HUMOROUS TREATMENT OF ACTUALITY

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Abstract

This essay is a close reading of the humor and irony used in Michael Moore's feature documentaries; *Roger and Me, Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko*. Based on existing theories on humor and the documentary, my analysis is a reading of carefully chosen scenes to illustrate the different methods used to create humor and irony, as well as a attempt to describe why we laugh at these particular scenes. A review of critical discourse surrounding Moore's films and their use of humor, identifies issues with the comedy/documentary hybridization, yet also that Moore's signature style of documentary is one of the latest manifestations in the evolution of the feature documentary film.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction
1.2 Background and Motivation

Documentary films have historically been viewed as serious business. They were often used for instructional and educational purposes and have certainly not been viewed as a source of entertainment. In his book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* Bill Nichols (1991, p. 3) describes this mentality as a "discourse of sobriety";

> Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare – these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself; they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety […]

The subject of a documentary had to be serious and important in order to promote change in the world. Nichols (1991, p.4) continues "Discourses of sobriety are sobering because they regard their relation to the real world as direct, immediate, transparent". The primary goal of a documentary was to show pressing issues challenging the world, and perhaps even give possible solutions of what could be done to fix these issues.

In the 1980's the documentary took a more entertainment-oriented direction; strategies borrowed from fiction became more common, such as the use of protagonists and antagonists, and narrative structures like the classic Hollywood narrative style. This is a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, and incorporating conflict, climax and resolution. The use of humor also increased, and the line between documentary and entertainment became increasingly blurred. (Middleton 2014) Humor and these other strategies can be described as *infotainment,* where fact meets fiction, and documentary meets entertainment. (Sørensen 2003) It is difficult to separate what is a direct result of humor and irony, and what is a result of other entertaining elements. One specific aspect of humor I wish to explore is irony. Although irony is not the same as humor, irony can often result in a humorous outcome. This essay will focus on the use of humor and irony, but this does not necessarily exclude the concept of infotainment as a whole.

Michael Moore and his film *Roger and Me* is often referred to one of the first examples of this more humorous trend in the documentary tradition. In fact, his entire career has been characterized by the use of humor, irony and entertainment elements and this usage has become an integral part of his

distinctive signature style. I have therefore chosen to make three of Michael Moore's feature documentary films the subjects of analysis in this essay.

I wish to explore the phenomena of the use of humor and irony in documentary films further because I believe the use of humor and irony to be an important step in the evolution of the documentary that some critics and academics have not taken seriously. And I argue that the use of humor and irony does not mean that a documentary film is incapable of tackling serious issues and promote change, neither does it automatically lessen the documentary's ability to tell truth. My goal with this essay is not only to present a view of the use of humor in documentary films, but also to discuss a trend which I believe aids the documentary film to gain a larger audience.

1.3 Selection of Films

I have chosen three different films from three different points of Moore career, *Roger and Me* (1989), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) and *Sicko* (2007). *Roger and Me* is the first film Moore ever made, and with a background in magazine journalism, he had little to no experience with filmmaking. *Bowling for Columbine* came out eleven years after *Roger and Me* and represents the middle of Moore career. Now Moore had gained a good amount of experience, the aforementioned *Roger and Me*, his first (and only) feature film *Canadian Bacon* (1995), another documentary feature *The Big One* (1997) and as well as two nonfiction television shows, *TV Nation* (1994) *and The Awful Truth* (1999). The last film I chose to analyze is *Sicko* which is one of Moore's latest film. By this point in his career Moore had an Academy Award win for *Bowling for Columbine*, the top grossing documentary feature ever with *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and an infamous reputation. The aim of this selection is not compare the use of humor and irony in these three film, but rather to capture a wider range of Moore's career.

1.4 Research Problem

It is no secret that Moore uses humor and irony in his documentary films, it has become deeply engrained in his film and a style he has stuck to throughout his career. I wish to study Moore's uses of humor in light of cinematic elements and techniques; *mise-en-scène*, sound, music, editing, sequencing, narrative form and point of view. I have come to the following research problem;

> How are cinematic techniques used to create humor and irony in Michael Moore's documentary films *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko?*

In addition to this research problem I wish to explore how Moore's films have been received by the film critic and academic communities. I therefore add the following supplementary research question;

> How has the use of humor and irony in Moore's films been perceived by film critics and academics?

1.5 Essay Structure

Chapter two feature short plot synopses of *Roger and Me, Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko*.

Chapter three gives a description of the methodical strategies I will take advantage of in order to answer the research problem and question.

In chapter four I will examine the theoretical framework surrounding humor and irony, and the documentary.

In chapter five I will put forth some examples from the three films which illustrate the use of humor and irony. First, I shall look at how Moore portraits the comic figure in his films and how he uses shock value to create humor. I shall then explore how strategic editing can create humor. Lastly, a description of how irony is created and understood on screen.

Chapter six gives a short description of the critical receptions Moore's humorous films have received, and a look at Moore's own opinions on this subject.

Chapter seven examines my findings in a forward perspective, and a short summary of how I have answered my research problem and question.

Appendix 1-3 are plot segmentations of each of Roger and Me, Bowling for Columbine, and Sicko for the reader's reference.

Chapter 2 Methodological Strategies
2.1 Qualitative Research

Quantitative research involve anything quantifiable and often comprises of numbers, counting and measuring. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is mostly based in words and results based on analysis and interpretation. (Blaikie, 2010) Qualitative research aims to explore the meaning behind different social phenomena. The term social phenomena include human communication and behavior. A documentary film can be placed under the category human communication. My research problem makes it clear that this essay will utilize qualitative research as I wish to better understand a social phenomena, Moore's documentary films, in light of a theoretical framework, in order to explore the meaning behind them.

2.2 Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a method used to analyze certain media texts «as closely and systematically as possible in order to answer specific research questions.» (Larsen 2002, p. 117) One might question the use of the terms *textual* analysis and media *text* when referring to the study of films. Larsen explains that the term media text has been used as "general term covering diverse phenomena such as music, still images, films and so on, in addition to written and spoken language." (Larsen 2002, p. 117) I will in in short perform a film analysis, in order to better understand how the use of humor and irony has impacted Moore's documentary films. As Geiger and Rutsky (2005, p.17) point out, films "are also meaningful documents with the potential to yield rich insights into the cultures and times in which they are made […] Film analysis aims to bring these ideas and values, and the means through which they are conveyed, to our awareness." (p.17)

When performing a textual, or film, analysis one looks towards the research problem to decide how to proceed. There are two basic types of textual analysis, one rooted in generalities and one in particulars. The one focused on generalities wishes to establish textual modes or prototypes by identifying distinctive features, while the one rooted in particulars delves into the media texts as isolated cases in regards to their specificities. As a reminder my research problem is: How are cinematic techniques used to create humor and irony in Michael Moore's documentary films *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko?* From this I can deduct that I wish to research the particulars of the media texts in question. The reading focusing on particulars is similar to what Atle Kittang describes as an objectifying reading of the media text, one that aims to analyze the media text inde-

pendently of the sender and the films' social contexts. (Østbye 2001, p.60) To achieve this I will do a close reading of the three films.

2.3 Close Reading

A close reading is a techniques rooted in literary theory and the 'New Critics' movement of the late 1930s and early 1940's. "A close reading is a detailed examination, deconstruction, and analysis of a media text. It is the quintessential humanist methodology, born in the study of literature, and adapted to other media forms such as cinema studies." (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2001, p. 289)
Reading a film and viewing a film is not the same thing. Reading a film is a much more active and critical way to approach a film; "To read a film is to look beyond its obvious meaning - what it says or what happens in its narrative - in order to find the often unnoticed meanings, assumptions, and beliefs around which it is organized." (Geiger and Rutsky 2005, p.19)

A close reading usually starts with multiple readings or viewings of the text in question, and an analysis of sections or scenes of interest in relation to the research problem. I will read scenes with my research problem close in mind and analyze these in light of relevant theory. My primary tool of research will be my own interpretive capacity. (Jensen and Jankowski 1991) What I wish to achieve with a close reading is to get the reader of this essay to see the films in relation to my research problem from my point of view. I will explain, deconstruct and analyze scenes I believe will best display my point of view. It is important to note that the results of my analysis is a result of multiple viewings and one cannot expect to yield the same results from just a single viewing. It is also relevant to point out that I am viewing these films today, and not the specific time periods they were produced and released.

The application of a close reading is strongly linked to relevant theory. A close reading can be used over a wide range of theoretical traditions, among them semiotics, hermeneutics, rhetoric, different ideological theories and theories of genre and discourse. Which brings me to ask the question; to what purpose am I reading this text or in which context shall my analysis be performed? Again, I go back to my research problem; how are cinematic techniques used to create humor and irony in Michael Moore's documentary films *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko?* I am looking at the humor in documentary film, or how the *genres* documentary and comedy mix.

2.3.1 Genre

A film, or media text, does not exist on a vacuum, it will form part of a larger context; "The underlying assumption is that a unique texts is quite a rare phenomenon. Most text belong to a larger classes of texts, and these classes, in turn, are defines by the features shared by the individual texts." (Larsen 2002, p.132) I will look at these films from a genre perspective, and as I will be looking at the use of comedy in documentaries, both the documentary and comedy genres are relevant to this analysis.

When it comes to the comedy genre the films will be analyzed in relation to theories on humor, specifically the superiority, incongruity and relief theories.

As for the documentary genre, firstly I will give what I believe to be the best definition of this genre and describe some of the characteristics I believe to be of importance in regards to my research problem.

Lastly, to answer my supplementary research question; How has the use of humor and irony in these films been perceived by film critics and academics? I will look at film critical discourse surrounding the films. I will gather reviews and academic writings on Moore's films which either criticizes or praises the use of humor in Moore's films. This is to better understand the success of Moore's methods as described in the analysis portion. Are Moore's methods important to the future development of the documentary genre?

Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 What is Humor?

The nature of humor has proven to be a complex and difficult concept to define, and the closest I have come to a definition is that humor is something that causes amusement. Likewise, humor theory is a complicated and at times confusing branch of academics which is extremely interdisciplinary incorporating linguistics, sociology, psychology and performance among others. Despite this, it is generally agreed that there are three main theories on why we laugh; the superiority theory, the incongruity theory and the relief theory. While these theories are thought of as independent theories and somewhat contradictory, it is evident that they do at times overlap. (Mills 2001, p.63)

3.1.1 The Superiority Theory

The oldest theory dates back to Plato and Aristotle and was later described by Thomas Hobbes; the superiority theory.

The superiority theory is based on the idea that laughter represents a feeling of superiority towards the object of the joke. "[Hobbes] suggests that humour arises from attaining a position of 'sudden glory', in which laughter reinforces power positions and is inevitably defined as a negative social phenomenon." (Mills 2001, p.63) A laughter response stems from a comparison of 'the laugher' and 'the laughed at'. 'The laugher' laughs at 'the laughed at' because the former appears superior in comparison to the latter. This theory could be described as being rooted in evil as the laughter comes at another's expense. We laugh at other people's shortcomings because it will assert our own superiority. Freud also links this idea to the concept of *Schadenfreude*, the taking of pleasure in someone else's misfortune.

