

“Now Fact Has Become Opinion”: ‘Fake News’ and the Search for Truth in *The Daily Show*

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Abstract: As an emerging phenomenon during the US presidential campaign 2016, ‘fake news’ has added a new layer to debates on media truthfulness. Donald Trump’s use of statements which share characteristics with ‘fake news’ and are characterized by an indifference to facts has been magnified by journalists’ inability to effectively fact-check his claims. My article uses the comedy program *The Daily Show With Trevor Noah* as a case study to highlight its critical interrogation of the media, its exposure of Trump’s communication strategy, and its conviction in finding a discernible truth in relation to fake news. First, I outline the characteristics of ‘fake news,’ then I demonstrate how aspects of the postmodern carnivalesque are present in *The Daily Show* and used to highlight features of Trump’s assertions. The program utilizes postmodern techniques to both mimic and critique the way in which the statements of the US President are covered by the media. I argue that the *The Daily Show* employs postmodern techniques such as Jürgen Habermas’s concept of strategic speech to expose similarities between ‘fake news’ and the statements made by President Trump. Moreover, the show utilizes a questioning technique in its interview segments adhering to Habermas’s parameters for communicative speech, which highlights the show’s modernist understanding of a discernible truth.

Despite being a comedy program, *The Daily Show* has come to play a significant role in the public discussion on politics and the news media in the United States. The show’s host, Trevor Noah, has interviewed leading politicians such as former US President Barack Obama. In *The Daily Show*, which airs on Comedy Central, the host comments on current news stories and how cable news channels present them in their reports. The late night show criticizes the way in which politicians and media organizations operate by mimicking their distinguishing elements and combining them with jokes. Through the use of irony

and mockery, this satirical criticism appeals to its late night audience and adds a humorous layer to what would otherwise be a serious critique.

The examination of news reports' consistency and truthfulness has always been an essential part of *The Daily Show's* media criticism. In the context of the 2016 US presidential election, the comedy program has commented on how the media has portrayed the phenomenon of 'fake news.' The circulation of these 'fake news' stories, which are defined as demonstrably and purposely false information and posted on social media platforms, has dominated news coverage and challenged broadcasters to adequately analyze and expose such stories. According to Geoffrey Baym, "[c]onventions of objectivity" prevent journalists from commenting on factually incorrect claims ("*The Daily Show*" 267). This statement is connected to a pronounced distinction of the terms 'fact' and 'opinion': A fact can be scientifically proven as being correct or false, whereas an opinion is a belief whose veracity or falseness cannot be determined with certainty ("Fact"; "Opinion"). Due to the inconsistent fashion in which news outlets react to 'fake news' and their dissemination, Baym suggests that the news present demonstrably false claims as equally valid as facts ("*The Daily Show*" 268).

This effect has been linked by Chuck Tryon to the creation of cable news programs, as he notes that "former CNN president Jonathan Klein urged his staff to produce 'emotionally-gripping, character-driven narratives'" (41). This demonstrates that the cable channels' primary goal has shifted from informing the public to emotionally capturing the audience. On *The Daily Show*, Noah ridicules broadcasters whose reports focus on entertainment rather than on examining the truthfulness of politicians' statements (Baym, "*The Daily Show*" 270). Through the use of postmodern techniques, the comedy program parodies the conflation of news and entertainment in cable news channels (Baym qtd. in Tryon 43). For instance, the show's set combines colors and illustrations that are reminiscent of these TV formats.

