

Wonks and War Rooms

S03 E05 - Political Satire with Tim Fontaine

Episode Transcript

Elizabeth: [00:00:04] Welcome to [Wonks and War Rooms](#), where political communication theory meets on the ground strategy. I'm your host [Elizabeth Dubois](#), and I'm an associate professor at the [University of Ottawa](#). My pronouns are she/her. Today, I'm recording from the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

[00:00:19] Today we're talking about political satire with Tim Fontaine. Tim, can you introduce yourself, please?

Tim: [00:00:26] I'm [Tim Fontaine](#) and I'm a former journalist—I was a journalist for 20 years off and on. In 2017 I started a website called [Walking Eagle News](#),¹ which is a satirical parody account of Canadian and Indigenous journalism. And I kind of transferred my journalism skills into doing that—between comedy and journalism. I'm Anishinaabe from [Sagkeeng First Nation](#).

Elizabeth: [00:00:55] Thank you. I am so excited to talk to you about what satire is. So we'll start off with the academic definition here, and we'll see whether or not that fits with what Walking Eagle News is and how you see your role in this political sphere.

[00:01:13] Satire, at its base, is humorous social criticism. It often uses laughter and joking to diminish or make fun of a subject, in this case, political subjects (so that could be a politician, a corporation, political party, you name it). They do this through disdain, amusement, indignation and irony and sarcasm are very common hallmarks of this kind of political communication. The idea of [political satire](#) is to provide an audience with a different perspective, to understand what the dominant narratives are, and [to] highlight

¹ The Walking Eagle News Twitter account is also worth checking out: <https://twitter.com/TheEagleist>

gaps in what might be dominant discourses. So, [does] that fit with what you understand political satire to be, first off?

Tim: [00:02:02] Yes, that sounds about right.

Elizabeth: [00:02:06] Perfect. Ok, I'm glad we're on the same page.

[00:02:09] And so, one of the big things about political satire that in academia people are grappling with is: Should we think about this as news/political information? Should we think about it as entertainment? Should we think about it as advocacy? What are your thoughts on that?

Tim: [00:02:28] I think it's a bit of all of it. I think it depends on the story, right? Sometimes what I do is, I guess, advocacy because, in some ways, it's sort of like telling the powers that be, "This is what this feels like. When you say that, this is how I interpreted it. This is how it feels." So, in some ways, yeah its advocacy and I'm glad that people get a laugh out of it. But it's funny- a lot of the stuff that I do is not overtly funny, it's not "ha ha" funny. I always joke that it's sort of like "ha ha, eeeee." You know? Like it's got a weird sort of thing to it. And so, in some ways it's using grim humour to make a point. So, yeah, I think it could be all of those things. I just think it really depends on how you're... Because in many ways, satire and news parody is a reflection of whatever is happening. So, sometimes all I do is just [take] things out of the headlines. Real headlines are actually quite strange.

Elizabeth: [00:03:35] Yeah. Yeah, and noticing how some of the dominant narratives, and the way that stories are expected to be told, sometimes if you don't question [those things], it's like, "Oh yeah, that's fine and normal." And then, all of a sudden, we're down this rabbit hole and it [becomes], "Why is this normal? This shouldn't be normal."

Tim: [00:03:53] Exactly! Well, yeah, that's the thing. Media has a way, whether they mean it or not, of normalizing things. And sometimes it's also the way... the language of

news is very funny because, although media - their whole reason for being to spread information to the public, they often do it using a language that the public doesn't understand.

Elizabeth: [00:04:17] Right.

Tim: [00:04:18] The ways that they write things—that's not how people talk and that's not how we describe things. [It's] a really strange thing, [that continues] to this day. And I was a journalist for many, many years—and I did it too—and I often think back about [it], like I still don't know why we did that and why we continue...

Elizabeth: [00:04:34] Yeah.

Tim: [00:04:34] ... to do that. Journalism is a funny thing. And I'm not into this whole, "They're the enemy," or whatever, because I think, you know, I believe in journalism.