French philosopher Henri Bergson later added another layer to the superiority theory; the notion that laughter can be a form of social correction. Bergson claims that «the comic expresses, above all else, a special lack of adaptability to society» (Bergson 1900, n.p.). The comic figure is clueless to the world around them and how they are perceived. Laugher then functions as "an avowed intention to humiliate, and consequently correct our neighbor." (Bergson 1900, n.p.) We laugh as a way to signify that someone's actions, statements or behavior is not acceptable in this society.

The superiority theory is not without its' critics. The German philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel challenged this negative view of the superiority theory and claimed that one does not always laugh *at* someone, one can also laugh *with* someone. (Kjus and Kaare 2006, p.17)

3.1.2 The Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory is traced back to Immanuel Kant and suggests that humor lies in the perception of something that is incongruous; that is, something that violates our mental patterns and expectations. (Morreal 2013) In other words, "…humor results from the clash of incompatible discourses…" (Mills 2011, p.63) Humor is created when something appears to be a paradox or takes a surprising turn. This is similar to that of a classic telling of a joke, which consists of set-up and punch line. The set up gives us certain expectations and the punch line go against these expectations thus resulting in laughter. The punch line is incongruous to the set up. The incongruity theory states that humor is perceived at the moment of realization of incongruity between a concept involved in a certain situation and the real objects thought to be in some relation to that concept. In other words, we laugh at the moment we understand that our expectations have not come true. The incongruity theory describes humor and laughter as a cognitive phenomenon and can be linked to the concept bisociative thinking, the act of experiencing an event in two irreconcilable contexts at the same time. (Kjus and Kaare 2006) That is, an action or scene can be understood in two different ways simultaneously, yet one explanation is more logical and plausible than the other. (Middleton 2014, p. 26) The logical explanation is our expectation, and the implausible one is the punch line.

3.1.3 The Relief Theory

In contrast to the superiority theory, the relief theory views laughter as a positive action. It is a way to reduce stress; «…laughter does in the nervous system what a pressure-relief valve does in a steam boiler.» (Morreall 2013) We use humor as a way to relieve the pressure and seriousness in trying psychological situations and is linked to the belief that laughter reduces psychological tension. This theory is rooted back to Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis. Freud divides jokes into two main categories, the tendentious and the non-tendentious. While non-tendentious jokes are innocent, tendentious jokes, jokes with a purpose, run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to listen to them. (Freud 1905, p.90) Tendentious jokes are often obscene, crass or hostile as these types of jokes can be a mask for sexual or aggressive impulses. We use psychological energy to keep these types of taboo subjects locked up and we laugh because these tendentious jokes releases

that psychological energy. This theory points to the purpose of humor as therapeutic that is, a relief of psychological tension.

The relief theory can be linked to the concept of catharsis. catharsis is an important concept introduced in Aristoteles' Poetics. It is a complex concept, and I include this definition;

> Catharsis (Latin), from the Greek Κάθαρσις Katharsis meaning "purification" or "cleansing" […] is a sudden emotional breakdown or climax that constitutes overwhelming feelings of great pity, sorrow, laughter, or any extreme change in emotion that results in renewal, restoration, and revitalization.
>
> (newworldencyclepedia.org 2013, n.p.)

Sudden overwhelming feelings of laughter cleanses the mind and releases tension, restoring the mind back to a state in which it is ready to receive more information, or perhaps ready to do something about the injustices portrayed in the documentary film. Instead of leaving the audience in an action-less depression about the state of the world, laughter can remind us that nothing is hopeless, and change can still happen.

3.2 Irony

Bill Nichols (2001, p.85) gives a simple explanation on the concept of irony; "Irony involves not saying what is meant or saying the opposite of what is meant." Freud (1905, p.73) has a similar view of the concept of irony; "The only technique that characterizes irony is representation by the opposite." On screen irony does not always result in the opposite, but rather a conflict between two elements creating an unsaid meaning. (Davis 1999, p.27).

How irony produces laughter can be tied to all three theories describes above. Irony can be used in a superior fashion, for example an ironic statement can work as social correction. The incongruity theory is rooted in a conflict between set up and punch line, while irony is rooted in a conflict between two statements or elements. The relief theory states that we laugh to release psychological pressure and irony can produce laughter because we do not know how to relate to conflicting statements. Despite of, or perhaps because of this, I have chosen to treat irony as a separate phenomenon.

A prime example of irony in documentary is Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* (1933) and its ironic narration. It uses a dry scientific voice-over, yet this narration does not go with the pictures shown. It be-

comes more and more clear that something is not as it should be and the irony becomes apparent. We laugh because we do not know how to relate to this obvious conflict.

So the use of irony in film is not a new concept, but it is by no means an uncomplicated one. A verbal ironic statement will be accompanied by a tone of voice, a gesture and in written language a signifier to help listener or reader understand the irony. This is not always possible on the screen. How irony works on the screen will be described in more detail in chapter five.

3.3 Documentary

Firstly, the definition of the documentary needs to be clear. I have chosen to go back to the 1930's and a definition set forth by documentarian John Grierson, who proposed that the documentary is a; "creative treatment of actuality". (Grierson, 1933, p. 8) Many definitions have been proposed since, but Grierson's description has been cemented as one many academics cite even today over sixty years later. The word 'actuality' acknowledges that documentaries are indeed rooted in the truth of reality, and is a reminder of the responsibility a documentarian carries towards her subject matter. The phrase 'creative treatment' communicates that documentaries are treated with a creative hand and can therefore not be regarded as an absolute truth. (Nichols, 2010)

Beyond Grierson's description the documentary genre conventions differs greatly. Many documentaries are for example characterized by their use of a voice-of-God narration, but this is by no means a requirement. (Nichols, 2010) No documentaries use the same techniques, deal with the same issues or display the same styles. I therefore do not wish to attribute any other characteristics to the documentary aside from their 'creative treatment of actuality'.

3.3.1 Documentary and Comedy Together

As described in chapter one the documentary film have long been regarded with a seriousness that Nichols describes as a 'discourse of sobriety'. They are to tackle serious issues like science, policy, education, economics and warfare and should serve a social purpose. Historically humor and irony has therefore not been a dominant devise in the documentary film. Humor has been present in films such as *Nanook of the North* (1922), in a scene where Nanook and the white man meet to trade and Nanook bites into a music record, and the aforementioned *Las Hurdes*. But it was not until the late 1980s that documentarians discovered the full potential in mixing humor and documentary. Films like *The Atomic Café* (1982) and *Roger and Me* used humor and irony very deliberately to help get

their political points across. It is important not to ignore the significance of this convention, as it has challenged our view of what a documentary film really *is*. This new wave of irony, humor and hybridization in documentary films "destabilize more conventional modes of documentary authority and spectatorial positioning." (Middleton 2014, pp.4-5)

The concept of *infotainment* came into play; where does the line between documentary and entertainment go? Can documentary filmmakers take advantage of the obscuring of this division? In his book *Documentary's Awkward Turn* Jason Middleton (2014) describes how he believes the awkward moments that often happen in documentaries can translate into humor, and how some documentarians, like Michael Moore, welcome awkward moments for humorous rhetorical effect. Does this mean we are moving away from Nichols' 'discourse of sobriety'?

Chapter 4 Plot Summaries
4.1 Roger and Me

Roger and Me chronicles the decline of Michael Moore's hometown of Flint, Michigan and the part he believes the auto company General Motors played in its downfall. General Motors was Flint's biggest employer and when the company decided to move its factories to Mexico, the city of Flint is left with record braking unemployment numbers and little to no industry to support its economy. Michael Moore makes it his mission to get General Motor's CEO, Roger Smith, to come to Flint to see what his actions has done to the city and the people who gave years of their lives to the company. Moore tells stories of ex-auto workers struggling to survive, failed attempts to revive the city, disturbingly high crime rates, serious depopulation and bleak employment opportunities for those who decide to stay behind.

4.2 Bowling for Columbine

As a reaction to the Columbine High School shooting, Moore takes a look at America's obsession with guns. Moore sets out to explore how and why America has the highest gun murder rate in the entire world. He debunks popular explanations such as violent history, access to guns, violent films and video games, shock-rocker Marilyn Manson and even poverty. Moore examines the media and their part in creating what he calls a 'culture of fear'; even though murder rates and violent crime statistics are down, the media's portrayal of murder and violence are rising dramatically. In an effort to do something about future shootings, Moore brings two Columbine victims to the Kmart head offices, the store where the gunmen bought the bullets still embedded in the victim's bodies, to ask them to stop selling handgun bullets. To Moore's surprise, the company publicly agrees to do so.

4.3 Sicko

In *Sicko,* Moore sets out to expose the flaws in the American health care system. He compares the workings of America's privatized, for-profit insurance companies to the Canadian, British and French free, government-run health care systems. Through health insurance horror stories, some with deadly results, he gives a glimpse of how companies will prioritize profit over the lives of Americans. Not only does he expose the excising American system as corrupt, morally dubious and life threatening, but shows how these other countries have made socialized medicine work with no ill effects to the public. As a last statement Moore brings a group of 9/11 rescue worker to communist Cuba. Even though their health issues directly stem from their efforts in the aftermath of the

terrorist attack they have been denied treatment by the US. In Cuba they are given all the treatment they need, absolutely free.

Chapter 5 Analysis

In this chapter I will examine different types of filmic devises that Moore uses to produce humor and irony in his films. I will be looking at the films' *mise-en-scène*, a term which is used to describe everything that we see in the frame, but excludes editing techniques and camera movement and position. (Phillips 2000, p.35) This includes the 'characters' actions, words and behavior. 'The *mise-en-scène* would also include things like quality of acting, costumes and sets, but since these are more a feature of fiction film, I will not feature these points. Of course, every scene in the film is a result of some sort of editing and has been «manipulated» in some way, therefore I will also be examining any post-production techniques used to create humor, such as voice-over, music, and certain editing techniques.

I have identified three types of humor Moore uses that links to the three humor theories described in chapter three. Firstly is awkward humor, which I argue have many similarities to the superiority theory. Then I have an example of what I would describe as shocking humor, which I would place under the relief theory. Academic Jason Middleton has identified one of Moore's methods of creating humor as 'cutting on the absurd', a technique I believe to have roots in both the incongruity theory and the superiority theory. Lastly, I present examples of use irony, which mostly are a result of the post-production process; voice-over, music and editing techniques. These divisions I have created in this chapter are by no means exact, there will be overlap and in most cases the examples described below can fall under more than humor theory, but I have placed each example under the theory I believe to the most prevalent in that particular scene.

