifacts of the dominant social logic as incriminations against that code. More than

simply exposing instances of oppressive power as produced by the convergence of

capitalism and fascism and communicated through mass cultural forms, the comedy of

Bill Hicks employs representational estrangement and subversion of meaning and value

to communicatively reproduce an alternative to the reality of the fascist ideosis.

Primary evidence for such assertions is found in the comedic performances of Bill

Hicks. For the purposes of analysis, the following performance material was examined:

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fourteen bootleg video recordings of Bill Hicks performing stand-up comedy (*Bill Hicks Adult Video Awards 1990, parts 1 & 2*; *Bill Hicks channels Mick Jagger*; *Bill Hicks Edinburgh Festival*; *Bill Hicks hates hecklers*; *Bill Hicks, Igby's, parts 1-7*; *Bill Hicks last show, parts 1-7*; *Bill Hicks- nothing goes right*; *Bill Hicks on TV sitcom*; *Bill Hicks performs for deaf crowd*; *Bill Hicks- Rascals Comedy Club*; *Bill Hicks very young early clip*; *Bill Hicks vs. heckler*; *Comedian Bill Hicks at Dangerfields*; *Freebird!*); eight officially released compact disc recordings of Bill Hicks performing stand-up comedy (Hicks, 1990, 1992b, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005a); four officially released digital video disc recordings of Bill Hicks performing stand-up comedy (Hicks, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2005); two bootleg audio recordings of Bill Hicks performing stand-up comedy (Hicks, 1989, 1992a); two manuscripts for a television pilot co-written by Bill Hicks (Hicks & Woodland, 2004a; 2004b); two bootleg video recordings of a television pilot co-starring Bill Hicks (*Bill Hicks manifesto for Counts of the Netherworld*; *Bill Hicks pilot of Counts of the Netherworld*); and one officially released collection of Bill Hicks's writings (Hicks, 2004a).

Secondary source material was examined in order to provide supplemental support for the primary evidence. The purpose of examining such secondary material is to understand the strategic and tactical implications of Hicks's use of comedic discourse to reform the meanings and values of mass cultural forms. These secondary sources include the following: sixteen bootleg interviews with Bill Hicks (video and audio format) (*Bill Hicks & George Carlin*; *Bill Hicks interview BBC2 1992*; *Bill Hicks interviewed by Jonathan Ross*; *Bill Hicks interview on 'The Word'*; *Bill Hicks interview, parts 1-4*; *Bill Hicks interview with Howard Stern, parts 1 & 2*; *Bill Hicks- it's just f*cking television*;

Bill Hicks on Clive Anderson; *Bill Hicks on David Letterman censorship*; *Bill Hicks on the Dennis Miller Show*; *Bill Hicks Scottish radio interview, parts 1-3*; *Bill Hicks telephone interview, parts 1-6*; *Bill Hicks- the evolution of an idea*; *Bill Hicks- United States of Advertising*; *CapZeyeZ interview*; *Len Belzer interview, parts 1-12*); eight officially released interviews with Bill Hicks (print format) (Dalton, 1992/2004; Draper, 1992/2004; Hicksville UFO, 1992/2004; Introducing… Bill Hicks, 1993/2004; Johnson, 1989/2004; Joseph, 1980/2004; McCree, 1993/2004; O'Brien, 1991/2004); and seven bootleg video and audio home recordings made by or including Bill Hicks (*Bill Hicks & Dwight Slade audio recording 1976, parts 1 & 2*; *Bill Hicks- backstage*; *Bill Hicks- Ninja Bachelor Party, parts 1-3*; *Bill Hicks on government*; *Bill Hicks singing for Arizona Bay*; *Bill Hicks talking outside Waco*; *Ninja Bachelor Party trailer*).

Biographical source material was then examined to provide anecdotal evidence for the assertion that the revoevolutionary will to power manifests not only in the comedy of Bill Hicks, but also in his lifestyle choices. These sources are as follows: two bootleg video recordings of documentaries about Bill Hicks (*Bill Hicks came 6th in recent TV poll*; *Bill Hicks outlaw comic documentary, parts 1-7*); two biographies written about Bill Hicks (Booth & Bertin, 2005; True, 2002); one officially released digital video disc recording of a documentary about Bill Hicks (Edwards, 1994); and one reminiscence written in honor of Bill Hicks (Lahr, 2004).

Additionally, the following sources were examined in order to provide an understanding of the long-term influence of Bill Hicks on American popular culture: thirty-six articles written about Bill Hicks (Accidental heroes, 1998, November 7; Atkinson, 1992, February 28; Bessman, 1997, January 25; Brownstein, 1992, October 26;

Brownstein, 1993, January 15; Brownstein, 1994, February 28; Canavan, 2006, October 14; Cook, 1992, December 3; Cook, 1994, March 9; Cook, 2005, February 26; Cook, 2007, September 15; Davis, 2006, July 24; Edwards, 1994, March 5; The gospel according to, 2002, March 30; Hasted, 1997, February 24; Haugsted, 2003, June 9; Hay, 2005, April 20; Kerr, 1993, October 11; Lahr, 1993, November 1; Lahr, 1994, March 9; Lennon, 1991, August 5; Logan, 2003, August 14; Logan, 2006, August 17; Logan, 2006, October 2; Maxwell, 2002, February 20; Meginty, 1992, May 4; Mueller, 2002, November 23; Nachman, 1993, July 24; Nachman, 1993, August 8; Pye, 1991, August 4; Segal, 2007, August 18; Thompson, 1994, October 23; Thornber, 1992, November 10; Tokuda & Marlow, 1993, October 8; Tucker, 1993, June 25; and Weingarten, 2001, September 30); twelve bootleg video recordings (*Bill Hicks memorial eulogy, parts 1 & 2*; *Colbert destroys O'Reilly*; *Did these comedians rip Bill Hicks off?*; *Doug Stanhope/Bill Hicks*; *Exhibit A: Dennis Leary vs. Bill Hicks, parts 1-3*; *Jon Stewart on Crossfire*; *Jon Stewart on the O'Reilly Factor*; *Keith Olbermann tribute to Bill Hicks; Larry King interviewing Jon Stewart*; *Positive drug story*; *Speech at White House correspondent's dinner, parts 1-3*; *Was George Carlin influenced by Bill Hicks?*); and one bootleg video recording of a censored Bill Hicks comedy routine from *Late Show with David Letterman* originally filmed in 1993 but not broadcast until 2009 (*Late Show with David Letterman, parts 1-3*).

Use of Unauthorized Source Material

Before proceeding further with a discussion of the methodology employed for the purposes of analysis, it is necessary to provide an explanation regarding the use of bootleg source material. The use of such material stems from a number of concerns. First,

the use of bootleg material is absolutely essential for providing an accurate analysis. The

majority of such material is simply not available through official copyrighted releases. To

omit relevant source material simply because it is unauthorized is to undermine the

purposes of this argument. The bootleg video and audio interview recordings (with the

exception of *CapZeyeZ interview*, as noted in References), video performance recordings,

video and audio home recordings, documentary recordings, television recordings, and

additional video recordings were obtained from YouTube. While YouTube does not

officially allow individuals other than the copyright holders to post material through its

server, unauthorized material does appear. I claim absolutely no responsibility for the

posting of such prohibited material. The material was posted by outside parties with no

relation to me, whose use of said material is solely for the purposes of scholarly research.

Without the use of such material, an analysis of the career of Bill Hicks would be

incomplete and unrepresentative. In certain instances, the unauthorized material cited

herein may have been removed or relocated from YouTube. The URL addresses provided

in References are accurate as of this writing.

The bootleg audio performance recordings were obtained from cassette tape in

1992 and 1993. While Bill Hicks was still alive and performing, very little material was

officially released. Due to this circumstance, fans of Hicks (myself included) obtained

recordings from whatever sources were available. Questions of legality aside, the trading

of bootleg tapes was (and in certain groups remains) a common subcultural practice for

the dissemination of otherwise marginalized information. Again, I have in no manner

reproduced said material and cites it here purely for the purposes of scholarship. As with

the previously mentioned bootleg source material cited herein, the relative dearth of

authorized material regarding Bill Hicks necessitates the inclusion of these audio

recordings as legitimate sources.

Concerns regarding the availability of source material aside, there remains

another reason for citing bootleg recordings. If revolutionary theory (particularly the

radical strand advanced in these pages) is to move beyond mere idealism or abstract

musing, it must be willing to engage in the insurrection about which it philosophizes. Use

of bootleg source material is one such tactic for enabling radical revolutionary theory as

revoevolutionary practice. While it would be hyperbolic to suggest that citing bootleg

source material represents an ideal form of insurrection, it remains an important

revoevolutionary tactic for the communication of marginalized knowledges in the

advancement of resistant power. Precedent for the use of bootleg source material comes

from both the anti-copyright advocated by Bey and the strategic plagiarism of the

CrimethInc. Workers' Collective.[30] [31] There is absolutely no sense or use whatsoever in

advocating the revoevolutionary liberation of individual and communal consciousnesses

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[30] Anti-copyright represents a subversion of copyright and intellectual property laws whereby the author (i.e. Bey) and the publisher (i.e. Autonomedia) explicitly grant with the publication of a work the unrestricted right for readers to copy and distribute such work in any manner without having to seek permission or pay for such use. The author and the publisher simply request that they be notified of such use.

[31] Strategic plagiarism is summarized by the CrimethInc. Workers' Collective (2001) as follows: "English language (and all applications thereof) used without permission from its inventors, writers, or copywriters. No rights reserved. All parts of this book may be reproduced and transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, especially including photocopying if it is done at the expense of some unsuspecting corporation. Other recommended methods include broadcasting readings over pirate radio, reprinting tracts in unwary newspapers, and just signing your own name to this and publishing it as your own work. Any claim relating to copyright infringement, advocation of illegal activities, defamation of character, incitement to riot, treason, etc. should be addressed directly to your Congressperson as a military rather than civil issue. *Oh, yeah… intended 'for entertainment purposes only.*"

if one is not also willing to engage in insurrectionary behavior. As such, the explicit use of unauthorized material for the purposes of analysis serves as a modest contribution to the continual rising up against oppressive power.

This collection of work by or about Bill Hicks represents the most complete sample available to me, with a number of notable exceptions. Though available for viewing, Bill Hicks's eleven appearances on *Late Night with David Letterman* are not analyzed. This is due to Hicks's oft-stated belief that his routines as recorded for the audience of David Letterman are unrepresentative of his work in that the economic and cultural limitations of the television format forced him to perform routines that lacked thematic and contextual development. One such appearance was even edited during broadcast due to producers' concerns regarding content. As such, these appearances do not merit inclusion in analysis. One notable exception to this exclusion is *Late Show with David Letterman, parts 1-3*.[32] This particular source is included for purposes of analysis for a number of reasons. As noted previously, Bill Hicks's single recorded appearance on *Late Show with David Letterman* was originally recorded in 1993. For reasons addressed in Analysis, this performance was not broadcast until 2009, nearly fifteen years after Hicks's death. The eventual broadcast is important to the argument at hand not necessarily because of the content of Hicks's routine but because of David Letterman's apology to the Hicks family and his explanation as to why the routine was not broadcast at the time of its recording. This source acquires further import due to the information

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[32] David Letterman hosted *Late Night with David Letterman* on NBC from 1982 until 1993. In 1993, Letterman relocated to CBS, which resulted in a change from *Late Night with David Letterman* to *Late Show with David Letterman*. Bill Hicks appeared on *Late Night with David Letterman* a total of eleven times. Hicks recorded one appearance for *Late Show with David Letterman* following Letterman's move to CBS.

provided by Hicks's mother, Mary Hicks, who appeared as a guest on *Late Show with David Letterman* on January 30, 2009.

It must be noted at this point that the source of this broadcast cited herein is a bootleg recording. The reason for citing a bootleg source for this particular recording is due to the fact that the regional CBS affiliate available to me (WRBL, Columbus, Georgia) experienced a blackout during the broadcast of *Late Show with David Letterman* on January 30, 2009.[33] As such, I was unable to view the actual broadcast through official sources. When contacted as to why the show was not broadcast, Otis Pickett (Vice President and General Manager, WRBL News-3/WRBL) responded: "There was a technical problem with the show that night that was created by WRBL equipment" (O. Pickett, personal communication, February 4, 2009).[34] Due to this unforeseeable circumstance, it became necessary to retrieve the broadcast through an unauthorized source.

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[33] The fact that this blackout was not experienced by the entirety of CBS affiliates was determined through personal correspondences between myself and a number of associates residing in Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama; Seattle, Washington; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina- all of whom were able to view the episode as it aired.

[34] Despite Pickett's response, I remain puzzled by two occurrences surrounding the blackout that appear to contradict the official explanation. First, while the actual episode of *Late Show with David Letterman* did not air, the commercial breaks coinciding with the episode were in fact broadcast as planned. Second, uninterrupted broadcast of CBS's scheduled programming recommenced immediately following the conclusion of *Late Show with David Letterman*. Reference to these occurrences is in no way intended to cast doubt on the official response provided by WRBL. It is instead intended to account for the use of bootleg source material as necessary, even unavoidable, and to illustrate the persistent diligence with which I attempted to view the broadcast through official sources. The appearance of inconsistency between these occurrences and WRBL's official response may very well be due to my ignorance regarding the technical processes of broadcast television rather than intentional censoring by a regional affiliate of CBS Broadcasting, Inc.

Theoretical Implications

        For the purposes of analysis, the sources cited herein are treated as evidence that the comedy of Bill Hicks functions as an artistic enactment of critical theory. While such a supposition may initially appear to contradict the accepted norms of theoretical tradition, precedent for considering non-scholarly source material as enactments of critical theory are to be found within the very foundations of critical theory itself. As argued by Horkheimer (1968/1972b), critical theory is at its core an investigation into the social conditioning of facts and theories that create material systems and structures. The primary activity with which critical theory is concerned is the dialectical critique of political economy that views oppressive power as intimately connected with social organization. Such activity is represented as critical thinking, the basis of which is founded on the presupposition that "thinking should in fact be a critical, promotive factor in the development of the masses" for the purposes of emancipating humanity from the political, economic, and social manifestations of oppressive power (p. 214). While avoiding idealism, critical theory refuses to accept as unchangeable the present structuring of society and posits that a society based on the mutual benefit of all is actually possible with contemporary means.