Since the media do not concentrate on differentiating between facts and fabrications, invented claims can obtain the same status as established truths in their reports (Baym, "*The Daily Show*" 268). This implies that entirely invented stories can proliferate without being controlled by the news. One person who regularly disseminated such stories via Twitter is Donald Trump, whose tweets comprise the characteristics of 'fake news' as defined by Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow (217). Fact-checking the assertions made by politicians has always been

an integral part of reporting, though this practice has gained traction recently, largely in response to Trump. However, Trump has disavowed this criticism in a way similar to *The Daily Show*. The show refutes the media's criticism of its arguments by pointing out that, as a comedy program, it is not required to follow standard journalistic principles. In the same way, Trump wards off critique by claiming that he was joking. This approach alludes to part of Aaron Hess's concept of the postmodern carnivalesque: Jokes, which are a central element of *The Daily Show's* carnivalesque argument scheme, take on various functions. The program's jokes do not merely serve to deride media personalities, but the incongruity between the original texts and the show's amusing comments also encourages viewers to reevaluate their notion of truth. Moreover, the program utilizes these postmodern methods to refute criticism and deconstruct the procedures of both the news media and politicians. Noah proposes a new way of enabling the media to deconstruct the President's statements. Noah's questioning technique, evident in the analysis of his interview with Tomi Lahren, focuses on an exchange of rational arguments and serves to scrutinize the coherence of his guest's argumentation. Furthermore, the interviewing technique displays a modernist understanding of a discernible truth. This paper demonstrates how *The Daily Show* and distributors of 'fake news' both embrace the postmodern carnivalesque in addressing their respective audiences and in deflecting criticism. However, *The Daily Show* also uses this very same technique to reveal how it is employed by news media. Therefore, it uses postmodern techniques to search for a discernible truth, which in itself is a modernist concept. This modernist notion of a discernible truth is further evident in Noah's questioning technique in the interview section, which reflects the principles of Jürgen Habermas's concept of communicative speech.

MODERNIST AND POSTMODERNIST NOTIONS OF TRUTH

Postmodernist notions of truth challenge modernist conceptions of this term (Abbott et al. 22). In contrast to postmodern thought, which holds that "reality [...] is unknowable or inaccessible" (Velez-Quinones) and that humans cannot have access to an objective truth, modernist notions are characterized by "a commitment to rationality, reason and science [...] and the possibility of universal, totalising theories" (Abbott et al. 22). Moreover, while modernists regard "[r]eason and science [as an] accurate, objective, reliable foundation of 'knowledge,'" postmodernists

claim that there are “no universal, objective means of judging any given concept as ‘true’” (Drake). The development of these notions, which emerged in the late twentieth century, has had a significant influence on TV programs such as comedy shows (Abbott et al. 22). As a TV show which simultaneously mimics and ridicules news outlets, *The Daily Show* blends typical elements of comedy and traditional news coverage (Tryon 41). It combines “humor with a serious concern for current events in ways that render the program difficult to pigeon-hole” (Baym, “*The Daily Show*” 263). A clear categorization of the show’s genre is difficult and thus the humorous statements made on the program are open to interpretation. As Udo Göttlich and Martin R. Herbers point out, “entertaining texts are polysemantic and, therefore, have to be interpreted by the audience” (81). The viewers need to connect the host’s jokes to their “prior knowledge” in order to understand them (Wiesman 133).

A further aspect of the show’s humorous performance is intertextuality, evident in the juxtaposition of video segments and the host’s comments on them (Tryon 73). According to Baym, “*The Daily Show* is dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense, the [play] of multiple voices against each other in a discursive exchange [...] forces the original statement into revealing contexts (see Griffin, 1994)” (“*The Daily Show*” 266). Comparing statements made by the same person and commenting on the differences, for instance, enables the host to point out contradictions. The fact that the show uses this technique in order to expose politicians’ falsehoods demonstrates its belief in a modernist notion of a discernible truth (“*The Daily Show*” 267). Although techniques such as intertextuality and stylistic elements such as humor are typically postmodern, *The Daily Show* uses them to “demand a measure of accountability” which is in itself a modernist idea (268). Through the combination and comparison of politicians’ contradicting statements, the show “search[es] for truth” and thereby informs the public (267). Since the program’s host comments on these contradictions in a humorous way, he does not present “a ready-made truth” (Griffin qtd. in Baym, “*The Daily Show*” 267) but requires the audience to connect the different elements.