5.1. Awkward Humor - Superiority Theory

Awkward humor is part of Moore's signature style of filmmaking. In his book 2014 *Documentary's Awkward Turn* Jason Middleton examines the use of what he called awkward humor in recent documentary films. He explains that "Awkward humor in the context of documentary film and other reality-based media is rooted in differentials in perception and affect among filmmaker, subject, and spectator […]" (Middleton 2014, s.26)". Awkward humor can be linked to the superiority theory in that the 'differentials in perception' can promote a feeling of superiority in the audience if the audience feels they know more than the subjects or filmmaker. An awkward interview with an expert who struggles to answer questions makes the audience feel superior to the expert even if we could not answer those questions ourselves. Middleton (2014, p.2) continues that awkwardness and documentary conjure similar feelings in the audience; "[…] awkward moments can be understood in a

sense as documentary moments. They are moments when an encounter feels too real: unscripted, unplanned, and, above all, occurring in person." This is an accurate description of most of Moore's encounters with his films' subjects.

5.1.1 Moore as a Comic Figure

Imagine Michael Moore; overweight, unkept hair, slouchy clothing and overall scruffy appearance and sporting his signature baseball cap, which in *Roger and Me* reads "I'm out for trout". Sharrett and Lurh (2003, p.36) presents the idea that Moore uses his personal appearance to his advantage. For example in *Roger and Me*, when walking into the corporate offices of General Motors he seems like a harmless hick without the common sense to put on a suit and he appears unthreatening and comically out of place. This is when he ambushed his interview subjects, showing that he is not as unthreatening as he seems. This is an example of differing perceptions between the filmmaker and his subjects. His on-screen appearance also strengthens his rhetoric as Middleton (2014, p.24) puts it, he becomes "the awkward everyman up against powerful forces";

> When Moore puts himself in awkward positions such as being detained by security guards while trying to board an exclusive elevator to the office of General Motors CEO Roger Smith, his naive protestations of ignorance are a pose meaning to cast shame upon a corporation that ruins the lives of its workers while remaining utterly inaccessible to their questions and demands. (Middleton, 2014, p.24)

In his book *Freakshow* (2000) Jon Dovey analyses the construction of an awkward, almost competent filmmaker persona, such as the one Moore plays in his films. Dovey (2000, p.50) argues that by coordinating audience's point of view with the perspective of the filmmaker, the humorous portrayal of the filmmaker makes him "serve… as a new source of authority." The humorous filmmaker persona does not lose the traditional authoritative presence that has historically been present in documentaries.

5.1.2 The intentional Comic Figure

An example of Moore portraying himself as an intentional comic figure can be found in *Sicko*. Moore visits a British NHS (National Health Service) run hospital. He meets a pregnant woman who explains that she is due in seven weeks and is visiting the hospital in preparation of the birth. Moore asks "So what do you pay for a stay here?" There is a small confused pause, and she responds "No one pays". She then laughs. Moore asks some administrators the same question, they confirm the woman's statement; "This is the NHS. There is no bill at the end of it." Fast paced music starts to play as Moore walks around the hospital in an investigative manner, peering through

windows and inspecting signs. Moore speaks in a voice-over: "Even with insurance there is bound to be a bill somewhere." A reception worker tells him there is no such thing as a billing department.

A couple with a newborn baby are about to leave the hospital. Moore asks them: "What did they charge you for that baby?" The mother confusingly replies "Sorry..?" Moore: "You have to pay before you can get outta here?" Both respond with; "no, no, no" and shake their heads. They look at each other. The father says "this is not America." and they laugh.

Moore explains in his voice-over that he is not giving up. He decides to visit the emergency room because, as he explains in his voice-over he might have "more luck in the part of the hospital where things can get seriously expensive." He asks a doctor how much a man's broken ankle with cost him. Yet again he is met with confusion then laughs. Moore questions this attitude saying, "I'm asking about hospital charges and you're laughing at me." The doctor responds that he has never heard that question before.

Moore continues to walk the corridors of the hospital while stating in his voice-over; "I was starting to fall for this everything is free bit. And then I discovered this;" Cut to a sign saying *Cashier*. Moore speaks to the man behind a glass hatch in the wall:

> Moore: So this is where people come to pay their bill when they are done staying in the hospital?
> Cashier: No, this is NHS hospital. You don't pay the bill.
> Moore: Then why does it say cashier here if people don't have to pay a bill?

It is explained that the man gives people money if they have reduced means and need to get reimbursed for transport to the hospital. A doctor explains that in Britain the criteria to leave the hospital is when the patient is healthy and ready and has a safe place to go to, not when the bill is paid. The scene ends with clips of everyone we have met in the hospital laughing, and Moore quipping in his voice-over; "Clearly I was just the butt of the joke here."

This last statement sums up the entire scene. Moore is the butt of the joke, but it is very much intentional. Even though Moore seems sincere in this scene, it is clear that he is playing a part. Moore is not as ignorant as he comes off in his scene. Even though he is an American he would, at least in the research for the film, have a basic knowledge of the British health care system. He is playing a part; the ignorant American. Moore aims to educate the public with his films, he plays dumb to show

how ignorant and dumb the American system is compared to the British one. He is, as an American, focused on payment, while the British are concentrating on the actual treatment of patients. The people he speaks to feel superior to this foreign man who knows nothing, and we, the audience, feel the same and this is why we laugh at Moore in this scene.

Moore purposefully does not fit into the situation. He refuses to believe what he is told, and he asks the same question over and over again. He plays the part of the awkward foreigner who does not understand the ways of the rest of the world. He invites the social correction described by Henri Bergson. Everyone he encounters laugh as a way to correct his behavior. The couple with the new-born baby, reminding him that this is not America or the emergency doctor telling him that no one has ever been dumb enough to ask such a silly question. They are saying, this is not how we behave in this society, now conform. You are making an absolute fool of yourself.

5.1.3 The Tragic Comic Figure

Moore does not only use himself as a comic figure. He also uses his subjects, although this often results in a more tragic comic figure. The 'Bunny Lady' scene is one of the more infamous scenes in *Roger and Me*. The scene starts with a shot of a cardboard sign reading: "Rabbits or Bunnies, Pets or Meat, For Sale" and dogs barking in the background. The camera then follows Moore as he goes up to a door and knocks. The Bunny Lady opens the door. The two have an awkward exchange where Moore expresses confusion about the sign. Here we witness an incongruity between Moore's confusion and the Bunny Lady's self-evident point of view about the meaning of the sign. It then cuts to a shot of the two standing outside by the rabbit cages and this exchange follows:

> Bunny Lady: I butcher the babies when they are four or five months old.
> Moore: Well, that's good. [*Nervous laugh*]
> Bunny Lady: If you butch the older ones, [*pointing to the rabbits in the cage next to her*] like these guys then they are stewers. They're not fryers. And a lot of people likes [sic] fry-ers better than they do the stewers.
> Moore: Yeah, that makes sense.

Moore's retorts mirrors the view of audience; uncomfortable, a little confused and ironically agree-ing with this weird woman's rhetoric. For example, his response of 'Yeah, that makes sense.' Does it? To the average person, and judging by his demeanor I assume this includes Moore, it makes no sense at all. First of all, most people don't eat bunnies, and second they would have no idea whether they would prefer 'stewers' or 'fryers'. The audience is made to feel superior to this woman, and up until this point the Bunny Lady is painted in a somewhat bad light, as someone who is heartless

enough to butcher baby bunnies and too stupid or lazy to not get a 'real' job, but towards the end of the scene this point of view changes. The camera is directed right at the Bunny Lady, who is explaining that after she was laid off from her job, her rabbits and dogs are her only source of income, besides the very little she gets from Social Security, and that sometimes she earns as little as $10-15 a week. Moore is now out of the shot, but it cuts to Moore listening to her explanation with a concerned look on his face. Like Moore, we now empathize with the Bunny Lady, and we can understand her struggle. Middleton (2014, p.41) explains further;

> […] the shift in tone engenders a productive tension: By feeling empathy for the woman at the end of the scene, the viewer may feel a bit guilty and question the basis of his or her prior feeling of amused superiority.

This feeling of empathy is strengthened later in the film when we revisit the Bunny Lady during the credits. Again, the Bunny Lady is alone in the shot speaking directly to the camera while petting one of her rabbits;

> Bunny Lady: I'm going back to school in January for veterinary assistance and also for dog grooming cause there's a lot of animals that need taking care of.

We understand now that this is a woman who does truly loves and cares for animals, she kills them, not for amusement or just the heck of it, but out of necessity in order to secure her own survival. This is harsh reality of the situation for the people in Flint. The audience should now no longer feel superiority towards the woman, but respect in that she has found a clever way to make a living. Bergson (1900, n.p.) explains;

> The comic, we said, appeals to the intelligence, pure and simple; laughter is incompatible with emotion. Depict some fault, however trifling, in such a way as to arouse sympathy, fear, or pity; the mischief is done, it is impossible for us to laugh.

Once we gain some sympathy for the bunny lady we no longer see her as a comic figure and we are incapable to laugh at her expense anymore.

We see the same tendency in the scene that comes directly after the Bunny Lady scene. We meet two young men who are standing outside Flint Plasma, a blood donation facility. One of them explains;

> Young Man: They're only open Mondays, and Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and Thursdays and Fridays. [*Pause*] Saturday and Sunday they're closed.

We are inclined to laugh at his wording; the fact that they are only open Mondays, and Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and Thursdays and Fridays already implies that they are closed on Saturday and Sunday. Yet this young man sees it necessary to make this implication explicit. This makes his statement ridiculous and intellectually we get a feeling of superiority towards him. Yet seconds later Moore asks to see the scars on his arm from donating blood. This is where emption comes into the picture and the laughter stops. While the needle marks are not dramatic, we are reminded of the fact that this man sells his blood for money. Much needed money. As described in the bunny lady example above, the tone shifts to a more serious one and we understand that Moore is trying to show us the extremes the people of Flint are resorting to in order to survive in the city.

Ultimately, we are not laughing at the expense of the working class in Flint. The true object of Moore's humor is the absurdity of the events that has caused his once flourishing hometown to the brink of despair. He uses humor as a social correction method, both to the working class, but more importantly to the elite. What Moore hopes to achieve is to show the elite, or more specifically Roger Smith, how the consequences of their actions have trickled down to dramatically affect the less fortunate in their community. (Middleton 2014, p.42)

5.2 Shocking Humor - Relief Theory

There are times in Moore's films we laugh because we are shocked, and laughing is the spontaneous reaction. I would link this to the relief theory, because I believe in the example below laughter is a way for the audience to relive the pressure and seriousness of the situation they are presented with. The example in this section is in no way humorous, but my reasons for including it will be explained.

5.2.2. Death

An extreme example of this type of shocking humor we find in *Sicko*. We meet Dawnell Keys, a woman who was fully insured by the insurance company Kaiser Permanente. Dawnell's 18 month old daughter, Mychelle, came down with a high fever one night. Dawnell called 911 and Mychelle was brought to the nearest hospital by ambulance. At the hospital the doctors refused the 18 month old girl the treatment she desperately needed because this specific hospital did not accept her health insurance from Kaiser Permanente. Dawnell begs the doctor to treat her daughter anyway, but to no avail. When contacted, Kaiser Premanente tells Dawnell to drive the little girl, by car, to one of their own hospitals. When the mother protests, she is escorted out of the hospital by security. After hours

of delay the little girl arrives at the Kaiser Permanente hospital just in time to go into cardiac arrest. The doctors work on her for 30 minutes, but Mychelle sadly passes away.