Elizabeth: [00:04:44] Yeah, and from the media studies perspective, we think a lot and talk a lot about how there are these expected structures for pieces, expected...

Tim: [00:04:55] Yes.

Elizabeth: [00:04:55] ... types of languages that journalists are taught to follow. And that's one of the ways that you ensure trust and...

Tim: [00:05:05] Yes.

Elizabeth: [00:05:05] ... and you build credibility. And those are important things. But, if you fall too far into those kinds of standards, then you sometimes can get lost in the weeds of them and miss the connection out to the community.

Tim: [00:05:22] Yeah, it's a slippery thing. Media is grappling with a lot of things right now because the world is changing and because communication is changing and people's appetites are changing. But I don't think anybody knows.... But in some ways, media feels like they're still trying to hold on to those old ways of doing things. You know, you wonder why people don't consume news the same anymore, but it's sort of like there's a lot of figuring out that needs to happen right now and I think that we're not there yet. I don't think anybody has hit it yet, so...

Elizabeth: [00:06:00] Yeah.

Tim: [00:06:00] And it's the same thing with, yeah. You talk about politics like, I think the relationship between media and government and politicians is still very funny. Like it's still... Too often, journalists and news organizations take for granted everything that [government and politicians] say, or take it as fact even sometimes, right?

Elizabeth: [00:06:20] Right.

Tim: [00:06:20] There's some fact check, but I think, for the most part, there's still a lot of just sort of repeating what it is that [governments or politicians] said as opposed to analyzing it, telling people... I mean, again, that thing about [the] language of news and the language of politicians. You will never hear a headline saying "He's lying." Like just that statement, right? "This is a lie." Like [during] the entire Trump administration never once, I think, did anyone ever say that Trump "lied". They find these funny ways and sort of... I can't even remember what it was... Like even just like that term, "factually incorrect". Just say he's lying. Especially in a situation like that.

[00:07:01] Or to say that something is racist—media don't say [that]. I think only in the past couple of years have media come around to say that something is racist. And again, like we had a lot of fun—I always say we even Walking Eagle News is just me—but the way [the media] got around saying [something is racist. For example:] this is perceived as racist, or it was or quote unquote racist, [or it was] racially tinged. That was one of the funniest things I ever read: something was "racially tinged". What does that even mean? Like, just say it's racist.

Elizabeth: [00:07:30] Yeah. Yeah, efforts to find balance and efforts to not be perceived as bias can mean that you're not being direct in what you're saying...

Tim: [00:07:41] Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:07:41] ... And that can be challenging. Whereas, I guess, political satire and parody have the advantage that nobody is assuming that there is going to be no perspective in that work off the get go right. There is an assumption from the base of it that there will be some sort of perspective with what is being said.

Tim: [00:08:03] Yeah, and often there isn't [balance in news], right? And I think there's lots of reasons for that, too. I mean, journalists are under incredible pressure now in ways I think they never were before. My lifetime in journalism, I saw... You had all of these silos.

Elizabeth: [00:08:21] Yeah.

Tim: [00:08:21] Where there was the... And even within those silos, they had their own silos. And by that I mean there would have been a crime guy, a reporter that had the crime beat—and I keep saying guy, but I mean, that's also what it looks like. And they worked only for TV. And [the media] may have had another crime person that worked for radio, and another one for print. And then now, one reporter can be all of those things on any [given day] and also be an expert in whatever it is that's the news of the day. So,

you can understand—I'm not making excuses for it, but you can see why things like that happen. [That's] why the rise of the government or the police or the corporate or whatever-it-is-spokesperson has become such a [important] thing, right? Where it's like [the government, police, or spokesperson says,] "Here's the information you want. You do whatever you want. Just try to make us look good." That's that sort of transaction in...

