Rhetoric through the Comedic Lens: An Antidote to Fear

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Abstract

This paper looks to examine the rhetoric of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” on October 30th, 2010 on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.. The purpose of this paper is to look at “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” through a dramatic lens as outlined by Kenneth Burke’s theory of *Comedic Enlightenment* through utilizing a generative methodology. The governing idea of this piece is to show that: “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear calls for greater amounts of discourse towards modern day mass media and accomplishes this call to action via formulaic comedy.” Whether it be the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom or the Beer Hall Putsch every rally has an express purpose and The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear would be no exception.

The generative methodology offers the capability for the jokes and segments of the rally to be analyzed against Burkean theory of comedic enlightenment. By looking to show that a means-end joke is an appropriate way in which to convey a message it would be seen that the message of the rally would not be eclipsed by the rally’s own noise and that the underlying message, to question the media and not take what is said for fact did get across to the audience.
Rationale

This criticism looks at the rally as broken down into smaller segments, these segments each highlight a joke or comedic presence that the hosts are putting forth and as such according to their formulaic means of theses jokes a means-end is established to provide the audience with a message. By analyzing the rally by breaking it down into segments the opportunity is provided to look at each joke for what it is, a joke. Jokes normally are told for purposed strictly pertaining to humor but these segments carry with them an underlying message that has been coated in a shell that is designed to make the audience laugh first and think while laughing. This fake news formula conveys the message but in a way as to not outright state the message, this is further seen on the individual host’s television shows, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report*, where the audience is posed satirical news reports that tend to have an underlying criticism of an actor involved in the report, only now this is taken to a live stage on the National Mall.

This rally sparked criticism as a sham and one that would undermine future rallies put on by pundits and political figures but the flip side showed that the rally was more than well received by the American people. It seems as if the message that the rally was putting forward was one that resonated well. This message resonated so well that a number of grassroots website popped up working in conjuncture with *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* to deliver the rally to people who would be unable to attend the rally in person. It is because of this overwhelming approval of the rally by the American people and disapproval of the rally by the media giants that gives reason to analyze this event in much greater critical detail other than looking at it as simply a comedic piece of history.
Whether the rally was meant to mean something more than just comedy to Stewart and Colbert or not, it took on a much greater purpose and made the American people not only laugh but question what the media giants are out to do, tell the whole story or only tell what the story that will generate the most ratings and viewers. The question of if the legitimacy of the rally is not something to be focusing on as the rally did receive the appropriate number of participants to make it a First Amendment protected event but rather the question is if anything of value could be picked apart from this rally or if the message was simply lost amongst the clutter of the hosts’ own scripted events and over-the-top jokes. Can a fully scripted comedic event carry a greater purpose other than just to incite laughter? Are Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert able to get through the clutter and noise that they themselves made with event and deliver something to the audience that isn’t just satire and poking fun at the hypocrisies of big media giants?

It would be important to note that while this rally for the a majority of the time is conducted with a satirical and humorous overtone there is a closing point where Jon Stewart and an out of character Stephen Colbert each give a speech directed at the audience that blatantly cuts out the humor and outlines exactly what the rally is about and what both of the hosts hoped the audience got out of the rally. In this criticism the portion of the rally that contains this directed message will and should be looked at and acknowledged but will be analyzed through a different lens as these concluding speeches are devoid of humor and are representative of speeches that would have been given at a classic rally rather than the standard of speech given during the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear.
Context of the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear

Just about a month prior to the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear both Glen Beck and Al Sharpton held two competing rallies on the same day, and at close proximal locations. Glen Beck’s “Restoring Honor Rally” and Al Sharpton’s “Reclaim the Dream Rally” both exploited a particularly important date in American history as on August 28th 2010 marked the 47th anniversary of the Great March on Washington. These two competing rallies sparked many an issue with the American people as both hosts of the rallies are very polarizing American figures and of course it was only a matter of time before the media got hold of the story and manipulated it in a means to spark any public controversy. On the flip side of the legitimate news media there was The Daily Show and The Colbert Report which received this media coverage of these rallies as foolish. In the Daily Show’s case this media coverage compiled with particularly trivial and not newsworthy news sparked Jon Stewart to call Americans to bring sanity back to the media as well as call for basic American participation in the news machine. Through this statement Stewart took a stand against the media’s form of shock news and focus on non-important issues. Meanwhile thirty minutes later Stephen Colbert made a statement while in character that the media needed instill fear within the American people again the media used to do back in the “Good ol’ days of Walter Cronkite”.

The event was first hinted at on September seventh on both the Daily Show and the Colbert Report and was officially announced on the September sixteenth show for both programs. Stewart and his “Rally to Restore Sanity” was meant to be geared for “the 70–80 percenters,” who do not hold extreme political views and lack a voice in the media. Colbert coined his rally the “March to Keep Fear Alive” and comically stated that “Now is not the time to be reasonable. Now is the time for all good to freak out for freedom”. These two conflicting
rallies are much like the two that Glen Beck and Al Sharpton put, in fact that would be the point but what these two rallies did was combine together into the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear with the two messages of the rallies remaining the same only now they were under the same banner.