Now, I would like to stress that I am not proposing that the possibly preventable death of an infant is in any way humorous. But I do argue that the reaction we as an audience has to this information is similar to the one described in the relief theory. The «laughter» we experience in this situation is not evoked by amusement, but from shock, discomfort or confusion and that this type of nervous laughter or shock laughter is not true laughter. We have this inappropriate reaction because we are in shock. It can be argued that we laugh because we want to convince ourselves that the information we are faced with cannot possibly be as bad as it seems. As Middleton (2014, p.28) explains "Laughter may defuse challenging or troubling images and ideas, and release viewers from a sense of responsibility toward documentary representations…" We laugh because we desperately do not want this information to be true.

The frustration in Dawnell and Mychelle's situation is emphasized by the next scene. Another little girl is playing on the floor. Her mother Carina explains that 6 months earlier little Zoe, just like Mychelle, came down with a high fever. She was taken to hospital where she immediately received treatment and was put under observation for 3 days. Why was Carina and her daughter treated so differently to Dawnell and Mychelle? Because Carina and her daughter live in France.

The message that Moore wants to convey with this scene is that it is possible that Mychelle died simply because she lived in the United States. The health care system in the United States may have caused a little girl's life. Moore's main target audience are Americans, and he wishes to inform them of the injustices in their own society. This example illustrate Moore's mission to show the American public that an alternative system is the only possible answer. He shocks them into realizing that change is essential.

5.3 Shocking humor - Incongruity Theory

Under is an example of what I believe to be an example go shocking humor that fits into the idea of the incongruity theory.

5.3.1 Handing out Guns in Banks

As an example I will be discussing the very beginning of *Bowling for Columbine*. The film opens on a shot of outside of a bank. We then move inside Moore stands at the counter and tells the teller behind it that he wishes to open an account. The teller asks what kind of account he wants. He replies; "I want the account where I can get the free gun", to which the teller relies, "Okay". Just over a minute into the film and our expectations are already reversed, resulting in what I would describe as the incongruity theory. The information we are given violates our expectations. The teller's simple reply of "okay" to Moore's seemingly preposterous request is not at all what we expect. The scene continues; Moore voice-over.: "I had spotted an ad in a local Michigan Paper that said if you opened an account at North County Bank, the bank will give you a gun." We are shown a picture of the ad in question. The ad reads: "More BANG for your BUCK", accompanied by a picture of two rifles.

As the scene continues, so do the shocking revelations: as Moore is flipping through a brochure of guns, the bank employee informs him that they have over 500 firearms in their vault at all times. And as Moore is sitting down to fill out forms for his background check we learn that the bank is also a licensed arms dealer. All this information goes against what we would expect to learn about a bank, and as explained above, our reaction is to laugh.

Moore is then given his brand new shotgun right there still inside the bank. Another bank employee says he has one himself and that it is a straight shooter. Moore cocks the gun and looks through the sight as he says; "Wow, sweet." Up until this point Moore has agreed with the bank's rhetoric, but he finally asks what is on the audience's mind:

> Moore: Here's my first question; do you think it's a little dangerous handing out guns in banks? [*Cue triumphant rock music*]

In conjunction with the music this statement works as a punch line to the scene. Moore walks triumphantly out of the bank with the gun on his shoulder and the opening credits start rolling. The whole scene consists of a set up and punch line. The set up is Moore walking into a bank, and the

punch line is him walking out of the same bank with a shotgun over his shoulder. By using this scene as an opening to the film, Moore ensures that he grabs the audience's attention from the very beginning and that the film starts off with a bang (literally).

5.4 Cutting on the Absurd - Incongruity theory

In this example I will be looking at an editing technique used in Moore's films to create humor. To start off, I wish to stress that every scene is a mixture of *mise-en-scène*, filming and editing techniques, yet the example I have chosen below to show specifically how editing can be used to create humor.

5.4.1 James Nichols

An example of using editing to create humor can be found in *Bowling for Columbine* and the 'character' of James Nichols. We are first introduced to James Nichols outside his farm in Michigan. Nichols and Moore stand outside his house looking out over the farm. Balding with a grey beard, a plaid shirt and light blue jacket Nichols seems like a very normal guy. Nichols explains to Moore that he currently grows tofu beans. Moore "You're a tofu farmer." A tofu farmer, perhaps the least threatening sounding profession one can think of. Nichols responds "A food farmer. I grow food for people to eat." This is where we first get an impression that this man is not what he seems. Firstly, his voice is high pitched, slightly nasal and is reminiscent of a pubescent boy's voice breaking. This is not a voice that carries much authority and that does not inspire confidence in his statements. Second, his statement is a little odd.

Moore then introduces Nichols in a voice-over sequence; that Nichols and the farm was investigated in connection to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing which killed 168 people and injured hundreds more. His brother, Terry Nichols, got a life sentence and the main suspect Timothy McVeigh got the death penalty for the bombing.

Back to the farm. Moore asks: "Did McVeigh ever stay here?" Nichols very nonchalantly explains that he did on several occasions and over extended periods of time. He then states that McVeigh was a nice guy. This is not the response we would expect. Most people would want to distance themselves from a convicted domestic terrorist, but here Nichols describes McVeigh as 'a nice guy' without any hesitation. Moore gives him a chance to perhaps rethink his answer when he responds with "A decent guy?" Nichols does not take this chance and simply says "Oh yeah."

Moore then asks if the FBI found anything incrimination on his farm during the investigation. Nichols: "Sure", and he goes on to list some of the items they found; blasting caps, dynamite fuses, black powder and diesel fuel. He does add; "But that is normal farm stuff." But this is not the information we remember from this exchange. Again Nichols volunteers information damaging to himself. Moore merely asks if the FBI found anything which could have been answered with a simple yes or no. But Nichols uses the words 'blasting', 'dynamite', 'powder' and 'fuel'. As someone with limited knowledge of both bomb making and farming, the connotations conjured by these particular words leans more towards bombs than it does farming.

Inside Nichols house. Nichols and Moore sit at the kitchen table.

> Nichols: "Them people, the law enforcement, if you wanna call them that, were here and they were shaking in their shoes, they were physically shaking, scared to death. Why? Cause they thought this would be another Waco. Because certain people,
> [hesitant pause]
> namely my ex-wife and other people said I'm a radical, I'm a wild man, I got a gun under every arm, down every leg, in every shoe, if you say anything I'll shoot ya…"

He laughs. Cut to Moore listening with a very serious look of concern. He is not amused. The somewhat reluctant naming of ex-wife as his main defamer paints Nichols as paranoid, and this paranoid, maniacal energy contrasted by Moore serious demeanor provokes laughter.

The conversation continues;

> Nichols: "If people were to find out how we have been enslaved by the government, by the powers to be, they would revolt with anger, with merciless anger. When a government becomes tyrannical it is your duty to overthrow it."
> Moore: "Why not use Gandhi's way? He didn't have any guns and he beat the British Empire."

Nichols pauses for a moment, widens his eyes, then shakes his head and says: "I'm not familiar with that." The camera lingers on his unknowing face for a few moments before cutting away to another scene.

Nichols admittance of ignorance about historical events, coupled with his unknowing misuse of the phrase 'the powers that be' as 'the powers to be' paints Nichols as an ignorant and unintelligent person and undermines everything he has said and will say.

Later in the discussion at the kitchen table the topic of gun control comes up. While Nichols believes that guns should not be restricted by the government he does admit that the everyman should not have the right to have weapons grade plutonium;

> Moore: So you believe in some restrictions.
> Nichols: Well, there's wackos out there.

The camera lingers on Nichols for a moment before there is an abrupt cut into a montage about guns to The Beatles' "Happiness is Warm Gun". This statement functions like a punch line to end the scene. It's a way to signal to the viewers that the point has been made, and the funniest thing has been said. This technique makes Nichols statement as a way of saying, there might be a wacko in here too.

Every sequence in this scene of Moore interactions with Nichols is ended on an absurd statement functioning like a punchline to that sequence. "I'm not familiar with that", "There's wackos out there.", "A decent guy", "I grow food for people to eat." and the volunteering of damaging information, all function as punch lines. This is linked to the incongruity theory in that these punchline statements are not what we expect to hear by what is set up before. Moore's questions work as the set up and Nichols' answers work as the punch line. Nichols' answers surprise us, and they are incongruous to our expectations.

Middleton (2014, pp.68-69) coined this way of editing as 'cutting on the absurd'. This is when the filmmaker "[…] turns bits of amusing dialogue into punch lines for a given scene by cutting away just as they are delivered." This 'cutting on the absurd' is one of the techniques that connects comedy and documentary, and Middleton (2002, p.61) argues that this technique;

> "…construct the disparity between a character's self-perception and a viewer's perception of him or her that is the basis of comic effect. When a subject's discourse is juxtaposed through the editing with other footage that ambiguates, contradicts, undermines or just provides a broader context for it, a differential in perception is created between subject and viewer."

This technique has been used by early mockumentaries such as *This is Spinal Tap* (1984). Mockumentaries borrow from the documentary and Middleton (2002, pp.57-58) identifies this technique as a modification of a traditional documentary editing technique what he calls 'cutting on significance';

> […] film-makers will cut away after a particularly telling statement made by a documentary subject in the conversation or interview, and follow this cut with a scene that comments upon and reinforces the meaning the viewer is meant to infer from the subject's statement.

As documentary viewers we are used to expect significance just before the cut. The lack of significance makes the absurdity that we get instead resonate even more strongly. Moore has borrowed a technique from the mockumentary that the mockumentary is based on a documentary technique.

Again, I believe there is more than one humor theory that applies to this example. These statements coupled with Nichols' wide-eyed expressions, high pitched voice and maniacal laughter paints Nichols as a comic figure. Middleton (2002, p.60) explains that "comic figures are often characterized by their 'unsociability' - their cluelessness to the goings on around them.", and this is linked to the idea of laughter as a social correction method as described in the superiority theory. Bergson (1900, n.p.) puts forth this idea; "In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed."

These punch line statement gives the impression that Nichols is ignorant to the way he presents him selves to the world, and how the world will perceive him as a result. We feel superiority to him. We know something Nichols does not (or perhaps several things). We know about Gandhi's nonviolent fight for independence, and we know not to call someone who killed 168 people a decent guy. We are superior in our knowledge of the historical world and of social acceptable behavior. We laugh because he should know this too.

5.5 Irony

In chapter three I defined the idea of irony as a representation of an implicit meaning. This meaning is usually suggested through tone of voice or other signifiers. But how does irony work on the screen? How can we, the audience, recognize when what is meant is not said, or to interpret what is said with the opposite meaning? Kimberly Davis (1999, p.27) explains in her article *White Film-makers and Majority Subjects*:

> In film, irony can be created through the juxtaposition of discordant shots and music, or the repetition of particular themes or images in different contexts, producing attention between two or several statements. The rubbing together of these statements or images, which can but does not necessarily entail a contradiction or opposition, alters the meaning of both to imply an unstated third meaning.