Elizabeth: [00:09:10] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:09:11] ... news now. Whereas before it was very much like, "Well, I don't believe you—that's too easy!" You know what I mean? If you give me all of this information, I'm going to treat that [information with] suspicion. But you don't see that anymore because now it's sort of like [the reporters] just take it as "information is information," right?

Elizabeth: [00:09:26] Yeah.

Tim: [00:09:27] I'm not saying all of them are like that, but you see a lot of that. They just sort of take the word of whoever it is that's saying it.

Elizabeth: [00:09:32] Right. And then there's, in this media environment that we've got where there's so many options for where to get information, everybody's creating their own little habits—they've all got their own little diets. This brings me to the next question I had for you:

[00:09:47] How do you see satire—or have you thought about how satire—fits into somebody's wider political information and media diet?

Tim: [00:09:56] Again, I think to me, it's no different than sort of a slant of news. You know, you can say that there's left-wing news and right-wing news and...

Elizabeth: [00:10:07] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:10:07] ... green news and this sort of thing. And I think it's no different than that because a lot of what Walking Eagle News does, because not all of it is political... Usually when it comes to politics, [Walking Eagle provides] a reflection and a response to something real. Something that's happened or something that continues to happen. Satire, I think, is no different than that. It's another way of interpreting, clarifying—of clarifying whatever it is that happens. Because a lot of satire, a lot of parody, and a lot of these things that are doing [political humour], that's what it's doing for you: it's interpreting that story and showing you it in a different way. Often, I think, the funniest ones are the ones where they tear away everything else from that story and just show you ~this~. "~This~ is what is actually happening." [The cop](#) that murdered George Floyd—that headline, ours was, I can't remember specifically what it was, but when that officer was found guilty, I think we said, "[Man seen murdering man found guilty](#)." And that's really what it was, right? Like, how did you have to have a trial, you know? But yet there were headlines that were far more convoluted than that.

[00:11:17] So yeah, I kind of like non-news people's ability to cut through all of that and just say what [it is]. I think that's why... Even at the time of the rise of [The Daily Show](#) and stuff like that in the States during the Bush administration and all these other wars, and [The Onion](#), where I remember reading—because I was still a real journalist then—I remember reading some article or some thing by somebody saying [that those satirical media are] where people are getting news. At the time, I thought, "This is unreal. Like, how do you...? Why do you...?" But now I understand. Now that I'm on the other side, I can see why.

Elizabeth: [00:11:51] Yeah, absolutely.

Tim: [00:11:53] There is a place for it, as long as it's done properly. Because everything has a spin and everything has a slant, so, why is this any different?

Elizabeth: [00:12:02] Yeah and being explicit about it and having the knowledge going in [that] this is going to have a slant and that's the point. Right?

Tim: [00:12:11] Yes.

Elizabeth: [00:12:11] That sort of clarity can be really helpful for people.

Tim: [00:12:15] Yeah, absolutely, I really believe that now. And part of it is because you don't want to, you know... modesty, or whatever. But like, I remember hearing that people were using Walking Eagle News as a part of curriculum—that it was included in that. Which I thought was like, "Don't do that." [Laughs]

Elizabeth: [00:12:31] [Laughs]

Tim: [00:12:31] But I mean, whatever, right?! Now I realize, "Okay, well all it is is... It's no different than a book or magazine or an article or whatever it is."

Elizabeth: [00:12:38] Yeah, I like to think about the various kinds of political information that all get sprinkled into a person's daily diet. Just because you follow Walking Eagle, or any other satirical or parody source, doesn't mean that's the only way you ever engage with political information.

Tim: [00:12:59] Yeah, yeah, yeah—it's just one part of your whole outlook. It's the same with me and a lot of people that I know, we don't get our news from one single source. Or at least I hope you wouldn't.

Elizabeth: [00:13:10] Yeah, ideally nobody is going to just one single source.

Tim: [00:13:13] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because then it's like, "What are you...? Why are you letting somebody do that?" [Laughs]

Elizabeth: [00:13:19] [Laughs] Yeah.