After the rally had finished the media seemed to go without comment on the rally. While there were some comments about how the rally was a sham and just simply a means to undermine the efforts and messages of an actual political rally, the majority of news networks simply chose to not report on it. Though the lack in coverage of the rally is not particularly surprising since the rally itself was just one huge criticism of mass media the message got through and did impact some minor change in the news formula for one specific anchor. There was one particular instance where this was not the case and the news anchor Keith Olbermann actually acknowledged the rally and its message which only showed that the media was listening and that message was very much understood.

**Literature Review**

“Convergent Critical Rhetoric at the ‘‘Rally to Restore Sanity’’: Exploring the Intersection of Rhetoric, Ethnography, and Documentary Production” Art Herbig and Aaron Hess

This essay by Art Herbig and Aaron Hess offers convergent critical rhetoric as an approach to critical television studies. Constructed through a combination of rhetoric, ethnography, and documentary film-making, the approach encourages critics to utilize the logic of production to illuminate participatory practices in media. This essay examines the voice of the participants at the rally, who questioned the polarized climate of the modern television industry.
Through their approach Herbig and Hess were able to define the typical participant as one who is “disillusioned” with the current media atmosphere and is generally unwilling to take everything that is being said on major news networks as fact.

This piece lends itself to provide the context that the audience members at the rally were able to pick apart the means-end style jokes that were behind utilized to convey the overarching message of the rally. The disillusioned audience member would is the typical viewer of The Daily Show with Jon Stewart and the Colbert Report and as such the humor and means of humor are would not be lost on the audience and in fact is more than likely something that the audience members are looking out for in expectance. The comedy duo of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert is nothing new and has a distinct way of going about with the conveying of a message, the formula ties very closely to how they conduct their shows and interact with one another in a “crazy man-straight man” routine which a seasoned viewer of their shows would be looking out for, making the message able to breach the proverbial noise.

“Retheorizing Comedic and Political Discourse, or What Do Jon Stewart and Charlie Chaplin Have in Common?” Rob King

Through this piece Rob King takes a look at the Rally to Restore Sanity and compares it to works of Charlie Chaplin, most notably “The Great Dictator”. Both the rally and “The Great Dictator” are amongst two fantastic satirical works that look to shed light on how people preserved what is being told to them. In “The Great Dictator” Chaplin portrays a dictator not much unlike Hitler and how he goes about his business as said dictator. The interactions with his staff and citizens shows that whatever the dictator says goes regardless of what anyone else says, this is being likened to modern media coverage where the media giants will cover what they want rather than what is wanted of them by their viewer. The rally and Jon Stewart represent an
aspect very different from the dictator in that it shows that people who listen to the media giants do not always take everything that is being said for fact and often times raise questions and concerns about what is being reported and why. The idea that there is a major media giant for every politically aligned viewer is also looked into in that a news network shouldn’t have to cater a story based on the political spectrum and that in cutting out major aspects of a story or just plain refusing to report on a story that might make a party or individual look bad is not only unfair to the masses but also undermines how information is received.

"A Rally is a Rally is a Rally?: The Limitations of Media Framing in the Reporting of the Mega-Rallies of 2010.", Victoria Gonzalez

In her thesis dissertation Victoria Gonzalez highlights a point based around the quote a “Rose is a rose is a rose”-Gertrude Stein. Gonzalez substitutes “Rose” from this quote with “Rally” and goes about explaining that regardless of what is being said and or how many people show up a rally will always carry a message and will inevitably get that message out be it during the rally or in pundit analysis after the event.

Gonzalez highlights three major rallies in her writings, Glen Beck’s “Rally to Restore Honor”, the labor union led “One Nation Working Together” rally and lastly Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Keep Fear Alive”. Each of these rallies displays an important aspect to what Gonzalez states are “Needed in order to create a meaningful and successful message through public discourse”.

Glen Beck’s “Rally to Restore Honor” displayed a massive following but more importantly had an abundance of what Gonzalez calls “True Participants” in attendance. A true
participant is one that is willing to take time out of there schedule being missing school, work, weekends, etc. and going down to the rally to show genuine support for the rally and its message.

It wasn’t much surprise that Glen Beck had plenty of these true participants in attendance seeing as how 2010 was a midterm year and Glen Beck used his show and this rally to enforce his and his general audience’s pro-conservative political leanings. The union led “One Nation Working Together” rally showed that a rally cannot be hastily put together in response to another. Being union led the “One Nation Working Together” rally was a democratic leaning rally that was meant to counter act Glen Beck’s rally but failed miserably in comparison simply because of the lack in true participants. Lastly Gonzalez discusses how the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Keep Fear Alive” is an example of a rally that invites people to be true participants. Regardless of political leanings the “Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Keep Fear Alive” was one that got people involved and got people wanting to attend just to see what would happen, the message did not matter to most people, whereas the hosts did. This lack of interest in a message or rather this lack of promotion of a clear message is what actually led to the success of this rally over others around the same time.