        To this end, the critical theorist attempts to construct an ever-evolving representation of the entire social system rather than a structure of hypotheses concerning the sequence or progression of particular events. Horkheimer (1968/1972b) elaborates on the process by which critical theory functions, beginning with abstract determinations that deal (in the contemporary era) with a characterization of the capitalist economy. A radical analysis of the historical processes and "inner dynamism" that allow for

capitalism to evolve and flourish is employed to illustrate how such an economic system generates, perpetuates, and carries to extremes certain manifestations of oppressive power within society (p. 225). This analysis follows from fundamental structure to concrete reality in the attempt to not only expose the social relations by which the exchange economy actively perpetuates divisive social inequalities, but through such exposure to suggest how such functions might be altered for more equitable enactments of power. Thus emerges the actual function of critical theory, which is to offer a representation of the social structure that "is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change" (Horkheimer, 1968/1972b, p. 215).

In this way, critical theory must be practical, represented in a certain form as what Debord (1967/2006) terms organizational radical theory. Such theory offers a dialectical critique in both form and content, contextually situated in historical and cultural realities while at the same time transcending such realities. As to how such transcendence might be functionally produced, Baudrillard (1991/1995) suggests interrogating the reality of any information offered by the dominant social code, resisting "the probability of any image or information whatever… and to that end re-immerse… all information in the virtuality from whence [it came]. Turn deterrence back against itself" (pp. 66-67). This perspective reflects Baudrillard's belief that critique "should be less a representation of reality than its transfiguration and that it should pursue a 'fatal strategy' of pushing things to extremes," that it should "subvert what is being said by pursuing its *implicit logic* to extremes" [emphasis added] (Patton, 1995, pp. 6-7). This strategy culminates in a symbolic challenge to the very logic of the dominant social code rather than challenging the forms through which that logic is expressed.

The need for such a strategy arises from the very nature of the capitalist economic system in that such a system produces an economy of values that "goes well beyond economic calculation and concerns all the processes of the transmutation of values, all those socially produced transitions from one value to another" in the creation of a political economy of social logic (Levin, 1981, p. 20). As such, radical analysis must address the formation of social logic itself, performing its critique of the internal relations of sign form as a stratified, hierarchical expression of oppressive power through a dominant social code (Baudrillard, 1981). While beginning with a dialectical critique of form and content, critical theory contains the potential (in limited analyses) of transcending the dialectic by pursuing a strategic symbolic challenge to the dominant social code. Herein lies the core connection (however limited) between the foundations of critical theory and later poststructuralist incarnations, even in the face of their general contentiousness.

In its attempts to develop detailed explanations and analyses of macro-level phenomena, critical theory must avoid any over-arching form of theoretical production that seeks to account for such phenomena in absolute, all-encompassing terms; lest it provide itself as a mechanism for the manifestation of fascist power. Herein lies the importance of micropolitics to critical theory, micropolitics representing the local character of such criticism. For Foucault (1977/1980c), this determination of the mechanisms of power in localized practice represents an autonomous, diffuse method of theoretical production, the validity of which is independent of the dominant social logic. Such criticism performs its function through enablement of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (p. 81)- the radical reappearance of blocs of knowledge

suppressed or disqualified by the logic of the dominant social code. Micro-level analyses become, then, particularly apt in determining the consequences of power as communicated discursively (Foucault, 1977/1980b). "Endeavoring… to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through, and on the basis of relations of power" (Foucault, 1976/1980, p. 70). When presented as integral to rather than competing with a macro-level analysis of capitalist production, micropolitical analysis enables an understanding of how discourses might also provide *for* the transformation of power through the reappearance of subjugated knowledges.

Such an understanding of critical theory lends support to the assertion that comedic discourse as practiced by Bill Hicks operates as an artistic enactment of critical theory manifesting through a particular form of popular culture.[35] This assertion gains particular significance when examined in relation to Horkheimer's (1968/1972a) declaration that "art is knowledge no less than science is" (p. 273). The comedy of Bill Hicks communicates a critique of political economy based on an investigation into the social conditioning of facts and theories, the existence of which creates systems of control within the context of contemporary American society. Such a critique exposes the macro- and micro-level manifestations of oppressive power through a discursive strategy founded on the analysis of communicative practices that reinforce the dominant social logic as a dominant social code of political, economic, cultural, and (ultimately) cognitive control. Such a strategy operates tactically through the use of spatial metaphors that pursue the dominant social logic to extremes, re-immersing into virtuality the dominant

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[35] This statement is not to be construed as a suggestion that Bill Hicks was familiar with the foundations and developments of critical theory.

social code through a transfigurative interrogation of the values and meanings communicated by that code. More than this, however, the comedy of Bill Hicks offers a symbolic challenge to the dominant social logic by refusing to accept as unchangeable the enactments of oppressive power as manifest through the dominant social code and, more importantly, by offering a radical yet practical alternative for more equitable enactments of power through the insurrectionary reappearance of subjugated knowledges.

Further support for this assertion is found in Walzer (1987), who notes that social criticism is the result of critical thought and interpretation- a by-product of cultural elaboration- as performed by emotionally and intellectually connected carriers of common culture (e.g. teachers, storytellers, artists) who seek positive individual and communal development. When examined in relation to the preceding paragraphs, a comedian such as Bill Hicks qualifies as a carrier of common culture performing the function of social critic. This statement is admittedly insufficient to conflate the assertion that the comedy of Bill Hicks operates as *connected social criticism* with the argument that it operates as an artistic manifestation of *critical theory*. It is not, however, without precedent and requires the support of Marcuse (1977/1978, 1993).

For the purposes of the argument contained herein, the comedic performances and constructions of Bill Hicks are considered as a form of art according to the arguments advanced by the Frankfurt School (as discussed in Relevant Literature) rather than as simply a form of mass entertainment. Further support for this assertion is found in Kaufman (1997), who includes Hicks along with Benjamin Franklin, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, Sinclair Lewis, Kurt Vonnegut, Lenny Bruce, and Garrison Keillor in an analysis of irony fatigue- the psychic and emotional toll visited upon satirists in the

process of "maintaining a web of ironic tension between falsehood and earnestness, play and criticism, defense and attack, [their] conflicting and simultaneous urges to be heeded and indulgently dismissed" (p. 12). According to Kaufman's (1997) analysis, Bill Hicks is not so much a stand-up comedian as he is "the true heir of Jonathan Swift" whose art was rare for the historical and cultural context in which it was created (p. 17). By accepting Hicks as an artist rather than merely a purveyor of popular culture diversions, the foundations of revolutionary aesthetics can readily be applied to Hicks's comedy. The necessary components of revolutionary aesthetics as explained by Marcuse (1977/1978, 1993) are themselves rooted in the foundational concepts and process of critical theory, providing the necessary connection between critical theory and revoevolutionary praxis.

Within the context of social relations, the political potential and function of art are located within aesthetics, the aesthetic form representing the realization of content as form "achieved through a reshaping of language, perception, and understandings so that they reveal the essence of reality *in its appearance*" [emphasis added] (Marcuse, 1977/1978, p. 8). Such reshaping constitutes an elemental reorganization of factual content through representative estrangement and subversion of dominant consciousnesses. Aesthetic form, then, determines the fundamental content of the artistic work and, consequently, the "relationships among the component parts, the vocabulary, and the rhythm and structure" of the work of art as a whole (Marcuse, 1993, p. 184).

Operationally, aesthetic form contains the potential for constituting an alternative social logic in which the artifacts of the dominant social code serve as incriminations against the logic of the dominant code. This is achieved by exposing the enactments of oppressive power as manifest through material structures and systems, social relations,

and (most crucially) the conditioning of values and meanings. In contradicting the meanings and values of the dominant social code, art achieves autonomy and (through this autonomy) achieves transcendence, thereby subverting the dominant consciousness. What results is (as characterized by Marcuse, 1977/1978) liberation through subsumption- the transformation of meaning and value enabled by a fundamental restructuring of consciousness. Though art is incapable of translating its ideal into material reality, the cognitive restructuring made *possible* by art can serve as a signpost to individuals operating in reality. Individuals- alone or in concert- who experience and absorb the inner logic of subversive aesthetic forms *are* capable of translating such an ideal into material reality, allowing for the possibility of a transhistorical radical otherness through a "rebirth of rebellious subjectivity" (p. 7).

> The radical quality of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image of liberation are grounded precisely in its dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as reality which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. The experience culminates in extreme situations… which explode the given reality in the name of truth normally denied or even unheard. The inner logic of the work terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions. (pp. 6-7)

Based on this perspective, the distinction between artist and critical theorist becomes more a matter of profession, technique, and sanctification rather than representing a real division between goals and/or processes.

Conclusions

This methodological standpoint provides the basis for a critical analysis of the *form* of the source material cited herein. Additionally, it provides the basis for a critical

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analysis of the source material's *content* and how such content exposes (as explicated in Relevant Literature) the fundamental components of the fascist ideosis while also providing the revoevolutionary communication of an alternative to such a manifestation of oppressive power. In furtherance of this objective, the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks are examined in order to provide evidence that: 1) the fundamental elements of fascism as explained in Relevant Literature materialize in American cultural practices and forms; 2) the resurgence of fascism as a cultural phenomenon is inextricably linked to the rise of global corporate capitalism as the dominant economic ideology/system; 3) the values of cultural fascism and global corporate capitalism are communicated through mass culture industries; and 4) anarchism/anarchy, however marginalized as a subjugated knowledge, can potentially provide for a resistant manifestation of power capable of reforming the meanings and values communicated by the dominant social code. Additionally, the source material cited herein is examined in relation to the characteristics of humor/comedy as discussed in Relevant Literature in order to ascertain how those characteristics enable the communication of subjugated knowledges in the work of Bill Hicks. More than simply providing evidence of the existence of a shared mental environment communicated by the fascist ideosis in the final stages of patho*logic*al inertia, or of the possibility for revoevolutionary activity towards the autonomy of the individual subject, this analysis provides evidence of the methods and processes by which oppressive and resistant power manifest, operate, and ultimately determine the meanings and values of human experience.

On October 1, 1993, after taping a performance for *Late Show with David Letterman*, Bill Hicks became the first comedian ever (and the first performer of any kind since Elvis Presley) to be censored at CBS's Ed Sullivan Theater (Lahr, 1993, November 1). Whereas Presley had been censored below the waist, Hicks noted wryly that he had been censored "from the neck up" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 259). Hicks's censorship "in the guise of 'reasonable' editorial procedure" (Kaufman, 1997, p. 16) represents the culmination of a career spent analyzing through the medium of stand-up comedy the relationships between social structure, political ideology, capitalist production, and mass media. Furthermore, "perhaps no other recent career raises such disturbing implications about the successful taming and silencing of the satiric voice by the commercial interests in [television]" (Kaufman, 1997, p. 114). The reasons for Hicks's censorship continue to be debated. Regardless, the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks present a direct micropolitical challenge to the social structure engendered by capitalist economic ideology as communicated and manifested through mass media embedded with the meanings and values of cultural fascism. This challenge offers an alternative social logic based on individual choice and responsibility, as well as the imperative for social

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[36] Many of the sources cited herein contain explicit language that some might consider offensive. In order to represent the source material in an accurate fashion, this language has not been censored. In regards to the use of explicit language, Bill Hicks states, "That is the way I kind of talk, but at the same time the language is just part of the character," while adding that those who are offended by such language "need to grow up" (Hicks, 2004, p. 279). Sensitive readers should consider themselves warned.

structures based on cooperation and community rather than the competitive drive for profit. As such, the reasons for Hicks's censorship within this particular context are less important than their representation of certain structural inevitabilities as determined by the dominant social code in contemporary America.

Though this analysis is not intended to repeat the information provided by True (2002) and Booth & Bertin (2005), a certain amount of biographical content as it relates to Hicks's comedy and lifestyle is worth noting in order to partially account for how an upper-class, Southern Baptist, multi-sport athlete from Houston, Texas, developed into one of the most significant social critics in recent American history.[37] The beginning of this development can be traced to the first time Hicks, at thirteen years of age, watched a movie starring Woody Allen: "A changing moment in my life came the first day I laughed. That was when life took a new form and my sad visions were cleansed by humor and from that day on I paid homage to comedy… For I loved comedy and I loved those who loved it. I loved those who gave their lives to find the perfect laugh, the real laugh, the gut laugh, the healing laugh" (True, 2002, p. 277). Even as a teenager, Hicks viewed comedy not as a diversionary cultural form for the provision of amusement, but as a method for the transformation of the individual and for the development of communal associations based on mutual enjoyment. Though often compared to Lenny Bruce, the development of Hicks's comedic sensibilities owes more to Mark Twain, Kurt Vonnegut, Charlie Chaplin, and Richard Pryor- whom Hicks once described as "the one and only master of stand-up [comedy]" (True, 2002, p. 48).

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[37] This statement is partially intended to provide limited, contextually specific support for the assertions of poststructuralist anarchism that essential notions regarding class and identity are outmoded and contain limited empirical value when determining individual behavior, political affiliation, etc.

Hicks's devotion to comedy closely parallels another devotion that began during his adolescence and continued until his death: the development of an inner voice of reason capable of determining the meanings and values of experience independent of sanctified social norms and/or accepted political/economic/ecclesiastical ideologies. Around fifteen years of age, Hicks and his friend Dwight Slade began experimenting with meditation, sensory deprivation, music, vegetarianism, and other methods for the alteration of the subjective conscious state. Though Hicks dropped out of the University of Houston after one semester, he read voraciously on subjects ranging from spirituality, religion and philosophy to politics, economics and history while also keeping abreast of contemporary developments in domestic and foreign affairs (Booth & Bertin, 2005). As noted by his former girlfriend, Laurie Mango, "He was always feeling less than others, less educated. In reality, meanwhile, he was reading books that were beyond me in complexity and was more intelligent than ninety-nine percent of the population anyway" (True, 2002, p. 76).

In his twenties, Hicks also began experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, ecstasy, cocaine, LSD, psilocybin, and other psychoactive substances.[38] Even after returning to a lifestyle of relative sobriety, Hicks continued to publicly and vociferously extol the positive consequences of the sacramental, ritualized use of psychoactive substances. This perspective is based on Hicks's personal experiences while also echoing the assertions of McKenna (1992)- whom Hicks frequently quoted onstage and in

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[38] Though Hicks's consumption of alcohol and hard drugs (i.e. cocaine, heroin, and crystal methamphetamine) would later devolve into addictive excess and lead him to join Alcoholics Anonymous, his ingestion of psilocybin mushrooms remained a ritual tool for the expansion of empathic consciousness.

interviews- that certain psychoactive substances are responsible for the cognitive evolution of humanity.