Tim: [00:13:22] But on the other hand, there were people...I think about my dad's day or my mom's day—it was like not that long ago, in the 80s—where my dad would read the newspaper and then he would watch whatever was on TV. That was how he saw the world. You know, and there was nothing wrong with that.

Elizabeth: [00:13:37] Yeah, absolutely.

[00:13:38] I want to ask you a little bit about some of the some of the critiques, I guess, of relying too heavily [on political satire], or the fears associated when people are seeing the late-night comedy shows all of a sudden become popular. So, one of the worries is that critiquing political structures too much makes people not trust those structures anymore.

Tim: [00:14:04] Yeah. I mean, you shouldn't anyways. That's why, again, when I was talking earlier about the role of the spokesperson... There was a time when there weren't necessarily [spokespeople]. How reporters interacted with the police was very much one-on-one and you had sources, or you would go ask them, or you do all of these things. And then they set up these processes that controlled that flow of information in a way that hadn't been done before. And so, you went from reporters having to dig and having to talk to people and having to find all of these things to try and get a story, to where once a day a designated police officer stands there and gives information that he's decided he can give. Right?

Elizabeth: [00:14:50] Right.

Tim: [00:14:50] And reporters—I wasn't there when that system changed, but I think—reporters went along with that. And then now, that's the reality, where it's like, "That person—that police officer—will only tell us the information that they deem fit to do so." It's a really frustrating thing, and that's sort of how the world is now. Even in this world where we have access to phones and we have access to all of this information, still, very much of the information we get is catered to us, or not catered to us but sort of controlled in how we get it. So that's kind of frustrating. And there's still that thing about trust—like, you can see why [people may no longer trust the political structures anymore], right? Like, that [controlled information flow] also erodes trust. You realize, like, "What are you not telling us then? So you're giving us these little bits, but what are you not telling?" When you see a reporter ask this person this question, or even perhaps even more frustratingly, when a reporter doesn't ask the question...

Elizabeth: [00:15:54] Yeah.

Tim: [00:15:54] Again, that whole thing about the way press conferences are controlled, right? Because people only get one question and the follow up, so they'll ask a direct question. Oftentimes the politician, or whoever it is, won't answer that question. All the other reporters just move on because they want to get their question in or [the original reporter doesn't] have their follow up question ready.

Elizabeth: [00:16:14] Yeah.

Tim: [00:16:14] That's incredibly frustrating. So, yeah, that's why, if there is mistrust of politicians or of government or of any establishment, they've done that to them.

Elizabeth: [00:16:24] Right, it's not the fault of satire that there is this mistrust...

Tim: [00:16:28] Oh yeah, yeah,

Elizabeth: [00:16:28] .. And what I'm hearing from you is that, [in doing] satire and other forms of comedic commentary, you get to avoid being stuck in those structures, right?

Tim: [00:16:41] Yes.

Elizabeth: [00:16:41] Like traditional journalists—if [they] want a press pass, [then they] have to follow the rules. And, to a certain extent, we do need rules to allow for any sort of consistent flow of information. But having people on the outside who have this other format for also making political commentary is really useful. And the point is to point out when these structures are bad and problematic.

Tim: [00:17:03] Yes. Yeah, yeah, I mean, it does have value. Part of any healthy society, I think, is to have people that say, "I don't agree with that, and here's why." Right?

Elizabeth: [00:17:14] Yeah.

Tim: [00:17:14] I mean, there's a history of that [type of discourse in society] and, you know, nobody's going to behead me now because I've said something about the government. But also it's harder to be heard.

Elizabeth: [00:17:27] Yeah, harder to be heard when there's all of these different avenues—people have to choose you.

Tim: [00:17:32] Yeah. Well, yeah, and that's the thing, right? And all media is going through that now.

Elizabeth: [00:17:37] What do you think makes people choose Walking Eagle or other forms of satire?

