

# Social Purposes of the Comedic

Existentialism and human emotions

# Existentialism

- A philosophical approach to understanding human behavior that emphasizes **the subjectivity of each individual**
- Also emphasizes **personal responsibility to make ethical choices**, instead of being led by social structures.
- It is often seen as an anti-philosophy, in that **it questions assumptions in humanism, technological empiricism, western religion, and the imbalance of global political systems**

# History

- Figures in modern existentialism began writing after the horrors of two world wars, and were particularly critical of the group-minded nationalism that led to sanctioned genocide and the use of nuclear weaponry.

# Philosophy

- Existentialism holds that a set of values preceding strict definition of events is necessary to understand why and how humans interact with each other.
- **Existentialism is concerned with finding a different discourse of “authenticity” to understand human life and emotions** such as boredom, freedom, nothingness, joy, elation, alienation, etc.
- Definition, or strict re-capitulation is not quite good enough to understand.

# Philosophy

- **Existentialism is concerned with Ontology, or the basics of existence without regard to pre-loaded definitional structures.**
- Asking questions like ‘why do we exist’, ‘what’s the use’, ‘who am I, really’?

# This is what they're saying:

- **Science (mostly), Politics (totally), Religion (to a lesser extent) don't help us understand what it truly means to be alive**, but rather impose a set of empirical rules for defining observations about it that don't probe below the surface of events.
- **Science, Religion, and Politics posit objective certainties** that are inadequate to understand the purpose of our existence because they don't understand emotional truths.

# A rejection of 'meta narratives'

- **A meta narrative is an organization of ideas under a single unifying ethos.**
- E.G. Science answers all questions through empiricism; Democracy is the only effective form of government; Our purpose is to love God and serve him.
- Existentialism happens at the beginning of the acceptance of 'many imperfect narratives'

# Example: The Computer Operating System

- **Computers use a specific operating system that objectifies and defines rules** about how a user will navigate the system.
- **This navigation is sometimes ideological, and usually subjective.**
- **\*But\*** knowing the operating system doesn't mean you understand how the computer actually functions (and is sometimes the opposite)



# I'm a...



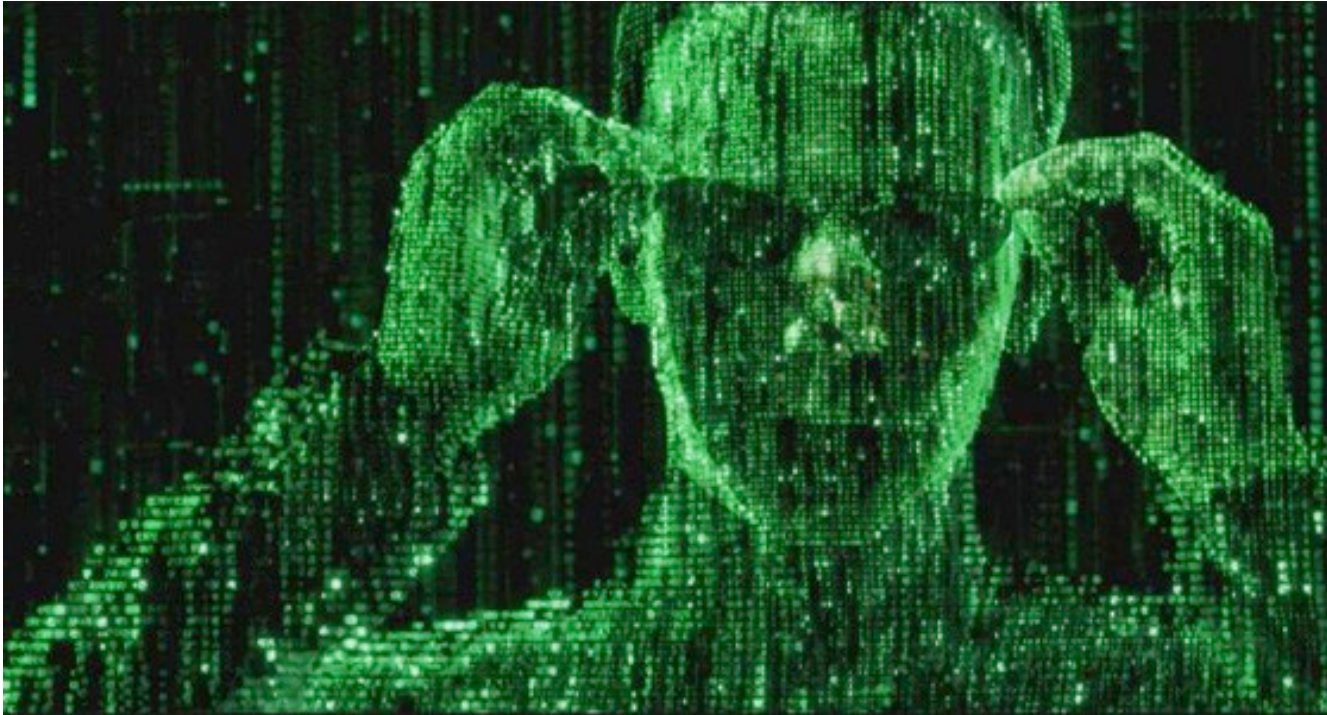
I'm a PC.



I'm a Mac.

- <http://youtu.be/C5z0la5jDt4>

# The Matrix



- <http://youtu.be/C5z0la5jDt4>

# Glitch Art (Jon Satrom)



- <http://vimeo.com/3352063>
- <http://vimeo.com/15821484>

# Comedy, Laughter and Existentialism

- Laughter and humor could be an indication of usefulness of existential views.
- Laughter is a subjective experience that **can't be well-described by science and religion, and can't be deployed socially** for political ends.
- Laughter is inherently human, and reminds us of our status as subjective and collective beings, therefore highlighting a potentially more authentic collective human experience.

# Becoming Aware of Emotion

- **Usually people desire to understand a more fundamental, basic aspect of themselves in the face of personal or social turmoil.**

## George Carlin: *It's Bad For Ya* (2008)

- Last stand up special by Carlin in 2008, in which he elegiacally focuses on the meaning of life in light of his old age.
- He considers politics, religion, and science not in an activist sense, but in a philosophical, subjective, ontological sense.

# Working Toward Authenticity

- **Tragic events make us more aware of certain social artifices**, and their inability to explain what these tragedies can teach us.
- E.G. George Carlin knows he has a short time to live, and existentialists were critical of war.

# The Big Lebowski

- What is considered authentic in this film? How are characters kept from achieving this authenticity?
- How do characters change their behaviors in response to tragic behaviors? How do they change in their quest for an authentic existence?