‘Fake news’ is a phenomenon that is characterized by an indifference to the concept of a discernible truth, and the writers’ motivation is not to inform the public but to attain their financial or political goals (Allcott and Gentzkow 213-17). The indifference to fact is linked to a postmodern notion of truth, according to which “reality [...] is unknowable” and therefore rejects the concept of a discernible

truth (Velez-Quinones). Considering these different notions of truth, *The Daily Show* utilizes postmodern techniques and humor to expose public statements that are false or not based on factual evidence, which reflects the show's understanding of a discernible truth. In contrast to this, 'fake news' disseminators typically focus on the achievement of their financial or political goals.

'FAKE NEWS' AND HABERMAS'S CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC SPEECH

This section will refer to the media through which 'fake news' are shared, the motives for their publication, factors that contributed to the rise of these fake stories, and their content. Moreover, I will connect this term to Habermas's concept of strategic speech.

Two of the major media through which 'fake news' articles are disseminated are the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Although a survey by Allcott and Gentzkow shows that these networks do not constitute the main source of information for US adults, according to a study from 2016, "62 percent of [this group of people] get news on social media" (Allcott and Gentzkow 212). These platforms provided access to news reports, including 'fake news,' to a large portion of American adults prior to the presidential election.

Another important aspect in the discussion of 'fake news' is the motive for their publication. For some creators, these fake stories generate a source of income because "news articles that go viral on social media can draw significant advertising revenue when users click to the original site" (Allcott and Gentzkow 217). While financial gain can be a motivation to publish 'fake news,' some writers are interested in promoting their political positions. One provider, for instance, "claims that he started the site mainly to help Donald Trump's campaign" (217). This statement demonstrates that for these authors, the purpose of 'fake news' is not to inform readers, but to shape their perception of politics and political actors.

Some 'fake news' articles express support for a political ideology or candidate and are designed to appeal to a certain group of people. This phenomenon fits notions of "today's fragmented news environment" (Marchi 257), which allows people to choose specific news sources that coincide with their political orientation. The "increasingly negative feelings each side of the political spectrum holds toward the other" (Allcott and Gentzkow 215) are a further factor that possibly contributed

to the proliferation of fake stories during the 2016 presidential election. This partisan division is connected to the preconceptions that individuals, as well as various groups in society, have about political actors. For instance, “[l]iberal consumers’ priors hold that the left-leaning candidate will perform better in office, while conservative consumers’ priors hold that the right-leaning candidate will perform better” (Allcott and Gentzkow 218). Most ‘fake news’ articles aim to impose an opinion on the readers. This influence conflicts with news consumers’ interest in having access to more nuanced and truthful information (Allcott and Gentzkow 218).

Since actual news reports are difficult to distinguish from ‘fake news,’ many readers believe the latter to be credible sources. These fake stories appear on sites that are designed to look like real news outlets or satirical sites that can be misinterpreted as factual, as well as on webpages with a mixture of factual and false reports (Allcott and Gentzkow 217). Allcott and Gentzkow categorize the term into “1) unintentional reporting mistakes [...]; 2) rumors that do not originate from a particular news article; 3) conspiracy theories [...]; 4) satire that is unlikely to be misconstrued as factual; 5) false statements by politicians” as well as articles that are highly partisan but not entirely false (214). Social media platforms on which ‘fake news’ reports spread do not provide sufficient checks on their contents’ factual accuracy, and so these reports are able to easily proliferate (211).

‘Fake news’ denotes deliberately and demonstrably false news articles intended to achieve a certain purpose, which resembles strategic speech as coined by Habermas. Strategic speech is characterized by an “orientation toward success” (Habermas 133). Strategic speakers “are interested solely in [...] the *consequences* or *outcomes* of their actions,” and “they will try to reach their objectives by influencing their opponent’s definition of the situation, and thus his decisions or motives” (133). Moreover, they falsely present the real state of affairs (Jones and Baym 286). The additional goal of ‘fake news’ writers who publish articles for financial profit is to increase their own influence. As their deliberately false articles appear on sites that look like actual news web pages, consumers cannot determine if they read ‘fake news’ or not. Just like strategic actors, the creators “[obscure] [their] intentions” (286). Furthermore, the fact that ‘fake news’ disseminators “make no investment in accurate reporting” (Allcott and Gentzkow 218) illustrates the irrelevance of factuality for the achievement of their objective. They do not intend to convey truthful information but merely focus on their actions’ outcome. ‘Fake news’