A filmmaker creates a paradox by placing two (or more) of the films components against each other. These components' conflicting meanings will compete and out of this a third unsaid meaning is created. It is the conflict between the two original components meaning that makes this third meaning, or irony, explicit for the audience. Irony and humor are closely connected and the rubbing together of two conflicting meaning often results in a humor.

This is of course all theoretical, so it is time to delve into how irony works in practice. First onto an example of how to use cross cutting to create an ironic scene.

5.5.1 Cross-cutting

Cross-cutting, or parallel editing, is used to establish action occurring at the same time in two different locations. The use can be traced all the way back to 1903 and Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*. The technique was later adopted Soviet montage pioneers such as Dzinga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein, who were not content in just telling stories with their films, they wanted to give meaning to the events portrayed. This was achieved by cross-cutting shots that juxtapose each other, thus revealing more meaning behind each shot. An example of this is Kuleshov's cutting together of a close up of the same face with a plate of soup, a dead woman in a coffin and finally a child playing with a toy. In doing this he demonstrated that even though the face was the same, you could control the audience's response by juxtaposing it with different images. The feeling conjured up in the audience went from hunger, to sadness and finally joy. (Crittenden, 1995, pp.5-8)

By cross cutting two juxtaposing events, one can create an ironic scene. The meaning of the finished scene does not exist in the individual shots; it only arises when they are juxtaposed. An example of this we encounter towards the end of *Roger and Me*. The scene starts at General Motors annual Christmas party, a choir sings "Santa Claus is coming to Town".

Cut to:

Sheriff's deputy Fred Ross is knocking on a door. He is here to evict the family living in the house.

Cut to:

The choir ending their song. A man welcomes everybody and introduces Roger Smith to the podium. Roger Smith starts giving his speech:

Smith: *You know, the thing that strikes me about Christmas is that it's such a total experience. For a few weeks out of our year our whole environment is transformed. There are the lights, of course that lift us out of winter's cold and gloom.*

Cut to:

The house is dark, with no indication of christmas lights or cheer. The woman being evicted is angrily walking around the house, and shouts: *"This bitch got his money and sent my motherfucking shit out."*

The heartwarming message Roger Smith is trying to convey is contrasted by the image of the falling apart house and the swearing of the women being thrown out of her house on Christmas Eve. For her, there are no lights and the reality of winter's cold and gloom is about to hit her and her children hard.

Thus continues a sequence of cross-cutting between Roger Smith giving his speech at the General Motors annual Christmas party and the family being evicted from their home;

> Smith (voice-over): "*They remind us of the warmth of human companionship.*"

> House: Man changes the lock on door of the house. Movers carrying out a sparsely decorated Christmas tree.

> GM Christmas Party: Smith (at the podium): "*We listen for jingle bells in the country. We smell the pine needle on the trees…*"

> House: Mover puts the Christmas tree on the sidewalk as it falls apart. This tree is clearly a fake tree with no pine needle smell.

> Smith (voice-over) : "*…and the turkey on the table.*"

> House: Movers putting wrapped Christmas presents in garbage bags.

> GM Christmas Party: Smith (at the podium): "*We even dream of a white Christmas in the hope that nature will accommodate our longing for a total experience.*"

House: Little boy looking to the camera as movers empty his house. Woman: *"Where are the motherfucking keys? That motherfucker got his money. They're setting us out on the street. I paid this man his rent. Give me my shit."*
The movers carry out a chest of drawers with clothes nearly falling out and dragging against the cold, wet ground.

Smith: (voice-over) "…*the individual dignity and worth of each human being the more fully human each of us will become.*"

House: Woman: *"I paid this man his rent. Give me my shit."* As she grabs a black trash bag from one of the movers.

The 'individual dignity and worth of each human being' as descibed by Smith in his speech does not seem to apply to his woman and her family. Her family and all her belongings are literally thrown out to the street. The clothes dragging on the ground is a reminder of the lack of respect society has for people like this woman.

The scene continues;
GM Christmas Party: Smith (at the podium): *Now let me close with an observation that I consider by a real leading authority on Christmas: Charles Dickens. Here is what he said: "I have always thought of Christmas as a good time."*

House: Woman being evicted yelling to her kids "*Get your goddamned coats on!*" as she pushes one of the children out of her way.

Smith: (voice-over): *"...a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time…"*

House: The last of the thing are carried out of the house. The woman is still yelling about having paid the rent while getting into a beat down car, plastic covering a broken window flutter in the wind.

Smith (voice-over): *"...the only time I know of, in the long calendar year when men and women seem by one consent to open their hearts freely."*

House: One of the kids climbs onto the back of an already overload truck to try to fit a few more items.

Smith (voice-over): "*And therefore though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket. I believe it has done me good and will do me good. And I say, God bless it!*"

GM Christmas Party: Smith (at the podium): "*Well, Mr. Dickens, I could not agree more. So I say God bless Christmas and God bless all of you.*"

By juxtaposing Smith's speech with these images Moore has undermined everything word of the speech. The images of Christmas Smith paints in his speech are as far away from reality as they can

get. Smith talks of human compassion, dignity and a time of year that brings joy and goodness to the world, while the images show a lack of human compassion, dignity and a cold time of year when being homeless can be a death sentence.

Even the family's Christmas tree becomes a symbol of what Christmas represents to this family; fake, barely decorated and with no lights to help lift them out of 'winter's cold and gloom'. A poor imitation of what Christmas is all about, and in stark contrast to the words in Smith's speech.

The speech and images of the family being tossed out of their house together create a third unsaid meaning; the elite is blind to the suffering of the people who support them. And the working class is powerless to do much about it.

5.5.2 Non-dietetic Sound

Non-dietetic sound is any sound that does not exist in the world while filming. Examples are voice over, sound effects and soundtrack. Moore does not use many sound effects in his films, therefore I will only give examples of ironic uses of music soundtrack and voice over.

5.5.2.1 Music

Music is often used in film to evoke a feeling or mood, or to emphasize or stand in contract to the images shown. Phillips (2000, p.102) suggests that music is often symbolic and identifying a piece of music as for example happy is something learned from our culture. He continues that music can transform a visual image "turning it from a simple resemblance […] into a representation of romance, beauty or danger."

Plantinga (1997, p.167) points out that music can also be used to create irony by; "using a juxtaposition of discordant images and music." A paradox is created between the images we see and the music we hear, and so a third implicit meaning is made explicit. An example of ironic use of music we find in *Roger and Me;*

The scene starts with Moore speaking to an old friend, Ben, who worked as an autoworker at one of General Motors' plants and as Moore explains in his voice over, he is now shooting hoops at the local mental hospital. He was fired a total of five times from GM in the space of five years. One day, Ben explains, while expecting to be fired for the sixth time, he snapped. He walked out of his work

place and got into his car and just drove. The Beach Boys' '*Wouldn't be Nice'* came on the radio and he thought "What a terrible song to have to listen to in the middle of a panic attack." He explains he tried to sing the lyrics and to think 'wouldn't it be nice', but it just was not working. As Ben finishes his story, "Wouldn't be Nice" starts playing in the background and the film cuts to images of a car driving by abandoned house after abandoned house in Flint. The images then cut to the sewers and a voice over comes on, a news reporter "The rat population in Flint has now surpassed the human by 50,000.This is due to people leaving and the county cutting back to twice monthly garbage pickups due to budget cuts." Cut to: a car driving by empty and boarded up stores and newspaper headlines announcing more layoffs to come. The song's lively and optimistic tone stands in stark contrast to the somber and pessimistic images we are presented with. The clash of these two elements creates a third unsaid meaning; wouldn't it be nice if Flint was not… this.

In the example above it is primarily the music's melody in relation to the images that creates a paradox, and therefore an ironic meaning. In *Bowling for Columbine*, we find an example of how the lyrics can also impact the scene. In a montage style segment in which Moore lists America's involvement in conflicts around the world through the years; we see images of assassinated world leaders, military action, mass graves and dead civilians along with the song What a Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong. While the melody is not too far removed from the images, the lyrics "I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do. But they're really saying is I love you", stand in stark contrast to what we see. The images of death do not convey the message that people are really saying "I love you". The irony becomes even more apparent with the song's final line "Yes, I think to myself what a wonderful world."

5.5.2.2 Voice-over Narration

Like music, voice-over narration can also be used signify a feeling or mood, yet much more explicitly so. Voice-over narration is a device that has a longstanding history in documentary films. Moore narrates all his films himself in what Nichols (2010) describes as a "Voice-of-God" or 'voice of Authority' commentary, a voice that represents the point of view of the film. Moore often uses the voice over narration to create irony. He presents a situation and then juxtaposes it in his voice-over.

An example of the ironic use of voice over narration can be found in *Sicko*. Moore describes how First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton was forced to give up on her campaign to introduce universal health care to the Americans.

Moore voice-over:
"A decade and a half went by. And still America had no universal health plan. The United States slipped to number 37 in healthcare around the world. Just slightly ahead of Slovenia. But that's understandable. Because Congress was busy with other matters."

Cut to:
Inside Congress. A man in a suit walks up to the speaker's podium. The man:
"Mr. Speaker, today I rise to offer congratulations to the confectioners at Just Born Incorporated, as they celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of their most recognized and celebrated products, not to mention my daughter's favorite, Marshmallow Peeps."

By setting up the scene in his voice-over and then cutting to this particular scene from the goings on at Congress, Moore ironically suggest the United States Congress prioritize a candy company over the health of their people. Yet he does not need to explicitly say so himself. He merely very deliberately uses irony and lets the audience come to this conclusion themselves.

The scene is similar to a set up and punch line; Moore's voice-over works at the set up and the congressman's remarks as the punch line. Like described in the incongruity theory, the punch line is not what we expect in relation to the set up.

5.6 Ironic Narrative Structure

Moore's films themselves can be described in having what Plantinga (1997) labels as an 'ironic narrative structure', rather than for example a romantic or tragic narrative structure. Ironic narrative structure means that the audience is constantly dragged out of the story line in order to try to reveal the ironic implicit meaning. Nichols (1991, p.61) explains that unexpected juxtapositions;

> "fold the viewer's consciousness back onto itself so that it comes into contacts with the work of the cinematic apparatus rather than being allowed to move unimpeded towards engagement with a representation of the historical world."

It can be disruptive for the audience to have to constantly have to search for an unsaid meaning throughout the films. While a valid concern I would argue it is not too problematic in Moore's works, as he is not trying to tell a linear story, but rather using smaller stories illustrate to a cohesive point of view.

 Using ironic structure give rise to certain implications. Literary historian Hayden White argues that the ironic narrative structure is "disabling and impotent, that it engenders belief in the "madness" of civilization and dissolves optimism about the possibility of positive political action." (Plantinga

1997, p.94). A common narrative technique found in both fiction and nonfiction is to end the narrative with a celebration of some sort. *Roger and Me* ends at Christmas, but Moore presents a very ironic view of Christmas, and not a celebratory one. Moore's films mostly end without a 'victory', think for example of *Roger and Me*; Moore fails to bring Roger Smith to Flint as he states is his goal and intention with the film. The film ends with little hope for the future. I see this as a call to action for the audience. Moore wants his audience angry about the issues he presents in his films. This is only one of the issues I have identified when it comes to the use irony in documentary film.