"Mr. Stewart and Mr. Colbert Go to Washington: Television Satirists Outside the Box." Jeffrey P. Jones, Geoffrey Baym and Amber Day

In this piece of literature Jones, Baym and Day draw the comparison of “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report” to what is essentially the forums of Rome. These two shows and their hosts are important figures in America, not because of who they are but because of what they say and do. The form of satire that takes place on the two shows, especially the satire present on “The Colbert Report” gets viewer to think and deliberate about that other actual news
shows on television. Through Colbert’s character the viewer can see just how ridiculous some of the pundits really when the rating call for it, in fact when looking at either of these shows and comparing the current events looked at and talked about on these shows to that of other pundit shows the viewer really begins to question which medium is humor and which is the “Real news”.

This idea of likening these to the Roman forums is only exemplified by Stewart and Colbert taking the shows to the rally setting and essentially opening up the shows to a mass audience versus what they would normally be able to fit in their respective studios. By taking their brand of comedy out of the studio they are able to expose more of their message to more individuals around the country at a more personal level creating more distance than just comedy between Stewart and Colbert and the major news networks.

“Jon Stewart and a question of ‘Sanity’: why a comedian is now liberals’ No. 1 hero; As the Rally to Restore Sanity’ shows, America’s liberals are increasingly turning to Jon Stewart as their most inspirational figure. Part of the reason is President Obama’s declining political fortunes, but ultimately it is the left’s desire for civility that has turned a comedian into a political star.” Niv Elis

The interesting thing about this article is that it take a primary focus on Jon Stewart versus both Stewart and Colbert, and while this may not seem to be a bit deal at first glance it’s after reading the article that I realized that it was a Liberal fluff piece. On the surface this article does really say much about rallies or public discourse but the reason I used it because it is directly demonstrating the current issue that so many people are having with media. Elis talks about Stewart as a hero, simply because “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” was a “great
victory for liberals the nation over” in this context the rally was taken the wrong way. Elis goes on to say that the rally was essentially only put on as a response to Glen Beck’s rally and doesn’t even make mention of Al Sharpton or the Labor Union led rallies. What’s even more surprising is that the message of the rally is not touched upon and the rally is made out to be just a public display of meaningless discourse for discourse’s sake.

"The Impudence Of Being Earnest: Jon Stewart And The Boundaries Of Discursive Responsibility." Matt Carlson and Jason T. Peifer

Carlson and Peifer discuss in their article how the traditional roles that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert have been playing over their careers on Comedy Central have taken a huge shift in what is both expected of them as well as what they can do. Carlson and Peifer start out with a quote that so accurately describes the position that the two comedians have placed themselves, “I know there are boundaries for a comedian/pundit talker guy, and I’m sure I’ll find out tomorrow how I have violated them.” – Jon Stewart at the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, both Colbert and Stewart achieved national recognition. With more of a focus on Jon Stewart than Colbert Carlson and Peifer show that Stewart’s job extends far beyond comedian status and is now more of a public advocate.

Using a textual analysis Carlson and Peifer study how journalists either legitimized or delegitimized Stewart’s actions during the rally in 2010. Through this process the various boundaries of acceptable public discourse for a journalist are tested, “What rules and norms is a journalist albeit a satirical journalist held to?” is the driving question. Are Stewart and by association Colbert granted special privileges by the public to perform such acts of discourse without so much as the slightest in public backlash. This study goes on to question what the
result would be if a respected journalist from CNN were to go about forming a rally in the same fashion Stewart did and how the public might react.

"Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective." Megan R. Hill

This critical analysis performed by Hill has the intended goal to establish a means by which political satire can be gauged as either effectively portraying a message or ineffectively portraying a message. Hill asks if what is being stated by satirical pundits is actually getting across to the audience as a serious message. If Jon Stewart were to say something on his show about Syria would it come off as a joke or would it simply be the news as received from a different lens. The analysis goes into this idea by gauging public reactions to factual segments on The Daily Show as compared to complete satirical segments from The Daily Show. The result being that more people found what was said on The Daily Show as being not misleading and that Jon Stewart was genuinely reporting news but putting a humorous spin on it for entertainment purposes. It stands to reason that this analysis can carry over and be applicable to the Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear simply because it is essentially just The Daily Show and The Colbert Report as put on in the public domain and with the intent to cause public discourse to make a point and convey a message.