writers act strategically when they attempt to affect people's perception of a political situation and their evaluation of that situation. Moreover, these fake stories are formulated in a way that exploits a certain group's preexisting beliefs. Similar to strategic actors, 'fake news' creators tailor their articles' content to a specific target group insofar as it serves the attainment of their purpose (Habermas 133).

POSTMODERN CARNIVALESQUE AS *THE DAILY SHOW*'S AND DONALD TRUMP'S ARGUMENTATION TECHNIQUE

The following part of the paper will draw parallels between Trump's fabricated claims on the social network Twitter and the argumentation technique of *The Daily Show*, since both employ features of Hess's concept of the postmodern carnivalesque. The postmodern carnivalesque in *The Daily Show* is based on the concept of the medieval carnival. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, "[c]ivil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals" (5). By mimicking characteristic elements and combining this mimicry with jokes, the show undermines the media's and politicians' serious self-image (Hess 102). Moreover, by the use of humorous comments, the show constantly reminds the viewer that it is to be understood as a comedy program and not as a serious news show.

A crucial aspect of the carnivalesque is the relation between artists and viewers. Medieval "carnival [...] does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. [...] Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (Bakhtin 7). Moreover, the studio audience participates in the program's performances as it can directly express its emotional responses through clapping or laughter (Baym, "Crafting" 99). Additionally, the viewer needs to interpret the ironic statements made on the show to understand their significance (Jones and Baym 290). Consequently, the audience does not merely absorb the information provided by the comedians, but it takes an active part in the meaning-making process (290). In one of the episodes, the host starts his comparison of Trump to a toddler by asking the viewers: "Have you ever argued with a toddler?" ("Mahershala Ali" 0:01:20). With this question, he addresses the audience, which responds with laughter. In this way, Noah and his fake correspondents minimize the distance between them and the spectators.

The Daily Show's audience takes an active part in the program's performances and similarly, by using the comment or retweet function on the social network Twitter, Trump's followers can directly express their opinions on the topics addressed in his posts. Just like 'fake news' writers, Trump has used social media as a means of communication during the presidential campaign. Internet platforms, such as Twitter, constitute "new avenues for political participation" (Jones and Baym 291) because they allow users to not only read, but also comment on and retweet politicians' claims. For instance, according to a CNN article, the President "recirculated a tweet [...] from a user" (Kopan, "Donald Trump Retweets"), which depicts one of his political opponents in an unfavorable way. The fact that Trump posts his statements on a publicly accessible platform and retweets his followers' responses illustrates that his communication strategy is similar to the "idea [of medieval carnival, which] embraces all the people" (Bakhtin 7). Both Trump and *The Daily Show* do not merely speak to their audiences but encourage interaction.

The Daily Show in its performances and Trump in his tweets set up a fake reality using a specific technique of argumentation. *The Daily Show* constantly refers to its comedic nature by means of postmodern techniques like genre blending. Besides the program's aesthetics, which remind the viewer of its constructedness, elements of the carnival, such as the use of profane language, serve to set it apart from actual news shows (Hess 104). Thus, the program points out that it is to be understood as a fictional news show. Likewise, since President Trump "repeats false claims that have already been fact-checked" (Kessler et al.) and posts "entirely false" statements (Coll), his claims on Twitter are detached from reality. As the politician's assertions are demonstrably false, they contain elements that Allcott and Gentzkow have ascribed to 'fake news' (213). Noah conveys this idea to the viewers by stating that the President "has created his own universe" of invented facts ("Mahershala Ali" 0:07:35). "*The Daily Show*'s 'reality' is one that is quite fake, or at least surreal" (Hess 99) and similarly, Trump creates a fabricated reality in his posts.

