SCOTTISH TELEVISION COMEDY AUDIENCES

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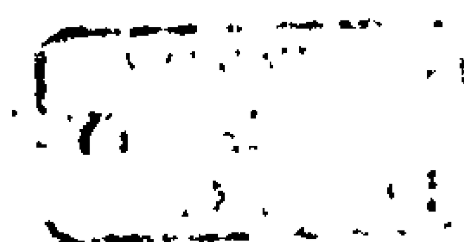
January 2002



ABSTRACT

This study explores how Scottish people feel about representations of Scottishness in contemporary television comedy. The thesis is in two related parts, articulating an exploration of genre, comedy and Scottish television texts with the theory, methodology and analysis of empirical audience research. The thesis begins by exploring how current television comedy is poorly served by critical literature beyond notions of genre although this field of study too fails to indicate significant contemporary permeabilities between comedy sub-genres, and between comedy and other kinds of leisure shows. The second chapter explores historical approaches to Scottish cultural criticism and literary myths (Tartanry, Kailyardism, Caledonian anti-syzygy, Clydesidism) and sets these against contemporary mythologising by individual Scottish comedy practitioners. The second half of the thesis marks a shift from textual studies toward audience research, and in particular develops a discussion about the problematics of researching comedy and audiences qualitatively. The first part of the second half is a literature survey of selected examples of audience research which is translated from theory and epistemology, to methodology and technique in the next section which comprises a discussion of the model for the empirical data collection. The next section presents data from a quantitative survey and qualitative focus-group discussions. The last part of the second section interprets the data through triangulation although this is limited by lack of comparable critical materials. The whole attempts to explore concepts of national identity in Scottish television comedy with audiences, but also develops the additional problematic of empirical qualitative research and comedy themes.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and institutions have provided support. Without funding assistance the project would never have been conceived, and without academic and personal support it could never have been completed.

For funding I wish to thank the University of Glasgow who provided a full scholarship plus ORS funds from the CVCP. The university also smoothed my transition to Scotland, offered valuable teaching and research work and provided important resources, funds and facilities in the Theatre, Film and Television Studies Department.

For academic support I wish to thank my supervisor John Caughie who invariably gave excellent advice. I am grateful to Tony Pearson, Karen Lury, Jan McDonald and Christine Hamilton within TFTS; Charles Woolfson, Bridget Fowler and Greg Philo in Social Sciences; Jim Bee and Michael Stewart at QMUC; John Norman MacLeod and Catriona Johnston at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig; and Richard Paterson at the BFI. I was encouraged by feedback at the *British Braids* and *Screen* conferences, and cheered on from afar by former supervisors Ken Harris and Howard McNaughton.

I am grateful to my survey and focus group respondents who were patient and generous and contributed to the most challenging and ultimately satisfying parts of the research experience. For their particularly helpful assistance I wish to thank staff at Scottish Screen, the Comedy Unit, BBC Scotland Arts and Entertainment, *The Scotsman*, The Stand Comedy Club, Channel Four, the ITC, and Nil By Mouth.

Many friends gave generously of their time, coffee, calming influences and incisive perceptions. To these sweet people go my heartfelt thanks. Most of all I want to thank my family, who wished I hadn't gone to Glasgow but never once said so, and Tristan, who said so frequently but never really meant it.

INTRODUCTION

THE TOPIC

Comedy encompasses a wide array of texts and performances. It can range from cartoons, pantomimes and musicals to radio plays and television satires. Within each form or medium there are numerous possibilities: a study of the history and development of each of the varieties of television comedy alone could fill several volumes. And within television comedy (the focus here) there is a range of modes and many genres: light-hearted gameshows, satirical parodies, sitcoms filled with stereotypes, and experimental sketch shows to suggest just a few. After exploring the genres and modes to be found in one-year sample, I have chosen to focus this study upon comedy references to and representations of Scottishness. In particular, I look at the aesthetics and some viewers' reported and observed experiences of watching parody and irony, and discover through audience research that social uses of comedy can range from a questioning of identificatory processes to the simple repeating of jokes and references to comedy texts to suit the viewer's own parodic and ironic purposes. Scottishness is often characterised in contemporary mainstream Scottish comedy by negativity, poverty and a certain linguistic and social roughness that might be read as either a self-deprecating revelling in the derogatory stereotypes Scots have endured for decades (an ironic counter-attack), or alternatively as reflecting the values by which 'Scottishness' has been created and circulated (as if these are the only comedy representations through which we can recognise Scottishness being portrayed). How viewers might align themselves with an ironic mode and enjoy the comedy, or reject the representations as out-dated, irrelevant, unrecognisable and thus cringe-worthy or unfunny, becomes an important focus in the audience study of Scottishness and television comedy.

There exists a large diverse corpus of critical writing about comedy in general, especially in theatre and literature. Comedy research has at times incorporated history, dramaturgy, philosophy, linguistics and rhetorical forms, psychology and psychoanalysis, and even physiology. However, this corpus of writing provides a contextual background rather than offering any substantive understanding of my chosen subject. For example, Albert D. Mackie (1973) combines a history of 'Scotch' comedy from medieval fairs to stage, radio and television with biographical studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century performers. While interesting historically, Mackie's text is dated and focuses on the development of certain performers who no longer appear on screen, and thus his work has limited application here. Susanne K. Langer (1953) uses literary theory to explore the aesthetics of clowns and buffoonery, combining linguistics and the aesthetics of stage performativity in her critique. Again, her work offers some useful theorisation for comedic performance but as it is written by an American in the 1950s, her text offers little of direct currency or relevance to the kind of comedy I seek to understand. Henri Bergson (1912) derives a theory of performance and joke-narrativity based upon mechanical movement, repetition and 'snowballing'. Although he is describing the stage performance of monologues and Molière plays at the end of the

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nineteenth century, his structures have been applied here briefly to contemporary television comedy when I explore sketch show structures (narrative snowballing) in the genre study. James Agee (1967) describes how the 'milking' and 'topping' of visual gags in silent film comedy produced and structured narratives around four textures of laughter in ascending intensity: the titter, the yowl, the belly laugh and the boffo (1967:2), but this approach presupposes the quality of laughter, and has limited application here as my study discusses little visual or silent comedy examples. Like Langer, Boris Sidis (1919), Anthony M. Ludovici (1932) and Arthur Koestler (1964) use philosophy and linguistics to seek the basis and meaning of laughter and like Langer, the works allow insight into comedy structures but are less applicable to television sitcoms and sketch shows. Mixing linguistics and literary theory, Jonathan Culler's (1988) collection of essays focuses upon puns and word play in literature, providing useful examples and terms for literary study but not discussing jokes or comedy texts in a social context.. Both Maurice Charney (1991) and Gerald Mast (1979) analyse examples of comedy material but where Charney examines jokes and literary texts in order to establish definitions for comedy techniques Mast discusses movies with regard to his eight fundamental comic narratives. Again, these oft-cited examples offer ways to look at comedy, but like the other sources mentioned here, their application to my particular approach to television comedy and its social context and reception is minimal. Some edited collections of research (Chapman and Foot 1976; Goldstein and McGhee 1972) combine papers from both philosophy and psychology, sometimes also investigating physiological aspects of laughter (see also Darwin 1965).

In terms of television aesthetics and comedy styles and texts the scholarly literature is more sparse. Many critics discuss specific texts or sub-genres (and some of these are discussed in Chapter One) but few approach the subject holistically. Neale and Krutnik's book comprises a thorough survey of forms, genres, styles and comedy criticism and ought to function as a primer for a project such as mine. However, although genres exclusive to one medium are properly discussed without reference to the other, Neale and Krutnik predominantly apply film theory and criticism rather than weighing up the two media as different but of similar importance (as their book's title might suggest). This is problematic for two reasons: they tend to conflate film and television texts and aesthetic values (interweaving feature films with sitcom examples as if they were equivalent or comparable), and when they do cover comedy with television aesthetics it is by relying on John Ellis's (1980) early, uneven, general comparisons which have a conspicuous cine-centric basis (in other words suggesting that television is an inferior medium when compared to cinema).

An understanding of the aesthetics of television and its comedy texts is crucial because unlike novels, films, theatre or radio, television uniquely offers the potential to produce topical, political, controversial material—visual, verbal, aural, physical representations and texts—and to broadcast it to regions, nations or whole continents simultaneously, selectively, repeatedly. Television can broadcast live events; television parody can be constructed moments afterwards. Television has different aesthetic qualities, structures, modes and forms than other media, and its comedy has genres, narrative types, performance styles, and modes of production, circulation and reception that are uniquely televisual. We tend to watch television in the private domestic sphere rather than in the darkened public yet isolating cinema, and as such television must compete with other media

and private activities to grab our interest rather than receive our rapt attention in the way that cinema can. The rules for watching television are those of private preference unlike cinema's public demands of silence and obedience. Within that domestic context, television needs to grab and hold our attention. It does this through the aesthetics of micro-narrative structures, repetition, and bright, often close-up visuals. Its reliance on continuous sound allows it to function like radio—to 'go around corners' so that focused viewing becomes unnecessary. This means dialogue- and repetition-rich texts like sitcoms or stand-up comics can be viewed and enjoyed without concentrating on the visual aspects (we can knit or eat at the same time, and the laugh-track tells us when to look up if the aural cue seems anomalous). However short-narrative and visual comedy structures like individual sketches, especially those with physical performativity or slap-stick sight-gags, require more concentration and attention to the screen. After a while sketch shows become familiar too and we can 'view' with our heads down (*The Fast Show* is a good example, where the voices represent the characters and many of the gags are catchphrases repeated every week). Getting the combination of technical parts (sound, performer, visuals, editing) and aesthetic balance right is paramount in communicating something as fragile as a joke, particularly a parodic or ironic representation of something very personal yet shared like a cultural identity. I explore these points more fully in the genre chapter.

Neale and Krutnik offer a text-based definition of comedy, working between film and television examples. They point out that while verbal jokes and humorous physical performativity are essential ingredients in comedy, 'funny lines and funny moments' may occur in other kinds of texts as well (1990:11). Comedy may be contrasted with tragedy but it is also more than the absence of tragedy: comedy texts might have narrative structures such as happy endings, they might use rhetorical devices or modes such as parody or irony, and they aim to induce laughter and happy feelings in the audience. Neale and Krutnik also explore 'comedy' against 'the comic', where the former refers to texts ('a comedy', 'that comedy series') and the latter refers to the parts or moments of the text that we recognise as funny—whether or not we laugh, and whether or not we ought to. While I accept that Neale and Krutnik's definitions suit their purposes, and while I borrow from them in my genre study (albeit to broaden the terms of genre categories and to demonstrate a continuum of comedy types), I nonetheless find their textual focus limiting. One complaint arising in my focus groups was that some comedy programmes used jokes that seemed dated. Neale and Krutnik do not explore audience or social aspects of comedy but I find it to be central: what happens when the mechanics and aesthetics 'fail' in the eyes of the viewer, when jokes feel dated or miss their target? I think in this study particularly, where the processes of viewer identification with a sense of 'self' and 'other' are crucial to the understanding and humour of the texts through the positioning of a view of 'Scottishness' and how it is valorised, comedy means so much more than genres and comic moments: comedy in a social context can be seen to include perceptions of connectedness to a national community, an insider's gaze. I explore this in the audience research, especially with regard to the notion of Contrastive Others: those viewers who are imagined by the insiders to exist outwith the cultural context for whom the comedy is seemingly constructed, and who thus impinge on social and cultural terrain by presuming to understand Scottish-focused comedy they cannot possibly 'get'.

Another potentially useful point of departure might have been Jerry Palmer's (1987) *The logic*

of the absurd. Palmer considers film and television comedy examples separately but whereas Palmer makes intricately-argued points about logic and surprise (the *peripeteia*), and Neale and Krutnik explore the difficulty of locating verisimilitude in a genre or mode predicated on transgressing institutional codes, neither source addresses television comedy in terms of television aesthetics through *television criticism* in the sense which we have latterly begun to understand it. These writers tend to concentrate on the linguistic deconstruction of jokes outwith any social or televisual context. Subsequently, potentially valuable lines of enquiry—writing and production, scheduling and broadcasting, audiences' tastes and viewing practices—are omitted. These examples have been skimmed rather than discussed because none of these approaches offers much to aid understanding how comedy *representations* of certain groups (Scottishness, in this study's greater focus) might be received by television *audiences*. This question can be separated into two distinct but connected parts: the construction of cultural representations for humour, and the reception and reading of televisual comedy.

Within this focus, then, we can see that unlike news texts, comedy texts using social or national representations and stereotypes might say one thing and mean the opposite—they joke about their meaning using an ironic double-voice. Meanings are produced when audiences encounter texts but comedy texts often exploit ambivalence and ambiguity: there can be several shifting strands of meaning in comedy texts and how social agents unravel the threads of comedy is not yet fully appreciated. This thesis explores the problematics of reading comedy texts, particularly as they relate to presumed cultural and national groups. In this study, the national and cultural groups of people in Scotland exist within and are partly defined by an historical context which sets them at odds with the dominant English culture, including television culture. This is partly an effect of the network system used by the three channels broadcasting most Scottish comedy (BBC1, BBC2, ITV) but this in turns reflects London's historical position as Britain's cultural and political centre. Now with Scotland's Holyrood parliament holding considerable devolved power, and after the explosion of interest in Scottish history and culture at home and abroad with films like *Braveheart, Rob Roy* and even *Shallow Grave* or *Trainspotting*, the way the cultural reflects developments in the social and political is due for exploration. The work takes an original approach by thinking through how young adult viewers feel about use of Scottishness for comedy purposes. Does Scottish comedy have defining features and themes that mark it as Scottish, regardless of the accent, dress and setting of the performers? Is there a qualitative difference in meaning for Scottish people between *Rab C. Nesbitt* and the Scottish characters to be found in so many English-produced sitcoms? In particular, this study explores the latter question—how Scottish people feel about representations of Scottishness in contemporary television comedy.

With its double voice humour is a double-edged sword, embodying the warrior's power to divide as well as to unite: when we laugh we draw conclusions about the value of a joke or comic situation and, consciously or unconsciously, align our responses and opinions with those of other people. As Sigmund Freud (1976) demonstrates in *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*, humorous comments may be either 'tendentious' jokes which take an object for ridicule and thus 'run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to listen to them' (1976:132), or the 'innocent' verbal play or nonsense joke which produces only 'a clear sense of satisfaction [and] a slight smile', but 'scarcely ever achieves the sudden burst of laughter which makes tendentious

ones so irresistible' (1976:139). However, very few jokes which appear victimless remain 'innocent' upon examination: often, unspoken hostilities and associated presumptions adhere. Freud notes that whether functioning as cynical acts of rebellion against authority, or to produce smut, or as disparagement of 'inferior and powerless people' (1976:149), these jokes align speaker and listener. Together these two construct an ideological framework within which the (usually absent) second person—the topic, ergo the object, of the joke—has no discursive power. Thus we might find ourselves laughing at material that repels us—perhaps, as Freud seems to suggest, *because* it repels us—if we engage with the comic moment on its own terms. As with critics mentioned briefly above, Freud is often referred to in a variety of scholarly disciplines but my topic works in an entirely new and different context, and requires specific tools and theorisations from outwith the canon of comedy critique. Leaving psychoanalysis aside, however, and considering contemporary Scottish cultural texts and contexts, we can nevertheless explore these tensions through questioning the relations of stereotypes, myths and irony to understand better how jokes and, more precisely, television comedy representations might function in a national and social environment such as post-Devolution Scotland.

Throughout my thesis I argue for a wider view of how comedy texts function beyond the hermeneutic interpretation of the single joke or the compilation of the genre, although I nonetheless recognise the value of these parts of the analysis. Instead I want to expand the idea of comedy to see how texts are used by audiences and to explore the social uses of comedy. In many respects then this thesis takes over where the current literature leaves off, making initial approaches to the relations of audiences to national television comedy in Scotland, and at the same time reconsidering the manner by which audience-focused research into such an ambiguous textual process like comedy can be constructed and conducted. The report is in two parts, articulating an exploration of genre, comedy and Scottish television texts with the theory, methodology and analysis of empirical audience research.

THE RESEARCH

The process of research is not straightforward or unilinear: flashes of perhaps illogical inspiration motivate reappraisals and repositionings against a background of workaday method. Not all researchers elaborate upon the process, instead glossing over mistakes and wrong turnings, making precious moments of inspiration appear planned, intellectually-developed, intentional. This thesis however reveals all, including abandoned lines of theoretical enquiry and methodological sections that had to be reworked. There were two reasons for these inclusions. First, there are no comparable pieces of research on this topic and it behoves me to reveal rather than conceal its development. Second, research is a *process* as well as a *product* and justifying one's research directions and decisions is just as important as substantiating one's outcomes and conclusions. Where there is little related scholarly material to triangulate against this becomes imperative.

Although there is considerable scholarly discussion and critique across Scottish cultural themes (Tartanry, Kailyardism, Caledonian anti-syzygy, Clydesidism) there is much less material to be

found about Scottish comedy and almost nothing about Scottish audiences for indigenous television programming. At the same time, there is a great deal of discussion about comedy in many historical periods, literary styles, different media and genres as well as research into the applications of humour in medicine or in business. There is also a varied, rapidly-expanding corpus of work interrogating the notion of the television audience. However, there is very little that could be described as research into television comedy and audiences together (I found two articles that I would describe this way) and nothing that looks at comedy *through* audiences. 'Scottish television comedy audiences' is undiscovered territory.

Thus the thesis here represents more than a series of chapters written in approximately chronological order and more than merely an epistemological shift from studying texts to studying audiences, although that does happen here for structural and formal reasons. The study is more than a sequence of shifts in focus and approach as some intended lines of enquiry fizzled out as impracticable for research purposes and others were regarded largely irrelevant, although that also happened too as the work progressed. What this thesis attempts is the contextualisation of Scottish television comedy texts within a British network and cultural superstructure while at the same time theorising, testing and constructing a working model for exploring notions of national identity, *in comedy, with audiences.*

This thesis sets out how I approached such an ambitious goal, but I accept and admit its limitations both in terms of its conduct and in terms of its ability to draw conclusions. My textual sample is restricted; my audience sample is small, unstructured and limited to university undergraduates studying media and cultural subjects in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Skye. Having read in recent years some dramatic claims about what various researchers' data 'prove' about audiences I am wary of making absolutist declarations when my own results are modest and the lack of material to triangulate against permits me to only to observe and surmise rather than to extrapolate and conclude. I do not attempt ground-breaking conclusions that cannot be substantiated by my data; instead this thesis details my doctoral work from which there are observations about Scottish texts, comedy, audiences, their relations between these, and reflections on the research process.

This last point is important because there were few strictly relevant pieces of literature for me to draw upon: the scholarly writings I have discussed, especially those referred to in the first two chapters, are often passed over quickly because although in summary they represent the edges of a field of study, in detail they often contributed very little of any consequence. Part of the rubric of this kind of research project is finding one's way through an established corpus to an original position, but in this thesis I had to work the other way around, starting with an original idea and attempting to collect the materials to fit, particularly for the opening chapters. For this reason I have worked with a variety of texts, complementing the critique of books and articles with descriptions and analysis of numerous television programmes ranging from the traditional comic styles to the extremes of comedy and taste. Except for the *Endurance UK* discussion, which deals with an unusual text for very particular purposes, the texts selected were screened on terrestrial British television, almost always viewed in Scotland, and almost all broadcast during the period October 1998-October 1999. Some back-catalogue examples from library and university video archives were used to demonstrate specific arguments, and to fill out the historical corpus of

Scottish television comedy, but I did not include feature films or children's comedy in my examples or analyses. I took a broad notion of 'television comedy' in order to test it against the theoretical tenants of genre study and the limits of the dynamic continua I describe, and against the definitions and expectations my audiences described to me in the empirical quantitative and qualitative research. At times in the thesis I refer to atypical, even oblique examples—to illustrate the limits of genre or the construction of televisual humour, to demonstrate the excesses of tastelessness or the extremes of stereotypes about Scottishness and identity—but this enables me to *focus* upon specifics in an academic field which contains few canonical texts or theories.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study explores how Scottish people feel about representations of Scottishness in contemporary British and Scottish television comedy. It does so by exploring and linking literature searches with television examples and audience experimentation. The chapters build successively in three parts from theoretical pieces and content descriptions (chapters one and two), through methodological and epistemological concerns (chapters three and four), to original data analysis and interpretation (chapter five). There is a flow through the chapters within the three parts, but the chapter delineations are also necessary to indicate topic substructures and to recognise disciplinary groupings in the literature surveyed.

The first part (chapters one and two) addresses comedy genres and Scottish television comedy. Chapter One comprises a literature survey of comedy genres and analysis of terrestrial programming in 1998/1999 and after testing and critiquing several traditional approaches to defining comedy genres, this chapter suggests genre boundaries are becoming more permeable both within the larger comedy genre, and between comedy and lifestyle or leisure programming. Where previous critics might have considered comedy genres as discrete and separable this analysis concludes that contemporary genre lines are blurred and that comedy programming can instead be understood as a continuum from serious or 'straight' examples in drama, talk or music texts on television to programmes which contain all the characteristics of comedy: jokes and gags, laughter from the studio and home audiences, smiling presenters and very particular narrative forms, styles and subjects. The second chapter approaches Scottish humour, delving into comedy genres as well as joke style and subject matter to consider whether and how 'Scottish television comedy' might refer to a significant body of work. This chapter addresses Scottish television comedy in the context of national myths (Tartanry, Kailyardism, Caledonian anti-syzygy, Clydesidism) and cultural criticism, incorporating ideas from current Scottish comedy practitioners and comparing historical comedy stereotypes from outwith Scotland against Scots' own self-deprecation.

The second part (chapters three and four) moves from the theoretical into the epistemological and practical problematics of researching comedy through audiences. Since there is almost no audience research using comedy as a focus available, the literature search describes methodological tools and methods for audience work in order to construct a thorough, critical and appropriate model for approaching television comedy audiences. Chapter Three articulates the

textual focus with the empirical audience study, interrogating diverse examples of audience research. Chapter Four explores the problematics of irony and comedy as subjects for audience research by analysing my pilot study and describing how the substantive work into representations of Scottishness was reconstructed in light of these initial results.

Whereas the audience study pilot discussed in the fourth chapter is treated as material for constructing and refining a methodological process, the final chapter (part three) offers substantive data and analysis from my Scottish television audience research. Chapter Five presents the data from two pieces of empirical audience research and discusses a third which was unsuccessful. The data presentation and analysis is paired with their interpretation in triangulation with other research into Scottish audiences and national self-identification. These interpretation sections are limited by the dearth of Scottish television comedy audience research and by the lack of quantitative and qualitative data about national self-identification—a subject often treated theoretically and discussed by applying induction and rhetoric to cultural movements and objects in current popular circulation.

Following the data discussion, the Conclusion assesses and contextualises the parts and offers some thoughts on further research strands. For examination purposes full transcripts of the focus groups and the group interview with the Gaelic-language trainees are appended.

CHAPTER ONE

Texts and Contexts:
Genre study and its limitations

While it might seem obvious what is meant by the term, 'television comedy' is ironically enigmatic: although we each understand the kinds of television texts suggested by these words finding an authorative definition is rendered problematic by two interlinked concerns. Firstly, 'comedy' may be understood to refer to a genre, a grouping of texts with similar aesthetic characteristics. Secondly, 'comedy' may be understood to refer to a mode, the particular moments when television performances amuse and make us laugh. Even so, not all comedy genre texts provoke laughter, and not all comic moments occur within comedy genres. In this chapter I consider the three main genres—light entertainment, quiz and game shows, and situation comedy—and their various component sub-genres to critique the way much writing on television comedy focuses on a single text or individual sub-genre or genre. Then I offer an alternative approach which considers instead the interrelationships between texts and genres and exposes the latter's fluidity and permeability within the television context. In the second chapter, I shall consider different modes of comedy, exploring the difficulties of determining fixed meanings for texts which often have a 'double voice' through sarcasm, irony, parody and satire and thus allow viewers the chance to construct ambiguous, multivalent or even contradictory pleasures and meanings.

Many critics separate the genres without difficulty but this study demonstrates how sub-genres and their constituent texts interrelate with diverse complex connections; thus, the discussion comprises one long chapter illustrating similarities rather than three smaller chapters emphasising difference. Sub-genres may be linked to other groups of comedy shows but also to shows outwith the comedy genre; for example, *Changing Rooms* (a home-decoration game show) may be considered along a continuum of fashion, home and gardening programmes as well as within the flexible groupings of games and quizzes. Thus, any particular programme may draw upon its resonances with other similar programmes and be located within a matrix of different continua, some of which exceed the genre or mode of television comedy.

Although I have divided television comedy into three genres (and these into sub-genres), I would agree with John Fiske (1987:111-2) that:

> [a] genre seen textually should be defined as a shifting provisional set of characteristics which is modified as each new example is produced. Any one programme will bear the main characteristics of its genre, but is likely to include some from others: ascribing it to one genre or another involves deciding which set of characteristics are [sic] the most important.

Paul Attallah (1984) critiques the circular arguments which construct genres from the characteristics one finds from the texts, using texts within that genre. However, Fiske's idea of genre as 'shifting' and 'provisional' means that the mismatches between some earlier critics' views of genre and my observations and analyses of contemporary television texts can be understood as indicative of the texts' historical specificities. If the characteristic components of genres change across time then so do genres; if the changes involve hybridities, overlaps and recombinations of genre elements then genres cannot be thought of as fixed or final but rather as the relations between dynamic continua in flux.

This chapter proceeds by addressing three main sub-genre categories in turn. In each of the three sections, scholarly literature about television comedy and genre is grouped, interrelated and critiqued, and the points raised in the literature discussion are then applied to a detailed analysis of one year's television comedy programming (limited as closely as was practicable to terrestrial programming from October 1998 to October 1999 with a few extraordinary examples drawn from outwith these parameters). Numerous textual examples are related to demonstrate that the connections which define traditional genre categories are still discernible, but these three sub-genres can also be seen to interrelate, and to have permeable boundaries encroaching on neighbouring non-comedy terrain. There are Tables attached to the end of this chapter setting out graphically some connections between traditional sub-genres and the continua which extend into the non-comedy genres. The three sub-genres are organised according to volume (Quiz and Game Shows first; Light Entertainment next; Situation Comedy last) which was calculated from a programme count during the contemporary television survey; the result is somewhat skewed by the (deliberate) inclusiveness of the category 'quiz and game show' and by those programmes' relative low cost and speed of production, high repetition ratios, and dominance in Channel 5's schedule. Whether this order reflects aesthetic quality (however we might judge or measure it) or commercial on-sale quantities and revenue, remains to be discovered. Whether this order reflects audience preference and appreciation, as well as whether the categories are meaningful to the public at large—which is significant given the fluidity and porosity of the continua I suggest here—will be explored through the empirical research in later chapters. I have referred to the overall subject as comedy and broken it down into sub-genres labelled Quiz and Game Shows, Light Entertainment, and Situation Comedy. Other critics call these not comedy but 'light entertainment' collectively; still others would leave out quiz and game shows. Most of those critics were writing decades ago, and while I do not claim this scheme to be perfect, my labels and groupings are an attempt to best describe and analyse the texts and their relations in contemporary television production and broadcasting.

QUIZ AND GAME SHOWS

Literature survey

Within a discussion of domestic television comedy in Britain, quizzes and game shows initially appear to comprise an easily differentiated sub-genre that displays minor variations on universal structures and themes. Academic literature on quizzes and game shows is scant, and some critics (notably Neale and Krutnik, and Jerry Palmer) ignore these programmes completely. But others consider quiz and game shows for the same reason I do: they are neither drama nor sport, neither current affairs nor educational programming: quiz and game shows are undemanding entertainment often written and produced in comedy units and involving to varying degrees celebrities, jokes, play and laughter. Beyond analyses of the transmedia adaptations from radio to television or historical pieces about the American 'contestant coaching' scandals of the late 1950s (Goedkoop 1985), scholarly writing on these numerous and popular programmes seems limited to essays in compilations rather than comprising any substantive assessment of the shows and their audiences. This reflects the low standing of quiz and games shows in academic terms. Some writers attempt to confront and correct this notion by applying models from high literature, for example Stuart M. Kaminsky and Jeffrey H. Mahan (1985) apply 'Northrop Frye's analytical method' to their analysis of quiz and game shows, establishing a hierarchical topology/typology of the texts which describes contestants variously as gods, heroes, men or fools. Alternatively, Mike Clarke (1987) works from a media-studies teaching perspective when he considers the industrial motivation to produce the shows and the audiences' pleasures in watching them and emphasises the shows' narrative structures and functions. John Fiske (1990) incorporates his ideas into a feminist corpus on television when he limits his discussion to the 'resisting pleasures' women might find in 'quiz' shows like *The New Price Is Right, Family Feud* and *Perfect Match.* Each article considers different aspects of quiz and game shows on television because each writer addresses a different context: Kaminsky and Mahan analyse *American Television Genres* through literary theory whereas Mike Clarke explores material for *Teaching Popular Television,* and John Fiske addresses the feminist academic readership of Mary Ellen Brown's compilation *Television and Women's Culture.* Similarly narrow in focus are Tulloch (1976), Fiske and Hartley (1978), Mills and Rice (1982), Simpson (1984), Brunt (1984), Lewis (1984) and Fiske (1989) who confine their respective analyses to one or two shows each. John Fiske's (1994) analysis of *The Newlywed Game* is the sole example of an audience study for game shows obtained in the literature survey, and because it mixes autoethnography with the problematics of fan study, I shall deal with it in a later chapter. While this brief overview of the available literature is not intended to be exhaustive, it nonetheless suggests that game and quiz shows enjoy little critical attention or rigorous analysis, much less any analysis of their positions within the comedy sub-genres.

Although many of the writers cited above have attempted to group shows together, their definitions are often pragmatic and incomplete and, brought together, their combined efforts express contradictions and omissions rather than concise definitions. Tulloch (1976:3) divides quiz shows between the 'intellectual' (*Mastermind*) and the 'populist' (*Sale of the Century*), discussing not only the respective rewards of 'status' and 'consumer durables' for the winners but also noting that some types of questions in both programmes are very similar; thus, he concludes, the formal and social context of the show not the knowledges *per se* demonstrated by the contestants constructs this intellectual/populist binarism. Fiske and Hartley (1978) examine *Bruce Forsyth's Generation Game* to consider how the game show exists solely for television (unlike sport) yet also reflects its music-hall and variety-show roots. Clarke (1987:50) considers a wider range of shows and audiences exploring intellectual, populist and celebrity shows, individual versus team contests and mental versus manual skills, as well as considering 'specialist' programmes dedicated to particular subjects rather than general knowledge and 'target' audiences (for example, children). Fiske (1990:143) attributes the 'factual' knowledges of *Mastermind* and *Sale of the Century* to masculine public culture and classifies shows like *Family Feud* (known as *Family Fortunes* in the UK) and *Perfect Match* as its carnivalesque inversion, the 'experiential, "intuitive"' knowledges of feminine culture which, Fiske insists, challenge patriarchal capitalist hegemonic social structures.[1]

Taking game and quiz shows as individual events and ignoring their intertextual context, however, limits the number and types of texts under discussion and thus oversimplifies and underestimates the genre. If *Mastermind* is to represent the 'intellectual quiz' yardstick, then how might *Countdown, Q Asia, Catchphrase* or *One Hundred Per Cent Gold* be measured? If *Perfect Match* is characterised as a quiz of 'populist knowledges' (requiring contestants' extrapolating from their observations and social experiences a likely answer rather than an objective fact), and *Pets Go Public, Family Fortunes* and the 'Baby-Left, Baby-Right' game on *TFI Friday* can be similarly described, then this grouping—and, presumably, other classifications like it—requires greater analysis than many of the writers cited earlier seem to recognise or acknowledge. Consequently, definitions are needed to account for the variety and differences—as well as the similarities—among game and quiz shows.

Contemporary television survey

Game and quiz show formats combine distinctive features with a selection of standard characteristics: host, 'quizmaster', competitors, live audience, apostrophe to viewers (or direct address), distinctive studio props, manual or physical tasks, questions, a system of points or scoring, time limits, chance, strategy, punishments, rewards. These ingredients are mixed in various combinations but each show maintains a distinctive flavour with an innovative characteristic. For example, *Generation Game* and *Sticky Moments* both contain elements of individual or paired quiz and play and mix

amateurish pantomime-style theatre with subjective judging, emphasising fun over competition. Whereas *Generation Game*'s distinctive feature is its contestants, a male and female pair from different generations of the same family, *Sticky Moments* is structured as a parody of *Generation Game*-type shows. Julian Clary doubles as host and as his own gorgeous, sometimes femininely-dressed, aide. His assistants (unusually, both men) are the round and ruffle-shirted 'Hugh Jolly' and the sulky Oxford-educated pianist 'Russell'; (homo)sexually excessive 'sticky-moment' prurient humour replaces *Generation Game*'s wholesome family-hour fun. The two shows' narratives—refining a larger group through successive loser-eliminating game rounds to a 'final' performance-based prize-winning round—contain similar structural features, but the method of selecting contestants (Julian invites individuals from the pre-show queue outside the studio), the style and tone of the host, quizzes and games, the selection of the winner and the value attached to the prizes (*GG*'s twenty prizes ranging from a cuddly toy to an overseas family holiday, against *SM*'s flowers, wine and a 'Fanny the Wonderdog statuette') nevertheless clearly differentiate the two shows.

Thus, each show has a distinguishing feature as well as a similar combination of standard ingredients. *Q Asia*, a 'specialist' show with a 'target audience' (in Clarke's terms) combines team and individual quiz rounds with an Asian host, Asian contestants, an Asian studio audience and questions in the Asian language nominated by each team. *Pets Win Prizes*, another 'specialist' show, combines individual quiz rounds with games played by each contestant and their respective accompanying pet together; although the host indulges in mild campy humour—admiring a large snake, for example—he nevertheless keeps his comments family-oriented. Sexual humour is suggested by Dale Winton's boyish smile to camera rather than explicitly voiced.

Quiz shows, games shows

Despite their variation game and quiz shows can be grouped according to some key characteristics. Quiz shows draw their contestants from self-selected viewers (competing individually or in teams), celebrities, or a mixture of the two, and a 'quizmaster' asks questions and awards points according to the response. There is considerable variation, however, as each show seeks a 'niche' among the group. In *University Challenge*, two four-person teams (selected from the top twenty-four university teams in pre-series 'heats') compete for the chance to answer 'starter' questions for ten points and the winners are rewarded with three topic-related 'bonus' questions for five points each. Host Jeremy Paxman speeds through the introductions and rules each week and completes more than twenty rounds in the time available, hurrying a team stalling for time with a testy "Oh *do come on*". By contrast, *One Hundred Per Cent Gold* positions its three standing contestants in booths and an unseen 'quizmaster' asks one hundred multiple choice or true/false questions to which the contestants silently reply by each pressing their appropriate buzzers. Jaunty music fills the embarrassing silences. These shows, like *Countdown, Fifteen To One, Pass The Buck,*

Cryptogram, Wipeout and *Today's The Day*, offer contestants status, small prizes and the chance to either return tomorrow or to participate in a 'grand final' in exchange for providing quick responses to certain kinds of questions (with each show preferring a certain range and type of intellectual display).

Some quizzes require strategic play: *Pass The Buck, Wipeout* and *Fifteen To One* offer the chance to eliminate another player by choosing who will answer. Some offer possible answers and a process of elimination (*Wipeout, One Hundred Per Cent Gold*) whereas *Countdown* both allows for some strategy as the contestants take turns to choose the letter and number components, and tests word-making and number-calculating skills rather than seeking pre-determined answers or emphasising knowledge and recall of objective facts.[2] Despite this variety, the key characteristics of the quiz are its emphasis on questions of knowledge, points awarded for quick responses and a prize of status.

Games, however, require physical movement characterised as good-natured and humorous play. Roger Caillois (1961:71) organises play activity among the categories of *'agôn'* (contest), *'alea'* (chance), *'mimicry'* (imitation) and *'ilinx'* (or 'vertigo', such as is found in funfair-type motion play). Game shows require more corporality and movement than the composed, classical body which speaks forth quiz show answers but the games might include any of the contest, chance, imitation or 'giddy' motion factors (note that *agôn* also describes the working of the intellectual quiz). For example, the games in *Gladiators* are sports-based and the competitors dress in activewear, clearly sweating and straining to complete the combative, physical challenges in time and for maximum points (awarded by the referee to strict rules). By contrast, the ridiculous fumblings of couples playing *In The Dark* (made visible to viewers through infra-red photography) combines mimicry with vertigo: the couples must pretend to have an office affair in a pitch black room (romping on the couch but answering the telephone when required) for which they receive points subjectively calculated on their degree of undress, simulated sexual passion and phone-locating skills. *Fort Boyard* includes contestants in skimpy activewear but its games are messier and, unlike the repetitive and formulaic *Gladiators*, the show tests each individual differently; in a typical example a woman who hates spiders is required to handle several large ones in order to help the team 'beat the Fort'. Game shows might include a dramatic sub-narrative (*Fort Boyard*'s clue-seeking and riddle-solving) or a series-style climactic continuity (*Gladiators*'s quarters, semi-finals and finals episodes amplify the rise of the eventual winners); they might mix several different games (the children's show, *Fun House*) or offer a prolonged test of an average person's ability to learn a certain trick or skill. A programme from *The Moment of Truth* typically includes Cilla Black and a stunt expert (juggler, tightrope walker, tumbling-dominoes placer) visiting the 'lively family' at home, a video diary of the contestant practising the trick—with family members making both supportive comments and sceptical judgments, and culminating in a successful performance in the backyard—and a chat on the studio sofa with Cilla, building tension before the aptly named 'moment'. Although the build-up takes about twenty minutes and is stalled further by a

commercial break the actual trick might succeed or fail in only a few seconds. Game shows offer considerable variety—*Robot Wars, Streetmate* and *Watercolour Challenge* all function as games—but they collectively articulate physical movement and competitive leisure rather than intellectual prowess.

A genre continuum

How useful are such definitions? While it is academically pragmatic to consider the educative functions of quizzes as different from the entertainment values of games, the wide variation among the groups of texts plus the considerable cross-over between the two genres means the distinctions become blurred (see Figure 1.1). *Dale's Supermarket Sweep* mixes a populist knowledge quiz ("How much do these three food items cost?") with the physical race through a simulated supermarket; *Singled Out* includes both 'acting out' games and, like *Blind Date,* a flirtatious question-and-answer section that does not correspond to typical quiz show notions of factual, objective knowledge. *Wheel of Fortune, Bruce's The Price Is Right* and *Michael Barrymore's Strike It Rich* combine displays of knowledge with chance and risk (*alea*); if viewer participation and luck are distinguishing features of games then prize-lines and phone-ins (a regular feature of children's programming but also accompanying quiz shows like *Today's The Day* or *Dale's Supermarket Sweep*) might also be considered, and if large prizes are taken as key characteristics of game shows then *The National Lottery* might function as the supreme game show (raising the more complex question of whether, like other game shows, the programme exists primarily for television). *Gladiators* is 'played' with more seriousness than quizzes like *Cryptogram, Tibs and Fibs* or *Move On Up*; the sedate *Pets Go Public* is technically a quiz, requiring a considered intellectual response, but only one question is posed—who owns which pet—relegating time constraints and point-scoring to second place behind congenial chat and friendly animal-related anecdotes. Quizzes are not necessarily as solemn as *Mastermind* and games might include more intellectual challenges—designing, building and manipulating a warrior robot, or learning to draw and paint—than those of the more playful quizzes. Quizzes and games also appear as inserts within larger texts ('Baby-Left, Baby-Right' in *TFI Friday,* 'Sofa Soccer' and 'NTV/ You're On Your Own' in *Noel Edmonds House Party,* 'The Friday Challenge' on *Blue Peter,* the quiz for guests on *Hit, Miss Or Maybe*), and in new variations (*Streetmate* and *Singled Out* deriving from *Blind Date*-type games, *You've Been Framed* and *Beadle's Hotshots* producing two prize-based variations on the spontaneous or staged *Candid Camera*-style shows) and in new combinations with emerging genres, further complicating the attempt to understand the limits of game and quiz shows.

Small-skill challenge shows, celebrity and panel shows

A recent addition to the game show line-up is the small-skill challenge in which 'average people' learn to cook (*Can't Cook, Won't Cook*), restore furniture (*The Great House Game*), or garden (*The Great Garden Game*) with guidance from 'experts'. These shows

create a form of intellectual play situated by concepts of celebrity and expertise with points and practical prizes (usually a 'starter kit' for the new craft learned) awarded for displays of skill. These game shows are modest and sedate, and very similar to the 'lifestyle' magazine programmes in which established craftspersons demonstrate various projects; indeed, we can map these shows into a continuum of 'game show-ness' which undermines the presumed game/quiz dichotomy (see Figure 1.2).

Thus, these games (chosen from many similar examples) merge with the craft/educational lifestyle shows, separated only by the degree of viewer participation. *Can't Cook Won't Cook* with Ainsley Harriott contains the most 'fun' of these shows, turning a housework chore into humour with Elvis impersonations, bottom-wiggling, suggestive catchphrases ("Have a bit of a toss") and silly voices. Experts on *The Great House Game* and *The Great Garden Game* supervise the pairs and offer demonstrations to the contestants and home viewers alike. *Ready Steady Cook* and *Changing Rooms* give the contestants an opportunity to try cooking or decorating but only within the plans set by the skilled experts. In *Homefront, Real Rooms* and *Style Challenge* the participants are still self-nominated home viewers but their contribution is non-competitive and largely passive: in *Real Rooms* they are physically excluded from their home until the makeover is finished. Two members of the studio audience each bring an old item of furniture for the *Change That* team to transform although the experts neither consult nor work with the owners, surprising or even shocking them instead with style treatments.

Experts fulfil both educational and evaluative roles, not only demonstrating the tasks to be attempted but also making subjective critical judgments on the level and range of skills displayed. Although Fiske and Hartley (1978:146) drew a comparison between the evaluations of a layperson's technique on *Generation Game* and the ritualised sports programme *Match Of The Day*, the apostrophe that encourages the viewer to judge ability (emphasising the difficulty of the goal scored, not merely the ball going into the net) is also invoked by the celebrity quiz or game. Like the skills-based lifestyle-development games shows, 'celebrity' shows (*Have I Got News For You, They Think It's All Over, Shooting Stars, Whose Line Is It Anyway* and so on) are significantly less competitive than other games and quizzes. No impressive title or status awaits the celebrity quiz contestant and no luxurious consumer durables or cash prizes are awarded to the celebrity game show participant.

The quiz section of the rock-music prediction show *Hit, Miss or Maybe* awards both points and a trophy to the most knowledgeable guest but among other celebrity contestant shows, the degree to which rules, times and objective adjudication are observed varies. Whereas the format of *A Question Of Sport* enforces time limits, prefers direct answers (with a little humorous diversion) and emphasises the scores throughout, *They Think It's All Over* encourages humorous cross-studio discussions, avoids hurrying the teams and invites numerous diversions including comic references to the non-sports aspects of sportspersons' lives (frequently, Gary Lineker's acting in crisps commercials). *Have I Got News For You* functions under similar rules of play to *They Think It's All Over*

although it discusses and lampoons not sport but politics. The arbitrariness of points awarded is most pronounced in *Whose Line Is It Anyway*, a celebrity theatresports show in which host Clive Anderson not only makes up the ranges and allocations of points per game and per show but also keeps the 'scores' to himself until declaring the winner—whose 'prize' is the extra duty of reading the credits "in the manner of my choosing".

The competitive, agonistic means and goals of the quiz or game are played down for celebrity shows, and viewers are invited instead to evaluate the proceedings on the basis of comedy. The promise of wit from Rory McGrath or sarcasm from Nick Hancock is not only a distinctive feature of *TTIAO* separating it from other quizzes but also expresses its essence and strongest attraction. Particular expectations obtain for the celebrity current affairs quiz *Have I Got News For You*, including a curmudgeonly rant from Paul Merton. In November 1998 the BBC banned comment on Department of Trade and Industry minister Peter Mandelson's sexuality; as its viewers might expect *HIGNFY* took every possible opportunity to mention it. Paul Merton wanted to explain why the journalist who 'outed' Mandelson was sacked from his columnist's job but was confounded:

> Paul Merton: "How do I get round the ban? ... [Matthew Parris] (bleep) Peter Mandelson but I can't say that can I?"
> Angus Deayton (host): "Well, you can, but the (shrugs) would have been bleeped out".

A 'complete the headline' game proposed: "Mandelson is '—'(small blank)":

> Paul Merton: "Going back in?"
> Ian Hislop: "[Mandelson is]... not to be mentioned on any BBC programmes, everyone will have to watch ITV or Channel Four or read the newspapers rather than refer to the BBC, obviously, a newsgathering and broadcasting service, supposed to be impartial... that all fits in there!"
> Angus Deayton: "Excellent guesses, unfortunately we're not allowed to give you the answer" (laughter, applause from the studio audience).

The three-letter sized "blank", the satirical rant by Hislop and the implied ridiculousness of the BBC ban drew strong laughter and invited evaluation of the satirical comedy and wit displayed rather than advancing the competitive positions of the two teams, particularly since no 'answer' was given and thus no points were awarded: the item had only comedic value not 'quiz' value. Although most answers are awarded or denied points, here the interim scores were announced as: "Both teams have one more point than we are allowed to say there are gays in the Cabinet"; this comment too plays down the competitive nature of the scores and emphasises a running gag for that series (an unusual feature in a quiz or game shows to which I shall return later this chapter).

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Literature survey

Game and quiz shows lack scholarly attention; light entertainment is better served although, as with all academic writing on comedy, variation in country of origin, focus and publication style means diverse texts are treated as comparable simply because there is an insufficient volume from which to select. Many writers approach one show or one sub-genre at a time so an holistic appreciation of the complex relations with other genres is not available. For example, Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990) describe 'variety', focus on the 'sketch' show format and then further limit their analysis to a single episode from *Monty Python's Flying Circus;* Barry Putterman (1995) considers alternative British comedy (specifically the Comic Strip group).

By contrast some critics take historiographic approaches: Stanley Reed (1961) and Granada (1958) explore British light entertainment's roots in film slapstick and *commedia dell'arte* respectively; writing two decades later, Bernard Sendall (1982) and Jeremy Potter (1989) examine the historical shifts between British channels and genres, and the differences between early vaudeville- or theatre-style presentations and later televisual programming which tailored itself to the medium. Burton Paulu (1961) addresses light entertainment and sports together in his report on *British Broadcasting In Transition* and assesses the outputs of the BBC and ITV companies through statistical comparisons but without clarifying the term 'light' programming. Timothy Scheurer (1985) presents historical analyses of the American variety show charting its transition from vaudeville and radio to national network programming. Andrew Crisell (1991) considers British satire in the 1960s; Anthony Davis (1989) provides biographies of British entertainers, and Jeffery Davis (1995) writes a history of children's television in the United States. But while each refers to light entertainment programming, none of these approaches resolves the problematics of defining and confining light entertainment. These reviews of critical literature and surveys of contemporary texts are intended to identify, describe and understand television comedy and the locus of the genre.

Richard Dyer's *Light Entertainment*

In his introduction to *Light Entertainment*, Richard Dyer (1973:7) writes:

> 'Light Entertainment' is the name of a department in the BBC and in the commercial companies, and covers a wide range of programmes—quiz games, comedy series, pop shows and variety .... [By variety I mean] programmes akin to show business, cabaret and musical comedy.

Dyer's use of 'light entertainment' where I have used 'comedy' indicates and articulates three concerns: first, the difficulties of locating precise, hermeneutical meanings for phrases in common parlance; second, justifying one version of a term over another; and last, my additional challenge of whether (and how) to use existing terminology to

describe new phenomena. Although Dyer (1973:9) comments that 'we all share a commonsense notion of what entertainment is', the contrast between his examples and my current viewing reveals significant gaps between light entertainment in 1970-1 and texts scrutinised here (circa 1998-1999 plus some back-catalogue on video). Dyer's study (1973:13) described television as 'small, for most people black and white [and] usually pretty imperfect in reproductive qualities'. British households now usually have more than one television (almost always a colour set) and often own or rent peripheral devices such as VCRs, satellite/cable links, camcorders, games consoles, stereo speakers, or digital technology for interactive programming.

Although many of the types of shows and particular celebrities Dyer preferred or disliked remain on British television, none of the programmes are as they were. Some shows are no longer being produced (*Morecambe and Wise* only exist as repeats), some hosts have switched genres (Cilla Black hosts game shows instead of musical variety), and some have updated their shows to attract a new generation of viewers (Des O'Connor emphasises his email address and introduces new talent rather than performing personally). Whereas Dyer (1973:7) was able to draw conclusions from 'programmes akin to show business, cabaret and musical comedy' by dismissing 'quiz games, comedy series and pop shows', contemporary light entertainment nevertheless contains an extensively varied range of texts and impinges frequently upon the genres Dyer excludes.

This study assumes an object different from the 'light entertainment' described by Dyer (1973) by exploring inclusively the diversity that exists in the intangible, shifting spaces between game or quiz shows and situation comedies. Game and quiz shows, however diverse and transgeneric, can be arranged according to specific continua: game or quiz, celebrity panel or public audience, easy or difficult tasks, valuable or valueless prizes, and so on. Equally situation comedies, despite differing widely in terms of style, structure, form, characterisation and comedic modes, have classifiable, defining traits.

'Light entertainment' here includes all other amusing or entertaining television forms outwith game or quiz shows and situation comedies. So loose a definition requires clarification not least because many programmes, forms and styles of comedy apparently outwith quiz/games and sitcoms nevertheless exhibit commonalities with these more clearly delineable genres. In the previous section some game shows displayed generic hybridity with lifestyle programmes (cooking or gardening craft shows); in this section the ends of the light entertainment continuum merge both with those competitive forms and with narrative dramatic forms of comedy, while the continuum itself contains a plethora of sub-genres. If game and quiz shows constitute not a rigid, simply defined genre but a palimpsestic, multidimensional array of intersecting and overlapping continua and degrees of comedy then a genre as complex and varied as light entertainment might also be conceptualised as multifaceted, fluid and permeable.

Contemporary television survey

Light entertainment comprises many sub-genres, some of which derive from earlier non-televisual forms and others which are recent innovations. Visual comedy like slapstick and clowning and verbal wit including stand-up and sketches may be traced to *commedia dell'arte* or even to classical Greek poetry via the circuses, magic shows, musical and theatrical variety of the fair, the freakshow, the burlesque and vaudeville (Neale and Krutnik 1990:10). At the same time, this study must also acknowledge the shifts within the plethora of light entertainment sub-genres. New series in 1998 offered new combinations: celebrity chat mixed with games (Richard Whiteley must work out who the mystery celebrity is; celebrities on *Star Secrets* try to guess a 'secret' visitor from their past) and several musical talent shows from *Cardiff Singer Of The World* through *Stars In Their Eyes* to *Young, Hot And Talented* ranged in style from almost-sport to almost-variety to almost-documentary to cover the same phenomenon.

New television celebrities are discovered in unlikely programmes creating intertextual connections between disjunctive genres. The carpenter from *Changing Rooms* ('Handy Andy') appears on *Open House With Gloria Hunniford* to make a coffee table and to promote his chart single, 'If I Had A Hammer'; he has also appeared on *Change That, Night Fever,* and *The Vanessa Show.* The docusoap *Cruise* made the ship's singer a television star: 'Jane' hosts awards ceremonies and talent shows and her televised wedding outrated Prince Edward's by 13 million to 9.34 million viewers.[3] Sportspeople also become entertainers: snooker player John Parrott, footballer Ally McCoist and former tennis star Sue Barker host the sports-oriented gameshow *A Question of Sport,* but like fellow footballer Ian Wright, McCoist also hosts a chat show (*McCoist and MacAulay* with Scots comic Fred MacAulay). Formula One driver Damon Hill fronts a sports excerpt show, delivering a deadpan comic voiceover. Knight, McCoist and Hill partly reconfigure sport and sportspeople as entertainment, creating a new light entertainment personality and producing an 'interface' connection between sport and comedy.

Where Richard Dyer was able to limit his analyses to certain specific types of spectacle, musical and theatrical variety shows, and Neale and Krutnik (1990:176-208) focus on the sketch, the double-act and the monologue, this study will proceed by exploring the characteristics of several examples of light entertainment texts before situating them within the continua which demonstrate not only the hybridity and diversity of current television genres but also the links between games and quizzes on the one hand and situation comedy on the other.

Stand-up comedy

Sole-performer stand-up comedy implicates the audiences (both studio and viewer) because the comedian must establish an intimate and apparently reciprocal link between her or himself and the audiences. Some stand-up shows are more theatrical than televisual working, like Dyer's circus examples (1973:14-6), by taping a live theatrical

show and editing it for comedic pace and clarity. *Eddie Izzard's Glorious, Ardal O'Hanlon Live,* Ben Elton's shows and much of Billy Connolly's oeuvre are taped theatrical events (what Dyer (1973:14) calls the 'outside broadcast situation') with the lone performer on a wide, proscenium-arch stage before a large, darkened rectangular auditorium. Other examples of stand-up comedy use a studio either with an auditorium setting (*Victoria Wood Still Standing*) or a rounded, tiered audience (*A Big Slice Of Jo Brand*) to produce Dyer's (1973:14) 'home-oriented situation' organised towards the home viewers rather than primarily taping a live event.

Hybridisation between stand-up and variety produces *An Audience With Jimmy Tarbuck* (or Ronnie Corbett, Ken Dodd, Lily Savage or Bob Monkhouse) whereby the star works a routine around 'questions' from members of the celebrity audience. This hybrid style permits individual stylistic variation: Lily Savage tells longer anecdotes than Ken Dodd's strung-together one-line gags but her patter includes fewer anacolutha and narrative diversions than Ronnie Corbett's characteristic shaggy dog stories while incorporating celebrity chat with the invited audience and three songs. These made-for-television shows feel timeless and can be easily repeated in the festive schedule.

By contrast, *The Mark Thomas Comedy Product* and *Michael Moore: The Awful Truth* rely on timeliness since each uses satirical comedy to inspire progressive action to challenge contemporary political and industrial hegemonies (Thomas in Britain and Moore in the USA). Both work similar formats: the performer begins onstage alone, outlines 'the problem', shows a video of the problem or an interview with the protagonists, talks about the problem by taking an ideological position, and suggests solutions or changes on behalf of those disadvantaged by the problem. However, the problems addressed differ: Thomas focusses upon current UK legislative change and political institutions, using date-stamps on interviews to heighten their immediacy and encouraging Labour party members to hand in their membership cards for him to destroy 'so it's not done in your name' whereas Moore attacks American 'big business' industrial relations and social issues like homophobia. Rory Bremner makes contemporary satirical comments through stand-up, impersonations and quasi-political interview sketches with John Bird and John Fortune but his targets are less partial (and more aligned with his own abilities to impersonate them) than Mark Thomas's and Bremner makes no suggestions for direct action. There are several other recent hybridised forms of stand-up with one or two examples each: stand-up/chat (*Strassman, Mark Lamarr Leaving The 20th Century*), the stand-up/chat-travel-talk of *Billy Connolly's World Tour of Scotland* and *World Tour of Australia,* and the self-parodying stand-up/cabaret sketches of the late-night, new-talent show *4Later: Red Velvet.*

Variety, persona variety, festive variety

Discerning the stand-up comedian from the comedian compere from the chat host is not straightforward. Although Ardal O'Hanlon, Ben Elton and Eddie Izzard recite prepared hour-long comic routines most television stand-up comedians include sketches,

musical numbers, celebrity chat or other forms of inserted material. Hale and Pace (*h&p@bbc*) and Chris Evans (*TFI Friday*) incorporate different staged elements within their show whereas Jim Tavaré (*The Jim Tavaré Show*) stars in his own sketches as well as his cabaret variety acts, and Fred MacAulay (*Life According To Fred*) includes not only sketches and animated cartoons but also miniature social-documentaries in which he interviews Scottish people on location.

To differentiate between these sub-genres I use the term 'variety' for shows in which the host provides links between otherwise discrete items and 'persona variety' where the host is present and significant in each constituent section. Thus, the four shows mentioned above represent persona variety although within the sub-genre there is considerable variation. Persona variety blends with many sub-genres (including games, see Figure 1.3). Pure 'variety' is now rare and *The Big Stage*, beginning on Channel Five in July 1999, seems to be the sole current example, offering a mix of new talent and established celebrities with a variety of routines. Its first episode included the host's comic introduction, a ventriloquist, a gymnastic team, Bobby Davro, Ed Byrne's stand-up comedy, a game with the studio audience, another comedian, a song and dance number, another game, more physical stand-up comedy and pop band 'Steps' to close the show. Variety has been dispersed between persona variety and game shows or talent contests which offer 'men' or members of the public the opportunities previously available only to 'Gods', the professional entertainers. Thus, *Families At War, Don't Try This At Home, Stars In Their Eyes, The Moment of Truth* and *Jim Davidson's Generation Game* stage individuals' or groups' routines lasting from three to six minutes including singing, dancing, joke-telling, juggling, circus acts, magic, and odd occupational skills.

Although persona variety and variety games dominate the sub-genre, 'festive variety' persists with 'specials' at Easter, Christmas, Hogmanay, the Queen's Birthday and Bank Holidays (although this last category is less pronounced as an event since not all UK Bank Holidays coincide). The 'festive variety' might be a one-off programme from an existing variety series (Alan Partridge's *Knowing Me Knowing Yule*) or a celebrity version of a public-participation show (*Stars In Their Eyes*, for example) or a regular made-for-the-Bank-Holiday special (*French And Saunders*). Other festive variety shows include the for-television Hogmanay special live from Edinburgh, or the annual *Comic Relief* charity shows. Festive variety thus encompasses many different kinds of variety entertainment, incorporating other comedy genres (game and quiz shows, situation comedy, parody chat, sketch shows) produced for special times during the year, but also including current events (in the summer of 1998 comedy shows about World Cup football abounded), variety shows for Hogmanay (which have developed their own history and traditions) and made-for-television events such as telethons (*Comic Relief*). Hogmanay is a significant festive variety moment as the whole evening's televisual flow is constructed as a persona event comprised of festive chat and humour acting as continuity between made-for-Hogmanay sketch and variety shows in the lead up to the bells.

In Scotland, Hogmanay offers an evening of festive variety entertainment with live

and pre-recorded inserts from all across the country: *Chewin The Fat,* Reverend IM Jolly (character monologue by Rikki Fulton) and *Only An Excuse?* specials are interspersed with Shetland fiddlers, Lewis dancers and a lone piper on Edinburgh castle. However, as well as being an unusual meta-structure as a variety event, Hogmanay broadcasts contain a significant, widely-viewed display of Scottish television comedy culture (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2 for typical annual Scottish comedy hours and Hogmanay listings).

Magazine shows, leisure skills shows

Magazine shows like *The Big Breakfast, This Morning* and *Open House With Gloria Hunniford* string together studio items and links with phone-in games and on-the-street outside broadcasts. The magazine show—always live—will often incorporate chat, talk (especially therapeutic talk via phone-in) and skill segments (cooking, gardening, DIY) and differs from the live persona variety shows through its emphasis on information over entertainment. Using Gini Graham Scott's categorisations (1996:273-4), 'morning news/magazine shows' like *This Morning* can be differentiated from 'early morning what's happening interview and entertainment shows' like *The Big Breakfast.* Scott suggests that their fragmentary format derives from the extended daytime viewing slot: magazine shows do not expect to capture large nor especially attentive audiences and thus offer undemanding brief items to accompany viewers' domestic duties.

Skills shows range from the talent show, game or quiz to the serious and educational to the consumer report to the exposé. Gardening, cooking, fashion, DIY, travel and car topics are currently popular; programmes combine different levels of expertise, audience participation and modes of address. *Nigel Slater's Real Food* demonstrates eight or ten recipes (for sausages, or for cheesecake) in one show preparing and serving each item directly before the camera. *The Naked Chef*'s Jamie Oliver cooks a three course meal offering tips but also answering questions from an invisible interviewer: the result is an informal blend of difficult food preparation and personal gossip. Ainsley Harriott brings his *Can't Cook, Won't Cook* style to *Ainsley's Big Cook Out;* although the latter show combines travel and vox-pop discussions Harriott's cooking demonstrations treat the viewer as a *CCWC* contestant. Not only does he continue with his quasi-operatic "Ollie-Oil", wiggling Elvis impersonations and overenthusiastic gurning "Mm-hm!", but Harriott also tells the viewer "Now I want you to take some garlic, don't be shy", delivering instructions verging on the remedial.

Whereas cooking shows are usually produced in studios and presented from a static position facing the camera and gardening shows are almost invariably produced as moving outside broadcasts, travel shows range from cultural or social documentaries, games, quizzes and expert advice shows to extended advertising. Although formats are dissimilar in their 'pure' standard forms, blended topics are possible. Thus, Sophie Grigson visits the gardens before cooking with the herbs, and the Two Fat Ladies travel on their motorbike, talk to locals and admire the scenery and architecture before cooking; consumer shows offer advice on travelling abroad to buy new cars more cheaply, or set

up 'under cover' operations to expose unprofessional practice in house building, car repairs or retail service. In terms of genre continua skills shows may be located between quizzes or games and exposés as well as contributing as inserts on magazine shows.

Exposés, excerpts, histories

The exposé can vary in tone from a serious sense of injustice (*Neighbours From Hell*) to docusoaps on light topics (*The Cruise, Airport*) or domestic subjects (*Do You Fancy Me?*), from Graham Norton camp (*Football Unzipped*) and chat or talk (*This Is Your Life*, surprise confrontations on *Ricki Lake*) to faux-naif parody (*Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends*). These shows—which might be hosted or voiced over and may include vox-pop or chat segments—fit between documentaries and excerpt programmes and are distinguished by their melodramatic tone or titillating subject matter. *Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends* is the most difficult example to classify since his attitude towards the odd people he meets and their bizarre practices is genuine and open yet the programme mocks them with its title and selection of guests. The subjects (swinging couples, shopping channel presenters, survivalists) are treated sympathetically by Theroux but his naive questions expose and mock the subjects' lifestyles and work habits. Ruby Wax uses a similar faux-naif style but bluffs—or breaks—her way into celebrities' homes rather than straight-facedly exploring the quirks of members of the public. Similarly 'Ali G' acts an an *eiron* or Socratic ironist, exposing the flaws in his guests' logic on *The 11 O'Clock Show* by putting naive questions to public figures, receiving simplistic or daft answers and then undercutting the interviewee with more pointed ridiculous questions. However, 'Ali G' is a character in the tradition of Mrs Merton or Dame Edna Everage whereas Louis Theroux is (seemingly) himself. Ruby Wax has earned celebrity status for herself with this bluff routine.

Between exposé and variety is the excerpt show. Chris Tarrant shows commercials and news stories from around the world; Jasper Carrott prefers commercials but intersperses them with stand-up comedy. Terry Wogan strings together out-takes according to topic presenting 'sporting bloomers' or 'animal bloomers' with new collections for the festive seasons. Chris Tarrant introduces commercials from different countries but rather than present from a vault like Wogan he sits in a studio with a large screen (and, presumably, a studio audience) commenting on the cultural mores he reads from the texts. *Tarrant On TV* airs on ITV and must contend with advertising breaks; usually, the last commercial he shows before a break is a poignant or shocking dramatic message (a graphic display against drunk driving, for example) which seems intent upon stopping the viewer's laughter, both heightening the intensity of the comedy and tragedy, and ensuring ITV's sponsors' advertisements may be distinguished from the commercials shown as entertainment. Clive James hosts a variety show which incorporates commercials and examples of culturally-specific humour (or historically specific humour) with chat and a closing song from the deliberately disrhythmic singer, Marguerita Pracatan. Single-episode excerpts shows are easily produced: Angus Deayton's *Not*

Another Awards Show presented clips of celebrities at awards ceremonies (tears, drunks, bad losers) but unlike Wogan, Deayton 'hosted' this show from a podium facing a studio audience giving the sense of an awards show and thus playing with its own title. Excerpts might cover any topic: *Damon Hill's Wild And Whacky Races* mixes vox-pop by amateur and professional sportspeople with excerpts of sports footage linked by Hill's dead-pan comic voice-over and opening/closing presence; *The World Of The Secret Camera* blends excerpts from candid-camera set-ups and reconstructions of famous camera gags with commentary from Noel Edmonds. Where Hill's show mixes sport with comedy, Edmonds's show blurs the boundaries between surveillance exposés, excerpts and home-video game shows (*Beadle's Hotshots* or *You've Been Framed*).

As well as hosted excerpt shows television recycles its material into programmes which tell 'the history of...' comedy genres or shows. Older programmes are reworked into nostalgic homages to styles (alternative comedy, slapstick comedy), genres (situation comedy, talent shows, awards ceremonies), individual artists or teams (Ruby Wax, Julian Clary, Mollie Sugden, French and Saunders), stereotypes and characterisations ('battleaxes', 'drag queens', 'camp men'), comedy topics (religion, war or politics in *You Cannot Be Serious*) or highlights and excerpts from programmes and series (*The Word, The Generation Game*). Theme evenings run to several hours' celebration for one programme: the '*Goodness Gracious Me* Night' mixed tongue-in-cheek pseudo-documentary on the show's genesis and a search for their greatest fan with excerpts and out-takes from the first sketch series. *The Two Ronnies* also enjoyed both a 'history of...' and a reunion show in one evening, the climax to a week's intensive publicity which included twice-daily screenings of isolated *Ronnies* sketches and invitations to viewers to vote for 'the nation's favourite sketch'.

Festive excerpts shows also appear mixing 'the best of...' one year's production on a certain show for the holiday season. This format blends excerpts with histories, particularly if a host presents the collection, and is often used by chat and talk shows (*Parkinson, Trisha*) to fill holiday breaks in production. By relocating smaller chat or talk items as excerpts or history the shows shift the discursive boundaries of the genres and present the items not as gossip or therapy but as examples of Dyer's (1973:14) 'object situation' where the text is viewed dispassionately since the sense of empathy established during the episode has been dissolved. Another related trend is the summertime shift to repeating older variety entertainment shows (particularly *Morecambe And Wise*), and sitcoms (*Butterflies, Dad's Army*) in single episodes out of sequence, historical context and out of their series run. Presenting single *Ronnies* sketches outwith their carefully crafted formulaic contexts (Neale and Krutnik 1990:181) or isolated programmes from their sitcom season—even distinctly episodic shows where very little changes from weeke to week—emphasises content over form through effectively fragmenting the text and its contexts and, as I shall discuss presently, perhaps challenges received wisdom about the necessity of following a sitcom's whole series.

Sketch shows

The final light entertainment sub-genre—and the one with no purpose or form other than pure comedic narrative entertainment—is the sketch show. Sketches usually occur within a persona variety format either using individuals (*The Jim Tavaré Show, Life According To Fred*) or double acts (*Morecambe and Wise, Bang Bang It's Reeves and Mortimer, French And Saunders*), but 'pure' sketch shows also exist (*Big Train, Smack The Pony, The Fast Show, Harry Enfield and Chums*). A programme's style and form can change over time: *Chewin The Fat* shifted from self-acted sketches hosted in a persona-format by Ford Kiernan and Greg Hemphill in its first series to a four-handed sketch show for later series.

The persona variety sketch consists of a fictional scenario, characterisations or personae (or both), and a visual or verbal gag (or both), although sometimes the humour derives from a seeming *lack* of comic moment, focus or closure, which expresses the entertainers' play with the ingredients of television comedy (a component of 'broken' comedy). Some parts of the show might be 'staged' and performed in a studio so that the comedian shifts performance style between a variety of personae (bordering very closely upon fictional characterisations) and pairs might engage in as 'straightman' versus 'funnyman' in cross-talk and banter, or as antagonists in mock-battle in staged sections, but as characters in the sketch inserts (Neale and Krutnik 1990). These dramatic sketches might be less than a minute long, or be longer but cut into tiny moments spliced among other sketches so the gag builds successively, sequentially into a narrative thread through the show (or series). This is similar to the verbal comedy stage performance techniques of 'repetition' and 'snowballing' (Henri Bergson 1912), adjusted and incorporated into the television medium. The sketch might continue a topical theme developed throughout the show (*Life According To Fred* is built around 'work' or 'romance') or it might rework a similar set-up and gag from a prior episode to provide continuity and development throughout the series (found in *Chewin The Fat* or *Big Train*). Jim Tavaré relies on the same sequence of variety items (musical stand-up) and the same sketch or monologue characters every week; thus, the bawdy bobby, the kung-fu monk and the naive homoerotic stories of the old major recur with only slight variations in setting and dialogue. *The Fast Show* similarly uses repetition across the series to build humour by presenting the same characters in almost identical situations with the same stock catchphrases each week. However, its 'Ted and Ralph' sketches function as a mini-serial providing a sense of narrative progression within and then across the series.

Sketch shows, like stand-up comedy and excerpts programmes, require both a written and an embodied comic essence to succeed. Unlike chat, talk, music and some forms of variety—which offer light entertainment but do not necessarily offer comic moments—sketch actors require tightly written scripts and considerable comedy experience to deliver lines, harmonise movements and place 'laugh pauses' with the correct timing. Sketches can also generate longer narrative items (*The Fast Show*'s spin-off festive special, *Ted And Ralph*), situation comedies (*Naked Video* spawned *Rab C. Nesbitt*), or

music videos (using the *Spitting Image* puppets or the French and Saunders team), feature films (*Monty Python's Flying Circus* or *Mr Bean*) and commercials (Hamlet cigars, also from *Naked Video*). With highly-polished writing, filmed rather than live presentation, repetitive miniaturised narrative structures, laugh-tracks, and familiar performers, sketch shows connect readily with sitcom in the dynamic continuum of television comedy.

SITUATION COMEDY

Literature survey

There is a plethora of scholarly writings about and critical approaches to sitcom. Since British television broadcasts considerable volumes of American situation comedy and British formats are often successfully reworked by American networks a separation of the two for the purposes of tidy discussion is perhaps a false distinction, particularly since many of the issues considered by scholars are not specifically national in emphasis nor even specifically confined to one text. Similarly the literature might be grouped in many different ways since most scholars deal with more than one problematic at a time, producing a matrix of discursive elements rather than a menu: history is articulated with ideology with texts; race combines with stars with ethnomethodology; content analysis mixes with history with empiricism; literary theory with nation, industry with gender— seemingly every possible combination has been attempted. What is missing, however, is any sense that situation comedy functions not as a wholly organic genre but rather as a sub-genre merged within television comedy's dynamic continuum.

Aesthetic, ritual, ideological

Jane Feuer's (1992) discussion of television genres groups approaches as aesthetic, ritual or ideological but these categorisations are useful only up to a point. Although aesthetic approaches are more easily delineated because they explore particular texts many other discussions (including Feuer's) synthesise approaches and issues to find connections between disparate epistemologies. Feuer's (1992:14[illegible]5) aesthetic approaches primarily consider the textual characteristics 'in terms of a system of conventions'; ritual approaches explore the expectations, investments and exchanges between audience and industry 'through which a culture speaks to itself'; and ideological analyses examine the ways texts might 'naturalize' the 'dominant ideology of the capitalist system'. These classifications cannot and do not account for every possible approach to genre theory and, as many of the following examples demonstrate, scholars often articulate these approaches together to understand the text(s) before them.

Although Feuer's (1992:146) argument cannot be extrapolated *ad infinitum* to suggest that every new contribution to the field of genre writing reconstitutes a new genre,

nevertheless I agree with her point that 'different methodologies for defining the genre have produced different notions of the sitcom as genre'. In this respect, Feuer explains, the different ways in which Horace Newcomb (1974), David Grote (1983) and David Marc (1984) approached the genre means that 'each has constructed a *different* genre called the sitcom' [emphasis in original]. However, because scholars often direct their investigations primarily towards a sitcom text rather than neatly exemplify only one of Feuer's models the sources available exhibit a discursive bricolage of aesthetic, ritual and ideological approaches to criticism.

For example, how might one classify an historical analysis of the industrial (ritual) impact of a series and its star (aesthetic) in terms of exceeding the disciplining effect of social gender roles (ideology)? Analyses of Mary Tyler-Moore (Feuer, Kerr and Vahimagi 1984), Lucille Ball and Gracie Allen (Mellencamp 1986), and Roseanne Barr (Rowe 1994) combine the three approaches to explore these women's contribution to situation comedy. Which category (or blend of categories) might best contain Betsy Williams's (1994) discussion of 'quality' in *Northern Exposure*? Sub-genres like British 'camp' (Boyd-Bowman 1982) are saturated with viewers' expectations combining aesthetic conventions (predictable gags and double entendres) with time-worn ideological rituals of stereotypical situations and *deus-ex-machina* resolutions. These examples demonstrate the complexity of sitcom analysis as well as the interrelatedness of the three categories Feuer seeks to distinguish.

Within the corpus of critical writing on situation comedy most examples originate in an analysis not of the genre but of the text, and occasionally from exactly the same text: Mick Bowes (1990) and Murray Smith (1989) discuss the same episode of *The Young Ones* as representing metacomedy (that is, it comments upon the situation comedy genre) but draw different conclusions about whether it is intrinsically progressive or conservative in nature. In series analysis too the same material can be used to illustrate different arguments: Paul Attallah's (1984) analysis of *The Beverly Hillbillies* problematises prescriptive notions of genre aesthetics and the way characteristics become conventions, whereas David Marc (1984) focuses upon on its writer Paul Hennings and the social values *The Beverly Hillbillies* uniquely presents.

Problems of form

It might appear a pragmatic solution to the pressures of academia to write the occasional article about this or that television show, tying the ideas in with current teaching responsibilities. But this pragmatism might also prove self-defeating: limiting one's discussion to ideological aspects within a single episode can evoke the aesthetic and ritual problematics of series form *precisely because* the critic attempts an insular attitude. Mick Eaton (1978/9) argues that even episodes from nothing-ever-changes sitcoms (like *The Beverly Hillbillies*, in Attallah's view) must be considered not only according to their material and historical specificity but also in terms of their position within the series. This is not merely because, as Patricia Mellencamp observes (1986),

actors age and fashions change (as do their social, political and cultural meanings), but also because originating or pilot episodes offer exposition and final episodes offer cliffhangers or changes even though the fundamental 'situation' remains unchanging.

Eaton's point is well illustrated by Denise J. Kervin's (1994) analysis of the first episode of *Married... With Children*. Unlike Bowes and Smith's discussions of *The Young Ones*, Kervin fails to connect with other sitcom issues but instead speculates about (an impossibly homogeneous, heterosexual, middle class, 1950s-born, presumably white Mid-Western American) audience's ambivalent pleasures and worse, founds these projections on the series' expositional episode (after which many explicitly stated key character relations shift). Kervin also confuses negative stereotypes with *subversion* of traditional roles, instead valuing misogyny and misandry as somehow equivalent, or perhaps even progressive (a conclusion about *Married... With Children* disputed by Rowe (1994:210-11)).[4] Judine Mayerle (1994) also considers just one episode from *Roseanne* but because she approaches the show as a production case study rather than as a representation of social interactions between neighbouring couples, she is able to draw conclusions by linking similarities and differences between this episode and others.

Historiographic approaches

Television's historical position within a national communications systems traditionally organised, if not owned, by the state means industrial issues often meld critically with British (Curtis 1982; Paulu 1961; Potter 1989; Reed 1961; Snoad 1988) or American network issues (Kervin 1994; Marc 1984; Mayerle 1994) or national syndication and international trade (Grote 1983). Mary Jane Miller (1987) considers the asymmetrical economic and cultural exchange of recordings and programme formats between the United States and Canada; Albert Moran (1985) discusses a multiply-inflected expression of national identity in four Australian sitcoms, and global trade in formats (Moran 1998); by contrast Murray Smith (1989) considers the intercultural shifts created by watching *The Young Ones* on MTV in the United States.

Discussion of historical issues also blurs the boundaries between aesthetic, ritual and ideological descriptions of television genres. Investigations into the historical transformation from the Greek classics, vaudeville and radio to television sitcom might explore the shifts in forms, subject matter and performance styles including later shifts from 'situation' to 'character' or 'star'-based comedy (Eaton 1978/9; Grote 1983; Mayerle 1994; Mellencamp 1986; Mintz 1985; Neale and Krutnik 1990). Eisner and Krinsky (1984) discuss trends of industrial significance, Marc and Thompson (1995) consider the social importance of situation comedies, while Arthur Hough (1981) processed data from four hundred American series between 1948 and 1978 to explore shifts in content as symptomatic and emblematic of shifts in mores and social realities. From these data Hough located 1965 as a 'moment' in which the traditional sitcom families and themes began to give way to more socially relevant and representative images and stories. David Grote (1983:81) came to similar conclusions about shifts from

the comedy based in a family, to work-mates as quasi-family, to disparate groupings, but his evidence is taken from watching television unlike Hough's meticulously calculated quantitative survey.

Text, context, audience

Other critics consider the ideological implications in past and contemporary examples in sitcom, investigating the (mis)matches between ideological messages in the television text and the social mores of the era (Mellencamp 1986; Oakley 1982 on *Yes Minister*) or the relations of history and nostalgia (Boyd-Bowman 1982; Curtis 1982) including Eaton's (1978/9:82) thought-provoking observation that nostalgia in sitcoms works intertextually to articulate the 'television past' with the 'cultural past'. Discussion of stereotypes and the transmission or subversion of dominant ideologies also raises questions about if and how audiences are positioned by the text including if and how they recognise and identify with asymmetrical relations of power between characters (Clarke 1987; Medhurst and Tuck 1982).

Deborah Klika (1982) presents but does not elaborate upon diagrams and script analysis which codes the linguistic content of two sitcom episodes, their mise-en-scène and the timing of the laughter-track, in order to propose a quantitative methodology for establishing which characters dominate the programme and thus have greater agency, so as to determine with whom the audience is intended to identify, and thus whether the text is progressive or conservative. Still other approaches to sitcom deconstruct the genre's narrative specificity, the styles, uses and meanings of humour (Cook 1982; Mellencamp 1986); or seek to understand how jokes and gags 'work', how they function within narrative or to produce it (Mellencamp 1986; Neale and Krutnik 1990; Palmer 1987).

Alternatively, some writers examine how comic moments contribute to the construction and positioning of subjectivity or how they might open up differing meanings for different groups to activate (Attallah 1984; Boyd-Bowman 1982; Clarke 1987; Eaton 1978/9; Lovell 1982; Medhurst and Tuck 1982). Some of their writings are speculative, some is self-reflexively aware of the problematical nature of audiences' interrelations with texts, but, as noted earlier, much of the critical material underestimates the difficulties of understanding how comedy's double-voice reveals as spurious any generalisation about audiences' responses to progressive or conservative ideological positions and messages. While Klika (1982) offers no explanatory notes to validate the way her schemata are shaped and presented she at least offers an engaged, empirical methodology which in itself exposes the limitations of presumptive, prescriptive academic declarations of which meanings certain audiences allegedly produce with each text.

Audience ethnographies

Three ethnographic studies analysed the empirical responses of different audiences to

the ideological messages of a text. When David Morley (1986) interviewed seventeen families in London about their general viewing habits and family gender roles, *The Young Ones* was mentioned as a particularly male-oriented comedy. Justin Lewis (1991) questioned single-race groups about their viewing of an episode of *The Cosby Show* and analysed their interpretations and reactions in terms of race and class issues. Kevin Glynn (1996) observed young boys watching *The Simpsons*. The boys' resistance to his enquiry demonstrates the difficulties of research into comedy in the home, the skills required to approach children as an audience, the impact of 'groupthink' among youth peers and their mistrust of Glynn as a researcher of a different status and generation, and the incendiary combination of ten year old boys, high-calorie snacks and spectacular cartoons. (The models and commentaries in these examples will be discussed in depth in the ethnomethodologies chapter.)

