Stand-up as Interaction:
Performance and Audience in Comedy Venues

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores stand-up comedy as live performance focusing on the manner in which audience, performer, jokes and venue combine to make a unique interactive experience. It outlines the failure of previous literature in humour research to move beyond simple stimulus models of joking and laughter. It argues for a shift in the study of humour towards *in situ* observation which draws on both conversation analysis and audience research. Through the observation of stand-up interaction the thesis demonstrates that audience laughter is organised in a consistent fashion and that the transition between comedian's talk and audience laughter is socially organised. In turn the thesis examines the openings, middles and closings of stand-up routines. It demonstrates that despite a considerable variety of performance style, comperes' introductions, the commencement of the comedians' routines themselves and the closing of acts, are organised around a set of common features each with a preferred order. Further, it demonstrates the active role played by the audience as well as the performer in maintaining this ordering. It shows how a feeling of "liveness" is built up out of these sequences as they are constructed specifically for, and respond to, individual audiences. Looking at the central section of stand-up routines this work demonstrates how jokes told by comedians incorporate a series of rhetorical and performance specific techniques which work towards announcing to an audience that a point of completion is approaching and that laughter is the preferred response. It is argued that this serves to minimise the audience's risk in laughing in a group situation and so is beneficial for both performer and audience. A new system for understanding stand-up is presented which pivots on notions of performance, interaction and liveness.

You know what your trouble was, Willy?
You always took the jokes too seriously.
They were just jokes.

<u>The Sunshine Boys</u>, Neil Simon

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CHAPTER 1

"THIS SOCIOLOGIST WALKS INTO A BAR...": STAND-UP AND SOCIOLOGY

> **Mark my words, when a society has to
> resort to the lavatory for its humour,
> the writing is on the wall.**
> **Alan Bennett**

Laughter, humour and joking surround and permeate our every business. They smooth our contact with other individuals, they pepper the media we are exposed to and they play a special part in the relationships we maintain. However very little attention has been paid to any of this by sociologists. It is as though only the unpleasant or the unequal is suitable focus for sociologists' concerns. Indeed when joking has been opened to research it has tended to be investigations of how it propagates sexism, racism or other forms of out-grouping. Looking at this literature it is very easy to forget what our everyday experience tells us - that joking and laughter are usually pleasant, warm and thoroughly unacademic experiences. Of course sociology is not alone in it lack of interest in humour and humour as a pleasurable thing to do, - but it provides a starting point.

The problem may be seen as an aspect of the secret guilt that is often associated with exploring pleasurable activities. The Protestant in us raises its ugly work ethic and points out the fun, and especially not rip roaring laughter, sits uneasily with hard work, dedication, and perseverance. Conversely, it may be because we can see inequality around us in concrete form, it has constancy and structure whereas laughter appears so much part of the moment, will 'o' the wisp, resistant to being pinned down with the laborious tools of the analyst. This thesis attempts to challenge such viewpoints and to show not only that joking and laughter should be

studied but also that they can be investigated sociologically with precision and accuracy.

What this thesis does is to take a very specific, and in many ways a very simple, site of joking. It looks at live stand-up comedy and explores the interplay of jokes, performance, laughter, venue, and audience which make up the experience and allow us to enjoy it. As such one of the main concerns of this thesis is to understand the significant differences between the telling of jokes and the experience of stand-up. It seeks to establish how audience, venue and comedian each contribute in manufacturing the stand-up performance which is recognisable by all concerned as well as the academic researcher as being a crucially different experience from the informal sharing of jokes between friends or colleagues.

What thesis will not do is provide any additional or supplementary theory on the working of the joke text itself. As will be seen, the mechanics of joke construction and been thoroughly analysed elsewhere and therefore, I shall not hypothesise what makes a *good* joke different from a *bad* joke. Nor shall I investigate the quality of incongruity established by various comic jokes, acts and sequences as such avenues are not a major area for concern within an empirical sociological study of humour. What I am primarily interested in is looking at the way a joke is performed. I will explore how it is received by an audience and how the dialogue between performer and members of an audience is ordered, maintained and regulated.

At a point in time when humour research is at its most institutionally organised Chapter 2 provides a systematic and historical overview of the field and its pre-history. It looks first at the basic trinity of classical humour theory: superiority, relief, and incongruity and offers a history of the development of each in turn and an assessment of their suitability as tools for my project. This leads into an examination of joke theory, which although a far more recent development in humour research is, with its linguistic foundations, having a profound influence on current work in the humour field. One of the main problems with these views of humour is that they tend towards ahistorical and asocial view of the phenomenon. They remove jokes

from time, place and teller in order to understand its workings. The asocial basis of these theories is addressed through a consideration of the various sociological perspectives that have been developed to explore, understand and explain humour, joking and laughter. The chapter concludes that a new way of looking at humour is needed, an approach based in the analysis of the way jokes are told, how hey are laughed at and the interactional space they inhabit.

The interactional space for stand-up is the comedy venue in which a performer and an audience work together to manufacture and evening of comedy. As such Chapter 3 proceeds to an examination of the mechanics this environment exploring what makes a comedy venue as well as how members of an audience fit into and negotiate themselves within it. Again I will review previous research in order to establish its weaknesses and its shortcomings as an academic approach to stand-up from a sociological perspective. Parallels will be drawn between stages of development in humour and audience research and a the case presented for adopting recent ethnographic approaches of the latter to inform the former. Building on this I will present a detailed description of what going to see stand-up involves, how audiences recognise stand-up and how commonality between venues is encouraged as beneficial for all concerned parties.

Chapter 2 and 3 present the building blocks of the theoretical perspective taken by this thesis and Chapter 4 takes a methodological turn. It explores how an *in situ* understanding of stand-up can be constructed and examines how such research can be conducted. It presents a set of criteria that such a new approach to humour has to meet in order to undertake the proposed project. It argues for an approach based upon conversation analysis to underpin it. With its focus on the step by step movement of interaction between individuals, the chapter indicates the implications conversation analysis has for conceptualising an active audience. The chapter finishes with a description of the problems met and process undertaken during my own research. It shows how access to comedy venues was negotiated and how the primary data which informs the following four chapters of this thesis was gathered.

Chapter 5 begins the examination and analysis of stand-up performance data. By exploring the relationship not only between punchline and laughter but between audience and comedian, the basic deficiencies in traditional humour research are once again highlighted. The assumed, natural, and omnipresent value of laughter as the consequence of a joke's punchline cannot be empirically substantiated. Drawing on examples from natural conversation as well as stand-up, the chapter demonstrates that audience laughter is regular and organised in ways not recognised by previous humour research. The chapter develops the merits of a conversation analytic approach to stand-up as a distinct form of interaction. This approach pays special attention to the exchanges between comedian and audience and their placing within the flow of the comedy performance.

The next three chapters together offer a structured analysis of the stand-up itself. In turn they look at openings, middles and closing of acts with a view to examining at how they are organised, how they work, and how they involve the audience within them. Chapter 6 looks at the importance of a successful opening in the organisation of stand-up performances. It shows that, despite their apparent diversity, openings share a common set of organisational elements which have a number of similarities with conversation openings. It looks at both the introduction from the compere that comedians receive as well as the opening of the acts themselves. It offers examples of rule following openings and explains examples which deviate from the common organisation identified.