In contrast to actual news outlets, which report in a serious manner, *The Daily Show* comments on news events in a humorous way. Its position as a comedy program makes it difficult for journalists to respond to the program's argumentation. It uses "[l]aughter [...] as a primary frame of reference against the official tone of" news broadcasters (Hess 104). As outlined by Hess, the show "can rely and rest upon its ridiculousness" (97) whenever a media personality or

organization attempts to have a serious discussion on the show's statements. It can refute criticism by pointing out that, as a comedy series, it does not need to adhere to the same principles as the news and therefore, "the argument of the program cannot be answered with standards of journalism" (94).

The way in which Trump handles media commentary on his statements demonstrates that he deals with critical responses in the same way as *The Daily Show*. For instance, the President's false claim that former US "President Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were 'co-founders' of [the terrorist organization] ISIS" has sparked public controversy (Kopan, "Donald Trump Tries"). According to a CNN article, after repeating the claim several times and facing criticism for it, "Trump tweeted [...] that the media was missing his sarcasm" ("Donald Trump Tries"). The fact that Donald Trump can ward off critique by recasting his own arguments as jokes indicates the irrelevance of the validity of his claims. Just as "*The Daily Show*, through laughter and excess, effectively rebukes its critics" (Hess 104), Trump can claim that his statements were not meant seriously when critiqued. Since the President's statements are demonstrably false and their content is open to interpretation, public debates about the topics addressed in his tweets are not based on factual arguments (Battaglio). Several news outlets, such as PBS and *The Los Angeles Times*, point to the polarization of political debates in the United States in which the President's posts are embedded ("Shields and Brooks"; Battaglio). While the public is engaged in discussions of Trump's claims, he is able to evade responsibility for his posts. Similar to 'fake news,' the aim of his posts is not to provide factual information, but to influence readers' opinions (Allcott and Gentzkow 217).

Irony forms an important part of *The Daily Show's* carnivalesque argument scheme. With its humorous comments, the program deviates from actual news shows and draws attention to its own 'fakeness.' Not only do jokes remind the viewer of the show's constructedness, they are also a way of deconstructing the procedure of media outlets and politicians. According to Göttlich and Herbers, the dissimulation of "the political content from the mere form" constitutes a "nontrivial cognitive task [and] facilitates learning" (85). The comedy series takes a meta-perspective which encourages viewers to think about the features of Trump's claims. This is observable in the previously mentioned part of the show where Noah compares the President's way of arguing to that of a toddler ("Mahershala Ali" 0:01:20). The comparison amuses the audience and simultaneously underlines that,

just like a toddler, Trump is “indifferent to things that are true or false” (“Zakaria”). Göttlich and Herbers contend that the program blends “rational discourse with nonrational techniques of presentation” (85). However, as outlined above, the program’s humorous forms of presentation do not merely appeal to the viewers’ emotions but stimulate thought processes, as they have an activating effect on the audience and point out how political actors proceed. In contrast to the news media, the program does not focus on the content of Trump’s statements but rather focuses on his argumentation technique and response to media criticism. Noah ridicules the media’s attempts to fact-check Trump’s claims and proposes an alternative way of reacting to these tweets. He suggests that media organizations could demand proof before they investigate his statements’ truthfulness and also question his argumentative logic (“Mahershala Ali” 0:09:44). Noah points out that if Trump’s claims were called into question, the President would not be able to prove them because they are made up, and the media should focus on “stories [of political importance, which] they can actually prove” (“Mahershala Ali” 0:11:21). In doing so, the host analyzes and explains the ways in which the media and the President interact.