"Lessons From America? News And Politics In Hard Times." David Nolan

David Nolan, an Australian scholar, highlights that in recent year’s rallies within the United States have been on the rise. Nolan attributes this to the “populist right” since a large portion of major rallies have been held by the Tea Party, but he does not discriminate and mentions some major leftward leaning rallies. The central point that Nolan is making is that the
rally within the United States is losing its appeal and are not nearly as effective as the rallies of the 60s and 70s as major news networks do not seem to invest nearly as much resources in wanting to cover every other rally since one is being held almost once a month. Nolan then goes on to say that The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear was one of the best things to happen to rallies in a long time. At a time during an upcoming midterm election and two years from a presidential election every rally was the same jargon only with a different environment. One political party faulted the other and this continued on and on but The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear broke the mold and provided something different. Nolan looks at The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear as a comment not on the media but on rallies themselves and tells that sometimes a rally shouldn’t be about serious business but rather focus on optimism, humor, fun and audience rather than on the host and his or her message about a political party. The article goes on to say that during times of political turmoil like that of a midterm election satirical pundits like Stewart and Colbert should be praised for bringing a human element to the political process and for their efforts at bringing the political issues to the common voter.

*The comic frame as a corrective to bureaucratization: a dramatistic perspective on argumentation. Arnie J. Madsen*

Madsen takes an in-depth look at how the established bureaucratic systems around the world look to maintain the status quo by means of limiting distinct arguments against the established bureaucratic systems. By limiting change in ideas the status quo is retained but what Madsen is looking into is how the comic frame as outlined by Kenneth Burke’s idea of Dramatism and argumentation is the task of the critic and that it is up to the critic to point out
and acknowledge the faults in a system and bring them to the forefront of conversation. However being a critic pointing out flaws or disparities in a system tends to bring about negative connotations about the critics themselves, so masking the criticism in the form of humor and satire lends itself perfectly to what is needed to be said while still getting the message across to a public audience.

The importance of this article when pertaining to *The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear* is that the rally is looking to interrupt the status quo not of bureaucratic systems but of the established system of mass media. Madsen’s work in conjunction with that of Kenneth Burke’s work and theories would support the idea that the comedic lens that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert take during their rally would be the appropriate means to convey their message. The satire that Stewart and Colbert use is a means get the audience thinking while not directly telling the audience what to think and how to act, thus avoiding the any negative backlash that could spring up from the two host being too direct with the crowd. This means of conveying the message also brings the media in in such a way as to paint the media as the bad guys if the rally faces relentless criticism from the media as a whole furthering the goals of Stewart and Colbert without them having to raise greater alarm.

Does political satire matter? *You betcha! A dramatistic analysis of the 2008 vice presidential debates and comedy satire. Margaret Duffy and Janis Page*

Duffy and Page look to establish the idea that political satire is a necessity when looking at the United States political system. Going in-depth with the Symbolic Convergence Theory and Kenneth Burke’s dramatistic pentad the visual and verbal aspects of the 2008 Vice-Presidential campaign are analyzed in conjunction with the satire and comedy that is put forward through the
various late-night television shows, Saturday Night Live, The Daily show with Jon Stewart, The Colbert Report, and Late Night with David Letterman. The thought behind this piece is that Vice-President Joe Biden and Sarah Palin were both thrust into the ring against one another and the media could pick one side and tear the other one up. Biden faced challenges about being verbose, patronizing and sexist, while Palin faced issues of competence and readiness for the role of Vice-President of the United States. Normally these grievances would be hashed out as the campaign goes and as traditional media begins to weigh in and provide their biases but what happened with this particular campaign was something a bit different. Satire and fake news played a huge roll.

Fake news skipped the biased and focused on deconstructing both parties involved in the debate. Now this may not have lasted all that long and eventually the fake news shows got mileage off of Palin’s media interaction what was determined is that fake news actually shifted thoughts about the two Vice-Presidential candidates as much as the more traditional media forms did. The Daily Show while criticizing Biden took a more direct approach with Palin and really showed why she would be a questionable choice for the Vice-Presidential position in government. Fake news was shifting opinions and doing it in such a way as to make the audience laugh and reach the conclusion on their own. The comedic enlightenment that these mediums used was much more relatable to the common viewer than the confusing visuals and graphics that would be shown on news networks like CNN or Fox News and relatability to the hosts of these shows and the message they were conveying is what drove people to be influenced and listen.

Methodology
In order to move forward with the analysis of *The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear* the methodology and theory by which the rally will be analysis through must be established and be shown to be an adequate means to test the thesis. The methodology that will be used is a generative methodology as outlined by Sonja Foss (1996) and will take a two-tiered approach to look at and analyze the spectacles of the rally. While the generative method will be used to construct the analysis, it would be important to acknowledge that the two-tiered analysis as a whole will be conducted through a comedic lens to show aspects of comedic enlightenment as outlined from Kenneth Burke’s theory of Dramatism. The two-tiered methodology will breakdown into one guiding step for the first tier and two steps for the second tier.

The first tier will be based solely around the dramatic perspective. Through this tier the goal would be to look at different singled out events of the rally and show the breakdown of Dramatism through the comedic lens from these events. The comedic lens that was chosen for this analysis would be the best fit theory to focus on for the simple reason that the two main hosts of the rally, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert as well as their associated “news teams” are plain and simple just comedians. The fact that they are comedians however does not belittle the message of the rally and in effect can help to increase the effectiveness of the message.

Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert accomplish through this rally the same thing that why accomplish through their shows, and that would be political satire via reporting fake news. It is through this medium and through the comedic approach that the two comedians are able to get their messages across to their audiences. By analyzing their formulas and the means by which they put on their performances it would be expected that both Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert would show that they both are benefiting from comedic enlightenment as outline by Kenneth
Burke. It is through this comedic enlightenment that their messages gain validity and audiences tend to be more understanding and willing to cooperate with their messages.

The second tier would be broken down into two steps. The first of these steps would be to identify an element of the rally for analysis. The second of these steps would be to identify the intent of the chosen element based upon a means-end spectrum.

The first step under the governing methodology is to identify a spectacle within The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear. This element would be a spectacle that takes place during the rally, an event on the itinerary of the rally that would take place on stage for the audience to see. The idea behind this step is that the rally itself has many smaller events and activities going on and that each of these elements would lend itself differently to the comedic lens and would more than likely be interpreted differently from each other under that lens. By breaking the rally down and analyzing individual elements in greater detail under the comedic lens more elaborate overlapping results should be yielded, thus being able to derive similarities between the events and bring forth the overarching premise of the rally.

The second step under the second tier is to look at the chosen elements of the rally as they are which is as jokes, stories, episodes, actions and the like. It is through these actions that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert bring out their intended messages. The way in which the action would be analyzed would be based around the idea that each action has a means and an end. It is through the means-end of each of these actions that the message is conveyed to the audience. The intent of each action is what is important, does the end of each analyzed action give a discernable message that would be linked back to show that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are in fact using this rally as a means to call for greater dissonance and discord amongst the public towards traditional mass media news outlets.
Analysis

The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear is an interesting and substantial event within the past decade that could very well be seen as one of the main as well as one the more successful criticisms of the traditional modern day media. The two hosts of the rally Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, known for their popular Comedy Central shows “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” and “The Colbert Report” construct their joint rally to, in a sense, mimic the satire of their two shows while still showing that they can retain and put forth a message to their audience, that calls for the public to challenge and raise discourse directed towards the traditional modern media outlets.

The comedic formula of “Fake News” that Stewart and Colbert adhere by is simply a breakdown into individual acts on their shows that each have a satirical message for the audience. While the message is on the surface meant for the purpose to generate a laugh more often than not these messages carry a criticism on current events. For example Stephen Colbert runs an entire segment on his show entitled Cheating Death with Dr. Stephen T. Colbert DFA where Colbert breaks down in a segment by segment manner jokes that pertain to controversial medical issues but provide some logical elements that would challenge what is being put forth by pharmaceutical companies, thus establishing Colbert’s means-end formula that is so prevalent in his show and in his stage performances. The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear in no way deviated from this formula and in fact dropped a lot of the subtly at time. Throughout the three hour run time of the rally there were five specific acts that displayed this extension of the show’s already established formula that all have the intent of calling for greater discourse when dealing with modern media. The established acts are as followed; “Stephen Colbert’s emerging from his

Each of these acts follow Kenneth Burke’s idea of comedic enlightenment. The two hosts Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert play off classic comedic positioning of the “straight-man and crazy-man” routine with Stewart representing the reasonable straight-man and Colbert representing he overtop embellished crazy-man. Through this juxtaposing that the audience is given some immediate sense on the course each comedian will take during the rally. Stewart’s stance of prevailing sanity is only made ever more appealing when seen in conjuncture with Colbert’s over the top representation of fear and panic. Keeping in mind that the rally is designed with the intent to call greater discourse against modern media it can easily be seen that Stewart is representing this discourse and Colbert is representing the fear that the media puts forth in its actions. For the most part Colbert acts in humorous ways to illustrate common media practices and Stewart criticizes him in ways that possess both a message and comedic intent that aligns with the rally. By the end of the rally when the “winner” is decided it would be difficult to try and argue to the contrary as Colbert’s fear mongering become more and more comic-tragic by making fun of irrational fears and reactions to irrational fears which results in making Stewart’s reasonableness become more and more appealing.

First Segment: “Stephen Colbert’s Emerging from his Fear Bunker”

The first appearance of both the hosts for the rally is promptly after some musical entertainment from The Roots. Jon Stewart first takes the stage and conducts the rally in a considerably normal fashion until he is cut off via video prompt by a half-naked Stephen Colbert who has confined himself within his “Fear bunker” because he is afraid the rally would be a failure and did not want to face that possible reality. After some goading by Stewart, Colbert
emerges from his bunker by means of imitating the Chilean miner rescue earlier that same year. It is promptly after Colbert emerges that he makes a clear move to wrestle control of the rally from Stewart. Colbert goes on stating that there are bees that are assaulting the crowd and that everyone should listen to him and run for their lives, Stewart interjects to bring some sensibility back to the rally bluntly saying that there are no bees only to have Colbert amend his threat of bees to “Bees coated in peanut butter” so they are not only are they terrifying to people with bee allergies but to people with nut allergies as well. This segment is drawn to a close with Stewart once again jumping in and claiming that Colbert is deliberately fabricating fears that are not present at the rally and that he expects people to listen to him based simply on the fact that he is holding a microphone and has audience.

