

THE DARK SIDE OF BILL HICKS
THE PUBLIC NEWS, JANUARY 6 1988

"The woman hanging on my arm was pregnant and in six or seven years the thing she was carrying inside her would be able to read the letters in the sky and he or she or it would know that it was a cigarette and later would smoke the cigarette, perhaps a package a day.

-Henry Miller

"Tropic of Capricorn"

"Can someone explain to me why my mom and dad fuck one day and suddenly I'm getting phone bills? I don't get the correlation there. Where did the price come in? We all pay for life with death, so everything in between should be free.

-Bill Hicks

If intensity counts for anything in the world of funny, then Bill Hicks sets the standard. He stabs at sober subjects with an almost visible sword of seriousness and lets the humor bleed out. It's one thing to poke fun at mediocrity but quite another to observe, "John Lennon was murdered, and Barry Manilow continues to put out records... We live in an opposite universe. When he says that God told Pat Robertson to run for president but "God didn't tell me to vote for him," he takes a seriously funny tangent that might not occur to everybody, let alone the Republican party.

Like most comedians when they're off stage, Hicks is just another guy, not necessarily funny. What's important is that off stage he maintains that irreverent outlook toward life and its injustices that makes him an unsettling yet hilarious comic on stage. That being said, here, in the interview following, is the darker side of the darkest comic we've seen in a long while.

PN: In your act, you point out how stupid Hinckley was for trying to kill the President with only a .22, all for the love of Jodie Foster.

Hicks: I'm not justifying violence in any form at all. It is, after all, just a joke, but I'm making a point about Ronald Reagan. It's not enough that some people don't like him, or do like him. I think the guy is a criminal against humanity. Anyone who sits on that kind of power and actually tells me to my face, 'Well, we gotta send troops to Nicaragua...' Let people alone. It's corporate interests that are driving us to do these things. But forget that, it's too obvious.

PN: Some of your material borders dangerously on sedition.

Hicks: It's not that it's sedition. Aren't people frustrated by the lies they're being told daily in the name of God and country? Excuse me, our source is life and to it we shall go. Let us pay homage to the one source, which is Life. Thank you and Amen. This could be heaven on Earth. That does not entail suffering or greed or lack not hopelessness. With, of course, the omnipresent humor of dick jokes thrown in.

PN: So it's your job to point out the injustices around us?

Hicks: What am I supposed to do? Sit back and talk about socks in the dryer? I personally like the idea of liberating myself, and I can't do it with sock-in-the-dryer/McNuggets material. As long as I'm going to live in this world, I might as well make it the most enjoyable and fun and fair place I can make it. And one way to do that is not to let these injustices slide by as if they're not happening.

PN: When you say 'liberate,' do you mean from outside influences?

Hicks: From the entire illusion that there is an outside. I'm talking like Shirley Maclaine now. We are boundless spirits. The idea that we are separate entities is an illusion. That's why people run around and have wars, because they feel like they lack something. I do what I do and make

a living at it and that to me is a living example of what I'm talking about, where you don't have to struggle to achieve. That is the illusion. What do you gain if you struggle? You've lost your time.

PN: So, in a sense you're telling us that life is all there is, and we should just enjoy it and each other.

Hicks: This is the premise I'm operating under, and I could be deranged. Wouldn't that be nice to know? Let's just pretend for a second. Most people in this country believe in a God, the Christian God of the Bible. In that Bible it says that we are all the children of God. Here's where I make my leap into the abyss. I'm asking the audience that if we are in fact the children of God, then our daddy is real well off, so much so that there is no suffering that he would allow us to live through. It must be our illusion to go through a hellish existence. As long as one person lives in darkness then it seems to be a responsibility to tell other people, 'Hey, until we're all equal let's stop all the tumultuous movement, shall we?'

P.N.: As a believer in God and Jesus Christ, one thing that makes me nervous is your sometimes irreverent attitude toward the subject.

Hicks: Let me put it in perspective for you. I believe in Jesus and in God, I just don't believe in suffering.

PN: As serious as your humor is, it's healthy in that we are able to hear someone articulate the thoughts we all have about life.

Hicks: It's a very good kind of humor, I think, when people are inundated with lies all the time: 'You have to work, work, work.' For what? For what? You do it because you have to, because that's the system that's been thrust upon us, with no explanation as to why this system is like this.

PN: You started your career by lip-synching Elvis in grade school. Now you do an outrageous imitation of The King. Can you explain your fascination with Elvis?

Hicks: I don't know; Elvis just cracks me up. I think he's an hilarious American story too. He had everything he could possibly want and he was still completely miserable. It's just mind boggling. One thing I don't like about certain aspects of life is the idea of the media and corporations pushing 'The American Way.' The American way is no way at all. Are people happier? Y judge a culture by how happy the people are, not by how much money they have.

PN: Who picks the music you come on stage to, and why do you use it?

Hicks: I pick it. It's whatever gets me off that night. Music is a great energizer. It's a language everybody knows. It's a point of reference everybody can deal with. No one doesn't like music. Not necessarily the music I pick, but the point is made... my point of reference is energy, enjoyment of life, love, if I may be so schmaltzy.

PN: When did you first realize you were funny?

Hicks: Not during this interview. I get something when I get in front of an audience. I don't know when I first figured it out. When I get up there, I feel good, I feel funny; I don't know what it is. I just feel that's my place to be right then. I used it to get attention; back in high school that was the only way I could do it. It's a good job. I like the hours.

PN: What do you try to accomplish on stage?

Hicks: I would like to see people just belly-laugh, knock over tables. And have everyone leave the theater going, 'Everything's cool, I finally laughed and got it out. It's a joke!' That's what I want to happen. I don't want to make it seem like I'm taking on the world. Maybe I have been

and that's why I'm sitting here babbling. You get that support, because the audience will tell you when you got it right, or maybe they won't.

He must be doing something right. Hicks is a three-time vet of the David Letterman show and headlines all over the country. Last year, Rodney Dangerfield was given a tape of one of Hicks' performances, and as a result he was invited to appear on "Dangerfield's Young Comedians Special," which will air on HBO on February 13. Bill has nothing but admiration for the veteran comic, saying "Rodney's amazing. He's 66 years old, completely alive, energetic, and funny, but the guy parties too."

Bill Hicks will be appearing through Saturday at Fitzgerald's with the Outlaw Comics as they look back at 1987. I've been told the opening sketch consists of God being subpoenaed before the Outlaw Subcommittee. Bill promises more of the no-holds-barred Outlaw comedy the gang has become famous for. In fact, he says they may never be able to work in this town again after the shows. Do yourself a favor with this one.