HABERMAS’S MODERNIST NOTION OF TRUTH IN *THE DAILY SHOW*

The Daily Show utilizes Habermas’s concept of strategic speech to critique the media’s handling of Trump’s tweets and to expose the media’s use of said concept in a humorous manner. In the program’s opening segments, in which Noah and the fake correspondents comment on current news, the host derides and exposes the use of strategic speech in the US media landscape (Jones and Baym 288). In contrast to that, the show changes to a serious tone in its expert interviews. Baym connects these interviews to the notion of communicative speech, which is part of Habermas’s theory on communicative action and its ethics (“Crafting” 112). According to that concept, speakers “make claims to *validity*—to correspondence with an external reality—and to *truthfulness*—to an accurate reflection of the speaker’s true intentions” (110). The intention of communicative speech is “to represent the actuality of a situation, to reflect honestly the intentions of the speaker” (Jones and Baym 286). In a dialogue, interlocutors can only communicate views when they refer to the real world and when they are honest about their statements’ purpose. When speakers utilize communicative speech, “the principle of

universalization [...] serves as a rule of argumentation in practical discourses” (Habermas 116). This rule states that “[f]or a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects that its *general* observance can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the particular interests of *each* person affected must be such that all affected can accept them freely” (120). Furthermore, this principle is connected to Kohlberg’s notion of “the development of the capacity for moral judgement” (Habermas 123). On “the stage of mutual interpersonal expectations, [...] and conformity,” “being concerned about the other people and their feelings [...] and being motivated to follow rules and expectations” is right (Kohlberg qtd. in Habermas 123). This idea forms part of communicative speech, in which interlocutors are not merely interested in the outcome of a discussion but show an honest interest in their dialogue partners’ views.

Although Habermas maintains that humans can, to some extent, have access to objective truth, modern science is also characterized by doubt. For instance, Popper points out that findings are only considered valid until they are proven false and, similarly, Kuhn mentions that scientific concepts are subject to constant changes (Barker and Jane 225). These ideas are ascertainable in Habermas’s theory, which underlines the significance “of the [communicative] process rather than the outcome of that process” (Barker and Jane 234). Instead of trying to reach a definite conclusion, the speakers focus on an exchange of thoughts. This model implies that the interlocutors deal with opposing views and are willing to modify their opinions. Accordingly, communicative speech aims “to move both speaker and listener closer to a position of consensus or mutual understanding (see McCarthy, 1978)” (Jones and Baym 286). Moreover, for communication to be possible, the dialogue partners need to base their discussion on agreed facts (Baym, “Crafting” 112).

The characteristics of communicative speech described above are observable in Noah’s conversations with pundits. Although Noah brings humorous remarks to the discussion, his expert interviews generally remain substantial. With the use of jokes, interviews “become conversations, not confrontations, grounded in the style of casual, interpersonal exchange” (Baym, “Crafting” 100). Moreover, by presenting rational arguments and dealing with opposing views, the host aims to create understanding and to engage in an honest debate. Consequently, the conception of the show’s last segment reflects the principles of Habermas’s communicative speech.

The Daily Show’s expert interviews share characteristics with Habermas’s notion of communicative speech and offer a counter model to the cable news

channels' debates. The comedy show's conversations demonstrate how a political discourse based on the principles of modernism could look. Its expert interviews focus on an exchange of thoughts and the creation of understanding. Thus, *The Daily Show's* interviews deviate significantly from postmodern television shows, which offer suspenseful and entertaining reports. These TV programs specialize on a particular audience and primarily focus on establishing a relation with the viewer rather than on informing the public (Tryon 41).

CRITICAL QUESTIONING IN THE TOMI LAHREN INTERVIEW

In the interview with conservative commentator Tomi Lahren, host Trevor Noah critically questions the logic of her statements. The interview guest, who hosted a show on the news network '*TheBlaze*,' is well known for her "Final Thoughts" on a variety of political topics. These segments are short video clips in which she comments on current political events and which are widely shared on social media. In one of those segments, she expresses her opinion on the Black Lives Matter movement. On its website, the movement describes itself as "a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes," thus protesting racism and police violence toward black people ("About").