Thus, the formal and aesthetic characteristics of situation comedies can be isolated and analysed in a number of different ways. However, they are most often articulated with ideological resonances and messages, a problem to which I shall return in the next chapter not because I find it irrelevant in the discussion of situation comedy (quite the opposite) but because I find these problematics to be illuminating across *all* comedy discourses and genres. What remains to be discovered is whether the situation comedy is more appropriately and usefully conceived as a distinct sub-genre or whether, with quizzes, games shows and the various components of light entertainment, it may be more properly conceived as part of a continuum of comedy texts.

Contemporary television survey

Situation comedy in Britain currently varies from *The Vicar of Dibley* and *South Park*, from repeats of *Father Ted* and *I'm Alan Partridge* to *Sex And The City*. Like quiz and games shows or variety and light entertainment, the larger category can be broken down into smaller sub-genres to demonstrate the complexity and variation among and between the programmes. Several critics have attempted to divide the genre into those comedies that dealt with domestic situations—the domcom—and those that dealt more specifically with groups of work colleagues (Grote 1983; Hough 1981; Newcomb 1974; Mintz 1985).[5] Mick Eaton challenges the work versus family dichotomous mould by positing a further model (as well as noting the hybridity possible from overlapping home and work situations, for example *Steptoe and Son*, *Open All Hours* and *Only Fools and Horses*).

As well as recognising the domestic comedies of families and the clashes of individuals in the work situations—in which gender, class, status, generation, race, nationality and, often, tensions about consumption or sexuality create conflicts—Eaton (1978/9:74) proposes a third paradigm which 'usually concerns a group of diverse people somehow connected in a situation outside that of their work-place.... [which] usually concerns the home, but not the family except tangentially as the "outside"'. This

model describes the groupings of characters in *Blackadder*, *The Young Ones*, and *Red Dwarf*; Eaton's examples—*Man About The House* and *Rising Damp*—express similar groupings of mostly single men with women characters added for narrative reasons like the creation of sexual tension (or its disavowal, for example Mrs Doyle in *Father Ted*) or to (literally) engender some farcical situation, for example a housewife accidentally and irretrievably launched into space in *Come Back Mrs Noah*. However, more balanced gender groupings are also possible outwith the workplace or nuclear family models. *Friends* is a contemporary example (where, from six characters, two are siblings, another two are dating, a different two are no longer dating, and two further pairings live as flatmates in the same hallway); by contrast, I would distinguish the balance of work and home relationships in *Frasier* as being constituted in a meticulous symmetry, expressing through its formal composition the logistic and emotional complexity of the professional and personal interrelationships among the characters.

Terry Lovell (1982:30) hints at another approach which exceeds the didymous conceptions of work versus family bases to situation comedy. Instead, she focuses upon the articulation of comic and political tone to argue, 'tentatively, that [one might] string sitcoms out on a continuum from the 'social realist' end (*Solo, Yes Minister*) through the comedies of social reversal, to the 'Murphy's Law' end (*Fawlty Towers*)'. My attempt to construct Lovell's continuum with current examples produced unexpected but enlightening problematics: *Rab C. Nesbitt, Birds Of A Feather* and *Ellen* all take a place between 'social realism' and 'social reversal' but determining precisely where on the scale they fit depends upon one's reading of the irony and satire used in the texts (see Figure 1.7). Lovell's (1982:24) 'middle ground', the social reversal sitcom, is now populated by a large number of texts which may be categorised not only by their dissimilarity of content but also by their unique range of possible locations on the plane. Similarly, which position *Frasier* and *Ally McBeal* might occupy depends crucially upon which episode is taken as a marker since the style and content shifts from week to week; these shows range between the social realist and the Murphy's Law dichotomies seemingly without passing through social reversal's middle ground. Perhaps sitcoms from the 1970s and 1980s like *Solo, Butterflies* and *'Allo 'Allo* are more easily classified in Lovell's terms than more recent hybridised styles and forms.

Whereas Lovell's conclusions from this illuminating structure are confined to suggesting that '[t]he stronger the referencing of social reality, the less 'subversive' sitcoms tend to be', other critics articulate the social realist and the farcical 'Murphy's Law' styles with variations in sitcom form. Thus, the *Fawlty Towers*-type comedy with a drastic or fantastic situation to be resolved epitomises the episodic form in that after resolution of the disruption, everything returns to the original equilibrium; for the social realist comedy, the situation (divorce, work, moving home, first love) is given less titillating treatment, the form is more akin to dramatic serialisation in which characters develop and cope with change, although as Eaton (1978/9:68-9) demonstrates, the serial situation comedy might also be fantastic if not farcical (for example, *The Fall And*

Rise Of Reginald Perrin). However, the link between episodic form and type of situation should not be extrapolated into a diagnostic tool for discovering a text's political purpose: as Mike Clarke notes, the situation comedy series 'which of itself necessitates that each episode leaves the fundamental situation unchanged' is 'not necessarily a product of conservativism in programme-makers' (1987:103) and nor it is inherently conservative in its ideologies, just as there is 'nothing *necessarily* progressive about ... anarchic comedies' (1987:106), a point to which I shall return in the next chapter.

Character comedy, persona comedy

Other critics distinguish between situations and comedies which are amusing in themselves and those which rely upon the intertextual associations already established by the main actor. For example, Terry Lovell's (1982:27) analysis of *Porridge* finds that, paradoxically, '[i]n a sense, Fletch plays Ronnie Barker. Like Barker as a comedian, Fletch is self-consciously funny in a way that the other characters are not'. This intertextual association is also intergeneric: Ronnie Barker is as familiar for his sketch work in light entertainment as he is for his situation comedy roles; by contrast, his co-star Ronnie Corbett was less successful in his sitcom *Sorry* and has latterly returned to his more distinctive role as stand-up comic, both hosting *An Evening With Ronnie Corbett* and reprising his *Two Ronnies* 'argyle-sweater joke' slot, this time for *The Ben Elton Show*. Thus, different kinds of intertextual connections can be made between performers' styles as well as from genre cues. As Jim Cook (1982:16-7) notes, it is important to recognise and consider 'different performance styles' as well as different character styles (which include '"actorly" performances', '"funny character" performances', 'witty characters' and 'rueful characters'). Similarly, Jerry Palmer (1985:132) finds the humour of John Cleese's physicality in *Fawlty Towers* derives not only from the absurd peripeteia arising from the comedy's situation (including goose-stepping before German tourists) and its disruptions, but also from the intertextual reverberations with Cleese's 'silly walks' routines from *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. This recognition of another intertextual layer of humour is however different from those mentioned above because it ties into caricatures generated previously by the actor; it is different again from the intra-series repetition through which viewers come to recognise the retired major's 'well-established stupidity' (Palmer 1985:124), itself the foundation of regular *Fawlty Towers* jokes.

But although intertextual referencing between genres works to the same end as genre the textual forms within the genres are equally significant. Sitcom does not merely exist in six-part series but may be put to many uses some of which paradoxically counteract this traditional formal structure. The established comedy might stage a one-off episode (*Birds of a Feather*) or a miniature three-part serial (*Men Behaving Badly*) for festive or series-closing purposes (or both); single episodes might also occur for charity purposes in *Comic Relief*, for example the celebrity-filled epsiode of *The Vicar Of Dibley*. This last example has also functioned in two further ways, both as a repeat to fill the summer hiatus between new productions and as a series preview to relaunch the day and time

slot as belonging to this show. Thus, a single episode can be used not only to expand the variety on *Comic Relief* but also to reestablish the ritual 'contract' between viewer and broadcaster. This strategy also serves the industry's economic interests, and programmes are promoted and reestablished through the repeating of the previous series immediately before the new season's shows are to begin.

In terms of comedy genres, however, this broadcasting strategy links celebrity quizzes, sketch shows and situation comedies: *Never Mind The Buzzcocks*, *Goodness Gracious Me* and *Red Dwarf* were all repeated before their respective new series aired. Series are also repeated purely because they were successful (*I'm Alan Partridge* or *Father Ted*). By contrast primetime celebrity game shows and chat shows—*It's Only TV But I Like It*, *Room 101*—are repeated later in the week they first aired. This mixing of episodes and fragmenting of the episodic cohesiveness theorised by Mick Eaton (1978/9) as narratively important in sitcom produces a new kind of ritual bond between broadcaster and viewer: as well as watching the series in sequence and 'learning' about the characters and their interactions, viewers can enjoy the proliferation of opportunities to watch as disinterested audiences. Watching a one-off episode repeat from a 1970s show—*Dad's Army* or *Butterflies*—would, thinking through Eaton's point, presumably produce a different text with different meanings, not only because of the layers of nostalgia (particularly true of *Dad's Army*) but also because they are viewed outwith their series structures.

Situation comedy is not the only sub-genre which uses semi-serialised forms: like *The Royle Family* or *Friends*, non-comic dramas like *Casualty* or *The X Files* also incorporate the micro-resolutions of the weekly disruption and the ongoing narrative threads of relationship changes. If a sitcom episode were to be broken down into scenes then its form might more closely resemble that of a sketch show or a persona variety act than a drama in this regard because some scenes would stand alone, others would build or snowball within the half-hour and still others would gradually build to resolution sequentially across the series. While breaking a structure traditionally perceived as primarily narrative into 'sketch'-like fragments might appear counterintuitive, sitcoms vary between the poles of causal, dramatic narrative structures like *Ally McBeal* and gag- or joke-dominated constructions like *Red Dwarf*.

Many sitcoms—including but not limited to cartoons like *South Park*, *The Simpsons* or *King Of The Hill*—are comprised of funny lines and scenes rather than a funny situation or scenario; narrative closure is often easily effected since nothing much significant happens anyway. Examples of this string-of-gags sitcom structure would include *Friends*, *Roseanne*, *Absolutely Fabulous* and *Rab C. Nesbitt*. *Seinfeld* was characterised and popularised precisely as a show in which nothing happened although gags and comedic situations abounded. As well as constituting a continuum within sitcom, this feature might also be seen to be common among quiz and game shows (particularly but not exclusively the celebrity-contestant quiz shows), sketch shows and variety shows. Stringing witty remarks together into a narratively-structured programme produces *It's*

Only TV But I Like It, The Fast Show and *The Ben Elton Show* as well as sitcoms like *Yes Minister, Kiss Me Kate* or *'Allo 'Allo*. If we recognise that sitcoms are often structured through a sequence of gags rather than an organic, causal narrative economy then Chris Tarrant's quiz show *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* and the interconnected anecdotes of *Eddie Izzard's Glorious* might promise a more satisfying narrativity, climax and closure than most situation comedies. The main difference between sitcom and these forms is its exclusively fictitious acted scenario; other ingredients like narrative causality and economy, the role of the persona or star, the speed and style of joke or gag delivery and the audience laughter-track link these sub-genres together rather than differentiate between them.

Funny situations are not easily extricated from the funny actors who perform them, and many situation comedies are successful precisely because they function as star vehicles and not because the situation is especially amusing. A simple commutation test will demonstrate this point: recasting the roles held by Lenny Henry in *Chef,* Rowan Atkinson in *Blackadder* or Victoria Wood in *Dinnerladies* would produce different characters, different associations, different meanings and a different texture to the comedy text: in other words, a different sitcom.

Even if it were possible, the mapping of the importance of any particular star performer to any particular situation comedy would produce an especially subjective continuum. Before positions could be assigned on the scale, however, two questions would need to be answered: first, how central to the comedy is the performer in question; and second, how much does the role fit (or contrast with) the performer's previous oeuvre, the styles, attitudes and performative specificities viewers have come to expect? Performance and star theory remains outside the capacity of this study but a consideration of the functions of stars in comedy, the ways in which ontological human and persona, actor and dramatic character intersect in the televised performing body is nevertheless fruitful. Lenny Henry, for example, has recently begun straight dramatic acting after a career in live theatrical stand-up, television sketch shows, sitcoms and hosting *Comic Relief*: each of these roles blends the component characterisations in different ways so that when Henry is onstage for charity or performing a stand-up routine, his persona is differently constructed and projected and the quality (the tone and texture) of the comedy and its performance are different.

This problem is important to the study of the comedy sub-genres because many stars cross between different styles and forms of texts just as they move between radio, theatre and television. If audiences perceive comedy on television at all in terms of genre, then the relations between different kinds of genre texts and the star performers in them must also be considered. Whereas Steve Neale's (1995:170-172) discussion of (American film) genres explores the ways in which 'genres are... best understood as *processes*' since a genre text 'reworks... extends... or transforms' the generic components, I would expand this conclusion with respect to television comedy to suggest that these dynamic processes also interrelate with shifting forms (serialisation in sitcoms), structures

(narrativity in stand-up comedy), uses within an evening's flow or across the season, and multiple, shifting positions in terms of star performers and their personae (including the ritualised characterisation in celebrity quiz shows). Just as Steve Neale (1981:41) abandons the academic hierarchies which distinguish social comedies from comedies of linguistic play and instead argues in favour of examining the relational spaces in which both circulate, so too must analysis of television comedy thus explore beyond the merely aesthetic (historical, ritual, ideological) concerns of individual texts in order to properly interrogate the complex multiple intertextual (and intermedia) relations that form part of the constantly shifting matrices of expectation and pleasure with which audiences approach television comedy texts.

Notes

[1] Fiske makes a similar point in an earlier paper (1987) graphically by drawing a hierarchy of knowledges required by different shows and assigns a gendered position (for player, for viewer) to each.
[2] Tulloch (1976) and Clarke (1987) both note the quiz show's emphasis on providing quick answers rather than *thinking* (that is, processing information).
[3] Figures from *This Morning* June 24 1999 and *The Sunday Times* 4 July 1999 (Culture: 36) respectively.
[4] This difficult problem of identifying and 'pinning down' ideological positions will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
[5] Paul A. Taylor (1985) elides domcom with sitcom rather than establishing that the former is a subset of the latter.

PARTICIPATION | EXPERTISE

(Fun) | (Education)

(Player activity) | (Player passivity)

She's Gotta Have It

Can't Cook Won't Cook (with Ainsley Harriott)

The Great House Game

The Great Garden Game

Can't Cook Won't Cook (with one of the other chefs)

Ready Steady Cook

Changing Rooms

Homefront

Real Rooms

Change That

Figure 1.1 Television texts arranged on a continuum:
Craft game shows by degree of player participation

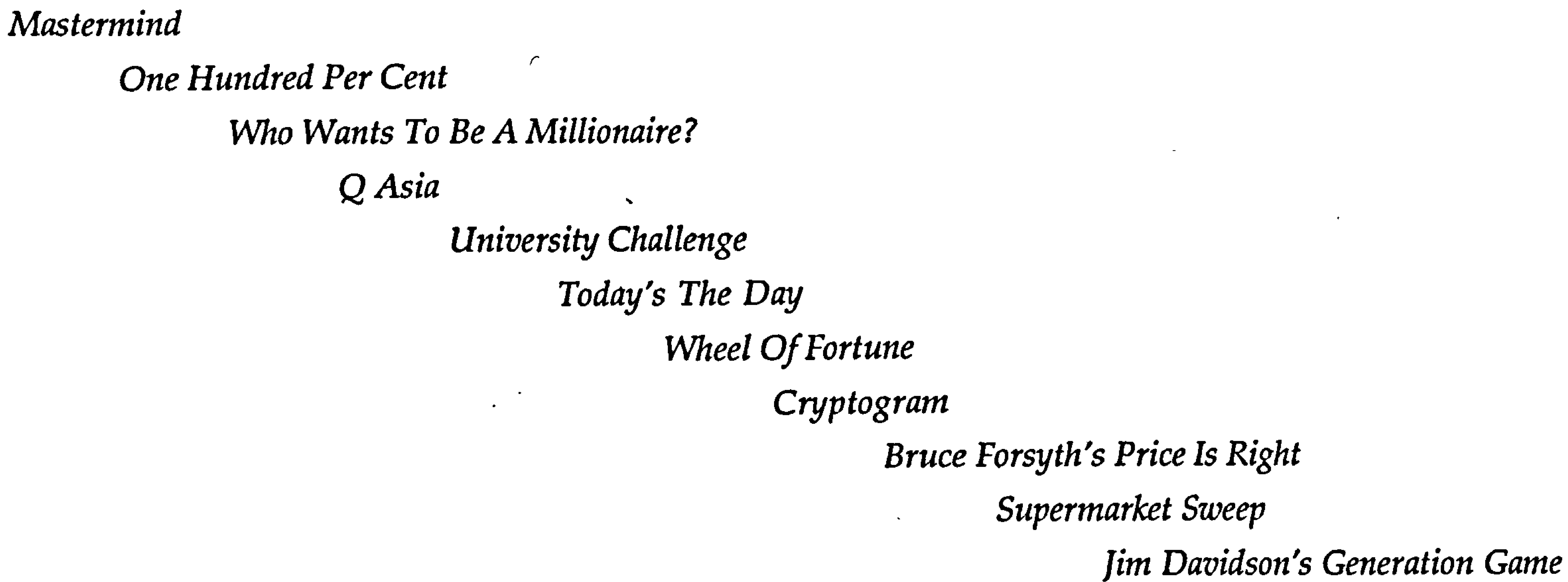

Figure 1.2 Television texts arranged on a continuum:
Quiz and game shows by degree of knowledge and play

QUIZ and GAME   VARIETY

A Question Of Sport

Have I Got News For You?

They Think It's All Over

Shooting Stars

Jim Davidson's Generation Game

Sticky Moments

Families At War

The Moment Of Truth

Stars In Their Eyes

Noel's House Party

Figure 1.3 Television texts arranged on a continuum:
Quiz and game show by degree of 'variety' content

'SOCIAL REALIST' — 'SOCIAL REVERSAL' — 'MURPHY'S LAW'

(Lovell's examples)

'Social realist'		'Social reversal'	'Murphy's Law'
Butterflies	*Porridge*	*George and Mildred*	*Fawlty Towers*
Solo		*Last Of The Summer Wine*	
Yes Minister		*You're Only Young Twice*	
		Dad's Army	

(Robinson's problematic)

South Park ------- ... -------*South Park*
Frasier ---------- ... ----------*Frasier*
--------*Ally McBeal*---- ... ----*Ally McBeal*----
---*Birds Of A Feather*----------
--------*Ellen*-------
--------*Rab C. Nesbittt*------------
--------*Goodnight Sweetheart*
Spin City
I'm Alan Partridge------
------------*Gimme Gimme Gimme*
----------*Red Dwarf*
-------*Father Ted*

Figure 1.4 Television texts arranged on a continuum:
Situation Comedies from 'Social realist' to 'Murphy's Law', after Terry Lovell (1982)

Scottish Television Comedy Programmes

Title	Genre	Length	Frequency	Channel, Day, Time
Aig Ire (in Gaelic, with English subtitles)	Magazine/ sketches	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC2; Tuesday; 7.30pm
Edinburgh or Bust	Festival stand-up	30m	Once a week, six-week series	4; Wednesday; 11.30pm
McCoist and MacAulay	Celebrity banter	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC1; Thursday; 10pm
Rab C. Nesbitt	Situation comedy	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC2; Friday; 9.30pm
Ran Dan (in Gaelic, with English subtitles)	Sketch	15m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC2; Thursday; 6.45pm
The Jack Docherty Show	Chat, stand-up	40 or 45m	1-4 nights p.w. in six-week seasons	5; various days; 10.45pm but varies
The Creatives	Situation comedy	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC2; Friday; 10pm
The Morwenna Banks Show	Sketch	30m	Once a week, six-week series	5; Tuesday; 10pm
The People Versus Jerry Sadowitz	Stand-up and chat	30m	Once a week, six-week series	5; Tuesday; 10.30pm

Scottish Television Comedy Programmes, occasional

Title	Genre	Length	Frequency	Channel, Day, Time
City Lights	Situation comedy	30m	One episode, from 1980s-series	BBC1; Thursday; 8pm
McCoist and MacAulay	Celebrity banter	40m	One episode, about football World Cup	BBC1; Tuesday; 9.30pm
One Foot In The Grave	Situation comedy	30m	One episode, from 1992 series	BBC1; Wednesday; 9.30pm
Only An Excuse?	Sketch	30m	One episode, about football World Cup	BBC1; Monday; 9.30pm
Stanley Baxter: His Best Bits!	Sketch excerpts	60m	Once (historical excerpts)	4; Monday; 9pm
Stanley Baxter in Reel Terms	Sketch excerpts	60m	Once (historical excerpts)	4; Sunday; 9pm

British Television Comedy Programmes with a consistent significant Scottish presence (host or team captain)

Title	Genre	Length	Frequency	Channel, Day, Time
A Question Of Sport	Celebrity quiz	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC1; Tuesday; 8.30pm
Friday Night Armistice	Sketch/ stand-up	35m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC2; Friday; 10.30pm
The Best Show In The World... Probably	Celebrity quiz	30m	Once a week, six-week series	BBC1; Thursday; 10.20pm

Table 1.1 Scottish Television Comedy Programmes in a typical year (1998), excluding in-week repeats and last-season repeats prior to new series
Source: *Radio Times*

Traditional Hogmanay 1: Tuesday December 31, 1996, on BBC1

Time	Title	Genre	Scottish Personae
8.55pm	*Bird in Hong Kong*	Light documentary	Jackie Bird, in Hong Kong
9.35pm	*Dorothy!*	Taped live stage act, stand-up comedy	Dorothy Paul
10.05pm	*News*	News	
10.25pm	*On The Bru*	Light documentary on 50 years of Irn Bru	Rhona Cameron Stuart Cosgrove and other contributors
10.40pm	*Only An Excuse?*	Football sketches and impersonations	Jonathan Watson
11.10pm	*Rikki Fulton's Scotch and Wry*	Monologues and sketches	Rikki Fulton
11.50pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown to the bells and fireworks at Edinburgh Castle	Carol Smillie Gordon Kennedy

Traditional Hogmanay 2: Wednesday December 31, 1997, on BBC1

Time	Title	Genre	Scottish Personae
7.55pm	*The Hospital That Jack Built*	Light documentary	Jackie Bird, in Ghana
8.25pm	*News*	News	
8.45pm	*National Lottery*	Lottery draw	
9.00pm	*Button Box Wizard*	Light documentary	Jimmy Shand (accordionist)
9.15pm	*Ex-S "Ballroom Dancer"*	Documentary (repeat)	Donnie Burns (dancer)
9.45pm	*Elaine With Attitude*	Taped live stage act, stand-up comedy	Elaine C. Smith
10.35pm	*McCoist and MacAulay*	Celebrity banter	Ally McCoist Fred MacAulay
11.15pm	*Only An Excuse?*	Football sketches and impersonations	Jonathan Watson
11.45pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown to the bells and fireworks at Edinburgh Castle	Carol Smillie Dougie Vipond

...continues on next page

Table 1.2 Scottish Television Comedy Programmes As Festive Variety
Source: *Radio Times*

Millennium Hogmanay: Friday December 31, 1999, on BBC2*

Time	Title	Genre	Scottish Personae
8.45pm	*Frankie Miller: Stubborn Kinda Fella*	Light documentary	Frankie Miller
9.15pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown banter	Hazel Irvine and guests
9.30pm	*Hoots!*	Scottish comedy excerpts and comment	Fred MacAulay
10.00pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown banter	Hazel Irvine and guests
10.30pm	*It's A Jolly Life*	Monologues and sketches	Rikki Fulton
11.00pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown banter	Hazel Irvine and guests
11.15pm	*Only An Excuse?*	Football sketches and impersonations	Jonathan Watson
11.45pm	*Hogmanay Live*	Live countdown to the bells and fireworks at Edinburgh Castle	various

Millennium Hogmanay: Friday December 31, 1999, on ITV (Scottish)

Time	Title	Genre	Scottish Personae
8pm	*Ronnie Corbett Tickles Your Fancy*	Historical excerpts of male Scottish stage/television comedians	Ronnie Corbett
9pm	*The Bill*	Police drama serial	
10pm	*High Road Millennium Special*	Scottish Highlands soap	various
11.00pm	*Edinburgh's Hogmanay*	Live chat and banter	various
11.15pm	*The Alexander Brothers and Friends*	Performances by Scottish folk musicians	Alexander brothers
11.45pm	*Edinburgh's Hogmanay*	Live countdown to the bells and fireworks at Edinburgh Castle	various

* NB: BBC1 (the usual Hogmanay channel) showed chat and live link-ups from 6pm, with Scottish performances and links to celebrations around the world

Table 1.2 Scottish Television Comedy Programmes As Festive Variety
Source: *Radio Times*

CHAPTER TWO

Texts and Contexts: Scottish Culture and Humour

In this chapter I explore how Scottishness—of comedy, in comedy—is conceptualised and represented. Cultural phenomena like Scottish television comedy texts cannot be defined ahistorically or apolitically within rigid taxonomies because these textual materials constitute an ever-changing relation of social, cultural, economic, political and industrial contexts. For example in terms of text and industry, Rab Nesbitt's character developed from a *Naked Video* sketch into a domestic sitcom in 1990. In terms of cultural intertextual references and social mores about television and humour a joke during a 'City Of Culture' episode (tx 11.10.1990) about 'seeing the wee Burrells' at the Burrell art collection is in contrast with Rab's friend Jamesie *in flagrante delicto* with a melon in 1999. To refer to the nine years of *Rab C. Nesbitt* as if it were a singular text fails to acknowledge the complexities of its internal history and its shifting cultural referents and underestimates its diversity, its impact on the corpus, and its role within BBC's national network. Further, we might explore *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s impact on audiences in other regions of the United Kingdom, and its impact on their views of Scots and Scotland (as well as Scots' self-image and exoteric self-image, that is what Scots think other people think of them) through such representations being circulated. Beyond *Rab C. Nesbitt* however there are many examples of Scottish television comedy and British comedy which include Scottish characters or settings.

This chapter complements the survey of critical literature about Scotland's myths of nation, identity and culture with qualitative interviews conducted with writers, performers and producers about a distinctive 'Scottish sense of humour'. The chapter asks both: What if anything is *distinctive* about Scottish television comedy, ***and*** b) how *significant* is this distinctiveness in terms of its contribution to and impact upon British television comedy and role in the debates about Scottish national cultures.

SCOTCH MYTHS: TARTAN MONSTERS AND THE KAILYARD

In *Light Entertainment* Richard Dyer disparages the 'symbolic clusters' and 'thin imagery' of a cultural phenomenon he terms 'Scottishism' (1973:34-35). By this he means:

> There is nearly always a Scots entertainer on at some point in the week—Moira Anderson, Kenneth McKellar, Andy Stewart have their own series and guest on others, *Opportunity*

Knocks often has a piper or Scottish dancing troop on, and the New Year celebrations occasion long programmes of studio Hogmanay parties. The emptiness of all this Tartanry, the jokes about sporrans and haggis, the whining bagpipes and accordion bands, the same old songs dragged out time and again... is easily mocked. It is one-dimensional imagery... tartanry means nothing about Scotland but the production of multi-coloured cloth.

Aside from the evocative pun on 'troupe' what is immediately striking about this statement is its datedness. Beyond the rituals of Hogmanay, Burns Night or the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Scottish variety where it perseveres tends toward stand-up comedy, and Scottish music shows predominantly form part of Gaelic language programming. Contemporary Gaelic music shows have a different meaning from the *White Heather Club* and Dyer's kilted balladeers because they represent political and social gains for the language in broadcasting and public life as much as continuity with and nostalgia for the Gaidhealtachd.

As well as referring to outdated programmes and styles Dyer's observations feel anachronistic because he invokes discourses of Tartanry. Rather than elaborate upon Scottishism and its 'desperation and imaginative thinness' (1973:35) Dyer quotes at length from Tom Nairn's diatribe against 'sporranry, alcoholism, and the ludicrous appropriation of the remains of Scotland's Celtic fringe as a national symbol... celebrated in a million emetic ballads'. Nairn's polemic continues with significant qualification (in Dyer 1973:35):

Yet any judgement on this aspect of Scottish national consciousness ought to be softened by the recognition that these are the pathetic symbols of an inarticulate people unable to forge valid correlates on their different experience: the peculiar crudity of Tartanry only corresponds to the peculiarly intense alienation of the Scots on this level.

How a 'Scottish national consciousness' might be conceptualised and represented depends upon whether culture is viewed as the matter derived from social experience, or as purely creative and symbolic and not at all pertaining to the real.[1] But another layer of discursive mythology can be seen at work in Nairn's comments and their application by Dyer onto television texts: that of Kailyardism. As Cairns Craig defines it (1982:7),

The Kailyard is established as the primary image of Scottish experience, a world concerned only with its own cabbage patch—which is the literal meaning of the Kailyard—and unaware of the parochial absurdity with which it will be viewed by the outside world.

Scottishism, in Dyer's view, combines kitsch tartanry with this parochial, limited view of the world. These are tremendously strong discursive positions which articulate the legacies of Walter Scott's romantic Tartanry and J.M. Barrie's grim Kailyardism. Just how much we ought to invest in the explanatory powers of these nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary myths is a matter of continued debate. The difficulty and the desirability of transcending these typifications and characterisations without merely reacting against them and creating replacement shadow-myths has been much discussed in the last forty years by Scottish cultural and social historians like Tom Nairn, Cairns

Craig, Christopher Harvie, David McCrone and others.

Most relevant to the discussion of film and television culture in Scotland is Colin McArthur's compilation *Scotch Reels* (1982) and the 'Scotch Reels' discussions and exhibition in Edinburgh of that year, which focused (like Nairn and Dyer, rather pessimistically) on the need for Scottish films and television texts to rise above traditions of Tartanry and Kailyardism. As John Caughie (1990:17, emphasis in original) later explains, '"Scotch Reels" as an event and as itself a "discursive position"....[was] meant to be an *intervention*' in the Marxist sense, that is constructed for the purposes of dialectic and progressive effect rather than merely offering a dismissive critique of the Scottish film industry and Scottish culture at large.

A decade after *Scotch Reels* and with its arguments very much in mind David McCrone (1992:175) states unequivocally that:

> [Tartanry and the Kailyard] are far less dominant than is made out, nor is their influence quite as unproblematic and pernicious. Indeed... the variety and eclecticism of Scottish culture today corresponds to world conditions in the late twentieth century rather than the distorting legacy of these "mythic structures".

That is not to say that McCrone abandons all Scottish myths out of hand. Rather, he traces historical trajectories which broaden the debate's terms of reference and add balance and perspective to a polemical, often negative discussion. Although the impact of Kailyard's influence as 'responsible in the twentieth century for a deformed and distorted sense of Scottishness' is rejected early on, McCrone balances his critique by considering several other myths about Scottish culture (1992:180).[2] For example, McCrone works through Tom Nairn's 1977 description of a schizophrenic 'Caledonian Antisyzygy' or split between 'Scottish heart' and 'British head', finding it to have some persuasive features but limited powers of explanation. Similarly, McCrone rejects Tartanry as having any significant resonance or grasp at the end of the twentieth century. McCrone also touches on 'Clydesidism', a twentieth-century Central Scottish nostalgia for honest masculine working-class shipyard socialism, a myth John Caughie (1990) offers then debunks as an alternative to Tartanry and Kailyard. None of these myths or explanations of a Scottish national culture satisfies McCrone.

The idea of a psychical obsession with unresolved neuroses of division and splitness reappears in Colin McArthur's reply to McCrone, 'The Scottish Discursive Unconscious' (1996). Here the split in the Scottish cultural psyche is seen in popular filmic representations as a literal rift between two polar characterisations: the Lowland and the Highland Scot. McArthur (1996:84) expands upon the contrasting halves of a split mythic psyche:

> *homo oeconomicus* [is] urban, civilised, rational, individualist, elegantly attired, barbered, cultured, ambitious, masculine in (gender and sensibility) [whereas] *homo celticus* [is] rural, uncivilised, emotional, communitarian, roughly garbed, hirsute, natural, shiftless, feminine (in sensibility).

McArthur's article, like McCrone's work, acknowledges the plurality of twentieth-

century discourses by introducing characterisations of the 'elegiac discourses' about Gaeldom and *The Big Man* or *No Mean City* representations of Glasgow which '[stress] its darkness, poverty, drunkenness, sectarianism and male violence' (1996:88).

Between them Nairn, McArthur, Caughie and McCrone survey and explore several explanations of a national Scottish cultural formation and while each questions the legitimacy of these male-centred myths, they are nonetheless unwilling to refute the myths' endurance. While Colin McArthur's assertion that such myths function within a discursive unconscious is by and large agreed, the same could be said of other nations and stable societies furth of Scotland.

McCrone's primary concern is to show that 'a narrow set of discourses—crucially Tartanry and Kailyardism—have been employed in the cultural analysis of Scotland, and the end result is a fairly pessimistic and misleading account of Scottish culture'[3] (1992:188). McCrone continues, 'much of the attack on tartanry and Kailyard has depended on an uncritical assumption that their impact has been comprehensive and homogeneous' (1992:189), a view McCrone consistently seeks to challenge. Thus he concludes (1997:195), albeit by positing additional questions: 'In other words, the argument has been that we cannot find [a Scottish national culture] precisely because the myths are hegemonic, when the real answer should be that the search itself is rapidly becoming invalid'.

Where Richard Dyer (1973) saw only 'Scottishism' and could only draw upon discourses of Tartanry to contextualise and explain it, now television comedy in Scotland and the tools with which to describe and analyse it are more culturally and intellectually developed. As McCrone puts it (1997:195):

> The question to ask is not how best do cultural forms reflect an essential national identity, but how do cultural forms actually help to construct and shape identity, or rather, identities—for there is less need to reconcile or prioritise these.

Before slipping into a discussion of plural cultures and myths the question hinted at by David McCrone (1997:195) must be addressed directly: why look for a distinctive Scottish national culture; why hunt the 'Scottish snark'? McCrone suggests that the mythologising of, and desire for, a distinctive Scottish identity and culture is partly related to discourses of Scottish inferiority and feelings of antagonism—particularly in relation to the economically, politically, militaristically and internationally more powerful English—since Union in 1707.

McCrone questions why Scots intellectuals seek proof of a Scottish exceptionalism, hinting that this is perhaps defeatist and another example of a complex of inferiorities being disavowed through the self-defence of a distinct and distinctive national identity, a defence that a more mature society sees—and has—much less need to assert. He writes (1997:194), '[t]he problem is that Scotland's right to exist as a separate society has too often seemed to depend on the unusual characteristic, as if in allowing similarity to a high degree, we undermine Scotland's very existence.' McCrone's question here is not so much an intellectual enquiry about whether cultural distinctions are *discovered* (like a

raw mineral) or *constructed* (by the motivations of the analysis) but whether the enquiry and focus are valid in the first place. While McCrone argues that these myths are insufficient for analysing contemporary Scottish national cultures and he is ambivalent about 'hunting of the Scottish snark', he does not question the *Scottishness* of the myths. Though their explanatory scope and the motivations for circulating the debate are questioned McCrone (and others) do not challenge the intrinsic Scottishness and exceptionalism of the myths.

Even if these myths were exceptional and intrinsically Scottish analytical difficulties remain. Part of the problem of using myth to explain culture is the way myth functions *as myth*: we recognise an allegorical distance between myth/narrative and ontological experience. Another difficulty is the backward glances involved: myth articulates nostalgia and historicism. Further, allegorical and historical distance allows irony to percolate through, producing a complex relation between myth and its contemporary analyses. Myths of Tartanry, Kailyardism, Clydesidism and Caledonian anti-syzygy persevere not only in Scottish culture and the 'discursive unconscious' but also provide the substance of many self-deprecating jokes. This too has historical roots: Kailyard writing a century ago was characterised by 'humour, irony and satire' (Knowles 1983:142) and as Dyer and *Scotch Reels* noted separately, Tartanry has had light entertainment uses (ironically positioned or not) for many decades. More recently Billy Connolly, *Rab C. Nesbitt* and *Chewin The Fat* have explored the comedic value of Clydesidism, often through contrast with characterisations resembling McArthur's *homo celticus*, the Scottish equivalent of a country bumpkin, the teuchter.

Herein lies a particularly tangled problem: how seriously ought we to take these historical myths given that these characterisations and structures function allegorically and ironically, and what happens when they appear in contemporary texts reconfigured for comedic purposes? How myth and narratives are reproduced as social stereotypes is beyond the reach of this thesis, but it remains important to consider here the kinds of myths that circulate about national identity within popular culture and to recognise the layers of history, allegory, irony and play in Scottish television comedy.

A SCOTTISH SENSE OF HUMOUR

Scottish television comedy grew out of local music-hall, pantomime and radio (Irving 1977; Yule 1989) and to a significant extent these links remain. Although music-hall no longer provides a stage for musical items the individual stage act exists in a vibrant stand-up comedy club environment and Edinburgh's annual, enormous Fringe Festival. Pantomime shares performers from radio and television sketch shows and sitcoms made in Scotland, and the role of radio as a cheap testing ground for comedy writers, performers and producers still obtains. *Chewin The Fat* and *Velvet Soup* both began as

radio sketch shows (the latter as *Velvet Cabaret*), exploring new comedy subjects and treatments, developing new writers and performers, and finding a niche audience before making the transition to television sketch production.

Scottish television comedy has been borrowing talent and material from live theatre and radio for years, and the interrelations between the industries has produced a localised west of Scotland comedy industry formerly distributed between summer holiday destinations like the Inverclyde and Rothesay areas but more recently focused around the BBC radio and television centre in Glasgow. Originally from Greenock and the live music -hall stage and later settling into broadcasting work in Glasgow, Chic Murray epitomises this era and industrial connection, moving between stage tours, radio, records, television and film work to produce a year-round income and to keep his name before the fans (Yule 1989).

By the time television arrived Glasgow's population had diminished from over a million c.1900 to about 750,000 (now closer to 615,000) after slum residents were cleared to new towns. Glasgow's cultural industries included the BBC and the central belt's ITV franchisee (Scottish Television), several daily newspapers, radio stations, theatres and performance venues. Having a large population to support entertainers, entrepreneurs and producers it seems natural that Glasgow developed a dominant role in Scottish television, including Scottish television comedy.

Although there is a distinct geographic, cultural, political, social and economic entity which we can point to as 'Scotland', all these classifications are rendered fluidly. This is even more true of television: cross-border financing, commissioning, production and transmission of television programmes exist in all three major terrestrial broadcasters (BBC, ITV and Channel Four). Scottish television's character is dominated by its relations with 'British television' at large rather than asserting a self-contained integrity and self-styled identity. An holistic view of Scottish television in terms of its potential for a distinct cultural logic, political agenda and textual corpus is difficult to argue because the channels which produce and broadcast Scottish comedy programmes work in direct competition with each other. But even with these caveats in mind, the question remains: what is Scottish television comedy?

There are two parts to the answer. One approach draws a prescriptive list of Scottishnesses and marks a text against it. Are finance, commissioning, writer(s), recording and post-production, location, and first broadcast based in Scotland? Can the Scottishness of setting, themes and topics, performers and their accents and languages (including Scots, Gaelic, Doric, Orcadian, Norn and other regional varieties) be determined? In all likelihood where three categories can be confirmed as being Scottish then other categories will probably follow. If we can describe two 'behind-the-scenes' aspects and one 'centre-stage' aspect of the text as discernibly Scottish then many of the other aspects will also be Scottish because of the intra-industrial links which determine how programmes are conceived, developed, funded, produced and broadcast here.

The other approach asks the question: 'what are Scottish themes and topics'? These

might include any of the cultural myths and historical discourses—Tartanry, Kailyardism, Caledonian antiszyzgy, and Clydesidism including the 'No Mean City' and 'Big Man' variations—that David McCrone and Colin McArthur found lurking in the Scottish creative unconscious. As well as viewing Scottish comedy on television, skimming newspaper and magazine commentaries and reading the very few scholarly articles on Scottish television comedy, I interviewed several practitioners for their idea on contemporary myths and topics. Among those interviewed were a newspaper columnist (A), a stand-up comedian with successful radio and television credits (B), a radio and television sketch show producer (C) and a part-time radio comedian specialising in football comedy (D), all men.[4] The range of their career largely determined which aspects of Scottish comedy were discussed although the emphases were: the notion of a Scottish sense of humour; the topics within Scottish comedy that each person considered especially Scottish; topics particularly favoured; and topics personally avoided by the interviewee in their comedy work.[5] Quotes from the interviews are labelled A, B, C and D so that a sense of a whole person's perspectives can be reconstructed. Line numbers are taken from printed transcriptions and included to give a sense of the interviews' internal chronologies.

To the question, 'Is there a different sense of humour in different parts of Scotland?', 'A' said:

> Yeah I think there is. I think Glasgow has a more, I mean it's all clichés but it is, does have a more gallus, in-your-face kind of humour, I'm trying to think if Edinburgh has a sense of humour actually, we'd probably have to have references to art or something or, I mean I honestly can't think of a particularly Edinburgh sense of humour. (Lines A170-174)

> I do actually get the feeling that if there is a regional humour in Scotland it's actually poking fun at the next region, or the next area. I mean I lived in Shetland for quite a few years and I don't actually remember a Shetland humour as such if there was it was a kind of pawky humour and it was to do with the weather... double-edged wind jokes... (Lines A189-194; 197)

> I think Glasgow is the humour capital of Scotland, no doubt about it I can't honestly think of any other indigenous sort of tradition. (Lines A199-201)

Having agreed with the proposition that different places have different kinds of humour, 'A' then suggests that perhaps only the targets shift from place to place (a notion 'B' concurs with) or that perhaps local conditions become the source of a local humour. His final answer is that Glasgow's 'gallus' (warm-hearted, boisterous) humour is not only distinctive but also dominant.

After listing numerous American stand-up comedians from the Eighties and Nineties, 'B', a performer, answered a question about his comedy heroes thus:

> From this country obviously Billy Connolly has been influential just because again like Arnold Brown he proved it could be done. Even to some extent Craig Ferguson, because Craig as a young man was doing what it took a lot of us a few years to catch on could be done, he took his stuff to London, took his stuff to New York, took his stuff to the States, you know. (Lines A90-94)

This respondent admired the careers of all the comedians he named although he

comments very little about what he particularly likes in their humour and material. Equally, while 'B' lists names, he does not expand upon what about the comedians' individual personae or humour is identifiably Scottish. Having conducted programme-related research into Scottish television comedy he was quick to debunk myths about a national sense of humour, saying:

> ...to be honest, you know we kind of say we love to laugh at ourselves, there's a self-deprecation in Scottish humour, [but] I think you might find it in other cultures as well. I think you'd be hard pushed to stick a camera in somebody's face and a microphone under their mouth and say 'Have you got a sense of humour' and they [would] say, "No, no, we find very little to laugh at". So I think it's, it's almost, you know, 'People are coming to interview you about your cultural sense of humour, do you have one?', "Oh aye, oh we've certainly got a sense of humour". And then you say to people, 'Is the sense of humour more earthy in the West of Scotland than it is in the east?' "Oh yes, people will speak to you at a bus stop in the west, you know." (Lines B118-126)

The notion that people in the west of Scotland are friendlier and more welcoming is a social trope commonly expressed and not only by professional comedians. As well as making sure newcomers are 'never lonely in a Glasgow bus queue', people living in the west of Scotland are said to offer generous hospitality at any hour whereas in Edinburgh, Glaswegians commonly jest, the door will be opened with the greeting 'You'll have had your tea'.

'B' was given the informal prompt, 'The Glasgow Edinburgh thing' by which I had meant intercity rivalries (he had the question in writing before him). 'B' took this vague oral non-question differently, and referring to his preparation for his television show, he said:

> Yes I think, we heard enough people to say it that I am convinced there probably is a more earthiness or a rawness to the Glasgow humour but I think you know you go looking for earthy humour, you go to the Govan shipyards, it's guaranteed to be there. You could go to a manufacturing plant in East Lothian and you'll find the same earthy humour, I'm fairly sure of that, I think you can kind of, if you want it to fit into your jigsaw, makes me sound like a jigsaw freak, but (pause) I think if we had wanted to we could have, you could have twisted it around, but, that doesn't make for good television. (Lines B144-151)

With the original question rephrased to clarify an interest in the Glasgow-Edinburgh rivalry, 'B' replied:

> No that, that really does exist I'm sad to say, not from looking at it from the comedy point of view on TV but just from you know moving through back and forward as I do. [...] I think if you, if we stopped talking about the rivalry between Glasgow and Edinburgh it might disappear. (Lines B154-5; B174-5) [6]

'B' suggests that earthiness, although frequently claimed as a west of Scotland humour trait, is more aligned perhaps to certain class divisions and certain kinds of workplace or social environment than to geographic location. He also feels strongly that Edinburgh and Glasgow do choose each other as targets for gentle and not-so-gentle ripostes, but that this is historically determined, self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating, though not immutable. Commenting about the perceived social coldness of Edinburghers he said many people who repeated such stereotypes rarely ventured to the city themselves, so

that ignorance and prejudice however jovially intended is consolidated and perpetuated.

By contrast 'C', a producer, described his philosophy toward Scottish comedy broadcasting thus:

> ... we've had a bit of a problem I think [...] inasmuch as the material that's worked quite well for a local audience and for a national audience in Scotland has often bombed hideously and looked anachronistic and looked parochial in the bigger picture. [...] *Rab C* is a fantastic programme, great heritage, really very funny, but it's very much, it has a kind of narrow identity, it has a very narrow way of looking at humour from Scotland and I think there's more to it than that. [...] I'm trying to encourage writers who are looking at different types of comedy... (Lines C66-75)

His work involves encouraging new sketch writers and new stand-up comedians so his attitude is to avoid the well-trodden paths of 'safe' television comedy. He highlights the relations between the financial and cultural implications of networked television: what is made in Scotland must be saleable to London because a Scotland-only audience is a minority and draws a much smaller budget allocation. This in turn impacts upon his ability to produce the comedy he would ideally like to. However, while 'A' and 'B' are both Scottish men in their early forties, 'C' is an English man in his mid-thirties. Without wishing to suggest a national split between English and Scottish practitioners in Scotland, 'C' was the only interviewee who disparaged what he felt to be traditional Scottish icons like 'Irn Bru and football, kebabs and knobs etcetera etcetera' (Line C467), finding these themes and material to be unoriginal and parochial. The Scottish comedians interviewed all said these topics still had currency.

Another Scottish interviewee had a different view on this problem, seeing it from a Scottish point of view as a double-bind for expressing identity both inwardly and outwith national territory across the British television network. 'D', a broadcaster and football comedian said:

> What I'd also add to that really is to do with the nature of broadcasting, which is that as we know Scottish broadcasting has always struggled to identify itself as a nation within a nation, the nation of Scotland emerging out of its past to try to redefine itself as a small country with its own national heritage and status and language and education and whatever existing in bed with an elephant if you like conjoined to England, and the whole kind of disUnited Kingdom of the British nation, right, where mostly institutions of mediation and broadcasting, the press and all the rest of it, have been run from London. And so in a way we see it with *Chewin the Fat* even now, I mean this would be something you would probably be best to talk to the Comedy Unit crowd about, which is the extent to which something can be a success in Scotland, and then has to <u>navigate</u> (stressed) going onto the network from a position of weakness, in which the perception is that in order to <u>crack</u> (stressed) the network you will have to compromise on all those things people found funny about you in the first place. So you're caught in that kind of double-bind. (Lines D115-129)

Asked whether the new television pilot he was promoting was 'Scottish comedy', 'C' replied:

> Well yeah it is, but it's not parochial and it's not about Scotland, it's, I think the easiest way to explain it is it's written from a Scottish perspective but it's not about Scottish issues, it's about stuff, it's about life, it's about whatever the writer happens to be thinking about.
>
> So I kind of deliberately took out specifically Scottish references. But they're still characters

that live in Scotland and have Scottish accents mostly...

> The geography of it actually doesn't matter. And I think that makes it a weaker programme for a Scottish audience because I think people do quite like to see something of themselves reflected back. But every programme is down to a matter of taste and a matter of judgment and my taste is that I'm not interested in that kind of humour and so I don't use it.
> (Lines 2C117-120; 2C128-9; 2C132-6)

As a producer, 'C' wields full creative veto over the radio and television shows he makes and largely determines the tone and limits himself. He makes the point that his writers and actors are all Scots, production crew and locations are Scottish, and that very occasionally the sketches exploit Scottish self-stereotypes (for example, a pawky Islander in a rowboat). Because he has such power as a producer 'C' can work to his own tastes and sculpt his own show, deleting 'specifically Scottish references' and claiming that 'geography doesn't matter'. At the same time he is acutely aware that Scots enjoy seeing their own distinctive cultural icons and preferred topics for humour, and that his show avoids delivering these kinds of jokes. Significantly, his series is half-funded from London (rather than financed purely from Scottish broadcasting budgets) and upon commissioning the programme will be networked directly in its first showing even though he is an inexperienced television producer.[7]

Nevertheless, 'C' finds his young emerging writers to be fixated with 'sex and poopoo and weewee', drugs and death (Lines C134-141) but he feels these to be essentially human topics transcending national or local parochialisms. On the other hand, 'A' found 'a vein of ... poo filth' running through Scottish humour by which he explicitly meant that sexual filth was subordinate if not marginal. 'B' frequently mentioned an 'earthiness' to Scottish humour which I take to include both kinds of filth. The 'Writer's Brief' from Rab Christie (2000:2) for *Chewin The Fat*'s third series includes the comments:

> Remember, Chewin' The Fat goes out on BBC1 so it can't be too surreal. But that doesn't mean we're after material that's ultra-safe. There's plenty bad taste jokes on They Think It's All Over at the moment. Don't forget, Chewin' The Fat can be just as filthy.

Other interviewees consistently emphasised earthy humour and death as being characteristically Scottish fixations, surpassed only by football. The writer and producer Phil Differ (*Naked Video* and *Only an Excuse*) has based a very successful career on west of Scotland football humour encompassing topics like religion and sectarianism, machismo and sexist attitudes, heroes and institutions and their (inevitable) falls from grace, and the inevitable ignominy of failure at international fixtures, particularly in games against England (another example of discourses of Scottish inferiority and aggression).

Another football comedian, 'D', further articulated this mixture of football and a special kind of loss:

> Football has always been you know the sport of the working class in Scotland and therefore you know football is always going to be fundamental part of the Scottish popular cultural character. And therefore because of that its always going to be seen as something that has a rich seam of comedy attached to it, either because of the characters that Scottish football

> throws up or because of the fact that you know that there is kind of recognisable people, terms of reference, events or whatever that is talked about by ordinary Scottish people. I think it's also fair to say in football terms that I think one of the fundamental comic characteristics of, or maybe it's a comic characteristic of humour in general, but I think specifically in terms of Scottish humour, is the capacity to laugh at failure, whether that's failure in terms of slapstick of someone who walks into a door and gets their face smacked or whether it's the failure of the kind of rather pompous person who gets sent up and brought down to earth or whatever but I think that in lots of ways Scottish football has with one or two obvious exceptions been about how we negotiate the pain of failure. And that's a richly comic area of life, it's where a lot of the best comedy comes from. (Lines D42-58).

One of the other interviewees 'A' had reconfigured Billy Connolly's classic joke 'Partick Thistle Nil' (that is, as the full name of the club) as 'Scotland Nil' in his newspaper columns preceding the Euro-2000 qualification matches. Football fans who felt their team had been unfairly dismissed before their games against England had even been played responded critically, sending him electronic mail and outraged letters to his editor. Another respondent made a well-received joke in stand-up after England's Euro-2000 games that Scottish fans were the friendliest in the world having supported Portugal, Germany and Romania all in one week—the three teams faced by the England team in the first round.[8]

Although all those interviewed volunteered without any prompting an admiration for the BBC1 sketch show *Chewin The Fat* and all noted the historical dominance of Billy Connolly in Scottish comedy, there was little agreement about: whether we could speak of a national Scottish sense of humour/ local community sense of humour; whether comedy which made explicitly Scottish references was insular and parochial or a strong statement of distinctive identity; or whether themes like earthiness, football and death exemplify a Scottish exceptionalism or rather British (or even universal) interests.

Certainly these topics although usually typified as a dark strain of humour are less negative and less distasteful in contemporary society than, for example, laying claim to a strong interest in sexist humour or enjoying perpetuating racist stereotypes, being anti-England or even anti-Gael. Football humour including Old Firm jokes was cautiously separated from sectarianism; sectarian jokes were explained, carefully, with gestures of 'inverted commas'.[9] Interestingly both 'A' and 'B' have in their professional careers made several jokes about the traditional targets of jokes circulated about Scotland—alcohol, stinginess, aggression, tenement slums,[10] stereotypes of simple country folk (Teuchters), the weather, anti-English sentiments, dark winters, Scottish national heroes and emblems—these subjects were scarcely even mentioned in passing.[11]

It is possible that these traditional stereotypes about Scots which form the gags and punchlines in many a joke book have been reconfigured as the mystique and ignorance held by other peoples about Scots, their society and their culture is replaced by greater contact and understanding. It is also possible that the shifts in joke material merely reflect changes in the modern world. It is further possible that the shift seen in literature away from discourses of Tartanry, the Kailyard, and Clydesidism toward more disparate cultural influences is reflected in humour. Similarly it is possible that there has

been no shift in material at all, merely that these Scots comedy practitioners sought to emphasise certain more fashionable, more palatable traits and to disavow, or at least decline to perpetuate, joke topics and Scottish personality stereotypes deemed anachronistic or regressive. Perhaps the topics avoided were left alone by the interviewees because they touched a raw nerve. As Jack House wrote (1960:49),

> Did Harry Lauder give the outside world a false impression of the Scots? I say he did not. His real trouble was that he gave far too true a portrayal, and that's one thing that none of us likes. He was pawky and couthy and thrifty and drouthy, and all the rest of the things we are we won't admit to ourselves. We call these things by different names now and so pretend that they no longer exist.

The fine line between portrayal and betrayal, between subtle irony and obvious invective, between humour and hatred, is expressed in these few words. House throws down the gauntlet and defies anyone to agree with him. Jokes acquired from other sources—solicited from members of the Scottish public via internet chatrooms or in public spaces like bars or Glasgow bus queues—as well as the professionals' work in circulation very often had a much sharper edge.

What becomes important in all this is the uses to which these Scottish myths and characteristics are put. Television comedy operates within certain genres and exploits certain familiar comedy constructions and forms with the intent (and, it is to be hoped, the effect) of entertaining, amusing, provoking laughter. The tartanry Richard Dyer abhors might alternatively been analysed as irony or kitsch, rather than merely dismissed as ghastly, sickly-sweet and irritating. The issue of Rab C. Nesbitt as stereotype and cliché or pantomime buffoon or ironic pricker of the middle classes' social conscience again resurfaces. As John Caughie notes, '[i]rony on its own, after all, always risks reviving the tired old representations it is negating' (1990:26). The question of whether a new sketch series which eschews the recognised Scottish themes, topics and emblems will be perceived as Scottish (at home and across the network) or become as popular with Scots as the more 'parochial' *Chewin The Fat* remains to be seen.

One way to proceed is to consult with Scottish adults in the post-devolution era and to attempt to move closer to an holistic idea of Scottishness which includes social perspectives as well as cultural conditions. When John Caughie says of the 'No Mean City' Glasgow policeman *Taggart*, 'he may be a stereotype, but he's our stereotype' (1990:13) he invokes not only myths of Clydesidism and Glaswegian hard-man stereotypes but also hints toward an identificatory relationship enjoyed by Scottish audiences. Taggart is drama however not comedy: the problematics hinted at earlier arise again, namely the question of what happens when fictional myths and historical discourses through which they have been understood are reconfigured through comedy? What happens when new myths are created through comedy (for example the *Rab C. Nesbitt* representation of people in Glasgow's run-down shipyard neighbourhood, Govan), how are they received and how do audiences relate to them? How are traditional comedy stereotypes read: Ironically? Affectionately? Cringingly?

The fundamental question on which this study is based and which links the first section of this thesis to the rest—from the study of television texts, comedy structures and national myths, to discovering ways of researching audiences' responses to locally-focused and locally-produced comedy—is this: How do Scottish people engage with the relation between representations and representativeness in the doubled, shifting ironic gestures of Scottish television comedy? And at the same time, how does the researcher go about approaching these subjects, given that no academic models or precedents exist? Even without the problem of comedy this study is unusual: more often, studies of a nation's culture focuses upon theorising a social entity from its political history and texts or cultural products. Engaging with social agents directly is somehow designated as the realm of the social scientist and not appropriate to the work of cultural theorists. Although I have no illusions to bridge this divide (which is perhaps less fixed and much smaller than imagined by some critics) I do however hope to demonstrate the benefits of approaching the issue of nation and culture from both ends, as it were.

The first section of the thesis has explored and challenged the dynamics of television comedy through genre study against a survey of contemporary texts, and identified the tensions surrounding modern discourses through which we may read Scottish culture, in particular through comparisons between traditional comedy stereotypes of Scottishness and contemporary Scottish comic focal points. While selective, the first section of the thesis has set a broad background for interrogating the problematics of researching comedy with audiences, and attempting to locate and understand the relations between representations and representativeness.

The second half of the thesis begins with a literature survey of audience research epistemologies and methodological examples. The final section presents the data, analysis and interpretation from the audience study. The overall objective in the audience study is to initiate discussion to the audience groups' own agendas television comedy fragments from established programmes and emerging series, familiar and unfamiliar performers, tartanry and parody and irony, clips from sitcoms, stand-up and sketch shows. In this way it is hoped a more pluralistic and less prescriptive methodology might enable a greater understanding of the meanings of Scottish television comedy in context.

Notes

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[1] John Caughie (1996:223) distils the arguments into a dialogue between 'representativeness' and 'representations' in culture. Thus: 'The principle seems to me to circulate around what it is we want to celebrate in the notion of a national cinema or a national television. Is it a national cinema or television as *representation* of the nation, capturing the images around which the complexity of the nation can identify itself as a unity, representing itself to the outside and securing its continuity on the global market? Or is it a national cinema or national television as *representative* of the nation, offering channels for different voices, capturing its diversity and reflecting the fault lines which disunite the culture into differences and complexities rather than imposing on it the imaginary and marketable identity often implicit in the desire for a unified National Culture or a national cinema?' (Emphasis in original). This is not true only of Scottish culture, of course. For discussion of New Zealand film and television comedy (particularly the work of Peter Jackson) in terms of tensions about representations, national identity and culture industries, see Robinson 1999; Robinson 1998; Robinson 1997.

[2] McCrone draws upon Thomas Knowles's (1983) analysis of the Kailyard writers in sociological and historical context, for example that 'specifically Scottish stories existed to satisfy English demand' (1983:29), a demand not easily met from the prior 'compact body of history and myth relating to the Scottish national character and Scottish life' (27). Knowles also supports Tom Nairn's observation that, as McCrone puts it (1997:179), '[t]he key role of the emigré both as producer and consumer was vital' in the development and popularity of Kailyard writing.

[3] For example, consider the pessimism expressed by Cairns Craig (1982:[illegible]-5) in *Scotch Reels*: 'For the problem that these mythic structures have left to twentieth-century Scottish art is that there are no tools which the artists can inherit from the past which are not tainted, warped, blunted by the uses to which they have been put'.

[4] There is a marked gender disparity in all areas of comedy production, not only in Scotland.

[5] Those interviewed formally were given prior notice of questions (though many ignored the list), gave permission to be tape-recorded and were all offered anonymity. Some felt more strongly about this than others but since the total number of informants was small I have elected not to ascribe quotes to named individuals at all. Some explained that they were barred by their employment contracts from making attributable comments in public. I also had numerous informal conversations with comedians, writers and the co-owner of a very successful stand-up comedy club.

[6] Example of Glasgow-Edinburgh joke, from R.K.S. Macaulay (1987:54),
"Are you from Edinburgh? No, I cut my mouth on a bottle."

[7] 'C' describes his show as fitting a new strain of 'broken comedy', comedy without punchlines or obvious ends to sketches, comedy that aligns itself more toward the 'surreal' work of Chris Morris's late-night experimental sketch series *Jaaaam* or primetime comedy programming like *Big Train, Smack The Pony* or *The League of Gentlemen* (none of which is produced in Scotland).

[8] Jokes sent to me by electronic mail immediately after Phil Neville ruined England's chances in the third match included gags like:
"Why aren't the England football team allowed to own a dog? Because they can't hold on to a lead."
"What's the difference between the England team and a tea-bag? The tea-bag stays in the cup longer."
"What's the difference between a roll of sellotape and Phil Neville? One's a glueless kit."
I also received longer jokes like:
"Did you feel it? Last night at 9.28pm BST, scientists at the British Geological Survey recorded an earthquake measuring 4.7 on the Richter scale. The tremor which was detectable throughout the world, had its epicentre in England and is thought to have been caused by 21 million people simultaneously shouting the word, 'Wanker'."

[9] There are endless Sectarian jokes many of which, like the football jokes discussed above, have a transference rather than an essence to the gag: almost any group could be the target and it merely depends where the joke-teller's sympathies lie. The gentlest Old Firm joke I encountered was this one in 2001 about the Rangers and Celtic stadia after Celtic won the three largest championships in Scotland ('The Treble'): "Why is there no tea at Ibrox? All the mugs are on the field and all the cups are at Parkhead." One might easily rearrange this joke for any pair of clubs or countries. For example, another generic joke goes like this: "How many [football club] fans does it take to change a lightbulb? All of them: one to change the bulb and the other to hold the ladder".

However, there are also examples of more topic-related humour: one interviewee told (then explained) about not being able to get an Orange signal in Dublin (Orange being his mobile telephone company). See Robinson (2000) for a discussion of sectarian football humour in Glasgow.

[10] One exception was 'A' who mentioned this topic in the context of Billy Connolly's history as a Clydeside Glaswegian.

[11] See almost any Scottish joke book or stand-up comedian for examples. Dark winters: 'See that eclipse last August, everyone standing around and it's dead dark at midday? We have that all the time in Scotland, it's called November'. Stinginess: Scot, 'It's easier to get a drink out of a coconut than out of an Aberdonian'; Aberdonian, 'Well awa' and buy yersel' a coconut then'. In his history of the Scottish stage comedians, Gordon Irving notes how stage characters were performed and circulated so as to become not only local caricatures but international stereotypes. Thus Irving notes (1977:8), '[Will Fyffe] caricatured the drunken wee Glasgow man and, by doing so, won fame for himself and probably created an image that the Glaswegian today would rather forget'. Elsewhere Irving writes (1977:28) romantically and nostalgically, '[Tommy Morgan] came from the tenement-symphony areas, where humour flourishes in adversity. He had the advantage of poverty. It's a true saying that some of out greatest comedians come from the poor among us—wealth doesn't aid a sense of fun'. And of Harry Lauder, the personification of Tartanry and Kailyardism combined, Irving writes (1977:81), 'The Lauder legend is so strong that many Scots condemn it, believing that a false image of ultra-thrifty Scots has gone round the world. The nation is really, they say, composed of generous and hospitable people. But to Harry Lauder it was a stage gimmick'. Caricatures, necessarily distorted through emphasising and exaggerating certain aspects of the character, became associated with certain locales. Of course other factors contribute to the circulation and adoption of ironic caricatures and negative stereotypes, but Irving's position is clear: many of these internationally beloved comics produced caricatures of Scots local traits and by circulating these characters across large geographic areas, served to disperse these particular views of the Scottish psyche around Scotland, Britain and the English-speaking world. See also (Davies 1988:13-5) for jokes about 'dour, rational, stingy Scotsmen [with] Calvin-bounded-lives'. These jokes in particular ascribe stinginess to Aberdonians ('as tight as two coats of paint')—a trait some Aberdonians in turn ascribe to Dundonians—but do not draw upon the other discourses of Aberdeen humour, notably the jocular rumour than Aberdonian men have conjugal relations with sheep. Jerry Palmer (1988:108) writes of 'Humor in Great Britain' with almost no mention of Scotland *per se* except to refer to the 'supposed meanness of the Scots and Jews'.

CHAPTER THREE

Empirical Research Problematics: Literature Survey and Discussion

Because research into television audiences is a relatively new discipline which develops from diverse academic traditions it can interlace only tentatively and approximately the political and aesthetic ideas it borrows from several epistemological positions. Each new study represents a bricolage, an ephemeral central strand supported by and contributing to a fragile web of connections and contradictions. On the one hand to embrace relativism and to assume carte blanche—that anything goes, that any theory or combination of theories may be applied or reconfigured according to the whim of the researcher—is to risk weakening the individual project and with it, the emerging field of television studies. But on the other hand to be constrained by convention and doxa is to miss out on unexplored territory (in terms of theory, method, and thus radical applications or otherwise invisible audiences) and to deny a critical inquisitiveness. By critiquing a number of studies in depth I hope to develop and demonstrate an understanding of how the existing literature can be utilised when approaching and describing television comedy audiences. This chapter marks a shift from the earlier theoretical discussion of genre, modes of comedy, and notions of national humour and Scottishness in comedy programming, toward the methodological processes and empirical problematics of studying audiences.

First however I would like to comment on the struggle between scholars over two key concepts: 'ethnography' and 'audience'. Marie Gillespie (1995) lived and worked as a secondary school teacher in Southall for over a decade and consequently became very familiar with the social (cultural, economic, religious) practices of the local Punjabi community. Her study particularly focuses on youth and their attitudes about television and popular culture but also incorporates a 'thick description' of the inter- and intra-family relations through which the young people's subjectivity is constituted. Gillespie is therefore a participant observer in the social anthropological tradition, living in the community and being accepted by them, becoming one of 'them' and finding a sense of her own separateness decreasing as time passes. Unlike positivist ethnographers (for example, Bronislaw Malinowski) Gillespie is self-reflexive about her status (a white, educated, independent woman) and uses her experiences to explore both the cultural practices of her subjects and the ethnographic enterprise in which she works. Because of the depth and breadth of contacts with the community she has studied, Gillespie is critical of audience researchers who use the term 'ethnography' to bestow credibility on their non-ethnographic qualitative audience work.[1, 2]

Gillespie (1995:51-2) explains her choice of methodologies with the cautious

qualification that:

> questionnaire design is itself a form of data construction and manipulation, rather than a means of gathering facts in some "neutral" and "value-free", quasi-ritualistic procedure which might be supposed to produce definitive factual accuracy.

By 'questionnaire design' Gillespie means not only the organisation of closed-ended questions into formal written surveys but many forms of social research techniques: open-ended questions, discussions, interviews, focus groups, participant observation and even the recruitment of, and informal social interaction with, the people whose opinions are sought. Thus Gillespie suggests that social research constructs rather than locates meaning. Asserting that, '[q]uantative survey methods are ideally suited to the purposes of establishing broad patterns of media consumption and taste, if used in conjunction with more qualitative methods' (1995:52) Gillespie emphasises the need to match research tools to the purpose required rather than to rely on a single dataset or to privilege certain data merely on the basis of their method of collection. Rather than choose sides in an historical intellectual debate which dichotomises and antagonises qualitative versus quantitative methods Gillespie prefers to interrelate the research materials produced so as to exploit and enhance their complementarity.[3]

As well as the different uses of the term 'ethnography', 'audience' becomes rearticulated and redefined which each new piece of writing. John Hartley takes the view that there are no audiences to study except those created through the empirical practices of audience research. Applying Benedict Anderson's descriptions of the processes of national self-identifications Hartley describes audiences as 'imagined communities'; thus Hartley writes (1989:227):

> Audiences may be imagined empirically, theoretically, or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the needs of the imagining institution. In no case is the audience "real," or external to its discursive construction. There is no actual audience that lies beyond its production as a category, which is merely to say that audiences are only ever encountered per se as *representations*.

Hartley rejects empirical research on the grounds of its 'presumption that audiences are not merely the product of the research into them but exist prior to, apart from, and beyond the activities of both television and television research' (1989:229). Problematically, Hartley achieves this position by falsifying the evidence before him, namely by criticising David Morley's 1980 *Nationwide* study for showing the text in question to people who were unfamiliar with it and for doing so in an institutional rather than a domestic setting (two issues Morley himself addresses fully; see Morley 1981, Morley 1986, both of which are discussed in more detail below). Thus, Hartley concludes, Morley's *Nationwide* audience is an 'invisible fiction' produced through the academic discourses and practices of empirical research (1989:229). This is significant because Morley's work has been and remains so influential to British television audience research.

Hartley is partly correct because, expanding Gillespie's point above, audience reception data are necessarily *constructed* and Morley's use of pre-formed groups which

did not usually watch the news programme means his empirical research in *The Nationwide Audience* is non-naturalistic. However Hartley's subsequent dismissal of further empirical explorations of audiences ignores both Morley's own self-critique and the secondary outcome of the research: post-*Nationwide* and post-*Family Television*, empirical studies of television audiences are now conducted very differently. Hartley's critique of *The Nationwide Audience* also ignores Morley's reason for conducting the study in the first place: testing theoretical models (developed from Frank Parkin and Stuart Hall) of 'encoding' and 'decoding' in relation to people in particular class positions.

While Shaun Moores (1993:2-3) is right to assert that '[t]here is no stable entity which we can isolate and identify as the media audience, no single object that is unprobematically "there" for us to observe and analyse', it is also the case that television does indeed have audiences. Ien Ang expands upon this impasse—how audiences might be located, studied, understood, especially outwith industrial ratings mechanisms which attempt to discipline them with measurement and surveillance—when she writes that there is an important distinction 'between "television audience" as discursive construct and the social world of actual audiences' (1991:13), a distinction Moores supports. Ang suggests that although in terms of producing ratings data for industry '[t]he audience commodity as a symbolic object is constructed by, and is not pre-existent to the discursive procedures of audience research' (1991:56), nevertheless 'however object-ified "television audience" as a categorical entity is, its construction is related to the subjective moment of actual people watching television' (1991:61). Moreover, Ang expands the notion of the audience beyond Hartley's anti-empirical rhetorics, beyond the industrial 'commodity' which she critiques, beyond the phenomenological semiotics of an individual or group's 'reading' of television texts (which Morley investigated in 1980) and uses her own term 'actual audiences' as a 'provisional shorthand for the infinite, contradictory, dispersed and dynamic *practices and experiences* of television audiencehood enacted by people in their everyday lives' (emphasis added, 1991:13).

These many tensions within television audience research remain critically unresolved. By attempting to locate and understand audiences empirically are we instead creating fictions? How might we, how ought we to study actual social audiences and their 'practices and experiences' fully? Whereas James Lull (1990:33) was able to organise observation of more than two hundred families for several hours across several days each and arrange depth-interviews with every family member, in pragmatic organisational terms such extensive, sustained, micro-social 'ethnomethodological' research is beyond the reach of most researchers. Lull's work is not an ethnography in Gillespie's terms because his study involves many sub-contracted observers working in detail to a preprinted schedule and for very short periods rather than immersing himself fully into an 'other' culture over an extended period. In this way Lull situates the act of television watching not only within its domestic environment but also within the practices and family structures of individuals' everyday lived experience.

The examples discussed in this chapter are not exclusively studies of television

audiences: some consider video watching, or movies, or using various forms of technology. Even those studies where television audiences are the focus differ in terms of the texts used, the methodologies, the settings, and the locales or countries where the research is undertaken. Thus my collection demonstrates the variety and disparity of techniques and approaches. By concentrating on methodology in this section I explore the practicalities (as well as the theoretical limits) of empirical audience research so that my own research can be conducted appropriately as well as effectively. The examples are discussed in a continuum from less controlled data collection to that more tightly controlled by the researcher; within each subsection I have avoided chronologising the studies which might suggest (spuriously) a development within the group when the whole realm of audience studies is cross-fertilised in a manner which is more organic and less organised than just the chronological progression of ideas. (The Semi-Structured Interview subsection breaks this rule; the reasons for this are explained there more fully.)

DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGICAL EXAMPLES

Unstructured viewer diaries/ letters

Sean Day-Lewis (1989); Ien Ang (1985); Jacqui Gabb (1999).

The BFI Audience Tracking Study provides the basis for two separate studies, Duncan Petrie and Janet Willis's (1995) *Television and the Household,* and David Gauntlett and Annette Hill's (1999) *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life.* The study arose from the 'One Day In The Life Of Television' project which encouraged open diaries about television viewing from anyone in the United Kingdom prepared to contribute (see Day-Lewis 1989). Leaflets about the project were widely distributed and some 18,000 people submitted their perceptions in relation to the programmes offered by the then four terrestrial channels on November 1st 1988. As well as members of the general public another 2,500 people working in the broadcasting industry wrote diaries of their experiences in television production on that day.

According to Sean Day-Lewis (1989:xi), the One Day project borrows from (and marks fifty years' passage from) the phenomenology of 'Mass-Observation, that very 1930s concept of a nation looking at itself'; however, the vast amounts of open-diary data collected here tell researchers very little about the respondents' attitudes to television as a lived experience (in the manner that Mass-Observation methods might) nor do they provide insight into the role of television in the understanding of a shared cultural 'moment'. Unlike the diaries of responses to royal Coronations broadcast in 1937 and 1951 the 'One Day' respondents had only an insignificant day's television to comment upon.[4], [5] The project offers an impressive resource but much of the commentary, including that on comedy shows, reads like this typical example (Day-Lewis 1989:325):

"We had decided to watch this series [*Colin's Sandwich*] from the beginning, because we admire

Mel Smith. My husband bears an amazing resemblance to the character of Colin and this can be amusing, and also extremely depressing..."
—Fiona Boismaison, Executive Officer, Department of Employment, St Neots, Cambridgeshire.

While interesting and offering differing perceptions from a very broad range of viewers, the data collected remains unsuitable for further analysis or triangulation since it is anecdotal and entirely unstructured by questionnaire; at the same time the respondent sample is self-selected, unrepresentative and, for my purposes, insufficiently detailed. For example, either an age (for a child) or an occupation (for an adult) is given but not both, and no mention of national identity or ethnicity occurs except by individual respondents.

Ien Ang's (1985) approach to the Dutch audience of *Dallas* uses another kind of open format wherein the respondent can exercise some choices regarding how and about what they write. Ang's motivation for this was largely comparable with Janice Radway's (1987) approach to romance fiction readers, that is, expressing a feminist politics through which they each sought to empower individual women (and men) to give voice to their lived experiences as audiences (or, in Radway's case, as readers) of texts perceived to have low cultural value. Ang (1985:10) placed an advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine explaining she was writing a university thesis, expressing her own conflicting feelings about watching *Dallas* and asking 'anyone' to write to tell her why they like or dislike the show. She received 42 replies 'varying in length from a few lines to around ten pages' of which 'only three letters were from boys or men. The rest were written by girls or women' (ibid). Acknowledging the lack of representativeness in her sample, Ang declares that her interest lies in reading the letters less for content and more for 'the relation between pleasure and ideology' (1989: ibid), looking beyond the explicit descriptions by the *Dallas* watchers to explore the cultural significance for Dutch women and men of a mid-Reagan era American television text.

The 'text' is an open concept here: Ang's respondents are not guided to address particular episodes or series, nor are they given instructions about contextualising the shows at all. Acknowledging the porosity of the object being examined Ang (1985:27) describes *Dallas* as a 'discontinuous text', 'an incomplete, "infinite" text'. What Ang means is that because she is interested in material not necessarily explicit in the respondents' letters—their assumptions and expectations about Dutch culture, for example—the fact that both she and the letter-writers treat a long-running serial as an organic whole is itself an important response to the text. Occasionally comments articulate the television show with secondary texts like magazine articles about the stars but usually the viewers treat the show as a stand-alone text, although many writers also reflect upon their own lives and experiences when discussing what they like or dislike about *Dallas*.[6]

Jacqui Gabb (1999) draws upon Ang's methods, placing an advertisement in the *Hull Daily Mail* and asking for fans of the British television programme *Gardeners' World* to share their ideas about it with her. Gabb received 'over thirty letters' all from women; from these Gabb 'selected a typical sample, of eight women, to be interviewed in more

depth' (1999:256). This is all the detail Gabb offers on her methodology: from this starting position she offers no insight into how the women are 'typical' or what transpired in the interviews. Indeed Gabb does not make clear if and how these women's contributions are qualitatively different from the quotes she has gleaned from letters to the *Radio Times*.[7] In fact Gabb borrows quotes from four of her letter-responses while using only three of her eight interviewees; but, more problematically, she cites from both sets of letterwriters in an identical fashion. Thus a *Radio Times* letter signed by Dorothy Brooks or Tony Clayton becomes a comment from 'Dorothy B' or 'Tony C', blending in her report with those from her interviewees 'Rosie M' or 'Mary S'.[8]

Not only does Gabb leave her methodological and theoretical assumptions in terms of the interviews and the letters unexplored and unexplained but she also blurs the results with unsolicited texts already abridged by *Radio Times*. Any interest in the women as textual producers remains concealed. Instead Gabb thinks of the host of *Gardeners' World* and the programme's audience in terms of gender and subjectivity, generating her ideas through applications of feminist psychoanalysis theory and not the interpretation of qualitative data collected in the Hull letters and interviews. Thus Gabb's 'fans' become supplementary to those men and women who had written to *Radio Times* rather than being understood in terms of their individual and collective relationships to *Gardeners' World*; both groups are understood as consuming the text which 'hails' them and situates them in terms of gendered pleasures (1999:257). While explicitly utilising ideas and methods from Ien Ang, this work has little in common with Ang's aims and objectives which concentrated on finding out how fans derived pleasure as they constructed meanings from *Dallas*. Gabb's work thus uses viewer commentary to support her preconceptions about ideology and gender rather than exploring the audience as producing meanings from texts.

Structured viewer diaries: *British Film Institute's Audience Tracking Study*

Duncan Petrie and Janet Willis (1995); David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999)

In the British Film Institute's Audience Tracking Study (1991-5) participants from across the United Kingdom were selected and invited to express themselves in three question-format diaries per year for five years. This study was developed from the 'One Day' project and written up into two separate volumes. The former considers the first year's diaries and maps preliminary findings whereas the latter provides a more substantial presentation and analysis of the data from the whole five years. In their introduction Gauntlett and Hill describe the BFI's ATS sample of 509 respondents selected from the 'One Day' contributors as 'generally representative of the population as a whole' but by the end of the study only 427 diarists remain; Gauntlett and Hill do not analyse the shifts in representativeness that such attrition might create. In part this is not so damaging to the BFI's study because the project sought qualitative data as well as quantitative statistics. Part of this qualitative research sought specifically to look at longitudinal shifts

within the sample and even had there been no attrition, the ages, occupations, family status, locations, lifestyles and perhaps even genders of some respondents could be expected to have changed, with possible subsequent changes in perceptions and attitudes.

Although the multiplicity and fluidity of the respondents' identity components is tracked and analysed one significant piece of information about people in the sample is missing from the study. Gauntlett and Hill write (1999:14):

> The BFI did not record the ethnicity of diarists, and no questions were asked about ethnicity or racial issues. This has meant that, unfortunately, we were unable to address in this book questions of ethnicity in relation to either broadcasting content or reception. It seems likely that ethnic minorities were under-represented in this study, and this—along with the lack of data on these related issues—has been disappointing.