This segment first exposes the audience to the comedy duo that is Stewart and Colbert and their frequently used “straight-man crazy-man” routine, but more importantly is the first exposure that the audience has to the overarching theme of the rally, in that fabricated fear is something that is present in American mass media and something that is so easily constructed. The means-end joke constructed from this act is that Colbert himself is acting as the joke, which is present more often than not in the rally. Through a combination of Colbert’s character and the seemingly ridiculous message that he is attempting to convey an uncomfortable situation is created. While laughing at the ridiculousness seems like a reasonable, course Colbert goes to such an extreme that there is clear reason to believe that there is something else at work. The point of this joke is to just show that when an individual is in command of an audience any message that they may try and convey can be seem as plausible or simply something worth paying attention to. That is where Stewart challenges this with reason, fabricating fears is
something anyone can do just because someone has a stage and microphone does not make those fabrications any more realistic or accurate.

“I am simply raising awareness of potential dangers and then allowing an informed public to decide whether to cower in terror or to die bravely”

- Stephen Colbert

This is directly applicable to modern mass media and more specifically the news industry. Fear is exciting and gets people to stick to channels for more information. Propping up fabrications as fact makes for news and can be seen as accurate just based upon the stage and medium that is being used to convey the message.

Second Segment: “A reading of Stephen Colbert’s poem ‘Are You Sure’”

Stephen Colbert looks to christen the rally with a poem he had written to be read by Sam Waterston the “most reasonably seeming man in America”. The poem was only made up of stanzas that highlighted typical fears people may have on a day to day basis, ranging from everything from pickpockets to forgetting to turn off the oven before leaving the house.

“A mad man could set loose a virus for which there is no cure and while these things may be unlikely ask yourself, are you sure? And can you be sure...that you won’t get Ebola from a tainted diet cola, toxic waste or getting chased by a bearded Ayatollah. Funnel clouds, inhale anthrax in the mail, your lover will discover your vestigial tail.” –Stephen Colbert; read by Sam Waterston
This segment exhibits a rather simple means-end joke. The joke was the poem itself, highlighting rather mundane things that normally do not mean much but when brought up together in succession they are at least a bit concerning and have at least been a fear someone has had at least once showing that no one is immune from these relatable fears. The end result of this joke is to show that the media does just this. Since anything can be a fear the media would find something so small and just exacerbate it until it is larger than life and un-ignoreable. Combine emphasis with repetition and there’s the typical news story. It is also shown that when an individual focuses on this highlighted fear they are seen as being much more important than they actually are and are thus often not exactly newsworthy. And if this point wasn’t seen at this early stage of the rally it would be seen later on during the “Fearzilla” where Colbert displayed actual media coverage of fear inducing events. A few of the stanzas were even straight out of some news stories, such as the fear of pickpockets which was shown to have been highlighted rather aggressively by Fox and CNN.

Third Segment: “Crazy-Peace Train”

This particular act was brought out not so much for comedic means but, to display conflicting genres of music as representations of each side of the rally. The act begins with Stewart introducing Yusuf Islam formally Cat Stevens to provide the audience with a peaceful and reasonable form of entertainment through Islam’s song Peace Train. Islam went about performing his song but was cut off my Colbert who exclaimed that he “Will not get on that peace train” and ushered in a more suitable “train” for the event through the introduction of Ozzy Osbourne who began to sing Crazy Train. For the next two minutes of the rally the Stewart and Colbert respectfully cut off Islam and Osbourne mid songs to get them to stop singing and let the other artist sing, reaching a point when both artists are singing their songs simultaneously. The
calm and peacefully lyrics of Islam’s *Peace Train* drowned out by the louder and in your face styled lyrics of Osbourne’s *Crazy Train*.

The important aspect of this act to keep in mind is that the two artists, Islam and Osbourne are acting as an extensions of the messages that either host is attempting to convey to the audience. Stewart’s chosen artist, Yusuf Islam put forward Stewart’s message of reasonableness, understanding and thought though what is a very passive song. Colbert on the other hand utilized Osbourne’s *Crazy Train* to the opposite effect. *Crazy Train* is naturally a much louder song than *Peace Train* is based purely on how the genre of music and how the artists preform their works. The joke put forth is that these two genres cannot be played together and retain their original intent. When both Osbourne and Islam played together all that could be heard was the instrumentals to and vocals to *Crazy Train* while *Peace Train* was just being overshadowed and if Islam was not present on stage it would be difficult to even determine that two different songs were being played. The end point put forward from this act is seen when applying representation to each of the artists. Since Stewart is representing the reasonable and sensible individual it would stand that Islam is an extension of this and would represent a more well-rounded and less biased news source or an individual’s opinion of a certain subject, whereas Osbourne is representative of the opposite, the mass media conglomerates such as CNN, Fox or CBS. These news organizations thrive off chaos and what is essentially a fabricated fear that is blown far out of proportion. With the combination of monetary backing and notoriety of the news organizations it is baseline difficult or near impossible to actually compete with them and get a separate message out to the public, essentially monopolizing on medium and the message, which is what this act during the rally attempts to show albeit in an indirect way.