Before the interview begins, an excerpt of Lahren's show is played. In the clip, she speaks about protests by the Black Lives Matter movement against the newly elected President Trump. She describes the protesters as "militant [and] overtly aggressive" ("Tomi Lahren" 0:12:22) which indicates that the protests pose a danger to the public. Simultaneously, she characterizes them as infantile and weak by calling them "crybabies" (0:12:03) and "whiners" (0:12:36). Since Lahren portrays the demonstrators as aggressors and victims at the same time, her description is contradictory. Moreover, she speaks in an agitated tone, which strengthens the emotional effect of these expressions. Through her manner of speaking she conveys certain emotions to the listeners and thereby attempts to influence their "definition of [political situations], and thus [their] decisions or motives" (Habermas 133) which is indicative of strategic speech. Furthermore, her statements' inconsistency illustrates that her primary intent is to influence the viewers' perceptions rather than to inform them about political issues.

In his first question, Noah points to the anger that is discernible in her videos. After she denies appearing angry, the host states: “It’s like Ellen [DeGeneres] saying, ‘I don’t like dancing.’ ‘Yeah, you do Ellen. You do.’” (“Tomi Lahren” 0:12:59). With this humorous remark, he suggests that she cannot deny her angry way of speaking. Despite the insertion of jokes, Noah’s questions and arguments in this conversation are serious. For instance, when he asks: “What is your biggest issue with Black Lives Matter?” (0:13:57), Noah offers Lahren the opportunity to explain her argument on the topic and thus enables the audience to understand her point of view. The creation of understanding is an element of Habermas’s concept of communicative speech (Baym, “Crafting” 112).

Although the interview questions help to present the guest as credible, Lahren’s assertions do not remain unscrutinized. The host’s responses clearly reflect his views on the discussed topic. This is, for example, observable in Noah’s reply to the conservative commentator’s portrayal of Black Lives Matter. She explains that she opposes this movement because its protesting “turned into rioting and looting” (“Tomi Lahren” 0:14:16). In response, Noah asks: “How are you labeling out the actions of a few and condemning an entire group?” (0:14:46). Instead of directly contradicting her, the host expresses his critical stance toward her viewpoint with further inquiry. The fact that he objects to Lahren’s statements with a question demonstrates that he does not attempt to convince her of his beliefs. Rather, he asks her to elaborate on the points she makes and critically examines them. The focus in this interview lies on the process of exchanging thoughts rather than on the aim to find clear answers. This procedure corresponds to Habermas’s concept of communicative speech (Barker and Jane 234). Habermas’s emphasis on the process of communication rather than on the achievement of a goal is apparent in the claim that “argumentation is a reflective form of communicative action,” which presumes “relationships of reciprocity and mutual recognition” (130). Moreover, by asking questions, the host presents his views but still enables the interlocutor to critically examine them and further elaborate on her point of view.

Another way of questioning his guest’s argument is to mimic her logic. Lahren enumerates several examples of violent acts that have been carried out by Black Lives Matter participants (“Tomi Lahren”). Therewith, she explains why she opposes this movement. Noah points out that these are individual actions and do not reflect the founding principles of the organization as a whole. Patrisse Cullors, cofounder of Black Lives Matter, supports nonviolence by stating: “I believe in direct action, but

nonviolent direction. And our movement believes in that nonviolent direct action” (Simmons and Kaleem). Noah then imitates her approach by referring to particular cases in which a police officer shot a black person and asking: “Are the police racist because [...] they’ve been shown to shoot black people when they are unarmed?” (“Tomi Lahren” 0:16:34). Again, Noah does not directly refute her argument and instead, he questions and reflects her reasoning. By solely focusing on her statements’ coherence, he avoids criticizing her personally and presenting her opinions as wrong. Throughout the interview, the host’s questions do not aim at rendering conservative views invalid but at scrutinizing Lahren’s logic. The examination of logic is an aspect of communicative speech, according to which an “agreement that is the goal of efforts to reach understanding depends on rationally motivated approval of the substance of an utterance” (Habermas 134).