Since Gauntlett and Hill did not commission, design or administer the questionnaires but could only work with the data provided by the BFI their disappointment (and caution about making the failure a larger issue) is understandable. The omission of data about respondents' ethnicity is all the more inexplicable because ethnicity was noted by Duncan Petrie in his earlier analysis of the 'youth' audience. Petrie (1995a:24) notes the diversity of tastes among this audience including comments from a young Asian woman 'brought up in a strict Muslim household' and a young black woman diarist who commented on stereotypes and identity.[9] I would share Gauntlett and Hill's disappointment if their comments were correct. However, BFI's Audience Tracking Study questionnaire for July 1995 (BFI 1996:17) asks about the participants' ethnicity first, and disability second; interestingly, disability is a subject Gauntlett and Hill discuss in detail whereas ethnicity is completely ignored.

Petrie and Willis's 1995 anthology of earlier papers organises diary data in ways that differ from Gauntlett and Hill's including relating viewing to age, geographic location (metropolitan London), or 'nationality' (Scotland). For example Petrie (1995b) worked from some of the earlier diaries and describes how Diary Three asked respondents about non-networked television programmes. The question put was (Petrie 1995b:83):

> How do you feel about the regional programmes in your area: do they reflect your region, your interests and the issues that concern you—and if so, how? Do they sometimes miss important things?

Petrie notes that, 'only one respondent offered the anticipated "Scotland isn't a region, it's a nation" line' to this 'deliberately provocative' question (1995:83); however, the diary did elicit many varied opinions on subjects ranging from televised sport to programmes in Gaelic.

Petrie's article demonstrates some methodological tensions: researchers can be bold and direct in their questioning and must be open to surprises in the respondents' answers (Paul Willis 1980:90). But whether the survey question uncovered an issue or created it is another matter. Petrie notes that some of the respondents with strongest opinions had expressed similar positions in earlier diaries in response to other general questioning (1995:83). However many others had not: had the sample been larger, perhaps dividing

the respondents into two parallel groups—one to receive provocative questioning about nation and identity, one control group to be asked nothing along these lines—clearer indications about the extent to which the 'Scottish' perspective as an issue was either made manifest by the survey or originated in the diarists might have been given. Nevertheless, although his sample population is small (n=56) Petrie explores attitudes towards regional television, parochialism, Gaelic language, 'Nationalism', and the relevance or appropriateness of English-produced programming for Scots.

Unlike Gauntlett and Hill (1999:19) who avoid identifying diarists' geographic locations to avoid producing 'mental stereotypes which any other details about a diarist were just 'pasted' on to, creating a veneer of understanding which is often actually illusory', Petrie includes respondents' locations.[10] As Petrie shows (1995:88), of those people among the Scottish population who speak Gaelic (at that time, about 82,000 people), 55% reside in the Grampian television region and 45% reside in STV's catchment. This means that comments (Petrie 1995:87)—from someone in Ayrshire, someone in Glasgow, someone in Shetland—about Gaelic language television programming are more meaningfully contextualised because we can know the kinds of television texts available in the different regions as well as the cultural and linguistic contexts in which the audiences live.[11] Petrie is hindered by a lack of data about the correspondents' ethnicities (although, as I have mentioned above, some youth respondents self-identified as Asian, or black, and Petrie has considered their views in this light); nonetheless he unpacks the statistical aggregations in a way that allows a better understanding of the sample to which he refers.

Semi-structured interviews in respondents' domestic settings

David Morley (1986); Dorothy Hobson (1982); Ann Gray (1992); Shaun Moores (1996)

David Morley, Dorothy Hobson, Ann Gray and Shaun Moores all begin with similar ideas about the role of television and related technologies in the domestic space and in viewers' lived experiences. Each of these researchers develops the semi-structured interview methodology differently but they all use qualitative research to understand more about real historical individuals' consumption of television and related media. For example, Morley asked families about the role of television (and VCRs and remote controls) in their home, enquiring into the relations of gender, life-stage and employment to understand how television is valued and experienced in the domestic setting. Hobson interviewed women (usually alone but sometimes in groups or with their husbands) from a variety of differently-composed households about their fascination with the 1980s British soap opera, *Crossroads*. Hobson's observations include many of the relations of family life and patterns of television viewing later explored by Gray and Moores, among others. Gray and Moores both acknowledge and critique the theoretical and methodological contributions of Morley and Hobson before them, and in this regard the latter subsection is critically reflexive and interrogates the discipline's shifts in thinking. Unlike the others,

then, this section aims to recognise and explore its critical chronological thread (although Hobson is not listed here first as that might imply that Morley's work derived from Hobson's when instead it represents developments from his previous *Nationwide* study). Gray reconfigures their studies in her exploration of women's leisure use of VCR technology, selecting from among the research tools and approaches used by Morley or Hobson to find methodologies and data that are both qualitative *and* focused, exploratory and systematic.[12] In South Wales, Moores interviewed households (rather than constructing a sample of approximately similar nuclear families) about how they had integrated satellite technologies into their television viewing patterns. The studies' aims, methodologies and conclusions differ in each case but the researchers' commitment to empirical collection of qualitative data about domestic television use means some choices remain fundamental, for example preferring open-ended questioning techniques and conducting interviews in the participants' homes. Discussing each example in greater depth allows insight into the logic which informs the development of this qualitative research strand.

David Morley interviewed eighteen households 'drawn from one area of South London. All possessed a video recorder. All consisted of [nuclear families]. All were white' (Morley 1986:52). Morley sought to understand what happens when families watch television. Achieving this included his questioning family members about uses of the television equipment (with hire videos, timeshifting, assembling a tape library, games console use); tastes for certain kinds of television programmes; interpretation of texts; the interactions between family members when choosing programmes; and the dynamics of family watching (including control of the remote). His conclusions indicate that when respondents discussed their favourite show, channel, or programme genre, there were significant consistent separations between the genders (and, much less visibly, between social classes) in terms of 'viewing style, power over programme choice and programme type preference' (1986:173). The use of the VCR and remote control also showed consistent gender divisions, with men more often taking command of these interactive technologies (1986:146).

Methodologically, Morley preferred a tape-recorded interview with each set of parents followed by a separate interview with the younger children after ascertaining details (through questionnaires) about the family's composition, education levels, financial and employment status, and household television access (1986:51-2).[13] By interviewing the respondents in their family groups Morley hoped to ensure the responses he received were more truthful than had he talked to family members individually: in describing this methodology he refers to the interview technique as 'designed to allow a fair degree of probing' which constituted 'a complex form of interrogation' with the 'built-in safeguards' of people clarifying or correcting other family members' statements (Morley 1986:52). In this regard although Morley's interviews were only one or two hours long he is able to pursue lines of thought and to double-back on respondents' answers in precisely the way diaries and questionnaires prevent. Morley collects his respondents' answers and

presents them as direct quotes arranged in two separate groupings: first, the families are assembled into four approximate class bands; second, the families are all considered together so that aspects of gender relations and differences can be observed more clearly. Morley acknowledges that the number of families in his sample is small, all-white, disproportionately 'traditional nuclear' in relation to the general United Kingdom population and from a geographically small, 'stable inner city environment' (1986:52-3), but this seems to me to provide an internal coherence which allows him to make comparisons between the family groups.

Dorothy Hobson (1982) on the other hand chooses a comparative approach, mixing unstructured interviews with semi-participant observation to understand how (predominantly women) viewers enjoyed the 1980s dinner-time soap *Crossroads*. Visiting the respondents at their homes Hobson watched an episode of the programme with them—often as they prepared meals and attended to children and husbands—and then interviewed them. Women varied in age and came from differently composed households: one elderly woman lived alone and was able to watch uninterrupted; another younger interviewee had pre-school children who not only required feeding and their mother's care during the screening but also demanded attention from Hobson (1982:112). Some women watched with sisters, husbands or teenage children but each had to negotiate somehow between the competing demands on their time and the desire to watch their favourite soap. As Hobson notes depressingly, '[t]elevision can compete with other interests but not with the duties and responsibilities, particularly those of women towards their families' (ibid). There exists a tension between the serial format which requires ongoing viewing and the material social circumstances of the audience to whom it appeals. The regular scheduling means the audience can develop a domestic 'routine' which allows them to acquire a *Crossroads* 'habit' despite the lack of leisure time and uninterrupted viewing conditions. Hobson reminds us that '[f]or some women viewers this time never arrives, for they never feel free from domestic responsibilities' (1982:115).

By seeing her respondents in their domestic environments, however, Hobson not only makes them feel comfortable about discussing their viewing habits but also observes for herself the interaction of television and lived family experience. By interviewing them immediately after the screening she is able to probe further how typical that night's activity was or how certain problems of negotiating family and social demands are settled as well as having extended discussions with the viewers about the plot, characters and situations of the programme. By quoting not only their responses but also her questions and comments Hobson keeps their answers in context while at the same time switching between her role as researcher and her position as fan and regular viewer of the programme.[14] Having spent an evening in their home Hobson thinks of her respondents as individuals within specific domestic contexts (she gives their first names whereas Morley identified families by number to show their unit coherence) rather than as representative of class, age, education or employment status, or other social groupings. Her writing thus creates a feminist discursive environment sympathetic to their personal

testimonies which privileges individual expression in order to break down presumed categorisations of womanhood in general and stereotypes of soap opera fans in particular.

But as Ann Gray (1992) points out, what appears to be a strength from one epistemological perspective is a weakness from another. She writes (1992:9):

> The subjects of [Hobson's] study are distinct only in that they are fans of the soap opera.... Information about the women, their class, age, family circumstances and employment, where it appears at all, is introduced in an unsystematic way, resulting in a collection of disembodied reports, organized around different forms of reported and observed viewing practices and pleasures.... [Thus] the study is almost a celebratory account of viewing pleasures associated with soap opera.

Gray's critique highlights and explores the tensions between Hobson's attempt to be respectful and attentive to the individual's personal story and the need to produce critical studies which situate the study's respondents in their material specificity as historical subjects.[15] In some respects, this clash of intellectual cultures comes about because Hobson and Gray occupy different niches both within the paradigmatic boundaries of the disciplines and within the historical trajectories of the disciplines.

Gray's preferred method is to conduct extended interviews with thirty women in their homes about their domestic use of technology including VCRs. Unlike Hobson, Gray articulates together her methodological focus and her theoretical assumptions so that she is self-reflexive about her research practices. Gray is aware that her 'ethnographic intentions' carry a range of potential values from positive emancipation through to negative subjugation in terms of the relations between researcher and researched. Thus she makes explicit the tensions and disparities between her position as an academic with 'access to quite powerful institutions and intellectual capital' and the less empowered positions of her working- or middle-class respondents (1992:34). She attempts to reduce the power disparity between herself and her subjects in part by assembling a sample with whom she has particular social and cultural characteristics in common. Thus, although her interviewees range in life-stage and social class position and have different employment and familial characteristics, they were almost all married heterosexual women and were exclusively white. Gray writes (1992:31-2):

> All the women shared the same ethnic background, for two main reasons. First I wanted to explore how factors such as age, class, employment and so on crossed gender within a broadly culturally homogeneous group, and second because.... as a white researcher, I felt unqualified to establish the appropriate subject-to-subject relationship with women whose ethnic background I did not share.

As well as constructing a sample of women with whom she hopes to relate comfortably Gray intends that her interview practices empower the women to speak freely. There are tensions here also: her 'sample' is chosen for balance and to provide a cross-section of some variables and a constancy among others (in some respects using a 'quantitative' or empiricist approach to her sampling) whereas her discussions with the women engage with them as individuals and work towards a qualitative understanding of their everyday lives. She works toward this second goal in connected ways. First, her questions are open-

ended and allow the women to partly direct the exchange so that '[m]any of the conversations were fun and certainly transgressed all notions of the "ideal" research interview' (1992:33). Second, Gray drew upon many of her life experiences, situating her own subjectivity within 'a very particular level of identification' with her interviewees so that her study was 'enriched by that shared knowledge' (1992:34). Gray uses autobiographical information to reveal the 'deeply contradictory' (ibid) nature of her subjectivity especially in terms of upward class mobility, but criticises Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) similar elaborations as shifting the balance of subjectivity toward '*self*-exploration through research' (emphasis added, ibid).

Gray is self-reflexive about the power relations of race and gender and seeks to neutralise their effect by only including white women in her study. There are theoretical and methodological tensions in her logic because by suggesting that power can be exchanged and shared solely between researchers and respondents of similar backgrounds Gray is implicitly reproducing the social relations by which members of minority communities are not given a voice. It would be interesting to know whether Gray would have felt 'qualified' to approach working-class women had her own personal life-history not been similar to the trajectories of theirs. It seems precious to judge Gray harshly for being aware of the problematics of 'ethnographic' research and for expressing her arguments explicitly. But tensions remain between her identifying with the respondents to the point of becoming 'a woman in [her own] study' (a result she describes in positive terms) and keeping vigilant for symptoms of the 'wider social and cultural networks of power' (1992:34, 30). The way she reveals the contradictions of her position as researcher becomes a strength of her study, however, as she keeps foregrounded the material and discursive practices of social and cultural relations of power both in the women's domestic environments and in their relations to her.

Shaun Moores (1996) also explores the effect of new technologies on viewing practices and family relations, interviewing eighteen households in South Wales about their new satellite receiver dishes in the early 1990s. Moores writes (1996:32):

> I wanted to comprehend the ways in which a new media technology was being appropriated and interpreted in different domestic and neighbourhood setting—as it entered into and helped to articulate specific social relations or divisions of class, gender, generation and ethnicity.

He reports that interviews were 'relaxed in manner and conversational in tone' adding that the respondents were 'actively encouraged to speak from experience and to relate episodes from their everyday life' (1996:34). By interviewing the respondents in their homes he is also able to observe both familial interactions (or their equivalent in non-family households) and the organisation of the domestic space, drawing conclusions about the impact of broadcasting technology on the households' social and cultural leisure practices. His recruitment methods involved locating satellite dishes on the sides of houses and then approaching the occupiers by letter; thus the participants represented 'no common household type' (ibid) although Moores clusters the eighteen into three subgroups according to the location and apparent affluence of their neighbourhoods.

Moores also presents his material in different ways across his study. His first subgroup is discussed in relation to his 'empirical portraits' (1996:44) of two households, but his second and third are organised according to 'thematic subheadings' (1996:47). Like Hobson, Moores avoids presenting any quantitative data partly because his mix of households is not designed to be a representative sample but rather consists of collected impressions and descriptive portraits which express the 'fine-grained detail of consumer practices' (1996:35).

Thus Moores's results like Hobson's are very difficult to match or compare with those of other studies. And while he acknowledges in his introductory remarks the 'relationships of power which are constituted between researchers and researched in the field' and the problematics of the 'ethics or politics of research itself' (1996:31) in terms of his own 'ethnographic intentions', he seems to make this explanatory gesture more to appease his critics (including Marie Gillespie, referred to above) than as a critical reexamination of his assumptions and practices in the field and in his writing. The fact that Moores constructs—rather than uncovers—his community of satellite television viewers is not acknowledged in his musings on ethnographic theory. And although he collects a large amount of detail about his 'dish-erectors' they do not cohere as a group or a community but rather exist purely as individual owners of a particular technology. Nevertheless Moores discovers that (1996:73):

> despite a wide variation in the material and social circumstances of residents featured in this study, it does appear that there are often similar gendered and generational dynamics in play within the home environment.

Such a conclusion is unsatisfactory given the small size of the group studied and the avowed lack of sampling structures and hypothesis-testing in his questioning. Given his methods and the way he presents his results it is very difficult to corroborate his conclusions from the data or to appreciate how (as he maintains) his study represents a critical *ethnography*. Unlike Morley (1986) who explores the significance of class and gender in his sample's viewing preferences Moores fails to elaborate how his three neighbourhood groupings as analytical constructs represent cohesive sub-sections beyond (insufficiently described) geographic locales. Unlike Hobson's feminist study Moores's work is indiscriminate in its focus and too brief a monograph to provide triangulation-useful empirical in-depth data. By eschewing quantitative or systematic description and analysis his research is reduced to anecdotal miniatures.

<u>Single group studies: small-scale semi-participant observation</u>

Kevin Glynn (1996); Julian Wood (1993)

Each of the next two studies addresses a single experience with a group of viewers and explores the dynamics of interacting with a small group of subjects in contrast with the multiple, stratified, comparative studies discussed above. Whereas Lewis had fifty groups and Liebes and Katz's study included sixty-six groups, Glynn and Wood take a

microcosmic approach by asking one group to analyse a single text.

Nowhere could the problem of comparing similar methodologies for markedly groups of texts and audiences be more apparent than within this artificially-assembled dyad: the materials used include an American cartoon sitcom shown to American children (Glynn) and a 'video nasty' owned by a fourteen-year-old boy living on a 'large working-class council estate' somewhere in the UK (Wood 1993:188). However since my objective in this section of the literature survey is to assess the possibilities and limitations of uses of certain methodological tools in concrete audience research situations then comparing and contrasting examples which employ approximately similar approaches, although not perfectly equivalent, is nonetheless a manageable and hopefully illuminating strategy.

Kevin Glynn (1996) begins by contextualising *The Simpsons* not so much as a text but as a network of audience responses and intertextual relations: the show becomes a cultural phenomenon which exceeds its function as a television programme and spills into gossip, talk, 'Black Bart' t-shirts, sermons, radio and television commentary, political speeches and children's play culture. His article covers three kinds of speech about *The Simpsons*: fan letters, children's talk while viewing, and an example of an educational psychology course that considered *The Simpsons* pathologically. The fan letters about *The Simpsons* answered a request published in the *Wisconsin State Journal* and Glynn accessed several letters which had not been published. The student teachers' final exam transcripts were supplied from a university institution on the condition that Glynn not reveal any details which might identify institution or students. (Neither the fan-letters nor the exam section is discussed further since I am interested here in Glynn's semi-participant observations.)

Glynn's approach to his audience is simple: 'in order to enhance my perspective on Bartmania, one Friday evening a friend and I threw a *Simpsons* pizza party for her ten-year-old son and a group of his friends' in suburban Wisconsin (1996:71). Glynn was surprised to discover that the boys resisted being questioned but rather made demands to watch more episodes of *The Simpsons*, a symptom, he suggests, of the 'power relations activated whenever adults study young audiences' but also indicative of the children's playing out the role of Bart-Simpson-as-rebel. He chooses to take their refusal to cooperate with his questions as providing 'insight... into both the mobilization of *The Simpsons* as youth culture, and into "observational" forms of media audience study' (1996:72). Of the nine boys, one was Asian-American, the others white; one was seven years old, the rest were aged ten or eleven and all were from middle-class backgrounds. Glynn told them he had the videos and asked them to talk about *The Simpsons* but the boys were far more interested in watching than discussing: between episodes he would again attempt discussion but this only lasted briefly before one of the boys subverted his intentions by pleading for more tapes to be played (1996:73-4). Glynn's own status as a *Simpsons* fan, his own memories of boyhood in that neighbourhood and his own pleasure at watching the videos leaves him wistfully wishing 'simply to lie on the floor with a slice of pizza and watch episode after episode' like them (1996:74).

Thus Glynn's role of researcher blurred with his deep identification with the children's

pleasure at watching *The Simpsons*. He vacillates between two conflicting positions: on the one hand he wants to generate an open discussion which allows the boys to 'plurivocalize' the *Simpsons* text (1996:72) but on the other hand, by attempting to control the proceedings and regularly trying to start a guided discussion about the programme, Glynn's function as researcher quells any possible discussion because despite his intentions to blend in with the boys' party, he is almost certainly perceived as a parent or, more problematically, as a teacher.

The children resist his attempts to make them productive with the text for several reasons, I suspect not least because *The Simpsons* is a comedy text and immensely attractive to them. The boys fool about on the floor (one hangs upside down from the sofa) performing Bart Simpson-like anti-authority attitudes but keeping their physical japes within the bounds of behaviour which the hostess will tolerate (1996:75-6). Glynn concludes (1996:77):

> my gender and self-declared status as a *Simpsons* fan probably have as much to do with the boys' willingness to mock for me the disapproval of their mothers and teachers as my identity as an adult researcher has to do with their indifference toward my agenda.

Clearly studying child audiences requires special skills and careful preparation.[16] High-energy snacks and a collection of videotapes of *The Simpsons* is quite possibly the worst way to study ten and eleven year old boys who are finished at school for the week and want to relax rather than be questioned by an academic. Whether the boys overperform their roles as fans and Bartmaniacs for Glynn might be ascertained by questioning the children's parents about 'normal' viewing practices but Glynn provides considerable evidence to support his view that the boys not only subverted his dominance of the remote control (1996:78) by whining for more episodes but also subverted his position as authoritative researcher by refusing to talk about television except in the hyperlative, hyperactive mannerisms of mimicking parental disapproval (1996:79), or in 'kidspeak' (secret jargon) or knowing looks and gestures (1996:78). In colloquial British terms Glynn appears to have been the victim of a 'wind-up', a play-bullying of an outsider demonstrating forcefully that the boys are not only sophisticated consumers of satirical texts (1996:66-7) but can also *activate* satire productively by using irony to mock Glynn's authoritative role, a possibility he fails to recognise. As Renato Rosaldo (1985:107) has noted it is vital for field ethnographers (and audience researchers) to recognise and guard against 'such errors as mistranslations, taking jokes seriously, missing double meanings [or] accepting an apocryphal story as the literal truth'.

As part of a longer-term study for the British Board of Film Classification, Julian Wood's article (1993) explores the attitudes of several teenage boys towards horror films on video. (Although Wood showed a film not a television programme and is interested in youth perceptions of video use, this study is included here since the text was a three-part television mini-series recompiled for video sales and the boys view the video in a domestic environment and are observed in a manner similar to other studies described above.) Part of Wood's study involved the semi-participant observation of several

fourteen year old boys all living on a large working-class council estate as well as 'school-based interviews and small-scale surveys of a wider sample of young people from... south-east England' (1993:184). Wood followed up the semi-participant observation with extended interviews: one with the host of the viewing, 'Colin', one with his friend 'Mark', and the last with Mark's mother. Mark also filled in a viewing diary (it is not recorded if the others did this too). Much of Wood's data was collected for use in a larger study and is not presented in this paper but it is interesting to note that four different empirical techniques—survey, interviews (in two locations and contexts), diary, and semi-participant observation—inform his results.

The semi-participant observation session involved six teenage boys watching the horror film *It* with Wood after school at Colin's home (1993:188). Like Kevin Glynn cited above, Wood found that the young men were 'slightly baffled as to why an adult should be so interested in a leisure pursuit that they assume is essentially "theirs"' (1993:187) and was aware that '[t]he presence of a middle-class adult in a context like [this] is bound to change it' partly because the boys perhaps felt the researcher's observation to be 'surveillance' and partly because their individual 'presentation of self in such situations is heavily influenced by the need to live up to peer-group expectations' (1993:192). The boys—eating crisps and smoking throughout the viewing—showed off with loud cheers and jeers as well as using exaggerated gestures, jostling and play-fighting, often initiated by Colin the host (just as Glynn noted with his pizza party guests). But unlike Glynn, Wood did not dominate the use of the remote control, rather he watched as the boys negotiated fast-forwarding and replaying particular familiar scenes to produce a horror text more fitting their tastes (1993:191). Later Wood interviewed Mark's mother at home and discussed what she chose to watch and had stored in the family tape-library collection. He cross-referenced her opinions with those of her son Mark (interviewed last) and asked each what they thought the other watched. Mark also filled in a television diary and was 'surprised' to discover that he 'still watched children's TV after school on a fairly regular basis' (1993:197), a poignant admission from a fourteen-year-old youth who 'shouted at' and 'punched' a friend who had made a small mistake with the video remote control during the observed viewing (1993:190).

Single small group viewing situations like these produced by Glynn and Wood allow the researcher to become more aware of how their role includes constructing and controlling the viewing and discussion circumstances rather than merely observing a natural display of normal viewing behaviours. Their subjects would rather show off and make noise than speak the words the researcher wants to hear.[17] Single group studies can be invaluable for researchers as they illustrate the value of pilot studies in helping to shape research methods appropriately and demonstrate the importance of researchers' remaining open to being 'surprised' by their respondents.

Multiple, stratified focus groups: large-scale semi-participant observation

Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993); Justin Lewis (1991)

Like Ien Ang (1985), Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993) explore the phenomenal success of the American serial *Dallas* and its reception outwith the United States. Where Ang asked readers of a Dutch women's magazine to write and tell her their views Liebes and Katz (1993:22-3) had the resources to arrange a large comparative study of sixty-six focus groups in six communities: there were four communities in Israel (Moroccan Jews, Russian immigrant Jews, Israeli Arabs, Israeli-born kibbutz members) plus viewers in Los Angeles (since *Dallas* was an American product) and in greater Tokyo (since *Dallas* was rejected by Japanese audiences and cancelled after six months). Each of these groups was generated by contacting a married couple (ten in each community) and asking them to invite two more couples of similar age, ethnicity and educational background (within limits set by the researchers). This produced groups with gender balance and relative homogeneity. Liebes and Katz employed this 'snowballing' recruitment technique and chose to focus upon groups of friends because they 'were less interested in random selections of a sample of each community' but rather sought to explore 'clusters of community members who are in close contact and among whom television programs are likely to be discussed' (1993:22-3). In this study the way *Dallas* was used as a source of conversation and gossip was an important aspect of its intercultural consumption.

The participants assembled at the nominated couple's home, filled in questionnaires which ascertained personal characteristics and television viewing preferences, watched the programme as it aired and then answered questions in the discussion period. Three researchers were present, tape-recording the viewing and discussion as well as taking verbatim notes and descriptions of the group's interactions, and although only one led the question session others chipped in occasionally. Liebes and Katz acknowledge that the datasets their methodology produced are not statistically representative (1993:24):

> The sample is too small, the sampling method too casual, and... the population parameters are too uncontrolled.... [and hinge] on an assumption—which may be legitimately challenged—that [people described by] these ethnic and communal labels... share a definable set of attitudes, values, and social relations which can legitimately be called a culture or subculture.

Not all groups were included in the final study analysis: fifteen were 'disqualified... for reasons of too few participants, lack of ethnic homogeneity, overcrowding by uninvited family members, failure to collect background data, and incoherent and incorrectly guided conversations' (1993:23). Of these fifteen excluded groups six were from the Israeli Arab community; Liebes and Katz also encountered extra difficulties with the translation of the Arabic transcripts and report that they 'are still unhappy with the result' (1993:31). Although the quality control mechanisms applied to the material gathered has rendered the Israeli Arab community's contribution disproportionate the sample is still of significant size and, despite the protestations of the authors, the overall study is very impressive in terms of scale and rigour.

The depth and breadth of Liebes and Katz's research requires considerable resources and is too ambitious for someone working alone, even with assistance. Justin Lewis (1991) adapts some of their hypotheses and methodologies for a smaller study comparing American viewers' responses to aspects of race in *The Cosby Show*. Although Liebes and Katz worked with heterosexual couples Lewis and his female co-researcher Sut Jhally sought to include people from non-traditional family groups; thus, each initial contact was asked to invite other friends or family members to the viewing and interview sessions in his or her home. Lewis notes 'the only proviso was that group members should be familiar with one another and comfortable about watching TV together' to create a comfortable atmosphere, providing 'an easy conversational atmosphere' which would require little prompting from the researcher (1991:113).

The initial contacts were sampled in such a way as to 'anticipate or explore certain variables' particularly those of race, class and gender. Thus Lewis recruited 'twenty-three black groups and twenty-seven white groups' which he then categorised broadly into class bands. These groups were mostly mixed-gender although groups of only men or only women were also included. While Lewis limited himself to two communities ('black' or 'white' people), he was able nonetheless to recruit people from diverse backgrounds within those confines. For example, unlike Liebes and Katz who restricted themselves to narrow but common and repeatable standards of family viewing (that is, husbands and wives), at least one of Lewis's groups comprised 'working-class gay men' including 'a transvestite who performed the interview as his female alter ego (1991:169).

However, Lewis gives few details beyond those cited here about his respondents: he does not list respondents' ages nor show the numbers of groups in each class bracket (nor does he explain how he calculated these divisions), nor does he elaborate upon the mixed/ single gender balance, nor the balance within genders and classes within each racial community. The mixed gender groups seem to counter some of his lines of enquiry: discussing gender roles in *The Cosby Show* men were sometimes 'rather less assertive' in criticising feminist discourses activated in the discussion 'possibly', Lewis surmised, 'because they felt constrained by the presence of other women (either in the group or interviewing them)' (1991:170). Whereas race was considered by Lewis to be a characteristic for appropriately dividing groups (since *The Cosby Show* is an all-black programme) gender was not uniformly treated this way.

It is true that only by comparing mixed gender groups with all-male or all-female groups that can any such constraint or reticence to speak about gender can be made visible but it is perhaps an opportunity lost to explore other aspects of gender when group members are made to feel uncomfortable presenting their opinions—however unpopular or anti-progressive or sexist—since the point of focus group research and interview is to explore individual points of view. That women perhaps might have felt constrained by male co-participants or interviewers is not acknowledged as a possibility. *The Cosby Show* episode presented mobilises explicit discourses about gender roles and ideally the discussion groups would have explored these openly. While group dynamics

are interesting as a sideline the researcher needs to minimise the potential for distraction in this manner.[18] If Lewis had set out more explicitly the data on which his conclusions about mixed-gender settings and men's reticence to speak had been made, the degree to which this is a typical focus-group dynamic (and methodological problem) could be better assessed. Lewis also notes that some potential recruitees 'with strongly held racist views would dislike *The Cosby Show* simply because it *was* black....Since the sample contained only people who watched *The Cosby Show*, we were, by definition, less likely to hear this kind of response' (1991:178, emphasis in original). Again, while it is appropriate to explore reasons for potential respondents' refusals to contribute to the study Lewis's lack of data appendices with makes assessing the importance of such experiences an impossible task.

As well as narrowing his communities to two racial groupings (how 'black' and 'white' were negotiated is also not made clear) and allowing the initial contact to mix 'family' with 'friends' in selecting group members, Lewis departs from the Liebes and Katz methodologies by showing a single episode on video to the groups rather than observing spontaneous discussion of live broadcast of new episodes (notwithstanding the fact that Liebes and Katz had to use tapes for their communities in Los Angeles and Japan because the television season in the US was differently timed and the show had been cancelled in Japan). By showing a single episode Lewis was able to maintain consistent content although there is an added (uncalculated) variable pertaining to those who had viewed the episode beforehand.

Focus Groups without semi-participant observation (non-domestic setting)

Schlesinger, Dobash, Dobash and Weaver (1991; 1992); Thomas (1997); Hill (1997); Morley (1980); ITC (1995)

One of the problems Kevin Glynn seems to struggle with in his *Simpsons* work (but does not acknowledge explicitly) is that he hopes for a focus group discussion from ten year old boys in a party atmosphere. Not only did he create a social situation which is not amenable to children talking politely to someone they perceive as a teacher but he also conflates semi-participant observation with a focus group discussion. Focus groups are used to discuss opinions and to explore social and cultural responses to issues in a dynamic, interactive situation which allows prompting and some direction whereas semi-participant observation requires less guidance of the research group and more *observation*. In other words Glynn's control of the VCR remote is symptomatic of his desire to maintain control of the viewing circumstances, itself a characteristic of focus group work rather than observing what takes place without prompting. Glynn's lack of experience with children and his role as an academic researcher more used to thoughtful intellectual discussion are partly to blame for his cautious, control-oriented approach.

But focus groups too require skilful handling if they are to function properly and generate a wide-ranging discussion from a group comprising people with similar

characteristics. In this section I shall discuss five pieces of research which use focus group methodologies outwith a domestic viewing environment, again exploring the techniques used and their appropriateness to the tasks for which the researchers selected them, in order to gauge the possibilities and limitations of such research practices. Whereas Liebes and Katz, and Lewis (cited above) combined their focus groups with a domestic viewing of the text thus discussing the programmes shown in a relaxed, relatively familiar (albeit artificially constituted) environment among the contact person's friends and relatives, the following studies all take place in non-domestic environments among groups structured by the researchers. In this regard the studies construct an environment which is one step further removed from the 'natural' domestic television-viewing environment experienced by a viewer in their day-to-day routine.

Not only do the participants in focus group studies have to be prompted, answer questions, have those answers probed and talk about subjects nominated by the researcher but they are also asked to watch the programs (films, commercials) outwith the normal viewing hours they would chose, outwith the normal (usually domestic) location and situation, and with people other than those they would ordinarily choose. Whereas Wood (1993) and Hobson (1982) observe first-hand the domestic specificities of everyday television watching—and Gray (1992) and Morley (1986) mention their respondents' commenting on juggling domestic tasks with viewing—these focus-group studies observe more keenly the dynamic interactions among groups, and between groups and researchers, by *dislocating* the viewing environment to an institutional space.

The five studies discussed here range in textual form, genre and content. Once again, the texts have been chosen in order to highlight the diversity of techniques employed and the possibilities and limitations of the methodologies used in terms of my own research. Thus, there are no structural similarities among these studies except those constructed by my selecting and comparing them in this manner. Schlesinger *et al* (1991) talk to women about viewing violent drama; Thomas (1997) analyses a single focus group's discussion of *Inspector Morse;* Hill (1997) talks to several groups of people who view violent films. Morley (1980) discusses the news programme *Nationwide* with a larger number of groups;[19] and the ITC study into audience attitudes toward nudity in advertising uses an even larger sample and number of groups.

In Schlesinger *et al*'s study of responses to televised violence, women viewers in England and Scotland were recruited and organised into focus groups according to ethnicity, class and personal experience of violence. The researchers did not use diaries but rather collected women together for a day's viewing and discussion. After being welcomed and completing personal questionnaires, the women viewed the first programme, filled in a questionnaire, discussed the programme in their group, filled in another questionnaire and then viewed the next programme (three texts in all including a feature-length drama). Thus, the researchers amassed a considerable resource of qualitative and quantitative data.[20]

Whereas the researchers found ethnicity and experience of violence to be significant

factors in women's responses, '[q]uestionnaire results (and group discussions)... revealed very little relationship between nationality (Scottish/ English) and interpretations of the selected programmes' (Schlesinger 1991: 29). Whereas Duncan Petrie's early analysis of BFI diaries drew together responses from one geographical area to explore the cohesiveness or difference of Scottish audiences in a national/regional context, Schlesinger (1991) found no significant differences between Scottish and English respondents. By considering the BFI study and Schlesinger together, we approach the classic methodological dilemma of social science: whether we ask the questions provocatively or not at all we nonetheless partially determine the answers—partially, in both senses of 'partly' and 'in favour of one or other result'—and mask our ability to acknowledge what *else* the data we have constructed might reveal.

In a very different, small-scale study Lyn Thomas (1997) begins by contextualising her chosen programme but unlike Glynn who discusses fan letters and the circulation of popular epistemologies, Thomas's context is located in intellectual discourses. Thus she questions whether *Inspector Morse* fits a perceived British tradition of 'quality' film and television production, and then articulates audience research of women with feminist and post-feminist modes of thinking. Finally, Thomas considers the responses of one group of *Inspector Morse* 'fans' to excerpts she has 'chosen for their relevance to... issues of gender' and analyses the group dynamics as well as the content of the discussion (1997:194).

Thomas's recruitment method was intended to access fans beyond her usual range of contacts. By circulating questionnaires at the 'John Thaw Season' screenings at the NFT in London Thomas acquired personal details from thirty respondents prepared to discuss the texts (1997:193). These thirty people were contacted seven months later when a new series of *Morse* was screened on ITV and of thirteen willing respondents, nine were interviewed by telephone; later two small groups were assembled for 'discussion evenings' (ibid). Thomas analyses the second of these two focus group discussions in detail. Although the group analysed here had the consistent characteristics of white, metropolitan middle-class fans, the group Thomas discusses comprised four women and only one man. Had she used a snowballing technique like Liebes and Katz, perhaps by asking the lone man to bring another man or two 'like himself', or recruited more men from the initial thirty respondents then possibly the antagonism the male participant experienced (explored below) might have been diverted into productive discussion about the text.

Thomas attempted to make the participants comfortable but noted a 'tension between the "party" connotations of plentiful supplies of food and wine and the far from luxurious classroom setting'; this institutional setting was emphasised further by the presence of one of Thomas's (female) academic colleagues enlisted as an observer (1997:194). However, the educational context became 'increasingly relaxed as the evening progressed' (1997:194-5) although not all the members of the group contributed evenly to the discussion. The group was shown clips chosen for their relevance to her own textual readings (1997:200) with discussion led by Thomas between each segment; the session

was tape-recorded and later transcribed and analysed 'by means of a simple line count and a "map" of the introduction of new topics' (1993:195).

Thomas notes the difference in her own responses to the young woman sitting opposite her (who 'assumed a "star pupil" role') and the only man in the group whom Thomas realised she had 'silenced on several occasions' (1997:196; 195). Thomas explains that 'keeping [him] under control and sabotaging his attempts at dominance [were] an important part of my role as discussion facilitator' but elsewhere expresses her contradictory desires to be both a 'neutral facilitator' and 'to switch to "fellow fan" mode' (1997:195). As she analyses the evening's conversation in terms of '*relations* between group members and *subject positions* adopted' (1997:194, emphasis in original) Thomas becomes aware of her roles not only as researcher (perceived as teacher) and fan, but also as a woman leading a discussion about gender in a situation where the lone male respondent was consistently distanced and silenced by her. Thomas justifies the treatment of the male participant by suggesting that 'counting the number of lines spoken... reveals that [he] spoke more than anyone other than [the "star pupil"]' and was thereby seen to have persevered rather than become submissive to her discursive authority. However, it is interesting to compare Thomas's report with Justin Lewis's suggestions above and see how easily lack of gender balance in the group environment, exacerbated by empathy between the female researcher and some particularly dominant women respondents—an empathy which Thomas attributes to similarity in age, educational status and corresponding feminist philosophies—can work to the detriment of openly exploring attitudes towards gender.

Although Thomas concedes feeling 'rather guilty about treating [him] unfairly' (1997:195) the loss of potentially illuminating comments is the more significant outcome. No feminist would accept constituting such a group with only one woman participant among four men respondents and two male academics: such a move would be considered politically reactionary, or patronising tokenism, and thought to be counterproductive at the very least. While I find her group construction to be hostile to her aims Thomas's transparency about the proceedings of the group meeting are nonetheless illuminating.

Annette Hill (1997) by contrast demonstrates greater self-reflexivity toward her topic and her respondents. Although her groups discussed violence in feature films many of her methodological interests are made explicit and can thus be critiqued in full. Situating her research as qualitative Hill seeks the 'portfolios of interpretation' or reading and meaning-making strategies active viewers 'possess' (1997:4). In this regard Hill (1997:8) feels her work 'follow[s] in the footsteps' of Ann Gray (1992, discussed above) and Schlesinger *et al* (1992, the rather differently focused book version of the 1991 report briefly mentioned above) although this comparison is hard to follow in any but the most general terms since Gray's work considers the role of gender and VCR use, and Schlesinger discusses women's attitudes toward televised violence in the context of their own experiences of (usually domestic) violence rather than as fans of violent films deriving pleasure from viewing (the topic of Hill's research).

Hill began with fifty questionnaire respondents and twenty individual interviewees but felt that these methods of data collection 'lacked an interaction of ideas' (1997:8). Consequently, Hill 'came to recognize this interaction is necessary to understanding the process of viewing violence, an activity which is more social than individual' (ibid); Hill cites, among others, Gray's work again as well as Marie Gillespie's ideas (1995, discussed above) as supporting her methodological position by writing '[o]ther research in media studies confirms this' (1997:8n). While these writers do both use qualitative research methods neither Gray nor Gillespie considers violent films in this context in their work: Gray considers video as domestic leisure (and only used individual depth interviews, not focus groups); Gillespie writes about the lives and cultural choices of Punjabi youths living in Southall. Although I find Hill's reasoning to be unsubstantiated by these sources I would agree that focus group moderation and discussion presents questions differently and thus produces different responses from participants than do questionnaires and interviews. Used in triangulation with her other results and compared to data collected from other sources, as Hill does, focus groups are potentially valuable.[21]

Hill found her research choices coupled with the subject deterred some potential focus group participants, especially (1997:13):

> female consumers of violent movies, who, although available in theory, were difficult to persuade to join the discussions. Many women would only come to single sex discussions.... Similar difficulties did not occur when recruiting male participants, who exhibited a confidence in choosing to become part of the focus groups which many female participants lacked.

Hill was careful to include a male assistant to provide an appropriate gender mix and noted that the all-male groups were less relaxed and more difficult to run than the mixed groups in which 'the presence of female participants visibly relaxed those male participants present' (1997:16). Although she aims to be 'neutral' she is less self-reflexive about her role as researcher: why was her presence as a woman not relaxing to the all-male group? Perhaps if her male assistant ran the all-male groups alone then the men might have been less reticent and more relaxed. The six focus group discussions were held in a London restaurant (closed to the public) to provide a 'neutral, safe environment' (1997:15) for group members to express their ideas but also including, somewhat illogically, '[w]ine, soft drinks and light refreshments... to relax participants and foster a more social environment' (1997:16). By using a restaurant Hill avoids the problems of the institutional setting which Thomas found a little distracting in her *Inspector Morse* groups; however I would question the appropriateness of providing alcohol to respondents discussing so emotive and sensitive a subject as film violence especially in mixed company. While I appreciate Hill's intention to produce a relaxed atmosphere for the participants I nonetheless find it unusual to attempt to construct a 'systematic protocol' which will yield 'reliability and validity' (1997:17) in a 'social environment' *with alcohol*.[22]

Hill also refers to her respondents by focus group and number and ignores their gender much of the time insisting that (ibid):

> The issue of gender is only significant at certain stages in the data analysis; to indicate the

> gender of every illustrative quote would be to highlight this issue unnecessarily, and in certain instances bias the study towards the issue of gender when the first object of this study is to examine the process of viewing violence.

Given that Hill cites among her sources studies which show how women read and use texts differently from men, presenting her results in this manner seems erroneous as well as reductive: Schlesinger *et al* (1992) undertook research on women viewers to complement the greater volume of research on men viewing violence, and these works can be extrapolated to show a considerable difference between men's and women's viewing of violence on television. Similarly Hill cites Ann Gray's research on video and technologies in the home in support of her own qualitative focus, but Gray's work emphasised how women and men ascribed differently gendered meanings to domestic technologies. Perhaps what Hill means to say is that although men and women interacted differently in their focus groups men expressed similar content consistently across all groups, and women did this too. What she seems to suggest however is that although the male, female, and mixed groups operated with different dynamics (despite her measures to regularise the content) men and women often *said and meant* the same thing when discussing film violence. That this is not presented by Hill as a significant result in itself (but rather offered as a apologia to not analysing gender as a variable more fully) is surprising and disappointing.

Hill's method contrasts strongly with that used by David Morley (1980) in his study of the audience responses to *Nationwide*. Not only does Morley work through his theoretical stance in detail showing exactly how his audience study is to be constituted to address a complex of hypotheses about the construction of meaning(s) but he also accepts that his methods comprise 'makeshift strategies' (1980:22) which incorporate 'provisional readings' of the text (1980:23). Contrary to Hill's (1997:17) structure wherein 'the same questions were asked in the same order, the same cues were used at the same time in the discussion, and the same location was used each week' Morley's exploratory emphasis means he (1980:32),

> dealt with open discussions rather than pre-sequenced interview schedules, attempting to impose an order of response as little as possible and indeed taking the premise that the order in which respondents ranked and spoke of issues would itself be a significant finding of the research.

As the discussions progressed within each of the twenty-nine groups (each comprising between two and thirteen participants) Morley (1980:33) moved from a non-directive to a probing format but still 'engaged with, and tried to develop, points already raised by respondents' instead of punctuating the discussion with video clips or introducing new subjects as Hill did. Because the groups were pre-existing (for example, bank staff undertaking a training course) or drawn from a larger pre-existing sample (a dozen teenagers studying 'A' levels together) and took place in the environments in which the groups were already situated and felt comfortable, Morley was able to treat them *as groups* (rather than as data 'sets') in an 'established institutional setting'(1980:36) as well

as to explore the ways their social and cultural characteristics might mean they cohere into subcultural clusters with similar decoding strategies and 'shared cultural formations' (1980:15), one hypothesis Morley sought to test. At the same time Morley emphasises the need to explore the groups' comments without presuming a deterministic relation between the respondents' social, cultural, physical and economic situations and the 'decodings' they produce.

The most unusual feature of Morley's study of the *Nationwide* audience is the relation between the text and the people asked to view it for discussion: other studies discussed here used texts with which the viewers were already familiar but Morley chooses his groups according to their theorised relation to the ideological messages in the news programme (in order to explore three 'decoding' positions: the dominant, the negotiated, the oppositional). For example trade union officials are grouped together according to their level or ranking within their organisation and high school students are grouped according to their year but Morley ignores whether the respondents are regular *Nationwide* viewers when constructing the groups, and from their comments it appears many of his participants were not. Thus the people he interviews do not constitute an 'audience' for this show in any sense and many are only viewers of the programme during the screening he offers.

This produces difficulties in later analysis because the viewers' lack of 'cultural competence' (Morley 1981:11) cannot be ascertained; thus the viewer has to work harder in the study screening to pick up any current affairs 'messages' at all, and expressing to a researcher how the programme relates to one's own concerns is therefore much more difficult. It is also possible that this lack of cultural competence might make the respondent feel inadequate before the researcher's gaze: the more unfamiliar s/he is with the material, the more difficult it becomes to feel comfortable in an environment where programme issues and personal political beliefs and attitudes are solicited and probed. It is unclear from Morley's descriptions how great a problem this was. For example, he writes in his analyses (1980:134):

> The black students make hardly any connection with the discourse of *Nationwide*. The concerns of *Nationwide* are not the concerns of their world. They do not so much produce an oppositional reading as refuse to read it at all.

By offering the viewers unfamiliar texts Morley ignores their individual socio-historical construction and cultural competences *as viewers* while attempting to locate 'the determinations on meaning produced by the effectivity of the traditional sociological/ structural variables—age, sex, race and class' (1981:3). In other words while he seeks to understand 'the effectivity of social structures in the *distribution* of different forms of cultural competence throughout the different sections of a social formation' (emphasis in original, 1981:3), Morley is unable to distinguish clearly whether for example the black students refuse to engage with the *Nationwide* text because they have not previously acquired the cultural competence necessary, or whether they have watched *Nationwide* and similar programmes in the past and do not watch them now because its discourse

offers nothing with which they 'connect'.

The level of the black students' cultural competence is harder to establish because most of them are situated in mixed race or mixed gender groups—which, from studies discussed above, we know can create additional discursive dynamics which function hegemonically to repress some group members' expressing particular attitudes and opinions while making others disproportionately manifest. Thus it remains unclear whether (lack of) cultural competence or participant disaffection caused by the mixed-race and/or mixed-gender group dynamic takes precedence in determining their discussions. The manner by which the groups are pre-constructed means Morley has to work within this constraint but while his theoretical analyses acknowledge the way the race is an important aspect of identity and affects cultural relations, his methodological descriptions do not offer any self-critique to show how he takes the multifarious groups' formulations into account.

This dilemma is both theoretical and methodological. Are the black students more aware than other groups of Morley's position as an older white, middle-class, educated male; does this make them more reticent to explore with him their refusal to connect with his programme, and encourage them to affect a position of disdain? Is their disinterest a calculated distance that rejects the questions of a researcher whose social and cultural status is greater than theirs? Morley is at pains to avoid a deterministic model (his whole premise requires this), and writes at the outset: (emphasis in original, 1980:19):

> [I]t is of course inadequate to present demographic/sociological factors—age, sex, race, class position—as objective correlates or determinants of differential decoding positions without any attempt to specify *how* they intervene in the process of communication'

Morley's point is similar to that quoted earlier from Annette Hill's study (1997) in which she guards against thinking too deterministically about gender, and similar problems become apparent. As Ien Ang points out (1989:110) in regard to his later study *Family Television,* Morley is not self-reflexive about the way his role as researcher configures him in an asymmetrical power relation. Ang notes the presence of a power disparity (in common with much ethnographic research) between Morley and the working-class south London families; it seems reasonable to expect that black students in their early twenties and thirties (both working-class and middle-class) will be politically astute enough about the discursive powers of media and academic institutions to perceive this constructed power differential and thus to be wary of participating freely in so avowedly political a study.

The last study I wish to incorporate here was undertaken by the Independent Television Commission (ITC) into attitudes toward nudity in advertising. This study uses a 'market research' format in common with much research produced by the Broadcasting Standards Council, working towards quantitative and qualitative evaluations of perceptions rather than establishing through sustained interviews and observation the viewer's integration of television watching and her/his daily life, although one of the significant findings of the research was that some people felt the viewing context

including who else was watching with them affected how acceptable they would find nudity and/or sexual messages and images in television advertising. The study comprises two parts. In the first part, participants viewed test reels, were asked questions and probed about attitudes to the commercials, shown more commercials (each of which included nudity), and then asked further questions about what was (in)appropriate or (dis)tasteful about each, allocating scores out of ten for acceptability using specific categories like 'storyline' and 'activity'. The participants comprised twelve groups of six people according to location, life-stage, gender and social class, and were interviewed by a moderator of the same sex; there were also twelve in-depth interviews with individual participants and twelve interviews with couples (ITC 1995:3). The second part of the study involved 120 respondents recruited from the street for a 'qualitative' interview lasting about thirty minutes; the results from these interviews were used to consolidate hypotheses formed by the researchers after the first stage.

The ITC study is transparent and exact with its methodology, forming its focus groups in such a way as to cover region, class, gender and age evenly. However race or ethnicity of respondents is not mentioned at all: thus, an important characteristic of the British population is suppressed in the analysis leaving its impact as a variable unexplained and unexplored. (Given that people from different cultures have different ideas of modesty and appropriate public body display, race and ethnicity are significant variables; if the sample population was all white—as I would presume given the care with which other variables are tested—then the population for which the results might be extrapolated is presumably also only white). Apart from this omission the study demonstrates clear organisation of sample, testing with repetition to cover all variables (except race and ethnicity), two-stage hypothesis forming, and quantitative data aggregated into qualitative conclusions. Those staff recruiting the participants on the street did not know the precise topic to be examined (ibid), and a mixed reel of various potentially unacceptable commercials preceded the reel of nudity-focused adverts; thus, spontaneous comments about nudity (or lack of such comments) could be gauged before soliciting opinions directly related to nudity in commercials. Participants were also asked to prepare in the few days between recruitment and focus group or interview their opinions on two commercials about which they felt positively and two, negatively, so that the researchers again could gauge the spontaneous, unprompted perceptions of the respondents (1995:7). Reels screened in the study were compiled to position the commercials in a random order and two versions of the showreel were produced in different orders, to counteract the order effect (the way in which participants 'learn' how to read the material presented to them, or begin to see a pattern of culmination and hierarchy when none exists).

The ITC study was thus a carefully constructed and acutely balanced piece of research. Compared to other studies cited above, it used a large sample in each stage (108 and 120 respectively). The research remains relatively anonymous in that the ITC commissioned an external consultant to do the work; in the other studies listed above a named

individual or group has proceeded from particular theoretical stances and topics, seeking to explore qualitative methodologies as well as to understand how viewers read and use texts. A study of advertisements, however, differs from studies of drama or comedy in that an advertisement functions as a sales device rather than as entertainment or information (although it may contain these too).

As well as constituting a brief text typically lasting twenty to sixty seconds in length, a commercial is unscheduled and thus the viewer is less prepared for its arrival: while 'zapping' channels, in Ien Ang's (1991) terms, is always possible, the viewer has little indication as to which commercials will be shown, or when. Thus, it proved advantageous for the researchers to recruit the second-stage respondents off the street 'for immediate interview' because 'the respondents could be shown the adverts without any warning or build-up. In this respect the research was closer to the in-home viewing situation' (ITC 1995:55). The viewing of several consecutive adverts containing nudity with a market researcher in a high-street office is not a typical 'in-home viewing situation' but it approximates the *textual* environment more closely than does Thomas's decontextualised clips from across the *Inspector Morse* years, the violent narrative climaxes in Hill's truncated movie excerpts or Morley's *Nationwide* programme shown days and weeks later.[23]

Nevertheless the market research environment is not fault-free even in regards to its ability to replicate typical advertisement viewing because it decontextualises the commercials from their usual relation within the television flow and recontextualises them as primary texts. According to the first stage participants, the use of humour in one advertisement meant it could 'defuse any likelihood of causing offence' (ITC 1995:36); in another 'the comic element of this advertisement was top of mind' (1995:38). But these two advertisements were both foreign, both familiar, (one had been seen 'in the context of television programmes presented by Chris Tarrant and Jasper Carrott' (ibid) and thus perceived predominantly as humour) and seen in the context of other non-humorous advertisements containing nudity. Humour makes the (non-frontal and strategically obscured) nudity more acceptable in the context of the other commercials, but how acceptable such commercials are in relation to other forms of humour, in relation to serious drama texts, in relation to news reporting remains to be explored some other time. The advertisements remain decontextualised from their usual textual environment and have been recontextualised in a manner which necessarily affects their reception.

There are no previous audience studies that integrate comedy and national or regional identity in the manner proposed in this research. This might be seen as either an encumbrance or as an opportunity: I prefer the latter attitude. Thus, I have used this chapter to familiarise myself with some examples of different kinds of audience research and to explore some of the methodological issues in each, in order to understand more fully—and thus be better equipped to meet—the challenge of designing, carrying out, analysing and presenting my own audience study. Because audiences studies which

concentrate on comedy texts are very few (Glynn 1996 and Lewis 1991 discussed above, are rare examples) there is a great deal of work to be done on theorising the particular problematics of how audiences 'read' comedy texts, what pleasures they find there, how different kinds of comedy appeals to different (groups of) people and so on.

The next chapter expands upon theoretical issues briefly mentioned above, particularly notions of 'ethnography', 'audience', and 'fans', as well as exploring how comedy as a genre and as a textual mode might effect my own methodological procedures.

Notes

[1] Gillespie singles out Shaun Moores (1993) for particular criticism; he addresses this in his later work (1996) by describing his 'ethnographic intentions', a term he borrows from Ann Gray (1992)
[2] See also Ien Ang (1989:110n-111n) whose view on this point is very similar to Gillespie's. See also Geraghty (1998) for an extended recent summary of the issues involved.
[3] That polemical debate exaggerates a false dichotomy between the sciences and deliberately misconstrues the assumptions and values of the other, often defensively. In reality, the academic subjects and their research methods and objects converge more fluidly than either side will generally admit. For variously-positioned summaries see Ang (1989); Lull (1990); McQuail (1997); Moores (1993); Morley (1989); Nightingale (1996); and Seiter (1999). Lull (1990:15) in particular uses words like 'scientistic' and 'empiricist' with disdain although he recognises that qualitative research can be systematic, 'scientific' and 'empirical'.
[4] See Scannell and Cardiff (1991).
[5] Day-Lewis notes that November 1, 1988 was chosen for this reason.
[6] Day-Lewis's diarists also snowball the individual programme texts into series or multiple-series wholes, although they were only asked to comment on a single day's viewing: time and again the respondents connect the programmes seen on the 'One Day' with others from the same series, same genre, with the same stars. Thus the diarists create their own viewing contexts through which they describe the single example, frequently describing their feelings about the whole series rather than the individual episode seen on November 1, 1988.
[7] *Radio Times* set aside space for audience members to write tributes about *Gardeners' World* host Geoff Hamilton, who had just died. See *Radio Times* August 24, 1996 p139.
[8] There seems to be no uniform manner of referring to respondents. Whereas Sean Day-Lewis includes as much identifying material as possible (see quote cited above), Ang refers to her replies by number, for example 'Letter 21'. This avoids breaching bonds of confidentiality and emphasises that her analysis is of the letters as cultural symptoms, and not of actual people. A disadvantage of this system is that there is very little indication of the person behind the letter, and the differences between the respondents as individuals are masked as groups of letter-writers are collapsed into depersonalised uniformity. However, Ang's method acknowledges gender: occasionally a quote is labelled 'Letter 23; this letter is from a man' (1985:26). This reverses patriarchal epistemological traditions by instead positioning women as the natural, unmarked gender and ostending the men as being outwith the 'norms' of the rest of her group. Thus the material elicited by the two open diary experiments differed widely in terms of size and breadth of viewer samples, textual focus, cultural self-awareness and critique, and the popular versus academic uses of the responses.
[9] This was in response to the BFI's questions in Diary Three: 'Do you consider yourself to be part of a group in society with special needs and interests and if so does TV cater for those needs and interests?' (BFI 1996:3)
[10] It is not made clear whether this is an attempt to open up the category of Scots respondent rather than to homogenise it or whether Petrie feels such stereotypes are less common in a smaller area like Scotland. Either way it obviates the criticisms made by Richard Paterson about 'the uninterrogated locational aspects of David Morley's [1986] study of 20 families in South London' (Paterson 1995:75n).
[11] While the Grampian licence area includes the Highlands and Western Isles where Gaelic speakers (including those for whom it is an acquired rather than first language) are more numerous and more likely to be fluent it also includes Orkney and Shetland where the history and culture owes more to Norse influences than to the Gaels.
[12] Gray is explicitly empirical about VCR use (compare Levy and Gunter 1988); contrast with Sean Cubitt's (1991) imaginative exploration of the aesthetic and political possibilities of the domestic VCR.
[13] Morley notes in an Afterword that is was 'impossible to sustain interviews of this complexity with adults and young children at the same time' and notes with regret that the children's views thus became 'much more marginal to the analysis' than he had hoped (1986:74).
[14] See Fiske (1994) for an extended self-examination into the roles of fan and researcher. See also Jenkins (1992); Tulloch and Jenkins (1995); Penley (1992); and Lewis (1992) for research into fan culture.
[15] James Lull (1990) calls the material historical specificity of his social actors their 'macrosocial' context.

[16] See for example Buckingham(1990); Buckingham (1993); Bazalgette and Buckingham (1995); Dorr (1986); Lury (2001) focuses on 'youth' rather than 'childrens' television. Helen Cunningham (1995) gets around the problems encountered by Glynn by interviewing her younger sister's friends about their computer games experiences. This of course produces different problems of analysis and the relations between researcher and researched.
[17] Compare the frustration—and honesty—of Jokes Hermes, who writes: 'I wanted to know how women's magazines became meaningful for readers and readers told me that women's magazines have hardly any meaning at all' (1995:143).
[18] By contrast Liebes and Katz's transcript and analysis (1993:34-67) for one group of three Moroccan Jewish couples (interviewed by one woman with two men observing) explores in minute detail the physical and verbal interactions of the six adults, from gender roles in *Dallas* to whether the focus group's hostess should serve tea to the researchers during the programme (1993:44-46).
[19] Morley's interest in news at this time reflects not only the many social changes taking place in Thatcherite Britain but also reflects the epistemological shifts within the discipline. In particular, the *Screen* theory emphasis on notions of ideologically interpellated audiences was challenged by Hall's (1973) theories on the differing reading strategies of subsections of the audience. News programmes, with their supposedly balanced, neutral stances and transparent messages, and their audiences are often studied. The *Nationwide* study by Morley (and Brunsdon) is one important innovative study, and is the model for Hagen (1992); the other is the continuing work of the 'Bad News' group, see Glasgow University Media Group (1976), Philo *et al* (1982). Glasgow University Media Group (1993) has published on other subject categories of late including representations of mental illness in various media, forms and genres.
[20] Research into violence and television has in the past been less exploratory and more in the 'effects' tradition, see Belson (1978), Bryant and Zillmann (1986), Fowles (1986), Milgram and Shotland (1973), Shaw (1972); for a critique see Gauntlett (1995, 1998). Other contemporary research uses quantitative rather than qualitative methods; for surveys, see Gunter and Wober (1988), Gunter and McAleer (1997), for content analysis (a method which is inapplicable to comedy since it records only explicit content and is more attuned to monitoring discrete data rather than exploring audiences' responses) see Cumberpatch *et al* (1987). The ITC and BSC also undertake research on this topic in Britain.
[21] Lull (1990:19) in particular emphasises the need for several methods of gathering data, 'the use of multiple streams of information converging *within* a particular study to construct an account of a complex investigatory theme', to confirm internal validity.
[22] A larger problem is that Hill seems unclear whether watching the violent films constitutes a video (with alcohol, social experience) or a cinema (no alcohol, individual experience) aesthetic.
[23] Like the others in this section (especially Thomas's), this study notes respondents' body language and non-verbal signals as well as their spoken comments; nonetheless the methodology is not regarded as participant observation since it occurs outwith the environment and context of the everyday lived experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

Empirical Research Problematics: Researching Television Comedy Audiences

In the previous chapter I summarised and critiqued numerous pieces of scholarly writing on empirical audiences and television (and, occasionally, film). I considered the methodologies and techniques used by researchers to approach both their textual or technological interest and their audiences. And I investigated not only *what* the researchers chose to work with—in terms of epistemological frameworks, qualitative and quantitative methodologies, ethos and practice, individuals and people in various groups including families, textual formats and assorted equipment—but also *how* these choices reflected their specific research questions and influenced their research outcomes. In this chapter I build upon that literature discussion and explore the theoretical and methodological challenges to be taken into account when designing empirical research into television comedy audiences.

In earlier chapters I situated recent writing about television comedy genres and texts against a contextual background of current terrestrial television in Britain. I noted how little research on television comedy dealt with audiences beyond discussing the ideological possibilities of sitcoms and gameshows, and how seldom researchers approached television comedy as constituted in and characterised by a distinct, significantly televisual aesthetic. For example *Popular Film and Television Comedy* by Neale and Krutnik (1990) makes insufficient aesthetic or critical distinction between televisual and cinematic comedy texts/comedic performativities and it ignores reception contexts and audiences altogether.

There are very few examples of research which theorise or investigate television comedy audiences. Kevin Glynn (1996) works from a cultural studies perspective and explores only a single evening's semi-participant observation within a larger exploration of the meanings three differently discursively-positioned groups have made of *The Simpsons*. Justin Lewis (1991) works through an encoding/decoding model that explores through empirical audience study both the reception of news messages (from David Morley's *Nationwide* work, modelled on Stuart Hall's (1973) theoretical work) and the ways in which *The Cosby Show* is read by different gender and racial groups (building on and adapting Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's (1990) cross-cultural work into ethnicity and decoding *Dallas*).

Glynn refers to several series of *The Simpsons* whereas Lewis shows the same episode from *The Cosby Show* to each group,[1] but neither frames their approach to the text and the

audiences as *comedy research.* Rather Glynn's piece considers how groups produce and circulate meanings and Lewis positions *The Cosby Show* as a cultural object pregnant with ideological messages about race and family gender roles rather than as a situation comedy. As I shall suggest below even an adapted encoding/ decoding model like Lewis's struggles to take account of the way irony plays with the 'messages' in comedy, rendering the various dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings much more difficult to describe or to align with the social positions of the audience members. In this regard the BFI folio of essays on sitcom (Cook 1982) perhaps goes further to understand these tensions, discussing the ways ideology and comedy interreact and interconflict even though the articles function as analyses of explicit versus latent textual meanings.

In a third example of empirical research about comedy audiences, John Fiske (1994) explores how audience research needs to consider the implications of participants' responding to the presence and presumed status of the researcher, and how an auto-ethnography of himself as a viewer is complicated by his contrasting discursive positions as both fan and academic. The fact that he is watching *The Newlywed Game* functions symbolically to suggest a text with particular cultural associations and connotations but it is not used by Fiske to draw conclusions explicitly or specifically about comedy audiences or the processes of valorisation of comedy texts.

The critical emphasis on a particular text in the empirical audience studies results in two useful contextualisations being lost. Potential respondents who displayed disinterest or expressed antagonised views toward the chosen text did not participate in the studies, and the text's importance to the respondent—relative to other texts—is not explored. As Lewis notes (1991:178):

> one [person with strongly held racist views] remarked during his refusal to take part in the study that the show was "stupid, stupid, stupid".... Since the sample contained only people who watched *The Cosby Show,* we were, by definition, less likely to hear this kind of response.

Thus Lewis's study, like Glynn's and Fiske's, proceeds with an audience sample comprised of people who have watched the text prior to discussion and are to a degree sympathetic towards it . However these viewers are not fans in either Lawrence Grossberg's (1992) or Henry Jenkins's (1992) senses. Grossberg defines fans as having an 'affective sensibility' or sympathetic predisposition toward reading their chosen texts, whereas Jenkins's fans were distinguished by the individual or collective creation and circulation of homemade texts—personal episodes of *Quantum Leap* for example, or even the matrix of homoerotic stories and artwork that develops a fantasy love-story between *Star Trek* heroes Spock and Kirk (hence, 'S/K' writing, see Constance Penley 1992).

Although tautologically it might appear that Lewis, Glynn, and Fiske's respondents and the three programmes' wider audiences are necessarily television comedy audiences, such a labelling brings us no closer to understanding how comedy as a genre or individual programmes are fitted into the personal textual, social, cultural, economic and political values and experiences of any viewer or group. The empirical research does provide conclusions about how certain people have produced certain meanings from

certain television comedy texts but several gaps remain to be explored. There are the encoding/decoding problematics to be worked through with respect to, for example, gender or race or age or class or any number of variables. Equally, there is room to more away from the text as focus and to look instead to the audience as central: what do they choose to watch in terms of television comedy, who chooses, how are these choices made and negotiated? and so on. Part of the research design needs to incorporate a model for exploring and dealing with how television comedy audiences perceive and read irony and create meanings from satire, parody, stereotypes and other forms of ironic comedy.

The parts need to be balanced and constructed with regard to both epistemological and methodological processes. Christine Geraghty (1998:155) draws a distinction between 'the questions to be asked in interviews and the research questions which underpin the study'. Her critical distinction between 'interview' and 'research' questions is correct (although she perhaps plays down their interrelativity); one might anticipate that empirical work progresses more clearly, logically and effectively when the 'research questions' are explored first. However, as this chapter demonstrates, studying new social phenomena is not a unilinear process and perhaps Geraghty's wording reflects more realistically the feed-back or dialectic that might occur as empirical research plans are constructed.

This chapter investigates the options for empirical research into television comedy audiences in Scotland, and is presented in two parts: the first refines the research questions by exploring epistemological and methodological considerations and discusses a pilot study for a research thread which was subsequently discontinued, and the second part sets how the empirical study is to be developed. The little-known game show *Endurance UK*, although an extreme and oblique example, earned its keep in my pilot study by illuminating the problematics of empirical qualitative audience research using comedy texts. The original and unexpected conclusions reached as a result of that pilot are then applied to the larger project to construct a better-focused and more closely-developed methodology for talking to Scottish students about television comedy and national humour (another underresearched subject). This chapter then articulates the twin concerns of the study as a whole: first, how audience research into comedy television might require its own specific epistemological and methodological approaches to structuring, implementing and analysing the research and second, developing the ideas about discussing potentially divisive comedy with audience groups towards this project's primary focus: Scottish television comedy and its audiences.

RESEARCH OPTION 1: ENCODING and DECODING A COMEDY TEXT: *Endurance UK*

In his extended criticism of David Morley's *Nationwide* studies Justin Lewis reaches the climax of his argument when he attacks the 'Critical Postscript' (Morley 1981). Lewis (writing then as Wren-Lewis 1983:192) sets out Morley's three revisions and writes:

> Now, the problem here is not that these revisions are wrong (they're not), but that they represent *more* than mere revisions.... The revisions suggested in the *Postscript*, I shall argue, undermine a great deal of the theoretical work done in *The Nationwide Audience*. (Emphasis in original.)

On Lewis's next page seemingly contradictory phrases from Morley's work are set out to substantiate claims that Morley's use of the term 'relative autonomy' is vague and ill-conceived. Lewis writes (Wren-Lewis 1983:193):

> [This vagueness] allows Morley (1980) to say:
> (a) "the structure of access to different discourses is determined by social position" (p.134) or "the real determines to a large extent the encounter of/with discourses" (p.19); and
> (b) "social position in no way directly correlates with decodings" (p.137).

Lewis has either misread the whole study or intentionally falsified Morley's work by taking the quotes out of context because rather than 'undermine' his conclusions, Morley has instead demonstrated the development of his research perspective. Morley (1980:134) first sets out what we thought we knew about encoding and decoding (to introduce the chapter); later he asserts emphatically that his empirical research demonstrated, by contrast, that decodings were produced in reading patterns markedly different from those anticipated of these class groupings (Morley 1980:137). So Morley's position has progressed: rather than write a closed final report Morley instead maps out a *process* of elaboration and reconsideration, showing how his empirical audience research demands a rethinking both of the encoding/decoding paradigm and of theoretical and empirical approaches to audiences. Morley's *Nationwide* study did not produce the decodings he expected and I would suggest that this *increases* its intellectual and pedagogical value. The three texts which constitute the *Nationwide* study show considerable and important progress in how research into textual messages and empirical audiences can be approached as well as demonstrating the strength and value of a reflective self-critique. (Lewis approached encoding/decoding more evenly in his 1991 study of the news and *The Cosby Show*.) In a similar yet more modest fashion, I hope to show in this chapter how experimental research into encoding/ decoding, irony, taste, comedy and audiences enabled more substantial analysis of the Scottish television comedy audiences data.

Some scholars, notably Martin Jordin and Rosalind Brunt (1988), critique Morley's work for using terms like 'ethnography of reading' to describe a quantitative and mechanistic decoding process—a distinction I shall explore further below—but they offer few specific alternatives or improvements. Their primary refashioning of Morley's work here is to recommend that rather than looking for evidence of Hall's decoding formulations—the dominant, the negotiated, and the oppositional—empirical audience researchers need instead to consider '*all* decoding as negotiation with a preferred reading' (1988:245). Jordin and Brunt argue this acceptance of many possible decodings allows better exploration of '*how* the text is appropriated rather than whether there is a "fit" or not', removes the need for 'an endless taxonomic proliferation of subcategories to formally classify them' and 'allows one to think through the potential for ideological resistance contained in any and all negotiations with dominant codes' (1988:246).

Jordin and Brunt's modification (designed in part to avoid the formal functions and symbolic representations which in their view burdened Morley's groups with expectations of quantitative comparability rather than permitting the groups' own exploration of the text) represents a shift away from testing hypotheses on particular groups' decodings toward a more pluralistic qualitative exploration. However, their method remains nonetheless text-focused. This approach makes sense if the study seeks to understand how a news programme (in Morley's work) or coverage of an election (Jordin and Brunt) is received and made meaningful by real social agents, in order to map the potential ideological relations of texts and audiences in a democratic society according to the aims of a progressive humanism.

But if the study is wider and seeks to understand how audiences feel about their leisure television viewing, for example, then interviewing a class-stratified group about a single text cannot generate that kind or degree of discussion focus. *The Nationwide Audience* demonstrates this point neatly. Of one group of young black further education students Morley writes (1980:134):

> The black students make hardly any connection with the discourse of *Nationwide*. The concerns of *Nationwide* are not concerns of their world. They do not so much produce an oppositional reading as refuse to read it at all.

Clearly a refusal to read is an illuminating and significant decoding strategy since it exceeds the parameters of Stuart Hall's model, and one which might tell us a great deal about black urban youth were it explored further elsewhere. Such a study would need to establish more clearly which kinds of variables might have contributed to this response in this example: variables of and within the text, the audience, the group and its dynamics, the process of the research interview, and how these specificities can be seen to interrelate. Morley's experience of this refusal to engage sits in counterpoint to Lewis's respondent cited earlier who refused to be part of the *Cosby Show* study on the grounds that it was 'stupid, stupid, stupid'. There is more work to be done on race and its impact both on individuals' media choices and the research dynamic that can explore them meaningfully.

Endurance UK: the problematics of ironic and parodic representations

My experience with a group's 'refusal to read' also occurs with a race-inflected text but the refusal was both vocal and complex and imbued with concern about the kind of irony involved in the text's racial representations. *Endurance UK*—a reworking and parody of the popular Japanese television gameshow *Endurance*—involves British (usually English) men and women in their twenties or thirties being taunted and debased by talk-back radio host Paul Ross and his two mock-Japanese clowns, Hoki and Koki. Hoki and Koki's costuming combines two contrasting embodiments of 'Japaneseness': the tailored grey suits of the contemporary *salariman* are offset by the 'kamikaze' white headband, thickly-rimmed glasses, yellow stage make-up, false eyelid-shapers and plastic buck-teeth

associated with the negative images circulated in the West about Japanese men since World War Two.[2] They also carry rods with which they strike the ground and, occasionally, the contestants, and the show's background mise-en-scene includes the whistled song 'Colonel Bogey' (a reference to David Lean's film *The Bridge On The River Kwai*) when the contestants are introduced, and xenophobic taunts of 'Go home!' when one fails to complete the task.

It might be tempting to see *EUK* as Orientalist, drawing upon the discursively-constructed myths that Edward Said (1979) asserts dominate Western approaches to 'the Orient'. Said's ideas derive from his analysis of how historical colonial attitudes in Europe and the United States were 'able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively' (1979:2), to instil a 'relationship of power, of domination of varying degrees of complex hegemony' between the so-called West and the (Middle) East (1979:5). One might argue that the contemporary representations of Japan in *EUK* also rely upon this colonial-minded discourse in order to naturalise the programme's imagining of Japanese culture as ridiculous, disgusting and inscrutable. As David Morley and Kevin Robins suggest (1995), although Britain has never held a position of colonial domination over it, '[Japan's] irreducible difference has been the source of both fascination and anxiety' (1995:161) to the West which reinforces and reproduces the blinkered, yellow-tinted vision which '[i]t seems that the West can never see Japan directly' (1995:172).

However *Endurance UK* does not eroticise nor exhibit any desire toward Japaneseness (whereas desire, feminisation, and eroticism of the exoticised is crucial in Said's explanation of Orientalism) nor is it straightforward in its ideological positioning of Japanese culture as exterior, un-English and unfathomable: the programme is after all a gameshow and the rubric of play must be considered. The game consists of eight contestants who must endure tasks such as eating mealy-worm quiche or keeping their legs raised while they lie on their backs in order to avoid popping a balloon and thus being drenched in pig's urine. In terms of emphasising playfulness over competition *EUK*'s menu is quite similar to sport-gameshows like *Gladiators* or variety-gameshows like *Generation Game, Sticky Moments* or the celebrity gameshow *Shooting Stars*.[3] But in terms of tone *EUK* is unique: not only does it exploit a mythologising superior standpoint toward excerpts from a bona fide Japanese cultural text and references to British treatment in POW camps during World War Two, it enacts these positions through a seemingly Bakhtinian carnivalesque revelry.

The games in *EUK* seem custom-made for an analysis of contemporary carnivalesque television (ignoring for the moment arguments of whether television as a non-democratic capitalist medium sanctions 'carnival' in order to control these anti-establishment practices rather than providing a cultural space in which genuinely revolutionary carnival spontaneously occurs).[4] Its games incorporate the excessiveness of grotesque realism described by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) with feasts, 'oceans of strong drink' (1984:xix) and the products of the 'bodily lower stratum' (1984:20) in contests which include eating

volumes of unpalatable foods at speed, 'Drink or Drown' lager races, and being covered in maggots and propelled by a bungee cord into a pile of manure. However, since the fundamental objective of carnival in Bakhtin's terms was a levelling event which overturned official strictures of speech and public social behaviour and thus expressly anti-hierarchical and anti-competitive, joining the 'body and bodily life [into] a cosmic and at the same time all-people's character' (1984:19) *EUK*'s competitive games contradict the potentially playful meaning of its revelry and grotesque realism. Carnival is not a contest but a revolution; not divisive but inclusive and all-encompassing. In this regard *EUK*'s playful use of excesses and bodily lower material is carnival-*like* in tone but fulfils neither the purpose nor the function of the cyclical yet spontaneous freedom of carnival. As Robert Stam warns (1989:94) true carnival must be distinguished from other kinds of material or grotesque play which become the 'pretext for a vacuous ludism that discerns redeeming elements even in the most degraded cultural productions and activities'.

As well as competitiveness and the status-defined hierarchies of hosts, assistants, players and audience, the racialised exaggerations and distortions of the clowns, Hoki and Koki, paradoxically detract further from any positive sense of carnival. Referring to a British song, their names are not authentically Japanese but instead serve to illustrate and highlight *EUK*'s racialising perspectives. The men's falsified Japanese names, faces and costume is complemented by their 'schoolboy' mock-Japanese speech pattern characterised by grunts, sing-song intonation, meaningless strings of faux Japanese words and often (but not consistently, depending on the gag available) using metathesis between their 'l' and 'r' sounds, and their 'v' and 'b' sounds. Other pronunciation gags occur: Koki sounds the silent 't' in 'bristles' as he brushes the contestants' bare feet explaining "I rub bristols, they rubbery"—a double-entendre on breasts—when he means 'I love bristles, they're lovely'. Using innuendo and double entendre and subscribing to a *Carry On* tradition for their many sex or penis-related gags the two clowns recontextualise these jokes through their ostensibly non-native lexicon to produce an ironic naiveté: Koki refers to contestants covered with grain as "spread with my seed", chickens are referred to as "peckers", fishermen have their "tackle out" and so on.[5]

EUK derives many of its opportunities for humour from its grotesque games and its exaggerated stereotypes. The kinds of comedy these two aspects produce are very different. The games reflect a schoolboy fascination with sexual and digestive processes and words, playing with innuendo in a manner similar to that used in gameshows like *Sticky Moments* or *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* and playing with fear and unpalatable foods like another show that goads contestants to do the unexpected or the unreasonable, *Don't Try This At Home.*

The exaggerated stereotypes, however, cast a racialising pall over the sense of playfulness; more significantly they raise questions of degree and whether the characters Hoki, Koki and Olivia are caricatures or stereotypes. If these representations are seen to be too extreme, too outrageous, too over-the-top then they become pure pantomime, fitting a tradition in British theatrical humour commonly associated with children's

holiday entertainment. Taken literally the text is racially and sexually regressive. (Whether children's pantomime also produces reactionary, socially and politically regressive texts is a different problem, but the comparison is still meaningful). If however these representations are not merely blunt, gauche parodies of a Japanese gameshow but rather satirise liberal 'politically correct' progressive attitudes associated with educated middle-class tastes then *EUK* becomes a sterling example of ironic satire which both speaks and undermines the position it attacks.

These three traditions (pantomime, literality, irony) cover similar terrain. *Private Eye*, the fortnightly satirical magazine now edited by Ian Hislop, puts Emperor Akihito on its cover (see Figure 2.5) with the caption 'Akihito flies in: Nice Nip in the air'; whether it rejects or reinforces the wartime anti-Japanese attitudes held by veterans and perhaps the general public is uncertain.[6] The contextual locations of *Private Eye*'s calling Akihito a 'Nip' (for Nippon, the Japanese name for Japan) and Paul Ross's calling the Japanese 'Nips' on his Talk Radio show encapsulate the problem of pinning down the moral and political values of comedy materials and practices.[7]

But this distinction is significant because it is important to know whether *EUK* can be thought of as critique and thus as satire; consequently it becomes important to consider why this appears so unlikely. Perhaps the coarseness of the material—the grotesque realism and the excessive costuming, makeup, manners and speech patterns—determines that the comedy is facile, pub-minded and lager-loutish. But perhaps these conclusions are not drawn objectively from the text but instead arrived at as a result of prejudices about which kinds of texts can produce satire, a kind of snobbery that means that *EUK* will only ever be considered rough, redneck, tastelessly 'sick' humour (funny or not) and *Private Eye* (or its television gameshow cousin *Have I Got News For You* to which Ian Hislop is a principal contributor) is only going to be received (funny or not) as witty satire and as intelligent lampooning.