Tim: [00:17:43] Again, I think it's just the ability to sort of say... A lot of people will contact me after [reading a Walking Eagle story] and say, "That's how I felt reading that newspaper [article which Walking Eagle just satirized]."

Elizabeth: [00:17:51] Right.

Tim: [00:17:52] I think that's what it is. People like that somebody is sort of cutting through all of the noise. That's my biggest takeaway, I think. And I've really only come to that realization in the past little while, it's that it's almost like interpreting. And I think that's the value in it.

Elizabeth: [00:18:11] Yeah.

Tim: [00:18:12] And again, I think it's because it's from, you know—talk about oversimplifying, but—it's from the Indigenous perspective, my perspective as an Anishinaabe man in this country. This is how I feel looking. I share them and a lot of other Indigenous people, and a lot of other people in general, agree with.

Elizabeth: [00:18:31] Yeah, that relatability seems so key, so essential. And it's interesting to see how that relatability paired with a shared past experience that you feel with whoever the author is—in this case, you, as the author—and then layering on that humour, or that sort of "make you chuckle, but then make you question." Right?

Tim: [00:19:00] [Laughs.] Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:19:00] That's not a thing that is necessarily a goal of a lot of mainstream media. And so...

Tim: [00:19:05] Yeah, and I think that was the thing. [It] was that when [Walking Eagle] first started, it was very deadpan and very sort of... I remember people saying it was gentle. It wasn't as sharp and direct as it is now. Like in the beginning when I started, I was doing it anonymously and I didn't really know what I was doing on jokes. And it wasn't until later, much later in the past little while where I've gotten really angry at it. I'm angry at [what I'm seeing in] politics, I'm angry at [what I'm seeing from] the police, I'm angry at all of these things. Walking Eagle sort of reflects that obviously, right? Things are a lot more pointed. But people seem to like it. But how much longer I'm going to do that I don't know.

Elizabeth: [00:19:50] It must take a lot out of you. It's also an emotional energy to put into that kind of thing.

Tim: [00:19:54] Well, and that's the thing, yeah, I mean, the same reasons why I left real journalism [are] probably the same things that are going to make me leave Walking Eagle News. It's that it's still... Now that I get into the business side of things, and because I do what I do now (I do comedy writing). I'm going to leave that eventually behind. It does feel... Because you still have to, in order to get the fodder, you've got to go through the news. So, in many ways it's as if I haven't left journalism. And it was funny, the first two years of Walking Eagle News, I would still very much parallel to [working in] real news. It seems like work, but it's also so heavy because again, like a guy on Twitter said, he called it "sad lol". Sad L-O-L — that's how he described it, that was the hashtag that he [used to] describe Walking Eagle News. And that's true! That's really what it is in a lot of ways.

Elizabeth: [00:20:49] Yeah

Tim: [00:20:49] It's sort of a funny brand. I wish it could be more straight-up humorous but I don't think I would want to.

Elizabeth: [00:20:56] Yeah, you have to deal with the heaviness of the content. You can inject humour into it, but, at the end of the day, there's a lot of very serious, very heavy, very difficult issues.

Tim: [00:21:10] Yeah, and that was one of the things. Like we talked about, it's often associated with humour, but there are some stuff that I've done where it's just a reaction.

Elizabeth: [00:21:21] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:21:22] It may be absurd, but it was never meant to be laugh-out-loud funny.

Elizabeth: [00:21:29] Right.

Tim: [00:21:30] You know, there was a couple of stories about the Liberals and their reaction... the stuff they've done with Child and Family Services—the way that they've gone to court with residential school survivors—some of those headlines I've used for that are not funny. They're actually not funny. They're very grim, right? And that's kind of the point. So, I think—like we talked about it very earlier on—I think sometimes satire doesn't have to be funny.

Elizabeth: [00:21:59] Yeah.

Tim: [00:21:59] I think it just has to be a reaction to it. Right?