Moving on from openings, Chapter 7 looks at the middles of comedy performance and more specifically considers the jokes and humour that make up the bulk of it. In opposition to joke theory the chapter will look not at how jokes are organised as *textual* units but how they are told as *interactive* events. It offers an alternative view of audience laughter which links it not with joke punchlines but rather with a set of rhetorical devices which set up opportunity for laughter, not directly stimulate it. Thus, an audience is not "made" to laugh by joke punchlines as has often been assumed. Rather, the way comedians perform jokes lets an audience know that laughter is expected and acceptable. Responsibility for a laughter response is passed on to the audience. Drawing parallels with work already done on other forms of

podium talk such as political speaking the chapter shows how a series of rhetorical formats are used with varying frequency in professional joke telling to maintain audience alertness as well as signpost when laughter is expected. It will demonstrate that these techniques are indeed linked to audience laughter before identifying a number of other performance techniques which are used specifically in stand-up.

Chapter 8 looks at the way comedians close their acts. It starts with the basic yet so far unarticulated observation that stand-up routines don't just finish but are brought to an end. Like Chapter 6 it explores the links between the organisation of conversation and the social organisation of stand-up and establishes a system of moves which are used and contributed to by performer and audience to manufacture the stand-up sequence. It ends by offering a graphic and rule-based view of the closing of stand-up performances.

Chapter 9 brings this thesis to a close and presents a series of conclusions based on the arguments and evidence of preceding chapter. The ramifications of the thesis for further research in humour studies and audience research in general are sketched.

CHAPTER 2

HUMOUR THEORY: CLASSICS, JOKES AND SOCIOLOGY

"A joke's a serious thing"
Charles Churchill, 1763

In the last two decades research into humour has developed into a multidisciplinary research area with its own literature, its own internal debates and a new wave of theory coming out of it. What was once primarily the concern of philosophers and literary critics is now a rich cross-disciplinary field of empirical, conceptual and analytical study. Since the addition to humour research of (social) science methodologies in the 1920s numerous disciplines have influenced its evolution. This development has been founded not only on an academic basis but also by an increasingly organised institutional one as international conferences, journals, professional bodies and research institutes have come into being.

1976 witnessed the first International Conference on Humour and Laughter in founding of the Western Humor and Irony Membership (WHIM) and its associated publication, WHIMSY. These have developed since then into the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) and its own journal edited by Victor Raskin. At the same time courses dealing specifically with humour are increasingly less rare if still not common[1] and journals such as Humor: International Journal of Humor Research, Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor and Studies in American Humor and the French language Humoresques enjoy a growing readership.

Like any other rapidly developing field, humour research is acquiring its canonical texts. These include Goldstein & McGhee (1972), Chapman & Foot (1977), Raskin (1985), Apte (1985), Morreall (1987) and Ziv (1988).[2] As this explosion of research

interest and activity has continued, a pattern of major concerns has emerged and been consolidated. These focus on the following:

- *Causes* of laughter and smiling
- *Structures* of humour
- *Functions* of humour
- *Effects* of humour on the individual
- *Role* of humour in the individual's character
- *Development* of humour viewed diachronically
- *Differences* in humour in various cultures

Each of these concerns has its own literature and principal researchers and is, in turn, divided into various subgroups of interests and approaches. However, they do, in general, tend to draw upon elements of a common body on which to build the foundations of their own concerns. Throughout this chapter it should be borne in mind that both the strength and weakness of humour studies is the manner in which it has a multidisciplinary appeal or at least appealed to scholars from a multitude of disciplines.[3] As a result, key ideas are tested, investigated and integrated by a variety of methods, concerns and specialities most of which fall outside the remit of this chapter. In addition, and partially through this process, these ideas have been redefined, specialised and reinterpreted to highlight specific concerns. Thus even key terms such as *Incongruity*, *Superiority*, and *Relief*[4] that organise the first section of this review,[5] can often have differing implications in different academic milieus. Without an accepted nomenclature for *Humorology* (the term coined in Apte 1988 for a humour studies discipline and approach) it is impossible (and probably not desirable) to use the discussion in this chapter to derive definitions for the terminology used. Instead it seeks to provide some understanding of the broadness and multiplicity that these terms both encompass and against which they struggle.

This chapter gives an overview of that foundational literature and represents an initial mapping of the theoretical framework of this thesis.[6] To accomplish this, the chapter below is divided into three sections. The first will take the broadest

approach by providing a map of humour research from its roots in classical philosophy to contemporary researchers. This will explore the three main conceptual themes of the field by outlining in turn the history and attitudes toward superiority theory, relief theory and incongruity theory. The second section of this chapter will turn towards an examination of the contribution made to humour studies by the recent development of the linguistics-influenced joke theory. The third section of the chapter will finish with an examination of the social and sociological theories of humour. This section suggests ways in which each of these approaches, while valuable, is lacking as far as concerns this current thesis. Finally, with extensive illustration, I will point out the unsubstantiated and false assumptions that have become ingrained in humour research Through this I will argue for a transformation in humour research by introducing new way of examining humour as an interactional experience.

2.1 CLASSICAL THEORIES

Most humour theory can easily be viewed as being derivative of one or more of the three main strands on humour conceptualisation namely superiority, relief and incongruity. These categories represent the "classical theories" of humour research. Each of these three theories has a separate foundation and set of concerns. For example, superiority theory assumes a common psychological make-up for humankind in which the desire to dominate is omnipresent; relief is based upon on understanding of physiology in which various energies are channelled and dissipated throughout the body and incongruity assumes a specific, linear cognitive model.

Many influential theories of humour, laughter and joking draw elements from more than one of these schools of thought. The primary purpose of the following review is to set out the constituent demands of each school of though. A further aim is to highlight the shortcomings of each approach and to give context to the work presented in later chapters of this thesis. The review, necessarily selective, will thus place the reader in a better position to appreciate the way my current work transforms and develops these perspectives.

2.1.1 Superiority

Although incongruity is the predominant contemporary theory of humour, superiority is not without its modern advocates such as Charles Gruner (1978)[7] who provides an analysis of humour in which, like Plato (429-347 BC), equates laughing with *laughing at* (specifically at the faults of friends rather than enemies). Superiority theory suggests that humour is essentially, if not ubiquitously, aggressive and the laughter that is based in superiority is the humour of ridicule, of the ludicrous and of the grotesque. This form of humour requires those who laugh at a joke viewing themselves as better than the butt of the joke. It is also known as disparagement humour (Suls 1977, McGhee & Duffey 1983, Zillman 1983), putdown humour (Zillman and Stocking 1976) and deprecatory humour (Davies 1991a).

We can see such humour as, in Plato's words, "a mixture of pain and pleasure" (Philebus, 48, p.56). It involves laughter at the folly of others, usually, and is directed against those who we perceive as inferior to ourselves (see also Aristotle, 1977). This is why, for Plato and Aristotle (384-322 BC), such joking is malicious, it is a vice, an activity that should, where possible, be avoided and discouraged. Aristotle argues that while laughter *per se* is not a vice, the failure to recognise the limits that mark the acceptability or otherwise of the joke is: "Because ridicule is a sort of deformation, and some forms of deformation are forbidden by law, and presumably some kinds of ridicule should be forbidden too." (Ethics, Book IV, Chpt. 8, p.168)[8] Therefore, in order for imperfections to be amusing, we must assess them as relatively minor in character (see also Bergson p.149, Rapp 1949 p.87-88, Zijderveld 1983 p.9-10, Flaherty 1984 p.76 and Powell 1988, p.93).