Hicks's personal experiences and absorption of subjugated knowledges led to the development of a personal perspective rooted firmly in anarchist philosophy. An avid reader of Noam Chomsky, Hicks rejected the notion of objective absolutes, preferring instead to embrace multiple and often contradictory perspectives in the attempt to propagate intellectual freedom and facilitate creative evolution (Lahr, 1993, November 1). In a radio interview with Len Belzer, Hicks stated in no uncertain terms, "As long as you don't harm another human being or prevent their freedom, everything goes" (*Len Belzer interview*).

These dual devotions- to comedy and the intentional development of an individual framework for interpreting information and experiential phenomena- found initial public expression in 1976 when Hicks performed an impromptu routine at church camp. His first experience performing stand-up comedy on stage was in 1978 at the Comedy Workshop in Houston, when Hicks was fifteen years of age (Hicks, 2004a). One taped performance from this period survives. It shows a composed and confident sixteen- or seventeen-year-old Hicks performing a routine in which he highlights the differences between himself and his classmates by joking that he carries a *Face the Nation* lunchbox on which a very dour image of Dan Rather is captioned by the phrase, "You're almost old enough to be drafted" (*Bill Hicks very young early clip*). Though admittedly underdeveloped, this routine evidences that, even as an adolescent, Hicks was able to combine personal experience with accumulated knowledge into an amusing form of social criticism.

Hicks soon became a regular fixture at the Comedy Workshop's open-mic nights. Though younger than the other regular performers by half a decade, he was recognized as their equal and became part of what would later be known as the Outlaw Comics- an anarchic, experimental collective of Houston-area comedians whose ranks also included Jimmy Pineapple, Ron Shock, Steve Epstein, and Sam Kinison. After a brief relocation to Los Angeles in 1980, Hicks returned to Houston where his professional career as a stand-up comedian began in earnest.

From then until his death, Hicks employed comedic discourse to expose and critique the manifestations of fascism in American mass culture, the relationship between oppressive social structures and capitalism, and the role of mass media in enabling fascism as the dominant social code of a capitalist system, all while offering an alternative to such a code- an alternative rooted in the philosophical foundations of anarchism. The following analysis provides evidence for these assertions, beginning with a discussion of the fascist ideosis and proceeding with a discussion of revoevolution as expressed through the comedy of Bill Hicks. Through this analysis, it is evidenced that the life and work of Bill Hicks provide significant insight into cultural fascism, global corporate capitalism, culture industries, anarchism, comedy, and (ultimately) power.

<div align="center">Fascist Ideosis</div>

Fascism and Capitalism

As discussed in Relevant Literature, certain characteristics of fascism have resurged in contemporary American society- chief among them an anti-democratic bureaucratic structure that perpetuates its control of society through democratic elections that serve as empty rituals of political choreography. For Bill Hicks, representative

democracy in America is merely a rhetorical smokescreen for distracting the attention of the populace from the actual workings of political and economic power. In a routine entitled "The Elite," Hicks constructs a fictional scenario to serve as a metaphor for the workings of a fascist bureaucratic system:

> Whoever's elected president… no matter what your promises you promise on the campaign trail… when you win, you go into this smoky room with these twelve industrialist capitalist scumfucks who got you in there and… this little film screen comes down… and a big guy with a cigar says, 'Roll the film,' and it's a shot of the Kennedy assassination from an angle you've never seen before… that looks suspiciously off the grassy knoll… and then the screen goes up and the lights go up and they go, to the new president, 'Any questions?'… 'Just what my agenda is.' (Hicks, 1997b)

From this perspective, achievement of the office of President is dependent on sanctification by corporate economic power, regardless of the political party from which a specific president is elected. The processes set in place by the Constitution ostensibly to ensure equitable representation of the populace within government are manipulated by the corporate/industrial/technological elite to ensure totalization of an economic ideology through the alienation of the public from the political process. Hicks (1997b) frequently refers to both Democrats and Republicans as puppets, the strings of whom are manipulated by the same corporate puppet master.

The result of such a political system is a weakened democratic structure controlled by multiparty coalitions distinguished by little actual difference between liberal and conservative participants- a structure in which deviation from the will of corporate financial interests is punished swiftly, often by extreme actions. What is significant about this particular routine is the clear connection Hicks makes between bureaucratic structure and corporate power, a connection that results in the submission of the populace to a rigidly hierarchical form of corporatism based upon political and

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economic elitism. Within this perspective, corruption is a systemically normalized feature

of the American political process. Democratic structures are thereby weakened by the

devolution of the legislative process into bureaucratic corruption. Furthermore, use of the

term *scumfucks* to refer to the capitalists in control of the democratic process serves to

personalize as well as demonize the drive for profit that resides at the core of capitalist

ideology.

This interpretation of representative democracy is a recurring theme throughout

Hicks's comedy and personal writings. As written in an essay leading up to the

presidential election of 1992:

> It has become more and more obvious that there is one real political party in
> America, and that is- THE BUSINESS PARTY. And, in order to placate the
> masses with the illusion of democracy, they hold a purely ceremonial election
> every four years while their propaganda arm- the corporate-owned mainstream
> media- obediently and even gleefully plays it to the hilt, as though there was
> actually a choice and you, the American people, were the ones getting to make
> that choice… Who are these [presidential candidates]? And who do they
> represent? Could it be they are the best the Business Party has to offer in the way
> of maximizing profits for the few, while pacifying the childlike masses with flag-
> waving, jingoistic rhetoric? Well? Is the choice between Democrat and
> Republican really a choice? There may be two sides to every coin, but what
> connects them is the coin. (Hicks, 2004a, p. 112)

Viewed in relation to "The Elite," this excerpt carries the indictment of the American

political system further by implicating the role of both the mainstream media and the

American population in the expansion and totalization of corporate power. While

governmental and corporate power are interdependent, they also depend upon culture

industries for communicating and generating support for their agendas among the

American population. Through the manipulation of symbols and utilization of

nationalistic rhetoric, mass media enable the effective submission of the populace to a

corporatist hierarchy, far more than with the use of overt force. As Hicks further

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emphasizes, "You can get away with anything if you have a flag behind you" (*Bill Hicks telephone interview*).

This perspective is reinforced in "Me and Saddam," in which Hicks exposes the manipulation of emotionally charged symbols to generate public support leading up to Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s. At the time, President George H. W. Bush repeated frequently in mainstream news coverage the story (now known to be falsified) that Iraqi soldiers had removed premature babies from incubators in a Kuwaiti hospital. While many Americans were moved to support the war due to this rhetorical strategy, Hicks himself saw through the charade and openly expressed his outrage at such a blatant manipulation of an emotionally charged symbol (i.e. murdered babies). In "Me and Saddam," Hicks mimics the voice of Bush, saying that the war is "for God and country and [Hussein]'s a Hitler and look… a fetus! Whatever you, the apathetic docile masses, need to get behind this" (Hicks, 1997a). Through this specific example, Hicks's routine serves as an indictment against not only the political and economic system that is truly responsible for the war, but also the mainstream news corporations for unquestioningly presenting blatant agitprop as fact. Moreover, individuals themselves are complicit in their own domination through their emotionally underdeveloped passivity in regards to brazenly obvious propaganda. In Hicks's view, the economic and political elite would be prevented from acting in such a manner if the American public ceased to be passively apathetic in their unquestioning submission to manufactured and ultimately imaginary hierarchies.

If, as communicated through the comedy of Bill Hicks, the American political process is merely a hollow ritual for the expansion of corporate power, what, then, are the

consequences of such a system? As explained in the review of literature, such a system creates, expands, and perpetuates a social structure displaying the following characteristics: 1) ultranationalism that seeks military and economic expansion mobilized by a myth of national unity; 2) reactionary rhetoric that emphasizes tradition while concurrently embracing technological innovation and the positivist materialism of scientific rationality; 3) anti-intellectualism favoring aggressive action and/or reaction rather than considered response; 4) democratically-elected legislature that relies on hollow political choreography and ritual; 5) government structure of multi-party coalitions with inextricable linkages to corporate and financial power; 6) legislative interference into the personal lives of individuals; 7) weakening of democratic structures and processes in concert with overt hostility towards liberalism and socialism; 8) overt hostility to dissent or analytical criticism; 9) manipulative contrivance of consensus through appeals to the latent fears of the social body (e.g. xenophobia, sexism, racism, etc.); 10) appeals to populist elitism; 11) dissemination of agitational propaganda through mass media; 12) a manichaean worldview that manifests rhetorically through the specter of an ill-defined and ever-shifting external enemy; and 13) the ultimate goal of totalization as a social code capable of determining the meanings and values of existence.[39]

One of the primary characteristics of cultural fascism is an extreme manifestation of nationalism that justifies military and economic expansion with appeals to a myth of national unity. While such expansion is typically justified as necessary for promoting

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[39] Evidence for the existence of characteristics 4, 5, and 7 as expressed in the work of Bill Hicks is presented through the source material cited at the beginning of this section. As such, further explanation in regards to these particular characteristics is considered redundant and therefore unnecessary.

democracy and protecting the citizenry of the United States, Hicks sees in ultranationalism a more sinister motive- "the rearming of the world in order to control it" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 114). Hicks refuses to rely solely on such simple unsupported explanations, however. In exposing what he believes to be the actual machinations behind U.S. foreign policy, Hicks draws upon his almost obsessive absorption of current events. In a routine from *Salvation*, Hicks (2005a) references a contemporary CNN news broadcast in which it was reported that President George H. W. Bush had sold one-hundred-and-sixty-four fighter jets to the Republic of Korea, as well as two-hundred-and-forty tanks to Kuwait.[40] While officially explained as necessary because "we still live in a dangerous world" (Hicks, 2005a), the sale of these weapons to American allies is interpreted by Hicks as evidence that the political and economic elite wish to perpetuate a system of global instability because war "keeps the economy afloat" (*Len Belzer interview*).

In a society characterized by fascist undercurrents, public support for economic and military expansion is generated through blatant appeals to a myth of national unity. In a routine entitled "A New Flag (Patriotism)," Hicks derides all forms of nationalism by pointing out that this is, in fact, a round world and national borders are imaginary constructs of geopolitical cartography. In defense of his hatred of patriotism, Hicks jokes, "My parents fucked [in America], that's all. I was in the spirit realm at the time. I tried to scream, 'Fuck in Paris!' but they couldn't hear me because I didn't have a mouth" (Hicks, 1997b). In order to stem the cultural obsession with nationalist pride, Hicks

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[40] While these numbers may not be exact, they are important to note because they reflect Hicks's understanding of American foreign policy as gleaned from American news media.

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suggests replacing the existing American flag with one that depicts the parents of various Americans engaged in sexual intercourse.

Rather than protecting the interests of the American people, American foreign policy is (according to Hicks) motivated by economic ideology. The fascist bureaucratic system enabled by such an ideology inevitably results in governmental policies that promote political assassinations (*Bill Hicks on government*), mass murder (*Bill Hicks performs for deaf crowd*), genocide (Hicks, 2005a), "spreading 'democracy' at gunpoint" (*CapZeyeZ interview*), and "overthrowing freely-elected democracies with military juntas for corporate interests" (*Bill Hicks last show*). While Hicks's perspective might seem at first glance to be based on a rigid ideology itself, it is, in fact, the result of individual interpretation regarding the foreign policy of the Reagan and Bush administrations as communicated through contemporary news media.

While Ronald Reagan is now generally lionized as a mythological figure from conservatism's golden past, Hicks's interpretation of the Reagan administration is not clouded by historical misrepresentation. It is, rather, the personal interpretation of a contemporary (and well-informed) witness appalled by the actions of the United States government in concert with corporate interests. This personal sense of horror and disgust with American foreign policy in the 1980s is evidenced in the simple question, "How does it feel to find out that WE are the Evil Empire?" (Hicks, 2005a).[41]

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[41] In order to prevent propagating the misperception that Bill Hicks's comedic attacks against Reagan and Bush are the result of some ideological allegiance to the Democratic Party, it must be noted that his comedic attacks against Bill Clinton are equally as vehement. Hicks even refers to Clinton as "a failure, an idiot" (*CapZeyeZ interview*). However, Hicks died near the beginning of Clinton's term and, consequently, most of his material concerning the policies of presidential administrations focuses on those of Reagan and Bush.

Leading from the above statements regarding current cultural representations of Ronald Reagan, cultural fascism is typically expressed through reactionary rhetoric that emphasizes tradition or a return to some mythologized image of the past. For Hicks, the reactionary desire for an imaginary past is intimately connected to the populist elitism, fear of aberrant behaviors, and latent racist, sexist and xenophobic undercurrents in American culture. In Hicks's comedy, these characteristics of cultural fascism are communicated primarily through the personae of Rush Limbaugh, fundamentalist Christians, and Hicks's own father. In one of his final performances, Hicks recounts a conversation with his father over Hicks's rejection of Rush Limbaugh's political perspective. In response to his father's suggestion that he should listen to Limbaugh's radio program, Hicks replies, "I have listened to him before. It was 1974, the show was called *All in the Family* and the character was called Archie Bunker… Unfortunately, there's no Meathead playing counterpart with this idiot" (*Bill Hick's, Igby's*). For Hicks, the return to traditional mores as advocated by both Limbaugh and Hicks's father is merely another rhetorical smokescreen for the propagation of fear-mongering among the middle classes. The comparison of Rush Limbaugh to Archie Bunker exposes the latent racism and sexism that underscores the mythologizing of the past as more tolerable and harmonious than the present. This typically American form of populist elitism is succinctly expressed in another performance in which Hicks recounts his father's assertion that "the peasants shouldn't be allowed to vote" (*Bill Hicks, last show*), as if to suggest that the lower economic classes and minority populations are too ignorant to participate in the political process. In these routines, the persona of Hicks's father is

symbolic of the latent racism and classism that characterize cultural fascism as manifest in contemporary American society.

Sexism, racism, and classism are closely related to another fundamental characteristic of cultural fascism- xenophobia. Hicks displays an acute awareness of such a connection in recounting an interaction with audience members in a small town in Alabama.[42] A few days prior to Hicks's performance, the majority of the town's population witnessed several Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) hovering over the area. In relating the incident to Hicks, one individual states that a number of people had come to the area armed with rifles in order to resist being abducted by supposed aliens, to which Hicks responded, "Do you think there will come a point in evolution when you put your guns aside?... Would you let the aliens land, please? They might be here to pick me up" (Hicks, 1992a, 2004c). Rather than merely poking fun at Southern rednecks (who are, admittedly, a favorite target of Hicks's humor), this routine highlights the connection between xenophobia and militarism in the form of gun ownership. As Hicks (2004a) explicitly states, "I like to use aliens in my act to point out a fear of strangers" (p. 87).