5.7 Issues with the use of Irony

The use of irony in documentary films can be viewed as problematic for several reasons. The first issue I will address is the fact that irony is easily misunderstood. Freud (1905, p.174) explains:

> Irony can only be employed when the other person is prepared to hear the opposite, so that he cannot fail to feel an inclination to contradict. As a result of this, irony is exposed particularly easily to the danger of being misunderstood.

Verbal use of irony can be detected by tone of voice, written irony used visual clues, for example italics or quotation marks, while the use of irony on screen is more complicated. Those who are not prepared to hear the irony might not understand Moore and the films' intentions. This is connected to the superiority theory, as Middleton observes comedy documentaries can create a privileged position for the audience who get the joke, while leaving behind those who do not. But for the ones that do understand the filmmaker's intentions have a feeling of superiority for being in the know. In Moore's films laughter "becomes the privileged sign of knowledge and understanding." (Middleton 2014, p.11)

Another pitfall when using irony as an instrument in documentary films is that it will exclude certain audiences. Davis (1999, p.36) is critical to the use of irony because; "I believe that irony may be disabling for filmmakers who aim to reach a diverse audience because it often seems to exclude more than it includes." Like explained above it will exclude those who simply does not get the joke. But there are others that might feel excluded. When it comes to political documentaries, like all of the films described in this essay, the irony might offend those who have a different political perspective from Moore. They feel ridiculed and that their political beliefs are being attacked.

The use of irony might put Moore at odd with his audience or potential audience, but more importantly as Davis identifies, there is another group that might find the use of irony problematic, that is

the films' own subjects. They might not recognize their situation as ironically depicted by Moore. They might not see the humor or irony of their own situation. They might feel their story is being used in order to illustrate a point of view they in which they do not identify. This could lead to them feel that Moore has exploited them as subjects in his films. He has broken the trust that should exist between documentary filmmakers and their subjects. Davis (1999, p.43) concludes; "Irony can lead to pity, but that is not the same as empathy."

Chapter 6 Criticism
6.1 Criticism

Naturally the academic and film critic communities have strong opinions about Moore's use of humor and irony in his films. Moore's style does not only involve humor, but also other elements used in order to entertain the audience. The use of humor and irony has contributed to the documentary film entering a more entertainment oriented space. Many are skeptical of this blurring lines between nonfiction and entertainment. This is especially true when political content is on the line. (Oberacker 2009, p.354).

I have found three main criticisms that pop up time and time again. The first is a question of how the truth in the documentary film is impacted as a result of the humor and irony. The second looks at ethical issues when it comes to representation and the third and final asks if Moore is undermining his own argument by utilizing humor and irony to express his points of view. As *Roger and Me* was Moore's first film and therefore the first to display his humorous rhetoric I have focused on the criticisms relating to this film.

6.1.1 The Question of Truth

Middleton (2014, p.27) explains how the audience perceives humor in relation to the truth in documentary films; "The viewer's sense of the incredibility or even implausibility of the comic moment is counteracted by his or her belief in the truth-value of the film itself." Precisely because we are watching a documentary we will believe that what we see on the screen is true even if it makes us laugh. But the question then becomes; should we?

Some critics of Moore's humorous rhetoric have questioned whether his quest for humor has compromised the truth in his films. Moore has been accused of molding the truth to favor his humorous rhetoric in his films. Film critic Harlan Jacobson (1989, p.16) goes as far as to say that "*Roger and Me* is too good to be true". In an interview in *Film Comment Magazine* Jacobson confronts Moore about some discrepancies in the chronology Moore presents in *Roger and Me*. In the interview Jacobson gives a long lists of events and their exact dates that he believes Moore should have included in his film. Moore started filming in the late 80's yet some of the events he depicts happened in the early 80s. These events are pushed together with few dates as reference and Jacobson therefore argues that Moore leads the audience to believe that everything happened in the time period of just a few years, when in actuality they happened over the course of about a decade. Moore himself ad-

mits that he has compressed events in order to fit them into the film; "As far as I am concerned, a period of seven or eight years […] is pretty immediate and pretty devastating." (Jacobson 1989, p. 22). When pressed by Jacobson about including the earlier events in sequence, Moore responds; "Then it's a three hour movie. It's a movie, you know: you can't do everything." (Jacobson 1989, p. 22) Moore emphasized here that a documentary film is a movie, not a piece of journalistic work. This is not a distinction everyone would agree on, but an important one to make. Moore set out to make a movie about these events, not a journalistic article. Richard Bernstein (1990) argues that satire, entertainment and humor depends on a certain partiality and exaggeration to successfully come across. Celebrated film critic Roger Ebert (1990, n.p.) has this to say about Moore's (mis)representations of the events in Flint;

> Did I care? No. Was I offended at this manipulation of reality, this twisting of the facts to suit Moore's thesis? No. I thought it was obvious what he was doing. He was taking the liberties that satirists and ironists have taken with material for generations, and he was making his point with sarcasm and deft timing.

We as the audience is intelligent enough to understand that Roger and Me is a film and not an exact retelling of reality. Because that would be impossible. Decorated documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman says this about the subject of truth in his documentary films; "I readily acknowledge that my films are biased, subjective, prejudiced, condensed, compressed." (Bernstein 1990, n.p.) Wiseman continues that "all documentaries are necessarily distortions of reality, since, obviously, they are filmed through a lens and edited." (Bernstein 1990, n.p.) There is no such thing as an absolute truth when it comes to documentary filmmaking. Wiseman touches on an important point, documentary films are biased and subjective. That is, Wiseman's film are from *his* point of view. And Moore's film's are from *his* point of view.

Film critic Pauline Kael was one of many who criticized *Roger and Me* for its lack of objectivity. She feels that Moore has not explored the other side of the story; General Motors' and Roger Smith's points of view. (Bernstein 1990, n.p.) Following this logic, no documentary could ever argue their point of view, regardless of how *true* that argument turns out to be. Sharrett and Luhr (2003, p.36) fire back eloquently at this type of criticism:

> An implicit idea in complaints about Moore past and present is that he somehow violates the aspirations of 'objective' documentary filmmaking (as if film history hasn't exposed this delusion decades ago), or that he fails to 'tell both sides of the story,' which would make his work about as compelling as network television.

Others have defended Moore and the ambiguous sequence of events by pointing to the films' point of view. William Wolf says about *Roger and Me* that Moore "signals from the very beginning - indeed, from the title itself- that he is fashioning a highly personal document, not a dispassionate academic treatment of a complex subject." (Bernstein 1990, n.p.) He continues "[…] the title «Roger and Me», clearly shows in advance that irreverence, eccentricity and a highly personal view are all among his primary intentions." (Bernstein 1990, n.p.). The audience should, from the title alone, which does include the word 'me', understand that this film is very much from Moore's point of view, 'his' truth of the events that happening in Flint in the 1980s.

I would at this point like to refer back to John Grierson's definition of the documentary as a "creative treatment of actuality." Moore shows 'actuality' through an ironic narrative structure, this is his creative treatment of the events in Flint during the General Motors layoffs. Whether Moore has been too creative with his treatment is of course up to interpretation and it is up to the individual to come to her one conclusion.

In his article *'Roger and Me': Documentary? Satire? Or Both?* Richard Bernstein (1990, n.p.) asks an important question: "Moreover, if *Roger and Me* has hewed to standard, impartial journalistic practices, could it have been as entertaining, as personal, as sharply targeted and there as successful as it has become?" There is no denying that *Roger and Me* was a successful documentary that reached a large audience and therefore an important documentary that has influenced future generations of documentarians. Had *Roger and Me not* been as funny as it is, and focused more on following standard journalistic practices it would not be the film it is today, and it would not have had the impact is has had on the documentary feature genre.

6.1.2 Ethical Issues of Representation

Critics of *Roger and Me* suggests that Moore deceived his subjects about how they could appear in the film, making them unwitting comic butts; "…the comedic effect within a documentary framework is often dependent upon the exploration of differentials in cultural capital among documentary film-makers, audiences and subjects." (Middleton 2002, p.65) They contend that the film allowed audiences easy laughs at people´s expense, and that Moore seeks out subjects the audience can laugh at rather than subjects who have something important to say about the film's topics. Moore's relationship with the audience, and with the one he has with his subjects, both have a power imbalance. Moore is in control in how he chooses to presents his subjects in his film and furthermore how

the audience should react to them. (Davis 1999, p.28) Because humor is often reliant on a feeling of superiority, Moore often presents his subjects, as well as himself, as ridiculous in order for the audience to feel superior and therefore laugh. Pauline Kael called *Roger and Me* ' a piece of gonzo demagoguery' in which everyone is painted as idiotic. (Bernstein 1990, n.p.) In other words, she believes Moore abuses his power and fools his audience by appealing to their emotions, passions and prejudices.

On top of this, the audience don't only laugh at the films' 'antagonists' but at the people whom Moore aims to represent, the everyman. I believe these types of ethical issues of representations is a universal issue in documentaries in general, but that it is worsened in the ones that uses humor as a filmic devise. Everyone depicted in a documentary open themselves up to misrepresentation. In the case of Michael Moore, everyone who agrees to appear open themselves up to potential ridicule. As stated in the previous chapter on issues surrounding the use of irony, his subjects might not recognize the way Moore chooses to represent them. Today, because of Moore's infamy most people would know this and be aware, but *Roger and Me* was Moore's first film and it is therefore more problematic.

As explained in the tragic comic example, we laugh at the Bunny Lady and man outside the Flint blood bank, and in these scenes Moore serves as a proxy to the audience's reactions. At first Moore invites the audience to laugh at the Bunny Lady and the young man, but the tone of the scene then changes to a more serious one. This is when Moore corrects the audiences' behavior and we feel guilty about laughing at them, Moore is using humor as a social correction method, and our laughter at their expense in the beginning is corrected, because we realize these are not people we should laugh at.

 Middleton (2014, p.11) states that because we so easily laugh at the film's subjects, it results in that the films "promoted a form of detached superiority that reduces understanding of-and engagement with- the political issues." Meaning, because the audience laughs, the film's potential impact is reduced. This brings me to the next section.

6.1.3 Undermining his own Argument

Michael Moore has been credited as one of the pioneers in the shift in the style and rhetoric in documentary films. While this has increased the visibility of the feature documentary film, many ques-

tion the use of comedy in political films. Dirk Eitzen put forth the question of whether the use of humor in political films "contributes to such films' political efficacy or reduced the viewers' sense of consequence of their subject matter". (Middleton 2014, p.4)

Many critics seem to agree with the logic that because we laugh, we are not capable to grasp the seriousness of the situation depicted on the screen. The fact that Moore is willing to make his audience laugh means his arguments are not to be taken seriously. Some critics went as far as calling *Roger and Me* propaganda or telling Moore to 'stick to the comedy', and let others take on political documentaries. They did not agree that comedy could be used to aid the documentary's aim of the call to social change. Many celebrated *Roger and Me* as a great film, just not one that could be taken seriously as a 'proper' documentary. Moore's humorous rhetoric became center stage instead of his message, thus softening his political blows. (Oberacker 2009, p.350-351)

Middleton (2014, p.28) agrees with this logic; "Laughter may defuse challenging or troubling images and ideas, and release viewers from a sense of responsibility towards documentary representations." Moore is undermining his own arguments by favoring a humorous rhetoric. Laughter is not a serious emotion, so how can we then relate to serious topics if we are laughing throughout the film?