Through such arguments the creation and appreciation of humour becomes one that involves working with notions of propriety and responsibility (see also Radcliffe-Brown, 1940):

> [T]he Ludicrous is merely a subdivision of the Ugly. It may be defined as a defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. Thus for example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not cause pain.

> Aristotle, 1977, Chpt 5

Similarly in The Passions of the Soul René Descartes (1596-1650) emphasises the object of humour must be of "some small evil" (Article 178). However, he adds that we must be perceive the butt of humour in successful joking as somehow *deserving* the derision and scorn of the joker. This view of humour as being somehow socially responsible is by no means common to all theorists of superiority. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), for example, argues his superiority theory of humour from a viewpoint of people in a constant struggle for power and the will to prove superiority over others. For him humour is a way of both exhibiting power over others and a demonstration of superiority. In Human Nature (1650/1969) Hobbes states "we triumph when we laugh" and explicitly suggests that there are two types of laughter:

1. Laughter at one's self - at our jokes, at our ability to exceed our expectations, or recognition of our own strengths which congratulates and consolidates our own superiority (the opposite to self-deprecatory humour and might be termed self-congratulatory humour)
2. Laughter at someone else - at their "infirmity or absurdity", the recognition that they are our inferiors, the realisation that they reinforce our eminence.

> Hobbes, 1650, Chpt 8,§13

Although Hobbes recognises the harm that the use of humour to attack others can do, the aggression of humour is essential and integral to its structure. He regards both the use of humour and the manner in which it is appreciated as containing a violent component. Central to the Hobbesian notion of superiority is the influential concept of "Sudden Glory", the belief that laughter is the result of an abrupt recognition of meaning or status. This Hobbes defines in Leviathan (1651/1974) as:

> [T]he passion which maketh those *grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are

conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep them selves in their own favour, by observing the imperfection of other men. And therefore, much laughter at defect of others, is a sign of pusillanimity. For of great minds, one of the proper works is, to help and free others from scorn; and compare themselves only with the most able.

Hobbes, 1974, p.52

Descartes suggests that laughter at the shortcomings of others (rather than the other themselves) is a beneficial activity that functions towards "reproving vices by making them appear ridiculous" (Articles 180). Such a viewpoint of superiority humour as a social corrective is most often associated with Henri Bergson (1859-1941).[9] Laughter, for Bergson, is not occasionally social in function but is essentially so. Laughter is the *social gesture* that highlights and embarrasses deviants into improvement or correction.

Polarities are central to Bergson's theory of laughter as he distinguishes between not only proper and improper social behaviour but between animal and human, the natural with the mechanical, the elastic with the inelastic. Unlike animals,[10] humans are governed by the opposing forces of *Tension* and *Elasticity*. Imbalance in these forces results in "sickness and infirmity and accidents of every kind," (1911, p.18) and therefore have social ramifications beyond the individual. In Bergson's phraseology we laugh as people's "*mechanical inelasticity*" (1911, p.10)[11] which is the result of habit, the result of acting solely in accordance to our previous experience without paying heed to our contemporary situation.[12] This formulation suggests that when we laugh, we laugh at the mechanical behaviour of an individual rather than at the individual themselves.

Such aggression expresses a psychological superiority that displays itself through laughter. However, for Albert Rapp (1949) such battling of the mind is just the most recent incarnation of physical aggression and bodily superiority. Although he makes no reference to Bergson, Rapp attempts to develop an evolutionary theory of laughter[13] with his suggestion that laughter is the socialised and modified variant of an atavistic demonstration of victory over an opponent that he calls "thrashing

laughter" (p.84). Similarly, as society evolves and censures violence the physical battle becomes a battle of wit and the joke becomes the symbolic representation of the barbaric duel. The "duel of mental skill" (p.88)[14] in which laughter still marks the winner and the derision of the looser supersedes warfare. In Understanding Laughter (1978) Gruner again paints the picture of our pre-vocal ancestors fighting "tooth and nail" (p.43) to settle differences with laughter being simultaneously a signal of victory and mockery over the inferior opponent. The verbal conflict becomes less formalised as the modern joke develops, the exchange becomes increasingly removed from the site of conflict as issues of sport, play, and fun become socialised into the joking ritual.

Agreeing with Rapp's evolutionary narrative, Gruner[15] is perhaps the most vocal proponent of aggression theory in contemporary humour studies with his placing of Rapp's theory firmly in the context of Hobbes' sudden glory.[16] Joking for both Rapp and Gruner is the contemporary version of battles. It has developed in accordance with a desire for social efficiency: the joking battle leaves no member of the community dead, physically wounded or unable to work. However, although the importance of the humiliation of the opponent becomes less central to the joking exchange, laughter still marks a victory over an inferior opponent. Where Gruner begins to supplement Rapp's theory is the importance he places on the development of language. This, he argues, not only made ridicule manufacturable on demand without the need for physical diversion, but allowed for exaggeration and distortion. Thus it was no longer possible to demonstrate victory only against those who are *actually* inferior. Language makes it feasible to *represent* others as being inferior through deliberate mockery.

The difficulty with superiority theory is that it requires such a malleable understanding of its key concept. Physical and mental superiority, social responsibility, mockery of the afflicted, unfounded denigration and a contest for dominance are all included within definitions of superiority and make any cohesive definition difficult to arrive at. Further, such notions of superiority and the acts they inspire are common to other forms of attack and derision that are clearly not associated with humour.[17] The parameters of who or what is superior and to who

often need redrawing or broadening in order to fit superiority theory so that they lose analytical cohesion. For example, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1756) points out if superiority is the essence of humour then it follows that greater superiority will lead to greater hilarity. However he suggests, using animals as an illustrative example, it is not the large differences (and therefore the greater superiority) which we laugh at but the lesser ones and even similarities. Thus we tend to find apes, cats and dogs funnier as they tend to be more easily personified than "asses, and owls, and snails" (1983, p.29).[18]

2.1.3 Relief

Theories of relief tend to be based on variations of what might be called the head-of-steam principle. That is, *something*, whether it be "psychic energy" (Freud, 1905/1976) or "nerve force" (Spencer, 1911) builds up within a person's system and, having no more useful purpose, must be released. Such a release must be physical, abrupt and socially acceptable and laughter is thought, by relief-theorists, to ideally fit that purpose. Relief theory assumes that this build-up of surplus energy is inefficient if not detrimental to physical or psychological well-being which is why a spontaneous release is necessary rather than a slow dissipation. Such a theory obviously has appeal to those who wish to link good-health and laughter[19] by arguing that laughter reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, helps the immune system, increases pain tolerance, etc.[20] As such, relief theories tend to be primarily theories of laughter rather than theories of humour.

However, there is also a rich background of literature outlining a theory of humour grounded in the link between laughter and the release of tension, energy or from seriousness. For example, although Alexander Pain (1820-1903) is more commonly associated with superiority theory he wrote in 1859: "It is the coerced form of seriousness and solemnity without the reality that gives us that position from which a contract with triviality of vulgarity relieves us, to our uproarious delight."