While Noah’s assertions aim at an exchange of logical arguments, many of Lahren’s comments are intended to evoke emotional responses. Her rhetoric contains some characteristics of strategic speech, as defined by Habermas. In the clip that is played at the beginning of the interview, she characterizes Black Lives Matter demonstrators in a contradictory way because she presents them as weak and childish and, simultaneously, as threatening (“Tomi Lahren”). The fact that she speaks in an angry way and that her line of argument is incoherent indicates that the primary intent of Lahren’s “Final Thoughts” is to manipulate viewers rather than to provide nuanced information. Similar to ‘fake news’ writers and strategic speakers, who “[obscure] [their] intentions” (Jones and Baym 286), she utilizes this agitated way of speaking to influence the listeners’ perceptions of political events. In contrast to that, the show’s expert interviews are closer to communicative speech as they provide a space for an exchange of thoughts (Habermas 134).

As described above, Noah’s interview technique serves not to undermine Lahren’s opinions but her logic. The scrutinization of Lahren’s argument through the use of critical questions reflects Noah’s skeptical attitude not only toward his guest’s but also toward his own way of thinking. Moreover, he repeatedly asks Lahren to explain her points. Noah scrutinizes his guest’s line of argument, but also offers her the opportunity to question his logic. The host’s questions serve to expose the inherent contradictions of Lahren’s statements. Consequently, this expert interview does not focus on an exchange of opinions but on the examination of the arguments’ coherence. Since opinions can neither be proven correct or false, the listeners of a debate based on opinions will encounter more difficulties in evaluating

the debaters' statements. In contrast to that, Noah examines the consistency of Lahren's argument, aims to enable understanding, and conveys information to the viewers based on which they can form their opinion. Thus, his interview incorporates characteristics of Habermas's communicative speech.

CONCLUSION

This article argues that *The Daily Show* and 'fake news' distributors employ the postmodern carnivalesque when they communicate with their audiences and refute criticism. Furthermore, *The Daily Show* does not only use the same postmodern techniques as 'fake news' disseminators, but it also employs these techniques to expose the media's use of the exact same techniques. Nevertheless, the analysis has indicated that although the show utilizes postmodern means, it still has a modernist understanding of a discernible truth which is reflected in Noah's approach in the interview with Lahren.

The Daily Show utilizes postmodern techniques such as intertextuality by which it contextualizes statements of public figures and reveals contradictions. While the comedy program's use of these techniques demonstrates its belief in a discernible truth, 'fake news' reports are characterized by an indifference to facts. 'Fake news' are demonstrably and intentionally false reports that are published on social media platforms. Similar to strategic speakers, as described by Habermas, the creators of 'fake news' stories are merely interested in the achievement of a financial or political goal. In *The Daily Show*, Noah points out that the fact-checking of President Trump's fabrications is ineffective. He suggests that a more efficient way to scrutinize the politician's claims would be to first ask him to provide evidence. Moreover, through the use of jokes, which are part of the program's carnivalesque argument scheme, the host ridicules and simultaneously points out characteristic features of the President's statements. In this way, the show helps the viewer to understand how Trump engages with the media. In contrast to strategic speech, which conceals the speaker's intentions, communicative speech aims at an honest exchange of thoughts and positions. The difference between manipulative and communicative speech is apparent in Noah's interview with pundit Tomi Lahren. To engage with her inconsistent and emotionally conveyed statements, Noah

exposes her flawed assertions by questioning or mimicking her logic but at the same time enables her to question his reasoning as well.

This analysis outlined different aspects of *The Daily Show* which demonstrate a modernist understanding of truth. The show's use of postmodern techniques serves to expose, for example, false claims made by politicians. Moreover, the fact that Noah points out the features of Trump's false statements and suggests a more effective way of countering them demonstrates that the host considers established truths an essential part of media reports. Furthermore, Noah's questioning technique indicates that he proposes an alternative model of a television interview based on communicative speech. This paper has suggested that the *The Daily Show*'s interviews and discussions of news events do not merely deride news organizations and politicians but rather bring clarity to political debates, in which "fact has become opinion" ("Trevor Noah").

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