As with stereotyped Southern rednecks, fundamentalist Christians are another recurring target of Hicks's comic invective, particularly their perennial political campaign plea for a return to traditional family values. For Hicks, the issue of *family values* is utterly irrelevant when a society cannot even agree to a definition of what constitutes a family or whose values should be accepted as normal (*Len Blezer interview*). Hicks exposes the source of this rhetorical confusion by pointing out that although Christians believe that the *Bible* is the literal word of God, they change and update the

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[42] Whether or not this interaction actually occurred is irrelevant to the argument at hand.

text of the *Bible* (Hicks, 2004d). The point Hicks is making here is that a group of people who cannot even come to a consensus as to what their sacred text actually means should not be entrusted with determining the meanings and values of experience for the entirety of a social body. Therefore, the fundamentalist call for a return to traditional values merely exposes the illogical, unfounded fear of aberration and polysemous discourse that lies at the core of cultural fascism.

This fear of aberrant behavior is closely related to the xenophobia, populist elitism, racism, and sexism that characterize cultural fascism, and is often expressed as a societal rejection of sexual behavior that might be deemed by some as nonstandard or deviant. Hicks exposes this fear in the routine "Gays in the Military," in which he lambasts the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy adopted by branches of the United States military in the early 1990s. For Hicks, the Congressional debates concerning homosexuals in the military merely underlined the hypocrisy of allowing a war machine to assume the role of moral arbiter. The routine culminates in a tirade typical of Hicks:

> I watched these fucking Congressional hearings and all these military guys and pundits, 'Seriously, the esprit de corps will be affected, and we are such a moral [institution].' Excuse me! Aren't y'all fucking hired killers!? Shut up! Y'all are thugs and when we need you to go blow the fuck out of a nation of little brown people, we'll let you know. Until then… When did the fucking military get all these morals? 'We are the military. Is that a village of children? Where's the napalm?... I don't want any gay people hanging around me while I'm killing kids. I just don't wanna see it.' (Hicks, 1997b)

The significance of this routine lies not only in how it exposes the connections between racism, sexism, and fear of aberration, but also in how the militaristic expansion of corporate ideology produces social structures that replicate fascist power. An economic system that encourages aggressive militarism also encourages rabid rejection of seemingly nonstandard behaviors, thus leading to institutionalized racism, sexism, and

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fear of aberration. Though the link between war and capitalism may not be immediately evident from this routine alone, it becomes more apparent when viewed in conjunction with other routines regarding what Hicks calls the "Persian Gulf Distraction" (Hicks, 1992b, 2004c).

The connections between capitalism and military expansion have already been discussed as they relate to the comedy of Bill Hicks. A few minor points regarding this issue still merit mention, however- specifically in reference to the Gulf War. For Hicks, this war was never about liberating Kuwait or protecting helpless infants. It was an attempt by George H. W. Bush to secure the military/industrial complex vote in an upcoming election (Hicks, 2004d) by providing a market for the manufacturers of weapons systems (Hicks, 2000) while simultaneously distracting the American public from domestic issues (e.g. economic recession) (Hicks, 1992b, 2004d).

Specific references to the Gulf War (particularly in regards to weapons systems) expose a fundamental logical inconsistency within cultural fascism. While relying upon reactionary rhetoric that emphasizes tradition and nationalism, fascism obsesses over technological innovation and the positivist materialism of scientific rationality. Hicks points to this obsession in "The War"- a routine in which Hicks mimics an Army officer achieving an erection while thumbing through a weapons catalogue to choose missiles based on descriptions such as "destroys everything but the fillings in [the enemy's] teeth" (Hicks, 2000). These references to the Gulf War also enable Hicks to communicate his overarching message about the relationship between capitalism and militarism: fascistic nationalism and global instability will continue to expand "as long as war turns a profit for the elite oligarchy that rules this planet" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 113).

Before proceeding with a more detailed analysis of the relationship between capitalism and culture industries as communicated through the comedy of Bill Hicks, a few other important characteristics of cultural fascism merit discussion. First, cultural fascism displays an anti-intellectualism that favors aggressive action over informed debate. In regards to anti-intellectualism, Hicks recounts an incident at a Waffle House in Tennessee in which he is accosted by a waitress and another restaurant patron for reading a book while eating.[43] The waitress asks (supposedly), "Why read when you can just turn on the [television]?" The other patron exclaims (with a tone of suspicious derision), "Well, it looks we got ourselves a reader" (Hicks, 1990, 2004b). Hicks uses this anecdote to segue into a commentary on the anti-intellectual bias that Hicks feels has been growing in America since 1980 and the election of Ronald Reagan.[44]

Concurrent with this anti-intellectualism is the favoring of aggressive action. For Hicks, this characteristic of fascism is exemplified by the television show *American Gladiators*- a program in which contestants compete against a stable of athletes in a variety of physical challenges. For Hicks, the presence on television of a show such as *American Gladiators* is not intended as entertainment, but rather as a command to "go back to bed, America. Your government is in control. Watch these pituitary retards bang their heads together while you congratulate yourselves on living in the land of freedom" (Hicks, 2004d).

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[43] As with the anecdote regarding UFO sightings in Alabama, whether or not this incident actually occurred is irrelevant to the argument at hand.

[44] Interestingly enough, the date suggested by Hicks coincides with the rise of free market ideology as a guiding principle behind U.S. policy initiatives.

Along with the suspicion of independent intellectual activity, cultural fascism displays an overt hostility to dissent or analytical criticism. In the comedy of Bill Hicks, this hostility to dissent manifests through a number of cultural phenomena, particularly the careful choreographing of political debates and the framing of issues discussed in these debates (Hicks, 2004a). Specifically, Hicks refers to flag burning (Hicks, 1990) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*) to illustrate how issues are framed in such a way as to make social problems seem unsolvable. Such framing discourages reasonable debate while engendering in the population a fear of complexity and divergence. Cultural issues such as flag burning serve as distractions from more crucial issues, while choreographed debates regarding legislation such as NAFTA increase citizens' reliance upon official sources of information. Infamous for his expletive-laced tirades, Hicks sums up the role of cultural issues and political debate in the following way: "The cocksucking elite who own and run everything in this fucking country are selling it out from under us tomorrow. There ain't a battle over NAFTA. That's a fucking charade like our elections are a fucking charade. And tomorrow, ladies and gentlemen, they're selling your fucking life out from under you" (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*). Whereas decisions regarding domestic and foreign policy are made and implemented by corporate power manifesting through political structures, the populace is left with merely the charade of political participation.

As a corollary to both the anti-intellectualism and the hostility to analytical critique discussed above, cultural fascism relies on an overt rejection of liberalism in general and socialism in particular. In a telephone interview with a college radio deejay,

Hicks mocks the argument offered by a number of conservative commentators in the

early 1990s that university students are brainwashed by liberal professors:

> These liberals! They want people to eat! They believe the earth supplies enough
> for everyone to live comfortably without having to work for it and without having
> a rich father to give it to you! Can you believe these liberals?! They think we
> should take care of the planet!... They think women should be individuals!... They
> believe we shouldn't have the right to kill anyone we want! (*Bill Hicks, telephone
> interview*)

While admittedly an exaggerated and unrepresentative perspective on the intentions of

conservative commentators, this excerpt is important because it displays Hicks's

understanding of the similarities between American culture in the early 1990s and the

fundamental characteristics of fascism. This is not to suggest that conservatives are

inherently fascist, but rather to suggest that certain cultural undercurrents as expressed by

conservative commentators at that time do contain elements of fascist ideology. Hicks's

role as a comedian facilitates the use of such exaggeration in his attempts to expose

fascist power as it manifests in contemporary American culture.

Another characteristic of fascism that finds expression in the comedy of Bill

Hicks is the legislative intrusion into private life. For Hicks, this interference is best

exemplified by the War on Drugs- a legislative initiative of the Reagan administration

characterized by a no-tolerance law enforcement policy in regards to personal substance

use. The War on Drugs, which Hicks characterizes as a "war against your civil liberties"

(McCree, 1993/2004, p. 185), is indicative of how illogical and pathologically inertial

American society has become. While drugs that grow naturally (e.g. marijuana and

psilocybin) and have never resulted in a single provable death remain illegal, the two

most fatal drugs (i.e. tobacco and alcohol) are not only legal but also (to some degree)

socially acceptable (*Bill Hicks, last show*). Furthermore, the severe prison sentences

employed as a deterrent against illicit substance use have not, in fact, led to a decrease in rates of substance use.

In "Talking Car," Hicks begins by relating an incident in which he and a friend are detained by police officers while on an LSD trip. This anecdote serves as the set-up for Hicks's ultimate point regarding drug laws: "I would not come out of jail wanting to do less drugs. I would wanna come out mainlining heroin into my fucking eyeball. I don't know the case yet that jail healed anybody. Okay? Okay, America? Wake up from your law enforcement fucking fantasy" (Hicks, 2000). For Hicks, this law enforcement fantasy is the central issue regarding legislative interference into personal life.

In "I.R.S. Bust," Hicks expands on this theme in a discussion of the television show *COPS*- a program that shows actual footage of law enforcement personnel detaining, arresting, and incarcerating people. Hicks admits a perverse personal affinity for the program, but notes that (as with *American Gladiators*) the actual reason for programming such as *COPS* has nothing to do with entertainment. "They show you shows like fucking *COPS* so you know that state power will win and bust your house down… That is the message they want to leave you with to keep you afraid and impotent" (Hicks, 1997b). In Hicks's understanding of American society, regulating personal behavior with threats of incarceration is an acknowledgement by the corporate/political elite that individuals themselves are the threat to oppressive power. Individual human behavior is a form of resistant power.

This acknowledgement of individual resistant power directly relates to the manichaean worldview at the core of fascism- one that portrays existence as a struggle between fundamentally opposing, mutually exclusive forces characterized as *good* and

evil. Such a worldview necessitates a rhetorical strategy of opposition to an ill-defined and ever-shifting external or (when necessary) internal enemy. Hicks exposes this worldview in discussing how the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War created a rhetorical abyss for elite power in the United States (Hicks, 2004a). In order to perpetuate fear among the American population and prevent internal threats to the status quo, the corporate and political elite present a rotating stock of villains from Manuel Noriega (Hicks, 2005a) to Saddam Hussein (Hicks 1992b, 1997a, 2000, 2004c) to drugs (*Bill Hicks, last show*; Hicks 1990, 2000) to David Koresh and the Branch Davidians (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*; *CapZeyeZ interview*).

According to Booth & Bertin (2004), the government siege of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, was a pivotal moment for Bill Hicks. During the siege, Hicks and his friend Kevin Booth gained access to the press area surrounding the compound using Booth's public access television credentials. While there, they filmed a mock news report in a cow pasture near the compound (*Bill Hicks talking outside Waco*). Days after Hicks and Booth returned to Houston, the standoff at Waco ended with the incineration of the compound resulting in the deaths of a number of Branch Davidians, including unarmed women and children.

In several performances, Hicks denounces the official government story that the siege was in response to reports of child abuse and the stockpiling of weapons at the compound. In the routine "Waco (Koresh)," Hicks again draws from his obsessive absorption of news content to point out that, although the Clinton administration claimed children were being abused and molested at the Branch Davidian compound, not one child from the compound actually claimed molestation or abuse Hicks, 1997b). Hicks

further dismantles the official story by posing the question, "if [government accusations concerning child abuse and molestation are] true, how come we don't see Bradley tanks knocking down Catholic churches?" (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*). During an appearance on Austin public access television, Hicks persuades the host of the program to air footage from the siege, which (according to Hicks) never aired on corporate-owned news channels (*CapZeyeZ interview*). It shows tanks apparently shooting fire into the Branch Davidian compound. If accurate, this footage further dismantles the official government story that the fire, which destroyed the compound and resulted in the deaths of those inside, was started from inside the compound while government tanks were merely shooting tear gas.[45]

For Hicks, the tragedy at Waco has nothing to do with concerns over child welfare or the stockpiling of weapons. It is instead evidence of a fascist government propagating fear through the destruction of aberrant behavior and beliefs. Furthermore, it highlights the need of fascism to define itself against an ill-defined and ever-shifting enemy- be it David Koresh, Saddam Hussein, psychoactive substances, or terrorism. The end of the Cold War rendered obsolete the rhetorical value of the Soviet Union as an enemy to American political and corporate interests and necessitated the creation of replacements. As noted by Hicks (2004a), the logical extreme of such a worldview culminates in the defining of Americans themselves as the enemies of America:

> Our next Cold War ought to be with ourselves. We're the logical choice. After all, who possesses the biggest danger to the American environment- we do. Who's responsible for our venal and corrupt government- we are. Besides, we could save

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[45] It is not my intention to make any claims regarding the accuracy of this footage or of Hicks's claims that no child from the compound claimed molestation. They are cited due to their contribution to Hicks's understanding of the events that occurred at the Branch Davidian compound.

money if we were our own worst enemy- for instance, the Hotline would become a local call. And if you thought McCarthyism in the 50's was irrational, think of the fun we could have asking Americans if they are or ever have been An American… So turn those missiles around 180 degrees and remember- Better Dead Than Us. (p. 239)

The ultimate goal of fascism, whether Classical or cultural, is the totalization of itself as a dominant social code capable of determining the meanings and values of individual human experience. For this to occur, a cultural monopoly of homogenization is necessary, the existence of which is dependent upon an economic ideology capable of expanding and reproducing the logic of the fascist code through the production of cultural forms. As communicated by the comedy of Bill Hicks, that economic ideology is global corporate capitalism.

Capitalism and Culture Industries

Capitalism (as a construct of human cognition) is ultimately imaginary. "Money doesn't buy you *anything*, it's an illusion. If there was no money on this planet there wouldn't be any less food" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 89). Economic ideologies do not provide the basic necessities for human survival, nor do they foster the creative capabilities of humans to facilitate individual and communal evolution. To assert that capitalism is ultimately imaginary is not to suggest, however, that it does not produce material consequences. The competitive drive for profit that lies at the core of capitalist ideology creates and perpetuates a system that reproduces oppressive power through political, economic, and social relationships and structures. Through comedy, Bill Hicks consistently addresses the material manifestations of capitalism in the attempt to expose the ultimate falsity underlying this ideology.