In writing about situation comedy other scholars make similar points about social realism and stereotyping. Lawrence Mintz (1985:111) describes the Archie Bunker character from *All In The Family* as a 'negative fool—that is, one who exemplifies rather than exposes the traits to be criticised', concluding that the satire is ambiguous.[8] Arthur Hough (1981:212) criticises the late-1970s phenomenon of '[television] producers so nervous about the old stereotypes that they overcompensated', creating 'a string of super-blacks—characters who were twice as smart, twice as quick, twice as "reality-oriented" as their white co-stars'. As Mike Clarke (1987:102), also discussing sitcom, asks, '[a]re these critics looking for *accurate* or *positive* images?' Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck (1981:47) extend the argument against reading aesthetic difference as progressive, exploring the possibility of a political 'inoculation' within the mainstream text. Using Roland Barthes's (1993:140) terms, Medhurst and Tuck assert that inoculation 'is a means of neutralising the threat of any subversive or oppositional ideologies by appearing to acknowledge some of their arguments'. In one example, representations of women in other than traditional familial roles (for instance, those in *Butterflies* or *Solo*) are shown to be

rendered ambivalently; thus, Medhurst and Tuck argue, the characters might express and crystallise progressive, anti-bourgeois feminist attitudes or, alternately, manifest the most 'insidious inoculation' through which women with oppositional lifestyles and choices are made to appear ridiculous and isolated.

Just as opposing the classical institutional conventions of text and genre results primarily in difference rather than progressiveness, Mike Clarke (1985:106) shows that there is 'nothing *necessarily* progressive' about anarchic satire like *The Young Ones* because, as he so astutely observes, oppositional values, inversions and disequilibria are not always Brechtian in manner and effect because comedy *requires* rupture and 'peripeteia' (Jerry Palmer 1987). Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990:92) put it another way, suggesting that 'while comic indecorum can on occasion disturb and offend, it usually does not—precisely because we *expect* indecorum of a comedy'.

Because *Endurance UK* makes its racialised representations comedic both in terms of script and performance, the situation is markedly different from Morley's black students watching the news or Lewis's white respondents declining to watch the African-American comedy, *The Cosby Show*. Even so I was interested to know how meanings were read and generated by audiences in order to explore the boundaries of taste and to test out some ideas about audience reception to British television comedy texts.

Early in my study I showed a video and presented a paper about *Endurance UK* to a mixed-gender postgraduate seminar group (predominantly but not exclusively white, in their late-twenties and early-thirties, all Glasgow-based media-culture research students) and every one of the respondents was so intensely horrified at the programme's grotesque display that even these highly-educated cultural critics had difficulty formulating and expressing opinions about it.[9] There was perhaps not so much a refusal to read meanings as an inability to express what those meanings were and a difficulty engaging with the material with peers who felt differently towards it. There was a notable lack of laughter manifesting a refusal to read as funny aspects of the text's comedy structures and comedic performance, but this response is more complex than merely 'holding back' since laughter is partly unconscious and partly controlled by our sense of (un)inhibitedness in a particular social setting. There was also a sense of frustration in the respondents who could not express their views with the sophistication they would usually possess because they did not have any prior experience of the show nor did they have the terminology (satire, different forms of irony, clowning) to adequately describe and debate their individual interactions with the material.

Certainly there was no consensus and several people 'changed sides' during the discussion. There were several examples of respondents' 'feeling' one way about the programme but 'thinking' something else. This affective and intellectual displacement works in a complex relation with the 'bouncing... between complicity and distance' that textual irony permits (Hutcheon 1985:32) and makes expressing and describing decodings very difficult. The lack of consensus became very clear very quickly. It was only by doing this seminar experiment for myself that I could realise how an encoding/decoding model

anticipates not only certain kinds of meaning from certain particular social or class groupings but also, in an empirical setting, requires a kind of resolution from within the group that in practice seems quite unfathomable. David Morley drew similar conclusions twenty years ago but like him I could only see this for myself by trying the process out.

In terms of the comedy script and comedic performance, some seminar participants made comments which implied or expressed concern that 'other people might not "get" it'. Many suppositions were made about the presumed inability of uneducated people—typically designated by the epithet 'tabloid newspaper readers'—to make distinctions about irony, pantomime and carnival on the one hand, and racism or sexism on the other.

Tabloid newspaper readers frequently become characterised in this way, sometimes to indicate a social class in general and sometimes by readers of other kinds of newspapers to emphasise the latter's own higher cultural and social position. Michael Billig (1992) found this second pattern when talking to families about their views on the Royal family, focusing specifically upon who might believe particular newspaper stories about the Royals. Billig writes (1992:156):

> Such talk of gullibility is almost invariably talk about the Other or, to be more precise, about Others.... Different speakers — indeed different groups of speakers — can identify different Contrastive Others. Stereotypes can be mobilised for the task.

This use of the 'Contrastive Other' defines the speaker as knowing and sophisticated whereas that gullible simpleton, one of those 'Others', fails to see through fabricated stories about the Royal family or, in the instance of the *Endurance UK* seminar, fails to understand the complex of contradictory ironic mechanisms and discourses which structure the comedy and performance.

The seminar group experience differs from Billig's family interviews however since some of my respondents who argued that 'tabloid readers' would not appreciate the humour but would 'side with' *EUK* and be amused by the spectacle were at the same time confronting peers who disagreed that *anyone* could find it either funny or offensive. The inference of a 'Contrastive Other' was neither a conclusion reached by consensus nor even a fixed position but rather was manifest within a complex array of ideas. Other of their peers resisted any attempt to predict either a target or an actual audience demographic, mobilising intellectual arguments from Hall and Morley for example to prefer empirical audience studies over speculation and to dismiss as spurious what they saw as sloppy class-based encoding/ decoding rubric which predicted decodings and then worked backwards to further assume which groups would decode meanings in this manner. The mobilisation of cultural theory and examples from each participants' readings obscured as often as illuminated the threads of the discussion. It also rendered completely transparent the conflict between the need and desire to equip the participants with the comedy terminology required to describe and illustrate their points, against the difficulty they faced as well-educated scholars influenced by others' thinking, when trying to express new ideas of their own.

Although there were intelligent and lively arguments made about irony and excess

discussion of the respondents' own lack of laughter required prompting and probing. There was an unwillingness to consider whether they would have liked to have laughed in other company or different circumstances and a difficulty in expressing how the comedic elements succeeded as a construction but failed in tone and topic. This group is a self-governing, autonomous co-operative balanced between three institutions and it became clear that if such highly-educated and skilled media critics could not formulate and articulate meaning in a comfortable and non-threatening group of peers, then using this text in an empirical study of comedy audiences would be highly problematic.

I took this seminar experience to be a constructive failure. This pilot group revealed several failings in the research design but my research was the more productive for it. First, the 'research questions' of the study are so numerous and drawn from so many other discursive fields and disciplines as to be unmanageable and untenable: How is laughter produced, how is it to be described? Is laughter a function of the text, the viewer, the context? Which variables produce or reduce the laughter? How is irony to be read?

Second, in terms of the 'interview questions' the effective administration of an empirical audience project like this one relies too greatly upon precise terminology; if the researcher has to offer ongoing guidance and explanation to the research audience then the participant is going to find expressing his or her own opinion difficult.

Third, this study model rediscovers one of Morley's most significant obstacles: the arbitrary centrality of a single text. Perhaps my choice of *EUK* is even worse than Morley's use of *Nationwide* since *EUK* is shown on late-night slots on Challenge TV, a small cable and satellite channel which broadcasts only quiz and gameshows. This relatively unknown text had been chosen deliberately because it had been so prominent in New Zealand where it led Channel Three's weekly BritComedy Wednesday sequence and I wanted to explore British perceptions of this programme, including attitudes to its being shown abroad. But while it suited my own research purposes it gave the seminar group, my pilot audience, a very difficult text to discuss.

Of these three objections—dispersed research topic, the need for a specific lexicon among respondents, and centrality of a single unfamiliar text—none is so great as to be insurmountable within a research design, and subsequent adjustments to the audience study attempted to respond to and incorporate such obstacles constructively. The fourth problem however had wider implications since it involved the response of the seminar audience group in a dynamic of distaste toward the chosen text, occasional examples of refusals to read the text, and social discomfort in the discussion.

Feedback from the research seminar indicated decisively that *Endurance UK* was too grotesque to 'inflict' upon research participants even intelligent, critical people. In part this expressed a tacit concern about some kind of 'damage' that viewing *EUK* might do to others but I could also see that the greater project of television audience studies would not be advanced by my disenchanting and disgusting further volunteers. Although one might make the argument that *somebody* watches this programme it is a very small number of viewers (which rules out the alternative of approaching fans), and it behoves

me to question the ethics of subjecting volunteers from the public to an extended viewing of this tape under the guise of 'comedy research', a phrase that might suggest a much more pleasurable experience.

Although it is erroneous to draw conclusions from a single example of a group discussion (because without comparison it is impossible to determine which data are related to the topic and which are related to the group's functional dynamic) it is critically important to reflect upon pilot studies before reshaping the research design. This *EUK* seminar group viewed half an hour of the show, heard a half-hour paper and then discussed both for another hour. Half the dozen participants were known to me and all regarded me as a peer. This dynamic does not describe a focus group designed for a qualitative study at all but rather suggests an intellectual interaction: some posturing and mock-debate occurs whenever this research group meets. That aside, the other problems made evident in the pilot example about using *Endurance UK* as a text and as a research focus means it was dropped from the study plan. Instead the limitations inform a qualitative audience-centred piece of research which asks a more primitive and more significant question about (whether, how) television comedy is important at all.

RESEARCH OPTION 2:
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: Scottish television comedy audiences

The experimental pilot seminar discussion about *EUK* like many others' attempts to explore encoding/ decoding in practice considered how a group of people could be observed empirically in relation to their experience of a given text. What it could not achieve was any understanding of how the respondents might relate to television comedy texts outwith the designated academic environment of the seminar group or further yet, their experiences and perceptions of their everyday lived audiencehood. Their lives as social agents with more significant personal relationships to television remain unreachable in this encoding/ decoding model. And without groups' and individuals' refusal to read or discuss the texts there is little indication of the *relevance* of the programmes to the respondents, a degree of participation, investment and appreciation by the audiences that ought to be considered and determined before experimentation begins. The inescapable flaw in the *EUK* encoding/ decoding model was that while it was interesting to me to explore how people make meaning from this text its grotesque material and relative unfamiliarity mean the value of those meanings in a wider context is diminished and more importantly, it is utterly insignificant to the respondents. If the research questions attempt to approach comedy and humour as social phenomena in context then more needs to been known of their roles and values to the respondents. In terms of setting out a research plan, then, a clearer idea of what we mean by audiences and how we might investigate comedy as a social text in context needs to be developed.

As Ien Ang (1991) and Janice Radway (1985) have both noted the notion of an audience

must consider both the reception context and the social and cultural reading strategies. In contrast with the notional audiences constructed by industrial ratings companies Ang uses the term 'actual audiences' as a 'provisional shorthand for the infinite, contradictory, dispersed and dynamic *practices and experiences* of television audiencehood enacted by people in their everyday lives' (emphasis added, 1991:13). These practices might include but are not limited to various degrees of attentiveness or different motivations for watching. As Michael Svennevig shows (1998:47) 'viewing' can be further described under various classifications of 'active', 'passive', 'sociable' or even 'avoidance' practices.

How these 'dynamic practices and experiences' might be observed, recorded, interpreted and analysed returns us to the issue of research focus. My research explores the multiple, sometimes conflicting ways in which Scottish audiences respond to television comedy. The qualitative enquiry investigates a widely-held myth about Scottish culture: the 'Glasgow sense of humour' within the wider context of Scottish and British television programming and consumption. Thus the overarching research project is interdisciplinary and methodologically diverse, combining an analysis of texts and television aesthetics with the detailed exposition of audiences' own experiences. This latter part of the study comprises the collection and analysis of original qualitative and quantitative data (from interviews, letters, focus groups and a survey) and later triangulates these with archival material from a five-year television diary study commissioned by the British Film Institute. A multi-faceted study produces as many problems as it solves, however, since it requires the analytical cross-comparison of different materials but also needs to maintain their contextual integrity.

In the next section I consider the methodologies for collecting and analysing the various qualitative and quantitative datasets. The research questions follow from the previous chapters and seek ways of approaching comedy from the audience's perspective. As well as genre and mode, 'comedy' describes a kind of work that requires particular audience interactions in order to be completed and realised as a whole text. Drama and documentary are pointless without audiences too, but comedy's construction and performance incorporate a vacuum around the textual skeleton which requires the audience to 'participate' in order to activate the text's potential for meaning. Thus comedy is an interactive art, so in this research at least a study of television comedy implies analysis of audiences as well as a discussion of texts and styles.

Studying comedy audiences empirically presents certain challenges. The scrutiny of television audiences in their usual often domestic, often private habitats is problematic because it necessitates an imposition by the researcher however well integrated into the family as a participant the interviewer or observer might be (as in James Lull's 1990 work). Sometimes Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle—which describes the way light particles vary minutely from their expected trajectories—is invoked through metaphor to describe what can happen in a social research dynamic. Where Heisenberg theorised that we cannot both observe and locate light particles in motion (because by locating or mapping them we 'take our eye off the ball' and lose track of their movement and

trajectory), this has been reworked in social science paradigms to suggest that by observing we determine and alter what we see. This works in two ways. Firstly there is the Heisenbergian paradox that by observing we restrict what we can see (which is not the same as saying we only see what we look for, although perhaps this additional tension exists too). Secondly there is the especially anthropological problem that by being seen to observe the subjects the researcher's presence affects the data to be empirically observed because her or his visible scrutiny works a little like a panopticon surveillance system to potentially alter and censor what the subject now thinks, says and does.

This paradox brings a degree of anxiety to the social researcher. Often this dilemma is resolved with varying adequacy by considering and applying critical self-reflexivity about the relations between researcher and subject. Equally important is the autocritique of one's methodologies especially when approaching a less-researched topic like comedy audiences. It is important to make plain one's approach and method in order that it might be improved upon constructively later. The problem of attempting to observe audiences in anything like a 'natural environment' when they view television comedy is rendered even more complicated because we intuitively suspect that a level of self-awareness caused by observation inhibits the subject's laughter and verbal responses (at the time of viewing or later) to the comedy texts. Since this study seeks to know what Scottish people think and feel about television comedy the methodologies need to produce a relaxed, informal, safe environment for discussion. There needs to be a study design which balances my need to acquire and create particular datasets with the audiences' need to be treated respectfully and properly as the centre of the research.

It is difficult to set out the justifications for choosing a particular combination of research directions—not because of any fear of critique but rather because it requires one to interrogate and express the critical assumptions which have come to appear self-evident after years of study. Critical self-examination requires honest introspection and true intellectual self-reflexivity; on occasion this scrutiny of the writer's self-manifestation in the project serves paradoxically to reinscribe the researcher as the *subject* rather than the medium through which ideas might be expressed. As Roger Silverstone *et al* conclude, there is a complex of tensions to be observed between the purposes of the researcher(s) and those of their subjects. Silverstone writes (1991:223):

> Our accounts must be plausible to those in our [intellectual] community who may take a different view of things—Runciman's 'rival observers'; but they must also be plausible to our subjects, in the sense that they can be persuaded that what we are accounting, and accounting for, in their lives and worlds is recognizable even if they may not in some cases be able to accept our explanation for it.

Silverstone's comments relate to a study of families and technology—a topic about which both academic peers and the families involved in the study might be equally but differently sceptical. The latter comment that the work must be 'plausible' to the participants suggests a healthy desire and a robust commitment to making the research accessible to the families too, presumably through the final feedback-interview described by Silverstone. Like Silverstone *et al*, many feminist writers working with audiences or in

other areas of social research of media use have expressed a wish that their work be accessible to their respondents as well as their academic peers. Such an approach attempts to rebalance the perceived distance of the ivory-tower academic with a less formalistic relation between the two parties, a democratic goal well suited to the study of people's social consumption and experience of popular media culture.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the methodologies and techniques used to collect and analyse the quantitative and qualitative data gathered for this study. They are presented in approximate chronological order since each attempt prompted further research questions and further reappraisal of method and technique: there was a circuit of plan, trial, critique and further plans which refined and expanded the focus and direction of the work at various points, just as the experience and the results of the *Endurance UK* pilot led to a very different kind of audience research strategy. This final part develops the theoretical positions discussed in the previous sections and chapters and functions as a prologue to the empirical data analysis and interpretation which follows in the next two chapters.

EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGIES

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to survey ninety-three first-year undergraduate students on the first day of their television studies term in February 2000. The timing was significant and chosen for the following reasons. The new term after a week's exam leave is a fresh start and my experiences as a student and teacher has suggested that attendance is better earlier rather than later in the terms; by the same token the students were aware from the previous term's study programme that important paperwork including bibliographies and essay questions would be handed out at this time so there were extra incentives for them to attend. The first day of term was also chosen because the 'housekeeping' and paperwork was sufficient to fill half the hour available leaving enough time to administer the survey without using class time required for teaching. The survey was completed first to avoid a mass exodus that might have resulted had the other class business been transacted at the beginning and students then asked to 'stay behind' to participate in the survey: they were a captive audience and the questionnaire was administered in a fashion calculated to ensure a high response rate. In this way the survey would be less disruptive to the usual workings of the lecture group and also provide maximal access to students who are interested in television but had not yet acquired any special academic or critical tools with which to describe or analyse it. In effect they were relatively 'naive' respondents. Although an audience's lack of a comedy-specific vocabulary had been identified as a problem with the design and administration of the *EUK* pilot this survey was not intended to achieve the reading of a text or the elaboration of meaning but rather

it was constructed to gather a basic profile of interested parties with no special knowledge and to trial questions for later development.

The survey forms and explanations of confidentiality were distributed as students arrived and as the researcher I spoke to the group to let them know who I was, what the survey was for, and asking them to complete the forms. In addition I emphasised that their participation was voluntary, that the forms and data would be kept secure and used in non-identifying ways, and that the paperwork and results were unconnected with their study or teaching save that the survey was being administered in a lecture class. I did not mention comedy in my comments to them nor did I emphasise any section of the form.

As I distributed and collected the forms I listened in to their occasional consultations and clarifications with their friends (although generally it was very quiet and each worked mostly alone). One asked a neighbour what Ethnicity meant; they agreed it was the same as Nationality. A few surreptitiously worked together on programme selections. When I collected the forms in rows afterwards there were patches where a distinct inter-influence of similar yet otherwise unique responses could be seen immediately but most people filled in the surveys individually.

The administration of the questionnaire was not done under test conditions and there was not enough time for the latecomers to complete their forms, which was disappointing since the questions I was most interested in—the ones on comedy—were placed at the end of the forms and subsequently there were blanks here (although respondent fatigue and disinterest might also be implicated).

Despite the fact that this survey included caveats about respondents' anonymity by insisting it would be used only in separate research and was not tied to the students' assessment or any other aspect of their departmental relationship, and despite both course lecturers (one of whom is HOD) passing the survey as not only appropriate but also a good idea, I hold some concerns about whether it was ethical for me as a tutor in the course to do this especially as the survey was undertaken in a lecture setting which made it more difficult for them to decline to participate. At the same time I felt the questions asked were not especially personal, revealing or probing, but rather sought to 'take the temperature' of a usefully large easily accessible and fairly homogeneous group before finalising my research questions for other data collection exercises. Equally a student might have refused to take or return a form or left many or all sections blank, but my headcount and forms count tallied perfectly so it appears noone chose this course. However from this residual unease I made certain to ensure that future respondents with relationship to our home department were recruited from classes where I had no teaching or other power relationship to the students, especially for the focus groups where responses are in-depth and delivered face-to-face in a semi-public forum.

The questions were organised to collect certain pieces of data rather than to produce a complete quantitative description of either the respondents or their television use. In the Individual Details section the Age, Ethnicity, and Nationality questions were open-ended rather than forcing a choice from pre-grouped ages or pre-described ethnicities or

nationalities. For Age, a very close cluster was expected between the ages 18 and 22 with the remainder spread as outliers and details this precise cannot be solicited through a grouped-age question. Ethnicity and Nationality were also offered as open-ended questions. These were constructed to explore how the predominantly 'white' group saw themselves individually in terms of ethnic origins or race, and to explore nationality, post-Devolution (a time in Scotland when a sense of nationhood and identity are being renegotiated, reshaped and redescribed). These two questions would give quantitative data that might also be interpreted qualitatively since unguided personal self-description produces revealing variations. The data can be compared with criteria used by Equal Opportunities or government statistics bureaux to explore 'official' descriptions against the respondents' own, both of which are not 'natural' but rather constructed, contingent labels for identity.

The Television Access questions were intended to gauge respondents' access to television and related technologies and to ensure that where they had no access at all comments about choice of programmes were considered in light of this. One question asked them to rank three from five available terrestrial channels (again allowing for those who had indicated in the previous question that they could not receive Channel 5); this and the subsequent question on the channels they would most like to receive were they to be allowed only two, sought to explore their overall channel preferences.

The Attitudes section offered a Likert scale and compared respondents' perception of the amount of television use against their enjoyment of it. The next guided questions asked them to list their favourite three shows in as much detail as they could, to name which two shows they felt most strongly about watching, and to name which two shows they would take the trouble to record if they were expecting to miss seeing them. Were these the same shows? How would these match subsequent replies about which genres they watched most, and which genres they enjoyed most (or least)? The forced-choice question regarding the nation of origin for their favourite genre of programme would offer insight into how important British programme-making was to the respondents.

The final section, Television Comedy, asked three questions with two blanks each. An explicit emphasis on British or even Scottish television comedy was not made; rather respondents were asked to name up to two shows in each of three categories. Would respondents—largely in their late teens and early twenties—describe their parents as watching different shows? Would there be clear differences in the Favourite and Not Funny categories, or would the same programmes be perceived differently by otherwise similar people? (I had asked these last two questions at an informal departmental presentation and had found, even in a group of thirty people, that shows some named as hilarious favourites were decried by others as unfunny or embarrassing.) By asking open-ended questions which sought two unranked responses each question was constructed to gather data which could be handled quantitatively but also be used to refine research questions and interview questions for further qualitative research.

By surveying respondents in a manner that gave them little specific information about

my research intentions I hoped to obtain relatively bias-free data from which I could judge the importance of comedy in the respondents' television choices. However, this attempted lack of influence also constructs an audience without a context, rather as the encoding/ decoding example had done with my *Endurance UK* seminar pilot. The selectivity of the questions and the small sample also limits the researcher's ability to extrapolate from the data. However it is anticipated that these data can still be instructive in relation to other data gathering exercises and in triangulation with other empirical audience studies (particularly the BFI Audience Tracking Study diaries).

Letters

In this section borrowed from Ien Ang's study of *Dallas* I asked members of the public to write to me with their views about Scottish television. Advertisement cards were mailed to one dozen Scottish community libraries with requests for a month's space on a noticeboard and similarly-worded advertisements were placed in as many national, local and community papers as would take them including leading Central-belt cultural magazine *The List* and the 600,000-plus circulation Scottish tabloid *The Daily Record*. As Jacqui Gabb's (1999) study on *Gardener's World* audiences had indicated that traditional newspaper advertising was drawing fewer volunteer respondents than Ang's efforts had, I also placed advertisements on comedy-related internet chat-rooms, news-groups, and certain message-boards on the World-Wide Web.

As I began doing this internet variation however I quickly realised that while people were interested it took several communications before some would commit to an email in response to the questions. In other words they were less rather than more inclined to participate after one notification, they seemed to need more personal interaction before agreeing to write, and since they often asked for guidance on what I wanted to know in real terms each person answered a different question for me.

There were problems in terms of collecting a wide sample from members of the internet-using Scottish public including the fact that the internet respects no national boundaries and I found it uncomfortable to request, and impossible to enforce, the requirement that respondents be from or based in Scotland. Some respondents were known to me through personal e-relationships and others were e-contacts of those e-contacts, responding as a favour to friend. Often people promised to respond and sent several small emails saying they would do it soon... but never have. This is the reality of research by email: it might appear to be a much easier, faster and more reliable means of making contact with large numbers of people but some treat email more lightly than letter-writing and while more convenient email perhaps carries less sense of obligation.

I received about thirty e-responses (including one from a woman in Canada asking how to place such a request herself in the *Daily Record*) and two letters on paper in response to the newspaper items. To my knowledge the library advertisements—which were intended to reach a varied, perhaps older, certainly a more geographically dispersed

public—yielded no response whatsoever. Where I had hoped for a large varied response to complement the more stratified, locally-specific focus groups I had instead received very limited replies from a very small geographic area and small age, ethnic, social class and cultural range (though individuals' personal descriptions were difficult to ascertain). This small number of responses, the uneven amounts of information and clarification received by some e-respondents prior to and during writing their replies, the different formats in which 'letters' were written to me all complicated the analysis. Upon reflection this section of the overall audience study is illuminating in its seeming failure.

One factor that might have influenced the lack of response was a lack of sufficient focus in the request locations. Perhaps focusing on fan magazines or fan websites might have yielded better response rates both in terms of number and detail of reply. Perhaps addressing particular target groups by name in each related general publication or library note might have increased participation too, for example, 'wanted: retired persons' or 'wanted: young people in the Highlands and Islands'. It is possible that I spread my net too widely and failed to attract the notice of anyone in particular.

Another factor which was probably as significant in the small number of replies was the lack of focus on any one show. The design had again been too broad: whereas Ang and Gabb had asked for fans of certain shows—in Ang's case, at the height of a huge national boom in *Dallas*-watching—I had asked for comments on Scottish television comedy, a general and perhaps ambiguous term which suggests no obvious group of motivated respondents whom might reply. Perhaps asking for responses about *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab C. Nesbitt* would have generated more focus and garnered a greater response. However this returns us to the dilemma of choosing a primary text for discussion without establishing its relevance or importance to the audience.

The converse is also true: selecting one television text as the focus might make the call for replies potentially more appealing to fans (fans in the affective sense); like advertising in a fanzine this is acceptable if we wish to explore fans' attitudes, opinions and affective viewing practices but it then becomes difficult to distinguish fan comments from the wider audiences' replies. Looking at the task in this light Ang's success in generating so many responses of such rich detail and variety surely deserves considerable acclaim.

Focus Groups

The major qualitative data-gathering exercise consisted of eight focus groups and a group interview spread across the three locations of Glasgow, Edinburgh and Isle of Skye. The groups were roughly equivalent in that all were composed of first or second-year undergraduate students taking courses in communications or cultural studies subjects. Each group completed questionnaires, viewed videotapes and explored through semi-structured discussion if and how they identified with the respective social and cultural representations especially those of Glaswegians, Gaels, and Scots at large.

The groups ranged in size from two to six persons and there were male-only, female-

only and mixed gender groups. There had been plans for three groups at each location but five groups were conducted at Glasgow including one each of Edinburgh natives, and Gaelic speakers with origins in the Western Isles. (See the Appendices for the group schedule.) The group interview with eleven Gaelic-language television production trainees is included but treated differently and as distinct from the focus groups.

The focus group procedures were structured to combine some quantitative data collection with some qualitative exploration of a handful of television comedy clips. Each group began with introductions, namecards, explanations, clarifications and refreshments (juice, hot drinks, biscuits and so forth but not alcohol). Forms conferring to me permission to record and report but not to identify, transmit, store or disperse the students' written and verbal responses were explained, then read and signed by the students. Time was taken to explain their rights within the study which included the opportunity to leave at any point, to refuse to answer, to rescind any answers or comments, or to remove themselves from the study afterwards. After this students completed two pages of the focus group questionnaire. Typically this paperwork lasted fifteen minutes and was followed by the video clip screening, then a little more paperwork and then the guided discussion. The whole session took an hour.

The video clips were assembled onto a videotape and each group watched the same clips in the same order. Had the number of groups been larger or the focus of the study been the degree to which people laughed at certain material then rotating the clips at random on two or more tapes to counter the order effect might have been appropriate. However it was anticipated (and observed) that respondents might feel somewhat inhibited watching videos in a university seminar-room research environment with strangers (or even—perhaps, especially so—with those other respondents known or related to them). For this reason the first three clips were from two popular, probably-familiar, non-Scottish texts (*Blackadder* and *Goodness Gracious Me*) and one was from a less-familiar Scottish show to break up the videotape's seeming juxtaposition of English and Scottish clips. The tape had been ordered then in such a way as to ease the respondents into watching and perhaps laughing comfortably before the all-important Scottish television comedy clips appeared onscreen. The last clip was the Gaelic-language comedy sketch from *Ran Dan*. It appeared last for weak technical reasons and when these constraints were overcome part way through the season of focus groups it seemed unnecessarily obstructive to reposition it. Putting it last felt to me like Gaelic language television was being isolated and appended rather than incorporated but none of the Gaelic speakers interviewed criticised this. The clips also included very few women comedians for similar technical reasons; one respondent mentioned this immediately the group was asked for initial comments and one other alluded to it indirectly. I took care to avoid sectarian, religious and football comedy because although there is plentiful material it can yield unpredictable and polarising hostilities among otherwise liberal and tolerant people. Like *Endurance UK*, it seemed needlessly provocative.

One problem with using short clips rather than perhaps a half-hour episode is the lack

of internal context for elements like the sitcom clip (*All Along the Watchtower*) and the disjuncture of styles from sketch show to sketch show. It takes a few clips before the respondents start to relax about the juxtaposition of *Goodness Gracious Me* to a grannie boxing (*Velvet Cabaret*). There is a phenomenology of television comedy consumption which is still being developed by psychologists elsewhere; suffice to say context of clips does have an impact in the empirical study of television comedy and the artificial textual environment needs to be considered as critically as the artificial viewing environment is.

After the video had been screened the respondents completed the last page of the questionnaire putting their immediate responses into writing. Many of my discussion questions were similar to those on the forms but as Kitzinger (1994) notes, having respondents commit in writing to their own private thoughts gives the researcher an insight into which aspects are most important to each person, it can assist the transcription, and it encourages them to verbalise their responses, including those which sit in opposition to those previously expressed by others in the group. By writing their ideas down respondents are more likely to contribute them orally to the discussion. It also allows for shy respondents with plenty to say but no opportunity to speak in the group. This stage usually took fifteen minutes so there was often only thirty minutes left for discussion. This was unfortunate but not hopeless. Without a one-hour constraint I might not have managed so many willing volunteers in the first place as university timetables permit free hours more easily than free ninety-minute slots and undergraduates become so accustomed to this routine their attention spans wane even with plenty of juice and Kitkats. The mitigating factor is that the time had been taken not with idleness but with providing constructive and detailed responses via the questionnaires.

The point of focus groups above individual interviews is not to save time, money and repetitive transcription by doing several people at once but rather to add another dimension by engaging the respondents interactively with each other (Kitzinger 1994). Achieving this interaction in practice takes some doing since there might be group pre-existing dynamics that the researcher cannot know about among friends or partners in the group. Beyond the issues of interactive dynamics which concern all focus group researchers, comedy texts and local/ regional/ national identity further problematise the methodological design. Comedy and humour can be divisive, and discussing comedy can be difficult without at least some common ground. The video clips were chosen to be less extreme than *EUK* and to be balanced in that Glaswegians, or Edinburghers, or Gaels, (or men, or white people, or Scots) were not the sole topic of all the sketches. As well as the responsibility to maintain a discussion dynamic between myself and all the respondents and the need to be sensitive to the potential for divisiveness or discomfort from the material to be discussed, a third issue confronted me as an individual researcher: the fact that I am not Scottish. In the end I think this was helpful rather than obtrusive because I was not perceived to be from one of the areas under discussion (at least, not properly).

Examples in the discussions which relied on particular historical or culturally-specific knowledges were often spelt out to me in a way that might have been left unspoken with

a Scottish interviewer. This was especially true among Gaelic-speakers both in Glasgow and on Skye, all of whom were helpful and patient and none of whom reacted negatively to my inability to speak their language.[10] Of course a Scottish interviewer might not have needed elaboration at all; my point is that where I had feared it might be disadvantageous or attract a particular hostility quite the opposite appeared to be true in practice. All my respondents were accommodating and the flow of conversation gave me good indications about how comfortable they were with the topic and the tone of the discussion. There were no tense or raised voices and no prolonged silences in any of the groups.

The discussion phase began with a broad question about the screening, moved through some transitional questions about groups, comedy and sense of humour, to final focus questions about Scottish groups, locations, sense of humour, and the best and worst of Scottish television comedy. This last question seems obvious with hindsight but in truth occurred to me only when my pilot group of Edinburgh men veered off into chatter about Canadians and Americans. In this first group I had allowed an hour for the discussion phase and deliberately indulged wanderings off-topic purely to establish how tightly I would need to focus the later groups and to try out the questions for relevance and future 'weighting' (in terms of approximate time needed for the discussion to run its course). By asking about the best and worst Scottish television comedy I had discovered a firm wrap-up question and left the discussion clearly concluded on topic after having allowed the participants the opportunity earlier in the discussion to talk about other kinds of comedy and not only Scottish texts. On more than one occasion a respondent told the group that they preferred and watched more American comedy to British comedy, an important unprompted distinction that might not have been aired had the 'Scottishness' of my research frame been made central at every stage of the session.

The greatest difficulty with the focus groups was recruiting appropriate and qualified respondents. The Glasgow groups were all relatively problem-free save for one where the Edinburgh students had trouble finding a parking space and had to be rescheduled (happily this was simple enough). The Edinburgh-based groups and the Skye-based group were more problematic. The pilot group was drawn from a comedy class and all four had the vocabulary, the focus and the confidence to discuss the clips and their ideas easily. However only two were actually Edinburghers (the others were a Dundonian and a Glaswegian), a problem brought about by a contact at that university acting as gatekeeper wanting to assist but finding it difficult to attract Edinburgh-only recruits.

The other Edinburgh group was equally inappropriate: of the four booked only two showed, one of whom had only lived in Edinburgh two months and the other identified as English. Travel between Glasgow and Edinburgh was very difficult at this time, sometimes taking two hours by train because of flooding and landslips, and I was loath to turn away willing respondents just because two is a pair and not a group. The Skye groups were all booked tentatively by me by approaching live-in students at dinner and breakfast. However, many used the free time on that Thursday afternoon in a neighbouring town (frustratingly, this timeslot had been recommended by researchers

based at Skye when I'd made a prior visit exactly to establish this kind of information). One group failed to show at all and two of the later group turned up rather drunk since they were procrastinating writing a long essay in Gaelic due the next day. Again, I was there, I had limited time, they were prepared to help, I could only try.

The focus groups were transcribed in as much detail as possible except in one group of six Glaswegian women where their voices were too similar to differentiate at all, and most of the trainees' interview on Skye. In these cases the groups were large enough and internally consistent enough to work as representative groups (so the Glasgow group was treated as 'Glaswegian women'). The transcriptions formed the basis for the analysis in tandem with my observational notes and the respondents' questionnaires in comparison with the first section questionnaires completed by the new television studies undergraduates, and in triangulation with other sources of data.

Further considerations

Audiences' relations with culture and society are immensely complex and often ephemeral, undetectable, inexpressible. What the encoding/decoding work in Morley's (1980, 1981) *Nationwide* studies finally achieved was a quantitative description of the project's poor fit between theory and praxis, between social class and decoding, between research question and research methodology. Although Christine Geraghty (1998:143) describes Hall's theories as 'not so much tested as developed through contact with "the readers"' in the *Nationwide* study, this summary takes into account Morley's later revisions, including his shift in 1986 toward studying television use in the domestic familial environment. While not wanting to suggest that a family is more natural or important a group or viewing situation than a focus group constructed for the purpose (or even a borrowed pre-existing classroom dynamic), I nevertheless take Morley's point about wanting to see *how* people make choices about typical, private television viewing. The move to *Family Television* is not merely a shift from a local college into a domestic living area but represents a total repositioning of the research question.

Instead of exploring social class and semiotics in an educational environment, Morley goes back to basics and looks at the point where individuals and family groups decide to watch television at all. What do they watch, who chooses, what struggles for control of the remote take place? And it is from this fundamental research question—'who watches what' (or, more broadly, 'who does what with the television set', since games, VCRs and teletext were also included in the related technologies explored)—that a completely new research trajectory becomes possible.

Where encoding/ decoding models emphasise and classify social differences and draw conclusions from the data to make wider generalisations about how particular distinct groups of people read television texts, qualitative models are able to explore one subsection of the audience in depth without the burden of representativeness or quantitatively assessed external validity (see Kitzinger 1994; Geraghty 1998). The studies

do still need to be systematic in their construction, description and analysis, however, as Ann Gray (1992) points out in her criticisms of Dorothy Hobson's (1982) unstructured interviews and scant descriptions of the women studied. Qualitative research privileges an open-ended research question which, as Christine Geraghty puts it, is explored and developed rather than tested: it employs hypothetico-inductive epistemologies rather than positivist ones, it is empirical without being empiricist (see Morley 1989 and Ang 1989 for a theoretical discussion of these critical distinctions arising from their respective self-reflections on earlier empirical work).

In research on television audiences or domestic technology users qualitative research on group interactions with social and cultural phenomena is often presented as an 'ethnography'. What constitutes ethnographic research or 'an ethnography' is hotly contested; Marie Gillespie (1995:1) defines ethnography as 'the empirical description and analysis of cultures based on intensive and extensive fieldwork in a selected local setting'. Gillespie expects an ethnography to include the long-term application of methodologies and techniques including writing an extended 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), collecting and creating of quantitative data, interviewing of groups, families and individuals, and taking part in considerable participant observation which is described in detail in fieldwork diaries. As Christine Geraghty notes (1998:142), Gillespie's definition anticipates 'ethnography' to refer to the application of '[ethnographic] method as well as the object or intention of the study'.

By comparison, examples of a television audience or user study presented as 'ethnography' abound but almost none includes a thick description—the result of what Silverstone *et al* (1991:204) refer to as the 'long conversation'—or details their participant observation beyond listing what each person said during the interview. While not suggesting that Marie Gillespie's is the one true ethnographic method I would instead repeat the many calls for such work to be designed and practised more self-reflexively, in epistemological and methodological terms as well as in terms of how researchers approach the researched social subjects.

This issue is not easy to resolve: as Janice Radway (1994) reminds us, no matter how close the rapport and empathy becomes between the researcher and her subjects Radway then writes up the social materials in a discursive manner and from an analytic perspective and distance which reinscribes the group as an object of study (if not as a deviant other). This is partly a tension between participating and observing: the researcher may have much in common with the group being studied but ultimately must detach from a participant's perspective in her discourse and analysis. Similarly Radway's point expresses a tension within the interdisciplinary paradigmatic connections *pace* Gillespie whereby ethnographic method and ethnographic intention must be clearly defined and carefully articulated. But the issue also involves a tension of positioning, of recognising and attempting to redress the considerable perceived and real imbalances of power and discourses of representation between the scholar and the participant. This problem has implications for both the 'research questions' and the 'interview questions'.

My study does not constitute an ethnography in any sense but rather seeks to do something much smaller: it considers how we can describe and analyse the importance of locally-made television comedy to a particular complex of regional and cultural groups within a small nation like Scotland. It recognises the epistemological and methodological gaps found in previous studies of television comedy audiences, namely the interrelated difficulties of watching people watch comedy. It weighs up the possible uses of an encoding/ decoding model and prefers explorative methods to create qualitative data. Most significantly, it retreats from a single-text focus and instead takes a step backwards to ask: how is Scottish television comedy important? And how important is it, this genre, this medium, these local programmes, to Scottish people? What do Scots make of it all? Do they cringe? Do they cheer? Do they laugh?

Notes

[1] This approach takes Lewis far closer to Morley's *Nationwide* study than to Tamar and Liebes's participant observation at the moment of watching an episode of *Dallas* as it was broadcast.
[2] The Japanese predecessor *Endurance* is familiar viewing in Britain because clips have featured regularly on television-culture focused shows like *Saturday Night Clive* (BBC) and *Tarrant on TV* (ITV). British audiences were thus accustomed to viewing these selected segments of the game out of context and through a cultural lens of ridicule, taking up the invitations issued by hosts Clive James or Chris Tarrant to judge the Japanese contestants as hilarious delinquent masochists who will do anything to be seen on television. *EUK* expands upon these familiar mainstream representations of *Endurance* as symptomatic of Japanese culture to reposition the games within the context of British humour, although screening late at night on the minor sattelite/cable channel Challenge TV, *EUK* is much less accessible. Of course Channel Four's *The Word* offered Britons the chance to eat their own pubic hair on crackers or to be submerged in a bath of manure: thus the desire to participate in delinquent rituals is not limited to Japan as *EUK* might seem to suggest.
[3] Perhaps *EUK's* closest relative is Reeves and Mortimer's *Families At War* in which team members display talents like boxing a shed until it is lower than a dog, or waxing hair from ten people before The Beautiful South finish singing their latest hit. However *Families at War* screened on BBC1 at tea-time and thus sits in the mainstream as acceptable for family viewing; by contrast *EUK* screened on the tiny Challenge TV satellite channel in late-night timeslots.
[4] For different readings on the nature of license, sanction, social safety valves and bourgeois complicity and recuperation of carnival, see Stallybrass and White 1986; Sloterdijk 1987; Fiske 1989; Stam 1989; Smith 1989. For arguments against the misuse of 'carnival', particularly with respect to the historical conditions under which Rabelais and Bakhtin worked, see Bennett 1986; Mercer 1986.
[5] Texts can contextualise identical comedic material differently. In Clifford Geertz's (1973:417) discussion of cock-fighting, including the 'deep psychological identification of Balinese men with their cocks' and their occasional desire to 'fiddle with someone else's cock', the double entendre is contextualised as academic wit but *EUK* has no such pretensions about its similar 'pecker' jokes.
[6] See *Private Eye* 1998a; Emperor Akihito's picture has an added speech-balloon which reads, 'I'm very sorry but I'm not going to apologise'. The editorial column (*Private Eye* 1998b) reprints the Hirohito cover from 1971 with the caption 'Nasty Nip in the Air', showing then-Emperor Hirohito saying 'Ah so' and subtitled with the reply, 'The *Eye* says, Piss Off Bandy Knees'. The inversion of 'Nasty' to 'Nice' is not a reversal of the invective stance taken toward Akihito's father—the editorial parodies the Emperors' traditional status as demi-gods and suggests it is time to 'build bridges, not to mention cars, with our former enemies the Japanese'—but rather uses irony to say one thing and assert another in order to critique any opinion which would recognise the political and historical differences between wartime Hirohito and 1990s Ahikito.
[7] See Donovan 1999. Donovan complains of the inconsistency which allows Ross to call the Japanese 'Nips' but disallows other phrases he considers to be parallel, asking, 'Just what ethnic terms are acceptable, and why?'. Compare with Hargrave 1991: 'Table 5: Acceptability of racist terms of abuse' (1991:17), part of a report on research undertaken by the Broadcasting Standards Council. About halfway down a ranked list of eighteen such terms, 'Nip' was described by respondents in the following percentages: 'Not at all' acceptable, 31%; 'Not very' acceptable, 26%; 'Fairly' acceptable, 33%; 'very' acceptable, 10%.
[8] Similar comments circulate about the films *Starship Troopers* (dir. Paul Verhoeven 1995) and *Natural Born Killers* (1993 dir. Oliver Stone) which use excessive significations of war and ultraviolence and can be read as either promoting or satirising these aspects of culture.
[9] Robinson 1999. The text of the paper largely followed the discussion included here.
[10] In Skye I asked one Gaelic student if she minded my questions and she explained her concerns with the following story. A reporter from a London newspaper had recently visited her community on Lewis. On returning to London the journalist wrote disparagingly about, among other things, the locals' eating oaten herrings with their fingers. This is best table manners in Lewis she said, and by far the best way to pick out the fine bones. Instead the writer had perpetuated stereotypes Gaels found so tiresome: that Gaels are anachronistic, cultureless, primitive, somehow frightening *and* quaint, a portrait that my contact described as 'racist' and which encouraged, as she saw it, mainlanders' views that Gaels are 'mad dwarves who live in caves'.

CHAPTER FIVE

Scottish Television Comedy Audiences: Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents three sections of empirical audience research. The first is a survey conducted among first-year students in a University of Glasgow film and television class; the second section is letters solicited from members of the public across Scotland; and the third is a series of focus groups whose participants were undergraduate students in three Scottish locations. The pieces of research were originally planned as a complementary trio but in practice the work developed a chronological and epistemological progression: the preliminary results of the survey affected the focus and qualitative approach to the letters section, and the less satisfactory letters data in turn affected how the focus groups were organised. These developments and rethinking of the research directions have been discussed in the previous chapter but will be reconsidered here and occasionally again in the interpretation and discussion chapter which follows.

The parts are presented and analysed in chronological order, but the letters section, which illustrated some intrinsic methodological problems and yielded little useful data, is given less discussion than the other two parts. The questionnaire section includes the data presentation as well as the analysis and interpretation, but the focus group section only shows the analysis and interpretation: the raw data from the focus groups are presented as transcripts and are appended to examination copies of the thesis. The survey created data from a single application of a questionnaire in a pre-existing university lecture group: like those who took part in the focus groups, these respondents were all undergraduate university students. Thus the respondents across the study can be thought of as having a degree of homogeneity in terms of approximate social class status and educational attainment levels. This is both helpful and a little problematic in that respondents might be thought of typically as students as well as containing or expressing a sense of Scottishness. Thus, the experiences and preferences they describe and select might differ from those to be found if other generational groups were studied. My results then can only be related to comparable groups; however by using more than one method of data collection and triangulating against other research, I hope to demonstrate the validity of these preliminary, exploratory empirical data and conclusions about these young people in Scotland and their relation to Scottish television comedy.

SECTION ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Individual details

This questionnaire section of the research sought to determine how important comedy was within the viewing preferences of a large relatively homogeneous group of mostly young, mostly British adults. There were ninety-three respondents whose details can be grouped and described as follows (see Table 5.1). The greatest consistency within the group was in regard to the respondents' ages: almost ninety percent (n=83) of the students taking part were between seventeen and twenty years old. Only ten respondents had ages beyond this cluster; of these, all were older, and the eldest was aged thirty-two years. In terms of gender, the ratio was approximately two-fifths male and three-fifths female. The age spread among male and female sections of the sample was similar. For ethnicity, the open-ended question generated some noteworthy responses, including a variety of alternatives (perhaps euphemisms) for 'white'. Examples of this creativity, inarticulacy or ambivalence include the anticipated responses of 'White', 'Caucasian', 'European' or 'White UK' and the more idiosyncratic, less anticipated responses of 'Catholic (White)', or 'English?' [*sic*] or 'None, really (White)'. Nearly one-eighth (n=12) of the respondents left this question blank: significantly, this was the second-highest scoring answer in terms of frequency in this section and a 'nil' response only occurred once elsewhere among these demographic categories (in Nationality, from a respondent who described themselves as 'White' and having 'always lived in Scotland').

Collapsing self-descriptions of ethnicity into more useful categories is often problematic—both difficult and perhaps unwise—since judgments must be made against the respondent's own declared preferences. For example, how might 'Irish', 'English?' and 'Greek' be articulated with 'European'? Are 'White UK', 'Scottish', and 'White Scottish' connected, let alone comparable or interchangeable? How does 'Catholic (White)' compare to 'Jewish'? The question was deliberately phrased in an open manner in order to see how the respondents did self-identify, rather than offering forced-choices for quantitative comparison. In this regard the analysis is more qualitative than quantitative so collapsing the variety of responses further into grouped categories is inappropriate.

One might anticipate that the same problematic would not arise with regard to Nationality, since it refers to a discrete geographical entity and not to a sense of personal or family origins. Thus we might expect that 'British', 'Scottish', 'English', 'UK' and other variations might be grouped together under an umbrella term for varieties of a collective United Kingdom identity. But the use of an open-ended question has again prompted quite specific responses many of which are just as likely to exclude as connect with, similar definitions. For example, are 'Scottish British' and 'British (Scottish)' effectively the

same, or are they diametrically opposed? Further, there are political ramifications to be considered when analysing these responses, not least with regard to the current position and status of Scottish devolution. Do respondents intend to refer to Great Britain when they call themselves 'British', that is, to explicitly disregard Northern Ireland and various adjacent archipelagos (that comprise the United Kingdom) as part of the region with which they identify? By calling themselves 'Scottish' are they rejecting the unifying political power of Westminster in favour of Holyrood as a centre for their identity; or are 'Scottish' respondents merely offering a geographically precise description, in which case 'Scottish, 'English' and 'N. Irish' might be considered equivalent location-descriptions although politically the three are significantly unequal and incomparable. Comparing and grouping these labels is therefore problematic and potentially spurious.

However, more information about these questions may be discovered through comparison with answers from the final demographic question which asks, 'How long have you lived in Scotland?'. The raw responses show nearly two-fifths had lived in Scotland 'since starting university' (that is, less than six months) whereas more than half had lived here 'always' (n=50). Of those who had always lived in Scotland (Group D), compared with those respondents who had lived in Scotland since starting university (Group A), their nationalities and ethnicities were described thus (see Table 5.2).

Although the raw tallies of nationalities reveal little more than a quantitative description, taken in connection with the period of residence the data suggest a demonstrable trend. Twice as many respondents who had 'always lived in Scotland' called themselves 'Scottish' (n=30) as 'British' (n=14), and this group (Group D) was considerably more likely to identify themselves at least partly as 'Scottish'. Using either 'Scottish', 'Scottish British' or 'British (Scottish)' as descriptions, thirty-three out of fifty respondents—two-thirds of Group D—incorporated some form of 'Scottish' self-description. At the same time, twenty from the fifty respondents in this category (including three who used 'Scottish' in combination with other terms) used terms other than 'Scottish' to describe their nationality (sometimes in combination) even though they had 'always lived in Scotland'.

In the contrasting group however, those respondents who had lived in Scotland since starting their university course (Group A) and were not 'international students' were much less likely to describe themselves in terms of *any* 'national' identity (English, Scottish, Northern Irish or Welsh) from within the United Kingdom, and were considerably more likely to self-identify using the pan-national term, 'British'.[1] At the same time only those respondents from within the United Kingdom displayed such indecision or variety when describing their own nationality, including, for example, a 'Canadian British' respondent in Group C (lived in Scotland more than five years). All respondents from furth of the United Kingdom identified their national status plainly, for example 'Korean' or 'USA'.

These demographic data and the interim results about how the respondents self-identify in terms of ethnicity and nationality gave some insight into the problematics of discussing texts and any sense of nation and identity with audience groups, a complex

issue reconsidered when the focus group interviews were being formulated and constructed. (Data from the survey are compared with similarly-acquired data from the focus group participants later.) These data come from a small sample and only limited conclusions can be drawn from them; nonetheless, patterns can be seen to emerge from the analysis.

Television access

This part of the research sought to quantify the kind and degree of access the respondents had to television and television-related technologies. Since this survey was administered in February 2000 there have been several developments in television-related technologies. At the time of writing (early 2001) digital television for the domestic user has become cheaper to install, web-TV (an Internet and email connection via an online television system) is widely available at a much lower cost than comparable computing equipment, television aerials can feed directly into domestic PCs, and DVD players offering extensive textual features for showing movies and excellent picture and sound quality have recently entered the home entertainment market. Rather than establish the market penetration of certain technologies, however, this part of the questionnaire sought to produce a profile of the respondents' access to these technologies in order to compare the participants' preferred channel choices with their stated access, as well as for comparison with regard to the respondents' attitudes toward and preferences within their television viewing.

Respondents were asked to enumerate the technologies in their 'current living situation'. Afterwards it became clear that a further question asking the nature of their domestic situations might have been additionally useful (this was asked of the focus group respondents later) but nonetheless, the data collected were illuminating (see Table 5.3). Degree of use and relative importance in the respondents' lives were also not explored, since technology was not the primary object of the study.

Of the 93 respondents, two had no domestic access to television. Only six had access to an old-style black-and-white television at home whereas ninety-one respondents—that is, everyone who had access to a television at all—had a colour television (including all those with a black-and-white set too). Eleven of these colour sets were widescreen televisions and therefore new, large and top-of-the-range, since widescreen is a recent television technology aimed at a luxury market. Of respondents reporting access to a colour television, forty-one (44%) had one set and fifteen (16%) had two sets, but thirty-four respondents (36%) indicated three or more colour televisions in their homes, and one respondent had six colour sets.

The number of technologies per respondent household varied from 'none' (n=1, the other person with no television access reporting ownership of a camcorder) to 'seven' (n=3) where the possible maximum was 'nine' (counting options like a widescreen colour television, or a digibox plus satellite dish, as two technologies each). Nearly half the of respondents reported 'four' or 'five' different technologies combined at home (n=46,

49.5%). When the number of different kinds of technologies are multiplied by their frequency within the home, the results range from the extremes of 'none' (n=1) to 'eighteen' (n=1), although over ninety percent of respondents listed from 'one' to 'ten' items (n=84) and a score of more than 'ten' distinct items was rarely reported.

From these data it is apparent that the respondents as a sample have a high standard of living in terms of access to television and related technologies with on average 3.88 kinds of technology in the home and 5.8 items.[2] The next part below discusses their reported times spent watching television and enjoyment of it compared to the previous year, and the remaining questions asked under 'access to television' about preferred channel choice are analysed with the respondents' favourite programmes and genres, later.

Levels of watching and enjoyment

The questionnaire offered a Likert scale and asked how much television the respondent watched in an average week, and how much they enjoyed watching television, as compared to the previous year. This question was constructed with the ideas of David Gauntlett and Annette Hill (1999) in mind; their analysis of the BFI five-year diaries had suggested a significant life-stage shift when young people ended high school and entered university or work in their late teens, and that television was less important in their lives. However, Gauntlett and Hill had access to qualitative diary data to support their theory and similar conclusions cannot be drawn here so easily. While a great majority of the respondents (students in a first-level course) were new students their age-spread indicates that not all transferred to university directly from high school, and their living situation was not established here so clearly as it had been in the BFI study. Thus, conclusions about related causes of respondents' attitudes and experiences cannot be drawn in this way from these data.

Nevertheless, the data show clear patterns. Dealing with the questions separately, it may be seen that two-thirds of respondents (n=63) noted that they watched less or much less television than a year previously; at the same time two-thirds (n=63) reported enjoying their viewing 'about the same' as the year before. Both genders followed this trend, but with some variation of proportion, with more men watching less or much less, and more women enjoying it 'about the same'. Among women respondents (n=57), almost sixty-five percent (n=37) watched less or much less television, and seventy-five percent reported enjoying it 'about the same' (n=43). Among men respondents (n=36), seventy-two percent watched less or much less television, and fifty-five percent (n=20) noted they enjoyed it 'about the same' (see Figure 5.1, Figure 5.2).

Preferred channels, programmes, genres and countries of origin

As well as expressing a reduction in television viewing in combination with levels of enjoyment similar to the year before, the respondents indicated clear preferences when asked to rank three from five possible terrestrial channels. There were three ambiguous

sets of answers in which the respondents had ticked three options rather than numbering them, and one nil response (see Table 5.4).[3] The 'ambiguous' responses are included in the combined channel scores since the channels are clearly indicated, but not included in the analyses which deal with rankings .

Channel4 was by far the most popular channel, scoring over half the first-place votes. Overall, however, BBC1 and Channel4 were comparably popular when all their place-ratings were added together; among those indicating a ranked preference (n=89), BBC1 drew approval from ninety-one percent (n=81) and Channel4 received approval from ninety-four percent (n=84). Both BBC1 and BBC2 scored much better as second and third-place choices, and ITV scored slightly more highly as a third choice than it had in first and second positions combined. Channel5 scored last in each category, drawing only half as many votes as the fourth-choice channel in second and third positions, and no first-place votes whatsoever.

The raw scores tallied in this way give an indication of the preferred channels but give no indication of the degree of preference or how the preferences were grouped. However, it is possible to see how the preferences represent strings of choices, and by calculating the possible permutations of channels chosen, a number of combinations become more clearly preferred. In terms of a string of responses, the combination with the highest frequency value (n=19) was Channel4 first, BBC2 second, BBC1 third [4-2-1]; the second highest scoring sequence was 4-1-3, with thirteen respondents citing this order of preference, and third most preferred order was 4-1-2, nominated by eight respondents. However, since there is no method of determining how much each respondent weights their hierarchies, the results ought to be compared with a combinatory analysis. When all scores for each possible grouping of channels are calculated together, the following results emerge. Among these respondents (n=93), a combination of BBC1, BBC2 and Channel4 [1*2*4] was the most popular, with just under half (48.9%, n=45) preferring these three channels together, and just under a third (32.6%, n=30) preferring a combination of BBC1, ITV and Channel4 [1*3*4]. Other combinations scored considerably less frequently.

The point of asking the questionnaire respondents how they felt about channels was in part an attempt to understand how strongly they noted channels as having separate and distinct identities and 'personalities' in terms of the kinds of programming each produces. While the degree to which the respondents identified with their choice of channels is not determinable from these data, the clear clustering of channel preferences (including the widespread lack of support for Channel5) does nevertheless indicate grouped perceptions about and preferences for particular British terrestrial channels.

Next the questionnaire asked the respondents to select 'only two channels from any source', and as an open-ended question this was answered with much more variation than the forced-choice hierarchy of the previous question.

The most popular channels from 'any source' were Channel4 with 16.7% of the respondents desiring it (n=31, from a possible 186) followed by a close grouping of BBC1 at 11.8% (n=22), Sky1 (10.8%, n=20), FilmFour (10.2%, n=19); MTV took fifth-equal position with 'nil response' (for each of these, 9.1%, n=17) and BBC2 was sixth with 8.6%

(n=16). Apart from SkySport (3.8%, n=7) and ITV (3.2%, n=6), the other channel options each received only a few nominations.[4] Those respondents who nominated terrestrial channels invariably selected from among their prior choices mentioned in their three-from-five rankings of the previous question. There was no significant difference between those with and those without satellite/ cable/ digital access in terms of their channel preferences, as Table 5.5 illustrates.

The questionnaire asked the respondents to list their three favourite television shows, two shows they 'hate to miss', two shows they would video if they were going out and a number of related questions on genre. The programmes questions were open-ended, whereas the genre questions required a forced-choice from a descriptive list. The genre questions asked which one genre the respondents watched most, which one genre they enjoyed most plus whether they preferred UK-made or US-made programmes of this kind, and the one genre they least enjoyed. After presenting raw tabulations, I will analyse the respondents' answers with regard to responses given elsewhere in the questionnaire.

In terms of preferred programmes, ninety-two programmes were mentioned with varying frequency across 279 possible responses (three nominations each from ninety-three respondents). Each respondent could nominate up to three favourite shows, but fifty-five of the shows were only mentioned once, sixteen were mentioned twice and nine were mentioned three times (where n=3 represents 1.1%). Only twelve programmes (and blanks, n=29) scored more highly (see Table 5.6). Similar patterns emerged with programmes the respondents 'hated to miss', although there were sixty-four blanks and seven explicit 'none' responses to be accounted for as well. When asked which programmes they would 'always video', there were eighty-eight blanks and eighteen responses of 'none' or 'never'.[5]

However, the emerging patterns are perhaps less predictable. As Table 5.7 demonstrates, these programme choices indicate preferences for a small range of genres, tightly-focused channel selections, and show a preference for American rather than British programming. Apart from three soaps (*Neighbours; Eastenders, Hollyoaks*), *The Eleven O'Clock Show* and 'football' all other programmes mentioned with any significant frequency originated in the United States; even these barely rise above the threshold, scoring only 1.4% and 1.6% of nominations respectively. (Preferred Country of Origin for favourite genre is discussed further below.) The channel preferences—predominantly programmes from Channel 4, BBC2 and BBC1, in order of descending frequency—appear similar to those previously listed by the respondents in the Channel-Preferences section of the questionnaire (see earlier discussion). And the limited range of particular genres cited appears similar to those subsequently listed as Genre Preferences (see below).

The final part of this section of the questionnaire offered a range of programme descriptions grouped to construct comprehensive generic categories. These categories were organised to be easily understood by the respondents with regard to what sorts of programmes were included and excluded from each grouping. However, a standardised, pre-existing format from similar or comparable studies was not used in this questionnaire because this question marks a transition from general to specifically comedy-related

enquiry, and this list of genres had to offer clear distinctions between kinds of comedy programmes in order to be analytically useful. Two theoretical problems arising in this study's earlier chapters from the initial literature survey on comedy genres related to whether viewers considered genres when making programme choices, and how certain comedy sub-genres might be perceived and preferred among this audience group, and this question was constructed to explore these ideas.

From the forced-choice list, the following responses were given (Figure 5.3). What is immediately striking about these responses is the strong clustering and clear divergences. We might expect that feature films would score highly among those genres watched most 'in terms of total time per week' given that most features take at least ninety minutes and sometimes run for three hours or more, particularly when shown on commercial channels. We might also predict that the genre most watched would also score highly among those 'most enjoyed'; given the extra time-investment that feature-film viewing requires, we might have predicted strong correlation between time spent watching feature films and its consequent enjoyment.

What is similarly striking, however, is the disparity between the amount of time spent watching soaps, listed here as second-most watched genre (n=17, 18.3%), and the subsequent low rating among those genres respondents 'most enjoy' (n=6, 6.5%). Music manifests a less striking example along similar lines, watched most by six respondents (6.5%) but enjoyed most by four respondents (4.3%); news was watched most by four respondents (4.3%) but nobody enjoyed it most. A converse comparison is also discernible. For example, sitcoms are watched most by twelve respondents (12.9%) but enjoyed most by seventeen respondents (18.3%); drama is watched most by nine respondents (9.7%) but enjoyed most by thirteen respondents (14%); and comedy ('stand-up, sketches, light ent.') is watched most by eight respondents (8.6%) but enjoyed most by fourteen respondents (15.1%). Sport was watched most and enjoyed most by the same number (n=5, 5.4%). Other genres gained only small scores, and leisure, special interest, game and quiz shows and childrens television scored no mentions at all in either most watched or most enjoyed categories. Taking comedy genres together, 'sitcoms' and 'comedy' were watched most by twenty respondents and, with 'chat', enjoyed most by thirty-two respondents (34.5%), a full third of the empirical sample.

Sport was least enjoyed by fifteen respondents (16.1%), soaps by seven respondents (7.5%) and 'docudrama' by six respondents (6.5%) but aside from these examples, notably different genres were cited as 'least enjoyed' from those mentioned in previous categories. Game or quiz shows, leisure shows ('travel, style makeover, animals, gardening, cooking') and chat or talk shows might all potentially be included in comedy as a broad metagenre, but these genre categories were enjoyed least by fourteen (15.1%), twelve (12.9%) and ten (10.8%) respondents respectively. A further ten (10.8%) enjoyed childrens programmes least, and seven (7.5%) least enjoyed special interest programmes (described in this question as 'language, religion, national or ethnic group' programmes). Other genres were mentioned much less frequently.

From these data definite patterns of preferences can be seen for certain types of

programme genres, and specifically, for certain types of comedy sub-genres. While sitcoms and stand-up, sketch or light entertainment comedy was most watched by twenty respondents (21.5%), these sub-genres plus chat were most enjoyed by thirty-two respondents (34.5%) and rated only one mention among those genres least enjoyed (one respondent specified 'Sitcom USA'). On the other hand, game and quiz shows and chat or talk shows were least enjoyed by twenty-four respondents (25.9%) and only mentioned once positively (one respondent enjoyed chat shows most).

In terms of country of origin for most enjoyed genre, the following preferences were expressed (Figure 5.4). Forty-two respondents preferred programmes from the UK, forty-five preferred programmes from the USA, and there were five blanks and one ambiguous response ('UK/USA'). Those preferring UK-made programmes from their most enjoyed genre category particularly mentioned feature films (n=10), drama (n=8), comedy (n=8), soaps (n=5), sitcoms, and sport (each, n=3); other genres scored less frequently or not at all. Those preferring US-made programmes from their most enjoyed genre category strongly favoured feature films (n=16) and sitcoms (n=14), mentioning comedy and drama less frequently (each, n=4) and other genres less frequently again, or not at all.

While it might seem desirable at this point to analyse the respondents' individual preferences in reverse, as it were, by comparing their various stated preferences in new combinations, in practice such questions were unanswerable. For example, comparing most enjoyed genre and country of origin with individuals' favourite programmes was impossible because respondents had indicated up to three programmes each; and, more significantly, because the 'most enjoyed genre' as a category was dominated by feature films, and favourite programmes excluded films through implicit mutual understanding between researcher and respondent (thus, no respondent listed feature films as a favourite programme). The difficulties assigning a genre or subgenre category to specific shows has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, but it becomes significant here too: is *Seinfeld* stand-up or sitcom? Comparing respondents' programme preferences and their channel preferences also presented difficulties in analysis for similar reasons of multiple replies; whereas the 'preferred two channels from any source' results often cited non-terrestrial channels, 'favourite programmes' were very frequently from terrestrial-only channels. This is rendered more complex by the fact that many non-terrestrial channels broadcast repeats of shows made and broadcast originally by terrestrial channels. Cross-analysis of individual responses also risks becoming too atomised and thus analytically unsustainable.

A significant line of enquiry that can be approached through these original data, however, is this: who in this sample prefers to watch British television comedy? And does their individual list of preferred programmes broadly confirm this stated preference? As a corollary, the same questions might be asked of American television comedy, especially given its frequent dominance of the programme choices and genre/ country of origin preferences.

Twelve respondents noted one of the comedy subgenres as their favourite genre and listed the UK as preferred country of origin; eighteen respondents chose a comedy

subgenre and preferred US-made programmes of these genres. Of those who preferred British comedy, there were eight men and four women; eight of the twelve had 'always' lived in Scotland and all had origins from within the geopolitical boundaries of the European Union. Of those preferring American comedy, there were fourteen women and four men; ten of this group had 'always' lived in Scotland and four were from the United States, the remainder having origins within Europe.

When the 'favourite programmes' are compared with the individual's stated preferences with regard to genre and country of origin, the twelve respondents who preferred UK-made comedy demonstrate some ambivalence in their programme choices, collectively listing UK-made comedy programmes eleven times and US-made comedies twelve times; programmes fitting other genre or country of origin categories were indicated eleven times and there were 4 four blanks (where n=36, that is, twelve respondents with three choices each). By contrast, those eighteen respondents who preferred US-made comedies listed nineteen preferred American comedies and only seven British ones, with twenty-two programmes of other genre types and six blanks (n=54).

When only responses from those indicating they have 'always' lived in Scotland are considered, any seeming disparity suggested by the above results is diminished. Those Scots who preferred UK-made comedy (n=8) chose UK-made shows seven times and US-made shows seven times, with nine mentions for other genres and one blank. Those Scots who preferred US-made comedy (n=10) listed seven UK-made comedy shows and ten American-made comedies, but they also chose eleven programmes from other genres or countries and left two blanks. Interestingly, the two mentions of Scottish-made comedy (*Chewin The Fat*) come from this group of Scots who profess to preferring American comedy shows. These data will be explored more fully in the next section, where comedy programme preferences are given.

Television comedy preferences

These three open-ended questions sought the respondents' opinions on comedy programmes they might watch with their parents, their two favourite comedy shows, and comedies they felt were not funny.

It might have been illuminating, had the opportunity arisen, to ask the parents the same question in reverse. There were thirty-six blanks from a possible 186 responses (Figure 5.5, Figure 5.6, Figure 5.7). According to these respondents, their parents also enjoyed *Frasier, Friends, Only Fools and Horses, Father Ted,* and *The Simpsons* in significant numbers. Parents watched more shows from previous decades like *Morecambe and Wise, Porridge, Dad's Army* and *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em* than did the respondents on their own, but also allegedly enjoyed odd-ball gameshows like *Bang Bang! It's Reeves and Mortimer,* black comedy like *The League of Gentlemen* and foul-language cartoons like *South Park.* In all, thirteen American shows garnered sixty-five mentions, and thirty-seven British shows were mentioned seventy-four times (one 'other' show, *Father Ted,* was nominated eleven times); both these country-of-origin cluster-patterns can be attributed to

the strong popularity of a handful of shows in combination with occasional mentions for many more.

Favourite comedy shows were again dominated by the American treble of *Friends, The Simpsons* and *Frasier* although blanks were numerous, as in the previous data (here there were thirty-four blanks of 186 possible replies). Including the three most popular shows, there were twelve American shows mentioned, aggregating to sixty-seven mentions between them; thirty British-made shows accumulated eighty-four mentions, and one 'other' country was mentioned once. In the 'not funny' category, blanks and comments scored most highly (n=60 and n=9 respectively), followed by *The Royle Family* (n=9), *Babes In The Wood, Beast, Dinnerladies, Friends, Gimme Gimme Gimme,* and *League of Gentlemen* (each, n=6). Of these, six were UK-made, and *Friends, The Royle Family, The Eleven O'Clock Show* and *League of Gentlemen* had each scored highly in the 'favourite comedies' section (n=30, n=8, n=7, n=7, respectively) as well as scoring frequently as 'not funny' (n=6, n=9, n=4, n=6). In all, thirty-seven British programmes were cited as not funny (with eighty-two mentions between them) and thirteen programmes from the United States were mentioned a total of thirty times, with five programmes from other or ambiguous sources listed once each.

As has been noted, a number of programmes were mentioned in more than one category (see Figure 5.8). The intersection of the first two categories (comedy programmes the respondents watch and enjoy with their parents, and favourite comedies) was to be expected. But the overlapping of the latter two categories—favourite comedies, and comedies that are 'just not funny'—was perhaps less easily anticipated. However, previous smaller-scale test-runs of these last two questions (at seminars, for example) had produced similar crossings-over, though in previous tests with smaller samples the clustering of larger frequencies was not so evident as it is here.

INTERPRETATION

Scottish Self-Identification

Among the students surveyed in the quantitative questionnaire (n=93, referred to here as the Robinson-2000 survey data), and excluding the fourteen 'international' students, the 50 home UK students who identified (using my wording) as having 'Always lived in Scotland' were twice as likely to identify by home nation, in this case, to use 'Scottish' as part of their self-description of nationality. Of these 50 Category D students, thirty described themselves as 'Scottish', 14 wrote 'British', two wrote 'Scottish British', two wrote 'UK', one used 'British (Scottish)' and one made no response. Two-thirds (n=33) of these Category D students used 'Scottish' either alone or in combination within their self-description compared to almost two-fifths (n=19) who used 'British' or 'UK' in the same way. Other non-international students were more likely to refer to some 'British' or 'UK' nationality rather than name a home nation: of the 29 remaining students in Categories A,

B and C (living in Scotland 'since university began', 'from six months to five years' and 'more than five years' respectively) who gave responses indicating a UK-based background, 'British' was used by 22 students, 'English' by three, 'Scottish' by two, and 'Northern Irish' and 'Canadian British' by one each. The survey sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of age and education level attained by respondents. From these responses I would conclude that sense of Scottishness has been established and demonstrated, in part because the labels are spontaneous and in part because of the frequency of the label's occurrence. It should also be noted that the students filling in the questionnaire were told that the study was about television at large, so their responses were not guided by the researcher towards 'Scottish television comedy' or 'national identity'. Thus the spontaneous self-labelling s Scottish is significant.

By comparison the BFI five-year diary study asked about ethnicity and nationality in a more guided manner. Its Diary 13, which also requested new personal information about other categories including disability and household structure, asks:

> Diary 13: 'How would you describe your ethnic origins/ nationality? (e.g. White British, British Black African, Pakistani, Chinese)

Respondents across the entire BFI cohort interacted with the question in a number of ways. Many respondents underlined or circled 'White British' or marked it with a tick (√) or crossed out all the other options, whereas many others indicated much the same information by writing 'White British' in the space provided. Some respondents adapted the options to fit their own circumstances, indicating their ethnicity and nationality in the format suggested, for example 'British Pakistani'. Some crossed out 'British', leaving 'White' intact and adding 'Scottish'. Others wrote 'Welsh' or 'Irish', 'English', or 'Scottish' in the space and ignored the ethnicity aspect. Occasionally a respondent placed 'White' in brackets thus: '(White) British'. A few respondents felt more strongly about these issues of nationality and ethnicity: one replaced 'British' with 'SCOTTISH' in large capitals.

Occasionally editorial comments appeared: one wrote 'White British—proudly!'; another wrote 'Human (+ disabled)'. One respondent described himself as 'Pinko Grey British (wife - also Pinko Grey British)' and a handful wrote approximate genealogies, for example, 'Celtic mongrel—I'm Irish, Scotish [sic] and Welsh'. Some criticised the question:

> Not *keen* on *this* sort of question—what the heck does it matter? Please don't copy Islingtonian/ Camdenian practices! [emphasis in original]

> [White British] but I think this is a racist question. I mean, how are we supposed to think of ourselves as anything like "all-the-same-really" when questions like this keep forcing us to think of our race and colour.

> I refused to call myself white in 1991 census on the grounds that it classified me along with those dreadful women in South Africa. Said I was Anglo-Saxon with a spot of Celtic.

The BFI respondents were asked to consider their ethnicity and nationality together as a descriptive pair and typically used the example given: 'White British'. Among the BFI's Scottish sub-sample (n=49, as I counted it) there were 35 completed responses. Of these

35, 20 identified as 'White British', six as 'White Scottish', four as 'Scottish', and one each of 'Anglo-Saxon/ Celt' (see quote above for the respondent's full explanation); 'British born in Scotland'; 'White British/ Irish'; 'White Scottish/ British'; and lastly 'White, British' with emphatic punctuation added. Thus, although it might appear that 57% (n=20) of the sub-sample responding to this question were prompted and possibly influenced by the guidance material (using 'White British' as per the example given) it must also be noted that 43 % (n=15) of the sub-sample's respondents assembled their own terms for their ethnic and national identities. One third (n=12) used 'Scottish' within their self-description; by contrast two-thirds (n=24) included 'British' in their response. All but six gave 'White' as their ethnicity.

When my survey respondents' answers are grouped to show ethnicity and nationality together, the following comparisons can be made. Although both samples are small and the Robinson-2000 ethnicity/nationality descriptions are based on the combination of two discrete data, nevertheless comparisons may be drawn:

- Where 57.1% (n=20) of the BFI sub-sample described themselves as 'White British' only 20% (n=10) of the students I surveyed used these terms.
- Where one-sixth (n=6) of the BFI sub-sample described themselves as 'White Scottish', fully one third (n=17) of the Robinson survey respondents used these terms.
- Of the BFI sub-sample, 11.4% described themselves as 'Scottish' alone, as did 12% of the Robinson students (n=6); for these respondents ethnicity was not mentioned.
- Lastly, 14.3% of the BFI sub-sample used other words to describe their ethnicity and nationality, as did a full third (n=17) of the Robinson survey group.

It would appear that having an example like 'White British' before them meant the BFI respondents were more likely to use this to self-describe; by contrast, the Robinson students were given more freedom to choose any terms they wished to self-identify and one-third did so (compared with 14% in the BFI sub-sample). Another explanation for the difference might be generational: perhaps, as I had anticipated, young adults living in Scotland are more likely to feel Scottish than British and to self-identify in this manner.

Self-identification as 'Scottish' is significant to this study because one of the central research questions asks how Scottish people negotiate (comedic) representations of Britishness and Scottishness. The notion of Scottish national identity is also widely circulated in the press, particularly since the establishment of the devolved Scottish parliament at Holyrood in 1999. 'More Scots feel they are Scottish says survey' reads one headline (Scott 2000), with figures from a survey by David McCrone given to show an increase in 'feeling "Scottish"' (from 56 to 77 per cent in 1979 and 1999 respectively) and a decrease in 'feeling "British"' (from 38 to 17 percent in the same period). Although it would be impossible to calculate the impact it is worth noting nonetheless that McCrone's 1999 survey was taken 'in the weeks immediately after the Scottish parliamentary election'. Recently *The Scotsman* commissioned and presented a survey as front page news (Kerevan 2001:1) under the headline: 'Pride in Scotland on the rise'. The article begins:

[Byline] Four-fifths feel more Scottish than British
[Byline] Nation seen as happy, modern and exciting
Scots feel more patriotic than ever before and hail their country as confident, modern and exciting, according to an exclusive poll for *The Scotsman*. The number of people declaring they are more Scottish than British is now at its highest ever recorded level, with four-fifths of Scots now saying they feel more Scottish than British.

Setting to one side the hyperbole of the reporting it is nonetheless interesting to compare the figures quoted. According to this newspaper's statistics the feeling of 'Scottishness' is more prevalent among the working-classes and supporters of certain political parties; further, people living in different areas of Scotland scored different levels of 'Scottish' identification comparatively. For example, the survey suggests that '[i]n the Borders and southern Scotland, 22 per cent feel equally at home being Scots and British—nearly twice the national average. And another 10 per cent felt positively more British—two and a half times the national average' (ibid). While space does not permit me to explore whether this parity between Scottishness and Britishness manifests a 'Borderlands consciousness' that Gloria Anzaldua (1985) theorised with regard to the fluid overlappings of society and culture on the Texas-Mexican border, it nevertheless highlights the dilemma faced when dealing with Duncan Petrie's (1995) definition of the Scottish audience for 'Television in Scotland'. Using 1991 data from the beginning of the BFI study, Petrie (1995:n6) incorporates six respondents from Cumbria and the Borders into his analysis because they reside within the Borders ITV range and as such are exposed to 'Scottish' television; these six respondents represent 10.7% of his 'Scottish' audience which in my opinion comprises a significant proportion and possible skew.

It is difficult to assess the relationship between the surveys reported in the press (quoted above) and those parts of my surveys or the BFI diary question results because the methodology, wording of survey questions and the sample's demographic structure are not usually made available in the newspaper reports. Nor is it possible here to interpret how much these media surveys become self-fulfilling prophesies and self-constructed fashions, producing and perpetuating the idea that a sense of Scottishness rather than a sense of Britishness is the new post-devolution social and cultural reality. Clearly how the question is phrased and when it is put will have an impact: asking Scots in the weeks after the Holyrood elections if they feel Scottish is likely, one imagines, to encourage a yes/no answer and a high rating for feeling Scottish in the way my deliberately open-ended question could not guarantee to deliver. However, it would appear from these cross-comparisons with other sources that the Scottish students I surveyed were not atypical in this regard. It is important to know this because another result from the Robinson-2000 survey which I hold to be significant was the seeming indifference the students held toward the Scottish derivation of programming, citing examples of Scottish shows less frequently than I had anticipated.

Part of the reasoning behind the survey and the manner of its construction was to determine the importance of Scottish television comedy programmes to this group. Thus, these open-ended nomination questions were used rather than a forced-choice or ranking of programmes exercise, so that the appearance (or not) of Scottish programmes could be

analysed as a gauge for their popularity. As with all these data and aggregated results, the timeliness of the survey administration must be considered. Many comedy shows on British television run for series of only six programmes and depending on the various schedules, popularity or antagonism for certain shows waxes or wanes fluidly. Thus, it might be argued that *Chewin The Fat* scored well (n=5, ranked ninth equal) in the 'favourite comedies' category because it had just finished its second series pre-Christmas and was still fresh in the minds of respondents. Similarly *The Creatives*, *Chewin The Fat* and *Rab C. Nesbitt* might all have scored their single votes as 'just not funny' as a consequence of timing and scheduling, as much as any ingrained dislike by the respondents. Nevertheless, these data also suggest the persistent popularity of Scottish programmes, characters and performers. In answer to the question, 'which comedy programmes that your parents watch and enjoy do you also watch and enjoy?', respondents listed *Scotch and Wry* twice, and *Chewin The Fat*, *Rab C. Nesbitt*, 'Reverend Jolly', 'Ricki Fulton' and *Rory Bremner* once each, suggesting that across time some Scottish comedies remain popular.