I would argue that laughter does not by any means signify that the audience does not grasp the seriousness of the situation. Laughter is merely an emotional response to the information. This makes the audience more emotionally invested in the situation. Ebert (1990, n.p.) disagrees with this logic; "The first time I saw Roger & Me … I responded to it immediately, in part because it was a funny, angry film that was consistently entertaining…" Moore also responds to this type of thinking in a section below.

6.2 Success
Even Moore's toughest critics cannot (nor have they tried to) deny the success of his documentaries. The list of the top 20 grossing documentary films of all time include an impressive five films by Michael Moore. (Middleton 2014, p.12). This means that Moore has succeeded in bringing his documentaries and the issues they depict to a much wider audience than most other documentary filmmakers have ever been able to do.

The lack of an Academy Award nomination for *Roger and Me* caused 45 filmmakers to write an open letter to the academy expressing their outrage and questioning of the Academy's methods in choosing their nominees. (Plantinga 2010, pp.8-9). Surely enough their efforts worked, Moore won an academy award with *Bowling for Columbine* eleven years later.

Moore's aim for *Roger and Me* was to make a 'popcorn movie with a political message'. (Oberacker 2009, p.346) I believe he achieved his goal; the audience bought tickets and his peers supported his work.

6.3 Moore's Response

It seems like everyone has an opinion about Moore and his film, but what are Moore's own thoughts on his documentary film and their use of humor? In his keynote at the 2014 Toronto Film Festival he presented his 13-point manifesto detailing his views on documentary filmmaking. Below I have identified two main points that pertains to the use of humor and irony.

6.3.1 People Want to be Entertained!

Michael Moore is very forthright that his primary goal is to make an entertaining film that the everyman would actually sit down and watch;

> And the audience, the people who've worked hard all week— it's Friday night, and they want to go to the movies. They want the lights to go down and be taken somewhere. They don't care whether you make them cry, whether you make them laugh, whether you challenge them to think— but damn it, they don't want to be lectured, they don't want to see our invisible wagging finger popping out of the screen. They want to be entertained. (Moore 2014, n.p.)

He continues that documentary filmmakers need to understand that the audience wants to be entertained and that as a filmmaker it is your responsibility to do so;

> Yet, they want the truth AND they want to be entertained. […] If you can't accept that you are an entertainer with your truth, then please get out of the business. We need teachers. Go be a teacher. Or a preacher. (Moore 2014, n.p.)

One of Moore's main arguments is that a documentary film needs to reach an audience. Any audience. Documentaries are not known to be big box office successes. It is therefore important to make a film people actually want to watch. The everyman will not seek out documentaries to learn something new. Or as Moore puts it "…you made the movie because there are so many people who

DON'T know about genetically modified foods. And you're right. There are. *And they just can't wait to give up their Saturday to learn about it*." (Moore 2014, n.p.)

Moore even declares the word *documentarian* dead at the very start of his keynote. He points out that as filmmakers, one should use the art form of cinema to its fullest potential. "The politics is secondary. The art is first", he declares, and continues that if the film is bad, the politics will not get anywhere. He argues that as a filmmaker one must respect the art of cinema, if you do not, no one will see your film, your message will go unnoticed, and your film will fail to inspire social change.

6.3.2 Laughter is Cathartic

Moore goes on to argue that the laughter produced from his films is not only for the purpose of entertainment. The humor serves a greater purpose;

> Laughter is a way, first of all, to alleviate the pain of what you know to be the truth. And if we're trying to be truth tellers as filmmakers, then for God's sake, what is wrong with giving the audience a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down? It's hard enough for people to have to think about these issues and grapple with them, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with letting them laugh, because laughter is cathartic. (Moore 2014, n.p.)

If laughter is cathartic and can cleanse the mind of the pain of the information given, does that mean we forget about them? I do not believe so. It reduces hopelessness. By using humor as a 'spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down', Moore is not only getting the audience into the movie theater seats, but also making sure they leave in the right state of mind. Making the audience laugh means that they are not depressed when walking out of the film. And depressed is not how Moore wants to make his audience feel, he wants them angry;

> Depressed is a passive emotion. Anger is active. Anger will mean that maybe 5 percent, 10 percent of that audience will get up and say, "I gotta do something. I'm going to tell others about this. I'm going to go look up more about this on the Internet. I'm gonna join a group and fight this! (Moore 2014, n.p.)

Getting the audience angry is a powerful tool. In Moore's mission to level the social playing field, humor can be viewed as a weapon against the powers that be.

> […] if humor can be used in a devastating fashion to shake people out of their seats and do something, well, it will be worth it. Humor can be devastating. Humor, ridicule, can be a very sharp edged sword to go after those in power, to go after those who are hurting others. (Moore 2014, n.p.)

By making his audience feel superior (or at least not inferior) to the film's antagonists Moore gives them the belief that things can change and the courage to do something about it. As Nichols (1991, p.3) stated documentaries should "effect action and entail consequences." Moore believes that humor is a way to make this happen.

Chapter 7 Conclusion
7.1 The Way Forward

One cannot ignore the success Michael Moore has had with his documentary films. Though controversial and hated by many, Moore is one of the most successful documentary filmmakers of all time. This must mean that he is on to something. I am not suggesting that his use of humor and irony is the only reason for his success, but I believe it to be a contributing factor. So is humor and irony the way forward for the documentary genre?

In his article *Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions* John Corner (2002) puts forth that the rise of fiction borrowing the 'documentary look', such as the mockumentary, has created a 'post-documentary' culture where the boundaries between reality and fiction is increasingly blurred. Corner (2002, p.264) argues that the documentary genre is now moving away from Nichols' 'discourse of sobriety' and towards a more 'lightness of being'. That is that more focus now lies with the documentary's entertainment value rather than its 'use value'.

Moore has found himself stuck between art and entertainment, between declaring a political message and selling a commodity. Too entertaining to be art and too message-driven to be entertainment. The question I then pose is; why not both? Documentary films can be taken seriously, while still incorporating humor that entertain the audience. Moore has used the art of cinema very strategically to reach as many viewers as possible. He has used the strategies that the art of film has offered him to get his message out to the world. For what is a message without recipients? Lost and meaningless.

At the end of *Roger and Me* we don't remember the exact number of auto workers who were made redundant, but we do remember the Bunny lady and her struggle. In *Bowling for Columbine* we remember James Nichols in his kitchen accusing his ex-wife of conspiring with the FBI. We remember Moore walking around the British hospital in *Sicko*.We remember what we laughed at, because laughter is a strong emotional response. Laughter is cathartic. Paired with powerful personal stories, like the one about little Mychelle dying as a result of lack of care at a hospital, the audience are taken on an emotional journey. And emotion leads to action, and inspires change. That is exactly how a documentary should make the audience feel.

7.2 Summary

The research problem I attempted to answer in this essay was;

> How are cinematic techniques used to create humor and irony in Michael Moore's documentary films *Roger and Me*, *Bowling for Columbine* and *Sicko?*

In this essay I have uncovered several techniques Michael Moore utilizes again and again in his feature films in order to create humor or irony. He uses awkward humor to make the audience feel superior to himself, and/or his subjects, and encourages the audience to laugh as a social correction method. He shocks his audience to the point that they laugh in order to release the psychological tension and cope with the information they are given. He uses editing techniques very deliberately to create incongruous set ups and punch lines that tickle the audiences' funny bone. I have found that the three humor theories apply to moor's techniques, but that most of the examples I have explored can fit into more than one of the theories, and that combinations of the theories are at work. Irony is created by juxtaposing two (or more) filmic elements to conjure up an ironic meaning. Again, Moore uses editing techniques, carefully placing images against each other, but also music and voice-over to create a paradox that makes the audience think. I have found that the use of irony is sometimes problematic, both in that it can potentially exclude audiences and because it poses ethical questions of representation.

I have also attempted to answer the question;

> How has the use of humor and irony in Moore's films been perceived by film critics and academics?

I have found that Moore's use of humor and irony has met both praise and critique. Moore's critics have said the Moore's quest for humor and irony has come before his films' factual and ethical responsibilities, and that he ultimately ends up undermining his own arguments. Moore responds that he wants his audience entertained and laughing, because he believes they are more likely to do something useful if they have not been bored to death. I have concluded that I believe humor and irony to be a useful tool for future documentary film makers, because Moore has proven that it is a way to draw a large audience for your film, and also your message.

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Appendices - Plot Segmentations
Appendix A - Roger and Me

1. Michael Moore's childhood.

2. Introduction of General Motors and the city of Flint, Michigan.
   a. Birthday parade for GM.
   b. Moore's whole family worked for GM.
   c. The great Flint sit-down strike. The Union was born.

3. Moore's background.
   a. Starts a Michigan newspaper then moves to San Francisco.
   b. I was an outsider.
   c. Moore is fired and returns to Flint.
   d. General Motors is closing plants in Flint.

4. Introduction of Roger Smith.
   a. Autoworkers leaving factory. Last car build on assembly line.
   b. Auto workers about Roger Smith: *Fire Roger Smith!*
   c. Tom Kay: GM lobbyist.

5. Moore goes to GM Headquarters.
   a. Moore runs into security and is denied access.
   b. Back to Tom Kay; *GM will do whatever it takes to stay afloat.*

6. Layoffs.
   a. Montage of media coverage.
   b. Moore meet my friend, laid off 5 times in 5 years, at local mental hospital.
   c. Music Montage: Images of abandoned houses and business. Music: "Wouldn't it be Nice" by The Beach Boys
   d. Ronald Reagan comes to town to take a dozen out of work autoworkers for pizza.

7. The more fortunate in Flint holding their annual Great Gatsby party.
   a. Moore interviews part guests.

8. Sheriff Ross evicting a family from their homes.

9. Moore at Smith's country club.

10. Flint County Fair
    a. Flint parade: Honoring the surviving sit down strikers.
    b. Moore interviews Miss Michigan after parade.

11. Fred Ross evicting another family.

12. Moore at a private club looking for Smith.

13. There are still opportunities in Flint!

      a. TV evangelist comes to Flint.
      b. Concert in Flint. Half price tickets for laid off auto workers.
      c. AMWAY party. Janet, the color consultant.
      d. Taco Bell training ex-GM worker.
      e. Tom Kay suggests lint rollers.

14. Moore visits the Bunny Lady.
      a. Pets or Meat
      b. Only income

15. Moore speaks to two guys outside Flint plasma.

16. Flint now has the highest crime rate in America.
      a. Montage of media footage.
      b. Shooting range.
      c. Gun store
      d. Train ex-auto workers as prison guards.
      e. Rich ladies at the golf course: They are just too lazy to work.