As noted in the discussion of cultural fascism, capitalist ideology manifests politically as corporatism- a system in which the purpose and functioning of government are directed towards the enactment of corporate will at expense of the public interest. Privatization and deregulation of business and finance are accompanied by the evisceration of social programs, resulting in the unequal distribution of wealth and general economic instability. In *Sane Man*, Hicks (2005b) criticizes the domestic consequences of corporate capitalism; while a routine from *Salvation* extends Hicks's (2005a) criticism to global affairs. The capitalist world as portrayed in these performances is one in which Shell and Diet Coke choose the next President of the United States while death squads eliminate Hondurans "so Pepsi can put a plant down there" (Hicks, 2005a). All the while, the "old boys club" in Washington D.C. enjoys "kickbacks and payoffs from major corporations" and idles away a life of leisure by selling "freedom of speech to the highest bidder" (Hicks, 2004a, pp. 288-291).

Capitalism, as expressed in the comedy of Bill Hicks, represents an advanced form of colonialism that often relies on military force to promote its interests. More effective than military force, however, is the reproduction of scarcity engendered by consumption. Hicks exposes the effects of this strategic method of capitalist power in "Waco (Koresh)" by noting that the fetishism of products is turning America into "a Third World consumer fucking plantation" (Hicks, 1997b). Rather than offering the fulfillment suggested in product advertising, consumption actually produces the scarcity that results in the oppressive power of economic hierarchy. The comparison of America with the Third World also highlights the effects of a globalized capitalist economic system. Hicks (2004a) addresses this specifically when noting that "we are pushing the

number one killer drug in the world [tobacco] to unsuspecting Third World nations with

the same glossy, enticing advertising that was used on US in the fifties" (p. 266). This

example of companies profiting from death in the form of cigarettes not only exposes the

consequences of global capitalism-as-colonialism, but also points to the role of

advertising in reproducing a fascist social code.

Of all the manifestations of capitalist ideology, Hicks reserves his greatest ire for

advertising, which he views as the most evil concept ever created. In *Arizona Bay* (Hicks,

1997b) and *Revelations* (Hicks, 2004d), Hicks repeatedly implores any audience

members who happen to be in marketing or advertising to kill themselves because there is

no rationalization for their professional activities. In response to laughter from the

audiences, Hicks insists that he is not joking. In personal writings, Hicks (2004a) even

goes so far as to suggest that the most painful levels of hell are reserved for bureaucrats,

arms dealers, child molesters, bankers, landlords, *advertisers*, and *marketing executives*.

This violent aversion to advertising is not simply a discursive device. In an

interview with Len Blezer, Hicks recounts calls he received from advertising executives:

> 'Who's your commercial agent.'
> 'I don't have one.'
> 'You don't? Why?'
> 'Because I don't do commercials.' (*Len Belzer interview*)

Though offered commercial deals by a number of companies, Hicks rejected them all out

of an intense desire to not "be another voice yelling at you to buy something" (*Len Belzer*

interview).

In the routine "Orange Drink," Hicks recounts an actual offer from a company in

Britain to record a television commercial for a product called Orange Drink. Hicks

responds to the offer by saying, "I'm not a salesman and I don't need money that is built

on blood" (Hicks, 1997b). The ridiculousness of such an offer is made apparent when Hicks pretends to actually be in the commercial that was offered: "You know, when I'm done ranting about elite power that rules this planet under a totalitarian government that uses the media in order to keep people stupid, my throat gets parched" (Hicks, 1997b). Hicks's refusal to endorse products comes from a highly-developed personal framework of ethical responsibility that refuses to compromise with the rituals of capitalism in its transformation of the world into the "third mall from the sun" (Hicks, 1990). As Hicks so bluntly states in an interview with McCree (1993/2004), "profit should be against the law" (p. 186).

As a competitive rather than cooperative economic system, capitalism is fundamentally anti-democratic. The methods of free-market economic ideology force individuals and societies to constantly consume the homogenized relics of mass production, thereby marginalizing and reducing alternatives to the fascist social code. For Bill Hicks, this consequence of consumption is most evident in the role mass media- as the cultural manifestations of capitalism- play in contemporary American society. In Hicks's comedy, the role of culture industries in enabling capitalism to expand a fascist social code is most often exposed through discussions about television programming and mainstream news.

When Hicks's appearance on *Late Show with David Letterman* was initially censored, the producers of the show told Hicks it was due to a problem with CBS Standards and Practices (Lahr, 1993, November 1). Hicks responds, "You have standards and practices? Isn't your company owned by General Electric- an arms dealer who sells weapons to the highest bidder? You have standards?" (*Bill Hicks telephone interview*).

Actual ownership of CBS aside, Hicks's response displays an understanding of the

relationship between corporate power, military expansion, and cultural production. While

the military enables the expansion and totalization of fascist power geopolitically, culture

industries serve the same purpose on the cognitive front.

Shared Mental Environment

Through the medium of television, the fascist social code creates and expands a

shared mental environment geared towards the deformation of reality. Referring to

television as "Lucifer's dreambox" (Lahr, 1993, November 1, para. 9), Hicks recognizes

the severe psychic and emotional toll that the world as represented on television exacts

from human consciousness. "No wonder we feel so confused, afraid, and out of control

when this is the reflection presented to us as 'life'" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 269). The ultimate

purpose of cultural forms such as television is not to provide entertainment or fulfillment,

but to generate advertising revenues for the corporations that own media outlets, thereby

expanding the economic power of the fascist social code.

As noted in the discussion of relevant literature, oppressive power can only be

resisted through an alteration of code. Altering content does not produce resistant power.

Particularly in discussions about television programming, Hicks takes the content

communicated by culture industries and imbues it with alternative meanings and values.

Rather than changing the content, Hicks uses the same content as the fascist social code

(e.g. popular culture forms, news, etc.) to serve as an indictment against the code. In the

smokescreen provided by television programming and cultural issues, Hicks sees

"mindless, unfulfilling titillation" (Hicks, 2002) designed to serve as "bad drugs that

deaden the mind and drive a wedge between our conscious and unconscious minds, and

between ourselves and each other, and between us and them, and between us and the experiencing of Life itself" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 264). Hicks utilizes the content (i.e. cultural forms) of the fascist social code to enact resistant power through the manipulation of meaning and value, thus providing an alternative social code. Specific evidence for this assertion is found in several performances in which Hicks begins by joking that his desire for knowledge and information leads him to watch twenty hours a day of CNN news coverage (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*; Hicks, 1992b, 2000, 2004c, 2005a).

The news content presented on CNN portrays for Hicks a world of ceaseless "war, death, famine, AIDS, homeless, recession, depression, deficit, drought, flood, earthquake, fire;" yet when Hicks opens his window, he hears nothing but crickets chirping and ponders, "Where's all this shit happening? I think Ted Turner's making this shit up" (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*). Although these events do occur in the world, Hicks's point is that the incessant barrage of images provided by the 24-hour news cycle presents an representation of the world that only serves to distort our perceptive abilities (Hicks, 1997a). Hicks also sees this malformation of perception evidenced in the use of public opinion polls.

In one performance, Hicks cites a poll in which, although 70% of those polled disapproved of President George H. W. Bush, 70% also claimed that they would re-elect him. Hicks jokes that one of the questions presented in the poll must have read, "Do you think George Bush- a good Christian white man- should send troops to Iraq to stem the brown Islamic tide from… coming over here and fucking your daughter?" (Hicks, 2005a). For Hicks, this poll demonstrates the manipulation of public opinion to achieve consensus while also exposing the pathological inertia of ideosis.

Further support for this assertion is found in an essay in which Hicks discusses the role of news media in serving as mouthpiece for elite political/economic power:

> From the 'inhuman savagery' of Native Americans, to the unchallenged 'he's a Hitler' statement regarding Saddam Hussein, perhaps we're just a little tired of having our emotional chain yanked by you agenda-setting wastrels… Bosnia-Herzegovina conveniently took center stage in your nightly newscast just as the Iraq War petered out and George Bush slinked away defeated. It's most impressive how this thousand-year-old conflict only recently became headline news… I guess you had to wait for the discovery of America and then the invention of television in order for the images you pass on [to] be extremely graphic and appalling, and therefore, hopefully, insuring [sic] an end to this now Vital conflict. (Hicks, 2004a, pp. 233-234)

From this perspective, news reports regarding world events are intentionally framed to present an image of the world as a series of problems with no solutions. The content of the fascist social code is designed to perpetuate fear and confusion as means of control.

For Hicks, the expansion of the fascist social code is nowhere more evident than in the cultural phenomenon of celebrity endorsements. In the routines "We Live in a Dangerous World" and "Drugs Have Done Good Things," Hicks rails against rock musicians who endorse products (Hicks, 1997a, 2000). In *Revelations*, Hicks (2004d) performs a routine in which celebrities such as George Michael, Vanilla Ice, and MC Hammer- all of whom had appeared in commercials for various products- taking turns fellating Satan in return for fifteen minutes of fame. For Hicks, these celebrities represent the "fevered egos" (Hicks, 1997b) of a "Reagan wet dream" (Hicks, 1990) carried to its logical extreme by advertising executives and the producers of television content.

Because television represents the equivalent of "taking black paint to your third eye" (Hicks, 1997b), the producers of television content are given no quarter by Hicks:

> I've lost count of how many times I've been in a 'creative' meeting in Los Angeles, and after pitching an idea for a show heard the following statement: 'That's very funny, but do you think it will play in the Mid-West?' As though the

Mid-West were this vast wasteland filled with bib-overall wearing bumpkins whose intellectual level and comprehension could only be satisfied with 'American Gladiators' or 'Love Connection'… I've played the Mid-West… The people there are quite intelligent, well read, thoughtful, reasonable folks, just like most people I meet every day, everywhere, all over the world. But no wonder there's an evergrowing sense of disenfranchisement, apathy, and cynicism in our country… We're all tuned in to the real drug of this country- television- brought to us by an elite class of 'unique' and 'special' people who find the dirty herd beneath contempt, and only there really to buy the useless products created to fill the imaginary 'wants' television really hawks between hours of puerile programming… At least drug dealers have enough shame to lurk on street corners and in alleyways, and not come over the tube into our homes. (Hicks, 2004a, pp. 264-265)

In "Goodbye You Lizard Scum," Hicks ruminates on a time when an earthquake finally destroys Los Angeles and drowns the "reptiles" responsible for television programming, leaving only the "cool, beautiful serenity that is Arizona Bay (Hicks, 1997a). According to True (2002), Hicks often walked out of meetings with these television executives and producers. In a number of television interviews (*Bill Hicks interviewed by Jonathon Ross*; *Bill Hicks on Clive Anderson*), Hicks expresses frustration with the interviewer and the television format. During an interview, Clive Anderson asks Bill if he is off drugs, to which Hicks replies, "Not since this show" (*Bill Hicks on Clive Anderson*).

Although the very facts that Hicks appeared on television and took meetings with television executives in the first place might seem contradictory or hypocritical, it instead represents an individual attempting to make conscious use of the methods of administration for the purposes of creating something other than administered culture. For all his cynicism, Hicks believed in the ability of individuals to alter existence for the better. This belief is also apparent in the fact the Hicks made eleven appearances on *Late Night with David Letterman*. Although he was prouder of his gig at the 1990 Adult Video Awards than of his appearances on television (Booth & Bertin, 2005), Hicks viewed his

Letterman appearances as a way to contribute to the betterment of popular culture through mass media exposure. Of course, the censorship of Hicks's final performance for *Letterman* stands as evidence that Hicks was unsuccessful in this attempt, at least in the short-term.

Lahr (1993, November 1) writes that while the producers of *Letterman* claimed the decision to censor Hicks came from CBS's Standards & Practices due to concerns about offending the viewing audience, the actual reason become apparent to Hicks while watching an episode of *Letterman* the following week. During the broadcast, a paid advertisement appeared for a pro-life group. Hicks's routine for *Letterman* included a reference to pro-life groups. Hicks had joked that if pro-life groups were really committed to the premise of protecting life, "they should lock arms and block cemeteries" (*Bill Hicks, last show*). From Hicks's perspective, his censoring had nothing to do with offending the viewing public, but rather with offending and (consequently) losing the profits offered by advertisers. Furthermore, Hicks later learned that although the producers of *Letterman* claimed the censorship was ordered by CBS's Standards & Practices, the decision to censor the performance was actually made by David Letterman himself.

Ironically, Hicks's censorship led to a number of offers to appear on other television programs. After a decade of performing in virtual anonymity, Hicks was offered appearances by Jay Leno, Arsenio Hall, Charlie Rose, and Dateline NBC (True, 2002). Hicks rejected every offer except one from Howard Stern's radio program. The only television appearance Hicks ever made between his censorship on *Letterman* and his death was on a late-night music video program aired on Austin public access (*CapZeyeZ*

interview). Though Hicks could have capitalized on his sudden notoriety by accepting

these television offers, he instead went back on tour, performing for live audiences the

exact routine that had gotten him censored. At a show in Los Angeles, Hicks performed

the set verbatim as recorded for *Letterman* then proceeded to explain his own thoughts

about the censorship:

> They felt you- the audience- are too stupid to know that these are jokes or to have
> material on it that might have ideas associated with them other than, 'Boy, food
> on airplanes sucks, don't it?'… or any number of other stupid, banal, trite, puerile
> jokes… so that they can keep you without any kind of social fucking awareness
> and keep us separate from each other… Do you understand how much contempt
> the networks have for us to put on that puerile bullshit and not give me- not just
> me- but anyone else with a point of view perhaps, maybe even one you don't
> agree with- on television? They kowtow to special interest groups and a couple of
> deranged motherfucking people who hear the word 'Jesus' and immediately think
> you're making fun of Jesus… They think you're too stupid to see through that and
> that's exactly what they fucking count on while they fucking sell the Number
> Two killer drug in this country- fucking alcohol- and they have the gall to do it in
> your fucking living room with your children there… And here's the punchline to
> the whole story… 'Bill, we [the producers of *Letterman*] really love you and we
> want you back in a couple of weeks.' 'Really, I don't know if I can learn to juggle
> that quickly. Hi, I'm Bill Hicks. I used to have a social conscience and wanna
> help the world by trying to point out how our belief systems are affecting us
> negatively. Now watch this- an apple!' (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*)

In this single tirade, Hicks exposes not only the relationship between economic ideology

and mass culture, but also the experiential manifestations of such a relationship- a shared

mental environment of falsity and illusion in which variation and divergence are wiped

out by corporate power operating through cultural homogenization. This shared mental

environment represents the totalization of fascist power as enacted through the capitalist

production of cultural forms operating as a dominant social code.