**Fourth Segment: “An Interpretation of Reporting”**
For the fourth major act Stewart and Colbert actually have little input as this act is left primarily up to news team correspondents to “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart”, Wyatt Cenac and Jason Jones. The act was introduced by Stewart as a means to segue into how the media would likely report on the rally in the coming week, having the two correspondents take two different angles, Wyatt Cenac approached the rally in a positive light whereas Jason Jones preformed his bit with a belligerent mindset towards the rally and the people in attendance.

Both Cenac and Jones interviewed the same individual at the rally, Kevin, but in their two separate styles that resulted in the two very polarizing interviews. Cenac looked and talked of rally as a “Vast swath of America brought together by the common optimism of a perfect future”. Upon interviewing Kevin Cenac spoke clearly and was welcoming to the opinion that Kevin had about the rally. Short sweet and to the point that media could highlight the event in positive light while not making the rally seem like it is just a group of annoyed Americans protesting to protest.

On the other side of the coin Jones stepped forward and immediately looked to darken the rally both literally and figuratively with his use of a black and white filter and his negative outlook on the rally. Jones states that the rally is more of a crowd and that they are a disorganized mass of activists that are rallying to push their own “Pet cause or grievance”. Upon interviewing Kevin Jones first calls him French, then asks him if he was in attendance for protest for something, and once Kevin denied acts of protest Jones immediately called the rally a sham and expressed that the rally was again disorganized in how “At the rally to restore sanity people can’t even agree on what sanity is”.

This segment did just what is was outlined to do only took it to the extreme for the purpose of laughs. The two correspondents showed what could be considered typical interview
procedure for certain news networks at a rally of this size. Cenac saying that the rally is a beautiful display of American freedom of expression and protest and Jones taking the side that dissonance and discourse of this size is a breeding ground for every type of protestor to come and voice their complaints about the world or their country. While both of these were taken to their respective extremes there is some validity to the sense that interviews at these types of rallies have been conducted in such a way as to belittle the cause and the people who are in attendance in favor of pushing the idea of a lack of unity in the country that could be reported on as a weakness and something that should be highlighted as news.

Fifth Segment: “Fearzilla”

The last act and perhaps the most telling act of the rally is the closing act of the event which so accurately portrays what both Stewart and Colbert were attempting to show throughout the rally in one simple act all without breaking character. During this act of the rally a literal debate begins with Stewart taking to defend the ideas of sanity and its guidelines of reasonableness, outward thinking and open-mindedness as compared to Colbert’s onslaught of fear and its general guideline of closed-mindedness and just general taking what is said for fact without any real input or thought. Though this was never really a true debate it still holds its merits to provide insight to each host’s opinion or character. Stewart preaches that it is through reason that we progress and are able to take action and that through fear we stagnate and thus progress is stunted. Colbert while still in character goes on to say that fear is much more necessary than sanity and reasonableness because it enables us to survive and that it is in our best interest as humans to fear. After these remarks is when everything gets a bit interesting, namely in the way Stewart addresses fear and its perpetrators.
“Keeping you scared is exactly what they want”, “They constantly chum the water with fear”

It is right from these quotes that the purpose of the rally can really be seen, Stewart blatantly call out the media while not actually addressing them by name, addressing the media as “they”.

From this point the true humor in the act begins, Colbert in shock over the revelation that fear maybe perpetrated by media steels his opinion through the form of a giant paper-mâche puppet constructed in his likeness, a Fearzilla as he calls it. After unleashing Fearzilla Colbert calls for the Media to also be unleashed, at which time various media coverages are shown to the audience of fear inducing stories that after listening to just go to show the extent in which the media blows its coverage out of proportion. The news highlights are not telling any useful information but rather just spouting trigger words that would get the public in an uproar; “Are terrorist in your backyard?”, “What about the water in your faucet, did you know there is stuff in there that could kill you!”, “Killer bees”, “Evangelical Christianity”, “Gay marriage” and other such highlights that could drive an audience to be concerned over minor issues that are made much larger than they actually are. After this media blitz Stewart goes on to reassure the audience that most of those highlights are over blow and that together as a nation the problems brought up could be solved including the problems brought up over the news organizations.

This is one of the longest segments of the rally but the most telling. While still keeping with the theme that the entire segment is a joke and thus designed to entertain, Stewart and Colbert break the mold a bit and just outright highlight what the problem is, albeit in a humorous way. With Colbert’s media montage outlining the fears that he has been talking about throughout the rally a face is added to the fear, the face of media. It is no longer up to an interpretation but rather put out in the open and while Colbert declares that he had won the rally the end result is
still the same. Stewart’s voice of reason is shown to be just that only validated when compared to such polarizing reports across news organizations from both sides of the political spectrum.