Elizabeth: [00:22:03] Yeah, it's that critique aspect. That makes me think about: where is the line between satire and news content? Throughout this conversation, you've used the idea of "real journalist" a few times. Where do you draw that line? Did you see a distinct shift from when you were "real" journalist-ing to when you were [working at Walking Eagle News]?

Tim: [00:22:28] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, for one thing, I don't feel the need... Like, there was a healthy—it's not even [that you had to give equal opportunity to] both sides [of a story, but] you do have to give the other side an opportunity to respond to whatever [when working as a "real" journalist]. Whereas with Walking Eagle News, it's such a huge relief to not have to do that. To just make it up.

Elizabeth: [00:22:48] [Laughs]

Tim: [00:22:48] To just say, "This is ~whatever~," or to be purposely imbalanced. I do understand the need for balance, right? All I do is just sort of parrot. And a lot of times—I'm sure some of my former copy editors will disagree, but—I think, for the most part, it's written exactly as the way it would have been had I been a real journalist. It uses the exact same format, this modified [Canadian Press style](#).² That's how I still write.

Elizabeth: [00:23:17] Why did you decide to keep it that sort of style?

Tim: [00:23:19] I found it really funny, I don't know why. I don't know what it was about seeing something... I mean, I guess it's the same way that [The Onion](#) is. Some of the things that I've laughed most at on The Onion are not even the political ones. It's just where they take something very mundane and write about it as if it's like a very serious thing.

Elizabeth: [00:23:40] Yeah.

² For a publicly available overview of the Canadian Press Style, see: <http://www.davidmckie.com/Canadian%20Press%20Style%20Guide%20Excerpts.pdf>

Tim: [00:23:40] There was one where, I think, it was some mother in the Midwest was worrying whether she bought enough dinner rolls for their Easter dinner. And just the way it was written, I thought, "This is so, so funny!" Right?

Elizabeth: [00:23:54] Yeah.

Tim: [00:23:54] And so, to me, something about that format was very funny. Because, what I used to do when I was getting trained in how to write that way at CBC was, we would have to do these exercises and write fake articles and I would always put a humorous [spin] on mine. And so, in many ways, those were sort of the beginnings of Walking Eagle News—these little articles that I didn't really save...

Elizabeth: [00:24:19] Yeah.

Tim: [00:24:19] ... But there's just something funny about it, I don't know what it is. Just something about that sort of fake [gravitas](#) of news language, right? It's so very funny to me.

Elizabeth: [00:24:31] Yeah, gravitas is the exact word I was thinking of as you're describing that.

Tim: [00:24:35] Yeah. And I give my—I have an older brother named Monty, and when we were kids, he used to mimic... We used to watch the news because I've watched the news most of my life. And we used to watch it, too. I grew up in a community called Hollow Water, and I remember when we were there—when we were kids—my brother mimicking the reporters on CBC...

Elizabeth: [00:24:56] Right.

Tim: [00:24:56] ...But talking about stuff that was happening. And it was so funny. And then he would even like [mimic] the behaviour and the language of TV reporter, and so he would [be] like, "[I'm] Fontaine, CBC News," and he would say something First Nations somewhere in Manitoba. It was so funny to me when I was young, and that sort of stuck with me, too. The mimicry of news has always been in my life—that's kind of where it came from.

Elizabeth: [00:25:19] That's really cool. And to go back to when you and your brother were consumers of this information, to see that sort of percolate and come up...

Tim: [00:25:30] Yeah. Like taking it... Yes. Taking the language of news and sort of twisting it and stuff like that, I think has always been built into my sense of humour.

Elizabeth: [00:25:39] I love it. Many years of experience there, that's awesome.
[Laughs]

Tim: [00:25:46] [Laughs] Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:25:46] That is so, so interesting. I really appreciated it. And it makes me think then about the dreaded "[fake news](#)" term, which obviously there's a whole lot to dig into and we don't have time to go through all of what is fake news...

Tim: [00:26:01] No, no.