This is a very unusual concept of relief as Bain's release is an escape from what Mulkay (1988) would refer to as "serious discourse" (p.22). In fact, Bain's work extensively criticises other relief theories, especially as found in Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) essay on comedy, which stresses physical relief as the cause of humour. Spencer proposes a general theory for laughter by turning to physiology. He builds on observations concerning reflex actions (such as blinking, or movement of the foot on being tickled) and extrapolates a reflexive view of the human body in an attempt to understand voluntary actions as well as involuntary ones. He links nervous and emotional states and provides illustrations of moments at which one effects the other such as facial movement almost universally accompanying joy, strength gained when life is under threat, the rise in pulse rate during stimulation. However, for Spencer, states such as fear do not just increase the ability for flight or fight but produce a surplus of energy that contributes to the "rapid current of ideas" (Morreall, 1987, p.102). The important thing is not how the nervous energy is used but that it must be dissipated through whatever physical channel is available. If one or more channel of discharge is obstructed, then this will increase the energy dissipated through other avenues. Laughter, for Spencer, is an effective method for the releasing of otherwise blocked nervous energy. If "nerve force" cannot be used practically in combat or through flight, the body will seek another option most commonly through the regularly used lungs, diaphragm, lips, tongue and face, that is through the physical action of laughing.

One potential weakness of such a biological theory might be the difficulty it has in explaining laughter where there is no physical involvement such as the perception of certain incongruities. Pre-empting this, Spencer argues that he laughter associated with such events, Spencer argues, is due to the emotional involvement with a situation rather than only the physical. Thus, to use his example:

> You are sitting in a theatre, absorbed in the progress of an interesting drama.
> Some climax has been reached which has aroused your sympathies - say, a
> reconciliation between the hero and heroine, after long and painful
> misunderstanding [...] And now, while you are contemplating the
> reconciliation with a pleasurable sympathy, there appears from behind the
> scenes a tame kid, which, having stared round at the audience, walks up to
> the lovers and sniffs at them.

Morreall, 1987, p.106

This is important to Spencer as it demonstrates the *descending* incongruity that arises in the emotional shift from expectation of an important event to the denial of this with the appearance of the goat. The emotional energy thus remains unchannelled and surplus and therefore, according to Spencer, is discharged through laughter.

It is, however, with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) that relief theory reaches its zenith and its most influential position (both as influence and counter action). Freud suggests that "psychic energy" is produced by individuals to facilitate the suppression of feelings in taboo areas such as sex, death or aggression. When we laugh at a dirty joke, the energy that would be used to suppress sexual feeling becomes surplus and laughter is used as a method of relieving ourselves of this energy. Laughing at the dirty joke not only releases the psychic energy but allows the entertainment of forbidden thoughts. Moreover the enjoyment of the joke correlates with the amount of energy that would have been used in suppression. Thus, in theory, the more repressed sexual feelings are, the more pleasure laughter at sexual jokes provides.

This theory of the release of psychic energy is divided by Freud into two systems - one for the appreciation of the comic and one for the appreciation of humour. In the appreciation of the comic, the observer of a performer goes through a process Freud calls 'ideational mimetics'. In this the observer mentally assesses the ideal (i.e. minimum) amount of energy needed to accomplish a task effectively. The performer use of too much or too little weight created a discrepancy between the understanding of the optimum amount of energy needed and the understanding of the energy used. It is the difference in the amount that is released as laughter. Thus, to use Freud's

example the picking up of a piece of fruit involves the assessment of the amount of energy needed is before the action is performed. If on picking the fruit up, it is found to be lighter, then expended laughter will follow.[21]

More conventionally for release theory, the release of psychic energy involved in the appreciation of humour is that provided as the pleasant sensations of experiencing humour replaces negative feelings such as pain, distress or sadness. Thus the observer of a person falling to the ground might normally feel pity or distress. However, if the faller is a clown, such feelings become inappropriate and are discharged as laughter.

Freud's influence can be seen most clearly in the work of Grotjahn (e.g. 1957) and in Berlyne's (1972) theory of arousal jag. The idea of release through laughter is also present in the formulations of Koestler (1964),[22] Gruner (1978) and Zillmann and Cantor (1976).[23] However, problems still remain with both a Freudian and more general view of relief theory. Relief theories are essential physiological or psycho-physiological in nature but have little biological evidence to support their foundation in the conversion of energy to laughter. The head-of-steam principle they assert is vague and those physical effects of laughter that are observable such as lowering of blood pressure tend to be negligible.

Further, relief theories are non-contextual; that is they seek to explain all laughter through a single set of causes regardless of its time and place, history or persons involved. They cannot incorporate social specifics into their viewpoint and so fail to recognise difference in laughter between different environments. For example they cannot differentiate between areas such as workplace, school yard or internet, or groups of individuals that may be organised by gender, ethnic or class grounds. Finally, relief theories seek to explain laughter rather than explore humour.

2.1.3 Incongruity

Incongruity has been and remains the most influential approach to the study of humour even though superiority predates it by approximately two thousand years. Although by no means the first or the most recent definition of humorous incongruity, Schopenhauer's analysis encapsulates the most common and central issues to incongruity theory:

> The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity.

> Schopenhauer, 1883, p.76

Incorporated in this observation by Schopenhauer are the main components common to incongruity theories:

- Difference (between an object and a concept of that object)
- Codes/myths/scripts/roles (depending on disciplinary terminology)
- Multiple sets of codes
- Presentation of the joke narrative (the stem)
- Presentation of the falseness of the narrative's congruity (punchline)
- Rapidity of the realisation of the incongruity

Although it is usually Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who is credited with the first full conceptualisation of incongruity as the root of all humour (e.g. Morreall 1983) the roots of a developing incongruity theory can be seen in Hutcheson's Reflections Upon Laughter (1750/1973). Here he begins to develop an almost proto-Barthian analysis of humour by suggesting that animals and objects each carry with them, an often unrecognised, set of ideas and associations. In viewing an object, according to Hutcheson, we experience it both as a item but also as an *emblem*: "An ass is the common emblem of stupidity and sloth, a swine of selfish luxury; an eagle of great

genius; a lion of intrepidity; an ant or bee of low industry and prudent economy."
(1973, p.109)

Given that objects carry an associated meaning, Hutcheson hypothesises in the association of contrasting elements, the mixing of high and low, the linking of perfection and profanity is essential to humour. So the simultaneous association and discrimination of two ideas (as in the pompous person falling on the archetypal banana skin) or the comparison of one object to another (as in Bottom's head being tuned into an ass' in A Midsummer's Night Dream) are humorous. Similarly if gravity, seriousness and high thought are discovered to be built on pretence, the contrast between the two entities is laughable.[24]

Whereas for Hutcheson, humour arises from the incompatibility of emblematic meanings, for Kant the emphasis is on the incongruity of the bodily experience. Kant's often-quoted definition of humorous laughter as "*an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing*" (1951, p.177) is the foundation of his theory of humour. He suggests that the things we laugh at are all very much like garden path stories in which arouse our expectations and peek our curiosity as we try to work out the (logical) conclusion of the tale, joke or happening. However, it is the unexpectedness of the conclusion of the story or event that leads to *nothingness* and so laughter. There are shades of relief theory here, especially with Kant's emphasis on the physiological. However, Kant reverses the usual relief equation suggesting that we laugh not because we need to expend the pent-up tension of expectation, but rather, because of the bodily shock of the joke's nothingness.

