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Late-night comedian's thoughtful take on popular culture something to see

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NCR Today

In an age of nonstop reality television, it is rare to find something truly "real" on the tube, but a friend slipped something into my inbox a couple of days ago, and it stunned me.

It comes from comedian Craig Ferguson, host of "The Late Late Show" on CBS. (Full disclosure: I work for CBS, but I don't often see this show because it comes on at 12:30 a.m., by which time I am very fast asleep. Very.)

The clip, a couple of years old by now, starts out with Ferguson popping into frame and telling the audience he has figured out the big answer. He has discovered why everything is terrible and getting worse. What follows is an astoundingly intelligent and frank three-minute speech about the shifting nature of popular culture and how demands of marketing, advertising and consumerism have over the decades changed who we are and how we function.

Ferguson -- a thoughtfully witty guy -- does not play this for big laughs. He means it, and you can feel the studio audience slowly realize they are being served something genuine, something very much off the mass communication menu.

Now, we've all gotten used to rants and ravings on television; we live in an age where it seems anyone with an opinion, no matter how misbegotten, is offered a studio and a camera crew. But these on-air blowhards are playing roles. They are intentionally amping up the outrage and delivering anger as a form of entertainment.

Ferguson, however, is not a character named "Ferguson." He is delivering a tough message in succinct

terms, and it is the closest I've seen any broadcaster come to that big Howard Beale moment in the movie "Network." ("I'm mad as hell and I'm not gonna take it anymore.")

Watch the video. It runs about three minutes. It's worth the time. One quick warning, however: Don't show this to anyone under 30.

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