Elizabeth: [00:26:01] ... but, do you have any thoughts about [the relationship between satire versus disinformation?](#)

Tim: [00:26:09] Yeah, I mean, it's weird, right? Like, I almost embraced that term when it first started circulating because I thought, "Well, it's kind of what I do. I mean, there's nothing real about what I do here." But then at the same time, it is...

Elizabeth: [00:26:22] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:26:23] ... It's become an attack, right? But it is, in some ways, the different side of the same coin, maybe...

Elizabeth: [00:26:28] Yeah.

Tim: [00:26:28] ... Because what I'm doing is taking the news, which is often not written from our point of view, and I'm putting it in our point of view. But it's yeah, it's dangerous because you do see, like, "[yellow journalism](#)" they call it.

Elizabeth: [00:26:43] Yeah.

Tim: [00:26:43] You pronounce it [Breitbart](#) or the dreaded [Rebel](#). I mean, just this sort of unapologetic, often right-wing news. This is our... This is them.

Elizabeth: [00:26:56] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:26:56] I guess it's the same way, I don't know. It's weird, I mean, it's a funny thing. I remember somebody—I think it was [John Hodgman](#), who's American writer—he said that the right was often accused of not having a sense of satire. Like that's why there was never a right-wing [Daily Show](#). But he had sort of argued in a weird way that, in many ways, Trump and all of these things [are] their satire. Because their twisting the

world in their own image and that. It's a weird sort of thing, right? But I guess that's, yeah...

Elizabeth: [00:27:31] Yeah.

Tim: [00:27:31] That's a big discussion.

Elizabeth: [00:27:33] Yeah, yeah. That's a really interesting perspective, I hadn't thought about it in that way. And the way you've described satire and what you do in terms of offering this perspective...

Tim: [00:27:45] Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:27:45] ... that I do see the connection there.

Tim: [00:27:48] Yes.

Elizabeth: [00:27:48] I guess for me, one of the big things is an acknowledgment of, "This is a perspective and this is meant to be satire. I am intentionally..."

Tim: [00:27:59] Yeah. Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:28:01] ... giving you this perspective so that you will feel seen, [so] that you will feel connected to, so that you'll have a laugh"—[or] whatever the emotion or connection is. Which is, I think, different from creating news stories and presenting them as if they had no bias when in fact they are fabricated.

Tim: [00:28:20] Yeah. Although even that... Because, I think, the funny thing about right-wing media is they often don't pretend that they're not trying to be biased.

Elizabeth: [00:28:30] Hmm, that's true.

Tim: [00:28:31] They'll often present it and then their supporters, or even they [themselves], will say, "This is what the left-wing doesn't want you to see." It's got that sort of thing to it, right? Like, "Well, the left does it all the time, so we're going to do it, too." And so there's always that sort of thing going on.

[00:28:51] I feel like other than the legacy media like CBC and CTV, [many media are starting to recognize their biases. CBC and CTV,] they're the ones that are still pretending that there's no sense of bias in their things. And whether it's conscious or unconscious—I mean, maybe that's the distinction. These smaller ones that are sort of like the Fox News[es] of the world, they're the ones that it's really a conscious bias. They're just not hiding it. But... But I don't think they would see themselves as fake news.

Elizabeth: [00:29:22] Yeah. I think there's what you've sort of mapped out, [which is that] there's the group of mainstream media, then there's the left niche, the right niche, there's satire—which may or may not fit in with the left niche or [may] be its own kind of standalone thing—and then, I think, there's also straight up disinformation, which are campaigns to...

Tim: [00:29:44] Yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:29:45] ... And [are] separate from news, although sometimes also put on the facade of news.

Tim: [00:29:51] Yeah, yeah, yeah, I mean, it's funny. It's hard to... And that's the problem: it's hard to [distinguish the difference]. If you're not [media literate](#) or you're not media savvy, it's very easy to fall prey to [disinformation that looks like news], right? I see it in... Facebook is one of the worst. You go on there and you see people who come from the communities that would be vilified by those publications sharing [that publication's] articles because maybe they agree with something in it. Like I've seen Indigenous people share [Ontario Proud](#) or far right-wing British things. Because, you know, they're afraid of the world, right? They have this... Something says something about—whether it's immigrants or whatever it is...