Kant's observation of humour's building up of expectation, followed by its transformation into nothingness and his assertion of the vitality of the suddenness (1951, p.179) of that transformation are a blueprint for an analysis of joke structure. His period of expectation is the stem of the joke while the rapid transformation equates with the well-structured punchline. This, when supplemented with Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) analysis begins to come even closer to modern joke and incongruity theory (e.g. Attardo & Raskin 1991). In jokes examined through incongruity theory, two or more objects are presented through a single concept, the

concept then becomes applied to both objects and the objects become similar. However, as the joke progresses, it becomes apparent that the concept only applies to one of the objects and the difference between them becomes apparent. Thus in a well-worn joke such as:

A: My dog has no nose

B: How does he smell

A: Terrible

Dog and *Nose* are the objects linked by the concept of smell and become part of the same unit. It is only when the response "Terrible" is added to the concept of smell that the realisation of a meaning applicable only to smell as a quality judgement rather than to smell as a biological action becomes apparent. Thus the hub of the joke structure lies not solely in the perception of incongruity but the resolution of that incongruity in a congruous, if novel, manner. As such incongruity theory becomes more correctly titled incongruity/resolution theory.

Working with a similar notion of humour as the resolution of incongruous, co-present ideas, as the violent combination of dissimilar ideas, Arthur Koestler (1905-1983)[25] proposes the concept of "bisociation" as the basis for humorous structures. He implies, by comparing a modern joke on the Oedipus complex with one of Freud's anecdotes (Koestler, 1964, pp.32-33) that his structural theory is essential and timeless. His theory suggests that it is not just the combination of ideas which people find amusing but the appreciation of the unusual logic applied to link them. His theory marks a shift from the combination of objects noted by Schopenhauer to the "clash of the two mutually incompatible codes" (Koestler, 1964, p.35). This collision of ideas is represented by Koestler in the diagram reproduced below.
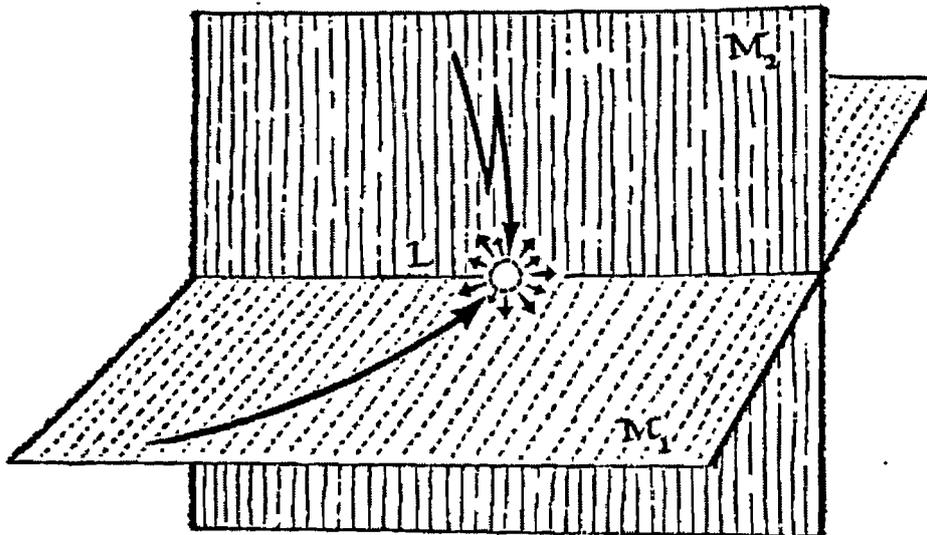
Figure 2-1: From Koestler, 1964, p.35

Koestler explains this figure thus:

> The pattern underlying both stories [Koestler's and Freud's] is *the perceiving of a situation of idea, L, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference, M_1 and M_2.* The event L, in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths, as it were. While this unusual situation lasts, L is not merely linked to one associative context, but *bisociated* with two.
>
> Koestler, 1964, p.35

To return to the dog joke referred to above to illustrate Koestler's diagram, the horizontal (M1) and vertical (M2) planes represent the dual meanings of "How does he smell". The joke's punchline precipitates a collision of these two incompatible meanings at the intersection of M_1 and M_2 and this collision at L is the basis of the joke's humour. This for Koestler is the essence of bisociation: The logical progression of one set of codes (usually contained within the establishing narrative of a joke) is collided with a logical, but apparently incompatible, second set of codes (usually contained within the punchline). The joke is manufactured by the realisation in the hearer that, within the unusual conditions of the joke's narrative, these two apparently disparate codes can be compatible and indeed linked.

The geometric simplicity that incongruity demonstrates and is found in diagrams such a Koestler's along with powerful demonstrations in incongruity literature of incongruities present in canned jokes makes incongruity theory a very attractive manner of approaching the study of jokes. However incongruity theory is essentially a theory of joke structure rather than an theory of humour, laughter or social use. As such it cannot address issues surrounding who is telling a joke, how it is told or who laughs at it. Further, incongruity theory is at a loss to sufficiently explain two basic questions that rise from its own argument: If incongruity relies on the surprise collision of two ideas why can we laugh at the same joke more that once? Why aren't all incongruities humorous? Finally, because of it conceptualisation of an all encompassing theory of humour incongruity theory cannot and does not address instances of humour which do not demonstrate the incongruous joke structure.

Despite this, the contribution of Koestler to humour theory has not only served as a focus to research dealing specifically with incongruity but has had a major influence on joke theory. This linguistics-centred field of humour research has developed out from his simple model of a canonical joke structure and seeks to explain the semantic or deep structure of jokes while bypassing the issues raised above.

2.2 JOKE THEORY

In the last decade, the development of *joke theory* has been immensely influential on all fields of humour research. This has developed primarily from linguistics and revolved around the work of Victor Raskin and later his graduate student Salvatore Attardo. Without doubt Raskin's Semantic Mechanism of Humor (1985), which develops a General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), has been the most influential work in humour research in its recent history. The GTVH has become widely accepted across the various disciplines involved in humour studies as a theoretical basis for research. It has gained, despite its faults and lacks, a canonical status such that it is nearly impossible to find published humour research that does not make a reference to it in some way. It is in recognition of this that I will give a brief overview of this work.

Raskin's joke theory is essentially an incongruity/resolution theory but unlike other theorists, Raskin is rigorous in attempting to establish exactly what incongruities are thought funny and what incongruity in the context of humour actually means. The crux of his system is

(107) A text can be characterised as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions in (108) are satisfied

(108) (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts[26]
(ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite

Raskin, 1985, p.99

This, he rapidly clarifies is not the cause of humour, an error made by many of the authors discussed above, but only "a necessary condition." To illustrate this formula, Raskin provides us with the following joke:

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in a bronchial whisper.
"No," the doctor's young pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

Raskin, 1985, p.100

In this joke, suggests Raskin, we have first the DOCTOR script that is signalled by, and through which we read, "doctor", "patient" and "bronchial." However, the reply the doctor's wife gives at the end of the joke introduces a second script, that of LOVER. This second script is compatible with the text's narrative in that it provides a "natural" answer to the question asked. However, it is incompatible with the initial script as the text cannot be both about a patient calling for medical advice and a lover calling for an illicit rendezvous. For Raskin, these two scripts are opposite.[27]

Although this exposition is brief[28] at this point Raskin appears, bar the addition of Gricean notions of communication and a semantic analysis, to have not progressed far from Schopenhauer's ideas discussed above. What makes this stream of joke theory so important is the development by Raskin and Attardo of the idea of "knowledge resources" that Raskin briefly refers to in 1985 but developed more fully in Raskin and Attardo (1991). In this paper, Raskin and Attardo break down the hearer's and (teller's) mechanisms for understanding a joke text into six discrete categories: Language, Narrative Strategy, Target, Situation, Logical Mechanisms, Script Opposition.