In the comedy of Bill Hicks, the fascist ideosis manifests as a "cloud of guilt and

shame that shrouds this planet" (Hicks, 2004a, pp. 227)- a shared mental environment

directed by ideology as bound to social code. Institutions fail because they are no longer

relevant to actual existence (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*). Fundamentalism breeds an ironic void in which learned beliefs perpetuate illusory economic and political structures (Hicks, 1997b). The threat of damnation for the crime of disbelief actualizes a self-fulfilling prophecy of that damnation (Hicks, 1997a, 2004a), creating a hellish existence in which individuals are rendered incapable of trusting or even believing in their own experience (Hicks, 1990). The legacy of this existence is reduced to fear, reprisal, denial, and ignorance- a framework of misperception operating as the inverted parody of a collective dream (Hicks, 1997, 2004a). In "News/Movies/Religion," Hicks portrays the logical extreme of this collective nightmare as a world in which armored delivery cars shoot pizzas through mail slots because the "completely neutered and docile fucking consumer community" refuses to leave their houses out of fear of being attacked by AIDS-infected pit bulls (Hicks, 2005a).

This shared sense of irrationality represents the internalization of elite values operating as an unconscious social logic that reproduces the hierarchical domination of fascist and capitalist ideologies. Through the omnipresence of media discourse, these ideologies simulate communication through propaganda, disinformation, and orders. The social code manifest through this media discourse relies on conformism, isolation, and surveillance to actualize an eternal present divorced from context. Ultimately, mass media represent the semiotic privilege of the fascist ideosis- the mastery of the process of signification that enables oppressive power to control and dominate the mutation and evolution of individual and communal consciousness.

In the comedy of Bill Hicks, the fascist ideosis is represented metaphorically in "The Ride" as a rollercoaster at an amusement park. This routine serves not only as an

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apt metaphor for the fascist ideosis, but also as an appropriate segue into an analysis of

anarchism as communicated through the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks:

> The world is like a ride at an amusement park. And when you choose to go on it, you think that it's real because that's how powerful our minds are. And the ride goes up and down and 'round and 'round. It has thrills and chills, and it's very brightly colored, and it's very loud and it's fun, for a while. Some people have been on the ride for a long time, and they begin to question- is this real, or is this just a ride? And other people have remembered, and they come back to us. They say, 'Hey! Don't worry, don't be afraid, ever, because this is just a ride.' And we… kill those people… 'Shut him up! We have a lot invested in this ride. Shut him up! Look at my furrows of worry. Look at my big bank account and my family. This just has to be real.'… It's just a ride. (Hicks, 2004d)

<div align="center">Revoevolution</div>

"There's no archetype for what I do. I have to create it, or uncover it" (Bill Hicks,

quoted in Lahr, 1993, November1, para. 29). The striving for liberation from oppressive

power as manifest in the fascist ideosis requires the individual will to experiment, to push

beyond the boundaries demarcated by the political and economic ideologies that

dominate contemporary society. Resistant power is the power of the individual to actively

manipulate signs in the determination of meanings and values independent of the

dominant social code, the power to take oneself as an autonomous subject without

concern for historical missions or transcendental guarantees. As such, resistant power

often manifests as the revoevolutionary will to anarchy.

Anarchism/Anarchy

Though the advanced form of anarchism discussed herein utterly rejects dogmatic

reliance on ideological assumptions or unalterable tenets, it does display a limited

number of unifying philosophical commitments and ethical guidelines. Anarchism

reflects the desire for human liberation from hierarchy, domination, authority, and

representation through a commitment to the primacy of individuals *with* other individuals

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in organic communities of self-management. It is posited that this commitment fosters the material actualization of human intellect for the mutual evolution of all. Based on this perspective, theory *is* practice- the practice of communicative action as the continual interrogation of social constructs. Such action manifests through multiple localized and irreducible strategies. Within the context of the fascist ideosis, the primary strategies of this form of anarchism are: 1) the systematic development of enhanced individual subjective consciousnesses; and 2) the insurrectionary communication of subjugated knowledges. These strategies (for the purposes of the argument at hand) manifest tactically in raids on consensus reality through the manipulation of cultural forms and symbols.

Based on the presupposition that a paradigmatic shift in collective consciousness is the precondition for success beyond the micro- level, this form of anarchy is fundamentally a manifestation of micropolitics, albeit one that is capable of presenting an informed critique of macro-level manifestations of oppressive power. This union of micro-level tactics with an understanding of macro-level phenomena represents radical organizational theory as the revolutionary practice of resistant power. Through an analysis of both the comedy and lifestyle choices of Bill Hicks, a localized, contextually-situated example of resistant power is offered.

Anarchism in Hicks's comedy.

The overarching political philosophy of Bill Hicks (2004a) is terse and simple: "I believe that as long as you don't harm another person, or get in the way of their freedom, ALL THINGS should be legal and available" (p. 227). While philosophers and political theorists alike have produced volumes on what constitutes anarchism, this single

utterance serves as effective a definition as any offered by more voluble commentators

(myself included). This philosophy is expressed in a number of routines in which Hicks

advocates legalizing all drugs (Hicks, 2005a), discarding societal restrictions against

healthy yet socially aberrant sexual behavior (Hicks, 1989), refusing to engage in wage

labor (Hicks, 2004b), and taking LSD trips instead of family vacations (Hicks, 2000),

while also suggesting that (if some rules are, in fact, necessary), profit should be made

illegal (Hicks, 2004a). In 1993, Hicks was nominated for Best Male Stand-Up at the

American Comedy Awards. His write-up for the awards ceremony program reads:

"Pornography is good. All drugs should be legal. War is wrong. The rich get richer. The

poor get poorer. Thank you I'll be here all week" (quoted in True, 2002, p. 198).

In "The Elephant Is Dead (Bush)," Hicks explicitly identifies himself with the

resistant power of anarchism by comparing himself and his friends to a tribe of guerrilla

pygmies shooting poison darts of comic invective at the elephantine figure of the Reagan

and Bush administrations. This perspective is reinforced in "As Long As We're Talking

Shelf Life (Kennedy)," in which Hicks pokes fun at the common cultural perceptions

regarding anarchists:

> [The Warren Commission] is a great example of how the totalitarian government
> who rules this planet partitions out information in such a way that we, the masses,
> are forced to base our conclusions on erroneous… Oh, I'm sorry, wrong
> meeting… I thought this was the meeting at the docks. No? Oh, shit. That's
> tomorrow night. (Hicks, 1997a)

While identifying Hicks as an anarchist, this routine also highlights one of the

fundamental problems with aligning oneself with anarchism- the common cultural

perception that anarchists are advocates of revolution who have to meet in secret in order

to plan their acts of violence. This is simply not the case with the particular form of

anarchism advocated by Hicks- a form alternately referred to as "Gentle Anarchy" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 227) or "intellectual anarchy" (Lahr, 1993, November 1, para. 11). Such a political philosophy closely resembles Ontological Anarchy, a form of anarchy that encourages the systematic cultivation of enhanced consciousness, as well as the destruction of patterns of ordered perception to arrive at direct experience in furtherance of material change in social relationships. This form of anarchy manifests not in traditional revolutionary action or violent confrontation, but rather in the guerrilla insurgency of thought (Hicks, 1997b).

The anarchism advocated by Hicks represents a rejection of ideological adherence to any external framework that arrogantly offers itself as the only proper perspective on existence (Hicks, 1997a). As Hicks (2004d) notes in *Revelations*, "I appreciate your quaint traditions and superstitions. I, on the other hand, am an evolved human being who deals solely with the source of light which exists in all of our hearts." In *Arizona Bay*, Hicks (1997a) repeats this assertion while adding that this source of light and reason also "exists in all of us in our minds- no middleman required." There is no need for an external framework of interpretation because "the Voice of Reason is in us all, and it is the *same voice* that is in us all. And when it is voiced, it is heard by all and everyone can recognize it, because it *makes* sense, and *everyone* benefits from it… equally" (Hicks, 2004a, pp. 221-222). This rejection of external frameworks manifests in the reliance on personal, individual interpretations of experience guided by both a willingness to learn from the experiences of others and an openness to being proved wrong (Hicks, 2004a). Hicks's statements also communicate a rejection of representation, this rejection being one of the defining characteristics of poststructuralist anarchism.

Furthermore, Hicks's statements regarding an internal voice of reason that exists in each individual introduce his overall message concerning human cognition. For Hicks, the evolutionary imperative facing humanity in the contemporary era is not biological or societal in nature. It is, in fact, psychological and spiritual:

> Evolution did not end with us growing opposable thumbs. We are always evolving and will evolve until we realize the true nature of our reality… [T]he reason we're troubled is we are undergoing evolution and people don't understand that. All our institutions have failed us. All ideas have failed us and people are fearful and are clinging now to even older ideas, are clinging to ideas that no longer work… It's time to evolve ideas. That's where we're at. We have to evolve ideas [and ideals]. (*Bill Hicks, last show*)

In pursuance of cognitive evolution, Hicks advocates an anarchic approach to thought and lived experience. Hicks's intellectual anarchism represents a return to older, more gnostic precursors of anarchist political theory.[46] The true imperative of revoevolution is not revolution, but radical spiritual and cognitive evolution enabled by the development of an internal framework of logic. Ultimately, the potential for resistant power resides within each individual's willingness to determine meanings and values independent of the dominant social code.

This is not to suggest that individuals must rely solely on themselves. During performances, Hicks frequently fosters discursive communicative action by questioning audiences and asking for their input, claiming that "when you talk these things out [with other individuals], they become a little clearer, don't they? That's called logic and it'll help *us all* evolve and get on the fucking spaceships and get out of here!" [emphasis added] (Hicks, 1990). Individual cognitive evolution, while based in the development of an internal, subjective framework of interpretation, is reliant on cooperative interaction

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[46] As with use of the term *manichaean* in these pages, the term *gnostic* is presented as a common noun in order to separate its usage here from any specific religious doctrine.

with other individuals. Quite frequently, the striving for cognitive evolution is expressed by Hicks through the metaphor of alien spaceships. While Hicks uses aliens to expose the xenophobic undercurrent of fascism, alien spaceships represent the vehicle for advancement beyond the world as expressed in the fascist ideosis.

Although desiring of communal evolution, Hicks rejects any humanistic idealism. In the routine "You're Children Aren't Special," Hicks lays bare the hypocrisy of humanism and its fascistic worship of youth by pointing out that childbirth is not a miracle, it is a chemical process akin to digesting food. From Hicks's perspective, the fact that only one sperm (out of hundreds of millions per a single ejaculation) is capable of fertilizing an egg is evidence that childbirth is not nearly as miraculous as portrayed (Hicks, 1997b). Hicks uses this point to highlight how the aggrandizement of childbirth and youth only serve to marginalize other segments of the population while also preventing the maturation of humanity as a species. Rather than getting in touch with one's inner child (a popular culture mantra during the early 1990s), Hicks suggests getting "in touch with your outer adult" (*Bill Hicks on the Dennis Miller Show*).

The comedic constructions of Bill Hicks ultimately represent the formation of a personal mythscape, the creation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone in which both Hicks and his audiences can experience in the present the psychological liberation that is the promise of anarchism. Through the intentional manipulation of signs, Hicks revalues existence and imparts new meanings to the worn-out relics of a world in the process of self-liquidation. This liberation is expressed in a number of routines, most notably "The Vision" (Hicks, 1990), "Sheep and the Message" (Hicks, 2005a), and the closing minutes of *Revelations* (Hicks, 2004d):

In the blink of an eye, we can have Heaven on Earth. It's a choice. That's all it is. There is… no need to go any farther. We know it now. It is all here. It's all clear. It's all right now. It's a choice. You can look through the eyes of fear. You can look through the eyes of love… The eyes of fear is insanity- it's not really there. The eyes of love are the only real eyes… All that money we spend on weapons and defense every year- that money we spend on buying bigger locks and more fucking cops. Instead, if we spent that money feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the world, which it would pay for many times over- not one human being excluded- we could, as one race, explore outer [and inner] space together in peace… forever. (Hicks, 2005a)

As expressed in this routine, the equitable enactment of power is possible with current means. Societies designed for the mutual benefit of *all* can exist once the fascist enactment of a capitalist system is discarded. It merely requires a radical shift in human cognition to realize that the world as presented through the fascist ideosis is imaginary, that the rituals of capitalism create the scarcity they claim to alleviate. Furthermore, the casting off of this illusion (while a frightening proposition to many) is all that is required to realize and actualize the intellectual and spiritual potential of humanity.

Anarchy in Hicks's lifestyle.

The communication of revoevolutionary power is not only evident in Hicks's comedy, but also in his lifestyle choices. Rather than simply manifesting as a discursive construct, anarchy constitutes the guiding principle of the life of Bill Hicks. Evidence for such an assertion is found in biographies about Hicks written by Booth & Bertin (2005) and True (2002), as well as documentaries (*Bill Hicks came 6th in recent TV poll*; *Bill Hicks outlaw comic documentary*; Edwards, 1994), performances (*Bill Hicks Adult Video Awards 1990*; *Bill Hicks channels Mick Jagger*; *Bill Hicks Edinburgh Festival*; *Bill Hicks hates hecklers*; *Bill Hicks- nothing goes right*; *Bill Hicks performs for deaf crowd*; *Bill Hicks vs. heckler*; *Freebird!*; Hicks, 1992a, 1997a, 2004d), writings (Hicks, 2004a), home video and audio recordings (*Bill Hicks & Dwight Slade audio recording 1976*; *Bill*

Hicks- backstage; *Bill Hicks- ninja Bachelor Party*; *Bill Hicks singing for Arizona Bay*;

Bill Hicks talking outside Waco; *Ninja Bachelor Party trailer*), interviews (*Bill Hicks*

interview BBC2 1992; *Bill Hicks- it's just f*cking television*; *Bill Hicks on David*

Letterman censorship; *Bill Hicks Scottish radio interview*; *Bill Hicks- the evolution of an*

idea; *Bill Hicks- Untied States of Advertising*; *CapZeyeZ interview*; *Len Belzer*

interview), and a pilot for a television show (*Bill Hicks manifesto for Counts of the*

Netherworld; *Bill Hicks pilot of Counts of the Netherworld*).