**Evaluation**

After looking at “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” through the established comedic lens under the outlined two-tiered generative methodology the ruling question of whether or not Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert are using “The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear” as a means to inspire acts of dissonance and discord towards modern day mass media can be seen rather clearly. By utilizing their own brand of unique means-end comedy Stewart and Colbert regularly employ on their two shows the two comedians have brought out the idea that news media has changed from reporting the news in a slightly biased way to reporting fabrications as news with a major biased so to attract greater viewership as well as retain their already enraptured audiences.

Through the individual segments of the rally the profiteering of news media as a fear mongering business is seen, more so it is seen through the preverbal avatar of news media, Stephen Colbert. Colbert took the stance early on in the rally to be the crazy-man of the comedy duo and as such would have to take a stance of lunacy at a rally that would strive for reasonableness. In his irrational actions and strict adherence to his character Colbert rather than propping up the idea of fear is actually poking fun at his own irrationality and by extension the irrationality of news media. The fears that Colbert highlights are common fears that news media take and run with, twisting the original image into something that should horrify any viewer keep people watching, otherwise they put themselves at risk of being unprepared. This point of fear fabrication puts viewers in a position where it is in their best interests to listen to their preferred
news outlet and take what they are saying for fact, this is contrary to what Stewart puts forward as the straight-man of the duo.

Stewart represented the idea of reasonableness and what is essentially a call for viewers to consider different avenues other than the one that is being put out to them by the news agencies. This stance was much more difficult to see on stage as the rally was being conducted as a majority of the time the spotlight was taken away from Stewart when Colbert would take the stage, which funny enough only lends to the point that the two comedians were making. Stewart is shown up by Colbert at almost every turn as Colbert’s volume, tone and overall showmanship just outweighed Stewarts which is further an indicator on how difficult it is to compete with whatever message the news agencies are pushing for the public to hear. The main avenue that Stewart takes to convey his message is the idea that unity will free thinking would be the best way to induce change in the established system that the news giants follow. The reason necessary to discern what parts of a story are factual and what parts of the story are fabricated is something that Stewart is pushing for. Rather than taking what is said for fact, Stewart is asking the audience to be more critical, do some background research, try out different news networks, look at the story from a difference perspective and when all else fails just tune out the noise by simply turning the noise off, that is the beauty of a television or radio.

After the events of the “Fearzilla” segment of the rally Jon Stewart took a particularly interesting step out of character and away from humor for about the last ten minutes of the rally. Stewart addressed the audience both those on the mall and those at home to give thanks for their support but to also provide a moment of sincerity and to provide the audience with a direct interpretation of what the rally was meant to be about.
“This was not a rally to ridicule people of faith, or people of activism, or look down our noses at the heartland, or passionate argument, or to suggest that times are not difficult and that we have nothing to fear. They are, and we do. But we live now in hard times, not end times.” – Jon Stewart

Through this single sentence Stewart sought to sum up the rally as a means to start down a different path and try to deviate from the already determined way of going about traditional media. Remove the anger, hate, elitism and reduce the volume of the medium and news will be news again.

In the days following the rally the news reported little on the event. When it was brought up the rally was primarily talked about as being solely for comedic purposed and that the hosts were just comedians looking to lighten up an afternoon in October and get people to laugh. However there was one news anchor that stood out from this common trend, and that anchor was Keith Olbermann. Two days after the rally Olbermann addressed his audience and while he did not praise the rally Olbermann did take a lesson from it. Olbermann decided to comply with the message of the rally and suspended his “Worst Person in the World” segment, in the interest of reducing the anger and volume that the segment carried with it and to instead focus on less aggravating pressuring topics. Olbermann a prominent news anchor took a stance against his own segment in direct opposition to his ratings and what his audience expected him to do in an effort to take the anger and fear out of news, Olbermann raised discourse against his own industry. While this did not last long it still went to show that the message was not lost amongst the news media and did make some kind of difference as to whether or not it will be heard later on will be another question all together.
With a major news anchor like Olbermann hearing the message of the rally and actually adapting to a more reasonable less aggressive segment of his show it would stand to reason that The Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear was a success. If the media that is being criticized gets the message and acts against itself to better its own image and for its own benefit then the message is clear. The segments of the rally do give reason to inspire dissonance, discord and thought towards the traditional new media outlets, and this message was successfully brought about by means of comedic enlightenment through the comedy duo of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. It is through this aspect of comedic enlightenment that the message was truly able to be conveyed, any other means could have stirred up some very unwanted opposition but comedy proved to be just benign enough not incur the wrath of the news giants and be just clear enough to inspire an audience to think about what they are watching and formulate their own interpretations on news stories rather than being subject to the fabricated fears that are propped up as facts.
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