Of course, each of these categories is found elsewhere in other humour research but the success of Attardo and Raskin has been to unite these structures into one coherent taxonomy. Further, the later testing of the system with psychological empiricism (Ruch, Attardo and Raskin, 1993) and their development of a hierarchy of these structures (see Figure 2-2 below).

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│      Script Oppositions      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Logical Mechanisms       │
└─────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│          Situations          │
└─────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│     Narrative Strategies     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│         · Language           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
                │
                ▼
            Joke Text
```
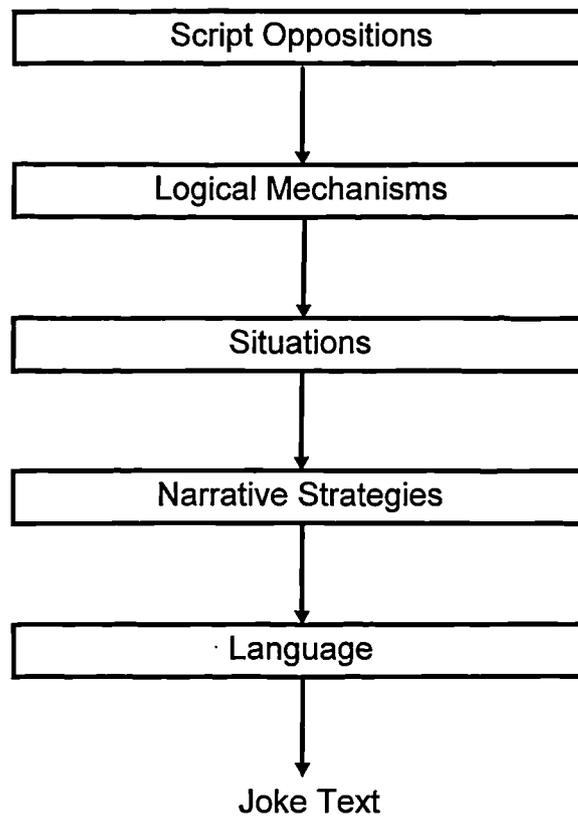
Figure 2-2: From Attardo & Raskin, 1991, p.325

In many ways, the Raskin and Attardo application of script theory to humour research is the ultimate progression of traditional humour research as it not only both grows out of and demonstrates a thorough awareness of previous traditions but incorporates all the features that are common to the main paradigm of incongruity theory. However, because of this it only succeed in providing an refinement of incongruity theory and does not address the basic problems of explaining which combinations of scripts are humorous and which are not nor issues surrounding the hearing and telling of incongruous humour within a lived social experience. [29]

Indeed, joke theory is not alone in its failure to fully recognise the importance of the social context of humour which is missing in any extended form in all the perspectives outlined above. This is because all these approaches are based within a framework that can be understood as being based on the following five criteria, each of which represents a major shortfall in the theory's foundation.

- **General theories**

  They suggest that there is one root of all humour

- **Individualist**

  They are only concerned with the laughter of the individual

- **Causal**

  They presume that humour is caused

- **Act based**

  They argue that in any event the cause of humour can be attributed to an individual action (e.g. a joke)

- **Non-contextual**

  They all take a view of humour abstracted from chronology, culture or society

In short these theories lack any debate with the plurality that humour demonstrates and its manifestation within our everyday lived experiences. They create an abstract notion of what is laughed at and work from that laughter towards a hypothesis of what caused it. Through the assumption that laughter is the product of a single and identifiable experience they refuse to investigate how humour and laughter are negotiated, shared and manufactured in a social experience. Although Bergson recognises that "our laughter is always the laughter of the group" (1911, p.6) there is surprisingly little work produced by humour researchers or sociologists that systematically examines humour in a group or social context. Although prefaces and introductions to humour theory texts (e.g. Palmer, 1994, Finney 1994) often include sociology as an area where humour research has centred, sociology's contribution to humour theory cannot compare with the history of that from philosophy, nor with the prominence of linguistics' contribution, nor with the sheer output of psychology texts investigating humour. Further, contrary to Palmer's (1994) suggestion there is not a "sociology of humour," - a unified body of work with common assumptions and academic aspirations. Confusing further this situation is the common tendency for theorists to read the work of literary theorists, philosophers or psychologists as sociological texts to mixed effect.[30] There arises a confusion between what are

essentially social theories and those which are more properly sociological. That is a failure to differentiate between theorists, such as Bergson (1911), who make general comments of the community they observe and those, such as Flaherty (1984), whose work is based within a specific discipline and set of methodologies.

2.3 SOCIAL THEORIES

There are indeed sociological works that deal with humour but as the review below will indicate, they provide contrasting, often contradictory perspectives from within a social framework. The bodies of sociological work investigate uses and examples of humour in people ranging from small groups negotiating relationships in the workplace to whole countries bolstering their national identities, and they employ methods ranging from the ethnography of Radcliffe-Brown (1940, 1949) to the interactionist theory of Mulkay (1988); from the micro-sociology of Harvey Sacks (1992) to the macro-analysis of Christie Davies (1980). So the problem arises as to what actually we may consider a sociological perspective for that study of humour. Attention towards or investigation into the social is not a useful criteria because it would include the bodies of psychological work such as Chapman's investigations into children, social skills and humour (1975, 1973), folklorists such as Dundes (1987) or Oring (1992), and cultural theorists such as Mintz (1987, 1992). Further there is a body of literature produced by sociologists that deals with subjects such as the use of humour in effective teaching or public speaking. Such work often has more to do with rhetorical analysis than social investigation.

It is more useful to investigate what common ground we can find in questions asked rather than method or topic. In choosing parameters for this review Francis' (1988) observation is a useful starting point. For Francis, the work of the sociologist studying humour differs from that of psychologists, linguists and philosophers in that

> [t]he main problem is not "why do we laugh?" - though laughing and humour cannot be totally disentangled - but to understand the social nexus in which humour and laughing occur.
>
> Francis, 1988, p159

By "social nexus" Francis means the cultural and social context that a joke and its audience share and through which an understanding of the joke, its context, its "meaning" and its consequences are learned. For the sociologist, the holy grail of humour research is not to establish what causes humour and laughter but to understand the way in which it is contextually interpreted. The sociology of humour research is concerned with the encoding of the experience of humour. This observation can be used to draw the parameters between the work of sociologists and the social-psychologists, philosophers and folklorists. It encapsulates the central concern for both the research here and that of other sociologists in the experience of humour, the life of humour beyond the text and outside the recurrent paradigm which sees laughter as a response to the joke stimulus.

Through a shift from examination of the humour text to an analysis of the humour environment, it has become a central assumption to the sociological study of humour that humour is constructed and consumed on a utilitarian plane[31] and joking can be seen to be part of many social actions.[32] For the sociologist studying humour, jokes and laughter are rarely just idle play or inconsequential fooling but are purposeful and effective ways of managing environments, situations and experiences. As such, I have categorised the sociologies of humour into three groups. Each of these demonstrates their own concern with humour as a social phenomenon and I have labelled *Maintenance Theories, Negotiation Theories* and *Frame Theories*. These categories organise the following sections of this review of social theories of humour which in turn are followed with a closing summary of the common weaknesses of the sociologies of humour and more generally humour theory. This closing section will put forward suggestions for transformations in the way joking, laughter and humour are studied and understood and highlight a number of the reconceptualisations and moves in methodolgy that underpin the research and analytical perspective that inform this thesis.

2.3.1 Maintenance Theories

Maintenance theories suggest that jokes are used by individuals to reinforce established social roles and divisions. They directly link the personal act of joking with a much broader social agenda. According to maintenance theories, jokes contribute to consolidating familial roles, status in the workplace, national identities and any situation in which an us-and-them opposition is established as profitable. The basis of maintenance theory lies in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's (1940, 1949) anthropological work on joking-relationships. The irony of Radcliffe-Brown's work is that it has become better known and referenced as an anthropological benchmark than as a significant contribution to the study of humour. It is easy to notice an absence of references to his work in otherwise widely encompassing surveys in humour theory. However, what Radcliffe-Brown suggests is that humour is used within established social organisations such as families to establish and maintain "social equilibrium" (1949, p.135). This done through the operation of "joking relationships" which he defines as:

> [A] custom by which persons standing in certain relationships resulting either from kinship, or more usually from marriage, were permitted or required to behave towards one another in a disrespectful or insulting way at which no offence might be taken.
>
> Radcliffe-Brown, 1949, p.133

Thus, encoded into the meaning of certain familial relationships are rituals of mockery, joking and teasing which are understood and expected by all parties concerned. Radcliffe-Brown observes that the use of such humour both marks solidarity within a group or family and the highlighting of differences within that group. Thus a man's joking with his wife's mother both marks the special quality of the relationship he has with her through his wife and emphasises her place within a separate family and generation. These joking relationships are not by any means egalitarian, they are unidirectional or asymmetrical. For example, "the nephew is disrespectful and the uncle accepts the disrespect" (1940, p.204) and as such it is apparent that both parties recognise the nephew as being the superior. This relationship is encoded by the social system it operates in as is the level of

"privileged disrespect and freedom or even licence" (p.208) that is permissible. The joking relationships have recognised limits that must not be crossed by the joker if they are to avoid giving offence. In Radcliffe-Brown's we can see some of the themes of classic humour theory discussed above; superiority/subordination is encoded into the joking relationship and, as was alluded to above, we can see that there is a recognised limit to the joking that is observed.

In contemporary humour studies, it is the work of Christie Davies that we can most clearly associate with the notion that humour functions to build and maintain social structures. His work on ethnic humour (e.g. 1991, 1988, 1982) is often quoted as *proof* of the functional value of humour although his work is conceptual rather than empirical. He argues that patterns can be observed in the jokes about stupidity told by various groups. For example, the English tell jokes about the Irish, the Americans tell jokes about the Poles, the Swedish tell jokes about the Finns and the Norwegians, etc.[33] In these jokes, a mythical member of an out group becomes a synecdochic representative of all members of that group, all the Irish become identified with and through the Irishman in the joke.

However, one interesting observation in Davies' analysis, and one often missed or glossed over, is that these groups singled out for ridicule are invariably not the arch enemies that the society believes in (such as the cold war Russian to the British) or representatives of a real threat (such as the Japanese during World War II).[34] Rather the characters who are represented as the butts of the jokes are of a much more local and observable nature. The butts of these ethnic jokes are chosen not because they represent characters alien to the jokers but because they are similar. As such, according to Davies, a real need is perceived to highlight the differences there are, so as to maintain a distinction between the in-group and out-group.

> In general their relationship [that of the joker and the butt of the joke] may be described as one of centre to periphery. The centre laughs at the alleged stupidity of the periphery, at people who are seen not as aliens but rather as comic versions of themselves.

Davies, 1988, p.48

Davies sees this type of humour as essentially a useful and productive pastime; these jokes, he asserts, "provide the teller with a sudden playful superiority" (1988, p.45), they "reduce anxiety" and "provide guidance" (1982, p.400). Such claims are one of the weaknesses of Davies' viewpoint. He does not provide evidence for these cathartic effects of racial (and racist) joking and does not account for instances where such jokes do in fact cause insult and are conductors for bigotry.[35]

Francis (1988) on the other hand is far less ambivalent in his analysis of ethnic humour. In contrast to Davies, he highlights the basis of jokes concerning ethnic derision within a culture of oppression and assumption of white superiority. The very fact that a society or group is willing to tell, laugh at and accept the values encoded into a joke's text demonstrates that "some things are proper topics for joking, that certain words are appropriate, that certain situations are appropriate" (p.160). In such an analysis, the Irish, Jewish, Black, etc. become synonymous with stupidity, meanness, laziness, etc. Further, Francis problematises the *just-joking* excuse when he points out that jokes are consumed by a self-selecting audience: ethnic jokes communicate specific values to specific peoples.[36] Drawing on Cooper (1988/1711 - often referenced as Shaftesbury), he points out that testing assumptions with humour only becomes a valued expression if the humour can be validated with reason. Thus, if jokes about race, sex, homosexuality, etc. remain in no way derogatory once removed from the humorous context, only then can we consider them play.[37]

It is perhaps Bogardus (1945) in his work on cartoons who most explicitly deals with this idea. He emphasises the democratic nature of the medium, arguing that its graphic form allows it wide social appeal and literacy, calling upon "natural sense [...] rather than a cultivated sense, such as that of reading or reasoning." (p.143). The cartoon, for Bogardus, like the joke, is a snapshot of popular opinion and a

representation of a culture's feelings.[38] The cartoon interpellates the reader of it, as

they recognise the situations that provoke humour or bathos. As such the cartoon,

and by extension jokes, gives the analyst of humour a view of the culture that

produced the joke.

In all these maintenance theories, the underlying assumption is that humour regulates

by passing some inalienable truths about a society or community. They do not

contemplate that these "truth" may not be held by people or that contrary beliefs or

multiple viewpoints might be held. Further maintenance theories imply not only

that humour reinforces accepted values but that there is indeed a stable set of these

norms and that they are in no way negotiated. It is this idea of an ever changing

social context that negotiation theories make some entry into exploring.

2.3.2 Negotiation Theories

Zijderveld's paper "Jokes and Their Relation to Social Reality" (1968) provides a

thorough and extended study of humour from a specifically sociological

perspective.[39] This, along with his 1983 paper, provides a rich resource for the

sociological researcher of comedy. One importance of his work that is often missing

from maintenance theories is an emphatic placing of the appreciation of humour

within an everyday framework. Humour for Zijderveld is inseparable from the

processes of interactive exchange out of which it comes. He sees humour not as the

text but as an event which involves agents, situation and interaction. Building on

Bergson (and criticising Freud's lack of social awareness), Zijderveld suggests that:

> Like most pleasures in human life, humour stands in need of at least one
> partner. The shipwrecked person on his lonely island may be the target of
> many jokes, but he himself has very little reason to laugh and few
> opportunities to engage in humorous exploits.
>
> Zijderveld, 1983, p.3[40]

Zijderveld, like Bergson, argues that humour is a group experience, its meaning is

provided by the interpretation of those who experience it rather than the coding of

the text. He notes that "it is the observer who defines [...] funny" (1983, p.8) and an old *zote* (a sexual joke) told by a child is funny "not because of the original substance and meaning, but because the narrator is still a child" (1968, p.291). It is with this change of focus that there is a moving towards an understanding of humour which provides an alternative to a stimulus/response model. In a social context then, incongruous narratives are not funny until we perceive them as such and the criteria we use to make judgements are socially and culturally informed. Jokes are empty vessels ready to be filled with meaning by the hearer. However, without an explanation of how this total filling up takes place, or how consensus can be reached among hearers, Zijderveld cannot help falling back onto the position that there is some concrete meaning or object that is the basis of the response.

The importance of the social encoding is fully realised when used to provide a sociological grasp of traditional methods of humour theory. With the realisation that incongruity, aggression and relief are all culturally informed and specific phenomenon, the effects of humour become relevant to an understanding of everyday experience. Zijderveld suggests that by filling a text with our values and assumptions, humour can show us the breaks in our streams of understanding, highlight false assumptions and lead to revelations. During social interaction, a joke can immediately reveal the rules governing interaction that we take for granted. In contrast to Davies then, Zijderveld makes the experience of humour an intersubjective one.