The questionnaire produced a variety of data but ultimately the sample was small, the respondents were a captive crowd of students, rushed, and most importantly, there was no opportunity to clarify or qualify their answers. Quantitative data collection on this scale provides little information about *how much* the respondents liked or disliked genres, countries of origin, or particular shows. Research can indicate areas of fruitful investigation for qualitative studies but on its own, in these contexts, quantitative data work fails to approach the topic in any developed or conclusive sense, and when dealing with small samples the appropriateness of breaking data clusters down further or extrapolating conclusions to incomparable groupings must be considered carefully.

SECTION TWO: LETTERS

This section of qualitative research was unsatisfactory: its chief value resides in its exemplary status as a cautionary tale. In *Watching Dallas* Ien Ang (1985) explains how she solicited letters from Dutch people at the height of the *Dallas* fascination, asking them to comment on why they liked or disliked the show. She received more than forty letters of varying length and detail, and her book discusses themes arising in the letters to complement her own theorisations about the *Dallas* phenomenon. In 'Consuming the Garden', Jacqui Gabb borrowed Ang's methodology and asks Hull locals to write to her about a BBC gardening show. She received about ten letters and supplemented these data with similar letters about the same show published in the *Radio Times*.

I attempted to solicit letters from Scottish people about their television comedy preferences, but decided with Gabb's experience in mind that it was risky and too narrowly focused to advertise in one publication. With a more inclusive agenda, I advertised in *The List*, a fortnightly culture listings magazine for Glasgow and Edinburgh and requested letters from readers of the *Daily Record*, a family tabloid paper with a Scottish daily circulation of over 600, 000. Similar requests were sent to ten smaller

newspapers in various Scottish locales. At the same time I sent a small notice to twelve libraries in central and remote areas of Scotland asking for volunteers to write to me. This effort produced _two_ letters. I also advertised on the internet: I posted requests to online news groups, asked regulars in chatrooms to email me, asked friends to forward email requests to everyone in their address book. From this I received nine replies from different internet sources (email, chatroom contacts, newsgroups) in different formats and answering slightly different versions of the same questions. From these diverse sources I received eleven equally diverse responses. One letter was handwritten on lined paper and accompanied by a newspaper cartoon, another was typed; the other replies were all emails. All eleven gave their gender (eight males, three females) and most gave ages (ranging from '19' to '60s'); locations included Glasgow (two), Edinburgh (two), Aberdeen, Fife and Fochabers. Their responses ranged from a short list to two closely-typed pages. Some respondents only listed specific programme names in their 'favourites' categories and either ignored 'not funny' or described comedy styles or even channels rather than naming programmes *per se*. One respondent knew my precise interest and only listed Scottish comedy shows, whereas the others wrote about general comedy interests and included a mixture of US-made and UK-made programmes.

The low response rate and variable amounts and kinds of material means these data cannot be analysed quantitatively nor qualitatively. Even tabulating how frequently a programme or country of origin was mentioned, to compare and contrast them with other data collection sources in this study, remains meaningless because these letterwriters have had no constraints on how many programmes they can nominate (unlike the survey or focus group respondents, who were limited to two each of 'favourites' and 'not funny') and there are no other data, demographic or otherwise, with which to process, aggregate and analyse the programme preferences. Some of these analytical problems would have obtained irrespective of the sample size due to the nature of the data and its collection, but the small sample size exposes these problems immediately.

SECTION THREE: FOCUS GROUPS

DATA ANALYSIS

This section of the research investigated the ways in which respondents identified with comedy characters and the representations of comic stereotypes from their local zone and those of neighbouring zones in Scotland. Comedy writers and performers interviewed had frequently mentioned the importance of establishing a sense of 'place' which functioned as a way of producing a cohesive bond among the audience members and establishes a means of expressing common culture between the writer or performer and his or her audience. But how do members of the television audience feel about the sense of place as self? The focus groups explored these issues further.

Methodologies and mythologies

There were eight focus groups each comprising from two to six participants, with a total of thirty respondents. Eight groups is only a small sample but the data created by them is nonetheless detailed and varied. The respondents each completed a two-page survey, viewed a prepared series of video clips, wrote a little about these clips and then discussed them together (see Table 5.8). This section analyses the texts of their discussions and written comments to explore how 'place' and comedy interrelate in Scottish culture.

The groups were organised by location in order to address some mythologies attached to social and cultural characteristics ascribed to the two metropolitan centres (Glasgow and Edinburgh) and the rural periphery (Gaelic-language speakers from Highland and Islands regions). Organising groups in this way made it easier to conceptualise and hopefully capture these popularly-constructed local characteristics but also necessarily foregrounded a single aspect of Scottish humour and a single way of defining 'groups' of participants. Whether the focus group participants' opinions were representative (in this instance, of their location), or whether they individually believed or merely retold the 'place' mythologies that circulate within Scottish culture is, unfortunately, impossible to determine from this qualitative research (as would be true of almost all focus group research into cultural matters).

Dynamics

Before the group data can be analysed, however, three distinctive aspects of the focus group dynamic warrant elaboration: heterogeneity of participants, open (polite) contradiction of other respondents, and good-natured teasing of participant peers where some relationship (usually a friendship) pre-existed the focus group situation. These dynamics contrasted greatly with those discovered in the *Endurance UK* pilot, but were consistent within this set of focus groups.

Despite careful efforts to ensure internal consistency and thus approximate comparability, groups often revealed unanticipated demographic heterogeneity. This became a significant challenge to the research as variation among respondents often occurred in the category which had become most significant to the study's direction: that of place of origin. This was more pronounced in groups sited away from Glasgow and over which I had less recruiting control, although it also arose in groups seemingly constituted more tightly. For example, one 'Edinburgh' group recruited by a gatekeeper on behalf comprised a woman who identified in the conversation as English despite having a Scottish mother and having lived in Edinburgh thirteen of her eighteen years; it subsequently transpired during discussion of the clips that the other respondent had lived in Edinburgh for only three months following several years in Stornoway. Another Edinburgh group contained a Dundonian and a Glaswegian as well as two Edinburghers. The pair in Skye were close friends but one was a native speaker of Gaelic, aged eighteen,

from Islay, and the other was a thirty-two year old learner from Glasgow. In these cases however, heterogeneity was treated of necessity as a virtue and became part of the discussion and attitudes to similarities and differences among Scots (and Britons).

The second distinctive characteristic of the groups was the frequent presence of polite, good-humoured direct contradiction. While a straightforward 'no I feel the opposite' was typical, the following conversation demonstrates the degree to which two participants—strangers—were prepared to state their preferences and to not compromise to fit with another's opposite view.

Int: Best and worst Scottish television comedy?
(pause)
B: Can't think of any that's bad. Do you really want Scottish examples?
Int: Do you have something in mind?
B: Yeah, *League of Gentlemen*
A: Oh I *love* that stuff! I went to see the live sketch show, absolutely loved it
Int: (laughs) Where was that?
A: It was in the festival theatre
B: I hate it, it's too surreal
A: No it was so good, I love the *League of Gentlemen*, it's fantastic
Int: You can't please people can you? (all laugh)
B: I can see why you say it's good, some of it's quite funny but some of it's just, 'what?' I don't get it, so strange
A: I like that, I like it even better, their whole wee world
B: Some of it's shocking, the darker meaning
[Edinburgh 7: 157-171]

Some explicit disagreement occurred in every group, usually over simple matters of taste for or against a particular programme or video clip. Sometimes, as in the example above, a respondent modified how they phrased their feelings in order to not appear disagreeable while still holding their ground. As group moderator I was gratified to see open yet usually respectful challenging of others' opinions throughout the interactions as it indicated respondents were comfortable expressing potentially unpopular views both within the group and in front of me. The only occasion when there seemed to be discomfort occurred during a discussion of the 'Rower' clip. In this group, 'M' (male) was positioned between two female friends 'K' and 'L' in a group with 'MK' (female) whom they had not previously met.

Int: Any other jokes that didn't work?
K: I didn't like the guy in the rowboat
Int: You didn't like him?
K: I didn't like him after he said he was gay (all laugh), I was shocked
Int: You were shocked?
K: Uhuh (more laughter). He didn't need to say that, I thought it was funny until then
Int: What do you others think?
L: I thought it was quite funny, mostly having a laugh at the Islander
K: I thought it was funny the way he said that, couldn't believe he was just rowing back and forth, until he had to bring in that awful Walter boy (all laugh)
MK: Cos that kind of thing's been done before as well, 'I'm the Islander man but I've got this secret sex life', it's like I know I've seen that done in other things as well
L: There must be some kind of stereotype people have of Islanders
Int: M?
M: I was finding it funny (looks closely at K) til that point, I thought it was genuinely funny

going back and forth, back and forth, and then it just kind of branched out on the humour, and yeah, you've heard it before
MK: It's quite a sharp change of tone
[Edinburgh 5: 72-89]

M watches K's expression as he proceeds, having hesitated to offer an opinion until probed by the interviewer with a question and direct eye contact. His body language and demeanour showed he was surprised and uncertain about K's comments and perhaps could not tell if he—indeed, all of us—was victim of a provocative wind-up or whether she held homophobic views of which he had been previously unaware. M's comments skirt the issue of the Islander's relationship with Walter and instead he concentrates on the early parts of the sketch and agreeing with MK's opinion on the joke being unoriginal.

The third notable dynamic was one of comedic performativity among respondents who were previously acquainted. For example, one participant swung the following conversation away from the question—'Are there other kinds of groups of people that humour would work with as a group thing?'—into an unexpected direction, to his companions' dead-pan amusement:

A: I think lots of, well I remember being taught at school, this little song (sings) 'You cannae chuck yer Grannie off a bus'. Everyone's, 'yes you can'. So I think I've, it's another reason, fond childhood memory, in a twisted sort of way
MG: Yes sir we've got some people outside waiting to talk to you after we're finished
G: White coats
[Edinburgh 1: 334-338]

These moments of jocularity at another group member's expense happened only among comfortable friends. It is possible that the discomfort exhibited towards the woman 'K' who expressed shock at the 'Rower', cited earlier, was partly due to her companions' feeling that she ought to have been joking; but because they were unsure whether she was being ironic for my sake or perhaps playing Devil's Advocate—or indeed, had homophobic biases—they felt excluded from the joke. A further example illustrates the level of comfort some respondents felt when discussing socially contentious comedy, in this case projecting the (fictive) violence of the 'Boxer' sketch toward A's grannie:

Int: Did you think that was going to happen?
A: No I didn't at all, that's why it was so good. At first I thought....
B: I was expecting her...
A: Aye, I thought she was gonna hit him and knock him out, but no, he just thrashed her. I thought that was funny cos I'd do that to my grannie (laughs)
B: (laughs) She was a mean grannie
A: (laughs) She was, she took away my Milky Way [chocolate bar].
[Gaelic 8: 19-25]

These two men were close friends living in adjacent rooms in a shared student hostel block and had been drinking spirits before the focus group, so it is probable that their inhibitions about taking the mickey out of each other (as they did throughout) were considerably lower than most groups'.

In terms of content, the groups were guided by a series of questions which were structured to funnel from general questions about the comedy clips and their own sense of humour, through transitional questions about social groups and humour, to specific questions about Scottish humour and comedy. Sometimes the questions arose naturally, out of the preferred order, but usually the later topic was deferred and the original question returned to. Despite careful checklists, questions were occasionally omitted accidentally and other topics developed further instead. The pilot group (Edinburgh 1) was allowed nearly twice the time of the subsequent groups but with the same range of questions; comparison with other groups' transcripts indicated that the pilot group's talk in response to the questions asked was about the same as other groups', with more tangential reminiscences and anecdotes rather than greater length, detail or analysis of the questions and video material.

Content

The dynamic of the groups frequently included open contradiction, and the content of their discussions is similarly contrastive. Four clips shown generated considerable discussion about national and local identifications—*All Along The Watchtower*, *Velvet Cabaret* (the 'Rower'), *Chewin The Fat* (the 'Chipshop'), and the *Ran Dan* sketch, and these will be analysed in detail with long excerpts below. The other clips also generated conversation but the respondents did not associate a sense of Scottish humour or identity with them. The *Blackadder Goes Forth* clip was shown first largely as a 'warm-up' text to relax the participants with a piece of familiar comedy, and several respondents noted this as a clip they had recognised and enjoyed. Satire against the upperclasses and military was thought to be valid because it made a coherent point about the futility and poor management of the First World War. Two groups' members recalled the final scene from *Blackadder Goes Forth* where all the characters make a last attempt at the frontline and are killed in action, a tragic moment which some respondents said had (paradoxically) increased their enjoyment of this comedy series through its 'grim reality'. Two other respondents found *Blackadder* comedy 'predictable' and 'boring'.

The *Goodness Gracious Me* clip was recognised by some but unknown to others. One respondent felt that:

> *Goodness Gracious Me* is like an ironic revenge against all that, we've had to put up with people taking the mick out of all parts of our culture so the sketch where they go for an English, that takes the mick out of the stereotypes we've had to live with, reverse the whole white stereotype [Glasgow 2: 79-82].[7]

Others in the groups felt that *Goodness Gracious Me* presented a balanced mix of comedy representations, directing comedy at seemingly 'Asian' topics—overbearing mothers, bogus spiritualists, teenagers who adopt black culture—as well as different Asian subcultures and stereotypes. The actors and comedy work was perceived almost exclusively as Asian however, rather than seeing any self-deprecating Englishness or

hybridity of identity in the texts, actors or performances. No-one found the clip offensive, and one woman acknowledged that she acted precisely in the manner they were parodying, ordering familiar food—chips—rather than being adventurous when she went to Indian restaurants.

The respondents expressed many different opinions however about the 'Boxer' clip from *Velvet Cabaret.* Some respondents found the sketch to be 'awful', 'sick', 'scary', 'shocking', and 'twisted'; others found it to be 'funny as fuck' or noted 'I couldn't stop laughing'. In one group, the contrasting opinions were given in the first minutes of the discussion:

> **Int: What did everyone put down as the sketch that didn't work?**
> ° The last one, the Gaelic one
> ° I put down the boxing one, I thought that was awful
> ° I liked that the most, he's like 'you hold her up' and then he keeps hitting her

A few minutes later, in the same group:

> **Int: And what about how that sketch continues? He picks her up and he keeps hitting her?** (laughter)
> ° I think it might have been best left, when the granny hit the floor, I thought that was a good starting point, taking it further went too far
> ° But I couldn't stop laughing at it, it's a kind of sadistic humour, you're probably laughing out of nervousness more than anything, you think 'God, he's beating a grannie'
> [Glasgow 2: 8-11; 32-37]

Several people expressed 'mixed emotions' or noted how their view changed as the sketch progressed: it was 'funny at first' until the first punch or, contrastingly, 'even funnier' when the boxer held her up and kept hitting her. Some commented on the style of production, indicating that it was 'an amusing idea badly done' or it was 'difficult to see what was going on'; one group felt the sketch needed 'more polish, more style' although they enjoyed what they termed the *'Raging Bull'* sequence at the end. One respondent said, 'the boxer wasn't funny at all, I don't mind tasteless humour so long as it's well done, but that wasnae that strong to carry it', and later, 'I think if it's sick humour it makes you laugh more cos you shouldn't'. Some people described it negatively to be 'too long', 'conventional', 'obvious', whereas others found the joke to be 'unexpected' particularly if they had anticipated a 'Supergrannie' character who would be revealed to be a champion boxer despite the other characters' condescension (this was a frequent expectation). One respondent answered a question about mixed emotions and the 'Boxer' sketch like this:

> M: When I'm watching comedy I always try to work out what the joke's going to be and if you guess, there's no laugh, and I tried to guess what the joke was going to be in the boxer sketch and that wasn't what I thought was going to happen, that's what made me laugh
> [Gaelic 6: 67-69].

Another respondent felt the sketch to be a satire against the boxer rather than a slapstick routine or a set-up gag about Supergrannies:

> D: I thought it was more like laughing at how sad boxing is, cos the guy just can't help beating her, 'you don't wanna come in here hen' and then he's like 'Ach Come on', he just canna help himself
> [Glasgow 4: 96-98].

Although this respondent performed the joke again with added Scottish linguistic identifiers—'hen' (an affectionate term for a woman), 'Ach' (an interjection showing resignedness)—there was nonetheless no discussion within any of the groups which acknowledges or approaches the sketch *as Scottish*. The 'Boxer' sketch is not considered by these groups to represent Scottish traits or characters, nor to draw upon myths about pugilistic Glaswegian men or beloved Scottish Grannies, nor is the clip making a joke particularly to appeal to a (notional) Scottish sense of humour. The Boxer wears a singlet with 'Dennistoun' on it (an inner-city suburb in Glasgow), the actors have Scottish accents and use common Scottish phrases like 'wee jab' and 'that's you', but the clip was only mentioned for its poor production values or, more frequently, described as tasteless or shocking. Although *Velvet Cabaret*'s producer intended to create a new style of Scottish comedy, it surprised me how effective this anti-parochial manifesto had been.

Respondents sometimes referred to their own grandmothers:

Int: OK, and which jokes didn't work?
L: I didn't like the boxing one
M: I found that really funny
MK: I couldn't decide, I was in two minds about that, I thought will she hit back, (M agrees) I thought it would be some kind of Supergrannie sketch and then when it went totally the other way I thought 'whoa', they're just trying to do an all-out shocker, can you imagine like old people watching that, like my Gran'd be like, 'What?!'
K: I thought it was quite funny, you didn't know what he was going to do, he got her on the carpet and just sort of knocked her out
M: My gran's like that, she goes swimming and goes to the gym, and boy, I could see her going to the boxing [ring] and going 'Oh come on now!'
[Edinburgh 5: 46-56]

Several respondents expressed an anxiety that their grandparents would find the sketch distressing as well as not funny, especially where their elderly relative feared or had suffered personal violence. Many respondents reflected upon their own family experiences in framing their opinions including 'M' (above) who believed his grandmother might fit such a scenario in reality, whereas another person (from Gaelic 8, quoted earlier) treated the subject humorously and both projected himself into the fray and reconceptualised the relationship between the two characters, joking that he would beat his own grannie (which the Boxer here does not).

'Scottish' humour

On the topic of a distinctive Scottish sense of humour, one group painstakingly teased out the idea of self-deprecating humour for several minutes. An excerpt is given here in full, allowing the drift and development of the conversation to be considered in context. One respondent offers an opinion that only Scots direct humour against themselves; another widens the category to suggest all Britons do this; another counters with the *All Along The Watchtower* clip shown earlier to suggest that the English use humour against the Scots. One says the Scots do not attack the English; another replies that Scots do; another insists the English do not laugh at themselves. When someone calls to mind a *Chewin The Fat*

sketch (not shown to the groups) in which naive Canadian tourists are burgled and overcharged in Scotland, the joke is repositioned discursively by others in the group to further the argument that Scots humour is self-deprecating, by reading the Canadians as expatriate Scots.

> **Int: Do you think Scottish people have a distinctive sense of humour?**
> R: I think they do cos they laugh at theirselves a lot more, you see *Chewin The Fat*, it's all like slagging Scottish people, we all think it's funny but other countries people can't laugh at theirselves
> K: Americans hate people taking the piss out of them
> R: And all, most of the Scottish comedy is about Scottish people, *Rab C. Nesbitt* and all that, still laughing at ourselves
> G: They had that thing on *Naked Video* before, where *Rab C. Nesbitt* came from, taking the mickey out of trendy Scottish stereotypes, remember one guy in a car, trying to impress the ladies, had these shoulder pads and white cool socks, and he pressed the button to get the window to come down in his car, and his fly came down, and they just laughed at him and kept walking and that was just like trendy Scottish guys all over
> K: I think all the British can take the mickey out of theirselves
> R: But then that English guy, was that an English guy in the back seat [Clip 2], he's taking the mickey out of the Scottish
> K: We take the mickey out of the English as well
> R: Aye they do but I've never seen an English show where they laugh at themselves, you never do ... it's always Scottish people, if they're going to take the mickey it's the English at the Scottish people
> K: Or the Irish
> C: I'm surprised none of your clips were American cos that's what's on most of the time, on satellite anyway, I like it [inaudible]
> G: They're not aware of Ireland, the difference in accent, they think we're all Irish
> K: I lived in America last year and I have so many videos, I'd never tape anything here but there there was so much to watch every night, *Ally McBeal*, *Frasier*, *Friends*
> D: I think the Scots have quite a sick sense of humour as well
> C: Because we've got that wee dark streak
> D: Aye, that's it, we're sick (laughter) it's shit, our sense of humour is boggin' aye
> R: Is it the Japanese or the Chinese, always have their crazy gameshows, the Japanese, they're not supposed to be funny, they just do the most mad things ever
> D: It's all this torture and that, they're laughing at their own sick humour [inaudible]
> C: I've never seen a Scottish comedy taking the piss of other folk, there's only one in *Chewin The Fat*, and they were two American tourists, two Canadian tourists
> D, G, K: But they were Scots! Returning home
> D: 'And that'll be twenty-five pound'
> C: They don't take the mickey out of any other culture, there's nothing, it's always us
> [Glasgow 4: 155-190]

The conversation becomes complicated with comments about Scottish and Irish people as English joke-targets, Scottish nationhood subsumed by an invisible Ireland in American consciousness, and a respondent's preferring American television comedy to British programmes; but talk is quickly returned to the notion of a distinctive Scots style of humour, 'that wee dark streak', only to be compared with Japanese television. The subject of Scottish distinctiveness is drawn out inductively through making contrasts with respondents' perceptions and experiences of other nations but no consensus is reached: Scots *and others* direct humour at themselves; Scots *and others* are the target of English humour; Scots *and others* have a 'sick sense of humour'. 'C' wanted to talk about his preference for American comedy but also instigated discussion of the *Chewin The Fat* sketch about the Canadians.

Contrasts emerged between groups as well as among them. In another group where discussion had considered extensively a perceived split between East coast and West coast culture and society, the question of a collective Scottish sense of humour brought a different focus to the topic:

Int: Getting back on the topic of Scottish humour. Do Scottish people share a sense single of humour as a nation?
A: I think they do, anti-English anyway. As well as *Chewin The Fat*, I can laugh at that as well, though we're not exactly East coast, not exactly West coast people so
MG: We're very East coast
A: Like East coasters and West coasters were, people do say there is that divide, but I think it is generally with the expansion of the Central Belt, it's joining them more together
M: I think that with Scotland getting more and more an identity, Scottish humour's going to be a more and more important thing. Things like the new parliament, more culture and an awareness, there's going to be more of this sort of thing
[Edinburgh 1: 183-192]

The opening response, 'anti-English anyway', was given flippantly and not repeated by any other respondent in the study. Similarly the insistence of an East coast/ West coast split dominated only this group; although other Edinburgh or Glasgow groups were familiar with myths about intra-city rivalries, they all played down a dichotomous relationship while still insisting their own city had a unique, distinctive style or personality. The final comment here that a sense of developing Scottish identity might be linked to the newly-established devolved Holyrood parliament was also not repeated elsewhere, a surprising omission given that the groups deliberately recruited university first-year students, that is, predominantly young adults attaining voting age as the new parliament opened. However, the respondent quoted here was the only person to mention devolution or the Scottish parliament (he was thirty-one years old).

In the two groups comprised of Gaelic-speakers, the question of a Scottish sense of humour seemed tangential. Talking to these Gaelic-speaking Scots (and the industry trainees and others interviewed on Skye) it became apparent that 'Scottishness' was not a significant part of their self-identification in the way that their Gaelic language and culture was. The question was reworked because the group's responses to the video clips had been so positive toward the *Ran Dan* sketch—'it's something I'm really familiar with, you go to the Park Bar and you meet people just like it, makes it funnier, it's Gaelic humour'—and because the rapport and dynamic was such that it seemed more natural to ask it in this way:

Int: Do you actually go to the Park Bar?
All : Yeah, yeah we do (all laugh)
Int: Do you see a lot of people like that, dressed up in their *Para Handy* suits?
All: Yeah (more laughter)
M: It's quite amazing the similarity to what does go on (laugh)
Int: Some of the Glaswegians [already interviewed] didn't get that joke, they had no idea what the Park Bar was unless they had Gaelic-speaking pals and then they really liked it
M: It was, I find it a really funny programme I thought it was really good because, I dunno, you miss the islands humour and they're so good, the men in the programme dress up as these old women they're just exactly the same as old women there some of them, it's quite funny
Int: Is there a different sense of humour [among Gaels] do you think?

(general agreement)
L: Yeah it is, a different kind of humour, and it doesn't come across in the English subtitles, just not as funny
Int: It's funnier in Gaelic than the subtitles?
L: Uhuh just can't translate Gaelic humour
M: It's just that it's a culture, you have to sort of know what the culture's like, it's the same with everything, we were saying that in on Monday in our [Gaelic] class, you can't translate poems, cos you just don't get all the meaning, it's the same with humour
[Gaelic 6: 42-60]

The connection between language and culture in understanding *Ran Dan* and Gaelic comedy was further expressed in a group supposedly constituted of Edinburghers. As discussion of 'sketches that weren't very funny' progressed one respondent revealed that she had lived in Lewis:

Int: (comments about the screening) **Any other sketches that weren't very funny?**
B: The last one
A: Which one?
Int: The Gaelic sketch, the guys from Lewis
A: I found that funny because I've lived in Lewis
Int: Uhuh? Really? Do you speak any Gaelic?
A: Oh no, my brother speaks Gaelic, but I didn't learn it
Int: Is he older or younger than you?
A: Younger, he did Gaelic at school. But I know people who are just like that, not the sailors, not the clothes, not everybody speaking Gaelic, it's not like that but just, when they go to the mainland, wow! Shops! Cinemas! It is.
Int: Did you recognise the bar in that sketch?
A: No
Int: It's the Park Bar in Glasgow, it's the local for Gaelic speakers, it's full of people from the Western Isles
B: I think if you speak Gaelic you'll have got the joke but I could hardly read the text
A: I don't think it's if you speak Gaelic, I think it's more if you have experience of people from a small island community then you'll understand it, their talk, their clothes, it's funny if you have experience of people like that
[Edinburgh 7: 58-76]

In another group, the notion of a Scottish sense of humour came out spontaneously to the transitional question about particular social groups and their sense of humour. According to these respondents differences in culture between Scots and the English manifested in a comedy like *Rab C. Nesbitt* meant that English viewers would neither 'get' the local references nor understand that Rab was a stereotyped character. When a subsequent question was asked specifically about a tangible Scottish sense of humour, the group then began to contradict earlier positions and appeared more reticent to generalise. One speaker, 'MK', suggested that recognising local references might be more important in the understanding of humour than a Scottish or English sense of humour *per se*.

Int: Do you think different groups of people laugh at different things?
(Pause, silent agreement)
L: I guess like I was saying about national humour, we find a lot of things, Scottish things, being Scottish, we get a lot of the in-jokes, but when the English are watching *Rab C. Nesbitt* and they just don't get it at all
MK: Yeah and they need subtitles
L: Yeah, there's also a kind of different cultural thing that affects it
Int: In what way do you mean they don't get it? The subject?
L: Maybe they're laughing at it more because it's Scots, it's a stereotype, it *is* a stereotype, maybe

they don't get the subtleties as much as Scottish people do, I don't know, we get a much broader view of it, a stereotype of Scotland a *Rab C.* character, we get it
M: In England I think in certain parts you get a view stereotypical view of Scotland, I remember I lived down there when I was younger and when I got told I was moving to Scotland I thought I'd have to wear a kilt and I was truly terrified of wearing a kilt (all laugh), I don't know how or why I got that preconception but I got it from somewhere, this stereotypical image of the Scottish person
Int: Do they really put subtitles on *Rab C. Nesbitt* in England?
MK: Apparently uhuh
L: Yeah when it went down south to places like London
K: And *Trainspotting* in America
MK: Yeah they do that for the Americans
L: And in England as well
Int: Do you think Scottish people have a different sense of humour to English people?
(pause)
M: No...
K: Mmm...
L: In some ways, I couldn't tell you exactly what they were but I think there are slight differences, but I wouldn't say they were major, I suppose it's like the Scottish, English in football and things
MK: I suppose if there were some comedy shows that specifically were about English like little cultural things in little regional areas it's possible we wouldn't get all of that although we'd get the broad idea but you wouldn't get all the little references, I think it's the same idea, it depends on where you're from, it's not different types of comedy it's just different things
[Edinburgh 5: 121-153]

Although the video clip did not contain any examples from the programme, *Rab C. Nesbitt* became a common example for expressing concern at people from other countries, especially England, not 'getting' the joke about Scottish identity and misunderstanding the irony of Rab's slovenly character. Anxiety about the irony being misunderstood is performed below in the comment, '"it's really a documentary"', a statement made sarcastically for comic effect. Paradoxically, this participant's ['B'] hyperbole is rendered more ironic through her steadfast identification as English despite living two-thirds of her life in Edinburgh; here she shifts to a Scottish position, thinking of people in England as 'them' and understanding *Rab C. Nesbitt* differently:

Int: What do you think people in England think of *Rab C.* ?
A: That it's crap, that's what we're all like
B: They think everyone does look like that, dress like that, bandage, (mock English tone) 'it's really a documentary'
(all laugh)
A: But I think you have to know something about Scotland to get it, I just think it wouldn't make sense if you didn't know about it
[Edinburgh 7: 112-118]

Another group exhibited a collective concern about English people's inability to understand the actors' strong Glaswegian accents and patter. The anxiety that *Rab C. Nesbitt* was broadcast in England with subtitles reappears here; the use of subtitles was seen as 'offensive' but also understandable given the imbalance between levels of 'exposure' to Scots pronunciation. Significantly, the first person to speak volunteered that she had no opinion on the matter. On a different tangent, but also significant here, the respondents parsed over what English people might think of Scots and Scotland, having watched the programme:

Int: What do you think people from other places think of Scotland when they watch Scots comedy programmes like *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab C. Nesbitt* or *Naked Video*?
R: Can't really think of anything
C: In England they had subtitles for *Rab* C. I think that's offensive, we can handle *EastEnders* I'm sure they can handle a wee bit of *Rab C?*
Int: Do they really have subtitles on them?
C, K: Aye, uhuh, they were getting *Chewin the Fat* with subtitles as well
Int: No, really?
G: It's just exposure, we're more used to listening to their pronunciation
R: It wouldn't be funny with subtitles, I don't see why the English would watch
[Glasgow 4: 191-200]

In one Glasgow group, *Rab C. Nesbitt* was mentioned by a respondent as an example of Scots' preference for laughing at themselves. The first comment below begins decisively but then negotiates cautiously through comparisons and contrasts with Irish and English humour to the point where the respondent hedges against generalisation. At this moment 'N' introduces *Rab C. Nesbitt* as an example. Asked if *Rab C. Nesbitt* represented Scottishness, or was Glasgow- or even Govan-specific in its humour, two respondents with personal ties to Govan expressed concern that viewers from furth of Scotland might think of *Rab C. Nesbitt* as representative of Glaswegians or, worse, as representative of Govanites. However, the strong position originally put by 'N' that there are actual living persons in Govan who resemble Rab Nesbitt is then self-contradicted and ascribed to a myth held by people 'in London' after 'K' disagrees from a position of knowledgeable authority:

Int: Do you think Scottish people have a definite sense of humour?
K: Yeah very much, Scottish and Irish people have, a very different sense of humour to English people, I don't know why but we definitely do, definitely do. I think they can laugh at themselves more, Irish people can laugh at themselves, but English, I don't like to generalise about all English people but a lot of English prefer to laugh at other races and other groups not themselves
N: Like the way, *Rab C. Nesbitt*, his view of Scotland, English people see it and think Scottish people are scum, there's no England sitcom that which parodies themselves
L: I don't mind Scottish people seeing *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab* C. but
N: But other people, they see *Rab* C, they don't know about us, they watch that, they see Rab as Scotland, that's all they're seeing
Int: Is Rab representing Scottishness, or is it Glaswegian, or even Govan humour?
K: Which street in Govan?
N: I've passed people like that in the street, the jacket and the bandages (**The string vest?**) The string vest, the whole thing. That hospital Rab always goes into, Southern General , he calls it Sufferin' General, that's where I was born! Definitely around that area you'll see a lot of Rab C. Nesbitts, it's tragic, they're grown men, but they are like, I don't understand it, I don't live in that area, I'm from there but
K: My dad lived in Govan for years and years and he's nothing like, him and my uncle Stan, nothing like Rab C. Nesbitt and Mary Doll or wee Burnie whatever his name is, not like any of them
N: Some people do actually believe it, you go down to London they'll say, 'where're you from', 'Govan', 'you know that Rab C. Nesbitt'
K: If it just for in Scotland then Scottish people would understand that it wasn't representative of Glaswegian people but it does go abroad doesn't it?
Int: What do you think English people think of *Rab C. Nesbitt*?
K: They think 'oh great ! this gives us another reason to hate Scottish people' (laughs)
N: English people are patronising (others agree)
L: How did it go so long?

[Glasgow 3: 155-183]

It transpired a few minutes later that a further objection to *Rab C. Nesbitt* was that it had run out of jokes and had recycled gags from previous series. Whereas other groups from Glasgow were concerned that perceptions about Rab C. as a character might be displaced onto them abstractly as Glaswegians by viewers with little experience of Glasgow and its people, the group cited above were concerned that real people from Govan would be perceived negatively because of the illusions *Rab C. Nesbitt* might create. Nonetheless, some Glaswegians viewed *Rab C. Nesbitt* with affection at the same time as finding the programme's themes and characters cringeworthy. It was felt to be 'outdated' but also, contrastingly, 'funny' and 'true', and the idea that the characters resembled real living persons was also offered here, this time without any direct challenge from others in the group:

Int: How do people feel about *Rab C. Nesbitt*?
° Hmm [laughter]
° I look at him and go 'oooh' [yuck], no I actually look at him and laugh
° It's funny and it's quite amusing but at the same time you kind of stop and think about whether other people believe it, when they know you're from Scotland it's all like, 'ooh, *Rab C. Nesbitt*'
° I think it's quite outdated, the whole string vest, chippie every night
° At the same time there is no denying that there is people like that, you can't get away from that, it is funny, it is funny
° It's a bit like *Chewin The Fat*, you do recognise that peculiarity, it is true
Int: What do you think they think of it in England?
° They think everyone up here's like that [agreement]
° They laugh at it because they go 'haha, that's Scotland, they all live in caves and play the bagpipes' or whatever
[Glasgow 2: 84-97]

These concerns that *Rab C. Nesbitt* might come to symbolise Scotland to the wider world and be misunderstood, without access to local references and local styles of humour, were mirrored in anxieties about other countries' representations of Scottishness. The second clip shown, from *All Along The Watchtower*, was frequently dismissed as 'unfunny' or confusing. Respondents simply confessed, 'I didn't get that', implying, 'so it cannot be funny'. One respondent added it to his questionnaire in the 'not funny' category during the conversation:

Int: Which of the clips weren't funny?
R: The last one, the Gaylic one
K: The guy in the taxi, driving through Scotland
G: I didn't get that, I didn't see the sign
Int: It says 'No sweeties for 32 miles', 'at least we know we're still in Scotland'
G: Right that's going in, 'sweetie gag' (writes it onto his green sheet)
Int: It's from a sitcom, from *All Along The Watchtower*, it's like the very beginning
R: I didn't get that
Int: Yeah I don't think it really works on its own
[Glasgow 4: 43-51]

It bothered me that perhaps the joke failed because it was taken from a situation comedy and was designed to work with a different pace and rhythm to that of sketch humour, in

other words, had been shown so much out of generic context that it could not function properly. The clip was very short and very fast but because it preceded the opening titles for the show, it functioned as a stand-alone gag, and thus required no background set-up nor was the cut at the end arbitrary or obstructive. It was perhaps better constructed as a short sketch than the *Blackadder* clip shown, which had also been truncated from a situation comedy. Occasionally other respondents mentioned they had missed reading the roadsign but it seemed this was a problem of comic timing rather than caused by my transferring the clip to video. Other groups however felt the topic and nature of the joke to be its sticking point. In the example below, 'K' professes to not getting the joke although she understood the components perfectly, 'L' exaggerates 'thirty-t[illegible] miles' into 'sixty miles' and 'MK' is insulted to the point where she can barely express her opinion:

K: I didn't get it, the English saying we know we're in Scotland
L: No sweets for sixty miles
M: It was such a bad joke
MK: Sweets, sweets? I mean!
M: It was almost funny because it was so bad
Int: Well, what do you think they're trying to say?
M: I don't know
L: That Scotland's a big backwater to the English, it really doesn't appeal to Scottish humour, that
[Edinburgh 5: 37-45]

In a group of two Gaelic-speaking men, their objection related to the joke not being funny rather than being offended by a (mis)representation of Scottishness. One man suggested trimming the scene from the end back, in other words cutting the joke:

Int: What about the one at the beginning with the man in the car?
B: No sweeties
A: Aye, that was pretty shit
B: Aye, I didn't think that worked at all
A: Maybe is would have been better if they'd have stopped earlier
B: What was it?
Int: It was from a series called *All Along The Watchtower*
B: See the sign said 'no sweeties'
A: I can't remember it anyway
[Gaelic 8: 6-14]

In the following excerpt, 'N' voices his concern that others might view *All Along The Watchtower*'s English representation of Scottishness. From a beginning position attacking its 'lame' comedy he goes on to express 'anger' at how 'stupid' the 'Scots stereotype about meanness' is. While respondents in other groups were unhappy about the idea of Scotland as a 'big backwater' and the inferred criticism of the Scottish diet (although this was not explicitly mentioned by respondents), 'N' alone read the clip to express a variation on a traditional Scots stereotype. It is worth noting that meanness as a stereotype for humour is used both against Scots by other cultures and within [West-coast dominated] Scottish joke culture against Aberdonians.[8]

K: The one that wasn't funny was one we haven't mentioned, it didn't really have much of an impact, that English guy in the car on the road to Scotland, I didn't find that at all funny
L: I didn't understand it, no sweets?

Int: Supposed to be a Scottish trait perhaps?
L: I didn't really get that, you know?
Int: What did you think?
N: I think it was a bit lame that last bit
Int: 'At least we know we're in Scotland'
N: Exactly, feel a bit angry at how stupid
K: I know, there's plenty of shops on the road, stopping for sweets
Int: So you think that's unrealistic?
K: Yeah I think it's just...
N: I think it's just kind of, Scots stereotype about meanness or something
K: Yeah
Int: And you're saying you didn't like that?
N: Uhuh, I wouldn't like that to be shown around, I didn't like that, it's not even a joke, it's just
[Glasgow 3: 14-29]

In the following example the question about *All Along The Watchtower* led to a comparison with Ruby Wax, a presenter originally from the United States who has worked in British television for many years and is famed for her *faux naïve* interview style (talking the Duchess of York into cleaning the bath on-camera, for instance). Here Wax was criticised for appearing ignorant of Scottish culture:

B: The one I thought went flat was that one in the car, it was okay but, small funny, you'd go 'yeah?' but not really laugh
Int: What did you think about that, the impressions of that man in the car, his ideas about Scotland?
B: It's just typical
A: A lot of people have the wrong idea about Scotland. I was watching *Ruby Wax* last night she was talking to Ewan McGregor
Int, B: Oh I missed that
A: And it was like Ruby Wax talking about 'when you were a boy in Scotland did you run around in the heather in a kilt?' And he was like (bemused tone) 'Yes, we do that a lot in Scotland'. It was just, an American view, they don't know anything, it's quite disturbing, in the Highlands, 'ah they live in wee huts in the hills' or something, it's just rubbish
B: Americans especially, they don't understand about Britain, you say you're from Edinburgh, 'Oh, is that near London?' Americans are stupid
[Edinburgh 7: 77-90]

A's final comment that Highlands-dwellers are perceived to 'live in wee huts in the hills' reflects anxieties expressed by other respondents. Although the link between her fear and the programme content is explicitly drawn in this example, the concern that people furth of Scotland perceive Scots as backward, rural, natural (as opposed to modern, metropolitan, cultural) was expressed by other respondents too. Similar anxieties were expressed by numerous personal contacts on Skye, especially by Gaelic-speakers from the Western Isles whose culture had suffered the effects of 'racism' for generations; however, respondents in urban-based focus groups also held similar fears. Examples cited earlier include the view that English people might perceive Scotland as a 'big backwater' from watching *All Along The Watchtower* or draw the conclusion from *Rab C. Nesbitt* that Scots 'all live in caves and play the bagpipes', this last comment manifesting a considerable leap of stereotype-logic given that *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s mythologising conveys the images, sounds, themes and values not of Highland Tartanry but of the wretched dregs of Clydeside's post-Industrial urban decline. Whereas the caves-and-bagpipes comment was possibly made ironically and sarcastically (like the earlier example where English people were said

to think *Rab C. Nesbitt* 'a documentary'), the defensive position taken against Ruby Wax here either fails to acknowledge the possibility of Socratic irony in Wax's style or perhaps knowingly refuses to engage in the joke, in order to resist negative cultural identifications.

'Local' humour

As well as group members identifying and responding to signs of 'Scottishness' in the clips, the discussions also ranged over notions of social or cultural representations peculiar to discrete geographic locales. In particular, the 'Rower' sketch from *Velvet Cabaret*, the Gaelic sketch from *Ran Dan* and the *Chewin The Fat* chip shop sketch were recognised and read as deriving from and characteristic of identifiable parts of Scotland and referring to localised rather than national stereotypes.

Some excerpts from focus group discussions about the 'Rower' and the sketch with two Gaels have been quoted already above. This is partly to illustrate other points since talking in groups often connects several topic-threads together, but also because respondents worked their ideas about identity in a fluid manner rather than separating local from national myths and characterisations. In the pilot focus group, the extended discussion shifted from talking about US cultural imperialism to an attack on Gaelic-speakers in a single breath:

G: It's the export nation [inaudible] standardised by American softwares, the spellchecker, they should have a UK version of it
A: There is
G: We don't have, you'd have thought the university, the university software should have UK dictionary
A: It does
G: But it's got a US one, so if you turn your spellcheck on, it's going to change the word colour to 'color' instead of '-our', and our language, it's the same all round the place, ours is changing cos theirs is larger. Now there's a backlash cos noone wants to speak Gaylic [but] Scottish people never spoke Gaylic, it's like 'it's an end, it's a loss', noone ever spoke Gaylic
MG: There's like only a thousand people or something speak Gaylic, a really really tiny minority, but the SNP wants street signs, I mean how many people [want] Princes Street [written in Gaelic]
G: It's not only how many people talk Gaylic but so many hours of Gaylic TV
MG: And nobody speaks it
G: And it's dire stuff, the only reason you watch it is to pick up double entendres, Callum de Cack and Charlie Chalk and Fireman Sam and all the rest of it
MG: How do they pronounce the names, it's just like a collection of consonants
A: Let's face it, it could be Welsh, it could be worse, it could be Welsh, I mean a long stream of consonants followed by one vowel
G: It's like Welsh scrabble, it's alarming, all c, w, y, ds or something, it could be venereal disease or the name of a town, I know, it's bizarre.
[Edinburgh 1: 247-268]

Beginning with their university computing software's spellchecker as a symbol of American standardisation, their opinions move through Microsoft's inferred affront on UK-English to a sudden flow of invective against 'Gaylic'[9] language in Scotland and a parody of written Welsh. Two points arise from this example. First, the national and the local are articulated together, in this case through a developing rant about language and

cultural colonisation. UK-English is perceived to be under attack from Microsoft US-English standardisation, and Scotland as a cultural entity is under attack from within by Gaelic language on television and in the streets of Edinburgh. Second, the dynamic of the group left me feeling uncomfortable: I had to repress the urge to correct misapprehensions because my role and intention were to encourage unfettered expression. As this had been the pilot group, I had allowed the tirades to flow because I wanted the fullest possible discussion yet I was also concerned that these respondents appeared to be performing these opinions as if the focus group exercise was a late-night comedy club: by seeking more qualitative data I had ostensibly encouraged them to create a discursive space for them to show off with irony and satire.

G's assertion that 'Scottish people never spoke Gaylic... noone ever spoke Gaylic' was backed up by MG's opinion that 'only a thousand people' speak Gaelic now. Although other groups also expressed criticism of Gaelic-language television, noone phrased their views with invective like 'G' and 'MG' above (G's comments seeming even more ironic given he had shared a flat with friends from the Gael strongholds of Lewis and Skye who used to 'get really hammered and listen to ceilidh music'). One group had two separate conversations about the *Ran Dan* sketch. 'R' had already told us she did not enjoy this sketch and after a discussion of *All Along The Watchtower*, 'D' returned the conversation to this topic, finding himself dispelling myths about Gaelic-language use as a result:

D: I liked the Highlanders one, 'show you a good time at the Park Bar', I used to live next to the Park Bar, it's hilarious, if you don't speak Gaelic they ignore you
R: People speak Gaelic in there?
D: Oh aye
R: Where is it?
D: It's on Argyle Street
Int: It's just through the park
G: I thought there were only thirty thousand speakers left and none of them were native
D: No
K: They speak it up north
G: Yeah but it's not their only language
D, K: Aye, but they speak it
D: The thing is you walk in and they're all speaking English, you come in and they all speak in Gaelic (laughter)
Int: So you found it funny?
D: I thought it was quite amazing actually. It was quite lame though, it wasn't like a new joke, but it was, 'oh in't that nice, Gaelic speakers have managed to do a sketch', we're like patronising them
[Glasgow 4: 52-69]

After 'D' explained he had a friend from Lewis and enjoyed 'laughing at her', the subject was put to the rest of the group from the reverse direction. This time respondents criticised the verisimilitude of the representations of Glaswegian nightlife, making jokes among themselves:

Int: And what didn't you like about the Gaelic sketch?
R: I didn't think it was funny really
C: It was overacted
R, K, D: Aye, totally, aye, it was annoying
C: Scottish comedy is full of that, over done
G: It was like a wee gag that was stretched out

Int: But you didn't know what the Park Bar was, you didn't recognise, that didn't really work for you, but when it's explained to you you can see what the joke was trying to do?
R: Aye
C: It's just the thing, Glasgow's the big city, 'Oh it's a night out in Glasgow', they meet the two prostitutes and that's somehow our city
R: It was quite good, they've got the big wall, that's the night out in Glasgow
C: And they've got the *Para Handy* thing on, the wee jacket
R: It'd have been funnier if the girls had come and nicked their shoes or something, like a real Saturday night out
[Glasgow 4: 77-91]

Four of the respondents in this Glasgow group had written 'the Gaelic sketch' on their forms as one they had enjoyed least as did four of the women from Glasgow 2, a fifth disliking the 'final clip with the Irishmen in Glasgow'. By contrast, the Gaelic-speakers in Gaelic 6 all identified the programme by name in their written responses and all made positive comments about it. As soon as the discussion began, all four mentioned *Ran Dan* favourably: it was a familiar programme, it reminded them of actual people they knew living in the Western Isles, it reflected their experiences of people they had met in the Park Bar, and it was 'Gaelic humour'. One respondent's Gaelic language course required an essay on contemporary culture and he had chosen that episode of *Ran Dan* as his topic. Although he knew I could not read Gaelic he nonetheless took great pride in showing me the essay later. *Ran Dan* held great significance to these respondents and they described it with touching affection:

Int: What did you think of the comedy on the tape?
M: I thought it was quite good, the bits I could identify with like *Ran Dan* and *Chewin The Fat* I found them funny. The way the woman was talking, was that *Chewin The Fat*?
Int: The chipshop sketch?
M: I think, 'oh yeah, I've seen a woman like that before', the two old men in *Ran Dan* you think 'yep, seen men like them from Lewis', absolutely
A: Yeah I've met men like those in *Ran Dan* just like at home, really amusing, it's just comic, didn't think much of the first clip though, the army men
L: I enjoy *Ran Dan* as well, it's something I'm really familiar with, you go to the Park Bar and you meet people just like it, makes it funnier, it's Gaelic humour.
C: It's the one I enjoy most and I'm most familiar with, wrote my essay on [for a Gaelic language course]
Int: That sketch?
C: That whole episode. I like *Chewin The Fat*, the [bawdy] fishermen, but you didn't show that
[Gaelic 6: 1-14]

The other Gaelic-speakers' group, however, was less familiar with *Ran Dan*. Here 'A', an eighteen-year-old native-speaker from Islay, criticises Gaelic-language television for its educational emphasis and lack of originality but also admits he has never seen *Ran Dan*. His friend, a thirty-two year-old learner-speaker from Glasgow, displays both a recognition of, and a desire to experience more of, *Ran Dan* as a programme and Gaelic television comedy as a cultural form:

Int: If there was more Gaelic television would you watch more?
A: Aye if there was something that was actually worth watching I'd watch it, but what are my chances? (all laugh) Gaelic TV needs to be more entertaining, it's not an educational programme, it's just like you'd watch it for the sake of watching a programme, not trying to copy anything else, something to do, you'd just watch it and it's funny or interesting but not

just 'let's just learn about'...
B: I've never really seen that *Ran Dan* cos I wasn't a Gaelic speaker when it was on, but I wouldnae mind actually seeing a lot more of that
A: What was it anyway?
B: That Gaelic comedy show, that sketch was from it, you always hear about people 'oh that *Ran Dan'*
A: Was it funny?
Int: I think it came out a few years ago and was recently repeated but it was very popular
B: I'd totally have never have seen it I've only seen the one
A: I've never seen it at all, not once
B: I've seen about two sketches or something never even seen the whole thing, I'd like to, I've never seen anything like that, Gaelic funny or a thing like that
[Gaelic 8: 178-194]

After my conversation with the earlier Gaelic-speakers' group about *Chewin The Fat*'s mock-Gaelic sock-puppets, I decided to show an extra clip from that programme to these two men. In Gaelic 6, one person remembered watching these sock-puppets and said 'it is [funny] cos when I was younger and my Gaelic wasn't too good I would hear Gaelic sentences, a long stream of Gaelic and an occasional English word, they're addressing a common joke in Gaelic'. In Gaelic 8, the learner-speaker from Glasgow recognised the sketch immediately and laughed throughout, whereas his native-speaker friend was confused at the sketch because he had expected the puppets to speak 'proper' Gaelic rather than parodying Gaelic intonation and the mixing of Gaelic with English words. He was frustrated at not understanding the puppet dialogue and did not enjoy the sketch at all, seeming embarrassed by his 'failure' to get the joke.

The sock-puppets were not always understood as a joke against Gaelic-speakers, however. In Glasgow 3, one respondent said the sketch sequence 'sums up Gaylic programmes' but this idea is then challenged, albeit with someone else's reported opinions, to turn the sketch into a satire of Glaswegian accents and attitudes:

Int: Do you watch any Gaelic humour?
K: No! (others shake head)
Int: Do you know any Gaelic speakers?
(all shake head)
N: I do watch [Gaelic television] sometimes, the current affairs and stuff
K: But *Chewin The Fat* sums up Gaylic programmes quite well you know, with their sock-puppet guys, that's what they're like! So even if you spoke Gaylic you wouldn't want to watch them cos
N: Somebody said they were just Glaswegian those sock puppets (laugh) that's why it's good, I think at lot of people have those attitudes about [Gaelic language television]
L: I don't know any speakers and I've never watched the programmes but I do like the puppets on *Chewin The Fat*. But I don't like people copying those phrases
[Glasgow 3: 31-42]

Many respondents enjoyed watching the 'Rower' character. Where one person felt the sketch to be shocking, and others thought it might shock their grandparents, others found it to be absurd and amusing in its shift from rowing to and fro to suddenly discussing the Rower's daily sexual encounters with Big Walter the fireman. One person suggested the stereotype being invoked was 'people who live alone' although several others described the joke as targeting Islanders, a distinction of social culture rather than geographic periphery. The Glaswegian-based learner-speaker in Gaelic 8 thought the sketch 'patronised the Islander' and would not be drawn on the Islander's place of origin, but his

younger friend performed the joke for several minutes, 'I row and I row and I row...', suggesting the 'Rower' might be going between Islay (his own home) and Jura. He continued with his own joke that people from Islay 'row all over the place! There's that many places to go, Barbados and all that, I row and I row and I row'. In Gaelic 6, the male respondent drew comparisons with a widespread comedy stereotype of rural men as bestial (this joke commonly targets Aberdonians in Scotland, and Welshmen in England) and retold a joke about island isolation:

Int: What about the guy in the rowboat going to and from the island?
M: That was quite good that
L: I thought it was quite long
C: That is the idea people have of islanders, people in Glasgow
Int: Do you think so?
C: Yes, Glaswegians think that, they call us sheep shaggers or something like that
Int: I think perhaps Glaswegians refer to just about everybody [from rural areas north of Glasgow] as sheep shaggers!
C: On *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* when Mark Lamarr was speaking, he made a joke, and then 'we're going to get loads of complaints from people in the Islands in two weeks time when the boat comes to collect the post' (all laugh)
Int: Did you find that funny?
C: Yeah I did
Int: Or did you also go 'Grrr'?
C: Ach no, I'm used to it
Int: What do you others think of the guy in the rowboat, do you think people think that of islanders?
A: I think more so further south, in England maybe, I suppose so in Glasgow as well but more so down south

[Gaelic 6: 23-41]

Gaelic-speakers and Highland- or Island-dwellers were identified as comedy targets, in their own words, as 'teuchters' (a backwoods-rural comedy stereotype, usually conjuring up images of Luddite men with lamb-chop whiskers, wearing tweed and Wellington boots). When asked who Gaels made fun of, the answers were inflected with a sense of language and culture as much as a sense of place. Gaelic 6 included respondents from Eriskay (L), Barra (A) and Lewis (M and C):

Int: Who do Islanders make jokes about?
C: [mocks the *Naked Video* catchphrase] Stoneybridge! (large laugh)
L: I'm not from Stoneybridge! (more laughter)
Int [To L]: Why are they looking at you? Apart from people from Stoneybridge, is there a main target?
L: Different islands make jokes about different people
M: Lewis
(general agreement)
L: Religion can get people started, religion and the way we don't do things on Sundays
Int: And that's different between different islands as well?
L: [nods] Eriskay and South Uist, and Lewis and Harris hate each other
Int: Is this a neighbourhood rivalry?
M: Just different islands
Int: Is it like the Glasgow Edinburgh thing, or different?
L: Yeah I think it's a bit like that
M: Cos in the islands there's like different accents, even in Gaelic, there's Lewis Gaelic and you've got the southern islands and Barra, we just make fun of each other

[Gaelic 6: 108-124]

'We just make fun of each other' disguises the strong historical antagonisms between some of the island groups. Sectarian divides between Catholics and Protestants are found throughout western Scotland (including Glasgow) and geographic separation of the islands means family groups and island communities are often defined and delimited by religion. For example, one interviewee on Skye told me his name was MacNeil; to a Gael, he said, this indicated he was a Catholic from Barra. Religion was rarely mentioned in other focus groups but here it is as central as different accents and pronunciations. 'The way we don't do things on Sundays' indicates a tricky subject for analysis because although comic stereotypes exist about Islanders and their Sabbath habits, much of this humour consists not of 'set-up and gag' jokes but manifests as mainlanders' observations expressed with incredulity or sarcasm: are children's swings in Stornoway really padlocked on Sundays?

The other group explored the idea of language and place but the comments are ambivalent. Asked 'who do Gaels make fun of? Is there a difference between the islands?' the native-speaker in Gaelic 8 replied, 'it's not really obvious' and later:

> A: If anything I'd say it about Lewis, coming from Islay, folk from Islay would say Lewis Gaelic's a load of shite, they talk about
> **Int: Why?**
> A: Folk from Islay think there's a lot more English words in it, like 'helicopter', you know, or 'bicycle' and all that, they use it themselves but they just sort of blame Lewis for it
> **Int: Does everyone from the islands pick on Lewis then?**
> A: Everybody's all the same, 'if we get that Lewis Gaelic that would be terrible', I've had teachers from Lewis, they're not rated, that's from Islay
> B: I've not lived here all the time so I notice you taking the piss out of each other
> A: Well here I don't know if you'd get it anyway cos everybody's from everywhere, you wouldn't get away with [taking the mickey out of different islands' accents]
> **Int: You'd have no friends?** (all laugh)
> A: Aye! there's just more like folk, you take the piss out of all of them, just normal things, I don't know if they're associated with being a Gael and all that
> **Int: Do you take the mick out of mainlanders?**
> A: Oh aye, Weegies ('B' laughs) no obviously we take the piss out of Neds and all that, the accent I think, the way Neds dress, it's funny cos they take the piss out of us, teuchters and all that, we take the piss out of them all the time
> [Gaelic 8: 239-256]

Here, Lewis Gaelic is reportedly the target of criticism, not joking, in Islay. However, a joke-solidarity among Gaels at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is also acknowledged, 'cos everybody's from everywhere' but 'A' felt this 'take-the-piss' sense of humour were not necessarily 'associated with being a Gael'. Whereas accent might be a subject for joking among friends, the status of the language was not: the political distinctions between the academic, formal Gaelic taught at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (SMOG), oral Gaelic forms from other places, and Lewis Gaelic, were explained to me frequently during my visits to Skye and several interviewees felt very strongly about how Gaelic might develop. The SMO Gaelic was not the Gaelic spoken by their grandfathers in Ullapool, for example, and where individuals were studying at SMO to help maintain Gaelic-learning in their own regions, some felt the academic environment so standardising as to defeat the purpose of working to maintain Gaelic as a living language group.

INTERPRETATION

'Scottishness': How It Is Represented On Television

The focus group respondents in my study had a great deal to say about representations of Scottishness and representations of regions and local people within different areas of Scotland. Although as I stressed in my introductory chapter concepts of national identity are convenient commonplace ways of describing complex groupings, alliances, tensions and resistances between social cultural political and economic bodies in definable geographic or geopolitical locales, such a notion necessarily elides difference in favour of an apparently unified corpus. As well as smoothing over difference, the notion of national identity has overtones of conservatism, partly because it is most often invoked in popular discourse at moments when a 'nation' competes for example at sport, at Eurovision, at war. The rallying cry to get behind the countrymen and women who represent the nation is a call not only to a unifying sense of belonging but also to a (perhaps mythical) past and nostalgia for when the nation's dominance—and coherence—seemed more assured. Further the term 'national identity' is problematic in Scotland (and the other constituent home nations) because of the polity's dual status. A person might feel Scottish but technically he or she is a UK national; in a post-devolution era however to ignore or play down the social, cultural, constitutional and economic impact of Scotland's parliament is to subscribe to conservative, even reactionary politics.

Despite academic queasiness over the empirical application of the term 'national identity' it is significant to this discussion and included here for four reasons. First ordinary people (including those in my survey sample and focus groups) invoke the concept of national identity whenever they describe themselves as Scottish: it is a meaningful *popular* self-description. Second, a devolved parliament means considerable change for Scottish social, cultural, political and economic processes and relations locally, intranationally and internationally and as Scotland undergoes these changes—uneven and intangible as these shifts might be—so too will her people's self-perceptions *as Scottish* require discussion and analysis. Third, much of the academic literature acknowledges that (post-)post-colonial reservations and arguments notwithstanding national identity provides a neat compact description when discussing and analysing some collective experiences: put simply, the academic community knows what it means by the 'Scottish' in Scottish culture. Lastly and most importantly here Scottishness as a definable identity separate from Britishness has been a comedic stalwart as stereotypes and as Scots-accented characters from music hall to contemporary television.

Exploring how Scottish people respond to Scottish stereotypes requires a discussion of relations between nation and identity as well as those between audience and text. National identity and television might seem a contradiction in terms given the way television is created, commissioned, produced and distributed. Locating national television is not simple. The United Kingdom's network system can unify the schedule

across and between home nations but at the same time transmission ranges and satellite footprints respect no border or boundary, and the international trade in programmes and formats for local reproduction (*Big Brother* for example) further creates a blended and hybridised textual flow. Nevertheless mention Scottish television comedy in almost any social context and most people will immediately comprehend the general confines of the subject and offer their favourite example.

The problems remain however that there can be no triangulation in terms of Scottish audiences discussing television comedy representations of Scottishness simply because no comparable research examples exist, although relevant data on how Scottish people feel about other kinds of locally made programmes are available. For example the BFI study asked the diarists (quoted in Petrie 1995:83):

> How do you feel about the regional programmes in your area: do they reflect your region, your interests and issues that concern you—and if so, how? Do they sometimes miss important things?

Petrie comments that '[t]his was deliberately provocative in the case of Scotland knowing perfectly well that many Scots don't like [the country] referred to as a "region"'. Perhaps if the same question were put to similar diarists currently this comment would require rephrasing to include all home nations given that the devolved parliament in Scotland and assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland have given rise to new popular requestioning of the role and meaning of nation, state and identity for people in England as well as the UK's smaller peripheral parts.

Comments cited by Petrie can be grouped as pertaining to the 'except for viewers in Scotland' issue; aspects of ITV zoning (including border regions); criticism of parochialism Scottish-made programmes; and negative attitudes towards Gaelic language programming. After discussing the relative sizes of linguistic populations in Wales and Scotland Petrie (1995:90) concludes that 'while the majority of respondents probably wouldn't be any more generously disposed towards programming in other languages than they are to Gaelic some of their objections to the latter do seem to be bound up with a desire to resist certain kinds of cultural stereotyping'.

Although there were exceptions my non-Gaelic-speaking focus group respondents seemed much less antagonistic toward Gaelic language programming nearly ten years after the BFI diarists made these comments. The only Gaelic-language video example showed to them was from the Gaelic comedy programme *Ran Dan* and any negative comments tended to express ignorance rather than aggression. Common questions from the respondents included the timing of Gaelic language programmes and the number and geographic location of Gaelic speakers. Criticisms tended to focus on perceived low production values and lack of humour but this often coincided with comments regarding the viewers' unfamiliarity with handling spoken Gaelic and English subtitles. The majority were not antagonistic toward Gaelic language programming *per se* and on several occasions spontaneously named other Gaelic-language programmes (especially *Eorpa* but also *Dotaman* and children's dubbed programmes) and noone suggested that

other minority groups in Scotland ought to have similar programming resources. Those individuals who were aggressive or antagonistic about Gaelic programming ('dire stuff') were often ignorant about and ill-disposed toward the Gaidhealtachd ('only a thousand people speak it' or 'noone ever spoke it'). Those who were most positive knew Gaelic speakers and those who enjoyed the humour of the sketch had visited the Park Bar or somewhere similar. Gaelic speakers enjoyed that comedy clip the most partly because it was a Gaelic comedy institution and partly because it reflected what one person called 'islands humour', an ephemeral untranslatable linguistic and social, cultural experience. However one Gaelic speaker pointed out that Gaelic language television had to be high quality before he would watch (he was especially derisive of the 1990s Gaelic language soap *Machair*) and programmes ought preferably to contribute some entertainment value to balance what he perceived to be an overly-educational bias. As one might expect the Gaelic-speaking television production trainees I interviewed in Skye had many different opinions and a great sense of engagement with the issues involved: Petrie's lack of Gaelic speakers in the BFI sample means the question of how Scottish people feel about Gaelic language television is incomplete (one BFI respondent noted in a much later diary that she had 'started to learn Gaelic but [had] noone to practise with', a not uncommon experience in central Scotland).

I had wondered whether people in focus groups might be less disposed toward offering anti-Gaidhealtachd and anti-Gaelic opinions, given the social censorship they might prompt from other group respondents (whereas diarists might perhaps feel less inhibited) but it became clear to me that no such restraint was evident. The respondents spoke as freely and candidly about Gaelic language television as they did on any other subject. In the study commissioned by the ITC into audiences in Grampian, some focus group respondents went further, making very negative comments, so that the report authors wrote (System Three 2000:14): 'the role of Gaelic within the regional programme mix is heavily questioned by viewers consulted within this piece of research' resulting, they assert, from a 'perceived lack of relevance' and even a sense of 'feeling alienated... rather than included as part of a regional community' experienced by people living in the Gaidhealtachd but who do not speak Gaelic.

One respondent in the ITC's Grampian study criticised the allocation of funds for Gaelic television saying, 'we have to put up with all the other rubbish because there's no money left once they've looked after the Gaels' (ibid) and another asked: 'Why don't they show them at two in the morning or something... like they do with those Open University programmes' (System Three 2000:15). Funding and scheduling are both the responsibility of the Comataidh Telebhisein Gàidhlig, and as Mike Cormack writes (1994:116):

> The CTG not only has the power to award or deny funding but it will also agree with broadcasters as to when the proposed programmes will be scheduled. This is important since the CTG has been concerned to avoid a ghettoisation of Gaelic programmes in unpopular late-night spots.

However, some non-Gaelic speaking respondents in my focus-groups told me that Gaelic-language programmes are often broadcast late at night (although many others are shown

around tea-time both mid-week and on Sundays) and several Gaelic-speakers complained about this at length. People with an interest in these issues had greater knowledge about the observable facts, a corollary also noted in System Three's study in Grampian.[10]

Setting aside for now the issue of Scotland's autochthonous linguistic communities there is little evidence from within my data or Duncan Petrie's BFI data to support John Caughie's emphatic statement about the collective sense of social or cultural separation between Edinburgh and Glasgow expressed by Edinburgh teenagers at a week-long television conference (1992:12):

> [I]n Edinburgh resentment seems to run almost as high against the dominance of Glasgow in the representation of Scotland. The Glasgow comedian Rab C. Nesbitt seemed to provide something of a touchstone. There was some local feeling that he tarnished the image of Edinburgh's Scotland with that of the Glasgow lout, but there was also national solidarity behind the argument that, while it may be all right for Scottish people to enjoy the comedy, English people should not be given the opportunity to laugh at us.

My Edinburgh-based focus group respondents did not express 'resentment' against a Glasgocentric culture (televisual or otherwise) not did they seem to have similar consternation that they or Edinburgh would be 'tarnished' by Rab C. Nesbitt's image. However some respondents across both Edinburgh and Glasgow groups expressed a concern about English viewers of the programme. My respondents were concerned that English people 'would not get it', not least because a purported ignorance of English viewers rendered symptomatically through the need for subtitles on some series:

> C: In England they had subtitles for *Rab* C. I think that's offensive, we can handle *EastEnders* I'm sure they can handle a wee bit of *Rab C?*
> **Int: Do they really have subtitles on them?**
> C, K: Aye, uhuh, they were getting *Chewin the Fat* with subtitles as well
> **Int: No, really?**
> G: It's just exposure, we're more used to listening to their pronunciation
> R: It wouldn't be funny with subtitles, I don't see why the English would watch
> [Glasgow 4: 194-200]

This last comment reflects the experience of some non-Gaelic-speaking focus group respondents during the screening of the *Ran Dan* clip, and is similar to the view expressed by one group of Gaelic speakers on behalf of non-Gaelic speaking viewers of *Ran Dan.* Comedy does seem to suffer a kind of perceptive lag when the viewer is unfamiliar with the aural language, is culturally dislocated by the visual material and then has to fill in all the gaps with the translated words, themselves restricted by the aesthetics of television.[11] However the respondents' feelings about subtitles are ambivalent and bemused as much as finding them offensive: whereas the use of English subtitles over non-English language programming is a political issue for Gaelic and Welsh speakers and viewers, *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s characters speak in English, albeit with strong accents and considerable use of local dialect. The Scottish respondents perhaps project some antagonistic feelings about Gaelic language programming when they realise English viewers have been given subtitles for what appears to be mainstream Glaswegian television. Perhaps this is akin to the cringe Petrie observed, displaced.

Underneath this concern about English viewers' needing subtitles and 'not getting' the

Glasgow or Scottish sense of humour and comic situations portrayed by the programme is a deeper anxiety. Although expressed as a concern that *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s irony is inaccessible by English people the real anxiety is not merely that the English have, as Caughie puts it, 'an opportunity to laugh at [Scots]' that Scots find unwelcome: rather it is that English people have an *additional* mode and manner of laughter—ridicule—which is inaccessible to Scottish people. The respondents often discussed at length a presumed Scottish social capacity to be self-deprecating or to 'take the piss out of theirselves' and expressed enjoyment (as well as dislike of) of *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s hyperbolic stereotypes as an example of this Scottish comedy tradition. Focus group conversations also sometimes included discussion of English-based comedies' portrayal of Scots as comic objects and articulated with this a perceived inability of the English to laugh at themselves. As with Caughie's group, *Rab C. Nesbitt*—a programme not shown to the focus groups—functioned in my group conversations as a 'touchstone' especially with regard to discussions of national identifications and anxieties about representation and comedy.[12]

However my Edinburgh-based focus group respondents were less concerned that as Edinburghers they might be 'tarnished' by this representation of Glaswegians, and more concerned, like their Glaswegians counterparts in other groups, that through *Rab C. Nesbitt* and other Scottish television comedy programmes that Scots were collectively misinterpreted and misunderstood outwith Scotland. The intra-Scottish rivalries I anticipated based on a notion of place—and from which so much comedic material derives—were not felt strongly by my respondents from Glasgow and Edinburgh. I had expected these rivalries to represent values held by the audiences but instead the response was definitely lukewarm and ambivalent: Glaswegians sometimes disliked *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab C. Nesbitt* and Edinburghers felt no particular loyalty towards or preference for *The Creatives*. This worked the other way around as well, so there was neither a significant attachment nor a significant cringe that could be ascribed to a loyalty to one's home city or place. It is possible that with few more years maturity—and perhaps the additional social and cultural contacts and diversity of experiences young adults often gain at university—Caughie's teenage correspondents might have felt a little more relaxed about these perceived Edinburgh-Glasgow divisions, as my respondents did.

Negotiating Identity And Representation: Comedic Performativity Of Anxieties

Where my respondents projected concerns onto an imagined (English) audience, this can be analysed in terms of Michael Billig's description of the 'Contrastive Other' from *Talking About the Royal Family*. In his study an interviewee might say: 'Of course I don't believe everything I read about the Royals but other people would' or specifically they might say: 'people who read tabloids would', or 'Grannie might believe that but I don't'. The lower classes and older people were frequently invoked by Billig's informants as more gullible and less critical readers; this process of creating a Contrastive Other confers a sense of greater wit and intelligence to oneself and elevates one to the position of critic. Billig writes (1992:156):

> Such talk of gullibility is almost invariably talk about the Other or, to be more precise, about Others.... Different speakers —indeed different groups of speakers—can identify different Contrastive Others. Stereotypes can be mobilised for the task.

In my correspondents' cases the generating of Contrastive Others occurred with regard to groups of people who might not 'get' a joke. Specifically the Contrastive Other would be presumed to not recognise the subtleties of local and regional references and linguistic features, or to not appreciate the intricacies of rhetorical devices such as irony, parody and caricature. My post-graduate group viewing *Endurance UK* in my pilot study for audiences and taste expressed concerns that less sophisticated viewers than themselves would not only read the text without irony but would be open to moral damage by *EUK* in that by taking pleasure in it the programme might reinforce their (presumed) racist and sexist attitudes.

In my national representations focus group study some respondents identified English viewers as not understanding the Scottish and Glaswegian specificities of certain video clips. In the following conversation by Edinburghers about *Rab C. Nesbitt* one respondent even gives an example from his own English childhood mispreconceptions about Scotland, projecting himself back in time and experience as a Contrastive Other to bolster the views of other respondents in his group:

> **Int: Do you think different groups of people laugh at different things?**
> (Pause, silent agreement)
> L: I guess like I was saying about national humour, we find a lot of things, Scottish things, being Scottish, we get a lot of the in-jokes, but when the English are watching *Rab C. Nesbitt* and they just don't get it at all
> MK: Yeah and they need subtitles
> L: Yeah, there's also a kind of different cultural thing that affects it
> **Int: In what way do you mean they don't get it? The subject?**
> L: Maybe they're laughing at it more because it's Scots, it's a stereotype, it *is* a stereotype, maybe they don't get the subtleties as much as Scottish people do, I don't know, we get a much broader view of it, a stereotype of Scotland a *Rab C.* character, we get
> M: In England I think in certain parts you get a view stereotypical view of Scotland, I remember I lived down there when I was younger and when I got told I was moving to Scotland I thought I'd have to wear a kilt and I was truly terrified of wearing a kilt (all laugh), I don't know how or why I got that preconception but I got it from somewhere, this stereotypical image of the Scottish person
> **Int: Do they really put subtitles on *Rab C. Nesbitt* in England?**
> MK: Apparently uhuh
> L: Yeah when it went down south to places like London
> [Edinburgh 5: 121-139]

Respondents in other focus groups made equivalent comments (further conversations are cited in the previous chapter) such as: 'They think it's crap, that's what we're all like'; or 'They think everyone does look like that, dress like that, bandage [on], "it's really a documentary"'; or 'Rab's funny and it's quite amusing but at the same time you do stop and think about whether other people believe it, when they know you're from Scotland it's all like, 'ooh, *Rab C. Nesbitt*''. In a similar vein another said: '[English people] think "oh great! [*Rab C. Nesbitt*] gives us another reason to hate Scottish people"', a comment which expresses an inferiority complex about Scottish identity through projecting a Contrastive

Other's antagonistic condescension.

As I noted in Chapter Four some comments were given a humorous performance. The group dynamic here often included jokes being performed back for me—"we're paying for the banter"—where the joke was especially enjoyed, and sometimes jokes that were seen to fall flat were performed with a deadpan if not cynical tone and no laughter. Group members sometimes wound one another up, in one case by offering unexpectedly homophobic comments the exact meaning of which I never did pin down properly. But personal opinions were also performed as jokes for my and the group's benefit, usually with the effect of asserting a dominance in the group. Note for example the exaggeration and tone of the last two replies here in an all-female group of Glaswegians:

> **Int: How do people feel about *Rab C. Nesbitt*?**
> ° Hmm [laughter]
> ° I look at him and go 'oooh' [yuck], no I actually look at him and laugh
> ° It's funny and it's quite amusing but at the same time you kind of s... and think about whether other people believe it, when they know you're from Scotland it's all like, 'ooh, *Rab C. Nesbitt*'
> ° I think it's quite outdated, the whole string vest, chippie every night
> ° At the same time there is no denying that there is people like that, you can't get away from that, it is funny, it is funny
> ° It's a bit like *Chewin The Fat*, you do recognise that peculiarity, it is ...
> **Int: What do you think they think of it in England?**
> ° They think everyone up here's like that [agreement]
> ° They laugh at it because they go 'haha, that's Scotland, they all live in caves and play the bagpipes' or whatever
> [Glasgow 2: 84-97]

This conversation is characterised by both earnestness and humour with some respondents talking about outdated stereotypes and 'truth' alongside peers who clearly treat the subject differently. The anxiety that English people use *Rab C. Nesbitt* as a vehicle to mock and ridicule Scottish people is expressed first seriously—'They think everyone up here's like that [agreement]'—and then comedically—'They laugh at it because they go "haha, that's Scotland, they all live in caves and play the bagpipes" or whatever'. The final 'or whatever' shows an ambivalence and indicates that her opinion has been expressed in a throwaway fashion but the other parts indicate enormous anxiety expressed within a comedic performativity: '"haha"'. Not only does this respondent perform her opinions with humour (as do some other participants in the groups) she also articulates them ironically, using a deadpan tone. Just as the participant quoted earlier above did not mean me to take seriously that English people would think *Rab C. Nesbitt* a 'documentary', similarly these comments and others like them are light-hearted jokes. At the same time however they do construct Contrastive Others and hint at anxieties about how, for whom and for what comedic purpose representations are created, to whom they are circulated, and how different groups outwith Scotland perceive Scots through Scottish television comedy.

Notes

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[1] Whether this suggests that English people in the sample felt less strongly than the Scots from the 'always' group about their 'national' identity, or were perhaps playing down their Englishness as a reaction to perceived or real experiences of ill-feeling towards English people by Scots in Scotland, is not discernible from this data. These feelings of discomfort, if any, are possibly though unlikely to have stemmed from the experience of the survey's administration since both lecturers were English and I am clearly not Scottish, so there would be no reason to expect English respondents to feel any threat in that regard.

[2] These figures exclude radio, hi-fi units, computers and other non-television technologies which might also appear in the home and which might conceivably command significant amounts of the respondents' attention in ways similar or comparable to those of television.

[3] This was the respondent who also indicated no access to any television-related technologies at home; she volunteered comments on her questionnaire indicating that she had arrived in the UK only three weeks earlier and had not established a television viewing routine.

[4] Occasionally a respondent referred to a television technology rather than a channel, so 'digital', 'satellite' and 'terrestrial' were all mentioned but only once or twice.

[5] It was not surprising that programmes clearly marked out in the 'favourites' question were mentioned again frequently as shows respondents would 'hate to miss' or 'would video' if they were going out.

[6] This respondent was very enthusiastic about *Goodness Gracious Me* and appears from her comments to identify as Asian. Indeed, when she arrived for the focus group I immediately considered her to have Asian origins (though a European name) and began to feel uncomfortable about the prospect of discussing race and ethnic culture with one Asian woman and five European women. However, I noted that she had listed her ethnicity on her survey forms as 'white', so I left the issue unspoken.

[7] Christie Davies (1988) gives examples of jokes against Scots, sometimes 'national' jokes and sometimes 'local' jokes, as here. He also demonstrates the relations between jokes and their objects: sometimes the 'other' group is involved in neighbourhood rivalries, other times the 'other' is a former colony *or* a former colonising power.

[8] Gaelic is transcribed 'Gaylic' here and in other focus group conversations to reflect the distinct, consistent mispronunciation. Interestingly, those respondents who were sympathetic to or had some contact with or knowledge of Gaelic language or culture invariably pronounced it as a Gaelic-speaker would ('Gahlic').

[9] Their quantitative study included surveying 1041 respondents of whom 7 per cent of the total sample, or 14 per cent in the former Highlands and Islands administrative area, spoke Gaelic. The survey asked how important and how relevant respondents felt Gaelic-language television to be and as well as noting differences in each region (the former Tayside, Highland and Islands, and Grampian administrative areas), the authors found that '[b]oth measures are naturally far higher among those who speak/understand Gaelic, with 85% saying it is important and 62% saying it is relevant' with similar levels of support 'among those who watch Gaelic programmes, at 79% and 46% respectively' (System Three 2000:42).

[10] One of my interviewees at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig—a former Gaelic-language television producer—talked at length about how knowing English subtitles would be applied to her filming affected her filming and editing decisions. There is a limit to how tight in you can take a close-up, she said, because the writing will be applied across the face; similarly you need extra time at the end of a shot for the strings of subtitles to 'catch up' and for that section's meaning to be conveyed before introducing the next topic or section. Thus subtitles contribute to the creation of a different aesthetic in terms of framing shots (of people, of photographs, of objects) and structuring the pace of transitions. Both these restrictions dilute the dramatic possibilities, contributing to a perception that Gaelic language television is slow and turgid.

[11] My groups discussed *Rab C. Nesbitt* ten years after it had begun; perhaps Caughie's teenagers expressed stronger views because in 1992 it s was still a new phenomenon and had a very strong initial impact, much the same way *Chewin The Fat* has a strong polarising effect currently.