Elizabeth: [00:30:34] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:30:35] ... Or COVID-19—I mean, that's the big one now. Something in [the article] connected with them and they share this without knowing that, you know what? The people that run that thing probably don't like you. And here you are sharing.

Elizabeth: [00:30:49] Mm hmm.

Tim: [00:30:49] And my problem, too, with Walking Eagle News, is that you would be surprised—or maybe you wouldn't be surprised—at how many people believe this stuff is fact, no matter how outlandish it is. I wrote an article—it's an older article that I reshared recently—that I hate that term, "There's only one race, the human race."³ People will often say that to Indigenous people. So, [the article for Walking Eagle](#) was that all Indigenous people in the country have packed it in. We're no longer Indigenous people because somebody online [said the phrase] and we took it to heart and said "Ok, well, I guess we're just humans now." And, every time I share that article, someone gets mad: "No, this isn't happening." And it's so absurd that anybody would, you know, [get mad]. But, at the same time, you realize [that] because things are... you can see why it's so easy to manipulate that information. When you make it look a little bit like real news than people will fall for it.

³ This phrase is considered a microaggression: <https://sph.umn.edu/site/docs/hewg/microaggressions.pdf>

Elizabeth: [00:31:46] Right.

Tim: [00:31:46] There is a danger and a risk to what it is that I do that I'm very well aware of. And I'm glad that most people will try and correct those people in the mentions and say, like, "It's not real. It's not an actual article."

Elizabeth: [00:31:59] Relying on the wider social media community to get back in there and be like, "No." [Laughs]

Tim: [00:32:03] Yeah, to sort of [say] like, "No, no, no, no." Yeah. The only Walking Eagle News story that I ever pulled was one about the [MMIWG](#) inquiry. I still think it's a funny article—I wouldn't share it again—but what happened was, again, because it looks like legitimate news, some families of MMIWGs saw that article. Like, that's again, the responsibility of [pulling an article is something] that I wish some real media would have...

Elizabeth: [00:32:32] Yeah.

Tim: [00:32:32] ... when they write articles that are harmful.

Elizabeth: [00:32:35] Yeah, because at some point, if you recognize that your work has had an unintended consequence, you have to make a choice of, "Do I continue to let this be a problem or do I shift what I've done?"

Tim: [00:32:51] Yeah. And again, those weird rules that only people in the media [think about]. When I think about some of the big media, they have policies [where] it's so rare that they actually pull—outright pull—[a piece of content]. They can amend it, they can tweak the headline, but they very rarely pull a story, no matter how harmful it is. It has to be like egregiously wrong. But oftentimes, while they're hemming and hawing and mulling, that original story is still circulating. And at that point, it's made its mark.

Elizabeth: [00:33:23] Right. All right, we are coming up on time. But before we end, I've got one last question for you. I'm wondering if you can define for us what satire is from your perspective.

Tim: [00:33:36] Yeah. Like again, satire doesn't always have to be funny. I think it just has to hold power to account. [Satire] looks at things in the world—the status quo—and says, "Maybe not. But this is actually what that looks like." That's my definition.

Elizabeth: [00:33:56] That's fantastic. Thank you. Yeah, I think that really pinpointing [political satire as] the holding up a different perspective and saying the dominant view is not it.

Tim: [00:34:08] Yeah. Yeah.

Elizabeth: [00:34:10] All right, well, thank you so much. This was wonderful. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Tim: [00:34:14] No, thank you. Thank you for having me, I appreciate it.

Elizabeth: [00:34:20] All right, that was our episode on political satire. Thank you so much for listening. If you'd like to learn more about political satire, the Walking Eagle News, or any of the other things we talked about on today's episode, you can check the show notes or head over to polcommtech.ca for more links.

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