17. Fred Ross knocking on house to evict its residents.
      a. Post office.
      b. U-Haul drivers.

18. Moore continues to try to track down Smith.
      a. Moore's crew in New York.
      b. Moore back at GM headquarters.

19. Flint: Unemployment capital of the country.
      a. Tourist official explains Flint will become a tourist attraction.
      b. Builds a hotel.
      c. Ad for Flint tourism.
      d. Flint tourism office.
      e. Scrabble tournament
      f. Water Street pavilion.
      g. General Motors theme park; Autoworld.
      h. A building in rubble.
      i. Flint official explaining what when wrong.

20. Flint is still struggling
      a. Tom Kay about Flint
      b. Shot out of the window of a car driving past abandoned houses.
      c. Fred Ross evicting a former classmate of Moore's.
      d. Back to Bunny Lady. She kills a rabbit on camera.

21. Money magazine called Flint the worst place to live.
      a. The locals burn the magazine.
      b. The TV show Nightline coming to Flint to film live. But, someone steals the satellite truck.

    c. The county build a new prison to hold all the new criminals. On the night before the jail was to open, the city threw a party where couples paid $100 to stay overnight in jail.

22. GM shareholder conference
    a. Moore tries to ask Smith a question, but is denied.
    b. GM closing the factory of the famous sit down strike.

23. Christmas Eve
    a. GM Christmas event. Roger gives speech.
    b. Fred Ross evicting a family.
    c. Moore managed to ask Roger to come to Flint, Smith refuses.

24. Credits. Music: "Wouldn't It Be Nice"- Beach Boys
    a. Tom Kay
    b. Tourist official.
    c. Flint official Maxine.
    d. Bob Eubanks.
    e. Bunny lady
    f. Pat Boone sings happy birthday to Flint.
    g. Text: The Flint Plasma Center is open Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Saturday and Sunday, they're closed.
    h. Text: Flint convention and visitors Bureau: 1-800-482-6708
    i. Text: This film cannot be shown within the city of Flint. All the movie theatre are closed.

Appendix B - Bowling for Columbine

1. It was the morning of April 20th. It was a typical day in USA.

2. Moore enters bank and opens account, bank gives him gun.

3. OPENING CREDITS.

4. 1950's ad for kid's guns.

5. Moore's childhood.

6. America is gun crazy
    a. Police telling the story of a dog shooting his owner.
    b. Moore get a haircut and buys bullets at the same time.
    c. Chris Rock stand up: Bullet control

7. Michigan militia
    a. Shooting bowling pins.
    b. Members talk about themselves, jobs and weapons at home.
    c. The Calendar.

8. James Nichols
    a. Outside the farm
    b. Introduction of the Nichols' brothers and Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City bombing.
    c. Inside Nichols' kitchen: Nichols' conspiracy theories.

12. Interviews with young men at arcade.

13. Back at Nichols.
    a. Moore: Wrong to blow up Oklahoma?
    b. Nichols shows Moore the gun he keeps under his pillow.
    c. Nichols: Well, there's wackos out there.

14. Music montage: Gun culture. Music: Happiness is a warm gun, The Beatles

15. Littleton, Colorado
    a. P.R. video for Littleton, Colorado.
    b. Security Consultant in Littleton.
    c. Lockheed Martin, the world's largest weapons developer.

16. Music Montage: America's involvement in conflicts around the world. Music: What a Wonderful World, Louis Armstrong

20. Lockheed Martin transports missiles through Littleton.

21. April 20, 1999.
    a. Biggest one day bombing by the U.S. in Kosovo War.

    b. Clinton press conference

    c. One hour later. Clinton: We all know there has been a terrible shooting at a high school in Littleton, Colorado…

22. Columbine High School Shooting
    a. Montage of 911 calls from students inside the school.
    b. The media starts calling, the tone is cheerful and light.
    c. Security footage from cafeteria showing the gunmen.
    d. Eric Harris father calls in saying he thinks Eric in involved.
    e. Outside the school: students describe what happened.

23. NRA conference: Charlton Heston

24. Father of Columbine victim speaking at gun protest.

25. Interview with Matt Stone.

26. After columbine
    a. Montage of security measures taken by schools in light of Columbine.
    b. Second grader suspended for nail clippers.
    c. First grader suspended for pointing a chicken nugget at a teacher.
    d. 17 year old could be expelled for wearing a kilt with a traditional knife.
    e. Superintended: It's almost like guerrilla warfare.
    f. Marketing video from Garrett Metal detectors about proper dress code.
    g. "Yes, our children were indeed something to fear."

27. But who was to blame?
    a. All the experts had an answer: Angry heavy metal subculture, the parents, violent movies, South Park, Video games, television, entertainment, Satan, cartoon, society, toy guns, drugs, shock rocker Marilyn Manson, Marilyn Manson, Marilyn Manson…
    b. News: Marilyn Manson has cancelled the last 5 dates of his us tour out of respect for those lost in Littleton.

28. Marilyn Manson interview.
    a. Poster boy for fear
    b. Entertainment and Gun control
    c. Fear and Consumption
    d. I would just listen to them, because that's what nobody did.

29. Interview with two girls in the gunmen's bowling class.

30. Why is not bowling blamed for this?
    a. Bowling exists in other countries.
    b. Marilyn Manson, video games, violent films also exist in other countries
    c. Montage of the other countries violent history
    d. Comparing gun deaths from other countries to America
    e. What is so different about America?

31. Animation: A brief history of the United States of America.

32. Media depiction of violence and fear in America.
    a. Y2K scare
    b. Killer bees
    c. Razor blade in Halloween candy
    d. What you don't know might kill you…
    e. Bush press conference. General threat

33. Media coverage
    a. Dangerous Black Male
    b. Statistics: murder rate down 20%, media coverage of murders up 600%.

34. Moore in South Central L.A.
    a. The corner of Florence and Normandy, where the LA riots started.
    b. Police show up, shortly after the media shows up.

35. The television show COPS.
    a. Media's responsibility.
    b. Moore pitches Corporate Cops.

36. Canada
    a. Low gun murders in Canadian cities.
    b. Fun facts about Canada
    c. Canadians don't lock their doors?!?
    d. Canadian media and politics and culture

37. Flint, Michigan: Youngest school shooting in history
    a. First grade boy shoots another first grader in their classroom
    b. Media arrives
    c. Poverty in Flint
    d. NRA and Heston comes to Flint
    e. Welfare-to-work program

38. Fear after 9/11
    a. Making money off of people's fear

39. Students wounded in Columbine massacre
    a. Interview
    b. Kmart corporate office
    c. Moore and students go to local Kmart and buy all the bullets they can
    d. Press conference outside Kmart

40. Moore visits Charlton Heston
    a. Interview
    b. Heston leaves the interview
    c. Moore leaves a picture of Kayla on Heston's property.

41. Three people shot dead in a blowing alley in Littleton, Colorado.

42. CREDITS

Appendix C - Sicko

1. Bush speech

2. OPENING CREDITS

3. Americans with no health insurance
    1. Adam saws his own wound together
    2. Rick cut off the tops of two of his fingers
    3. This film is not about them, this is about the 200 million americans with insurance.

4. Larry and Donna Smith
    1. Moving in to daughters storage room
    2. Larry's heart attacks and Donna's cancer
    3. Father of the house leaves for Iraq

5. More examples
    1. 79 year old still working
    2. Ambulance not pre-approved

6. Rejected for health insurance
    1. Too tall
    2. Too fat

7. Moore asks people to tell him their story
    1. 25 000 emails in one week
    2. Doug takes things into one hands
    3. Letters from people inside the health care industry
    4. List of pre-existing conditions

8. Insured costumers denied treatment they need
    1. Maria brain tumor
    2. Diane died from brain tumor
    3. Laurel's cancer spread
    4. Caroline's breast cancer went untreated for too long
    5. Maria sues the insurance company
9. Medical director
    1. Bonus system

10. Investigation after payment
    1. Undisclosed condition
    2. Investigator

11. Tracy Pierce's cancer
    1. All treatment denied
    2. Bone marrow match is found! Denied.
    3. Tracy dies

12. Politics

1. Former Insurance Medial Director Linda Pino testifies before congress
2. Nixon discussing how to make money of health care
3. Nixon presents his new health care plan to public
4. News montage of overcrowded hospitals
5. Hillary Rodham Clinton tries to force through universal health care
6. Montage of old socialist and anti-socialist films
7. USA still has no universal healthcare
8. Congress discussing Marshmallow peeps
9. Insurance industry makes huge profits.
10. Prescription drugs

13. Canada
    1. Adrianne Campbell takes her daughter to Canada for medical treatment
    2. American news footage dissing Canadian healthcare
    3. Moore speaks to his Canadian relatives
    4. Conservative Canadian explains the Canadian system and thought processes
    5. Canadian man who accidentally cut off four of his fingers got all his fingers reattached
    6. Canadian hospital waiting room

14. England
    1. American Eric injures himself in England and gets treatment free
    2. Moore visits British pharmacy
    3. Moore visits NHS hospital, and goes on the hunt for a billing department
    4. Moore visits American family living in England
    5. Soviet propaganda film, subtitled to fit American society
    6. Labour politician explains how the NHS came to be
    7. Moore speaks to an English doctor about his work and lifestyle

15. Montage: Your American Life

16. France
    1. In America 2 year old Mychelle is denied treatment because her hospital did not accept her health insurance. Mychelle passes away.
    2. In France 2 year old Zoe came down with a fever and received the treatment she needed.
    3. Frenchman Alexis lived in the USA all his life, became sick and moved back to France for treatment.
    4. French doctor explains French health system.
    5. Moore meets with a group with Americans living in France.
    6. Moore tags along with a French home visit doctor service.
    7. French day care
    8. French culture of protest
    9. Moore visits French family to talk about taxes.
    10. Why do American's hate the French?

17. Back in the USA
    1. Hospitals putting uninsured patients out on the street.

18. Rescue workers during 9/11

1. Volunteer rescue workers struggle to receive any compensation for their health problems directly caused by their efforts during and after 9/11
2. Volunteer EMT John's lungs are almost destroyed.
3. Volunteer Firefighter Bill has destroyed his teeth from grinding from PTSD
4. Volunteer EMT Reggie has problems breathing and a cough that will not go away.
5. Detainees of Guantanamo Bay has better health care than the average American.

19. Moore takes 9/11 workers to Cuba
    1. Moore fills a boat with Americans who need healthcare.
    2. Moore and his group goes to see Guantanamo Bay from a distance.
    3. Montage: Cuban and American relation through history
    4. Cuban health care history.
    5. Moore and group visit a Cuban pharmacy. Reggie gets an inhaler that cost $120 in the USA for only 5 cents.
    6. Moore takes his group to a Cuban hospital where they receive comprehensive care.
    7. Local cuban fire department invite the volunteers in order to honor them for their efforts during 9/11.

20. Anti-Moore website
    1. Moore gives money to the man who runs an anti-Moore website in order to pay his wife's medical bills.

21. Moore summarizes his feeling about what he has experienced.

22. Moore goes to get the government to do his laundry.

23. CREDITS