AGE

Age	Frequency
17	10
18	30
19	24
20	19
21	3
22	1
23	2
24	1
25	1
31	1
32	1
	n=93

RESIDENCE in Scotland

Options	Frequency
Since starting uni	36
6 months to five years	1
More than five years	6
Always	50
	n=93

ETHNICITY

Description	Frequency
White	57
No response	12
Caucasian	8
European	2
White UK	2
Asian Indian	1
British	1
Catholic (White)	1
English?	1
European/ White	1
Greek	1
Irish	1
Jewish	1
Korean	1
None, really (White)	1
Scottish	1
White Scottish	1
	n=93

NATIONALITY

Description	Frequency
British	36
Scottish	32
USA	9
English	3
Scottish British	2
UK	2
British (Scottish)	1
Canadian British	1
German	1
Greek	1
Irish	1
Korean	1
N. Irish	1
Norwegian	1
No response	1
	n=93

GENDER

Gender	Frequency
Male	36
Female	57
	n=93

Table 5.1 Demographic Details of Questionnaire Respondents

Group D: Always lived in Scotland			Group A: Lived here since starting university		
Description	Freq.	%	Description	Freq.	%
Scottish	30	*60*	British	18	*50*
British	14	*28*	USA	8	*22.2*
Scottish British	2	*4*	English	3	*8.2*
UK	2	*4*	German	1	*2.8*
British (Scottish)	1	*2*	Greek	1	*2.8*
No response	1	*2*	Irish	1	*2.8*
			Korean	1	*2.8*
			N. Irish	1	*2.8*
			Norwegian	1	*2.8*
			Scottish	1	*2.8*
Totals	n=50	*100*	Totals	n=36	*100*

Table 5.2 Self-description of 'nationality' in relations to length of residence in Scotland, two groups, by descending order of frequency

Black & White TV	Colour TV	VCR	Teletext TV	Games Console
n...*Freq.*	n...*Freq.*	n...*Freq.*	n...*Freq.*	n...*Freq.*
0... *87*	0... *2*	0...*11*	0...*29*	0...*47*
1... *6*	1...*41*	1...*49*	1...*46*	1...*38*
	2...*16*	2...*25*	2...*11*	2... *6*
	3...*20*	3... *7*	3... *5*	3... *2*
	4... *9*	4... *1*	4... *2*	
	5... *4*			
	6... *1*			

Table 5.3 Access to technology where *n* is the number of each in the house and Frequency shows how many respondents indicated access to this many items

Channels (options given)	First	Second	Third	Totals
'BBC1'	20	31	30	=81
'BBC2'	11	24	19	=54
'ITV'	9	9	19	=37
'Channel4'	49	21	14	=84
'Channel5'	0	4	7	=11
Ambiguous	3	3	3	=9
No response	1	1	1	=3

Table 5.4 Responses to, "If you could receive only THREE terrestrial channels which would you prefer?"

Preferred channels:	Without s/c/d	%	With s/c/d	%	All	%
One terrestrial, one s/c/d	19...	*34.5*	14...	*36.8*	33...	*35.5*
Two s/c/d	17...	*30.9*	11...	*28.9*	28...	*30.1*
Two terrestrial	15...	*27.3*	8...	*21.1*	23...	*24.7*
Nil response	4...	*7.3*	4...	*10.6*	8...	*8.6*
One response only	0...	*0*	1...	*2.6*	1...	*1.1*
Totals	55	*100%*	38	*100%*	93	*100%*

Table 5.5 Scores for Two Preferred Channels From Any Source, grouped by respondents' access to technology at home, n=93

Favourites (three each, from possible 279)	Freq.	Hate to Miss (two each, from possible 186)	Freq.	Always video (two each, from possible 186)	Freq.
Friends	31	[Blank]	64	[Blank]	88
[Blank]	29	*Friends*	17	[None/Never Ask]	18
The Simpsons	25	*The Simpsons*	11	*Friends*	17
ER	16	*Neighbours*	9	*Ally McBeal*	6
Ally McBeal	12	*ER*	8	*Frasier*	4
Buffy	11	[None]	7	*The X-Files*	4
Eastenders	10	*The X-Files*	6	*Buffy*	3
The X-Files	9	*Eastenders*	6	*Dawsons Creek*	3
Frasier	6	*Ally McBeal*	5	*Eastenders*	3
The Eleven O'Clock Show	4	*Buffy*	4	*ER*	3
Hollyoaks	4	*Sunset Beach*	3	'Football'	3
Neighbours	4	*Frasier*	3	*The Simpsons*	3
South Park	4	[Two...	6	[Two...	4
[Three...	9	[One mention	31	[One mention	23
[Two...	16				
[One mention	55				
Total	279	Total	186	Total	186

Table 5.6 Most frequently mentioned programmes in three categories: Favourite Show, Hate To Miss, and Always Video.

Programme	Genre	Channel	Country of Origin	Combined Score (out of 651)
Friends	sitcom	Channel4	USA	65
The Simpsons	sitcom/cartoon	BBC2	USA	39
ER	drama	Channel4	USA	27
Ally McBeal	drama/comedy	Channel4	USA	23
Eastenders	soap	BBC1	UK	19
The X-Files	drama/fantasy	BBC2	USA	19
Buffy	drama/fantasy	BBC2	USA	18
Frasier	sitcom	Channel4	USA	13
Neighbours	soap	BBC1	Australia	13

Table 5.7 Programmes with the greatest frequency of mention over the three categories combined (Favourite Show, Hate To Miss, and Always Video). The combined score is the sum of the frequencies of mention as a 'favourite' (possible, 279), a 'hate to miss' (possible, 186) and an 'always video' (possible, 186), and only those programmes with a combined score above 6.5 (that is, 1%) are listed here.

AGE

Age	Frequency
17	3
18	13
19	8
20	1
22	1
26	1
31	1
32	1
33	1
	n=30

ETHNICITY

Description	Frequency
White	20
No response	3
Scottish	3
White European	2
Caucasian	1
	n=30

RESIDENCE in Scotland

Options	Frequency
Since starting uni	0
Six months. to five years	0
More than five years	3
Always	26
No response	1
	n=30

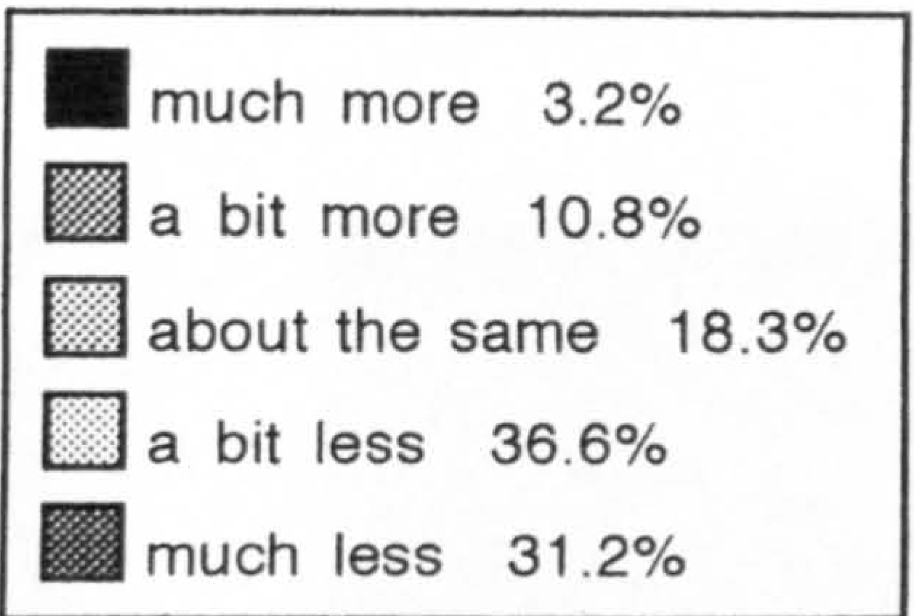
GENDER

Gender	Frequency
Male	12
Female	18
	n=30

NATIONALITY

Description	Frequency
Scottish	18
British	7
UK	3
British (English)	1
Scottish British	1
	n=30

Table 5.8 Focus Groups' Collective Demographic Details



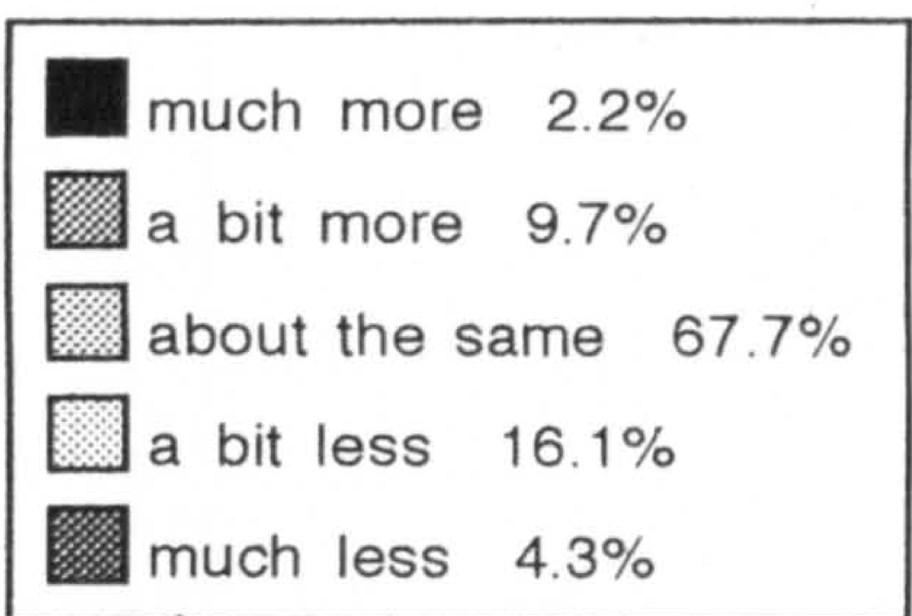


Figure 5.1 How much [TV] do you watch compared to last year?
Figure 5.2 How much do you enjoy [TV] compared to last year?

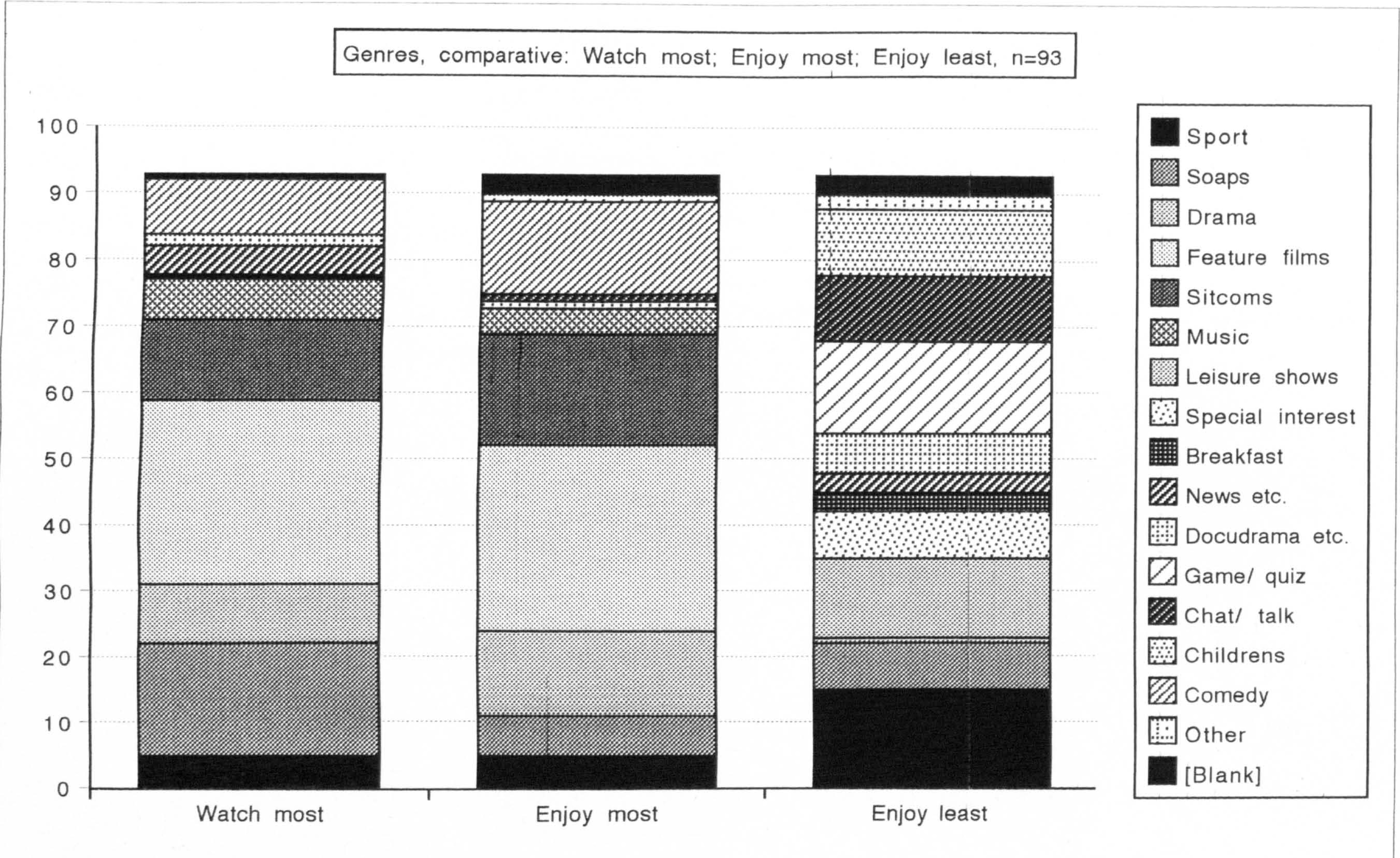


Figure 5.3 Genre preferences, from forced-choice list

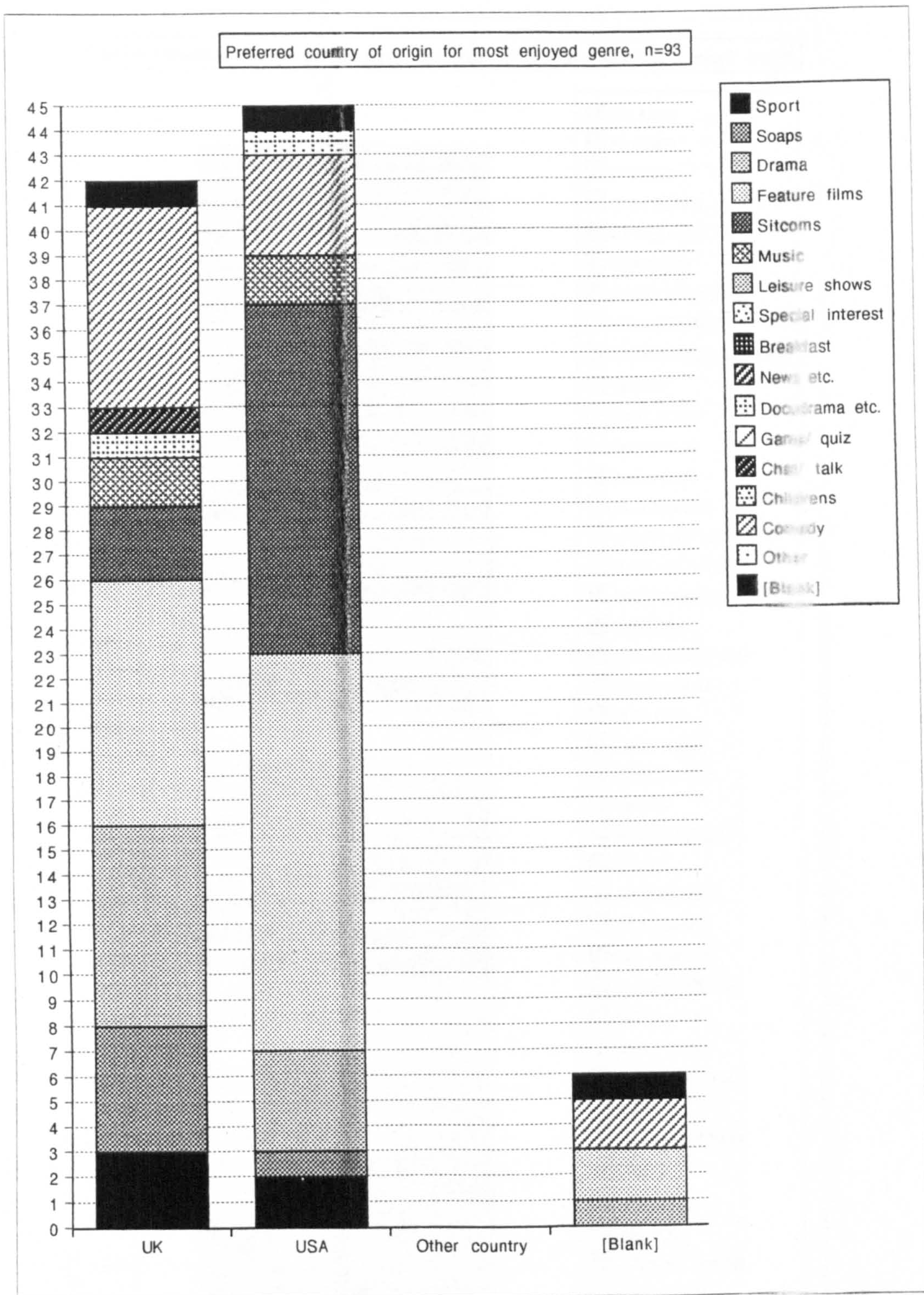


Figure 5.4 Preferred 'Country of Origin' for favourite genre (forced choice)

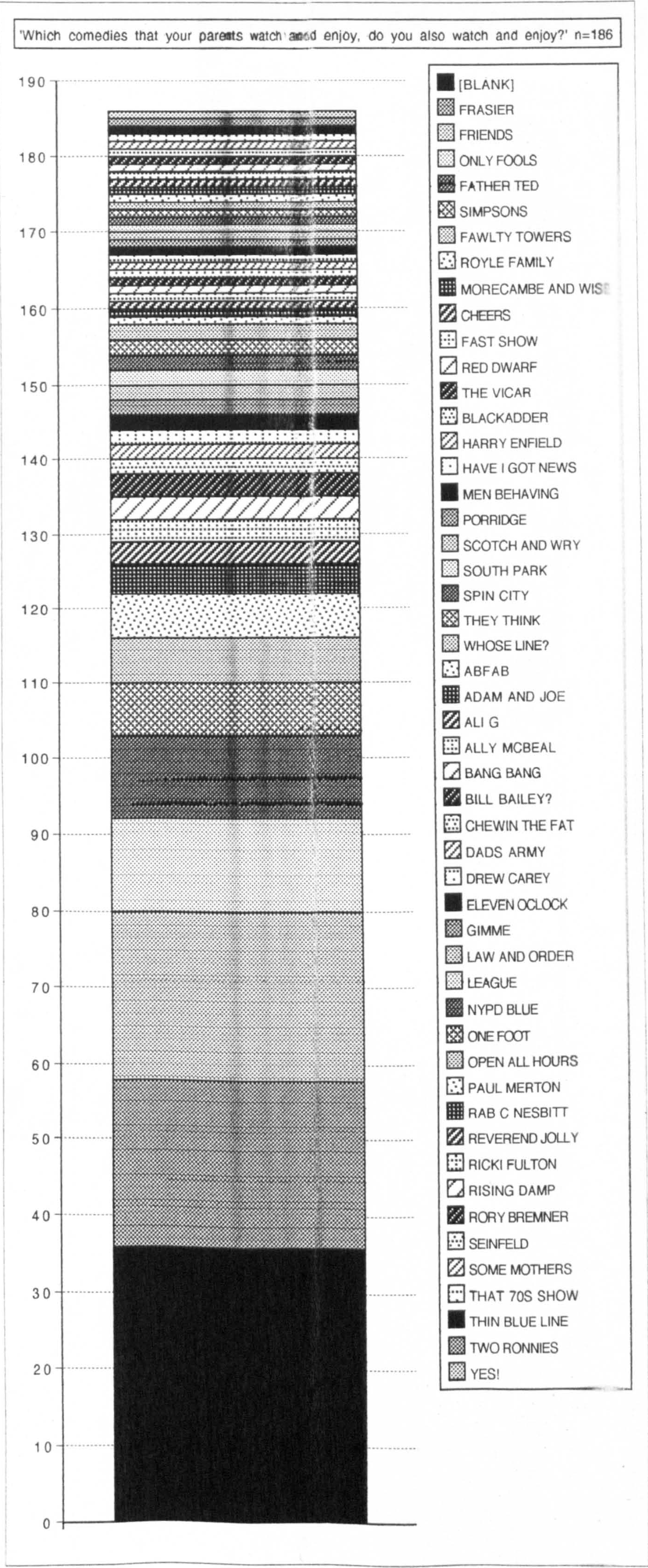


Figure 5.5 "Which comedies that your parents watch and enjoy do you also watch and enjoy?" sorted by frequency.

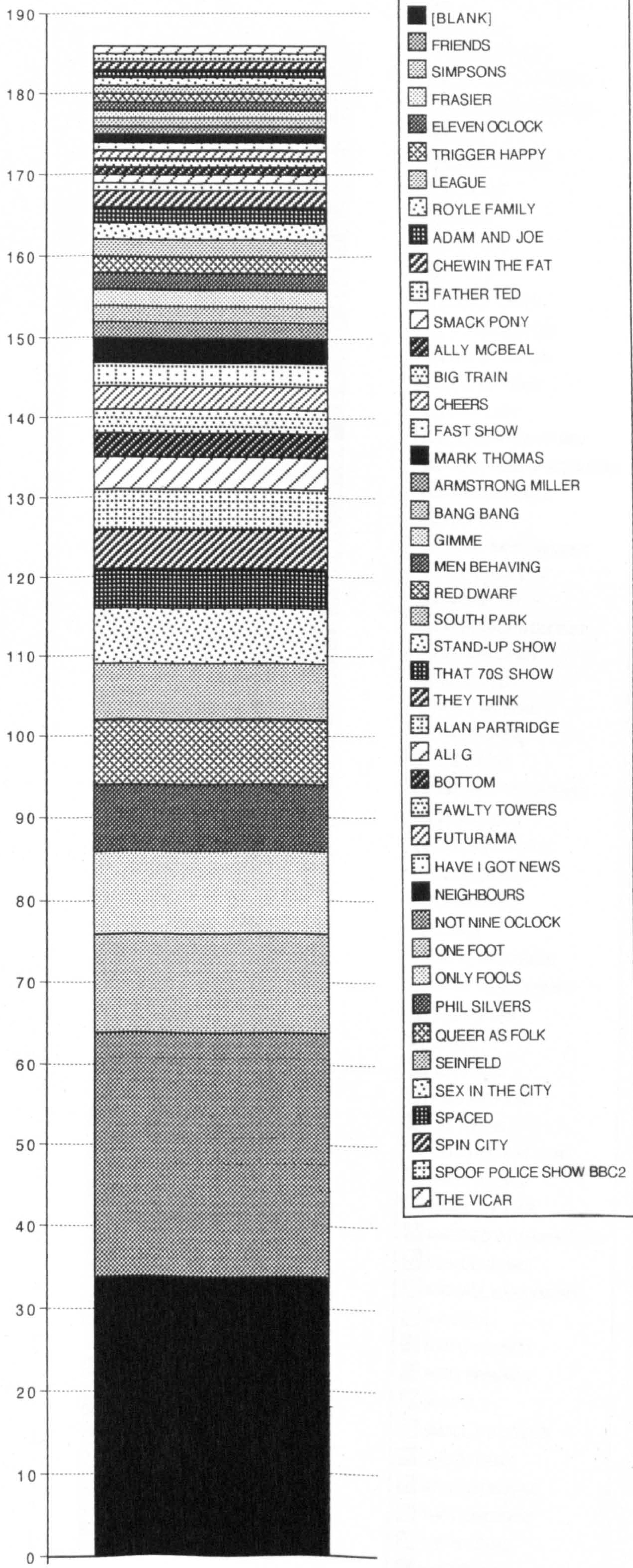


Figure 5.6 "Which comedy shows on television in the last year are your favourites?" sorted by frequency.

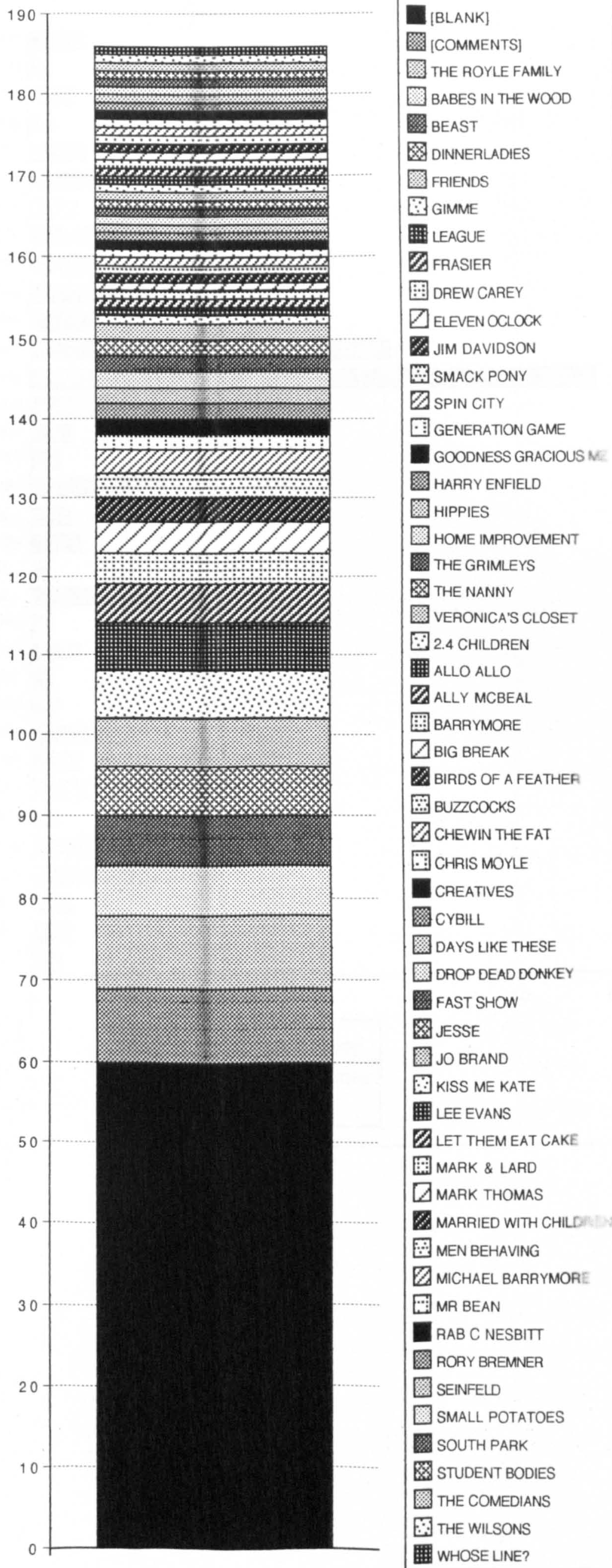


Figure 5.7 "Which comedy shows on television are just NOT funny?" sorted by frequency.

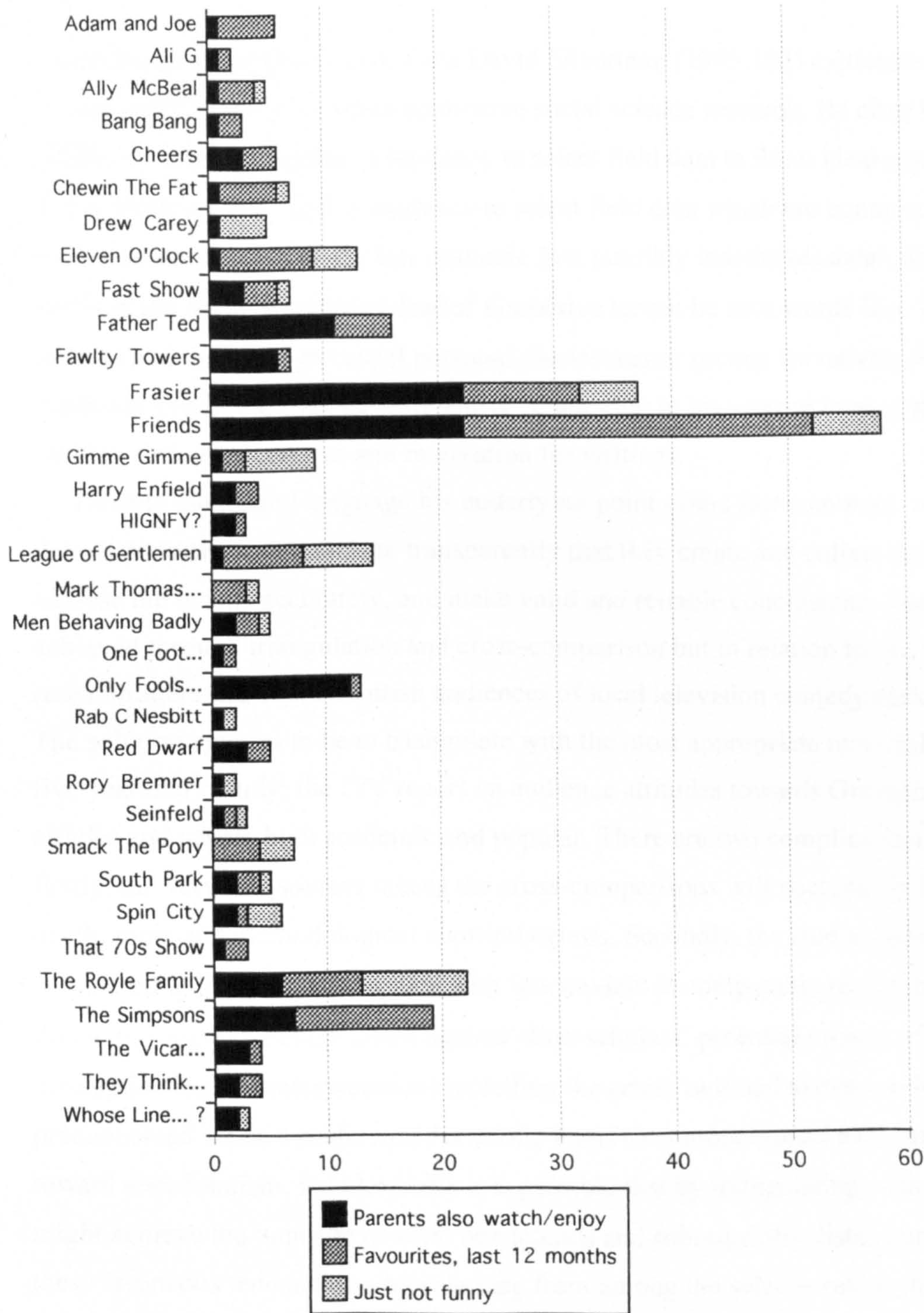


Figure 5.8 Programmes named in more than one category, sorted by frequency

CONCLUSION

In his *Interpreting Qualitative Data* David Silverman (1993:153) expresses concern at an '"anecdotal" quality' in some qualitative social science research. He cites Fielding and Fielding's (1986:32) cautions against 'a tendency to select field data to fit an ideal conception (preconception) of the phenomenon', and 'a tendency to select field data which are conspicuous because they are exotic, at the expense of the less dramatic (but possibly indicative) data' Silverman's point is partly made through selecting loaded discursive terms: he uses words like 'anecdotal' to frame the sources and oral texts as casual personal disclosures or private narratives whereas elsewhere he explicitly privileges 'representativeness', connoting in his view at least systematic testing and validity (his chief concern and motivation for writing).

Despite the loaded language his underlying point offers fair comment: researchers need to demonstrate and communicate transparently that they create and collect data carefully, gather and analyse the results accurately, and make valid and reliable conclusions. The last part is best achieved through triangulation and cross-comparison but in relation to this study the dearth of research literature about Scottish audiences of local television comedy makes such a task difficult. The solution appears to be to triangulate with the most appropriate material available: the BFI's five year diary study; the ITV report on audience attitudes towards Grampian; and various reports, articles and papers both academic and popular. There are two complications with this approach: firstly, the very few sources means the cross-comparisons will necessarily be limited by number, depth, topic and methodological appropriateness. Secondly, the studies themselves have also been completed under similar pressures with few models or comparable research examples. Therefore this writer must somehow guard against other scholars' potential misuse of data (misconstruction, misapplication, misinterpretation) including the errors outlined above—selecting data to fit preconceived ideas, a preference for exotic items over more typical mundane data, and a tendency toward anecdotalism. Paradoxically it is possible that by triangulating with other research one might achieve the opposite of what one intends and subsequently distil, condense and consolidate these erroneous tendencies—by selecting from among the select—rather than expose, challenge and critique them with external sources as intended.

I am not suggesting that the literature examples available for comparison are poorly researched. However, a precise match between different pieces of research is not possible and we must ensure that in making connections we do not consequently produce distortions. For example, the report for the ITC into Grampian's audiences was produced by market research consultants whose methodologies in the focus groups, and goals and processes in the analysis and reporting stages, aim for a consensus that is articulated through a very few quoted examples. Often market research-style focus groups are not transcribed in full but instead pithy comments are drawn from the audiotapes either to substantiate the consensus or to express a contrary view. The focus group aesthetics of variety, contradiction, humour, interaction, inarticulacy or uncertainty are expunged from these reports and condensed results are expressed in a matter-of-fact manner, easily digested by the non-academic commissioning body. By selecting the conspicuous and the exotic out of context that study epitomises the methodological approach condemned by David Silverman above.

The problem of indeterminable selectivity might have a lesser impact on triangulation if original data were available so as to permit analysis in context. The BFI holds nearly five hundred people's hand-written diaries but the packaged computerised dataset lent to me included answers to only about a tenth of the questions. More data would have been available had I hand-copied from selected diaries ordered in advance from the BFI archives in Stevenage and while I did as much of this as was practicable, logistically such access is limited by personal research resources. As well as limitations on the amount of accessible original data the usefulness of the BFI study for triangulation is limited further by the way its diary topics developed and changed longitudinally as researchers thought of different ways to ask different things—as one observer put it, a 'suck it and see' research structure. Despite the number of comedy programmes on television and the total number of questions possible across the fifteen diaries only one BFI question asked about comedy; this occurred towards the end of the study in Diary 14 when the sample had thinned and the volume and range of respondents is reduced (particularly so in the Scottish sub-sample). Considering these data—the subset's responses to one question—within the context of the BFI study as a whole is difficult enough. Add the problems of datedness and selective focus—the question was put in 1995 and asks opinions on five programmes, two of which I have not seen—and making sense of these data for triangulation purposes becomes a formidable task. Taking into account the further incongruence of the BFI's written diary format with my hour-long focus group discussions, then comparisons between the two sets of respondents' comments need to be approached very carefully and critically.

However these limitations are the necessary limitations of all research practices and triangulation and cross-comparison are invaluable nevertheless. This thesis not only explores texts and original data but also investigates the problematics of doing audience-focused research into nationally-inflected television comedy. This final chapter offers a discussion of my study's survey and focus group data and analyses in order to draw conclusions about young Scottish adults' experiences of television comedy. By summarising the previous chapters and drawing the threads together, this chapter interrogates: a sense of 'Scottishness' in terms of respondents' personal self-description; how representations of 'Scottishness' on television are regarded by respondents; and how comedy works in regard to the respondents' negotiating their identity between the two. My conclusions are modest because with very little critical material to triangulate against, there are necessarily real limits as to how much we can conclude and extrapolate from two small samples. Similarly, there are caveats to my data too: the data come from first-year university students, the survey session and focus groups were few and brief, there were discrepancies between the size and geographic homogeneity or representativeness of the groups, and so on. However the research was predominantly interested in developing a template or a guide for collecting and understanding qualitative data to expand upon the problematics of reading Scottish television comedy texts, and in this regard the data analysis and discussion presented in Chapter Five demonstrates some progress. This section reconsiders the conclusions formulated throughout the thesis by feeding the data and results back into the suppositions and ideas explored at the start.

Evaluating the Research

Part One: Texts and Contexts: Literature and contemporary television surveys

In the first half of the thesis I explored the relations between comedy genres, a history of Scottish cultural critique, and how we might consider contemporary Scottish humour and television comedy in that light.

The first chapter summarised and critiqued literature on comedy genres and sub-genres. I demonstrated that some scholars' research contained circular arguments about genre, or viewed genre through the distorting lens of a single programme, or applied theories inappropriately or unconvincingly, or, most frequently, failed to contextualise a text within its sub-genre and the comedy genre as a whole. However there is a substantial critical corpus of television genre study and it constitutes the largest group of television comedy analyses. In an attempt to understand the role of Scottish television comedy, and keeping in mind the historical and national specificities of the writers' positions, I compared the literature against my own schema of contemporary genre relations on British terrestrial network television. I theorised that individual genre texts might further be thought of as points along a graded line or 'continuum' and that these continua interrelate and interconnect. The relations between different sub-genre categories can thus be seen to function more fluidly, more permeably, than is usually suggested by scholars' writings about comedy and genre. I wondered aloud whether audiences use genres and sub-genres as meaningful categories when selecting what to watch, in other words: genre is a meaningful concept academically and industrially but do audiences use it to frame their own preferences?

The main parts of Chapter One, the textual analyses and overview of programmes on continua, are not developed as tools for the rest of the thesis, and definitions have been prepared by induction out of the materials collected rather than working against an external set of structures. Similarly, literature examples are parsed over somewhat rather than explored in depth. The reasons for this are connected: Chapter One functions to compile a working corpus of viewing available as a background for the focus group clips and for the focus group respondents at that time, after demonstrating the lack of such an overview in the critical literature available. Comedy genre writing tends to focus on individual programmes or individual shows without seeing in context the wider televisual terrain and the academic precepts used by other writers. Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik's *Popular film and television comedy* did not provide the definitions or televisual focus my writing needed, but rather mixed film and television comedy examples together from different countries of origin and different historical periods to provide an exploration of joke structures rather than aesthetics and the experience of genres and genre blending at any given moment in time. While it might be tidier to focus on a single show and to set it within only its genre and historical context and follow it through to its fans and audiences, this would presuppose something central about that one programme, and I had not been prepared to expect that a single show could be so significant. Identity is diverse and fluid and multiple and personal and contradictory—how could one programme possibly express sufficiently the range of experience young students might enjoy in Scotland (the sample sets in both pieces of participatory research)? As it happened *Rab C. Nesbitt* was mentioned in the audience discussions every time without prompting and without any

clips being shown—in other words, it *had* been central in a spontaneous and consistent fashion, even though its meaning and importance to people was not unidimensional.

However, I stand by my decision to seek to define contemporary televisual comedy by exploring what actually played on British terrestrial television for a year, and to work up an understanding of the genre and the televisual aesthetics from there. The chapter contains some faults I criticise in others' work—it hedges definitions, it uses selectively drawn examples for extra analysis—but in the main it achieves its objective to map and contextualise the comedy shows (sometimes to the furthest edges of the genre continua) to be found on terrestrial Scottish television in 1998/1999. Unfortunately it later transpired that genre modes and categories were not especially significant to the respondents, so its value to the audience research rests mostly in its worth as contextualising preparation to me as someone new to Scotland and Scottish television. Participants did not appear to work from a genre preference when selecting their Scottish television comedy viewing, but rather identified the stars and programmes they enjoyed and chose viewing like that.

Certainly genre was a factor in programme choice because there were differences between the kinds of programmes respondents watched most, enjoyed most and enjoyed least (Figure 5.3). 'Comedy' and 'sitcoms' were well watched and very well enjoyed but 'quiz/game' shows only scored, and scored quite highly, as programmes which were enjoyed the least. But while individual examples of comedy programmes were popular among the student group polled, and while the term 'comedy' clearly meant something to them—when asked to name television comedies they largely succeeded, although a radio show programme or presenter was mentioned once or twice—just how significant 'comedy' was in determining whether a person watched a particular programme could not be demonstrated here. Similarly, deeper careful questioning and better explanatory statements defining the genres would be required in a more focused study of genre and audiences: the problems with lexicon and definitions which arose in the pilot of the *Endurance UK* study apply to survey formats as well. *Have I Got News For You?* is was used in my genre discussion as an example of a programme which might best be described on a continuum of genre blends. Thus, a study asking respondents to classify it or other similarly multivalent programmes as a quiz show or as a comedy—perceived and valued differently by the respondents in the survey group—needs more careful structuring than the background questions I asked in this study for my particular purposes.

As Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990) note, comedy is not simply the absence of tragedy in a text, nor simply a genre (whether of films or television programmes) of texts with similar structures, narratives and themes, nor is it merely a term for one of these shows individually (hence, 'I watched that new comedy last night'). These characteristics are worth noting, but more central to this study is the way audiences might think and feel about its content and use, that is, the socio-moral values and levels of entertainment the viewer might create from the text.

Thus, in the second chapter of Part One I considered historical debates about national identity and Scottish culture, looking at mythologies of Scottishness and the role of culture in representing and exploring Scottish social, cultural and political values. A brief history of Scottish humour is included and the lack of critical sources about Scottish comedy is supplemented by an analysis of several interviews with selected current Scottish comedy practitioners (writers, performers, producers, tutors). These interviews were treated qualitatively and the respondents suggested

collectively that humour works on local levels particularly in Glasgow (Glasgow versus Edinburgh, East End versus West End and so on) as well as nationally, both to cohere social groups and to distance that group from others (or Others). Taken together their comments also express an anxiety about Scottish struggles for a defining culture becoming negative and parochial, and demonstrate some ambivalent feelings about if and how jokes about Irn Bru or football or hating the English or many other mythic comedic Scottishisms might reflect or be representative of Scottish social experience. This chapter concluded the contextualisation of Scottish television comedy texts and articulates the texts with the empirical audience research in Part Two.

Comedy here then ties into an intellectual and an individual struggle for identity through culture. The respondents were not only discussing specific joke examples but also negotiating for themselves and as a group a sense of Scottishness. The struggles for representational power—the power to determine which themes and attitudes will be dominant in culture—can be seen to exist on at least three levels. Intellectuals might be thinking in terms of postcolonial geopolitics and its ramifications for a sense of identity for Scotland, particularly in relation to her changing intra- and international fortunes in the last one hundred years and more recently, since parliamentary devolution in 1999. Local comedians might not express their concerns in such terms but we may still observe a similar thread of negotiated identity and social change reflected in joke cycles and shifts in comedy subjects and attitudes. The comedians function like an articulating hinge between intellectuals and students, not only as the direct transmitters of ideas but also because they work with irony, taking the aspirations of the critics and intellectuals for new ways of expressing (national) identity and Scottish self-perceptions in culture, and teasingly producing both pleasure and dismay for the viewer through comedic representations both traditional and anti-parochial.

Many of the students, especially the Scottish-educated ones, had some background knowledge of postcolonial theory and culture and understood the tensions between Scotland's historical subordination to England, its Victorian-era triumphs as a colonial power and the modern devolved Scotland as a redeveloping, inward-focused self-determining nation engaged in the perpetual power struggle local and global power. The students also had, between them, considerable experience of both the proud pleasure and the groaning pain of their own identifications and the (imagined) projected identifications of Contrastive Others (especially English people) with regard to explicitly Scottish representations in television comedy. Thus, they were able to draw upon additional examples of comedy programming and widen the conversation according to their own tastes and viewing experiences, including comments about *Naked Video, City Lights, Para Handy* and other Scottish comedy programmes from the past as well as *Rab C. Nesbitt* and Rikki Fulton's *Rev IM Jolly* character, both of which still appeared on Scottish television in 1998/1999.

However, intellectual theory and cultural history were rarely discussed in the focus groups: when the students were asked to reflect on the video clips many of their responses were *personalised.* Focus group respondents made comments like 'my parents would be shocked' or 'my gran is just like that'. At the same time, students also reflected upon their own experience of being Scottish, and projected the beliefs of Contrastive Others onto the onscreen representations and, crucially, onto themselves. Contrastive Others were not only evoked in the manner described by Michael Billig (1992) wherein one of his respondents might have said, 'other people believe the tabloid stories about the Royal family but I don't', or in the manner I found in my pilot group

discussing *Endurance UK*, for example, 'I can see the irony but other people wouldn't'. My focus group respondents frequently expressed a very specific anxiety about *how others saw them as Scottish people* through comedy representations. Thus, my respondents expressed concerns like 'people think Islanders [like me] are sheep-shaggers' and 'English people think we [Scots] live in caves and play the bagpipes' and 'English people think *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s a documentary'. Note that each of these statements is expressed in self-deprecating, witty terms: the unconscious anxiety is positioned as a joke, making themselves both the creator and the object of sometimes quite clever comments. Once again joke-making remains a significant aesthetic of the focus group dynamic.

The students' lived experience of the comedy culture is far removed from the theoretical postcolonial positions discussed academically but neither invalidates the other. Rather, the intellectual argument explores the macro-social terrain and the students' discussions explore their micro-social experiences. In between is the comedians' creative zone, drawing upon the tensions within the traditional representations and exploiting the anxieties of their young Scottish audience. My focus groups were less inclined to agree with the Glasgow-Edinburgh or town-country divisions suggested by the comedians. They were able to repeat the traditional stereotypical assertions that 'Edinburgh people won't talk to you at the bus stop' but these were not held to be nearly so significant or so true as observations and projections about English people or Americans, or self-reflections on their own culture as Scots collectively. The students were aware that many jokes are made about the seeming rivalry between Glasgow and Edinburgh but their personal experiences and their comedy horizons of expectation would not permit them to see the world as divided in this manner, or if it was, it was hardly significant to them.

Where a sense of unity and identity could be felt in a focus group discussion, this almost exclusively worked on a Scottish level. Just as the survey results and comparable newspaper polls had shown for other groups, feeling themselves to be *Scottish* was significant to the focus group students, who identified with the negative as well as the positive social connotations and comedic textual representations. Although we cannot make definitive statements due to the small group sizes and the geographically 'impure' bases for the groups, we can still observe easily that belonging to a city or place—being from Edinburgh or being from Glasgow—was much less important to the respondents than feeling Scottish, in terms of identifying with a group. For Islanders and Gaelic-speakers, however, identifying strongly as part of this minority group was as important, or even more important, than feeling Scottish. As Freud might have predicted, we can perhaps see which identity is most significant to the focus group students—and which aspects of this identity creates the most anxiety about meaning—by the kinds of jokes they made about themselves. By using irony and hyperbole, these students were creating their own *non-representative* self-representations.

From the paper survey I conducted it may be clearly seen that 'being Scottish' was very important to certain respondents, whereas consciously choosing to 'watch Scottish' television comedy was not so important. While academics enjoy engaging with arguments about culture and identity, society and history, this somewhat internal intellectual conversation uses very different modes of speech from those used by the respondents for either the survey or the focus groups. As such, the analysis in Chapter Two is useful for positioning an academic exploration but much of the value of the cultural history and contemporary mythologising resides in its expression of the

difficulty in determining the layers of irony and the problematics of discussing comedy and stereotypes, particularly national ones. We can observe the shift between traditional, often external jokes against Scots (drunkenness, meanness, poverty) and contemporary 'home-made' Scottish jokes about death, football, filth and any number of other subjects, including a deliberate attempt by one programme maker to anti-parochialise the Scottish comedy programmes he produced. Old-fashioned tartanry and Kailyardism have given way to new forms of signifying identity, new modes of ironic self-deprecation and new reworkings of old stereotypes and modes of representation. How we can discuss myths about ourselves where comedy (irony, stereotypes, parody, sarcasm, hyperbole) is involved remains a subject for further exploration.

The value of this chapter was largely contextual for me as preparation for the audience research, and was helpful in determining the kinds of themes and clips I would wish the focus groups to discuss. I could not write a complete historical survey of Scottish television comedy—surely a whole thesis in itself—nor could I produce a full cultural history of Scotland which incorporated and reconciled the postcolonial urges of the devolutionary era with the shifts in mythologising I could only observe in minor detail. Similarly, as mentioned above, I chose not to focus on one individual show as a case study in production, although the opportunity did present itself to me as I had useful creative and industrial contacts within Scottish Screen, the BBC and the Comedy Unit. With hindsight, I might have followed a series of *Rab C. Nesbitt* or *Chewin' The Fat* from inception to reception and indeed I did send scripts to a few sketch shows myself (which would have offered a peculiarly subjective opportunity to compare the authorial view with the audience view—had they been accepted). However, just as Chapter One sought to expand and map the field of television comedy, Chapter Two worked to open the subject out rather than focus on a single version of Scottish cultural history or mode of representation.

Part Two: Empirical research problematics

In Chapter Three I undertook a literature review of selected examples of empirical audience research in order to explore, critique and analyse them before constructing an appropriate methodology for approaching Scottish television comedy audiences. My progress in this section was hindered by the paucity of empirical research into comedy audiences. I discussed two examples at length but noted that neither scholar had conceived of the programmes he mentions *as comedy:* that is, with irony creating pleasurable ambiguities about meaning. Both those critical examples read the texts as unproblematic in this regard. My literature review sought to include a wide selection from the field and I considered the approaches, topics, audiences and methodologies of each example in order to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of particular research directions. This preparation was necessary because there were no models for researching television comedy audiences in the way I was proposing.

This chapter marked the move from textual analyses and historical overview to a survey of methods and techniques for audience research. This is where the construction of a 'template' begins in terms of comedy and television audiences as a distinct research methodology project. A variety of research examples are critiqued, although I recognise that having indicated the inconsistencies or erroneous practices in others' work I made several myself. I criticised one writer

for showing focus groups clips from the climax of violent films in a manner that isolated those parts from the context of the rest of the movie, and then in my own groups showed sections from situation comedies as if they were constructed and intended to be read as sketches. I criticised the same writer for supplying alcohol to the focus group participants, but decided to include in the work a focus group where the two respondents arrived quite drunk. I noted other researchers' small and unstratified samples and then later used similarly limited survey and focus group structures.

Admittedly some of these failings were beyond my control as I had relied upon others to be gatekeepers in Edinburgh and Skye but in all cases the responsibility for including or excluding any particular research group rested with me, and I did include focus pairs (groups of two), one set of slightly drunk respondents, and groups wherein the identifying criterion was not met by all members (for example, a group of four 'Edinburghers' with a Dundonian and a Glaswegian in it). I chose to include the drunk students' data partly because I had so few opportunities to talk to Gaels and partly because with hindsight I realised that in considering their responses against the other group of Gaels, these two had balanced out the others' responses, giving a breadth of perspective and ensuring I did not give too much weighting to the comments of other Gaels who had felt differently. For example, it was illuminating to meet a young native-Gaelic speaker studying Gaelic culture at SMO who had never seen or even heard of *Ran Dan* when his Glaswegian-based learner-speaker friend has seen two episodes and greatly desired to see more.

At the same time, the respondents in the drunken pair did several of the things other (sober) respondents did: they created Contrastive Others, they personalised the clips and told their own jokes ('I'd beat up my grannie'), they performed jokes from the cliptape, they wound each other up as a joke between themselves, and they introduced other related comedy subjects (*Father Ted*, a comedy about priests on an isolated island in Ireland). At the same time they offered opinions not expressed elsewhere and surprised me, revealing my own assumptions. For example the learner-speaker from Glasgow told me he had very religious parents who would not watch any of the programmes he would enjoy. By contrast his co-respondent's grandfather had been a minister in Islay, however religion had little impact on this Ileach's viewpoint except as a comedy opportunity. These were passing surprises I could adapt to: other groups surprised me in fundamental and sometimes unhelpful ways, telling me that they identified as English or were from Lewis rather than being the Edinburghers I had expected. It is possible that one reason I failed to find much evidence of identifying with a sense of place (Glaswegian-ness, if you like, Edinburgher-ness) derives directly from this lack of homogeneity in the focus group structures. Perhaps much stricter control on the selection for and construction of the groups would have given clearer preferences and clearer signifiers of locale.

However, in the few groups where this homogeneity was achieved, heterogeneity of response still occurred. Successfully recruiting groups of Western Isles Gaelic-speakers or Edinburgh student-commuters in Glasgow demonstrates further why the distinctive sense of place the comedians drew upon was not supported to the degree I had expected: people of this age group move around, mix with other young students from a variety of backgrounds and (we hope) experience the joys of an open mind and forming their own opinions about the world. This might include dismissing the traditional stereotypes of place and people held by their elders, but it certainly includes adjusting one's personal beliefs in the face of lived experience. This is why, I

think, there was such ambivalence about the jokes of place, for example whether people like *Rab C. Nesbitt* exist (at all, in Govan, in Scotland). Although it suits a stand-up comedian or sketch writer to encourage the audience to take their viewpoint—often by cohering the audience around a commonality like locale, to get them 'onside' and receptive to the jokes—for commuters or those with dispersed families, personal reflection in the focus groups permitted very different experiences to colour seemingly similar people's appreciation of, and 'belief in', the jokes. A larger mythology like Scottishness, then, is perhaps less easily undermined by comparison against personal experience, then, because we understand modern Scottishness to include much variety and many contradictions.

Chapter Three segues into Chapter Four because although they are clearly different in terms of structure and topic the two are nevertheless closely related. In Chapter Four I summarised my pilot study of *Endurance UK* and showed how that attempt, although not continued as a research direction, produced four important conclusions, none of which I had foreseen. Firstly the respondents found discussing the material very difficult without a lexicon of comedy terminology and although they were postgraduate media culture students and were able to speak concisely in theoretical terms or draw upon external literature throughout the discussion, they could not express themselves with the precision they would have preferred or felt was appropriate in postgraduate forum. Secondly comedy, while perhaps not usually considered to represent an emotionally sensitive subject, can nonetheless incorporate socially difficult issues like race or sex in a way that might make people uncomfortable and repress their own or others' opinions. Comedy texts can invite us to 'take sides' in a way that may be difficult to discuss in a social research group. Thirdly I was faced with the ethical problem of showing a revolting programme (*Endurance UK*) under the guise of comedy research, a process my respondents expected to be pleasurable but instead found sometimes nauseating and irritating. Lastly there is the logistical issue: people need time watching the programme to be warmed up, so watching a series of quick clips or having the advertisements (especially foreign unfamiliar ones) fast-forwarded through can be disorientating generally and especially so in the kinds of attention required for comedy. The four conclusions can be grouped into two pairs: the first pair addresses the opinions and discussion of content from the respondents' comments and the second pair comprises an assessment of the behavioural dynamics of the group from the researcher's observations. Chapter Four concluded with an outline of the quantitative and qualitative research methodologies decided upon for the data collection.

In Chapter Four I faced a moral, ethical and methodological dilemma using the survey materials and results where the students had been a captive audience. I felt I had possibly exploited my position as a research student and occasional lecturer in the department, although I also felt this approach to the students had been sanctioned if not encouraged by some members of staff. Is it too much to ask a first-year student to offer fifteen minutes to a postgraduate student working in their discipline? Sometimes what is simplest and tidiest in terms of data collection has to suffice: I still cannot think of another way to entice so many similar respondents to answer a survey voluntarily. This concern that others might not be interested in my subject was borne out by the letters disaster. Where I had insufficient personal access to the potential respondents I could not engage them in the research properly nor control their responses or even clarify what the intended questions were. A fanzine-based study on a single television comedy text—which I deliberately chose to avoid

doing—might have produced greater volume, validity and consistency of response data, but its wider application would have been limited. Throughout the research process I was conscious of the methodological and epistemological trade-offs required: a single television text meant greater consistency and structure to the data but reduced how I might extrapolate the results, whereas asking open-ended questions about a selection of texts to non-fan groups meant the data was more varied and seemingly of wider value and interest, albeit with less statistical foundation because of the variety of the human sample sets involved. In the end my samples were small, student-focused, and not exclusively 'Scottish' which is not a failing in itself but nevertheless means that my ability to extrapolate for larger populations is limited.

The *Endurance UK* piece was an illuminating pilot study although the text chosen had no significance to the postgrad students who were asked to discuss it. They had never seen the show before and if they had, then some of their inconsistent and ill-expressed opinions might have been differently formed. It is a central blunder in this section that I chose a television show for my own uses and not with the audience in mind. I was surprised when they criticised the text as being virtually unwatchable in cultural and ethical terms but relieved that I had at least done a pilot group to determine this at an early stage. The show had no relevance in terms of *Scottish* national identity except inasmuch as Scottishness was not singled out from the totalising representation of Britishness. It was a useful piece of research-template testing because I uncovered some focus group dynamics borne out in later groups—the need for a lexicon of precise terminology; the problems of taste and distaste and how these can affect individuals' self-expression and inhibition in group discussions, particularly with regard to racial, sexual or violent subjects; the need to consider ethics of 'comedy' viz-á-viz the audience's expectation of a pleasurable experience; and the need to consider how the group will be introduced to the texts for discussion, in other words the construction of the clip tape, allowing enough time after screening before starting the discussion and so on. It was useful to me as a beginning template, but needed complete reworking for the larger study.

The *Endurance UK* text had suited me as it had been an anchor for the 'BritComedy Wednesday' nights at 7.30pm on the main non-governmental channel in my native New Zealand. Although New Zealanders do not observe a 'watershed' as such, a cartoon Kiwi bird appears at 8.30pm on every channel telling children to go to bed, and this programme preceded the warning. It had occurred to me as I prepared to move to Scotland that it would be illuminating to explore ideas of national identity and comedy using *Endurance UK*, but I had not thought through the problems of how such an empirical study might work in practice. Thus this section of the research is limited in its relevance to the discussion of how young Scottish people might see their culture reflected using humour, but it has value in its testing of the possibilities and limits of using extreme texts. Thus, while there might be future study topics arising from this difficulty of talking to audiences about distasteful material, this again however distracts us from the notion of nation and identity.

Part Three: Scottish Television Comedy Audiences

Chapter Five presented the data from three sections of empirical research. The quantitative survey consisted of an anonymous questionnaire administered to over ninety university undergraduates, which asked the respondents' demographic details, their access to television, their channel preferences, how much they watched and how much they enjoyed television, their favourite shows and favourite genre, the country their favourite genre shows came from, and finally some questions about comedy. The surveys were analysed quantitatively but due to the small, unrepresentative sample the analyses are carefully restricted to raw scores and internal comparisons. The aim was to 'take the temperature' of a group of young Scottish adults to understand a little more about them and their values before launching into focus groups which would concentrate on comedy and representations of Scottishnesses. The second part was a request for letters from members of the public about Scottish television comedy. Despite advertising widely and extensively my request attracted less than a dozen responses. The analysis of these letters was abandoned (I describe why I think it failed in more detail in Chapters Four and Five). The third part was a series of focus groups where university students from Glasgow, Edinburgh and the Gaidhealtachd were shown comedy clips and asked to discuss them. These focus groups were transcribed in detail and analysed qualitatively. To bolster my data about Gaelic speakers I also interviewed a group of eleven Gaelic-language television trainees at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig on the Isle of Skye, although that discussion is treated separately from the focus group data. There were logistical difficulties which impacted upon the extent to which I could extrapolate from the data, namely the problem recruiting the 'right' people into each group: getting a 'pure' group of Edinburghers proved impossible and one of my two Gaelic groups was a pair of friends who turned up drunk.

The data presented, analysed and interpreted in Chapter Five suggest the following additional conclusions. In terms of demographics, among those respondents who had always lived in Scotland twice as many described themselves as 'Scottish' than 'British'. In terms of the quantitative data the respondents had coherent preferences for certain channels, for certain genres and against others, and watched less television than a year prior although they enjoyed it about the same. There were small gender differences here. Respondents nominated different groups of comedy programmes for each of the three categories offered (with parents, favourite, not funny) but there were also a significant number of programmes nominated in two or occasionally three categories. This suggested there would be a diversity of opinion worth pursuing in a qualitative study. Most significantly there was no evidence to suggest strong feelings about Scottish television or Scottish television comedy, either positively or negatively. While some individuals found *Chewin The Fat* particularly amusing, for example, these people numbered very few and elsewhere in the survey the respondents had indicated other shows and genres as being more important to them.

In terms of the qualitative data the conclusions were again grouped into two parts, the respondents' opinions (content) and the researchers' observations (group dynamics). The qualitative data were very diverse and a brief summary here will not do it justice. Put very briefly, analysis of the group discussions suggested that respondents enjoyed some Scottish television comedy and occasionally cringed at comedy they found unfunny or parochial. Several respondents took exception to *All Along the Watchtower*'s implied representation of Scotland and reacted negatively, finding the intended joke 'not funny'. Like the respondent who seemed not to 'get' Ruby Wax's ironic statements to Ewan McGregor, the students did not seem to read the joke as an

ironic criticism of the English neophyte airman whose feelings toward Scotland were ignorant and patronising and, as later parts of the programme seem to suggest, not entirely wide of the mark. This programme was actually made by BBC Scotland and offered the opportunity for Scots to laugh at old *Whisky Galore*-style jokes about Highlanders and rural military communities. This style of comedy is not easily communicated in a brief clip, and my separating the very beginning of the show from the context of the rest of the episode and the rest of the series meant it was more difficult for the focus group students to read the joke. Equally, it was first in the string and as such suffered in the discussion because it functioned more to ease the students into the clip viewing than it did as an introduction to the comedy forms and subjects.

While *All Along The Watchtower* was almost exclusively disliked, many people in the groups had ambivalent feelings about *Rab C. Nesbitt*—a programme not included in the clips but invariably mentioned during discussion—because they sometimes felt affection toward the characters although they thought English viewers would misread the irony (either deliberately or through ignorance) and thus feel superior to Scots. The Contrastive Others invoked thus has access to a form of laughter against Scots that the focus group students could not access and they were occasionally quite angry about it. Reflections on personal experience were more common in groups of Glaswegians, although laughing suggestions that 'there are people like that' came from several sources. Both *AATW* and *Rab C. Nesbitt* drew comments like 'I wouldn't like that shown around' particularly with reference to audiences in England but also 'abroad' (presumably, furth of the United Kingdom. I found no evidence, and it seems unlikely to me, that *Rab C. Nesbitt* would be shown in the usual markets abroad, for the same reason that it required subtitling in England; certainly I was not aware of it being screened in Australia, New Zealand or the United States).

Blackadder Goes Forth and *Goodness Gracious Me* excerpts were discussed in terms of their familiarity, style of humour and the particular targets each show uses: in *Blackadder* the joke-targets were considered to be the incompetent upper-classes and in *Goodness Gracious Me* the targets were identified as characters from different subgroups of Asian society. Some respondents thought 'The English' were the target of *GGM*'s restaurant sketch although others felt it addressed mannerisms found widely among white Britons (including people they knew) and one person identified herself as acting in precisely the manner the sketch mocked. Taking the sketches as a pair however we can see clearly some differences in the ways students engaged with the materials. Reflections on *GGM* were personalised and Contrastive Others were projected, whereas *Blackadder* was viewed as making a valid criticism on an indisputably foolhardy process (Britain's management of World War 1). The range of comments about *GGM* was far greater and several readings of what the joke was were discussed; by contrast *Blackadder* was understood to primarily draw upon and reflect widely-recognised criticism of early Twentieth-century class structures and military ineptitude. There was easy agreement about what the joke was, or whether it had a message or point. *GGM* on the other hand could be understood as a parody or an inversion or even as 'revenge' for traditional stereotypes of Asian culture and Asian people, by parodying common British practices in Asian restaurants and playing these in an exaggerated style using Asian actors 'going for an English'. The focus groups did not see the further layer of identity politics and irony that the 'Asian' actors—and almost all Asian people in England—are English too. 'Going for an English' makes a comment on race and visible cultural difference and this was discussed by the

groups, but it might also be read as a comment on assimilation and race-blindness as well as continuing a critical theme frequently found in *GGM* sketches, that of very different religions and cultures being though of and represented as one 'Asian' culture. Perhaps if the actors had had Scottish accents these points might have been more accessible to Scottish students.

However, accent is not the only nor even the most important signifier in a sketch. Despite the Scottish dialect used, the 'Boxer' was not discussed explicitly as having a Scottish or a Glaswegian resonance but rather in terms of taste, and comments were often personalised with reference to the respondents' own grandmothers. Discussion of *Chewin The Fat* often brought talk of the mythologised rivalries between Glasgow and Edinburgh, and although respondents from these places acknowledged these myths they suggested that the cities were distinct but not locked in a dichotomous relationship of antagonism. The clash of classes and sexualities represented by the accents and manners of the characters was most noticeable and enjoyable for Glaswegian respondents. The 'Rower' was found to be funny although some respondents indicated their grandparents would be shocked and one respondent said she herself was shocked at the Rower's homosexual revelations. Where no-one appreciated the joke in *All Along The Watchtower*—no sweeties for 32 miles, 'at least we know we're in Scotland'—the Rower produced more discussion and more ambivalent commentary. A few found the idea of an isolated Islander engaged in a daily toast ritual culminating in a homosexual affair with the fireman to be funny, or even very funny, but some others felt it was an old joke about islanders which was offensive because of its staleness and lack of originality. Jokes which use stereotypes run this risk; a joke can feel old and stale even if it has not been seen before.

Ran Dan was found to be funnier by people who had visited the Park Bar or knew Gaelic-speakers (one group of Gaelic-speakers felt a personal affection for *Ran Dan* and enjoyed it most of all the clips); however others often cited it as not funny, a frequent response being 'I didn't get it'. There was little difference between the groups in difference regions except that Gaelic speakers and others with experience of Gaelic-speaking friends enjoyed the Gaelic comedy whereas non-speakers of Gaelic found it difficult to follow and not at all funny. This is a good example of where personal experience and reflection can affect how participants read the humour. Whereas some respondents projected a sense of identification with the Supergran in the Boxer sketch, the *Ran Dan* sketch led some people to reflect on their own experience of cultural diversity. When I occasionally heard very negative comments against Gaelic speakers, especially in the first Edinburgh group, I reflected on the political ends that might be achieved had I surreptitiously included a Gaelic speaker to the group. I have taught seminar groups where the 'excessive' amount and perceived low quality of Gaelic broadcasting has been criticised by emotive non-speakers of Gaelic only to have a native-Gaelic speaker quietly but confidently reaffirm their belief in and right to access Gaelic-language programmes. Something similar happened in one focus group where two respondents believed that 'noone speaks it any more' whereas another respondent in the same group was familiar with Western Islanders and the culture of the Park Bar and could share, with humour, his experience of feeling excluded by people in the bar suddenly changing languages from English to Gaelic. But when someone revealed personal experience about this subject, others tended to withdraw from the discussion. Gaelic culture was something sufficiently unknown that when an 'expert' appeared, others deferred.

The dynamics of the groups were also significant. From time to time respondents repeated jokes from the viewing or introduced new ones performing them in such a way as to indicate whether they enjoyed or disapproved of the joke in question. At times they played with the group dynamic, winding each other up, playing Devil's Advocate and 'taking the piss'. The groups flowed easily. on the whole, suggesting I had overcome the problems of lack of lexicon and social discomfort discovered in the pilot study failure.

At the outset of this chapter I cited David Silverman who cautioned against drawing conclusions from exotic minor data in the face of more numerous but less prominent data which suggest more mundane conclusions. Without sufficient material, particularly original data, to triangulate against however this ideal becomes unattainable. It is true that a great many of the students who completed my questionnaires had few conspicuously strong views about the Scottishness of their television comedy, either in favour or cringing against it. Television comedy was enjoyed if it was funny (in the eyes of the respondent) and the national point of origin was not a significant criterion, it seems, for selection. The Scottish respondents offered examples of Scottish television comedy but only in small numbers. There appeared to be no particular hang-ups about Scottish television comedy among these Scottish questionnaire respondents: no great desire to seek it out and no significant cringe against it.

After the letters study was abandoned the focus groups became the most useful tool for exploring if and how Scottish television comedy was important to young Scottish adults. These respondents had not been told that national identity and comedic representations of Scottishness were my area of interest (although I was immediately rumbled a couple of times) so the groups could progress from as neutral an agenda as possible. However focus groups are like other groups: social and cultural dynamics of interpersonal relations and polite conversational etiquette affect to a degree how we express ourselves. Neutral comments or those which repeat others' are often repressed or take the form of a simple 'I don't know', 'yeah', 'uhuh', 'oh aye'. There are limits in terms of how much an interviewer can probe a neutral comment without provoking a negative response or closing down other conversation with the other respondents. Silverman is correct that there is a great deal of mundane detail which gets left unquoted but that is not to say it is ignored in the interpretation. At the same time I was frequently surprised by how much depth and variety was expressed by such small groups in such brief sessions. This chapter's analysis has focused on respondents' feelings about Scottishness in television comedy partly because it *was* significant in the conversations and partly because these are data with which I can triangulate (namely the Scottish press surveys, the BFI diaries, Petrie 1995 and Caughie 1992).

As well as the opinions articulated—principally with respect to the Scottishness, the Gaidhealtachd and (projected) English viewers' reception of Scottish comedy stereotypes—the manner of expression is significant. The multitude of comedic performance practices among the focus group respondents is an aspect which ought to be explored further in other research. Did this occur because the respondents were young? Or because the topic was comedy? Was it an expression of nervousness or an attempt to dominate? People do use catchphrases and repeated lines from comedy to connect with other people socially—at work, at the pub, at dinner—and sometimes this is just as they would retell a sports event or describe a news story while at other times the selected copying of humour functions socially for other purposes. For example telling a

blue joke can turn a private discussion toward intimate matters or a tendentious joke can be used to put someone down or to establish their loyalties. While I cannot speculate on the psychological uses of comedy in group situations I nevertheless think it represents an important finding from my focus group research. Television comedies which involve representations and identifications (in this example, Scottishnesses) have certain rhetorical and formal techniques of humour and irony, parody and sarcasm; audiences too employ certain rhetorical devices to discuss them.

When irony and joking becomes so large a part of the commentary as it did in my focus groups, this humour must be taken into account in the analyses. Without other similar focus group data to triangulate against the results will necessarily be less sensitive or conclusive; it is hoped that although I am not able to make unequivocal statements that in future, with these problematics in mind, others will develop methodologies and research practices which can explore and explicate much better the difficult subject of audiences' responses to Scottish television comedy.

It is hoped that this thesis has some value as a template—if not as a model—for further research. As well as summarising the previous chapters, the conclusion must assess the thesis as a piece of research, balancing the parts that worked well against the inconsistencies and contradictions that inevitably appear in such work. In total this thesis explored but could only draw limited conclusions about Scottish television comedy audiences. It mapped beginning points for several connected and previously unconsidered research trajectories which others might take into very different directions. While I could not make an unequivocal statement about 'what Scottish television comedy means to its audience' I have nonetheless made and substantiated several smaller analytical observations. The research literature on television comedy as a genre and as a mode has been found lacking and retheorised; the relations between Scottish national identity and national humour have been questioned and developed; and a model for qualitative exploration of television comedy audiences has been tentatively drawn up. The two parts of the thesis interrelate and intercontextualise to produce a holistic structure which I hope has contributed something original to the field.

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GROUP 1

September 28, 2000, Room 350, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

RESPONDENTS: MEN FROM EDINBURGH (RECRUITED BY TUTORS)

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Edinburgh.

M: Scottish; Scottish; 31; M; 5 years in Edinburgh
A: White; UK; 19; M; 19 years in Edinburgh
G: White; British; 22; M; 2 years in Edinburgh
D: White; Scottish; 20; M; no years in Edinburgh (commutes from Dundee)

GENERAL COMMENTS

I had a feeling of considerable apprehension before we commenced mostly due to technical details and a poor night's sleep. The room number had not been properly communicated to me and the layout of QMUC is illogical. The borrowed microphone (and my own) did not fit the borrowed tape recorder. The room assigned had no TV or video as requested Of the five volunteers only four were available and only two were properly Edinburghers (one from Dundee, one Glaswegian). Tutor found us a video and TV and I resorted to back-up miniature dictaphone. The benefit of this was that they had to sit quite close and all spoke clearly for me.

This was the pilot group. Paperwork seems like it takes a long time to me but they coped alright. Tape quality might be revisited. Need to take time also with introductions and explanations of confidentiality. Seated without desks is a more comfortable room layout if there is a central desk with the mike, but they also need to be able to write (initially at least). Perhaps start with the paperwork out on the desks so they can begin when they arrive. Clip format rather jerky and illogical especially the excerpt from *All Along the Watchtower.*

Their questions: what is meant by ethnicity? does TV viewing include videos? What is meant by current living situation? I left them so answer these themselves.

Future groups will be scheduled for only one hour; ninety minutes is too long and allows them to ramble, and it is too difficult for students to schedule. QMUC has a timetable where classes start 15 minutes after the hour.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

The group covered most of the questions and issues without prompting. I allowed them to ramble somewhat at times, which in places yielded gems. They spoke among each other very well, possibly because they knew each other well. There was a definite dynamic split of a pair, a mediator and an outsider. Namecards were useful to incorporate the quieter outsider into the group.

The group mentioned a variety of Scottish, English and American comedy influences, covering many years and many different kinds of texts. The idea that Scotland had localised senses of humour or comedy focal points came out without much prompting. The problem with this was that it was difficult to get them to think across other groups. When they did, they leapt to ideas of class and age, then listed a string including gender etc. as if by rote.

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

EDINBURGH 1

A (male Edinburgh 19); G (male Glasgow 22); M (male Edinburgh 31); MG (male Dundee 20).