As noted by his lifelong friend Kevin Booth, Hicks's dominant personality traits

were a lack of timidity and restraint, along with an intense drive to experience everything

(Booth & Bertin, 2005). These traits often manifested in a refusal to wait for permission

or resources. "Use what you have and start right now," was a favorite mantra of Hicks

(quoted in Booth & Bertin, 2005, p. 26). Such an anarchic approach to life is particularly

recognizable in Hicks's perspective on religion. Able to understand the fundamental

connections between various religious texts (e.g. the *Bible* and the *Bhagavad Gita*) while

also maintaining a willingness to hold multiple, seemingly contradictory religious beliefs,

Hicks displays an openness to the subjective multiplicity of consciousness and experience

(Booth & Bertin, 2005; True, 2002). From Hicks's perspective, the choosing of one path

over another is entirely dependent on context and does not result in the invalidation of

other paths (True, 2002). This perspective was enacted in the lifestyle of Bill Hicks a

number of ways- from experimenting with sensory deprivation, meditation, fasting, and

vegetarianism (Hicks once went several months eating only rice and beans) (True, 2002)

to the experiencing of telepathic "insect consciousness" while tripping on psilocybin

mushrooms (Booth & Bertin, 2005, p. 214).

Such an approach to life extended beyond the merely philosophical into the

practical aspects of Hicks's day-to-day lifestyle choices. As noted by Booth & Bertin

(2005), Hicks never had a phone, never paid his bills, and (through his status as a local

celebrity with the Outlaw Comics) scammed a free apartment in the Houston House high-

rise. Hicks (2002) considered rent a legal form of mugging, once telling an interviewer,

"I'm residing inside these clothes" (*CapZeyeZ interview*). When asked by an interviewer

what type of vehicle he owned, Hicks (2004a) replied "a left foot and a right foot" (p.

96). True (2002) also notes that Hicks refused to open a checking account.

These facts can be attributed partially to Hicks's desire to maintain as few

possessions as possible, but also to his refusal to cooperate with the rituals of capitalism

any more than absolutely necessary. Booth & Bertin (2005) recount a particularly telling

performance in which a group of audience members persist in interrupting Hicks's

routines:

> Bill does everything he can to quiet them, knocking them down verbally and
> calling them assholes in clever ways. Nothing worked. Finally, Bill stopped his
> set and says to them: "Look, I've heard this material. These other people can't
> hear. So why don't you shut up?"
> The Arab guys shoot back, "It's her birthday, man. Fuck you and do your act."
> Bill… tells them, "I don't give a fuck if it's her birthday."
> So the Arab peels off [a] $20 bill, throws it at Bill and says, "Do your fucking
> act."
> This sets Bill off… "I don't want your fucking money. You're fucking up the
> show. I don't need your fucking money. Look, I shit $20 bills." So Bill took the
> $20, wiped his ass with it, then threw it back in the guy's face. (p. 121)

For Bill Hicks, the communication of artistic vision is more valuable than money, which

merely represents the excremental waste of capitalist production. Further evidence for

this assertion is found in True (2002), who states that, while living in New York, Hicks

never left his apartment without filling his pockets with loose change to distribute to the

homeless. Hicks (2004a) himself writes that the only disgusting thing about poor people "is that they crave money," insisting that instead of striving for material goods, individuals should "wear [only] blue jeans and T-shirts and eat rice and beans and break every fucking company" (p. 89).

This anarchic approach to existence is further exemplified in Hicks's attitude toward the relationship between his art form and the demands of mass media. Hicks would have appeared on *Letterman* earlier in his career than he actually did except for one particular incident in which Hicks ate LSD with a friend and preferred to spend the day wandering the streets rather than call the *Letterman* producers to finalize arrangements for his appearance on the show (Booth & Bertin, 2005). This displays an anarchic approach to life that values direct immediate experience over the possible future rewards of mass media exposure. After his censorship on *Letterman*, Hicks turned down every offer of television appearances except one.

On October 24, 1993, between 1:30 and 4 am, Hicks appeared on *CapZeyeZ*- a late-night call-in music show airing on public access in Austin, Texas. While Hicks's notoriety from the *Letterman* incident could have generated financial as well as artistic benefits, Hicks had reached a breaking point with corporate-owned media. "I'd rather be here on public access than play to three million yahoos who think they're watching something radical or rebellious" (*CapZeyeZ interview*). During the show, Hicks, the host, and a number of callers discuss foreign policy, censorship, the siege at Waco, and the role of mass media in perpetuating a false representation of the world. In this interview, Hicks displays a comprehensive knowledge of contemporary affairs, but also a willingness to admit when he does not know enough about a subject to comment thoughtfully.

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Hicks appeared on *CapZeyeZ* ostensibly to promote a performance scheduled for the next night at a comedy club in Austin. One caller to the program admits that, although he wants to attend the show, he can not afford the admission price. True to form, Hicks asks for the caller's name then proceeds to add the caller and a friend to the guest list. This incident lends further support to the assertion that, for Bill Hicks, the communication of artistic vision is worth more than money.

Hicks's enactment of anarchism as a practical lifestyle choice is also evidenced in his changing attitudes toward drug use. During the course of his lifetime, Hicks proceeded from an absolute rejection of substance use as a teenager to ritualistic experimentation with psychedelics in his early twenties to drunken, cocaine-fueled excess in his mid- to late twenties to sobriety in his early thirties. Though Hicks did not personally care for the effects of marijuana, it was one of two drugs (including psilocybin mushrooms) whose use he advocated unequivocally (Booth & Bertin, 2005). Additionally, Hicks proceeded from being an avid opponent of tobacco use to "going through two lighters a day" to giving up the habit (Hicks, 1992b, 2004c). This evolving attitude towards substance use displays a desire to experiment with altered states of consciousness, but also a willingness to change perspectives and admit when experimentation has outlived its beneficial use. "A real rebel can face down his habits" (*Len Belzer interview*).

As recounted in Booth & Bertin (2005), Hicks's rebellious attitude towards authority manifested nearly to the point of riotous violence while Hicks and fellow comedian Jack Mark Wilkes were engaged at a club in Bossier City, Louisiana. On the last night of the engagement, plain-clothes and uniformed police officers staked out the

club for the purposes of arresting or at least intimidating the comedians. Such a display of state power, however, only served to fuel the drunken fire in Hicks. During his set, Hicks taunted the police, getting the audience to join him with catcalls. The officers responded by cutting off Hicks's microphone. Hicks responded to this by inciting the audience to sing and yell at the officers. As noted by Wilkes, "We [had] just wagged our butts in the face of their authority and dismissed them as insignificant because we thought we had control over our comedy. That's all we wanted: creative control over our show. They were furious, and they were going to take it out on us" (quoted in Booth & Bertin, 2005, p. 188). When the police officers began to swarm towards the stage, the audience formed a protective barrier around Hicks and Wilkes, keeping the cops at bay until the two comedians could escape the club. Hicks's defiant stance toward state power was not merely a rhetorical device. It was a lifestyle choice for the manifestation of the anarchic will to individual resistant power.

Artistic Methods for Reforming Meaning and Value

Most significant, however, is the manifestation of the anarchic will to individual power within Hicks's creative artistic process. For the album *Arizona Bay*, Hicks (1997a) combines comedy with original music and sound effects to create a soundscape of Los Angeles being destroyed in an earthquake, devolving into mass chaos, and finally sinking into the Pacific Ocean, leaving only the tranquility of the water and the songs of whales in celebration of the final destruction of "the lizard people." Shortly before his death, Hicks (along with collaborator Fallon Woodland) developed a television program for BBC2 in the United Kingdom (*Bill Hicks manifesto for Counts of the Netherworld*; *Bill Hicks pilot of Counts of the Netherworld*; Hicks & Woodland, 2004a, 2004b). Though

Hicks died before the program could be fully developed, what does remain of the program further evidences the actualization of anarchy through the process of artistic creation. The set of the program was intended to represent a salon floating through the universe in which Hicks and Woodland (as the Counts of the Netherworld) activate the conscious awakening of the "Unconscious Collective Mind" (Hicks & Woodland, 2004b, p. 101) through the combination of discursive communicative action, theater, interviews, artistic performances by guests, and edited footage gathered on the streets of various cities (Hicks & Woodland, 2004a).

What lies at the heart of Hicks's work is the recognition that he is using comedy in furtherance of "an Art War. You're either on the side of telling the truth and trying to make the world a better place or you are on the side of selling garbage to people" (as quoted by Steven Doster in Booth & Bertin, 2005, p. 325). For Hicks, the ultimate purpose of comedy is how it can be utilized strategically in the destruction of malign ideas and ideologies, in the furtherance of Poetic Terrorism as tactical manipulations of symbols for the purposes of aesthetic shock and the sabotage of archetypes. Furthermore, Hicks's comedy evidences the dialectical tension between the communicative resources of both oppressive and resistant power. Whereas the failure serious discourse is representative of oppressive power as manifest through propaganda, information, and orders, comedy enables the discursive, logical development and communication of subjugated knowledges as manifestations of resistant power.

As Hicks noted in an interview with theater critic John Lahr, "To me, the comic is the guy who says 'wait a minute' as the consensus forms. He's the antithesis of the mob mentality. The comic is a flame- like Shiva the Destroyer, toppling idols no matter where

they are. He keeps cutting everything back to the moment" (Lahr, 1993, November 1, para. 1). From this perspective, comedy represents the shamanistic ritual escape from the unreality of the world, from the spectacular simulation that is itself more a joke than is comedy (Hicks, 2004a). A proper understanding of this perspective requires a brief discussion as to Hicks's methods for the creation and performance of his comedy.

Two routines provide significant insight into the creative method behind Hicks's comedy. The first, entitled "Great Times on Drugs," expresses Hicks disgust with anti-drug public service announcements being aired in conjunction with commercials for alcoholic beverages. One particular public service announcement cited by Hicks contains a man holding a frying pan and an egg. "This is your brain," states the man in reference to the egg, which he then breaks into the frying pan. As the egg begins to cook, the man states, "This is your brain on drugs." Hicks utilizes the content of the public service announcement, imbuing it with meanings and values alternative to those intended by the announcement's producers:

> [While on drugs, I] never murdered anybody, never robbed anybody, never raped anybody, never beat anybody, never lost a job, a car, a house, a wife or kids, laughed my ass off… and went about my day… Sorry… Now, where's my commercial?... That ain't a brain. That's breakfast. I have seen UFOs split the sky like a sheet, but I have never looked at an egg and thought it was a fucking brain… I have had seven balls of light come off of a UFO, lead me onto their ship, explain to me telepathically that we are all one and there's no such thing as death, but I have never looked at an egg and thought it was a fucking brain… Now, maybe I wasn't getting good shit… What is that, CIA stash?... I'm tripping right now and I still see that is a fucking egg. I see the UFOs around it… There's a hobbit eating it… He is on a unicorn, but they are eating eggs! How dare you have a wino tell me not to do drugs… Alcohol kills more people than crack, cocaine, and heroin combined each year… There are better drugs and better drugs for you… Your denial is beneath you and thanks to the use of hallucinogenic drugs, I see through you. (Hicks, 2000)

This routine evidences the method with which Hicks exposes the dominant social code while also providing an alternative to that code through the reformation of meaning and value. The content provided by the fascist ideosis in furtherance of oppressive power is utilized as an indictment against the dominant social code that liquidates itself through the reproduction of its own illogic to such extremes that ideas themselves become the structures of control.

The second routine that stands as an exemplar of Hicks's creative method is from one of his final performances. While traveling and performing in Australia, Hicks was amused to learn that Australians celebrate Easter in the same fashion as Americans- by telling children that a giant rabbit leaves chocolate eggs during the night. Hicks discusses this tradition to expose how erroneous beliefs recreate a world of simulation and illusion, thus expanding and totalizing the social code that serves as the primary enactment of oppressive power. Hicks points out that, if individuals and societies are going to create beliefs out of imaginative constructs and then act on those beliefs, they should at least put some real imagination into the process. Hicks presents this point through the example of Easter traditions, suggesting that parents should tell their children that goldfish leave Lincoln Logs in their sock drawers because the idea of a goldfish carrying a Lincoln Log across a child's bedroom floor actually contains some miraculous connotations:

> 'Mommy, today I woke up and found a Lincoln Log in my sock drawer.'
> 'That's the story of Jesus.' (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*)

Hicks then considers the absurdity of Jesus reappearing in the form of a rabbit:

> 'Hey, aren't you Jesus?'
> 'No, I'm a fucking rabbit. Shut up. Here's a chocolate egg. That's about all y'all can handle spiritually right now. Could y'all evolve by next Easter? This suit is really fucking itchy.' (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*)

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This routine highlights the absurdity of traditions and beliefs that characterize the dominant social code while also reframing the meanings and values of such traditions and beliefs in order to provide an alternative framework for the interpretation of information.

Evidence of Hicks performative methods is found primarily in an interview conducted with Hicks for BBC2 sometime in the early 1990s, in which Hicks states that he converses with audiences in the same manner as he does with friends in order to strip popular culture of its artifice and provide a space for the discursive creation of knowledge (*Bill Hicks interview BBC2*). By framing such an approach within the milieu of comedy, Hicks enacts resistant power as the communication of subjugated knowledges. As discussed in Relevant Literature, the production of humor is fundamentally ambiguous, subjective, and anarchic. By providing symbolic patterns of social patterns, humor allows for the introduction of topics typically forbidden in serious discourse, while also subverting the form of serious discourse. "Comedy is a double-edged sword; on the one hand no one gives you any flak because you're a comedian and it's all a joke, on the other hand it's not a joke- I'm serious about what I'm saying" (Hicks, 2004a, p. 88). In this way, the subversion of form in Hicks's comedy represents resistance to the dominant social code and the creation and communication of an alternative framework for the interpretation of experience. Should the communication of subjugated knowledges prove too much for certain audiences, Hicks relies on the failsafe, "There's dick jokes coming up. Please relax" (*Bill Hicks, Igby's*).

Final Performance

Bill Hicks's final performance occurred on January 5, 1994, at Caroline's Comedy Club in New York City. Thirty minutes into the set, the effects of Hicks's illness

proved too much. He stopped abruptly, asked for assistance from his fiancé, and left the

stage (Lahr, 2004). As such, Hicks's gig at Igby's in Los Angeles on November 17, 1993,

stands as his last complete performance. After repeating verbatim the routine that got him

censored from *Letterman*, Hicks performed for nearly an hour, ending with a tirade

against the role of comedy in contemporary American popular culture. For Hicks, the

inane and illogical state of American culture is most fully represented in the person of

Gallagher- a stand-up comedian who became famous for destroying perfectly edible food

with a sledgehammer. As music by Rage Against the Machine plays in the background,

Hicks brings a watermelon onstage and places it on a stool. He grabs the microphone

stand and gestures to the crowd. As the cries from the audience grow louder, Hicks struts

across the stage to the watermelon, raises the microphone stand above his head and

brings it crashing to the floor, leaving the watermelon intact. Hicks then raises both

middle fingers to the audience and sings along: "Fuck you. I won't do what you tell me.