1 **Int: What did you think of the sketches?**
2 G: I thought they were really good. *Blackadder, Chewin The Fat*
3 A: Liked the *Blackadder*, a great show, other stuff was mildly amusing, you could smile at it but
4 it wasn't really funny, forgot it as soon as the scene was over
5 MG: *Blackadder* sticks in your mind cos you've seen it so often. I hadn't seen the other sketches
6 before, didn't even know what programme they were from
7 G: *Chewin The Fat* and *Blackadder* stood out, those ones I recognise, seen them before and I find
8 them really funny. The rest apart from the two guys from Lewis, didn't work for me
9 MG: I didn't understand that one really
10 G: That's just... that's just what people from Lewis do, get really hammered and listen to ceilidh
11 music, used to live with some guys from Lewis and Skye, they were just like that guy in the
12 boat [The Rower]
13 **Int: No!**
14 G: They were just like that, they'd say things like that... that guy, rows back and forth, you
15 wonder when it's going to end, and he's seducing the fireman
16 A: Yeah I thought was classic, that was really quite good that
17 M: I didn't really enjoy [The Rower], I don't particularly like monologue comedy I find it very
18 hard to get into and the one with the colonel [*All Along The Watchtower*] in the back of the
19 car, I wasn't terribly keen on that one either
20 G: That sketch didn't go anywhere
21 A: It's from a series
22 **Int: It's from *All Along The Watchtower***
23 A: It was an amusing series but I think it was dropped by the BBC after three or four episodes
24 G: Never seen it
25 **Int: Sunday teatime sort of timeslot**
26 A: Must have been on when I came back from work or something
27 MG: A lot of the problem with some of the sketches is that even if the idea is interesting, old
28 lady fights the boxer, it was badly directed, I don't know if the camera was on the floor or not,
29 it just didn't go anywhere, it went along for a bit and stopped
30 G: I think it's a thing about sketch comedy, it's a oneliner, 'bloke goes into a pub and this
31 happens', it's funny, that's it, that's where it ends, and that's the nature of sketch comedy.
32 *Monty Python, Fast Show*... they don't tell a joke anymore. The boxer though, that was a bit
33 scary, I don't know if it ended there, don't know if she has to die or what
34 M: I had mixed feelings. I'd say it was probably, I mean it was pretty obvious she was going to get
35 knocked out. I don't know what happens next but am I right in thinking she gives the bloke a
36 really hard sock at some point?
37 MG: That's what I thought was going to happen, he was patronising her and she was going to,
38 like, but it was just a guy beating her up, nothing subversive about that, I thought it would
39 end, the punch is over, you think 'this is it'
40 A: If it ends after knocking her flat then it might have got away with it but by dragging it on for
41 another minute or something, there's nothing more to it, but the next minute after initially
42 punching her there's nothing funny happens, 'you think where's this going?'
43 G: When he hits her you laugh and you think, 'that's gotta be the end of it', and then he picks
44 her up, goes on a little bit too long, beating her a second time
45 MG: I think that's where they should have closed the sketch, just where he's started laying into
46 her, the idea was amusing enough in itself, it could have been done better by more talented
47 people, been funnier
48 G: Directed better or performed better?
49 MG: Also the direction as well, it's very cluttered, it just didn't seem to have room to breathe, he
50 punched her, the guy held her up, it just didn't seem almost obvious enough what was going on.
51 It was just like, are we supposed to be laughing at this? Again, not in context, in itself, if it
52 was presented with something around it, you might get used to it, it was funny at first but
53 after a while you think
54 G: See the style, there's elements there of the fly-on-the-wall documentary thing... I can
55 understand that, get the feeling it's the beginning of a film where granny learns to become a
56 boxer, if the guy who's directing it's the same as the guy who's performing it chances are he
57 grew up stand-up background, more used to working in, trying to recreate that within the sets,
58 it was good, it was a bit clumsy at times but it wasn't particularly well done, *Chewin The Fat*
59 as well

60 MG: I think that was the thing, it was a visual gag but it was clumsily done and I think that
61 really backfired it. If someone told a verbal joke it wouldn't have really mattered
62 G: Don't want it to be too polished as well
63 M: I don't think it needs to be really polished, just, it's hard to explain, just needs to be done in a
64 different way. There was an interesting shot, in the slowmotion, kind of *Raging Bull*, doing
65 that, and then the next shot it's really hard to see what's going on, that was probably the
66 cleverest shot in it, the idea of doing that, and then it goes back to battering her
67 **Int: The sketch originally continued on for another minute, he keeps hitting her, she doesn't hit**
68 **him. Which was the funniest of those clips, you recognised the *Blackadder*, so that was**
69 **easier to laugh at, but was there other funny stuff?**
70 A: I liked the way he takes the mick cos I studied World War One in history when I was at
71 school
72 MG: Everybody did
73 A: I liked the idea of taking the mick out of the upper class, you've got Blackadder being this
74 common working class person risen to captain, 'wait a minute we've been running up to the line
75 18 times, let's do it again'
76 MG: I think it's the most genuinely funny, it's recognisable because it was funny, I mean it was
77 made back in [19]89 or something, if it had been crap then nobody would know it now, but it's
78 sustained itself all these years because it's that good. In ten years I don't think anyone will be
79 looking at these other clips, that's just my opinion
80 M: The other thing *Blackadder* is, is almost like the underlying message in it. You know the very
81 last scene from the very last episode, they all go out to Flanders or something (others: Oh
82 yeah) and they all get shot dead, so there's also that grim reality to it
83 A: The point was tactics and the toffs, quite well made, and Colonel Darling or whatever it was
84 M: He tells them to stick pencils up their noses
85 G: Oh yeah, and pants on their head. I like *Goodness Gracious Me* it's really good too, it's like
86 Asian comedy, but it's mainstream Asian comedy, where they do the British restaurant and
87 them coming to Britain, I think that's really good, I really like that style of Asian comedy.
88 *Chewin The Fat*'s really cool, it's distinctive Scottish comedy, it's got a very local slant to it
89 MG: A lot of that actually goes over my head, even though I'm Scots, a lot of it seems very
90 localised
91 **Int: Localised from where?**
92 MG: Dundee
93 G: Where?
94 MG: Isn't it Glaswegian?
95 G: It's very Glaswegian based, that's like when they go, 'Gonnae no dae tha, just gonnae no' and
96 that's like living in Glasgow. I think *Chewin The Fat*'s good, *Blackadder*'s good,
97 *Blackadder*'s classic BBC comedy, but it is, BBC comedy it's very formulaic... but at the same
98 time *Chewin The Fat* is less predictable, it's more localised humour, like *Goodness Gracious*
99 *Me*, more catering for Asian families but we can still laugh at it
100 A: I think it's what people can laugh at being spoofed in the restaurant, white people going into
101 an Indian restaurant and saying 'can I have an omelette' or whatever
102 MG: Again I also think the ideas are better than the execution, my biggest problem, with the
103 script, I think the idea of Asian people acting in the reverse is funny, but there's no one-liners,
104 nothing which makes you laugh out loud, it's more like heehee, mildly amusing but nothing
105 funny, whereas with me, not just that *Blackadder*, any of the *Blackadder* ones, I laugh out
106 loud, genuinely funny, the rest of them are just like clever ideas but
107 G: I find *Chewin The Fat* funny because with *Chewin The Fat* it's harder to know where it's going
108 to go, with *Blackadder* I know, they do something stupid then Blackadder says something
109 sarky, to point out that it's stupid, then they do something stupid again, *Chewin The Fat* you
110 don't really know where it's going to go, a bit like the guy on the boat [The Rower], turns out to
111 be gay
112 MG: But do you not think they're trying so hard to be different they're actually forgetting to be
113 funny, it's like 'hey let's make this ordinary guy be gay' but
114 G: It starts out as a joke about him going back and forth and then he leans forward and says 'But
115 my bed is warm and there's lots of milk'
116 MG: It was certainly odd, I'll give you that
117 A: I was just thinking, going back to *Chewin The Fat*, being from the East Coast a lot of it does go
118 over my head a little bit, you still get to laugh at it, you do get used to that show, what's
119 going on, 'Gonnae no dae tha', the first time I'd actually heard it was on *Chewin The Fat* and I
120 just find it so funny, it is quite original. I don't think it does leave from the humour, cos that
121 originality appeals to an East Coast person like myself cos I don't actually know what's going
122 on here, it is very West Coast, a lot of it I don't know very much about but still I can relate to

123 something like the [*Chewin The Fat* sketches 'News for Neds'] the Neds, instead of the sign
124 language you've got the Neds, I think it's quite funny. *Goodness Gracious Me* has got a similar
125 thing because it's got that Asian community, which I'm not really used to that at all, and that
126 clip wasn't exactly the best one, there was this guy called 'Check please', remember him,
127 that's going back to the one-liners, they do do a lot of one-liners and it's quite funny, that's
128 why they do it for me. It's the originality and there is a bit you do recognise, it is a good mix
129 G: It's more that with *Chewin The Fat*, if you don't know what Argyle Street is it won't work,
130 where he goes to see the bank manager about his business, 'Sport socks, two for a pound, get
131 your sport socks' and the guy goes 'that's a cool idea, you could branch into lighters as well',
132 that's all they sell in Argyle Street, all the guys are selling socks, and they just shout that all
133 day, it's really good, it makes you, you think, I do know that
134 A: It is still quite funny cos you can recognise the stereotypes going on there, if you go up Argyle
135 Street you do have all these stalls, you do see these and various other things, you do get the
136 feeling there's a bank manager going, 'Ah! Lighters!'
137 MG: In Dundee you don't have these kinds of streets
138 G: You do have [gentrified areas], the market
139 **Int: [to M] What do you think of the Glaswegian humour as they've been describing it, *Chewin***
140 ***The Fat?***
141 M: Some of it's quite funny. I think Glasgow's always had this image of being a very rough place,
142 it's tended to rough things like humour, and it's been portrayed as very abrasive but I think
143 there's a turn in the tide, in that it's now becoming more down to earth some of the jokes are
144 becoming clearer. I can think of a lot of programmes that are much older, a lot of Scottish
145 comedians, people like Robbie Coltrane who I think are very funny
146 G: [inaudible about Billy Connolly's earlier material, dialect]
147 MG: Even so, I think he could try more to explain it or make it clearer, even stuff that wasn't
148 localised, there never seemed to be any trouble in the translation. I don't know how far back
149 you're talking about
150 A: I heard a recording from the Seventies, when he still going around doing his banjo thing and it
151 was the Crucifixion have you heard that? Set in Glasgow. It's the classic scene, but I don't get
152 half the imagery about the pubs on the Cross or whatever. That's what really gets me because
153 I don't know Glasgow that well
154 G: [inaudible, localised humour] My uncle went to Canada and took some *Para Handy* with him,
155 you know *Para Handy*, pure Scottish, and they wanted to copy it, and they had to get it
156 converted [from PAL to NTSC] and the guy who gave it back to him asked if he could borrow it
157 an extra day cos he thought it was amazing, so they had their own copy of it as well, and
158 they're Canadian
159 A: Well lots of Canadians are ex-pat Scots. I always remember my journalism teacher going on
160 about the *Sunday Post*, they used to sell more copies than there's people in Scotland, cos
161 they'd always used to ship it out to people in Canada, to people's friends. So they do know a
162 lot about Scottish culture
163 MG: I think Canadians tend to be more worldly aware than say Americans, cos a lot of different
164 people have come to Canada, lot of French there, lot of Chinese there, whereas Americans are
165 struggling to even know about their own country
166 G: Yeah if Americans notice you have a different accent, they say you're from that little country
167 that starts with S
168 A: That's pathetic
169 G: Yeah I'm Swedish
170 A: I remember a Canadian taking the mick out of the Americans, it was on Jeremy Clarkson, there
171 was this map of the world, but they missed out the United States, and he was just going, 'I bet
172 if you asked most Americans where the United States is on that map they'd go "is it that big
173 bit there" pointing to Russia'
174 MG: I remember once during the during the World Cup, someone asking 'do you know where
175 Romania is' and they said 'is that in England', it was just ridiculous nonsense. Some of them
176 have got no clue. Of course that's not everyone but a lot of them, surprisingly so
177 A: That George W. Bush, I remember him [being parodied] on *Have I Got News For You*, there
178 was just this interviewer going, 'do you know the capital of India?', and he was going on, about
179 half an hour later, the next bit, 'do you know the capital of Britain?', [Bush's response] 'was
180 that in England?'
181 G: I remember one described America as the greatest planet on earth, and misspelt potato
182 MG: Oh yeah, Dan Quayle, at a school, spelt it with an 'e'
183 **Int: Getting back on the topic of Scottish humour. Do Scottish people share a sense single of**
184 **humour as a nation?**
185 A: I think they do, anti-English anyway. As well as *Chewin The Fat*, I can laugh at that as

186 well, though we're not exactly East coast, not exactly West coast people so
187 MG: We're very East coast
188 A: Like East coasters and West coasters were, people do say there is that divide, but I think it is
189 generally with the expansion of the Central Belt, it's joining them more together
190 M: I think that with Scotland getting more and more an identity, Scottish humour's going to be a
191 more and more important thing. Things like the new parliament, more culture and an
192 awareness, there's going to be more of this sort of thing
193 **Int [to G]: You said you'd had flatmates from Skye and Lewis?**
194 G: Uhuh [inaudible comments about accent] The sketch there about the men with a Kelvinside
195 accent in the fish and chip shop, and they do speak like that, so I think that's very funny, cos
196 they go around affecting the posh, posh accent and the accent of a chip shop worker. You do
197 wonder if you're English, do you get that, do you get the difference in accent for a start
198 A: I doubt it
199 M: I struggled until you explained what that stuff meant. So if someone came in here
200 G: [inaudible comment about Kelvinside accents and class]
201 A: I know that *Chewin The Fat* wasn't broadcast in England but was only
202 G: But *Naked Video* was broadcast there, I don't know how well that went down there
203 A, MG: That went well
204 MG: Cos *Rab C. Nesbitt* was shown there
205 G: *Rab C. Nesbitt*, from what I remember it was a lot less local-based humour, though there was
206 'InterHebrides Broadcasting Corporation', *Rab Nesbitt* and all the rest of it [inaudible] they
207 used to use news clips and knit them together, Mark Philips and Princess Anne, they're
208 shooting and a plane bursts into flames
209 MG: Actually what I think is important it also managed to create some spin-off characters like
210 *Rab C. Nesbitt*, the *Baldy Guy*, I mean from a small sketch, people did remember, they had
211 quite an effect
212 G: They were less local based, more toilet humour. *Rab C. Nesbitt*'s all about being hard and
213 poor, toilet humour you can base it anywhere, do anything, do it in another country, do it in
214 this country, it's always going to be funny, for some reason
215 **Int: Would you [others] agree with that? That there's nothing, I mean from what you're saying,**
216 **you're saying it's not distinctively Scottish topics so much as a Scottish treatment toward**
217 **humour?**
218 G: There's no real, I don't think there's any real sense, there are different types of humour,
219 literature and television... if you watch Dutch television, my father lives there, the German
220 version of *You've Been Framed* is not funny unless someone dies (laughter) or is horribly
221 maimed, it's like this one, it's a legend, there's this priest standing next to this candle and
222 he's going up in flames, and all the Germans go 'Ha ha Priest on fire'. They wouldn't show
223 that in Britain because it would be shocking and all the rest of it, but they like the *Two*
224 *Ronnies* and basically rip off *The Two Ronnies*, and so I think nationally it's a very clear sense
225 of humour but at the same time there will be some things people just won't get purely from the
226 entire being human thing
227 A: I think there is a lot of cultures of prerogative, I mean even in the UK, the US is different from
228 England and the same is true of Scotland, if you watch, I love watching *South Park*, I have to
229 admit it, some of the stuff they do, there's this fat woman who does a lot for charity in
230 America portrayed her as Jabba The Hutt [from *Star Wars*], I didn't really sort of, I find it
231 funny because I knew she was obese but I didn't get that sort of proper of the jokes, same with
232 the [*South Park*] movie because I didn't know much about the Baldwins [actor brothers], and
233 Canada bombed their house, so there is certain references to the actual culture, it just means
234 there's variance from nation to nation. All in all I think humour's the same
235 M: I think international humour thinks more about the Americans than the Americans do about
236 everybody else. So a lot of gags in things life *South Park* and *The Simpsons* we would get over
237 here, not everyone maybe, but if something from here was taken to America, they probably
238 wouldn't get most of it
239 G: [inaudible comments about American products] You can get Hershey bars and American beer
240 here, you can't go to America and get Scottish beer [inaudible comments about one-way
241 cultural traffic]
242 MG: I mean we're very close to America and it's like the fifty-first state
243 A: I think they actually class us as that. It's scary but I was watching *Armageddon* and it was
244 going around all the nations of the world, like France and all that and then they show the
245 clips of Bill Clinton making an emergency speech beside Tony Blair you know as if to say 'it's
246 just a slight technicality we've got a Prime Minister'
247 G: It's the export nation [inaudible] standardised by American software, the spellchecker, they
248 should have a UK version of it

249 A: There is
250 G: We don't have, you'd have thought the university, the university software should have UK
251 dictionary
252 A: It does
253 G: But it's got a US one, so if you turn your spellcheck on, it's going to change the word colour to
254 'color' instead of '-our', and our language, it's the same all round the place, ours is changing cos
255 theirs is larger. Now there's a backlash cos noone wants to speak Gaylic [but] Scottish people
256 never spoke Gaylic, it's like 'it's an end, it's a loss', noone ever spoke Gaylic
257 MG: There's like only a thousand people or something speak Gaylic, a really really tiny
258 minority, but the SNP wants street signs, I mean how many people [want] Princes Street
259 [written in Gaelic]
260 G: It's not only how many people talk Gaylic but so many hours of Gaylic TV
261 MG: And nobody speaks it
262 G: And it's dire stuff, the only reason you watch it is to pick up double entendres, Callum de Cack
263 and Charlie Chalk and Fireman Sam and all the rest of it
264 MG: How do they pronounce the names, it's just like a collection of consonants
265 A: Let's face it, it could be Welsh, it could be worse, it could be Welsh, I mean a long stream of
266 consonants followed by one vowel
267 G: It's like Welsh scrabble, it's alarming, all c, w, y, ds or something, it could be venereal disease
268 or the name of a town, I know, it's bizarre. [inaudible] *The Fast Show*, 'Scorchio!', it's like
269 I've got a friend in Romania and they get it there as well [they] didn't speak any English [but
270 knew to say] 'Scorchio'!
271 **Int: You two, the Edinburghers (A sniggers), is there an Edinburgh sense of humour?**
272 A: It's difficult to say now, cos I know Glaswegian people, and I get on well with them, but I do
273 pick up on things like, I remember when I was at college, [name] she was from Glasgow, she
274 went up the union and said 'Can I have a bottle of ginger please' and the guy's going 'Huh?'
275 and we're sort of going 'Ha ha ha ha' and we'd laugh at that because there's a slight
276 different language, we do pick up on it. I think to an extent we've got a lot, Edinburgh's got a
277 lot of the business side, I don't know if it's more than it used to be, but we've got a lot of life
278 insurance and humour is more conservative maybe? Not like the Glaswegians who are very
279 full of life. I think there is, maybe a slight difference
280 M: I think there is and I think the obvious case is the [Edinburgh] Festival which is used as a
281 platform for people's launching pads, I mean I know that's world-wide and not just Edinburgh
282 but a good proportion of the people that perform are Edinburgh based. I do think that there is
283 a distinctive Edinburgh culture
284 G: [inaudible: different styles of audiences, Glasgow audiences don't heckle because Glasgow
285 comedians will put them in their place]
286 MG: Maybe that's a reflection of class culture, Glaswegians are very working class, so is Dundee
287 but Edinburgh less so
288 A: We're the pension capital of Britain so, it's our claim to fame (laughs) no we've got like all
289 these business type people, just been at work all day, can't be bothered heckling people,
290 comedians, to use their phrase, die on their arse quite easily here cos we're just quite happy to
291 sit back 'c'mon then', while they try their best, we see them sweating. At the Best of Irish
292 during the Edinburgh Festival, this guy's doing his best to be as funny as possible, do
293 whatever gags possible, we're going... maybe we are slightly laid-back we haven't got as
294 much to be depressed about as say Glasgow
295 G: [inaudible about Billy Connolly, Glasgow sense of humour]
296 **Int [To MG]: MG would you say there is a Dundee sense of humour?**
297 MG: I don't know to be honest, I don't know if you could really pinpoint any differences between
298 anywhere else and obviously there's some local gags anywhere and that kind of thing, that
299 make more sense but I don't think there's anything that far removed, I don't think there's a
300 sense of humour that you wouldn't get, that'd make outsiders. I think Scotland as a whole
301 tends to fit in with each other with slight variations but not enough to say it's an identity.
302 Scotland as a whole has to be it's own identity but not parts of it, maybe because it's so small
303 as a country, also in a big place like America, massive gaps, Britain's smaller than Texas, one
304 state, never mind Scotland, I think we can pretty much all understand each other, basically
305 G: Aberdeen's a strange place as well, it's like people who are from Glasgow live in Glasgow,
306 people who live in Edinburgh are from Edinburgh, generally, but Aberdeen, it's a mix... a lot
307 of different people brought together, there's a different mentality. Now Dundee's getting
308 gentrified up, it's getting, it's got the DCA [Dundee Centre for the Arts] now, it's getting its
309 new restaurants, it's becoming very cool, it's more, it's less
310 MG: Cosmopolitan
311 G: Yeah cosmopolitan, that's a good word

312 **Int: We've been talking a bit about places within Scotland and the particular senses of humour in that way, are there other, I mean that kind of suggests that people from different areas have a different sense of humour, different priorities in humour and understand different things differently as being funny, are there other kinds of groups of people that humour would work with as a group thing?**
317 G: You mean a class thing?
318 **Int: Maybe a class thing**
319 A: Maybe an age thing, I do remember, I had a cool journalist lecturer, he was like forties, his sense of humour, you always detected it was, he did come from Dundee but during when it was an industrial town, and you did detect elements of, knowing that although you find his stuff funny, he's still, my generation and our generation still recognise some of the imagery. I remember one of these funny stories involved teddy bears on this work site, don't ask! And he was saying when the lunch break went, the hooter, that's a very 50s, 60s type image. It still works cos we see enough *LoonyToon* cartoons
326 G: *Flintstones*
327 A: But I think there is also an age thing even between my Dad and myself, you can always tell, that gap cos he also came from a rural, Dalmeny, just the other side of North Queensferry, so there is also some difference
330 G: There's always going to be age, sex, differences in sex is very funny, towns, class, countryside, rural, whatever, depends who you are, your own personal experiences for what's funny. If you saw the Boxer [sketch] and your grandmother's just been beaten to death by some nutter you won't find it very funny cos of your personal experiences
334 A: I think lots of, well I remember being taught at school, this little song (sings) 'You cannae chuck yer Grannie off a bus'. Everyone's, 'yes you can'. So I think I've it's another reason, fond childhood memory, in a twisted sort of way
337 MG: Yes sir we've got some people outside waiting to talk to you after we're finished
338 G: White coats
339 **Int: M, other groups?**
340 M: I think a lot of it's to do with your interests. I mean I like people like [numerous older comics, inaudible], it's aimed at an older age group but their humour is what I care for, but by the same token I can't really get into people like Eddie Izzard and people like that. You what they think just doesn't amuse me, I'm not saying it's not funny, I'm just saying it doesn't personally amuse me
345 G: What about the *Goon Show* stuff, can you get into that?
346 (M nods)
347 MG: (whispers) I like *The Three Stooges*, (outloud) I mean that's from way back in the 1930s but it's still funny to me, appeals to me personally, it's good slapstick, it translates
349 G: To me that kind of surreal humour... it has changed... different style these days
350 A: Sometimes I don't get into Eddie Izzard myself! I love surreal humour I do love that and I think that's why I do laugh at his comedy stuff, he takes an abrasive look... some of the stuff he does, some of the stuff he doesn't, cos I remember he was talking about when you're chatting up the hens, maybe like dogs we should have a 'season', that would help us out. Then he takes it to the next level, he's got his family, his father chucking stones, 'Get away from my daughter' each step going beyond where most comedians do but Eddie Izzard really does, he goes for it, like 'underpants', 'whitewash'
357 MG: It's probably the kind of humour you either go with or you don't, it's like you get it or you don't
359 G: It's funny cos Eddie Izzard's humour has progressed [inaudible comparison with Billy Connolly]
361 MG: And they're both very popular in America, very telling, Eddie Izzard's picked up two Emmies, I mean big prestigious awards and they gave them to this outsider... tailor his material for an international market, specifically for that
364 G: [inaudible, Izzard in Montreux festival]
365 MG: I think you also have to get used to Eddie Izzard and his style of delivery, if that was kind of your first dose of Eddie Izzard you'd be going 'what the hell, he's in this dress, he's wearing these boots, and he's speaking...'
368 G: He was in a suit back then, he only wears the kind of women's clothes, that men, that women would wear that look like men's clothes, when he started he only had on, looked very minimalistic, I think he had nail polish
371 **Int: Nail polish and a little bit of makeup**
372 G: Aye that was it. Now he's more famous he can wear a dress, doesn't get beaten any more as he leaves a club
374 **Int [To MG]: When you said he was an outsider what did you mean by that?**

375 MG: Well I didn't mean his sort of sexual preferences to be honest I just meant the fact that he
376 was from Britain, not forgetting he's very British now the Americans are finding him funny
377 crossed the cultural barrier, probably not many can do that, or at least
378 A: Well I think America really is looking at Britain, I don't know if anyone's seen [TV show]
379 *Midsomer Murders*, it's got the guy who was in *Bergerac* in it, and it's a very English thing, set
380 in English villages and all that, and you know you watch it and think, 'it's not too bad, it's a
381 whodunnit thing', you go to America, (American accent) 'This is so English', they watch
382 *Taggart* 'This is so Scottish', believe Britain's part of America now, they really like our stuff.
383 It's like [actor] Mike Myers, *Austin Powers*, taking the mick out of *James Bond* which is
384 internationally well known, also taking the mick out of Englishness, and particularly
385 Scotland with the Fat Bastard [character]. Also if you went earlier, *I Married an Axe*
386 *Murderer*, that's a very Scottish thing, quite interesting that he's Canadian so he might have
387 a background there, and then he takes it to Hollywood, 'Oh my God he's so Scottish'
388 [Inaudible collective discussion about Mike Myers's parents' origins]
389 G: [inaudible comments about music influences in the United States]
390 A: American version of [magazine] *FHM* as well... trying to cut into our ladette humour, lads
391 humour
392 G: [inaudible comments about *Friends* and American humour]
393 A: [inaudible comments about tax, Cold War relations US and UK] They colonise us in a sense
394 there, that's when Americanism came to us, there's a bit of a backlash, although we're taking
395 in a bit of America, Britain is fairly much going across there. We've seen with Billy Connolly
396 in particular, he broke the comedy section there, well *Monty Python* did beforehand, one of
397 them was an American anyway
398 G, MG: Terry Gilliam
399 A: So there's a strong connection between Britain, I remember *Third Rock From The Sun*, John
400 Lithgow says the *Carry On* [films] were a big influence, so there is this link, probably
401 partially because we helped found the United States. So they look on us, although they're
402 Uncle Sam, we're mum and dad
403 G: Pretty strange relationships
404 **Int: OK, we're pretty much done, one last question: the best and worst Scottish television comedy?**
405 MG: *The Creatives*, that's the worst
406 G: Is it that one about the advertising agency?
407 **Int: And what's the best?**
408 MG to G: [Yes] Jack Docherty
409 A: Some of his stuff's alright
410 MG: I just cannot laugh at him, he's just not funny. He did this awards show earlier in the year
411 and he was telling jokes and you know what celebrities are like, they'll laugh at anything,
412 these were dead faces, he bombed, they were not laughing, these are people who would laugh
413 at the opening of an envelope and he's telling these jokes, it's like, dead silence, it was one of
414 the most embarrassing things I've ever seen at least there wasn't more publicity about it in the
415 papers cos usually soandso going out with soandso is front page news, here's this guy dying in
416 front of celebrities, nobody's mentioning it
417 **Int: M, best and worst Scottish television comedy?**
418 M: Still *Rab C. Nesbitt* for the best, and yes I'd say *The Creatives* for the worst as well, I was
419 actually quite surprised about. I had real high hopes for that and it's turned out to be a real
420 damp squib. I mean an example of the humour would be two people going into work saying, 'for
421 goodness sake, don't let anyone know we spent the evening together', they walk in the front
422 door and everyone will say 'is it really true that you two spent the evening together' and it
423 was just such a disappointment
424 A: It was, I just can't believe it got a second series
425 **Int: They're usually commissioned in two-series lots, but if it's really bad...**
426 A: Are they, are they? I heard a rumour that the only reason the second series come up was
427 because the BBC had to fill a Scottish quota, it's the only reason
428 **Int: Well it is difficult to know, we do hear these rumours... about *Rab C. Nesbitt* only getting**
429 **another series because nobody could find a sitcom to replace it. So what do you think was the**
430 **best Scottish comedy?**
431 A: Billy Connolly, has to be the best, he redefined, he helped redefine a whole comedy culture
432 and alternative scene, sent British comedy into Australia, into America, so I think Billy
433 Connolly would have to be it
434 MG: For stand-up I'd have to say Billy Connolly, for sketch comedy I'd say *Naked Video* or
435 *Scotch and Wry*, Ricki Fulton
436 **Int: And the worst?**
437 MG: I don't really have one to be honest, there's no one thing that stands out

438 **Int: Nothing makes you cringe?**
439 MG: I can't think of anything, if you gave me a big list I could think of something but not
440 anything offhand
441 G: I think it's a really hard choice between *Chewin The Fat* and *Naked Video* [for best], I'm not
442 sure about Billy Connolly, Billy Connolly's good, exceptionally good, but worst one I'm not sure
443 about, *Absolutely*
444 MG: Jack Docherty was in *Absolutely* as well, there you go!
445 G: [inaudible 'Stoneybridge' comments]
446 MG: I think I tend to not give a lot of things a chance, some people don't give anything a chance
447 when it comes to comedy, but if I see a trailer and don't like the look of it I just won't watch it,
448 you've all seen *The Creatives*, I've never seen it cos I maybe saw a trailer and thought 'oh
449 that's rubbish' and didn't bother watching it

GROUP 5

October 30, 2000, Gilmorehill Centre Rm 409, University of Glasgow, Glasgow

RESPONDENTS: EDINBURGHERS RESIDENT IN GLASGOW

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Glasgow.

M: White; British; 19; M; 6 years in Edinburgh
MK: White; Scottish; 18; F; 18 years in Edinburgh
L: White; Scottish; 19; F; 19 years in Edinburgh
K: White; Scottish; 18; F; 17 years in Edinburgh

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group was reformed from the previous week when three did not show due to travel problems (they commute from Edinburgh). All contacted me within an hour and were rescheduled for this time. All turned up on time. M brought two other friends. Thus we had four: three women, one man; three friends and one outsider, but luckily seating arrangements happened that the group of three was physically split up. The redubbed tape worked well but sound levels were low, and one early clip is in the wrong place. Once one had juice they all did; when told the kitkats were paid for they took one each and someone took two. They took longer than most groups to complete paperwork and were not as chatty or excitable as some groups.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

Both MK and L appeared to 'see through' the clips immediately; MK found them very male-orinted, L found them to contain a clash of cultures, or divisions. She even saw this in clips I had not really considered as such. They enjoyed the boxer sketch, again expecting a supergrannie response from the woman, and the chipshop sketch, but had mixed feelings about the rower, not finding his shift to seducer of a fireman to be very funny. M seemed to feel pressured to agree with K's homophobic (if humorously expressed) comments. Again they mentioned the Rab Nesbitt subtitles theory. They were not keen to subscribe to many black and white theories of Glasgow versus Edinburgh or Scotland versus England. One found *The High Life* to be cringeworthy, not especially because of its campness or its Scottishness but purely because it ran out of jokes. Not much to say about Gaels.

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

EDINBURGH 5 (Edinburghers living in Glasgow)

K (female Edinburgh 18); L (female Edinburgh 19); MK (female Edinburgh 18); M (male Edinburgh 19).

1 **Int: First of all, what did you think of the tape?**
2 MK: It was quite a mix of different kinds of clips, one thing I noticed there wasn't a lot of female
3 comedians, there was a lot of guy jokes, a lot of it was quite funny
4 L: I thought that a lot of it was quite based on cultural and national differences, the English
5 versus the Huns, the classic English versus Gerry, then the Indians going for an English, even
6 the Scottish bits at the end, the Highlanders in town, using various kinds of stereotypes
7 **Int: It wasn't deliberate, but it's interesting that you see that though**
8 M: (agrees) The Highlander one, and the Islander one where he's rowing a lot, even the *Chewin*
9 *The Fat* sketch
10 L: Even the English guy in the back of the car, 'we must be in Scotland'
11 **Int [To K]: Ideas?**
12 K: I quite liked them but I don't usually watch programmes like that
13 **Int: Did you recognise many of clips?**
14 M: Too many, it worries me
15 L: Watch too much TV!
16 MK: The *Chewin The Fat* one
17 K: Which one was that?
18 **Int: The chipshop one**
19 K: I didn't recognise any of them at all
20 MK: *Goodness Gracious Me*
21 M: I like that sketch from *Goodness Gracious Me*
22 L: Has a go at Merrie England
23 M: It's good
24 **Int: So you've seen that one before?**
25 M: Yeah, and I saw that one with the Army guy, in the car
26 MK: What was that series again, I was trying to remember?
27 **Int: *All Along The Watchtower***
28 MK: Yeah, I'd watched it but that was not funny at all
29 M: Didn't they just have the one showing of it? They were going to make it if it was a hit, but it
30 wasn't, funnily enough (laughter)
31 **Int: So you'd watched it, you'd seen it?**
32 MK: I'd seen bits of it, I'd recognised the guys in the car, I thought I'd seen that before, but I
33 didn't think that was... it seemed... I think a lot of the humour in that series the bits that I
34 saw were really forced, it didn't come naturally, I like *Chewin The Fat* because those guys are
35 naturally funny, they know, they have, they're trained and they know how to do it, the
36 accents, the culture, so well so it works, but [*All Along The*] *Watchtower* doesn't
37 K: I didn't get it, the English saying we know we're in Scotland
38 L: No sweets for sixty miles
39 M: It was such a bad joke
40 MK: Sweets, sweets? I mean!
41 M: It was almost funny because it was so bad
42 **Int: Well, what do you think they're trying to say?**
43 M: I don't know
44 L: That Scotland's a big backwater to the English, it really doesn't appeal to Scottish humour,
45 that
46 **Int: OK, and which jokes didn't work?**
47 L: I didn't like the boxing one
48 M: I found that really funny
49 MK: I couldn't decide, I was in two minds about that, I thought will she hit back, (M agrees) I
50 thought it would be some kind of Supergrannie sketch and then when it went totally the other
51 way I thought 'whoa', they're just trying to do an all-out shocker, can you imagine like old
52 people watching that, like my Gran'd be like, 'What?!'
53 K: I thought it was quite funny, you didn't know what he was going to do, he got her on the carpet
54 and just sort of knocked her out
55 M: My gran's like that, she goes swimming and goes to the gym, and boy, I could see her going to
56 the boxing [ring] and going 'Oh come on now!'
57 **Int: So you expected her to hit him?**

58 (all agree)
59 MK: Well I suppose it's quite a convention the little puny grannie beating up the big tough guys, that's quite an obvious joke, and then when it goes the other way it's like, whoever wrote it is looking for revenge for all this, I don't know, just trying to shock
62 **Int: What about when he keeps hitting her? He knocks her out the first time, and then he picks her up and hits her again, does that change how you feel about it?**
64 MK: That's really perverse
65 L: He could have stopped but he kept hitting her and that was it, humour stopped
66 MK: Helping her hit back
67 **Int: I went to the audience taping of that and the sketch actually carries on and he keep hitting her, interestingly it was trimmed... So MK, you had mixed emotions?**
69 MK: Yeah, I thought it was funny at first when he knocked her out, oh you shouldn't be laughing but in a way it was good that it turned a tired joke around but then it's just like he keeps hitting her, it just seemed like some sick sort of sadistic nightmare
72 **Int: Any other jokes that didn't work?**
73 K: I didn't like the guy in the rowboat
74 **Int: You didn't like him?**
75 K: I didn't like him after he said he was gay (all laugh), I was shocked
76 **Int: You were shocked?**
77 K: Uhuh (more laughter). He didn't need to say that, I thought it was funny until then
78 **Int: What do you others think?**
79 L: I thought it was quite funny, mostly having a laugh at the Islander
80 K: I thought it was funny the way he said that, couldn't believe he was just rowing back and forth, until he had to bring in that awful Walter boy (all laugh)
82 MK: Cos that kind of thing's been done before as well, 'I'm the Islander man but I've got this secret sex life', it's like I know I've seen that done in other things as well
84 L: There must be some kind of stereotype people have of Islanders
85 **Int: M?**
86 M: I was finding it funny (looks closely at K) til that point, I thought it was genuinely funny going back and forth, back and forth, and then it just kind of branched out on the humour, and yeah, you've heard it before
89 MK: It's quite a sharp change of tone
90 **Int: OK what about the last sketch, the Gaelic sketch?**
91 K: I didn't think it was very good
92 L: It wasn't hilarious, it was funny but not very funny
93 M: Definitely over our head, it uses a kind of humour we don't understand, when they talk about Lewis we don't know it
95 L: And you get this kind of point of view about people who live in the Central Belt (inaudible) a weekend in Glasgow
97 M: Actually I was drinking, cos I've some friends from the Highlands and from Lewis and that pub they went to, I've been taken to that pub and I thought, 'Oh God!' (laughter)
99 **Int: You've been to the Park Bar?**
100 M: I've been to the Park Bar and I had such a good night but you go in and you see all these Highlanders, you know, in the corner you've got a band, the accordion and maybe a fiddle, and then... I had a good time. I know people from Lewis as well, not quite like them
103 **Int: MK?**
104 MK: I just didn't find that very funny, I suppose like the bit when, there's this shot of the bar and you know what it's going to be and that was a bit funny, maybe it's just that I don't know enough about what they're trying to take the piss of
107 **Int: So you recognised the Park Bar, you knew what was going to happen?**
108 MK: Yeah, I knew, it was quite obvious but it just didn't... I mean I like over-the-top characters cos for example like Harry Enfield, it can be done really well, like *The Fast Show*, but this just didn't really seem, I don't know, didn't really work
111 **Int: Are there things we shouldn't really be laughing at?**
112 (pause, silence)
113 MK: Like really really offensive things?
114 **Int: Yes?**
115 MK: I mean I think so many of the sorts of film ideas like *There's Something About Mary, American Pie, Road Trip* and stuff, there's like really pushing the boundaries, people do find it funny, people like offensive jokes
118 L: It's safe to laugh, you know you're laughing and you know it's like taboo and you shouldn't be laughing
120 MK: Yeah which makes it even funnier

121 **Int: Do you think different groups of people laugh at different things?**
122 (Pause, silent agreement)
123 L: I guess like I was saying about national humour, we find a lot of things, Scottish things, being
124 Scottish, we get a lot of the in-jokes, but when the English are watching *Rab C. Nesbitt* and
125 they just don't get it at all
126 MK: Yeah and they need subtitles
127 L: Yeah, there's also a kind of different cultural thing that affects it
128 **Int: In what way do you mean they don't get it? The subject?**
129 L: Maybe they're laughing at it more because it's Scots, it's a stereotype, it *is* a stereotype, maybe
130 they don't get the subtleties as much as Scottish people do, I don't know, we get a much
131 broader view of it, a stereotype of Scotland a Rab C. character, we get it
132 M: In England I think in certain parts you get a view stereotypical view of Scotland, I remember I
133 lived down there when I was younger and when I got told I was moving to Scotland I thought
134 I'd have to wear a kilt and I was truly terrified of wearing a kilt (all laugh), I don't know
135 how or why I got that preconception but I got it from somewhere, this stereotypical image of
136 the Scottish person
137 **Int: Do they really put subtitles on *Rab C. Nesbitt* in England?**
138 MK: Apparently uhuh
139 L: Yeah when it went down south to places like London
140 K: And *Trainspotting* in America
141 MK: Yeah they do that for the Americans
142 L: And in England as well
143 **Int: Do you think Scottish people have a different sense of humour to English people?**
144 (pause)
145 M: No...
146 K: Mmm...
147 L: In some ways, I couldn't tell you exactly what they were but I think there are slight
148 differences, but I wouldn't say they were major, I suppose it's like that Scottish, English in
149 football and things
150 MK: I suppose if there were some comedy shows that specifically were about English like little
151 cultural things in little regional areas it's possible we wouldn't get all of that although we'd
152 get the broad idea but you wouldn't get all the little references, I think it's the same idea, it
153 depends on where you're from, it's not different types of comedy it's just different things
154 **Int: Do you think people from Edinburgh have a different sense of humour than Glaswegians?**
155 (pause, silence)
156 **Int: Since you see both sides of it?**
157 L: There's all these ideas that Glasgow is different, a lot funnier, and kinder
158 MK: We're meant to be a lot posher, more hibrow than them
159 L: Well it's convoluted to an extent, well maybe we see that because as Edinburgh we tend to get
160 more of the negative side of the comparison a lot of the time, we get told we live in a lovely
161 place and all that, but a lot of people think it is more snobby
162 K: A lot of people in Edinburgh don't like Glasgow as much, when I said I was going to Glasgow I
163 got so many comments, call [Glaswegians] Weegies and stuff, my family hate it, if anybody
164 comes through they slag off the Weegies all the time
165 MK: Weegies!
166 **Int: Best and worst Scottish television comedy?**
167 MK: I think *Chewin The Fat* has been one of the funniest things that has been brought of out
168 Scotland for a long time. I remember something called *The High Life* with Alan Cumming in
169 it, which I thought was either really funny or really really cringeworthy, like some of the
170 jokes were like so original because it was like really camp and other times it didn't work, just
171 unfunny in the extreme, would make quite a good example to show
172 **Int: When you say cringeworthy was it because of the Scottishness or the campness or...?**
173 MK: Just like it got to the point where it ran out of ideas and just put in any old thing
174 M: As for worst comedy, I can't thing of an examples right now, just the style of it
175 K: Can't think of anything, don't watch it really
176 M: Sometimes you can just sit and watch it and it seems really forced, if they don't have a lot of
177 material to go with
178 K I think that's a problem quite lot you see the same jokes over and over again
179 M: But at the same time in we can see that the money's not being ploughed in to develop a lot of
180 the scripts, the sketches are done outside cos they can't afford sets or if they do they're really
181 simple and ... bad, but I can't think of any names
182 K: Trying to think, I know there's loads
183 M: Usually if I see it I turn it over so it's no problem

184 MK: A lot of the humour is either central like Glasgow or the Highland humour, it's like just one
185 of the other, from what I can remember off the top of my head, there isn't so much variety
186 **Int: You said at the beginning MK that you thought most of the clips were sort of male humour?**
187 MK: Yeah I thought a lot of them were. I mean in general you don't get much female comedy, I
188 don't mean like [inaudible] things like that, in terms of a lot of the shows are just a couple of
189 guys, like *The League of Gentlemen*, that's something as well I think's really funny but a lot of
190 the best comedy seems to be from the guys not a lot from comediennes
191 L: Even the *Chewin The Fat* sketch, they have a woman but she's always the supporting part,
192 *Goodness Gracious Me* the women seem to be more central, but that sketch with the
193 [competitive mothers], maybe that's because women, and I don't know it's a huge
194 generalisation, but maybe women might have a more central role in their society maybe it
195 derives from there
196 MK: Cos one of their main writers is female
197 **Int: They have a larger team of writers and performers. [To K] Would you agree that male**
198 **comedy and female comedy are different?**
199 K: Yeah but I don't watch a lot so I don't really know, seems it, sort of like *Smack The Pony* or
200 something is that women? (agreement) That's quite funny. There wasn't a lot of girls in that
201 (cliptape)
202 **Int: That's partly a technical problem but yes, you're right.**

GROUP 7

November 7, 2000, Room 350, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh

RESPONDENTS: EDINBURGH WOMEN (RECRUITED BY TUTOR)

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Edinburgh.

A: White; British (English); 18; F; 7 years in Edinburgh
B: Cocasian [sic]; Scottish; 18; F; two months (moved from Lewis to study at QMUC)

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group had taken several weeks to organise, so when only two of the promised four volunteers appeared I continued (this decision was made easier by the difficulties travelling to and from Edinburgh after flooding and slips at Polmont, and the need to travel to Skye the next day, making rescheduling difficult). The women were happy to talk and both Level One media/communications students at QMUC, although they did not previously know each other. Both revealed during the course of the group that they were not actually *from Edinburgh*, the main criterion on which volunteers were supposed to be selected. There are unresolved difficulties which arise when teachers ask for volunteers, as it appears to dissuade the students (who perceive it as more coursework) and there is little 'quality control' available to the researcher who is at a distance. Since the onsite tutors have no interest in the project beyond a collegial willingness to assist there is no motivation for them to take care with group constitution, and it is difficult for a remote researcher to insist that they do this 'properly'. So I did the group but in effect I only had a 'pure' Edinburghers group in Glasgow, ironically enough (Group 1 contained a Glasgwegian and a Dundonian).

COMMENTS ON CONTENT

There were only two of them but they often disagreed, especially toward the end. I was always cheered by overt disagreement as it suggests to me that the respondents feel comfortable to assert their own views, both to me and to the strangers (or friends) also in the group. Familiar themes arose: Rab Nesbitt and its role as representation beyond Scotland's borders, lack of ironic distance in Others (in this case, one took jokes by Ruby Wax—who has lived in the UK for many years—seriously), a perception of, but lack of belief in, the rivalry between Glasgow and Edinburgh, a sense of separate Scottish identity, not much emphasis on gender differences.

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

EDINBURGH 7

A (female Edinburgh 18); B (female Edinburgh 18).

1 **Int: What did you think of the clips?**
2 A: I enjoyed them, some of them were ones I'd watched before
3 B: They were good, I enjoyed them
4 **Int: Were there any there that you didn't recognise?**
5 A: The one with the old woman and the boxer, I didn't think that was going to go so long, apart
6 from that I think I'd seen them
7 B: The one in the car, where there's the sign, no sweeties for sixty miles, I don't think I'd seen
8 that one
9 **Int: The one with the woman getting punched and the guy in the rowboat are from a new comedy**
10 **series called *Velvet Soup*...**
11 A: I think I'd seen the rowboat one
12 **Int: And the guy in the car is from *All Along The Watchtower*. So which was the funniest bit?**
13 B: I like the *Chewin The Fat*, it's great
14 **Int: What's so funny about it?**
15 B: It's just because the two guys are from Edinburgh but come to, they just take the piss out of the
16 Glaswegian type of common accent, with their accent, I don't know how to describe that accent
17 (laughs)
18 A: Yeah
19 B: [My Gran] she's a big fan of *Chewin The Fat* (laughs) so yeah we love *Chewin The Fat*
20 **Int: Do you think the guys are from Edinburgh, is that what it's supposed to be, a clash of**
21 **Edinburgh/ Glasgow?**
22 A: I don't know if it's Edinburgh as such, I think it's more, but that's the way it comes across
23 B: I think it is, but I think their accent, they're supposed to be from sort of upper class Edinburgh
24 **Int: Do you know anyone with an accent like that, who works in a chipshop, that 'chipshop**
25 **accent', that kind of Glaswegian?**
26 B: Yeah I've I got relatives there who talk like that
27 **Int: Which other ones were funny?**
28 A: *Goodness Gracious Me*
29 **Int: Had you seen that one before?**
30 A: Oh uhuh, it's just the best, takes our ideas about going for an Indian and undoes it, the guy
31 who's too drunk, the whole thing
32 B: I liked the *Blackadder* bit, the surrealness, 'they'll never guess cos we've done so often before'
33 **Int: Which of the *Blackadder* series did you like best?**
34 B: I'd seen most of them, I quite like the Elizabethan one, but I haven't seen all of the war ones
35 **Int: The last series?**
36 B: Uhuh
37 **Int [To A]: Do you have a personal favourite?**
38 A: I didn't watch it that much, I've not seen all of them
39 **Int: I'm sure it's coming back, they're always repeating it. So which of the jokes didn't really**
40 **work?**
41 (Pause)
42 A: I didn't really like, I didn't find the boxing ring one, I don't like that kind of humour. When
43 he first hit her I thought she'll get her own back, it was just not my kind of humour
44 B: I thought he might hit her
45 **Int: Did you think that was what was going to happen, that he was going to hit her?**
46 A: I thought he would but she'd hit him back a bit, but he continued, it just went on
47 **Int: But not funny?**
48 A: No, it was funny at first but then
49 **Int [To B]: Did you think he was going to hit her?**
50 B: No
51 **Int: What did you think was going to happen?**
52 B: I don't know. I suppose I thought he might hit her but that she'd hit him back, that that
53 would be the punchline
54 **Int: Punchline? (all laugh) A lot of people had said that they thought she was going to hit him,**
55 **that she was going to be a sort of Supergrannie**
56 A, B: Yeah, that's what I thought
57 A: I thought he'd hit her then she'd hit him harder, get her own back
58 **Int: (comments about the screening) Any other sketches that weren't very funny?**

59 B: The last one
60 A: Which one?
61 **Int: The Gaelic sketch, the guys from Lewis**
62 A: I found that funny because I've lived in Lewis
63 **Int: Uhuh? Really? Do you speak any Gaelic?**
64 A: Oh no, my brother speaks Gaelic, but I didn't learn it
65 **Int: Is he older or younger than you?**
66 A: Younger, he did Gaelic at school. But I know people who are just like that, not the sailors, not
67 the clothes, not everybody speaking Gaelic, it's not like that but just, when they go to the
68 mainland, wow! Shops! Cinemas! It is.
69 **Int: Did you recognise the bar in that sketch?**
70 A: No
71 **Int: It's the Park Bar in Glasgow, it's the local for Gaelic speakers, it's full of people from the**
72 **Western Isles**
73 B: I think if you speak Gaelic you'll have got the joke but I could hardly read the text
74 A: I don't think it's if you speak Gaelic, I think it's more if you have experience of people from a
75 small island community then you'll understand it, their talk, their clothes, it's funny if you
76 have experience of people like that
77 B: The one I thought went flat was that one in the car, it was okay but, small funny, you'd go
78 'yeah?' but not really laugh
79 **Int: What did you think about that, the impressions of that man in the car, his ideas about**
80 **Scotland?**
81 B: It's just typical
82 A: A lot of people have the wrong idea about Scotland. I was watching *Ruby Wax* last night she
83 was talking to Ewan McGregor
84 **Int, B: Oh I missed that**
85 A: And it was like Ruby Wax talking about 'when you were a boy in Scotland did you run around
86 in the heather in a kilt?' And he was like (bemused tone) 'Yeah we do that a lot in Scotland'.
87 It was just, an American view, they don't know anything, it's quite disturbing, in the
88 Highlands, 'ah they live in wee huts in the hills' or something, it's just rubbish
89 B: Americans especially, they don't understand about Britain, you say you're from Edinburgh,
90 'Oh, is that near London?' Americans are stupid
91 A: It's such a small distance for them, from London to Edinburgh
92 **Int: Did you have mixed emotions when you laughed at some of these things?**
93 A, B: Yeah, the boxer one
94 B: The first part OK, so long as she gets her own back, but then he just kept going and going, I was
95 like, (groans) 'Oh!'
96 **Int: Any of the others? Was it, they were either funny or they weren't?**
97 A, B: Yeah
98 A: The boxer was more on the edge
99 **Int: Do you think different groups of people find different things funny?**
100 A: I think so but quite a few jokes let you all join in, I've cousins in Glasgow so I can laugh at
101 *Chewin The Fat*
102 B: I think so because I'm English, I was born in England, and my mother's Scottish, and me and my
103 mother can sit and watch *Rab C. Nesbitt*, and both howl with laughter, and she'll say,
104 'What are you laughing for? You're English!'
105 **Int: So how much of your life have you lived in Scotland?**
106 B: Ah, I'm eighteen so about thirteen years
107 **Int: But you still think of yourself as English?**
108 B: I do, I do, it's really strange, cos I hardly remember it, I should feel Scottish but I'm still
109 English
110 **Int: Do you like *Rab C. Nesbitt*?**
111 A: Yeah
112 **Int: What do you think people in England think of *Rab C.* ?**
113 A: That it's crap, that's what we're all like
114 B: They think everyone does look like that, dress like that, bandage, (mock English tone) 'it's
115 really a documentary'
116 (all laugh)
117 A: But I think you have to know something about Scotland to get it, I just think it wouldn't make
118 sense if you didn't know about it
119 **Int: Do you think it's a Scottish humour or a Glasgow humour?**
120 (pause)
121 A: Um, I'm not sure. I like it, but then I've got relatives from Glasgow so I can see that side of it as

122 well
123 B: It's bit sort of Glasgocentric but I still get a lot out of it
124 **Int: Quite accessible?**
125 B: Yeah
126 **Int: You were saying [A] your mother might find different things funny, are there other groups that might enjoy different humour?**
127
128 A: There was that thing by Billy Connolly where he dressed up as the Pope from Glasgow and upset the church and a lot of really religious people didn't find that funny, so I think that can affect it, if you're religiously strict then you're not going to find that sort of thing funny
129
130
131 B: [inaudible]
132 **Int: Who do you think would like things like *Goodness Gracious Me*?**
133 B: I think most people would find that funny, not just Asian people, like the restaurant, English people would agree, that does happen, how stupid that is, going for an English, I think a lot of people could relate in that way
134
135
136 A: [inaudible] (agrees)
137 **Int: Would you say TV comedy caters for your sense of humour in general?**
138 A: I think that it does, there's a range to choose from whatever your mood, so I think generally yeah
139
140 B: I like more American humour, *Frasier, Friends,* shows like that, I don't think British humour is as good, they're just better written, but I do like *Chewin The Fat.* I don't think there's anything funny on ITV
141
142
143 **Int: No they're focusing on drama**
144 B: They don't do anything funny
145 **Int: I'll let you tell them that! Yeah, it's not one of their key areas of investment. The Glasgow/ Edinburgh thing?**
146
147 A: (mock cagey) What thing? You mean the rivalry?
148 **Int: Do you think such a thing exists, do you think there's much difference between the two?**
149 A: I don't really know cos I've only been here for a few months, but my cousins say it all the time, that Edinburgh is so different to them, but to me they're just... cities, I don't see the difference, *Chewin The Fat* seems to be about Glasgow more but I don't know why
150
151
152 B: I don't know about the rivalry but they are different, Edinburgh's got the older architecture and Glasgow's got the shops
153
154 A: I really can't see it, but I know what they mean
155 **Int: So you're aware of the idea of a rivalry?**
156 A: Yeah
157 **Int: Best and worst Scottish television comedy?**
158 (pause)
159 B: Can't think of any that's bad. Do you really want Scottish examples?
160 **Int: Do you have something in mind?**
161 B: Yeah, *League of Gentlemen*
162 A: Oh I *love* that stuff! I went to see the live sketch show, absolutely loved it
163 **Int: (laughs) Where was that?**
164 A: It was in the festival theatre
165 B: I hate it, it's too surreal
166 A: No it was so good, I love the *League of Gentlemen,* it's fantastic
167 **Int: You can't please people can you?** (all laugh)
168 B: I can see why you say it's good, some of it's quite funny but some of it's just, 'what?' I don't get it, so strange
169
170 A: I like that, I like it even better, their whole wee world
171 B: Some of it's shocking, the darker meaning
172 **Int: Any Scottish comedy that makes you feel like that?**
173 A: (quietly) Can't think of anything Scottish
174 B: I can't think of any Scottish comedy that's really bad
175 [inaudible]
176 **Int: Are there any topics that you see on TV that's supposed to be funny but you just don't think people should be making jokes about?**
177
178 B: I think the boxer one is an example. I mean people do mug old grannies for their pension money, so I don't really think we should...
179
180 A: Yeah OK she went in and you could say she asked to be punched but she didn't really, but she didn't really ask to be beaten like that
181
182 **Int: Can you think of any other comedies you've watched where you've felt that way?**
183 (pause)
184 A, B: I don't know

185 A: I think it's the style of humour as much as the topic. I really like Eddie Izzard, just love his
186 style, the topics are really ordinary. That late-night show on Channel Four, it's really
187 strange humour, not laugh-out-loud funny, just really weird, I never really got into that,
188 *Jaaam* it was
189 **Int: Did you ever see the really late-night version, where they recut the sketches and turned up**
190 **the colour and slowed down the sound?**
191 A: Yeah I think I saw it once
192 **Int [To B]: Did you ever see it, *Jaaam*? it's by Chris Morris**
193 B: No
194 **Int [To A]: You said you liked Eddie Izzard, is he your favourite comedian?**
195 A: Oh yes, he's brilliant
196 **Int: You've got all his videos?**
197 A: Oh yeah
198 **Int: Have you been to see him live?**
199 A: Can't wait, but I've been trying, trying, trying to get tickets, but they all go within the hour,
200 but I love Eddie
201 **Int [To B]: And do you have any particular favourite?**
202 B: Not really, though I'd like to see Jo Brand
203 **Int: Would you go and see her live?**
204 B: If I could

GROUP 2

October 16 ,2000, Gilmorehill Centre Rm 409, University of Glasgow, Glasgow

RESPONDENTS: GLASWEGIAN WOMEN RESIDENT IN GLASGOW

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age, Gender; Years in Glasgow.

S: (blank); British; 19; F; 1 year in Glasgow (origin not known)
V: White; British; 18; F; 18 years in Glasgow
M: White; Scottish; 17; F; 12 years in Glasgow
L: White; British; 18; F; 18 years in Glasgow
F: White; Scottish; 18; F; 18 years in Glasgow
C: White; British; 17; F; 17 years in Glasgow

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group seemed to be much more under my control than the first group although I dispensed with the idea of a table mike entirely and only used a small dictaphone. There were also some problems using the video equipment, the power switch on the wall needs turning on. Set out food and drink etc. but noone touched it. Why was this, this was the only group it happened in (all women).

All six respondents turned up, one brought a male friend who had to be turned away because the rest of the group was female. Tried to reschedule him for the parallel mix gender group next Monday, same time (he didn't arrive). This group had been formed from twelve volunteers from Level One; since a large number were women I managed to organise both a women-only and a mixed-gender group of a decent size for each week. As they were all women, the comments are transcribed unattributed.

One respondent noted in her paperwork she'd only lived in Glasgow one year, I didn't establish where she'd moved from. One identified on the forms as 'white' although she used words like 'we' and 'ironic revenge' in the discussion and appeared to be of Asian or part-Asian family origin. As the cliptape included a *Goodness Gracious Me* clip I felt somewhat uncomfortable to be showing this and seemingly singling her out, but she said early on in the discussion that she enjoyed this show, and she showed no signs of being uncomfortable discussing race in this context. Why she identified on paper as 'white' is unclear to me.

There was less discussion among them than the previous Edinburgh men group, felt I didn't have enough questions at times.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

Noone noted the masculinity of the clips shown, noone mentioned *BlackAdder* at all except in their paperwork. There was ambivalence about the boxer sketch, some found it quite funny, all had expected her to hit him. The Gaelic humour (again, often pronounced Gaylic) was not enjoyed, the references to the Park Bar were not appreciated, it was felt something was missing in the execution. One noted on her form she thought they were Irish. The idea of a Glasgow sense of humour was not strongly endorsed, and the idea that Edinburghers have a different sense of humour was not given much weight either. The notion that it's okay to laugh at ourselves but not to have others laugh at us, as in *Goodness Gracious Me* or *Rab C. Nesbitt* was expressed in a developed way. Aberdeen again was mentioned as a Contrastive Other, as having a very strange dialect and jokes based on their funny words and pronunciations. The chip shop sketch was thought to not work well outside Scotland, partly because chipshop culture is especially Scottish, they said.

GLASGOW 2

Six women from Glasgow (aged 17, 17, 18, 18, 18, 19)

1 **Int: Which image or joke was the most striking?**
2 *Chewin The Fat*, the chip shop, the guy in the boat rowing and rowing and rowing
3 **Int: Did you recognise the sketches?**
4 I'd seen the *Chewin' The Fat* one
5 *Goodness Gracious Me*
6 I didn't think that was funny
7 It was probably the one I liked most, my favourite show
8 **Int: What did everyone put down as the sketch that didn't work?**
9 The last one, the Gaelic one
10 I put down the boxing one, I thought that was awful
11 I liked that the most, he's like 'you hold her up' and then he keeps hitting her
12 **Int: So why didn't you like the last one?**
13 It's the image of Gaelic people, the boys out for a good time
14 It wasn't a bad idea it just didn't carry it off, just something not there
15 Don't speak Gaelic, don't know, don't get their humour
16 **Int: Anyone here speak Gaelic? [no] So which one was the funniest, which ones did make you**
17 **laugh?**
18 The Rower one it was just stupid, truly bizarre, having to go back and forth, his house on fire,
19 going for the fireman
20 [mock accent] 'And then I saw my house was on fire, and then I had to go back, and then he said to
21 me "your house is not on fire"' and that just made me laugh because it was just so
22 My nan in London watching *Chewin The Fat*, like the chipshop sketch, just doesn't get it, it's
23 very Scottish
24 **Int: How is that particular sketch a Scottish joke?**
25 Because down in London there's not that many chippies about the place and you don't get them
26 talking in that kind of accent
27 **Int: You were saying about having kind of mixed emotions watching the woman and the boxer?**
28 It's a bit twisted, laughing at old people, like when people fall down in the street you're like
29 (acts, 'ha ha') but you shouldn't
30 It was so unexpected, cos I thought she was going to be a Supergrannie and that she would
31 actually hit him, and he hit her and it was like 'okay...'
32 **Int: And what about how that sketch continues? He picks her up and he keeps hitting her?**
33 (laughter)
34 I think it might have been best left, when the granny hit the floor, I thought that was a good
35 starting point, taking it further went too far
36 But I couldn't stop laughing at it, it's a kind of sadistic humour, you're probably laughing out of
37 nervousness more than anything, you think 'God, he's beating a grannie'
38 **Int: But you thought she was going to hit him (uhuh), you all thought that (aye) when that**
39 **sketch was first taped it actually went on for another minute**
40 It's enough like it is, wouldn't find it funny if it just kept banging on
41 **Int: You were talking a bit about Scottish jokes and Scottish humour, do you think different**
42 **groups of people find different things funny?**
43 Oh definitely, there's a very particular Glaswegian humour, even our stand-up comedians, that
44 is completely Glaswegian humour [inaudible]
45 **Int: Do you think there is a separate Glaswegian sense of humour, distinct from the rest of**
46 **Scotland?**
47 Well the chipshop one, I don't know about the rest of Scotland, there's the same kind of thing in
48 Edinburgh, the women in the chipshops
49 I don't know if there is a Glasgow sense of humour but some of these jokes if you're from Glasgow,
50 you're more likely to get it... So it's not so much a shared sense of humour as being able to get
51 jokes about it
52 They have to understand our dialect as well, our funny words and just what we're saying in other
53 areas of Scotland
54 **Int: Do you think people in Edinburgh have a different sense of humour to Glaswegians or do you**
55 **think it's actually pretty similar across the Central Belt?**
56 I think it's pretty similar, there's not that much of a distance between us and Edinburgh
57 There's the whole rivalry thing apparently

58 **Int: What do you mean, the whole rivalry thing apparently?**
59 Who's the real capital of Scotland, but it doesn't bother me
60 Just everywhere's the same really, we laugh at the same stuff, we've got a distinct comedy thing
61 [inaudible]
62 **Int: You were talking about Scottish humour in England, how do you think they cope with it?**
63 Depends how many Scottish friends and relatives they have, how much they believe the
64 Scottish stereotypes
65 It's like the guy in the back seat in that sketch
66 I think if they use stereotypes they have to be balanced. When I was a holiday rep were doing
67 this big sketch of people from different places, and they did Essex girls and everyone found it
68 funny, even Essex girls sitting there found it funny, and they did the Scottish people and they
69 were the ones who arrived at the airport and started fighting everyone and had blue paint on
70 their faces and we found that funny and all the English found that funny as well, I think with
71 stereotypes it depends how it's presented, if there's a balance then you don't get upset about it
72 So long as there's jokes about Scottish people and Irish people and English people then it's okay,
73 like the character on *The Simpsons*, Groundskeeper Willie, I find that funny because that
74 show takes the mick at whoever it wants whenever it wants, not specifically at Scottish
75 people
76 Most comedy takes the mick out of minority group and works around that, picks on one group, but
77 like for different sketches it will move through a whole loads of minority groups
78 Scottish comedy tends to take the mick out of our own, rather than another minority
79 I think *Goodness Gracious Me* is like an ironic revenge against all that, we've had to put up with
80 people taking the mick out of all parts of our culture so the sketch where they go for an
81 English, that takes the mick out of the stereotypes we've had to live with, reverse the whole
82 white stereotype
83 It's great, if white people did it, it would be banned but because they're Asian it works
84 **Int: How do people feel about *Rab C. Nesbitt*?**
85 Hmm [laughter]
86 I look at him and go 'oooh' [yuck], no I actually look at him and laugh
87 It's funny and it's quite amusing but at the same time you kind of stop and think about whether
88 other people believe it, when they know you're from Scotland it's all like, 'ooh, *Rab C.*
89 *Nesbitt*'
90 I think it's quite outdated, the whole string vest, chippie every night
91 At the same time there is no denying that there is people like that, you can't get away from
92 that, it is funny, it is funny
93 It's a bit like *Chewin The Fat*, you do recognise that peculiarity, it is true
94 **Int: What do you think they think of it in England?**
95 They think everyone up here's like that [agreement]
96 They laugh at it because they go 'haha, that's Scotland, they all live in caves and play the
97 bagpipes' or whatever
98 Every time I go there they go 'Rangers or Celtic?', [I go] 'what?!'
99 Partick Thistle!
100 **Int: What do you think would be the best and the worst Scottish TV comedy shows, just from your**
101 **individual opinions?**
102 *Chewin The Fat*'s done really well, like a lot of people are now saying... How's it go now, what's
103 that phrase from *Chewin The Fat*?
104 (all): 'Gonnae no dae that!' (laughter)
105 Yeah that's really cottoned on... (laughter). I think that's done quite well cos it's been edited
106 quite professionally and such, part of why we're laughing is cos it's done well, I don't know
107 the worst
108 I don't like *Chewin The Fat*
109 I like stand-up more than sitcom, and I like women comedians. The worst would be like the *Rab*
110 *C. Nesbitt*, it's a very narrow idea of funny. I like Dorothy Paul, Elaine C. Smith
111 I think my favourite is Phil Kay
112 Yeah him too actually
113 He really appeals, he's just such a funny guy, I think he's one of the funniest in Scotland
114 I do like Scottish stand-up comedians, and more than sitcom or sketches, it's just the manner, I
115 think it's done really really well
116 I think a lot of foreign people like a Scottish accent
117 Yeah they go 'that accent's so cute'
118 Aye they go 'what?'
119 **Int: Do you think women laugh at different things?**
120 You get the battle of the sexes, the women stand-up comedians and all her jokes are about men

121 and the women are all laughing, it's hilarious
122 We laugh at their reaction as well, we laugh at the guys getting all upset and it's funnier
123 At the same time you get people who get, men who get angry at it
124 The important thing is to be really funny about it, not just get up there and be really sexist, I don't have a problem with [male comedy]
126 I think if you say something in stand-up that a male or female can identify with
127 It also depends what you're into, my boyfriend's really keen on *They Think It's All Over*, but then I'm not all that interested in the government
129 *Have I Got News For You* [correcting her]
130 My boyfriend's always going on about it, like it's his favourite programme of all time, it's all right, but if you're not up with what's going on
132 **Int: Can I ask you another question about the Gaelic comedy. Has anyone here actually watched any Gaelic TV comedy?**
134 Who's the guy with the beard? [on *Dotaman*?] Yeah *Dotaman*, great hat, comedy hat
135 With that show [*Ran Dan*], if it was on, what time's it at?
136 **Int: It's on the BBC teatimes, but it's finished now**
137 What's that programme which is also in English they dub in Gaylic?
138 *Postman Pat*
139 It's on very early in the morning
140 I don't know, if I saw the whole show I might find it funny
141 **Int: Well if you've got another half hour we can check that theory!**
142 I'm not sure I even got that sketch, like what the two women were actually doing
143 **Int: Have you ever been to the Park Bar in Argyle Street? That's the pub**
144 I got the feeling that that was part of the joke but I didn't get it, what's that bar, I don't know
145 **Int: It's just up in Argyle Street, you know, there's quite a large Gaelic community in Partick, and they go to listen to ceilidh music, drink with a glass in each hand**
147 Aye students drink with a glass in each hand
148 Aye but it's plastic not glass, they don't trust us!

GROUP 3

October 17, 2000, Gilmorehill Centre Rm 408, University of Glasgow, Glasgow

RESPONDENTS: GLASWEGIANS RESIDENT IN GLASGOW

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Glasgow.

L: British/ White; Scottish/ British; 18; F; 18 years in Glasgow
N: White; Scottish; 26; M; 26 years in Glasgow
K: White; Scottish; 18; F; 17.5 years in Glasgow

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group almost didn't happen. There were four confirmed to arrive and two possibles who then cancelled. I sent an email around on the Monday explaining this situation and asking respondents to bring spares if they could. Two arrived on time but nos. 3 and 4 were nowhere to be found. I toyed with the idea of dragging in Glasgwegian officemates but since neither was available checked the Resources Room and found Respondent 3 checking her email. Three is enough for a group. She had been a little confused about the timing but was more than happy to be dragged off, though a little flushed. Respondent 1 had already said she had skipped a tutorial to attend this so I wanted to be sure of completing today if possible.

Once we were started the group worked well. The tape is looking very tired. Projection etc. was fine. I used the mini dictaphone again since there were only three, rather than the microphone.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

The discussion was thorough and interesting, all three contributing evenly. The gender imbalance seemed not to worry anyone. Perhaps it is easier in a smaller group. The male laughed well throughout (yesterday the women all laughed in a relaxed way) as did the women from time to time.

Comments about groups who share a sense of humour included age, race, class (not well discussed). I suggested Scottishness but failed to develop the Glasgow/ Edinburgh rivalry or get an idea if all Scots laugh at the same thing, very little to suggest from this group that location makes much difference. One used words like 'cringe' to discuss *Rab C Nesbitt* but this was as much a response to repeated jokes as to the perceived exterior perceptions of them as Scots. Aesthetics important to convey joke properly and to be funny, even tasteless humour can appeal if well produced. Sense of realism important. All thought the woman would hit the boxer. All thought that sketch too long. None knew any Gaelic speaker. I didn't ask if they knew the Park Bar. All thought that sketch weak.

This group because of its muddled start didn't get going into as much depth as it might have but each member took equal turns and was able to mention their views on most things. Some anecdotage occurred, and some self-correction of topic. 'L' mumbled with her hand over her mouth at times and is sometimes inaudible for this.

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

GLASGOW 3

K (female, Glasgow 18); L (female, Glasgow 18); N (male, Glasgow 26).

1 **Int: What did you think of the comedy clips? Which bits were funny?**
2 K: *Chewin The Fat* and *Blackadder*, and that one with the old woman in the boxing ring, I didn't
3 really like the others very much, I didn't like, I do normally like *Goodness Gracious Me* but I
4 didn't think that was one of their best from *Goodness Gracious Me*
5 L: I liked *Chewin The Fat*, liked the *Blackadder*, I didn't like the last one, I didn't like the one
6 with the guy in the boat
7 K: He was so creepy
8 N: I thought that *Blackadder* was good and I like that guy in the rowboat
9 **Int: What was it about it that worked well?**
10 N: He's kind of a stereotype, and it's an exaggerated story
11 **Int: When you say it's a stereotype, what kind of person it is a stereotype of?**
12 N: People that live alone, there's just something funny about them
13 **Int: And thinking about the clips that just weren't funny, can you tell me about what didn't work?**
14 K: The one that wasn't funny was one we haven't mentioned, it didn't really have much of an
15 impact, that English guy in the car on the road to Scotland, I didn't find that at all funny
16 L: I didn't understand it, no sweets?
17 **Int: Supposed to be a Scottish trait perhaps?**
18 L: I didn't really get that, you know?
19 **Int: What did you think?**
20 N: I think it was a bit lame that last bit
21 **Int: 'At least we know we're in Scotland'**
22 N: Exactly, feel a bit angry at how stupid
23 K: I know, there's plenty of shops on the road, stopping for sweets
24 **Int: So you think that's unrealistic?**
25 K: Yeah I think it's just...
26 N: I think it's just kind of, Scots stereotype about meanness or something
27 K: Yeah
28 **Int: And you're saying you didn't like that?**
29 N: Uhuh, I wouldn't like that to be shown around, I didn't like that, it's not even a joke, it's just
30 K: The joke I didn't like was the last one
31 **Int: Do you watch any Gaelic humour?**
32 K: No! (others shake head)
33 **Int: Do you know any Gaelic speakers?**
34 (all shake head)
35 N: I do watch [Gaelic television] sometimes, the current affairs and stuff
36 K: But *Chewin The Fat* sums up Gaylic programmes quite well you know, with their sock-puppet
37 guys, that's what they're like! So even if you spoke Gaylic you wouldn't want to watch them
38 cos
39 N: Somebody said they were just Glaswegian those sock puppets (laugh) that's why it's good, I
40 think at lot of people have those attitudes about [Gaelic language television]
41 L: I don't know any speakers and I've never watched the programmes but I do like the puppets on
42 *Chewin The Fat*. But I don't like people copying those phrases
43 N: I never heard anyone say 'Gonnae No Dae That', then everybody was walking about saying it,
44 now everybody's walking about saying 'Wazzup' [catchphrase on beer commercial], and it
45 brings that advert to mind
46 K: What is that with that advert anyway? All guys are obsessed with that advert (L laughs)
47 L: I think it's really funny
48 N: I've heard girls saying it
49 K: It's *Ali G* as well, all those [catchphrases]
50 **Int: The boxer sketch, your views on that?**
51 N: The boxer wasn't funny at all, I don't mind tasteless humour so long as it's done well, but that
52 wasnae that strong to carry it
53 K: I think it went on too long, the first time he did it, we laughed, but then he kept doing it, you
54 just couldn't go with it
55 L: It did go on a bit
56 **Int: Did you think that was going to happen?**
57 N: I thought she was going to hit him

58 K: Yeah!
59 N: I didn't think she'd get the floor
60 **Int: The original version of that sketch goes on for another minute and he just keeps hitting her...**
61 K: What show's that from anyway?
62 **Int: *Velvet Soup*, used to be *Velvet Cabaret*, started on the radio**
63 K: *Chewin The Fat* used to be on the radio
64 **Int: Do you have any mixed emotions watching comedy?**
65 N: If it's funny I don't have a problem with [tasteless comedy] I think if it's sick humour it makes
66 you laugh the more cos you shouldn't
67 K: I think it's good to laugh at these things because if you didn't laugh life'd be too hard, it's
68 good to turn life into jokes sometimes to relieve the...
69 N: We know we shouldn't laugh at other people's misfortune but we do
70 **Int: Do you think different groups of people find different things funny?**
71 L: Yeah
72 K: Definitely, old people watch *Last of the Summer Wine* and think that's funny, I don't think
73 anyone young could watch that and laugh at it
74 N: They always end up rolling down a hill in a barrel, every week, there they are, the first half,
75 first three quarters, walking up the hill (K laughs) and then they roll down the hill (K
76 laughs), and it's always got a sort of a canned laughter, it always puts you off anyway
77 K: My nana always watches loads of sitcoms, if she saw the boxer, some old people might
78 manage but I don't think she would
79 N: A lot of them love their Saturday night light entertainment, they couldn't handle anything
80 extra, they're so used to that they couldn't understand anything
81 K: But then a lot of older people like in their sixties remember *The Goon Show* and think that's
82 very funny and that wasn't your straight, bland conventional stuff. But then as they get older
83 something goes and they're not so able to laugh at that stuff
84 L: My gran really liked *There's Something About Mary*, (laughs) I just thought 'Calm down!' but
85 I just find that strange but it's true
86 **Int: Did she go with you?**
87 L: Uhuh, we went to see something else but couldn't get in and it was the next time and said 'shall
88 we go and see that?' and she was in stitches! And I was so embarrassed because she was
89 laughing too much, even I didn't think [it was that funny], well I did find some of it funny
90 **Int: Apart from older people what other groups do you think find different things funny?**
91 K: Different races I suppose would have a different sense of humour, a different take on life
92 L: That Indian one, what was it?
93 **Int: *Goodness Gracious Me***
94 L: I've never seen it before, I might watch it if it was on
95 N: I don't like racial comedy, or like black comedy, almost every joke is based on race, but that
96 *Goodness Gracious Me* is alright, I watched it, it was different, that *Richard Blackwood*
97 show, every single joke is about being black
98 K: That black one who used to be on *The Real McCoy*, do you remember?
99 N: I don't watch a lot of stand-up
100 K: He was on that and it was really weird because he had a lot of black fans and Asian fans and
101 told a lot of ethnic jokes [inaudible]
102 L: My gran she doesn't like *Chewin The Fat* because
103 **Int: She doesn't like that?**
104 L: Because of the way the woman's speaking and that like that Chipshop one, it's no good, but
105 obviously that's it, they're making a point
106 N: It's alright for us to slag off how the Scottish talk, poke fun at ourselves, we're sitting
107 laughing
108 K: The gay Kelvinsiders, that's what I love. It's the old men that I like those two old men,
109 Hamish or Hector or some stupid names, and I was on the bus the other day with two old guys
110 who were just exactly like them, I bet they were based on them, bet they were, it was one
111 o'clock in the afternoon, they 'd both been drinking and were trying to chat up all the women
112 in the bus, they fell asleep and missed their stop (all laugh) they're just remind me so much of
113 them
114 **Int: Do you [N] watch *Goodness Gracious Me*?**
115 N: See that sketch, I've never seen that one before
116 **Int: It's one of their more famous sketches, 'Going for an English'**
117 N: I quite liked it, that was good, quite original, reminded me of English people on holiday in
118 Spain
119 K: Aye they don't bother to learn Spanish and then wonder why they can't communicate

120 N: It's just arrogance, I remember the same thing in Holland, we expect them to speak English but
121 who would learn to speak Dutch? It's not that difficult
122 K: It's good though because they find things in their own culture as well, you know the
123 overbearing mothers who fight about their sons, they don't just make fun of white people,
124 they make fun of everyone, it's quite fair how they do the show like that, they don't try to
125 put up as many barriers as Richard Blackwood does
126 N: I've found some bits of his show [to be] racist, the whole show, a lot of his jokes are racist
127 about how crap white people are, but we can't do that, can't do any jokes about that, we can't
128 do it like black men can do it, if we did that in reverse it'd be called racism, in a way it's a
129 kind of reverse racism, but the seem to get away with it, but it can be quite funny
130 K: I don't like Richard Blackwood, I think he's trying to be Will Smith and I don't like Will
131 Smith either and him trying to be Will Smith makes him even unfunnier, I don't like Richard
132 Blackwood at all
133 L: [inaudible]
134 K: I think he's Naomi Campbell's cousin
135 **Int: Stepbrother**
136 K: Stepbrother? I knew he was related
137 N: I don't like him and half the show is about him going 'who's da man'
138 K: Not him anyway
139 **Int: Okay, we've mentioned different age groups and different ethnic or racial groups, any other**
140 **kinds of groups with a particular sense of humour?**
141 K: Classes, definitely
142 N: I think the generational thing is strongest, they watch stuff with less of an edge to it
143 K: *Waiting For God* and that sort of stuff
144 N: I don't know, they're wanting things that don't challenge
145 **Int: So out of the shows there, which would appeal?**
146 K: Maybe *Blackadder*, my grandad was English and a bit middle class and a bit racist, well very
147 racist to be honest, if an Indian doctor saves his life he's okay, if he serves him in the shop
148 he's okay, but don't have contact with the culture. He can't stand *The Royle Family*, he can't
149 stand *Chewin The Fat* but he watches *Blackadder*, and *One Foot in the Grave* stuff that
150 doesn't really make him question himself in any way
151 N: They seem to watch comedy less, unless it's sitcom, it's pop culture and keep away from serious
152 programming
153 L: I don't know
154 N: They like different types of comedy
155 **Int: Do you think Scottish people have a definite sense of humour?**
156 K: Yeah very much, Scottish and Irish people have, a very different sense of humour to English
157 people, I don't know why but we definitely do, definitely do. I think they can laugh at
158 themselves more, Irish people can laugh at themselves, but English, I don't like to generalise
159 about all English people but a lot of English prefer to laugh at other races and other groups not
160 themselves
161 N: Like the way, *Rab C. Nesbitt*, his view of Scotland, English people see it and think Scottish
162 people are scum, there's no England sitcom that which parodies themselves
163 L: I don't mind Scottish people seeing *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab C.* but
164 N: But other people, they see *Rab C*, they don't know about us, they watch that, they see Rab as
165 Scotland, that's all they're seeing
166 **Int: Is Rab representing Scottishness, or is it Glaswegian, or even Govan humour?**
167 K: Which street in Govan?
168 N: I've passed people like that in the street, the jacket and the bandages **(The string vest?)** The
169 string vest, the whole thing. That hospital Rab always goes into, Southern General , he calls
170 it Sufferin' General, that's where I was born! Definitely around that area you'll see a lot of
171 Rab C. Nesbitts, it's tragic, they're grown men, but they are like, I don't understand it, I don't
172 live in that area, I'm from there but
173 K: My dad lived in Govan for years and years and he's nothing like, him and my uncle Stan,
174 nothing like Rab C. Nesbitt and Mary Doll or wee Burnie whatever his name is, not like any
175 of them
176 N: Some people do actually believe it, you go down to London they'll say, 'where're you from',
177 'Govan', 'you know that Rab C. Nesbitt'
178 K: If it just for in Scotland then Scottish people would understand that it wasn't representative of
179 Glaswegian people but it does go abroad doesn't it?
180 **Int: What do you think English people think of *Rab C. Nesbitt*?**
181 K: They think 'oh great ! this gives us another reason to hate Scottish people' (laughs)

182 N: English people are patronising (others agree)
183 L: How did it go so long?
184 **Int: It had eight or nine series, someone thought it was funny**
185 N: It might have had nine series but they're all pish
186 K: That's the problem with majority of television, they get one idea and they keep going and
187 going and going, flogging a dead horse, [they should] stop it
188 **Int: Best and worst Scottish television comedy shows?**
189 K: Any comedy on ITV is really bad, remember that *Babes in the Wood*, with Denise Van Outen,
190 Samantha Janus and the other one
191 N: Do you want Scottish?
192 **Int: Any Scottish TV comedy you can't stand?**
193 K: I can't think of more than two or three Scottish comedies anyway
194 N: I used to really like Rab and I'd watch it but they used the same jokes every year and it really
195 stinks
196 K: The one I couldn't stand was the wee fat *Baldy Man*, that one Gregor Fisher did
197 N: Aye that was terrible
198 K: The one that Prince Charles got sent videotapes to Buckingham Palace and that, that says it
199 all!
200 **Int: He never actually said anything did he, just slapstick, more visual comedy?**
201 K: You know that Hamlet cigar ad he used to be on, he was just an extended version of that
202 N: It was off a sketch show called *Naked Video* before it was an ad, but I think that was all it
203 was good for, one sketch a week on that show but not a whole series
204 K: Remember that *City Lights* was that comedy?
205 L: Kind of a drama
206 K: I remember it from when I was young so I don't remember too much about it except the music
207 N: There were programmes we used to see and then we see them now and we go 'that's boggin'
208 K: I wish that didn't happen, I'd like to keep it in a wee bubble from we were ten, but then we
209 kind of see it again it's not funny, that's sad
210 N: The jokes have dated
211 K: But then you get that is all scripts, there's always something that'll miss the mark like that
212 *Smack The Pony*, I've never really liked that at all, remember that *Smack The Pony*? I don't
213 like it
214 N: Yeah I like that. The one I like is that series with the cartoon about the world staring
215 championships
216 **Int: *Big Train*?**
217 N: I really liked that show, it was great, it was brilliant
218 K: Would you call *High Road* comedy? there's noone like that anyway, it's a kind of time warp
219 up there
220 [inaudible]
221 **Int: So when you say you watch Rab Nesbitt and sometimes you just cringe, why do you cringe?**
222 N: They just recycle the jokes, the first time they were really funny, they're just variations on the
223 same joke

GROUP 4

October 23, 2000, Gilmorehill Centre Rm 409, from 2-3pm

RESPONDENTS: GLASWEGIANS RESIDENT IN GLASGOW

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Glasgow.

R: White; Scottish; 18; F; 18 years in Glasgow
K: White Euro; Scottish; 18; F; 17 years in Glasgow
C: White; British; 17; M; 17 years in Glasgow
D: White; Scottish; 33; M; (blank)
G: White European; UK citizen; 18; M; 18 years in Glasgow

GENERAL COMMENTS

Six were booked plus one spare; of these four showed and one brought her bored friend back to join us, so we had five (three men two women). All were Level One students. The videotape is looking very tired indeed, time to redub I think. They all had kitkats and hot drinks unlike the previous group of women. Tape recorder was a little wobbly; clearly needs to be in the right position for tape to flow.

Laughter seems to come about three sketches in to the tape; clearly a need for warming the audience up; needs to be taken into account when researching comedy audiences.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

Not sure that Billy Connolly was even mentioned; *Blackadder* wasn't mentioned until the end of the session when I asked if there were anysubjects we shouldn't laugh about. The Boxer sketch was much enjoyed, as was the rower. The one person (D, very animated) who enjoyed the Gaelic sketch had Gaelic friends and had lived very near the Park Bar, so understood the references; at the same time he didn't like the way Gaelic people would speak in English until an outsider arrived then move into Gaelic (waves two fingers each hand). Others did not know the bar and did not enjoy the joke; one thought it reminded him of Russ Abbott humour from years ago; another found the sketch much overacted, he also said he preferred American comedy to Scottish anyway. *IM Jolly* received a mention as a one-joke character, trotted out every Hogmanay (the girls enjoyed *The Steamie* at Hogmanay also). Girls said toward the end that women enjoy different kinds of humour, but local differences between Glasgow and other places was not mentioned except in the context of English people not understanding Scottish accents (*Rab Nesbitt*, *Chewin' the Fat* with subtitles etc). Felt anything could be laughed at in context. Not fond of Roy Chubby Brown or Jim Davidson, felt them to be old-fashioned and sexist. Felt *GGM* was acceptable (a couple found that hard to follow) because it used racist stereotypes. Girls especially enjoyed the boxer sketch; some disagreement about what they expected to happen. Rower also enjoyed. *AAW* and Gaelic sketch most unfunny, partly because they didn't get the references.

FOCUS GROUPS TRANSCRIPT

GLASGOW 4

R (female Glasgow 18); K (female Glasgow 18); C (male Glasgow 17); D (male Glasgow 33); G (male Glasgow 18).

1 **Int: What did you find most striking about those clips? What was funniest?**
2 (various) *Chewin The Fat*, the boxer, *Goodness Gracious Me*
3 **Int: What did you think of the boxer sketch?**
4 R: It was quite funny, it was good
5 **Int: What was it that made it funny?**
6 R: The fact that he hit her (all laugh), then picks her back up and hits her again
7 **Int: Is that what you thought was going to happen? You didn't? What did you think was going to**
8 **happen?**
9 K: I though she was going to hit him
10 R: Aye so did I
11 G: I thought what happened was going to happen. I thought if she hit him it'd be too obvious,
12 then he hits her
13 **Int: Did you find it funny?**
14 G: Oh yeah, yeah
15 D: I didn't expect him to keep hitting her, it made it even funnier (agreement), the other guy
16 holds her up
17 **Int: *Goodness Gracious Me*, 'Going for an English'**
18 R: That was good
19 C: That highlights how life is, how when you go out to a restaurant to try new things, try the
20 hottest thing, there's always one person who just wants chips, you always laugh at that
21 R: When you go for a curry, that's why I thought it was funny, that's me that orders chips, I
22 never get anything exciting
23 K: I didn't think it was funny until then, especially the totally drunkard men
24 C: And the way they patronise the waiter, 'Jay-mes'
25 **Int: And you also mentioned the chipshop one**
26 R: That's so true, it's so funny.
27 C: Where was it from, the guy in the boat?
28 **Int: From the same show that the boxer sketch was from**
29 C: That was so good, just so twisted
30 R, K: So funny, so dead funny
31 G: I just though it was going to be really banal
32 **Int: Going back to the chipshop one, what is so funny about that?**
33 R: Just the way she was going, was talking
34 K: I think we can relate to that more than people that aren't from Glasgow, we know about
35 chipshops
36 R: Other people might think that was exaggerated
37 K: But it's not, they actually do speak
38 D: And the two guys are just total West-Endy BBC types, 'Oh I love the banter!', people talk like
39 that all the time
40 **Int: So where in Glasgow would she be from with that accent?**
41 G: Could be from anywhere, not really a place
42 C: It's a chipshop accent! (laughter)
43 **Int: Which of the clips weren't funny?**
44 R: The last one, the Gaylic one
45 K: The guy in the taxi, driving through Scotland
46 G: I didn't get that, I didn't see the sign
47 **Int: It says 'No sweeties for 32 miles', 'at least we know we're still in Scotland'**
48 G: Right that's going in, 'sweetie gag' (writes it onto his green sheet)
49 **Int: It's from a sitcom, from *All Along The Watchtower*, it's like the very beginning**
50 R: I didn't get that
51 **Int: Yeah I don't think it really works on its own**
52 D: I liked the Highlanders one, 'show you a good time at the Park Bar', I used to live next to the
53 Park Bar, it's hilarious, if you don't speak Gaelic they ignore you
54 R: People speak Gaelic in there?
55 D: Oh aye
56 R: Where is it?

57 D: It's on Argyle Street
58 **Int: It's just through the park**
59 G: I thought there were only thirty thousand speakers left and none of them were native
60 D: No
61 K: They speak it up north
62 G: Yeah but it's not their only language
63 D, K: Aye, but they speak it
64 D: The thing is you walk in and they're all speaking English, you come in and they all speak in
65 Gaelic (laughter)
66 **Int: So you found it funny?**
67 D: I thought it was quite amazing actually. It was quite lame though, it wasn't like a new joke,
68 but it was, 'oh in't that nice, Gaelic speakers have managed to do a sketch', we're like
69 patronising them
70 G: It almost felt like a Russ Abbott sketch from about thirty years ago, just realised there's this
71 kind of humour, and going to go with it
72 D: I actually know a girl who works for the Gaelic department at the BBC and she grew up in
73 Lewis, so that's why I enjoy that kind of sketch, I enjoy laughing at her
74 R: Like the one in the chipshop, we've got a friend [name] who puts that accent on, and she's very
75 good at that, and that reminds me of her, when she does it it's hilarious, and it just reminds
76 me of that *Chewin The Fat* one
77 **Int: And what didn't you like about the Gaelic sketch?**
78 R: I didn't think it was funny really
79 C: It was overacted
80 R, K, D: Aye, totally, aye, it was annoying
81 C: Scottish comedy is full of that, over done
82 G: It was like a wee gag that was stretched out
83 **Int: But you didn't know what the Park Bar was, you didn't recognise, that didn't really work for**
84 **you, but when it's explained to you you can see what the joke was trying to do?**
85 R: Aye
86 C: It's just the thing, Glasgow's the big city, 'Oh it's a night out in Glasgow', they meet the two
87 prostitutes and that's somehow our city
88 R: It was quite good, they've got the big wall, that's the night out in Glasgow
89 C: And they've got the *Para Handy* thing on, the wee jacket
90 R: It'd have been funnier if the girls had come and nicked their shoes or something, like a real
91 Saturday night out
92 **Int: Do you have any mixed emotions when you laugh at some things, anything you shouldn't,**
93 **like the boxer sketch?**
94 C: Aye a grannie getting hammered (laughter)
95 K: That's sick!
96 D: I thought it was more like laughing at how sad boxing is, cos the guy just can't help beating
97 her, 'you don't wanna come in here hen' and then he's like 'Ach Come on', he just canna help
98 himself
99 R: I just thought it was funny because, I don't know, there is guys like that, boxing
100 G: And then it just stops, you're not expecting it to come out his mouth
101 R: And he just goes on and on
102 C: It's a bit like the show about, *Smith and Jones*, the guys up north, in the lighthouse, that kind
103 of humour, you're just not expecting it, but this guy's like that, I just wasn't expecting it, dead
104 funny
105 **Int: Are there some things we shouldn't be laughing at, things we couldn't really make comedy**
106 **about on telly?**
107 G: Is it not all a matter of context really? You can say all sorts of words and things but it depends
108 how you say it
109 D: Depends how it's handled, it'a all about WW1 and such [*Blackadder*], the Germans and stuff
110 and that wasn't funny
111 G: There was another part in *Blackadder Goes Forth* where he's got a piece of turf and says 'this
112 is the ground we've advanced tonight', and he says 'What scale's this on?' and he says 'One to
113 one' and it was two feet and they'd won the battle that day and how many people had died
114 for it, that's absurd
115 D: It's the army that's absurd
116 R: I think it's because it has a point that it's good
117 D: I think if you're making a political statement, with no serious point there's nothing in there
118 R: You're not offended by it because they're making that point

119 K: When *Blackadder* finished it wasn't funny, all the guys died that wasn't funny (laughter)
120 C: They're not telling all these people war's great they're making you think
121 **Int: Do you think different people find different things funny? (All: aye) and do you think that's individual or do you think certain groups find certain things funny?**
123 R: My grannie and grandda wouldn't find the Rower funny, they'd be fair shocked
124 **Int: Why?**
125 R: It's cos they're old
126 **Int: But what would shock them?**
127 R: A guy being gay, they'd be shocked, stuff like that because they're very old-fashioned
128 C: I don't think a lot of people go for that kind of humour, I think they're more into straight gags and that
130 D: It's that thing where Harry Enfield's [Wayne] Slob, and he learns that penis is another word for knob, and knobjokes, and now he gets that, and folk that kind of line of humour, that Russ Abbott and Jim Davidson
133 K: Disgusting
134 G: I was watching TV in the house and that thing came on, *Jim Davidson's Generation Game*, and he actually started off talking about women drivers, was his first line and I was expecting beer mug, spangly curtain
137 D: That kind of humour, unacceptable humour, sexist humour and racist humour, doesn't have any context or agenda to it, I think you can still, Jerry Sadowitz can be funny, what do you say to a Muslim on Christmas Day?, 'Twenty Benson and Hedges', I do think that's funny and I don't think that's necessarily racist but
141 K: *Goodness Gracious Me*
142 D: Exactly, they're turning that whole thing round and putting it on its head, but Jim Davidson would do more, 'Honky man' you know
144 K: Aye Roy Chubby Brown as well, I detest with a burning passion that man, he actually makes my skin crawl, see when you're on holiday, there's only him and *Only Fools and Horses* on every pub TV, why do people even go, just stay there, why go on holiday at the pub
147 G: There's no other level behind it, that's it
148 D, R: Aye, it's just terrible
149 G: *Goodness Gracious Me* has that sort of thing, it's so like how British people are but Roy Chubby Brown, that's not, that's just not anything funny
151 K: It's not funny, it's terrible
152 [inaudible]
153 K: They always pick on the weakest people, take an easy subject
154 C: Anyone seen *The Nutty Professor*? Eddie Murphy (fat jokes), so funny
155 **Int: Do you think Scottish people have a distinctive sense of humour?**
156 R: I think they do cos they laugh at theirselves a lot more, you see *Chewin The Fat*, it's all like slagging Scottish people, we all think it's funny but other countries people can't laugh at theirselves
159 K: Americans hate people taking the piss out of them
160 R: And all, most of the Scottish comedy is about Scottish people, *Rab C. Nesbitt* and all that, still laughing at ourselves
162 G: They had that thing on *Naked Video* before, where *Rab C. Nesbitt* came from, taking the mickey out of trendy Scottish stereotypes, remember one guy in a car, trying to impress the ladies, had these shoulder pads and white cool socks, and he pressed the button to get the window to come down in his car, and his fly came down, and they just laughed at him and kept walking and that was just like trendy Scottish guys all over
167 K: I think all the British can take the mickey out of theirselves
168 R: But then that English guy, was that an English guy in the back seat [Clip 2], he's taking the mickey out of the Scottish
170 K: We take the mickey out of the English as well
171 R: Aye they do but I've never seen an English show where they laugh at themselves, you never do ... it's always Scottish people, if they're going to take the mickey it's the English at the Scottish people
174 K: Or the Irish
175 C: I'm surprised none of your clips were American cos that's what's on most of the time, on satellite anyway, I like it [inaudible]
177 G: They're not aware of Ireland, the difference in accent, they think we're all Irish
178 K: I lived in America last year and I have so many videos, I'd never tape anything here but there there was so much to watch every night, *Ally McBeal, Frasier, Friends*
180 D: I think the Scots have quite a sick sense of humour as well

181 C: Because we've got that wee dark streak
182 D: Aye, that's it, we're sick (laughter) it's shit, our sense of humour is boggin' aye
183 R: Is it the Japanese or the Chinese, always have their crazy gameshows, the Japanese, they're
184 not supposed to be funny, they just do the most mad things ever
185 D: It's all this torture and that, they're laughing at their own sick humour [inaudible]
186 C: I've never seen a Scottish comedy taking the piss of other folk, there's only one in *Chewin The*
187 *Fat*, and they were two American tourists, two Canadian tourists
188 D, G, K: But they were Scots! Returning home
189 D: 'And that'll be twenty-five pound'
190 C: They don't take the mickey out of any other culture, there's nothing, it's always us
191 **Int: What do you think people from other places think of Scotland when they watch Scots**
192 **comedy programmes like *Chewin The Fat* or *Rab C. Nesbitt* or *Naked Video*?**
193 R: Can't really think of anything
194 C: In England they had subtitles for *Rab C.* I think that's offensive, we can handle *EastEnders*
195 I'm sure they can handle a wee bit of *Rab C?*
196 **Int: Do they really have subtitles on them?**
197 C, K: Aye, uhuh, they were getting *Chewin the Fat* with subtitles as well
198 **Int: No, really?**
199 G: It's just exposure, we're more used to listening to their pronunciation
200 R: It wouldn't be funny with subtitles, I don't see why the English would watch
201 K: It's actually really difficult for people to understand us, I don't have a very broad accent and I
202 was in America I was with loads of other exchange students around the world, and nobody
203 could understand that, everybody could understand
204 D: I used to live in England and it was very similar, they assumed because I was Scottish they
205 wouldn't understand me
206 K: But I was in America and they said 'you speak English very well' and I was like, 'Thanks'
207 (laughs)
208 **Int: Last question, best and worst Scots comedy?**
209 [much to and fro]
210 R: *Chewin The Fat* is probably the best
211 C: See that translating for the Neds
212 R, K: Aye
213 R: Or the crimewatch phone in, the gangster guy, going to batter all the guys, so funny
214 C: That really is spot-on. I thought *Rab C.* was really bad after the first series, the first series
215 was good but after that
216 R: aye, I just got sick of it after a while
217 D: to begin with it was actually really witty and then it got worse, they should never have...
218 G: it's great when he starts to have a go. The first couple of times seemed to be okay but then
219 eventually
220 [inaudible] just got really annoyed when I'd watch it
221 K: *Only An Excuse*
222 **Int: You do like it or you don't like it?**
223 K: Do like it
224 G: I think *IM Jolly* was pants, he only had like a two-minute skit and yet they made him a big
225 show and he's a one-gag man, he's a sad priest who hates his wife, a sad priest, a sad vicar
226 who hates his wife and that's the gag and we get half an hour every New Year
227 **Int: If there was more Gaelic comedy on, would you watch it, if it was on say prime time? Would**
228 **you avoid it?**
229 (various): I don't really like Gaelic stuff, it's not much fun, I don't even speak Gaelic, *Dotaman*,
230 oh God
231 C: I met the guy at the BBC when I was out and I thought 'you wasted my childhood sunshine'
232 and ITV between ten and twelve was just dead
233 G: One time when it was late at night and I was in bed and I was half watching it and I was
234 falling asleep and I couldn't understand what they were saying and I thought I was going
235 crazy and I turned it all up to nineteen [on the volume control] and I realised it was in Gaelic I
236 thought I'd lost my head, all these people going 'tada dada dudu'. It's quite funny when you
237 get an English word, 'nightclub'
238 C: Aye, 'helicopter'
239 D: I would watch it to remind me of my Gaelic friend
240 G: I wouldn't avoid that, if it was funny I'd watch it but
241 D: I'd definitely watch it if it was funny but I'd watch it
242 R: If I don't understand it cos it's in Gaelic I just turn it over

243 C: See them on the news and they seem to be stuck in the eighties
244 D: See on 'Europa' [*Eorpa*] it's really good it's kind of like *Panorama* but it's loads better current
245 affairs
246 C: Is that like on at one in the morning?
247 D: No it's on at teatime but the first series they didn't have subtitles which makes it quite hard
248 C: But if it's on in Gaelic, that's who I suppose it's for
249 **Int: So you didn't like IM Jolly, you thought it was pants, any other Scottish comedy dislikes?**
250 R: I didn't like it either, I used to watch it when I was really wee cos I thought it was funny cos
251 other people were laughing but I didn't get it
252 D: It was like all Scottish comedy at the time
253 R: *The Steamie* was always on at New Year
254 R, K: Love *The Steamie*
255 C: I loved it
256 R: I used to watch it with my Grannie but that's what I like about it, love it
257 G: But that's kind of twee, hold up the washing and it's full of holes, no pattern on
258 R: I like it cos I used to watch it with my Grannie, I think it's a girl thing
259 K: It's a kind of girl thing
260 R: aye it is, all women's humour, it's Scottish humour but it's women's humour
261 **Int: Is women's humour different from men's humour?**
262 K: Aye cos it was talking about all ladies's things

GROUP 6

November 2, 2000, Gilmorehill Centre Rm 217b, University of Glasgow, Glasgow

RESPONDENTS: GAELIC SPEAKERS RESIDENT IN GLASGOW

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years in Glasgow.

M: (blank); Scottish; 19; F; 5 years in Glasgow; originally from Stornoway (native)
L: Scottish; UK; 19; F; 2 years in Glasgow; originally from Eriskay (native)
A: Scottish; Scottish; 19; F; 2 years in Glasgow; originally from Lewis? (native)
C: (blank); Scottish; 19; M; (blank) more than 5 years in Glasgow (young learner)

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group went extremely well and despite emailing several Gaelic language classes all the respondents were close contacts of M (her male cousin and two female friends), a former seminar student of mine. I had asked another former student to come and to bring friends but he had a class clash. There was a technical problem with the tape: the *GGM* sketch had no sound whatsoever so it wasn't mentioned in the discussion. Forms took more than 30 minutes to complete, taking lateness and thoroughness into account. C mentioned he had been set as an exercise in his Gaelic language class an essay on Gaelic humour and had used *Ran Dan* as his example (this episode). He gave me this tutor's name for future contact.

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

Generally the conversation flowed well and evenly, and was relaxed as the respondents were all familiar. They mentioned things I had hoped they would - difference among different islands, mainland perceptions of islanders, religion - and were all avowed fans of *Ran Dan* and Gaelic comedy; one spontaneously mentioned *Ran Dan* as a programme she would watch with her parents. Norman MacLean was mentioned, as was Tony Kearney (a *Ran Dan* actor); Billy Connolly and Phil Kay were also mentioned as Scottish comics.

They agreed among themselves that Gaelic humour exists as a separate style and that it doesn't translate into English well at all; one made the comparison with poetry as untranslatable. They said islanders made fun of other islanders, especially those from Eriskay (looking at L) but I think this was a private joke. Their preference for *Ran Dan* was very strongly marked indeed. They didn't think much of *Blackadder*. Noone mentioned the *AAW* section except L who had noted in her written section that she thought this 'quite good'. As noted above, *GGM* sketch was missing/ not discussed.

1 FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT
2
3 *What did you think of the comedy on the tape?*
4 M: I thought it was quite good, the bits I could identify with like *Ran Dan* and *Chewin*
5 *the Fat* I found them funny. The way the woman was talking, was that *Chewin the*
6 *Fat*?
7 *The chipshop sketch?*
8 M: I think, oh yeah, I've seen a woman like that before, the two old men in *Ran Dan*
9 you think yep, seen men like them from Lewis, absolutely
10 A: yeah I've met men like those in *Ran Dan* just like at home, really amusing, it's just
11 comic, didn't think much of the first clip though, the army men
12 L: I enjoy *Ran Dan* as well, it's something I'm really familiar with, you go to the Park
13 Bar and you meet people just like it, makes it funnier, it's Gaelic humour.
14 A: it's the one I enjoy most and I'm most familiar with, wrote my essay on [for a
15 Gaelic language course]
16 *That sketch?*
17 A: that whole episode. I like *Chewin the Fat*, the [bawdy] fishermen, but you didn't
18 show that
19 M: what about that one with the boxer and the old lady, I did actually find that
20 funny, because it was just so unexpected, this guy battering this old woman, I
21 didn't expect him to do that
22 *What did you expect?*
23 M: I thought maybe once, he'd punch her or something and that would be it but I
24 didn't think it would carry on and on and they guy would hold her up
25 L: I though she'd fight back
26 *To L, A: You expected her to fight him?*
27 L, A: yeah
28
29 *What about the guy in the rowboat going to and from the island?*
30 M: that was quite good that
31 L: I thought it was quite long
32 C: that is the idea people have of islanders, people in Glasgow
33 *Do you think so?*
34 C: yes, Glasgwegians think that, they call us sheep shaggers or something like that
35 *I think perhaps Glaswegians refer to just about everybody [from rural areas north of Glasgow]*
36 *as sheep shaggers!*
37 C: On *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* when Mark Lamarr was speaking, he made a joke,
38 and then 'we're going to get loads of complaints from people in the Islands in two
39 weeks time when the boat comes to collect the post' (all laugh)
40 *Did you find that funny?*
41 C: yeah I did
42 *Or did you also go 'Grrr'?*
43 C: ach no, I'm used to it
44 *What do you others think of the guy in the rowboat, do you think people think that*
45 *of islanders?*
46 A: I think more so further south, in England maybe, I suppose so in Glasgow as well
47 but more so down south
48
49 *Do you actually go to the Park Bar?*
50 All : yeah, yeah we do (all laugh)
51 *Do you see a lot of people like that, dressed up in their* Para Handy *suits?*
52 All: yeah (more laughter)
53 M: it's quite amazing the similarity to what does go on (laugh)
54 *Some of the Glaswegians [already interviews] didn't get that joke, they had no idea*
55 *what the Park Bar was unless they had Gaelic-speaking mates and then they*
56 *really liked it*
57 M: it was, I find it a really funny programme I thought it was really good because, I
58 dunno, you miss the islands humour and they're so good, the men in the

59 programme dress up as these old women they're just exactly the same as old
60 women there some of them, it's quite funny
61
62 *Is there a different sense of humour [among Gaels] do you think?*
63 (general agreement)
64 L: yeah it is, a different kind of humour, and it doesn't come across in the English
65 subtitles, just not as funny
66 *It's funnier in Gaelic than the subtitles?*
67 L: uhuh just can't translate Gaelic humour
68 M: it's just that it's a culture, you have to sort of know what the culture's like, it's the
69 same with everything, we were saying that in on Monday in our [Gaelic] class, you
70 can't translate poems, cos you just don't get all the meaning, it's the same with
71 humour
72
73 *So which jokes didn't work? You ['A'] didn't think much of* **Blackadder?**
74 A: no I just never watched that programme
75 C: I found it predictable, *Blackadder,* you could see the joke miles away, you could see
76 it coming. Oh I still laughed but it's not *Chewin the Fat* standard
77
78 *Do you ever have mixed emotions watching comedy, perhaps like the boxer sketch?*
79 (pause, silence)
80 M: When I'm watching comedy I always try to work out what the joke's going to be
81 and if you guess, there no laugh, and I tried to guess what the joke was going to be
82 in the boxer sketch and that wasn't what I thought was going to happen, that's
83 what made me laugh
84
85 *Do you think there are things in our culture, our society, that we shouldn't laugh at?*
86 A: I think if it's done in the right way, things like Diana dying, there were all these
87 jokes, some of them just pushed, I don't really think you should joke about that
88 anyway, but some of the comedians just pushed the boundaries far too far. I don't
89 know why they think they had to do that, do they have to say it, maybe if they
90 don't...
91 C: someone else will do it
92 A: yeah [inaudible], so they've forgotten how to make something light of it. *The*
93 *Eleven O'Clock Show,* sometimes they just go a bit too far
94 L: too far, yeah
95 A: some of it's quite funny, but as long as it's not too serious. But I suppose that's the
96 way
97 *With what sorts of subjects do they go too far?*
98 A: well whatever's in the news at the time, they pick on it. Sometimes they go on
99 about celebrities, that's quite funny, but when they go on about serious things, war
100 and so on, I just don't enjoy it
101 *Any other sort of comedy that goes too far?*
102 (long pause, silence)
103 C: Roy Chubby Brown, he doesn't hold back anything at all and if he gets a poor
104 reaction he just tells them to f*ck off and they all laugh again, I don't how he's got
105 some sort of licence that lets him get away with all that stuff. My dad never liked
106 Billy Connolly because he swore
107 *Do you like Roy Chubby Brown?*
108 C: I have to laugh, he told a joke, I told it to you ['M'] but you didn't like it ['M' looks
109 blank] I can't remember it now but it was a real bloke joke
110
111 *Do you think there are different jokes for blokes then?*
112 C: Yeah, definitely!
113 L: [inaudible about Billy Connolly] I think a lot of older people are put off by
114 swearing, that's actually like my mum, she hates people swearing, she won't talk
115 to them, but you see her kind of smiling at all these jokes, and she doesn't want to
116 let you see her smile, but I think he's brilliant, apparently he never used to swear

117 so much and he lost a lot of his audience when he did start swearing
118 *Do you think that's an Islander thing, the dislike of swearing*
119 C: No
120 *Or do you think it's a generation thing?*
121 L: I think that's generational
122
123 *Do you think different groups of people laugh at different things?*
124 C: Yes, there's a Highlander/ Lowlander split, there's a male/female split, there's
125 racism, and I've heard loads and loads of jokes about Pakistanis, jokes I would
126 never tell, I couldn't do it, I couldn't say to somebody from Pakistan, I can't
127 actually think of any jokes just the moment, but I just couldn't do it
128
129 *Who do Islanders make jokes about?*
130 C: [mocks the *Naked Video* catchphrase] Stoneybridge! (large laugh)
131 L: I'm not from Stoneybridge! (more laughter)
132 *To L: Why are they looking at you? ...apart from people from Stoneybridge, is there a*
133 *main target?*
134 L: different islands make jokes about different people
135 M: Lewis
136 (general agreement)
137 L: religion can get people started, religion and the way we don't do things on
138 Sundays
139 *And that's different between different islands as well, you've got your Wee Frees and*
140 *your Uniteds*
141 L: [nods] Eriskay and South Uist, and Lewis and Harris hate each other
142 *Is this a neighbourhood rivalry is it?*
143 M: just different islands
144 *Is it like the Glasgow Edinburgh thing, or different?*
145 L: yeah I think it's a bit like that
146 M: cos in the islands there's like different accents, even in Gaelic, there's Lewis Gaelic
147 and you've got the southern islands and Barra, we just make fun of each other
148
149 *Best and worst TV comedy from Scotland?*
150 A: I can't think of any *bad* Scottish comedy
151 (pause)
152 C: Is it Phil McKay or Paul McKay?
153 L, A, C: Phil Kay
154 L: oh yeah I really like him
155 C: I don't like him, an acquired taste that
156 M: I really like *Chewin The Fat*
157 L: Some of it can be really good but some of it I don't think much of, it's very
158 Glaswegian humour
159 *What do you think of the sock puppets [a regular sketch on* **Chewin The Fat**]*?*
160 (pause)
161 *Do you know about the sock puppets? The mock-Gaelic speaking puppets*
162 C: oh yeah!
163 (others look bewildered)
164 *Is that funny?*
165 C: it is cos when I was younger and my Gaelic wasn't too good I would hear Gaelic
166 sentences, a long stream of Gaelic and an occasional English word, they're
167 addressing a common joke in Gaelic
168 *To the others: have you seen them? (no) there's these two little sock puppet*
169 *characters and they, (to C) it's not Gaelic though is it, it's pretend Gaelic,*
170 *'Holasch!' they talk to each other and one of them's wearing a kilt and every*
171 *other word is in English, so they rabbit on a bit and then, 'testicular cancer'*
172 **(women laugh)**
173 L: everyone we know is like that though, people that don't speak Gaelic, they talk
174 about '*Telefios*' and like things that there is Gaelic words for, I reckon politics is a

175 good one, 'Liberoch Democracoch', they always take the mickey, (mock accent)
176 'helicopter going to Broadford hospital' (all laugh) that is very funny (more
177 laughter)
178 A: Billy Connolly does that too, he's hilarious, he goes a lot of Gaelic people sing just
179 three words, they sing 'hello hello' but in a million different ways
180 C: is that when he's singing that song
181 A: he's hilarious, everyone in Gaelic is always singing it
182 A, L (sing): 'Hello hello hello hello'
183 (long laughter)
184
185 *Apart from* Ran Dan, *what other Gaelic television comedy has there been?*
186 C: I don't really think there is any
187 L: There used to be some sketches at the start of *Aig Ire* but I don't think there's
188 much now
189 *Would you like to see more?* (yeah) *Do you watch Gaelic television?* (hmm, kind of,
190 yeah) *just if it's on?*
191 M: yeah, yeah, there's not much comedy on there, *Ran Dan* was like one of the first
192 A: it's really different
193 *Would you like to see more?* (yeah) *Do you think it's important to have Gaelic*
194 *television across Scotland?*
195 A: it's on like three o'clock in the morning, I suppose that's okay if you've got a video
196 which I don't, not where I live now in Glasgow anyway
197 C: what was his name, the name of this famous guy from *Ran Dan*, Tony Kearney, he
198 wasn't in that sketch but he was used a lot, he was a good comedy actor, he signed
199 a contract with STV and when he got to Glasgow they didn't know what to do
200 with him, and now he's presenting prizes on *Wheel of Fortune*
201 M, L: oh that's right
202 *So he's the guy who stands there with the fridge* (yeah) *that's a real [mis]use of*
203 *talent isn't it?*
204 L: he's supposed to be really embarrassed about it
205 C: who wouldn't be? (laughter)
206 L: we just couldn't believe it
207 *That says a lot about STV doesn't it, they couldn't find anything to do with him?*
208 L: it's a shame because he's so talented at comedy as an actor, really really good at it,
209 and on *Ran Dan* he just brought this character to life, he dressed up as this old
210 lady, and she was a cult figure, we used to know so many old ladies just like her
211 [inaudible, about *Ran Dan* actors and characters staging a mock wedding for charity,
212 selling the video, seats for the show and the video sold out really quickly] it was
213 hilarious, Norman MacLean was the priest or something
214 M: they just videoed this mock wedding
215 L: classic island humour, it was hilarious

GROUP 8

November 9, 2000, seminar room, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Sleat, Isle of Skye

RESPONDENTS: GAELIC SPEAKERS RESIDENT ON SKYE

Ethnicity; Nationality; Age; Gender; Years on Skye

A: White; Scottish; 18; M; 2; originally from Islay (native speaker)
B: White; Scottish; 32; M; 2; originally from Glasgow (recent learner)

GENERAL COMMENTS

This group had been organised via the Head of Studies at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Originally I had planned to do two groups, and had recruited vigorously as soon as I had arrived, having ascertained on a previous visit that the students, many of whom live-in at SMO, would have free time on Thursday afternoon. However, many choose to travel to Portree to shop and relax and some had required geology outings that afternoon, so the campus was deserted. Several people has promised to come but didn't. These two, who stayed in the same accommodation block as I did, were procrastinating a 3000-word essay in Gaelic on seventeenth-century poetry and had been drinking spirits for at least three hours. However, they were there and willing so I proceeded, with numerous reservations. One tried to collect others to join the group but failed [they were staff and unable to free themselves from work duties for an hour].

COMMENTS ABOUT CONTENT

The conversation was particularly informal and relaxed, and is peppered with casual slang and some showing-off throughout. The close friendship between these two is demonstrated by the many jibes at the other's expense (especially Island/Teuchter vs Glaswegian/Ned references). As well as the usual clip tape I showed them a clip of the *Chewin The Fat* sock-puppets speaking mock-Gaelic; A had not seen these characters before and was frustrated that he couldn't understand them, expecting them to be speaking 'true' Gaelic and perhaps being slightly confused through drink. B found it much funnier. Because there were only two of them and they had difficulty concentrating, I found myself asking questions about every aspect and almost every clip rather than trusting their selection of important issues. Their view on inter-island rivalries is coloured perhaps by their living in close proximity with people from all parts of the Gaidhealtachd (whereas Group 6 were predominantly Lewis-based); as a group of students they seem to set these aside as irrelevant and for the benefit of group cohesion. Contrast their dislike of copied programme formats with SMcN's comments in the interview. For some reason questions about Scottish comedy brought out discussion of *Father Ted.*

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

I also took the opportunity while in Skye to converse as widely as possible. One staff member told me a joke about the difference between Gaelic and yogurt (yogurt is a live culture); two mentioned the proposal for the digital channel. The students in my accommodation watched *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* before their regular Thursday night out at Isle Ornsay, translating the questions and choices into Gaelic for themselves. Before this show they had watched a Gaelic programme; they were critical of the disparity between subtitled translations and the actual phrases used and laughed at the use of English words like 'dust and din', thinking the subtitler must have been 'Glaswegian' to use such a phrase. Criticisms of subtitles included inaccuracy, distraction annoyance, use of English and that 'you can't turn them off'.

GAELIC 8
A (male Islay 18); B (male Glasgow 32).

1 **Int: What did you think of the comedy on the tape?**
2 A: I would say the Gaelic one, that was funny, the one at the end there, I found that really funny,
3 and the Asian one was funny, that was really funny, was that one *Chewin The Fat*? Yeah,
4 *Blackadder*, no I wouldn't say that was, they were all quite funny, aye, they were all quite
5 funny.
6 **Int: What about the one at the beginning with the man in the car?**
7 B : No sweeties
8 A: Aye, that was pretty shit
9 B: Aye, I didn't think that worked at all
10 A: Maybe is would have been better if they'd have stopped earlier
11 B: What was it?
12 **Int: It was from a series called *All Along The Watchtower***
13 B: See the sign said 'no sweeties'
14 A: I can't remember it anyway
15 **Int: How about the boxer sketch?**
16 A: Oh that was funny as fuck that, I really did! (laughs) At first I was thinking 'what are they
17 actually gonna do here'? And then he just started thrashing her
18 B: (laughs)
19 **Int: Did you think that was going to happen?**
20 A: No I didn't at all, that's why it was so good. At first I thought....
21 B: I was expecting her...
22 A: Aye, I thought she was gonna hit him and knock him out, but no, he just thrashed her. I
23 thought that was funny cos I'd do that to my grannie (laughs)
24 B: (laughs) She was a mean grannie
25 A: (laughs) She was, she took away my Milky Way [chocolate bar]. But anyway, onto another
26 bit
27 **Int: Just tell me a bit more, first he knocks her out, did you think that was the end?**
28 A: No, right, I kept expecting her to lump him one back, but it just didn't happen, he just pulled
29 her up, no that was kind of ...
30 **Int: What did you think of the guy in the rowboat?**
31 A: Oh that was great that
32 B: (laughs)
33 A: 'I row and I row and I row', that was great
34 **Int: I've asked people from all over Scotland where they think this guy is, where do you think**
35 **this guy is?**
36 B: I don't know...
37 A: I could picture that being Islay and Jura, 'I row and I row and I row back to Islay to get...'
38 B: It patronises the Islander...
39 A: '...Some more [food]...'
40 B: It's just a more Islander joke...
41 A: '...Or something like that. And I row and I row and I row back again'
42 B: Any island as far as I'm concerned
43 A: More like Jura, I think Jura would be a good one, from Islay to Jura, 'and I row and I row and I
44 row back to my house'
45 **Int: People do row that [strait]?**
46 A: Oh aye, they row all over the place! There's that many places to go, Barbados and all that, 'I
47 row and I row and I row'
48 **Int: So you mentioned the Gaelic sketch, tell me more about what was funny in that?**
49 A: I found them picking her up and then showing her a good night, and then it's the Park Bar, I
50 found that bit funny but after that it wasn't
51 B: It was quite good, the ceilidh
52 A: The Park Bar in fact was good but the bit, they know the sailors or whatever
53 B: It was almost two sketches, the boys and the Glasgow taverns but yeah it was quite good, it
54 was quite funny
55 A: It was, but they could have done it a bit better, a lot better
56 B: Not difficult (laughs)
57 A: Aye

58 **Int: Chipshop sketch?**
59 A: I just, just laugh at that
60 B: I do laugh at the two old geezers, like two old Glasgow fags and all that
61 A: (laughs)
62 B: 'Oh we're just here for the banter' and all that
63 A: (laughs)
64 B: I think she's brilliant
65 A: Aye
66 B: The patter and all that
67 A: [mock voice] 'Black pudding', that's good
68 B: [mock voice] 'Oh that'll be sixteen pound'
69 A: (laughs) Just that wee bit exaggerated with it
70 B: You can't imagine them two being about a place like that
71 **Int: Do you think it's exaggerated?**
72 A: Oh yeah
73 B: it's accentuated a wee bit
74 A: I've never come across anybody like that
75 B: I have! (laughs) up in Maryhill, plenty of people like that, my uncle lives there, he's a
76 lovely guy
77 **Int: Do you think Scottish people have a distinctive sense of humour?**
78 (Pause)
79 B: I don't know I think they have a wee bit, but I couldn't
80 A: I would say they did, I think, I like the way they take the piss out of themselves, that
81 happens a lot, I like it when that does happen
82 B: I don't know, I don't find all these sitcoms funny at all...
83 A: That [*One*] *Foot in the Grave* thing, that's shite
84 B: Yeah, that's a really good [example of poor comedy], I was trying to think of that one, it's just
85 like taking the piss kind of thing out of people you know and the situation of the day, the
86 minister comes round for tea and the house isn't tidy enough, I think, 'argh'
87 A: *Father Ted*, that's what I was trying to think of [fills in form] was that last year? Well
88 anyway *Father Ted* is my favourite show in the world.
89 **Int: What did you enjoy most about it?**
90 A: [writing on form] It was Dougall in *Father Ted*, Dougall was just that thick! He reminded me
91 of wee [name] at home, just that dense, really really stupid, no common sense, it was just really
92 funny, cos my Grandpa was a minister and he was meant to be quite funny as well and I heard a
93 few stories about him, I don't know, I found it really funny.
94 B: [mock look of being overwhelmed by 'A'] I like it, aye
95 A: (laughs)
96 **Int: Do you think Gaels have a distinctive sense of humour?**
97 A: Ah no we don't, Gaels?
98 B: It was funny, in saying that, see when I was just out trying the people up here [to join the
99 group], they were saying 'Oh can't do all this, she'll expect people to come back with a line
100 straight away' and I was, to that girl upstairs, 'but you know what you're saying about' but we
101 just take the piss out of each other really
102 A: I think
103 B: Just taking the piss out of each other, but some folk never think of, some folk wouldn't agree
104 with it
105 A: That's a hard one that
106 B: That guy in the rowboat, you could see that...
107 A: I didn't understand that as being...
108 B: ...Wouldn't be laughing at it because it's teuchters and stuff like that
109 A: [inaudible]
110 **Int: You disagree?**
111 A: No, I don't think it is, but I don't know. I couldn't really say if it was or if it wasn't
112 **Int: Best and worst Scots TV comedy?**
113 A: *Rab C. Nesbitt*, definitely funny, very funny
114 **Int: Rab C.?**
115 B: I've only watched selective programmes, I haven't seen enough *Rab C.* I do like Billy Connolly
116 and his live stage act
117 A: That's not a TV show though is it?
118 **Int: It was on television**
119 A: Oh aye he's been on TV but I would say he's more a pub-circuit comedian. He's quite good, he's

120 really funny
121 **Int: What's so funny about his comedy?**
122 A: Billy Connolly's shit-hot. He's quite good at taking the piss out of Scots people, yeah I like
123 that, sometimes!
124 **Int: He does a sketch, have you seen it, a song, about how you only need about three words of**
125 **Gaelic to sing: 'hi-lo, hi-lo'**
126 B: Aye! heely-hoo, heely-i, (laughs)
127 A: (laughs) But if anybody else tried to taking the piss out of Scotland it's not quite so funny,
128 because he's like Scottish, I think it's good that he does the Glasgow series in there
129 B: I think he takes the mick out of the [Glaswegian Scots] language kind of thing, I think that is
130 quite funny, like when you see [the sockpuppets on] *Chewin The Fat* doing all that stuff 'och
131 nich na helicopterich' and all that. ('A' laughs) and I hadn't heard of that, but I have seen
132 some people doing that, I think most of us here recognise definitely a stereotype of that, not
133 talking in general but there are examples.
134 **Int: Worst comedy?**
135 B: That's a real taboo [inaudible] sometimes it just is, it just depends what it is
136 A: It's quite hard to say I think, I can't think I've really got a bad memory though I can't even
137 remember what I watched here, let alone... Ach I don't think I've ever watched anything and
138 gone 'that's terrible'
139 B: Sometimes I find things funny but then other people have taken offence to it, then it's even
140 more funny, but not really in a bad way, we should be able to laugh at anything, it would be
141 terrible if [a character] were paralysed from the waist down, I could laugh at somebody doing
142 that, if somebody laughed at me in that position then I really wouldn't think that's cool, but
143 it's human nature to laugh at other's misfortunes, it's wrong to say 'you cannae make up a joke
144 about that'
145 **Int: Can you think of an example where you've been watching TV with other people and they've**
146 **found something funny and you've not?**
147 B: My parents, I've got a pretty similar sense of humour to Billy Connolly and all that, so they
148 watch sitcoms and all that, I don't find that funny, I can't laugh at them, but generally
149 they're religious so anything with words or shagging or anything like that you know that's on
150 the telly they're switching over.
151 **Int: Do they watch television comedy?**
152 B: They maybe watch it a wee bit but as soon as [characters] start swearing (laughs) I can't watch
153 anything at all with them you know, it's just a nightmare, I just have to go out. I can see
154 they've got a sense of humour, but I think they'd have a better sense of humour if they weren't
155 religious, cos they weren't always like that, but definitely, anything to do with anything we
156 like, sexual references, they're very selective with their viewing
157 A: Aye did you like *Father Ted*?
158 B: I thought it was hysterical
159 A: Really really good
160 B: They've never seen it [inaudible]
161 A: My favourite is where Ted's giving up smoking and he's craving and he sees Dougall dressed
162 up as a big cigarette, I always think of that, there's loads of them, some guy Daniel
163 O'Donnell, some guy like him he's meant to be twenty or thirty and he was like an eleven
164 year old school boy, he was just being a spoilt wee brat, 'I don't like that mummy' you know,
165 and then all these old grannies were trying to break in
166 B: Aye break in
167 A: Like a horror film or something
168 B: Aye there were stuck in the living room with all these grannies at the window, wanting to get
169 an autograph
170 A: Aye that was funny, never mind, anyway, back to your questions
171 **Int: Do you watch much Gaelic television?**
172 A: Aye I watch it if it's on yeah but I wouldn't make a point of watching
173 B: It's hardly on anyway you need a time for Gaelic programmes
174 A: Aye it's at stupid times, you've got lots of other times during the day, you're not going to
175 watch Gaelic TV at twelve o'clock at night
176 B: *Eorpa*'s OK but there's no Gaelic programmes that I'd watch, I'd probably look out for them at
177 the weekend but there's not really any...
178 **Int: If there was more Gaelic television would you watch more?**
179 A: Aye if there was something that was actually worth watching I'd watch it, but what are my
180 chances? (all laugh) Gaelic TV needs to be more entertaining, it's not an educational
181 programme, it's just like you'd watch it for the sake of watching a programme, not trying to

182 copy anything else, something to do, you'd just watch it and it's funny or interesting but not just
183 'let's just learn about'...
184 B: I've never really seen that *Ran Dan* cos I wasn't a Gaelic speaker when it was on, but I
185 wouldnae mind actually seeing a lot more of that
186 A: What was it anyway?
187 B: That Gaelic comedy show, that sketch was from it, you always hear about people 'oh that
188 *Ran Dan*'
189 A: Was it funny?
190 **Int: I think it came out a few years ago and was recently repeated but it was very popular**
191 B: I'd totally have never have seen it I've only seen the one
192 A: I've never seen it at all, not once
193 B: I've seen about two sketches or something never even seen the whole thing, I'd like to, I've
194 never seen anything like that, Gaelic funny or a thing like that.
195 A: I think what's wrong with Gaelic TV is they're always trying to copy something, something
196 that's already been done, but once it's already been done, like *Machair* and all that shit, they
197 just try and make a Gaelic soap opera, and it just a load of shite, I only watched a couple of
198 episodes
199 **Int: Why?**
200 A: It was just pish
201 B: I used to like taking the piss out of it when I was in Glasgow. The soundtrack was always
202 wrong, even when they were in the bank and all that you'd like hear the sheep neighing [sic]
203 in the background, they never really changed it, everywhere you went there was like 'baa
204 baa',
205 A: Real Scottish countryside, 'baa baa'
206 B: In the background stuff they're always be like cows going, I just found it funny
207 A: It was pish awful it really was bad, the only thing I've ever heard about *Machair* is 'pish'
208 **Int: Is that because it was Scottish or because it was Gaelic?**
209 A: Ach I don't know, it's just the formula, they just do the same things all the other soaps do,
210 there's too many, I don't like it, soaps piss me off anyway, *Brookside* and all that shit, like
211 we watched it last night [together in the student common room] I don't think, the acting in it
212 was crap, it was just crap storyline in flashbacks
213 B: [inaudible]
214 A: But *Machair* was pish, *EastEnders* is the exception to everything, *Coronation Street*, that's
215 pish, but *EastEnders*, everybody never smiles, everybody hates everybody, you want to see
216 who falls out with who next, or maybe that's just a glitch in my personality, if there was a
217 Gaelic version of that it'd be good but nobody could ever match that
218 **Int: But if they could?**
219 A: But you could never match it anyway, just as I said if we try to copy someone else it'd just be
220 shit it wouldn't be the same, you could set it in Glasgow no problem, like Bonhill or
221 somewhere like this, some really rough horrible place
222 B: I always thought we should have a Glasgow soap and all that
223 A: All walking about with tracksuits and big socks and trainers and all that, Neds
224 B: Taking drugs and spewing up
225 A: Aye fighting the streets with bits of rope and all that
226 B: Think there's be a bit of money in that, you'd get the viewers flocking in
227 A: That's why I think *Rab C.* was funny, cos it was like touching on reality and there is folk like
228 that
229 B: There must be important TV bosses who think, 'you cannae do that'
230 A: That's why I think *Rab C.* was funny cos there is actually folk who are really like that
231 **Int: No!**
232 A: Not *just* like that but aye, loads of people on Islay who are just like that
233 **Int: Well that's someone making fun of Glaswegians, but who do Gaels make fun of? Is there a**
234 **difference between the islands?**
235 A: It's not really obvious, it gets quite hard to
236 B: I don't really laugh *at* them, just the way they talk
237 A: [demonstrates mock Gaelic accent]
238 B: It's just like the accent but I'd not really know
239 A: If anything I'd say it about Lewis, coming from Islay, folk from Islay would say Lewis Gaelic's
240 a load of shite, they talk about
241 **Int: Why?**
242 A: Folk from Islay think there's a lot more English words in it, like 'helicopter', you know, or
243 'bicycle' and all that, they use it themselves but they just sort of blame Lewis for it

244 **Int: Does everyone from the islands pick on Lewis then?**
245 A: Everybody's all the same, 'if we get that Lewis Gaelic that would be terrible', I've had
246 teachers from Lewis, they're not rated, that's from Islay
247 B: I've not lived here all the time so I notice you taking the piss out of each other
248 A: Well here I don't know if you'd get it anyway cos everybody's from everywhere, you wouldn't
249 get away with [taking the mickey out of different islands' accents]
250 **Int: You'd have no friends?** (all laugh)
251 A: Aye! there's just more like folk, you take the piss out of all of them, just normal things, I don't
252 know if they're associated with being a Gael and all that
253 **Int: Do you take the mick out of mainlanders?**
254 A: Oh aye, Weegies ('B' laughs) no obviously we take the piss out of Neds and all that, the
255 accent I think, the way Neds dress, it's funny cos they take the piss out of us, teuchters and all
256 that, we take the piss out of them all the time

TRAINEES

November 9, 2000, seminar room, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Sleat, Isle of Skye

RESPONDENTS: GAELIC SPEAKERS RESIDENT ON SKYE

The following summarises a group interview with trainees on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's Diploma course for Gaelic television production, made available to me by their tutor and using their own time. There were eleven television production trainees, all of whom were either native Gaelic speakers or advanced learner speakers. That week their classes had covered camera work in their studio and extra Gaelic language to keep their language work going. In general they have coursework from 9.30 to 4.30 five days per week plus additional work as required (covering the *Mod*, for example); in their second year they are placed in various Gaelic television production companies and work full-time, receiving about £8000 tax-free as a bursary. It is a well-known course among Gaelic educators and there is some dissension among academics and others, with some feeling that the students are either a) paid too much or b) exploited by the employers. (Compare with SMcN who felt the trainees were insufficiently specialised in their first year to cope with the industry work in their second year). These trainees were all enthusiastic about their course.

There were three men and eight women aged from early twenties to early thirties; to gain a place on the course all had either an HND or degree qualification and most had some broadcasting experience. They answered the question 'Where's home?' with the following responses: Edinburgh, Glasgow, 'the top half of Scotland' (near Inverness), Mull, Isle of Skye (2), Isle of Barra, South Uist, North Uist, Isle of Lewis (2). In other words, the range of the Gaidhealtachd was well covered.

The discussion is transcribed as fully as was possible given the sound quality (the respondents sat at a long thin table around the microphone) and it is interesting to note how their two-word responses soon give way to longer and longer opinions. At one point, during the discussion of subtitling, one male took a 'Devil's Advocate' position and provoked (or perhaps, *staged* for me) an argument about subtitles and the accessibility of Gaelic television. This section is transcribed with a seating plan and identifies who said what, within the context. Elsewhere the conversation was more openly directed to the group at large, and no particular contributor(s) dominated or directed the discussion. The people who challenged the 'Devil's Advocate' were women at the other end of the table, and the exchange was quite heated but yet good-natured; after the interviewer tried to move the subject on there were some further jibes in each direction, suggesting that this was a typical 'wind-up' manoeuvre of his. (It was his birthday and he was keen to go out soon.)

The respondents did speak over each other and some spoke rarely and quietly, but most of the conversation is presented here in as much detail as possible.

After discussing genre spontaneously the topic turned itself to ideas of quality and perceptions of Gaelic programming, including whether its function is educational for children and learner-speakers or reflective of culture and society for native speakers (or both). There was much agreement and well-intended disagreement within the group; the members of the group had different levels of Gaelic and different perspectives on language use, but they also knew each other well and showed respectful argumentativeness, having shared close work and living environments [for over two months when I met them].

	E	B	*	*	*	A
*						
	*	D	Int	*	C	

1 GROUP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
2
3 *What would you like to see on Gaelic television?*
4 more drama but that's really expensive to make
5 more sketch shows:
6 *Ran Dan* (much agreement)
7 soaps
8 more contemporary music programmes:
9 not the *White Heather Club*!
10 talk shows:
11 but any Gaelic programme needs to be good quality or we look such fools
12 I know but more accessible programmes are important too in the Gaelic medium,
13 we need an Oprah
14 Gaelic programmes suck unless they're made from a Gaelic view
15 we definitely need to look at the scheduling issue
16 there are some very good Gaelic programmes which are just as good, and watched
17 by people who don't have Gaelic:
18 *Air Chuairt* is watched by more people than there are Gaelic speakers (laughter)
19 I really like that nature programme they did on otters
20 I wouldn't actually say that's Gaelic though, it's just dubbed over
21
22 *Does that count against [the channel's] quota?*
23 probably counts as a different kind of hours
24 it's probably how they managed to get the quota up, they can promise this many of
25 these
26 it's much cheaper to do, to buy in and dub:
27 that'll be our jobs in two years (laughter)
28 but it's often on irrelevant or trivial issues not really cultural, not Gaelic
29 I would say there's not much for twentysomethings (agreement):
30 what do you think [children's show] *Dé A-Nis* is? (laughter)
31 let's be serious, this is on tape!
32 [joking voice] "Paul stuck up his middle finger" (more laughter)
33
34 *You've said there's not much for twenty-somethings, what would you like to see*
35 *more of?*
36 that's quite hard to answer, you have to think, 'what do I watch' [in English], I
37 suppose music shows
38 magazine shows perhaps:
39 No, not more magazine programmes, no, come on, that format doesn't work
40 they can be really good [in English]
41 there are occasional ones in Gaelic
42 oh not *Splaoid!*
43 but you don't get magazine programmes in English for 20s (disagreement)
44 which ones? they're only for teens (agreement)
45 I think you do need a lot of money to make those programmes well, it's like you
46 say, we shouldn't put all the money into one sector of the audience
47 it's always the funding row isn't it? (agreement)
48
49 *Did someone say soap?*
50 aye, I wouldn't mind seeing a Gaelic soap, a better one:
51 but not *Machair!*
52 it was so poor
53 but we watched it
54 it was terrible, the walls wobbled
55 it was closet watching!
56 you didn't admit to it! (agreement) we did!
57 our exchange student watched it, but we didn't, we thought she was really weird
58 [person who brought the subject up]: I never watched it, I watched the first one

59 it was on against EastEnders, we'd forget to put it on it cos it was on at the same
60 time
61 what's the point if noone watches Gaelic TV?
62 I'm not going to watch it just because it's in Gaelic
63 No I'm not criticising you for saying that but we do need to watch Gaelic TV
64 but then it might not be interesting
65 I will watch Gaelic programmes if they're good
66 Yeah I do watch Thursday nights TV [on BBC 2]
67 but that's only cos I want to improve my Gaelic
68 quite a few people watch for that
69 I think that's alright
70 that's the question though isn't it, is it for others or for Gaels?
71
72 (some inaudible comments, including aspects of language teaching at Sabhal Mòr
73 Ostaig, how it isn't the language you speak when you go home and talk to people
74 in bars — much laughter — for example, and the irrelevance of seventeenth-
75 century poetry to modern Gaels in conversation)
76
77 we need more Gaelic arts shows:
78 aye, that'll fill two minutes (laughter)
79 but *Cunntas* [a Scottish BAFTA award winner] was so good:
80 is that the show you had a section on each week (much laughter)
81 but it is good, my pals from art school used to watch it ('cos they're your mates')
82 well I know I was on it...
83 we all know you were on it!
84 I can't believe your self-promotion!
85 it is good cos my pals from art school used to watch it ('big crowd' more laughter)
86 cos it was about contemporary art, there isn't a contemporary art programme
87 in English
88 and is it still going on?
89 was it just arts or was it music as well?
90 could be anything artistic ... [inaudible] I suppose it did use a lot of money but it
91 was so original
92 [inaudible about funding]
93
94 ***How do you feel about English subtitling?***
95 yeah it's good
96 there's too much of it
97 it's probably required
98 I think it's good for people who don't have Gaelic
99 but no good if you do
100 if you have Gaelic you can't get rid of it though, you find yourself reading the
101 bottom of the screen, you get lazy and reliant, my tutor says to cover the bottom
102 of the screen so you can't see them
103 no I think it's better to have them
104 why can't they have them in teletext?
105 but if you don't have that then you can't watch it
106 then noone else would watch it
107 but it's such a minority language, we need it
108 children don't
109 ***Children's programming isn't subtitled***
110 you have to think about who the audience is and why they're watching, and
111 obviously some of them have less Gaelic than others and obviously the subtitles
112 help to encourage them
113
114 ***So you're saying you think it's important that Gaelic programming is accessible?***
115 A) but what is it supposed to do, is it supposed to be encouraging people to learn
116 Gaelic by watching documentaries on otters? That's not an effective way. So it

117 should be for Gaelic speakers:
118 B) since when is TV about learning a language? (various interjections)
119 A) well if it isn't then why are there subtitles, why are there subtitles at all?
120 C) they're *Speaking Our Language* [a successful series of videos for Gaelic learners,
121 produced at and by SMO, parodied on Gaelic sketch show *Ran Dan* and in Gaelic
122 conversation generally]
123 B) *Speaking Our Language*! (laughs)
124 A) if that's the case why have subtitles in the first place, it's just about viewership,
125 that's all, television, Gaelic television
126 D) the viewership comes from all across Scotland
127 A) why bother having it in Gaelic then? If they did it in English they could have lots
128 of viewers
129 D) I don't think it's about viewership at all, it's important what is does for the
130 language, for someone learning it
131 E) to increase sympathy for the language
132 A) what does it do for the language?
133 D) that's a terrible question!
134 A) no it's not, come on now, take that smile off your face (laughter) tell me, you're
135 flogging just one point of view... as usual!
136 D) (protests, laughter) What? can't I be...? But...
137 [A interjects freely]
138 D) why do you watch English TV?
139 A) uhuh. (Pause, laughter) Why do I watch English TV? Because I can understand it
140 fundamentally (laughter)
141 D) that's not the point!
142 A) I don't watch any French television cos I can't speak the language (laughs)
143 D) you watch it for its entertainment value!
144 A) yeah but that's what I'm saying, the subtitles won't help the entertainment value
145 of a programme
146 B) do you not watch any foreign films?
147 A) yes but not for the language!
148 C) oh yes he watches foreign films (laughter) but they're all dubbed!
149 A) there's no words in the films I watch! (men laugh, women groan in protest)
150
151 ***OK, scheduling then, changing the subject slightly (laughter)***
152 D) he always takes that side (agreement)
153 A) I thought you at least could think about why they're there, question it, don't
154 blindly accept that subtitles are necessary. Some people with Gaelic don't want
155 subtitles
156 D) I think they're quite useful
157 C) personally, I quite like it. I sometimes like to watch a Gaelic programme where I
158 don't have to listen so hard, you can just read it. But I do sympathise
159 ***I think it's actually required, it's a criterion of the [broadcasters'] licences that all***
160 ***Gaelic language programming is subtitled, except children's, which is exempt.***
161 [inaudible comments]
162
163 ***So back to the topic of scheduling? [Name] you've said [earlier, at dinner] that they***
164 ***show [Gaelic programmes] at times like 2am. Are they really on at 2am?***
165 they are yeah
166 aye
167 especially on Tuesday nights
168 there was one this week I wanted to watch on Tuesday night and they moved it, it
169 changes all the time, but it was on at half-past twelve
170 is this on STV? Yeah it changes for the football
171 how are they going to attract audiences if it's on at 2am?
172 do they think we're going to stay up just to watch it?
173 if it was on at a decent time of day I'd watch more
174 it should be possible for Gaelic [television programming] to get prime time slots

175 on BBC2 on Thursdays they do
176 there's nothing on a good times for us during the day
177 well there is kids programmes
178 true, in the afternoon
179 BBC2 Thursday nights, the rest of it I don't stay up for
180 *There's some on Sunday teatime?*
181 some on STV, yeah
182 I think it's a cycle, because of the nature of the production it's shown late and then
183 there aren't the audiences
184 we need this digital channel [currently under discussion, set-up costs of about £30m
185 were regularly cited throughout my stay on Skye] then we can set our own hours
186 what about some Gaelic programmes on Channel Four, they do nothing, it's
187 rubbish, rubbish
188 we need quality programmes before 24-hour quantities, we can't supply a 24-hour
189 channel
190 ***Are you able to get digital television here [in the Western Isles]?***
191 Can't even get the radio in some parts!
192 But less people are taking up digital:
193 it's too early to say
194 if there's noone investing in it we can't do it
195 You can get it through SKY:
196 You can't get digital here (agreement)
197 Do you not have to have a satellite [dish]?
198 Yeah you have to have a satellite
199 No but can't you get
200 No if you want to watch digital you have to have a satellite [dish] and [digi-] box
201 A what?
202 A digibox and minidish
203 ***Would you want a digital Gaelic programming channel?***
204 (General agreement)
205 I can't see how it would work, there's just not [the programmes made], maybe thirty
206 years down the line when we're all out there but right now eight or ten hours a
207 day would be utterly impossible, the industry couldn't do it
208 but think, if this thing happens, it'll increase the demand for Gaelic television
209 it's not an issue of 24-hour TV but about Gaelic culture
210 it might never happen
211 they can't get out of it, they'll have to
212 what do you mean they'll have to?
213 it's gone through [to the Scottish Parliament]
214 yes but we'll always have to fight for someone to fund it
215 but £30 million isn't that much money
216 it's far more than they give us now (laughs) it's three times more than we currently
217 get
218 I just get embarrassed about the idea of a 24 hour channel, what will they show?
219 well they'll have more funds to do more
220 I know but they can't do twelve hours a day, we don't even get twelve hours a week
221 I think they probably will do language TV, so much language teaching and so much
222 culture. I just hope it doesn't look like Channel Five, which is 24-hour and
223 complete trash
224 well we'll all be the presenters, so it'll be better looking anyway
225 is that what you're going to be doing? do you think that's the kind of jobs we'll get?
226 if they want someone old then [name] will be laughing!
227
228 ***The last question is, what are your worries or concerns for Gaelic broadcasting?***
229 just that the language will keep declining, declining and declining:
230 we're not replacing ourselves
231 not for lack of trying! (laughter)
232 yeah I would say that's a worry

233 [inaudible comments about rate of decline versus rate of new learners and new
234 native speakers]
235 [inaudible comments about the problems of their course teaching them SMOG
236 rather than their—in this speaker's case—native Gaelic used in social situations at
237 home which she felt was important within a family for connecting the
238 generations, and the effect of SMOG on the popularity and reach of Gaelic
239 medium television]
240 yeah it's not much use, nobody understands [SMOG]
241 *What* is *that? I've been here a whole day and all I hear about is the difference*
242 *between SMOG and Lewis Gaelic:*
243 Lewis Gaelic is the true Gaelic! (laughter)
244 *That's the one with all the English words in is it? (laughter) Is it? (Pause)*
245 there's too many different groups all against each other
246 too many fuddie-duddies in the politics
247 aye
248 too busy guarding their patch and controlling their salaries, which is why we need
249 the change to the law [to give Gaelic protected status] then it would be accepted
250 It is a kind of racism though, on official forms you can have Gujerati or Arabic or
251 Chinese but they never bother with Gaelic. And people can slag us off, you'd
252 never slag off a Pakistani but it's still racism, just not recognised, you know they
253 think we live in caves
254 [Gaelic] is not even recognised as a skill by employers outside the Gaidhealtachd, the
255 application forms are in English, it's not considered important except in our area
256 of broadcasting
257 there's not so much worry [about the viability of the language] now the schools are
258 well established but [protected status] is still important, to show that there's a
259 commitment to the culture
260 but there's still the attitudes against us [Gaels] on the mainland
261 the schools don't guarantee the role and place of Gaelic, they still need more money
262 and training in the schools, they can't get the materials, I know teachers who say
263 they buy English [language] story books, translate them, and stick the Gaelic
264 words on for the children because there just isn't the investment in educational
265 materials, and there books don't reflect the culture, so we're not there yet, and I
266 don't think television can keep the language alive on its own
267 one thing we need in Gaelic television is new faces (laughter) I'm absolutely sick of
268 those same people week after week, as far as the future of Gaelic goes, of Gaelic
269 television goes, I wouldn't be here if I didn't think... there are some well talented
270 people, absolutely talented people in my class (laughter), so that's eleven of us,
271 and this course will produce another eleven next year and however many each
272 year on, the point is, will we get the chance? That's the thing.
273 the chance to do what?
274 to work in Gaelic television
275 yeah we will, we're well sorted (laughter) as far as having this course I mean
276 but can the [Gaelic television] industry sustain all these new people every year?
277 so long as we cover our backs, we'll be alright, forget about everybody else!
278 It would be good if there were enough speakers that is was used more as a first
279 language, that we weren't just looking for broadcasting jobs but that you could
280 use Gaelic everywhere, like in Stornoway they'd use Gaelic in the bank, maybe
281 that's a bit stupid:
282 No it's not stupid
283 ok maybe it's not stupid, but it would be good to use Gaelic in all sorts of workplaces
284 and public places, if people could speak Gaelic every day then there would be a
285 stronger future
286 well if you have Gaelic that's okay, but we don't just live in a Gaelic world, are you
287 going to stop people working in the bank if they don't have Gaelic?
288 No but in Edinburgh they didn't actually get a Gaelic primary school because
289 Edinburgh [Council] said, 'there's not enough numbers' there weren't including
290 how many actually wanted to go, they were predicting twenty-five but thirty-five

291 actually wanted to go
292 if that's thirty kids who want to learn Gaelic in Scotland and can't then that's thirty
293 fewer teachers, the idea's obviously got potential, why can't they have a Gaelic
294 unit or a Gaelic school or whatever, where's the block? it's obviously political will.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CHECKLIST

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS
- tapes, batteries
- mike, cables
- recorder
- TV/ video booked
- videotape

PAPERWORK
- namecards
- confidentiality/consent forms
- response sheet
  - personal data
  - viewing preferences
  - response to clips
- question sheets
- checklist

CONSUMABLES
- juice
- water
- coffee, tea
- biscuits

ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

INTRODUCTIONS
- Thanks for attending
- Explain procedures:
  - recording
  - confidentiality
  - paperwork
  - how these parts are important to the research
- Collect consent forms
- Allow them to fill in paperwork up to page two
- Check namecards

TRANSITION
- Determine extent of knowledge of topic
- Clarify topic
- Explain what will happen today
- Pause for questions
- Show videotape
- Allow them to complete page three
- Check they are ready to discuss

INFORM THEM TAPING WILL COMMENCE

START TAPE RECORDER

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

INITIAL

Which image or joke or line was MOST STRIKING?

Thinking about the tape, name a clip that was especially funny
describe how the JOKE WORKS?

Thinking about the tape, name a clip that was especially unfunny
describe how the JOKE DOESN'T WORK?

Any OTHER comments on the kind of humour here?

REFLECTION

Which clips do you RECOGNISE most ? Any you DON'T RECOGNISE?

Does anyone have MIXED EMOTIONS when they laugh at these things?

Are there jokes here or things in society we SHOULDN'T BE LAUGHING at?

———> follow all answers including digressions, DO NOT PROMPT

SOCIAL GROUPS

Do some PEOPLE find different things funny?

Do some GROUPS find different things funny?

———> follow all answers including digressions; DO NOT PROMPT

Do Scottish people share a DISTINCTIVE sense of humour?

Do people in YOUR LOCALE [Glaswegians/ Edinburghers/ Gaels] share a
distinctive sense of humour?

BEST AND WORST Scottish television comedy?

———> if time remains, follow up HANGING DIGRESSIONS

THANKS

CLOSE

CLIP TAPE SHOWN TO FOCUS GROUPS

These clips have been transferred to one tape except for the last which for technical reasons could not. This is explained to the group before the tape is shown. Later redubbing allowed this to be incorporated onto the same tape but it remained the last clip, for consistency. I felt it unfortunate that the Gaelic clip should be singled out in this way but technical difficulties were significant. Another clip from *Elaine C. Smith* couldn't be used at all, which I regretted.

CLIP ONE
A scene from *Blackadder Goes Forth*
35 seconds

Scenario: General explains latest battle plan to Blackadder (World War One)
Characters: General, Darling (upper-middle class English dunces, somehow in charge); Blackadder, clever, insightful, less highly ranked.

(Interior: an office with maps, a battlefield model and a leather-topped desk)

General: Field Marshall Haig has formulated this new tactical plan to ensure final victory in the field.
Blackadder: Ah, would this brilliant plan involve us climbing out of our trenches and walking very slowly towards the enemy sir?
Darling: How could you possibly know that, Blackadder? That's classified information!
Blackadder: It's the same plan that we used last time, and the seventeen times before that.
General: Exactly! And that is what is so brilliant about it! It will catch the watchful Hun totally offguard! Doing precisely what we've done eighteen times before is the last thing they'll expect us to do this time! There is however one small problem.
Blackadder: Everyone always gets slaughtered in the first ten seconds.
General: That's right!

CLIP TWO
A scene from *All Along The Watchtower*
25 seconds

Scenario: Driver delivering Colonel to remote airforce base in Caithness
Characters: Driver, 20s; Colonel, 30s, both Airforce men

(Outdoors shot, car interior, with view of misty countryside about them)

Driver: Good job we filled up on that motorway sir, this place could take a bit of finding.

(Passes sign which reads, 'No petrol for sixty miles')

Colonel: Oh don't worry, noone at HQ had the foggiest idea about where it was either. Ah still at least we know we're definitely in Scotland.

(Passes sign which reads, 'No sweeties for 32 miles').

CLIP THREE
A sketch from *Goodness Gracious Me*
90 seconds

Scenario: a group of Asian men and women having dinner on a Friday night in Bombay's best English restaurant.
Characters: Asian men and women in their 30s; English waiter in his 20s

(Interior scene: the group is seated about a round restaurant table)

Nina: Anyway I love English food
Nathan: Ay, get off, you just fancy the waiters, innit!
Man A: Okay, main course, what's everyone having?
Nathan: (with bravado) What's the blandest thing on the menu?
James (waiter): The scampi is particularly bland.
Nathan: I'll have that, and bring a fork and knife.
Man A: Listen, I'm going to have the same as him except I'm also going to have... prawn cocktail!
Woman B: (sing-song) You'll regret it in the morning!
Man C: Gammon Steak please (collapses unconscious)
Man A: Jams [sic], tell you what, give him the gammon steak but leave off all your crap, none of your peaches halves or your pineapple rings, not in his condition, you know what I mean?
Man D: I'll have the gammon steak but crap on the side OK?
Nina: Um, could I just have the chicken curry please?
Man D: Nina! It's an English restaurant, come on, you've got to have something English, none of your spicy *scheisse*
Nina: But I don't like anything too bland
Nathan: Have something a little bland, huh? Hey Jay-mas, what have you got that isn't totally tasteless?
James: Well the steak and kidney pie is only little bit dull
Nathan: There you go Nina, steak and kidney pee
Nina: No Nathan it blocks me right up, I won't go to the toilet for a week.
Man A: Nina that's the point of going for an English.

CLIP FOUR
A sketch from *Velvet Cabaret* (the pilot for a series renamed *Velvet Soup*)
120 seconds

Scenario: An elderly woman enters the gym wanting to train as a boxer.
Characters: Woman, 70s, middle class, carrying shopping bags, wearing glasses; Boxer, 30s, dressed in singlet 'Dennistoun' (inner city working-class area) on the back, boxing gloves, shorts; Billy, 30s, sparring partner.

(Interior: a gymnasium boxing ring, walls covered with pictures of boxers)

Boxer: Can I help you missus? You looking for your grandson?
Woman: No it's me, I want to become a boxer.
Boxer: Oh you can't be a boxer missus, you're an old woman
Woman: Oh thta's sexist young man, and it's ageist. I've seen plenty of old men fighting in the ring, and it's not any different for me.
Boxer: Because you're an old woman, you'll die!
Woman: That's the risk the boxer takes. I am championship material my boy.
Boxer: Oh missus! Right, prove me wrong, right. I'll give you a wee jab, just a wee stiff jab, just to see how your jaw takes it.
Woman: Just a minute (takes off spectacles), thank you. On you go now!

(Boxer flattens her with one punch)

Boxer: There you are missus (helping her up) c'mon now, you're okay, nice and easy, just get a hold of my arm, there's no rush, you take your time, there you go, that's you. You see, it's not as easy as it looks, is it?
Woman: Mmm
Boxer: Mmm-mm. There you are. Billy you keep a hold of her. You alright? You steady, just make sure you're steady, that's you, ok. And JAB! Jab! Jab! Jab! and a strong right hook! Now just hit me, hit me once, just once!

(Billy helps Woman punch Boxer, he beats them to the blow)

Boxer: Too slow!

(Boxer grunts and flares nostrils, shot in slow motion, before lunging across ring at her)

Boxer: C'MON!

CLIP FIVE
A sketch from *Chewin The Fat*
45 seconds

Scenario: Two camp men order dinner at the chippy
Characters: Two gay Kelvinside men (upper-middle class Glasgow) in their 60s; gum-chewing girl in her late teens from south Glasgow/Ayrshire serving

(Interior: standard chip shop)

Girl: 'Zat yous?
Man 1: Oh absolutely, 'zat's us
Girl: 'Zat all yous are wanting?
Man 2: 'Zat is all we are WAN-ting
Girl: That's one chicken supper, one single special fish, one haggis, one black pudding, one hoff [sic] pizza supper, one roll and fritter, three pakos, two sachets of red sauce, and one bottle of Tizer. Sixteen poun' eigh'y.
Man 2: There you go my delightful wee bauchle, keep the change
Girl: What about your suppers?
Man 1: (leaving with a wave of the wrist) Oh hang the suppers! We're paying for the banter!

CLIP SIX
A sketch from *Velvet Cabaret*
120 seconds

Scenario: Rower tells his story in monologue, to camera
Character: Rower, 30s, woolly hat, thick anorak, bearded, strong accent

(Exterior shot of Rower in boat, intercut between him heading toward small town and in the opposite direction, toward a small island)

Rower: Every day I get into my wee boat and I row and I row and I row over to the mainland to but my milk and my bread. Then I row and I row and I row over to the island. I pop the bread in for toasting and I pour myself a wee glass of milk. And then, nearly every day, I realise I have forgotten the marGHarine [sic]. And

so I row and I row and I row back over to the mainland to buy it, and then I row and I row and I row over to the island, only to discover that my house is on fire because of that bleddy toaster. And so I row and I row and I row back to the mainland to fetch big Walter the fireman, and I row and I row and I row over to the island. And Walter says to me, 'Shipperston, your house is not on fire' and I say, 'I know, but my bed is warm and there's plenty of milk'. And Walter says, 'As long as I'm here, let's make some love'. And for the next three hours our bodies are locked together in manly passion. (Pause) Later, Walter stands by the fire getting all smoky and sooty so that people will get the impression he has been wrestling with flames. And you know, in a funny way, that's not far from the truth.

CLIP SEVEN
A sketch from *Ran Dan*
90 seconds
Note: Except where stated the sketch is delivered in Gaelic with English subtitles

Scenario: two naive Lewismen take two working girls to the pub in Glasgow
Characters: two men in navy boilersuits and flat tweed caps, one has taped spectacles; two women in blonde wigs, short skirts, high heels and heavy makeup, clearly prostitutes

(Exterior shot, industrial area, heavily graffittied wall as backdrop)

Lewis 1: Isn't this great! Glasgow on a Friday night!
Prostitute 1: [*In English]* Hello boys, why don't we go back to your place and have some fun?
Lewis 1: Fun? Is that what they call it? What do you think?
Lewis 2: Ach it can't do any harm
Lewis 1: *[In English]* Come on girls, we'll show you a good time!

(Exterior establishing shot, The Park Bar in Argyle Street)
(Interior, the bar, men sit together with a drink in each hand, the women sulk and smoke)

Lewis 1: Hi! They're not too keen on Donald MacRae, eh?
Lewis 2: No but did you notice they know lots of Lewismen? The sailors anyway
Lewis 1: Aye that's funny right enough, they don't look as if they've ever been to sea.

APPENDIX

VELVET SOUP (2000-2001)

'Broken comedy' experimental sketch show for BBC Scotland including writing by Connell and Florence (later writers for Chewin The Fat), and starring Julie Duncanson, Mark McDonnell, Steven McNicoll and Gavin Mitchell. This show developed from an experimental radio show Velvet Cabaret which BBC Scotland hoped would provide an opportunity for new Scottish writing talent to develop.

CHEWIN THE FAT (1998-2001)

Sketch show produced by Colin Gilbert and Avril Chamberlain for BBC Scotland, based on the radio show of the same name. Starring Ford Kiernan, Greg Hemphill and Karen Dunbar, *Chewin The Fat* was screened in six-part series with a strong structure of familiar scenario repetition. Sketches were linked from week to week with repeated characters and catchphrases, some of which have stuck firmly in viewers' collective vocabulary. The lighthousekeeper's 'Gonnae no dae tha', and the young men's 'Aye, you'll take a drink' or 'wank, good guy' are particularly prevalent. Other characters and scenarios which string the series together are the lonely woman shopkeeper, the smokers, the bawdy old woman, the flamboyant West End gay men, acting audition failure Ronald Villiers, and the news translated with signing 'for the neds' (weedy but tough young urban unemployed). Some sketches were written by Kiernan and Hemphill, including the original scenario for 'Jack and Victor', which in 2002 produced a spin-off BBC Scotland sitcom series *Still Game*. Other contributors include the young new writers Iain Connell and Robert Florence, who also wrote many sketches for *Velvet Soup.*

THE BALDY MAN (c.1995-6)

Silent slapstick comedy starring Gregor Fisher, *The Baldy Man* developed from a sketch in *Naked Video* (early 1990s). The character became most famous through an advertisement for Hamlet cigars. As a dialogue-free comedy *The Baldy Man* was similar to *Mr Bean,* though the latter's demeanour is warmer and somewhat more attractive.

PARA HANDY (c.1994-1996)

Based on the books by Neil Munro, *Para Handy* details the voyages of the eponymous Master

Mariner, the 'Vital Spark' and its crew as it puffs about the west Highland coast. This BBC sitcom was directed by Ron Bain, and starred Gregor Fisher, Rikki Fulton, Sean Scanlan and Andrew Fairlie (who also played *Rab C Nesbitt*'s son Gash).

ABSOLUTELY (1990-1995)

The sketch show *Absolutely* starred Morwenna Banks, Jack Docherty, Moray Hunter and Gordon Kennedy and brought regular sketches like 'The Inter Hebrides Broadcasting Corporation' and catchphrases like 'Stoneybridge' to Scotland via Channel 4. The writers and actors formed the independent Absolutely Productions, responsible for *Armstrong and Miller* (sketches, 1996-2000, Channel 4), *The Creatives* starring Docherty and Hunter (sitcom, 1998-1999, BBC), *Stressed Eric* voiced by Gordon Kennedy (animation, 1997, 2000, BBC), *The Jack Docherty Show* (chat, 1997-1999, Ch5), *The Morwenna Banks Show* (sketches, 1998-1999, Ch5) and more recently, Dom Joly's *Trigger Happy TV* (practical jokes/ sketches 1999-2001, Channel 4). As an independent production company largely producing material for Channel 4 and Ch5, Absolutely Productions no longer focus on Scottish themes.

RAB C NESBITT (1989-1999)

Occasionally employed but usually 'resting', Rab C Nesbitt lives in a council flat in Govan, a grim suburb on the southern edge of the River Clyde once central to shipbuilding industries but now very run down. *Rab C Nesbitt* is characterised by themes of poverty and urban malaise but also a Glaswegian warmth and earthiness. The accents and patter can be impenetrable for non-Glaswegian viewers and especially when Rab has one of his impassioned rants. The programme grew out of sketches from *Naked Video* and after its pilot (*Rab C Nesbitt's Seasonal Greet*, BBC, 31 Dec 89) it enjoyed nine series plus specials for the World Cup in 1990 ('Fitba') and at Hogmanay (1992 and 1994). Episodes often had Scots words in the titles—'Wean' (child), or 'Semmitry' (a pun on Rab's semmit or vest)—or referred to contemporary Scottish phenomena—'Eorpa' (a Gaelic-language documentary series); or 'Buckfast' (a cheap tonic wine favoured by underage boys). The last episode was broadcast in June 1999. Rab (from the Scots form of 'Robert') was played by Gregor Fisher, a Scottish television comedy stalwart. Gregor also starred as *The Baldy Man* (another *Naked Video* spin-off) in the early 1990s and has performed in two new sitcoms since *Rab C Nesbitt* ended. The programme also starred Elaine C. Smith who had her own show *Elaine* in 1998-1999 in which she performed recorded stand-up routines and sang jazz and ballads. *Rab C Nesbitt* was written by Ian Pattison and produced by Colin Gilbert, firstly at BBC

Scotland and later at his Comedy Unit production centre on commission.

CITY LIGHTS (1987-1991)

Glasgow-set situation comedy starring Willie Melvin as Gerard Kelly, a bank clerk who dreams of being a novellist. Four series were produced for the BBC, written by Bob Black and directed by Ron Bain and Colin Gilbert. Comedy stalwarts Elaine C Smith and Iain McColl (from *Rab C Nesbitt*), and Jonathan Wilson (*Only An Excuse*) also starred.

SCOTCH AND WRY (1978-1993)

Sketch show from BBC Scotland, starring Rikki Fulton, Gregor Fisher and Tony Roper (Jamesie Cotter in *Rab C Nesbitt), Scotch and Wry* was the founding father of the Scotland-focused comedy series. *City Lights* writer Bob Black contributed sketches (as did John Byrne), and *CL* stars Gerard Kelly and Jan Wilson also appeared. Although Rikki Fulton is equally famous in Scotland for his stage partnering with Jack Milroy as Teddy-boys *Francie and Josie*, his character the Rev IM Jolly became a national institution as it not only closed *Scotch and Wry* but it also preceded BBC Scotland's Hogmanay specials. IM Jolly was a grim-faced drunken Free Presbyterian minister balanced by Rev David Goodchild, his smiling accidentally-drunken equivalent.

Mary-Doll.   Rab C Nesbitt

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