Fuck you. I won't do what you tell me." The audience erupts into thunderous applause

and cheers as Hicks leaves the stage. As the noise from the crowd dissipates, an audience

member can be heard saying, "That was a great show. That was classic" (*Bill Hicks,

Igby's*).

     Three months later, on Saturday, February 26, 1994, Bill Hicks died of pancreatic

cancer at the age of thirty-two (True, 2002).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

On January 30, 2009, *Late Show with David Letterman* broadcast unedited the routine that had gotten Bill Hicks censored from the program fifteen years earlier. In 1993, Bill Hicks was told by *Letterman's* producers that the decision to censor his routine had come from CBS's Standards and Practices. After an enraged fan contacted CBS about the censorship, it was learned that the decision to censor Hicks had not come from Standards and Practices at all. It had, in fact, come from the producers of *Late Show with David Letterman* regarding concerns about potential reactions to the routine from particular advertisers (Lahr, 1993, November 1).[47] After fifteen years, David Letterman finally admitted his own role in the censoring of Bill Hicks:

> Afterwards, considering what I had seen- and it was an error of judgment on my part, just a mistake- I made a decision I think born of insecurity more than anything else, and I said, 'I don't think we want to have that on the show.' So we removed it from the show… And when I say 'we' I mean the production staff, but the decision was mine and… looking back on it, I had no real reason… I don't know why and I'm sorry that I did it and it was a mistake. (*Late Show with David Letterman*)

This apology was made to Hicks's mother, Mary Hicks, who appeared as a guest of David Letterman. After sitting through Letterman's carefully scripted questions and banter, Mary Hicks took the opportunity to express how much pain and sadness Letterman's decision had caused the Hicks family. Letterman then admitted that he had

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[47] As noted in Methodology, the local CBS affiliate available to me experienced a blackout during the broadcasting of *Late Show with David Letterman* on January 30, 2009. I find it highly ironic that, in light of the reasons for Hicks's censorship as discussed in Analysis, the commercial breaks still aired as intended.

not viewed the routine since its initial recording and cautioned the audience that some of the material might seem dated. After airing the censored performance in its entirety, Letterman appeared shocked and quickly recanted his statement as to the relevance of the material:

> Seeing it now, it raises the question, 'What was the matter with me? What was I thinking?' That was just tremendous. If anything, it says a great deal more about me. It says more about me as a guy than it says about Bill because there was absolutely nothing wrong with that… Just perfect… And I expected it to be somewhat dated being that old, but it's not. It's just great. In fact, I guess it speaks to the suggestion that he was way ahead of his time. (*Late Show with David Letterman*)

Cultural Significance

This belated and merely symbolic gesture of atonement is one of the most recent acknowledgements of the growing cultural significance of Bill Hicks. In fact, recognition of Hicks's significance to American culture began shortly after he was originally censored in 1993. Within three months of his censorship, Bill Hicks received seven book offers from publishers, a column in *The Nation*, a recording offer from Robert DeNiro's Tribeca record label, and a television pilot for BBC Channel 4 (Lahr, 2004). Hicks noted at the time, "It's almost as though I've been lifted out of a ten-year rut and placed in a position where the offers finally match my long held and deeply cherished creative aspirations… Somehow, people are listening in a new light. Somehow the possibilities (creatively) seem limitless" (quoted in Lahr, 2004, p. xx).

Since Hicks's death, his renown has only expanded. Professional comedians Richard Jeni, Allan Harvey, Richard Belzer, Jay Leno, Brett Butler, Dwight Slade, David Letterman, Eric Bogosian, Eddie Izzard, and Thea Vidale have all recognized his influence not only in the world of stand-up comedy, but also on American culture in

general (*It's just a ride*). Jon Stewart- host of *The Daily Show*- remarked, "[Hicks] was the guy you looked to. He wasn't trying to be mediocre; he wasn't trying to satisfy some need for fame; he wasn't trying to get a sitcom; he was trying to be expert. Hicks was an adult among children" (quoted in Lahr, 2004, p. xxv). In fact, the comedy of Bill Hicks paved the way for programs such *The Daily Show*, *Politically Incorrect*, and *Real Time with Bill Maher*- all of which have gained considerable fame from exposing the hypocrisy of the U.S. government and American news media. Colleen McGarr (Hicks's former manager and fiancé) asserts that Hicks was originally considered for host of *Politically Incorrect*, but was deemed by the network to be too controversial (Lahr, 2004).[48] Bill Maher was chosen instead. The bands Radiohead, Tool, and Rage Against the Machine have all dedicated albums to the memory of Bill Hicks (*Bill Hicks outlaw comic documentary*). Comics such as George Carlin, Robin Williams, Dennis Miller, Eddie Griffin, Lewis Black, and (most notably) Dennis Leary have reworked and/or stolen Hicks's material (*Did these comedians rip off Bill Hicks*; *Exhibit A: Dennis Leary vs. Bill Hicks*; *Was George Carlin influenced by Bill Hicks?*). While still alive, Hicks himself recognized Leary's plagiarism by joking, "I stole his act. I camouflaged it with punchlines and, to really throw people off, I did it before he did" (quoted in *Exhibit A: Dennis Leary vs. Bill Hicks*). Furthermore, during research for the argument contained herein, I determined that Bill Maher's "New Rules" routine arguably originates from a Bill Hicks performance from 1988.

On February 26, 2004- the tenth anniversary of Hicks's death- over twenty tribute performances were staged simultaneously in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Canada,

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[48] I can neither verify nor refute this assertion and, as such, do not present it with any claims to absolute factuality.

Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (Booth & Bertin, 2005)- including a

tribute in Belfast dubbed "Leary Karaoke Night" (*Bill Hicks memorial eulogy*). As ironic

as it might seem, British MP Stephen Pound called an early day motion of Parliament to

commemorate the occasion:

> This House notes with sadness the tenth anniversary of the death of Bill Hicks…
> recalls his assertion that his words would be a bullet in the heart of consumerism,
> capitalism, and the American Dream, and mourns the passing of one of the few
> people who may be mentioned as being worthy of inclusion with Lenny Bruce in
> any list of unflinchingly and painfully honest political philosophers. (*Bill Hicks
> came 6th in recent TV poll*)

On December 16, 2008- what would have been Bill Hicks's forty-seventh birthday- Keith

Olbermann, host of *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* on MSNBC, honored Hicks's

memory by stating, "[Hicks was] so searingly insightful that had he had more time, he

could have started his own church… [Hicks] died in 1994 but is still being quoted and

probably will be for several millennia to come" (*Keith Olbermann tribute to Bill Hicks*).

<div align="center">Power</div>

The tribute now being paid to the life and work of Bill Hicks is ambiguous at best.

While it might be viewed as a long overdue yet fitting recognition, it also calls to mind

the assertions of Foucault concerning resistant power and the emancipatory potential of

art. Foucault (1977/1980c) notes that oppressive power appropriates localized instances

of resistant power when their political and/or economic value to oppressive power is

realized, thus exposing resistant power to the danger of recodification. Within the context

of Bill Hicks's comedy, localized instance of resistant power cannot become popularized

without risking their emancipatory potential. These concerns become particularly

pronounced when viewed in relation to the influence Hicks had on such popular

television programs as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *Real Time with Bill Maher*.

The argument can reasonably be made that these programs represent a defanged, declawed interpretation of resistant power as enabled by the life and work of Bill Hicks. While appearing to be on the margins of power, these programs merely serve to lampoon individual actors within the power structure while avoiding serious critique of the structure itself- all the while earning significant profit for the corporations that own Comedy Central and HBO.

Regardless, the life and work of Bill Hicks remain singularly significant for a number of reasons. As Horkheimer (1968/1972b) notes, "a will which aims at the shaping of society as a whole is already conspicuously operative in the construction of the theory and practice which will lead to it" (p. 218). The creative and performative methods employed by Bill Hicks provide support for the assertion that Hicks's comedy functions as an artistic enactment of critical theory by communicating a dialectical critique of the relationship between capitalist production and the inequitable social relations created by such an economic system. Based in the primary activity of critical thinking, Hicks's comedy represents a continual interrogation of facts as conditioned by the dominant social code, resulting in a critique that is situated historically and culturally within the context of 1980s and early-1990s America. Through a comedic strategy of forcing the inner logic of the dominant social code to extremes, Hicks exposes the historical development and internal forces that perpetuate and expand fascism through the production of cultural forms by a capitalist system. Rather than challenging the content of the dominant code, Hicks challenges the very formation of social logic as directed by the code. When viewed as a unified whole, Hicks's body of work represents a symbolic challenge to the dominant code through macro-level analyses and micropolitical tactics.

Hicks promotes the insurrectionary reemergence of subjugated knowledges in order to show that the present system can be changed, even within current means.

The critique offered by the life and work of Bill Hicks exposes a shared mental environment dominated by spectacle, simulation, falsity of meaning, and communicative malfunction. As the planned result of consumption, this shared mental environment constitutes the reformation of reality into an integrative social code striving for totality. Characterized by isolation, surveillance, hierarchical social structures, and the regulation of meaning and value, the dominant social code reproduces itself through consumption and communicative regulation. The reproduction of this code strives to disable the discursive production of meaning, thereby limiting community and individual critical awareness to the dictates of the code. By participating with the rituals of capitalism through consumption, individuals are thus implicated in the reproduction of their own oppression. In this way, consumption ultimately creates value beyond the purely economic or political. Consumption represents the internal unconscious acceptance of the code of social logic most amenable to the capitalist system. As referent to the analysis offered herein, that social code is characterized by cultural fascism. As such, consumption operates as the key mechanism of oppressive power for the fascist social code as enabled by a capitalist economic system. Through the comedy of Bill Hicks, this system is exposed as the capitalist enactment of fascist ideology having reached a pathological state of inertia and self-liquidation through self-replication by means of mass culture. Such is the fascist ideosis.

As noted in the introduction to this argument, oppressive power necessarily creates its own resistance. In the life and work of Bill Hicks, resistant power to the fascist

ideosis manifests as the anarchic individual will to power through the revolutionary evolution of consciousness combined with communicative action that reproduces alternative logical frameworks. This form of resistant power operates through the active manipulation of signs to reform meanings and values independent of the dominant social code, thus allowing for individual autonomy even within the present system. Inner subjectivity is the key to radical liberation through insurrection- the continual rising up of radical otherness in tactical raids on consensus reality.

The very existence of oppressive power formations depends on individual subservience to ideas and abstract principles. Consequently, altering the structures of power necessitates a social code based on the continual questioning and revision of ideas. In the comedy of Bill Hicks, this manifests as connected criticism and dissent, with logic and reason as fundamental revolutionary tools. Relying on mutual recognition as a rhetorical strategy, Hicks's comedy represents the shamanic ritual communication of signs-as-system, content interoperating as code. Through the discursive production of knowledge presented in his comedic performances, Bill Hicks engages in a cognitive/spiritual revolution in which liberation is presented as a biological necessity rather than a construct of ideology. Furthermore, Hicks's comedy and lifestyle choices represent radical revolutionary theory-as-practice- the cultivation of critical consciousness combined with creative experimentalism, individual choice and responsibility, and practical organization in the form of an artistic war machine. Through the example of Bill Hicks, revoevolutionary power is evidenced as the willful autonomous reclamation of individual subjective sovereignty over meaning and value in

the furtherance of open, polysemous, ethical discourse as the continuously evolving

creation and communication of reality.

Moreover, the comedy of Bill Hicks suggests that the poststructuralist rejection of

the dialectic might indeed be premature. The realities of capitalist economic production

do create and reinforce inequalities in social relations. Hicks's comedy strategically

communicates this dialectic while also exposing the role of mass cultural forms in the

continued expansion and adaptation of the dialectic. Hicks's comedy also provides

evidence for Adorno's (1982/2002) assertion concerning fascism as the end result of

organized humanity. What arises from this dialectical tension between political economy

and social organization is a fascist cultural logic. The oppressive power of the fascist

ideosis culminates in the totalization of fascism as the dominant social code. Such

totalization is only achievable through the mechanisms of capitalist production, most

effectively in the production of mass cultural forms.

Beyond evidencing the complex relationships between ideology, economic

production, cultural forms, and oppressive power, the example of Bill Hicks also

provides valuable insight into the workings of resistant power. The ideosis creates its own

resistance through the illogic of its own attempts at totalization. While the fascist social

code is most effectively communicated through mass cultural forms, these forms also

contain some of the greatest potential for communicating alternatives to that code.

Through the workings of capitalist production, mass cultural forms are embedded with

meanings and values amenable to the expansion of fascism. However, because these

forms (interoperating as signs-as-code) are essentially ambiguous, individuals can reform

the meanings and values of such forms by replacing the code of social logic that

determines the relations between such forms. The comedy of Bill Hicks provides a possible framework for future resistance that relies on reforming the meaning of the content of the dominant social code (as opposed to simply attempting to replace the content itself), thus communicating an alternative code of social logic. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from the life of Bill Hicks illustrates the material application of such a strategy to lifestyle choices, providing another possible framework for resistance through the physical refusal to behave according to the dictates of the dominant social code. Rather than simply advocating that the system be altered or destroyed, Bill Hicks lived as though the system already did not exist, thus enacting the revoevolutionary will to power.

Further Implications

Ultimately, the comedy and lifestyle of Bill Hicks provide a limited, contextually situated example of how the individual can transform and recreate power through the active manipulation of signs in the production of meaning and value. This reaffirms the poststructuralist assertions regarding power and the individual. The resistance to the dominant social code offered by Hicks manifests as the production of meaning through micropolitical practices. Thus, the individual remains focal to analyses of power. If, as asserted, the individual is formed through meaning expressed by signs interoperating as code, then the individual is capable of reforming power relations through the communication of subjugated knowledges that represent alternatives to the dominant code. This is possible because power is pervasive, dynamically active, and inherently neither positive nor negative. The meanings and values of signs are dependent on the social code through which they are communicated. Through the revoevolutionary will to power manifesting as the active manipulation of signs, the individual remains capable of

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resisting the oppressive power of the fascist ideosis. Furthermore, the resistant power that

manifests through the life and work of Bill Hicks communicates the immediate

possibility of "a future where the demand for the eruption of the marvelous into the

ordinary will become the most ringing, poignant, and tumultuous of all political

demands- a future which will begin (wait a minute, lemme check my clock)… 7, 6, 5, 4,

3, 2, 1… NOW" (Bey, 2003, p. 83).

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