Similarly, Powell (1988) informs his analysis with ideas of specific cultural knowledge when, (building on a foundation of Bergsonian control), he suggests that laughter at inappropriate actions is dependent on a number of social criteria including status, relationship and perceived threat. However, where Powell supplements Bergson's idea of "the mechanical encrusted upon the living" and moves even closer to Zijderveld is in his realisation of the essentially mythical nature of humour as a stimulus for unified response. He rejects the idea, put forward by Douglas, Davies and others, that any society, group or audience has one notion of acceptability or a shared set of cultural values and thus, rather than accepting a basic maintenance notion of laughter. Powell argues that through humour and laughter not only are

deviants controlled, but social values are discussed and negotiated. Laughter and humour have become once again a site for individuality and discussion. Consensus cannot be assumed in humour as both Zijderveld and Powell examine ways in which humour attempts to minimise difference but do not take it as read.[41] Thus, the idea of humour's potential for plurality, confusion and contradiction highlights and further points towards the shortcomings in Davies' theorising.

2.3.3 Frame Theories

In contrast to negotiation theories which place joking against a background of understanding for the everyday culture of the joke frame theories suggest that jokes, riddles and spontaneous witticisms are not part of everyday serious social reality but are breaks from it or in it. They suggest that a time for humour outside serious interaction has to be established and consented to by those involved in joking in order to be successful. Implicit as part of this consent is the understanding that the usual rules of social discourse are temporarily suspended for the duration of the joking frame established status roles are ignored, responsibility for opinion is denied and taboos can be breached. The joker is allowed to stand outside normal discourse and protocol and present criticism without fear or retribution. Douglas (1968) investigates joking as ritual in which the joker is granted license to challenge "sense and hierarchy" (p.370). As such the joke, the joker and their social and historical context are completely intertwined. They make not only the decoding of the joke possible but they control the social regulations that underlie what can be joked at and even what is indeed a joke. Thus, Douglas argues, there is an undeniable link between social cultures and the joke in that "[t]he social dimension enters at all levels into the perception of a joke. Even its typical patterning depends on a social valuation of the elements." (p.365) Like Zijderveld, but less successfully, she argues for a shift from the study of joking and humour as important only as social functions toward a viewpoint which suggests that it is the real world occurrence of the joking situation that is important. Standing in opposition to Radcliffe-Brown, she argues that what is important in the anthropological study of humour is not the

way in which joking might function towards maintaining social roles but the social context in which the humour is shared. What the humour research, for Douglas, must examine is the "relation between symbolic systems and experience" (1968, p.361).

Douglas' argument takes a previous position to Bogardus' (1945) system by arguing that it is only possible to recognise what a joke is in the first place by knowing the culture that produced it. Only by knowing a culture can an observer read what cultural regulations are being flouted. She suggests that the structures observed in standardised jokes cannot account for most spontaneous humour acts, nor can they define when, in insult rituals, the joking ends and the abuse begins. Jokes can only be understood as founded upon a social context but standing outside its normal discourse. Without knowledge of the relationship between the teller of the joke and its butt, jokes become meaningless. Therefore, for Douglas (and Powell, 1988, assumes this but never explicitly recognises it), jokes are reliant on social structure, they derive from and highlight social positions and anomalies, they are challenges to the social hierarchy. Therefore it is the perception of the "joke form" of the social structure and experience that contributes to the perception of humour more than the joke structure itself. Thus:

> In the case of the bishop being stuck in the lift, a group of people are related together in a newly relevant pattern which overthrows the normal one: when one of them makes the smallest jest, something pertinent has been said about the social structure. Hence the enthusiasm with which a joke at the right time is always hailed.

> Douglas, 1968, p.368

The joke is simultaneously part of and a reflection upon the social structure it inhabits. It is a symbolic reference to the social form and therefore is a rite set outside the normal nature of everyday discourse.

Such a viewpoint on frame shifting is allied to maintenance theories in that frames are manipulated and the roles established through it operates on a macro social level. However, there are also variations on frame theory more allied to negotiation theory

in which the frames that shift operate on a more personal or interactive level. Emerson (1969) points to the negotiation of humorous frames in conversation where comments, opinions and subject matters are recognised as *not counting* or *unofficial.*[42] Within these humorous frames, taboos can be breached without causing offence and accepted roles may be temporarily breached without any challenge to the relationship. Of course, the negotiations of these humorous transgressions are not necessarily spontaneous or unproblematically accepted by all the parties involved. Jokes are not always accepted as such, and even where a joke is recognised as operating within a humorous frame, this frame may not be accepted by all hearers.[43] This is why the two major questions of interest for Emerson are "How much license may be taken under the guise of humour?" and "How will responsibility for circumventing the punchline be allocated?" (p.170.)

As does Norrick (1993) and Graham (1992), Emerson points out the possibility that humour has for testing the acceptability of a topic for conversation, for sounding out another person's feeling on the topic, for "bargaining" (Emerson p.173) or as Goffman says "putting out feelers" (1959). By introducing a potentially volatile subject in a humorous frame, the joker minimises the risk of rejection and opens up potential for the "only joking" excuse. Emerson also points out the potential for shifts of status that are possible from refusing to recognise a joker's establishing of the joke frame or the suggestion that certain topics are not a joking matter. An attempt to shift the humorous frame back to the serious places the joker in the position where they have to defend their comments and take full responsibility for their implications. For Emerson, these humorous frameworks are not the neat consensual shifts sometimes presented by some of the authors discussed below but are ambiguous and potentially volatile.

A somewhat more optimistic perspective of the humorous framework can be found in Flaherty's (1984) proposal of humour as "reality play" (p.75). Reality play is "a more or less innocuous and transient rifling with these normative expectations which are, themselves, constitutive or reality work" (p.80). In his conception of the comic, all parties involved are only too glad to escape from "the dreary, sometimes alienating encumbrances of reality work" (p.76) and the "humdrum regularity which

would otherwise fill our lives" (p.80). In his understanding of humorous social interaction, the audience for a joke will accept the joking frame without discussion or negotiation in order to show solidarity and sameness as part of their ongoing socialisation and in order to temporarily depart from standard assumption and practices. Thus for Flaherty, all moments of reality play are humour.

A similar opposition between play and serious discourse but more influential in contemporary humour research has been Mulkay's (1988) contribution to frame theory and terminology inherent in his view of the "humorous mode." For Mulkay, this change in perspective from serious discourse to a humorous frame allows people to enter into negotiations with the paradoxes and ambiguities that we are exposed to both in improvised discourse and standard" (i.e. *canned*) jokes.[44] He argues that "the serious mode" does not encourage us to contemplate apparent incongruities. When we encounter contradictions we are encouraged to dismiss them as faults in the discourse and seek verification rather than accepting them as unresolvable. In the humorous mode we can accept and more importantly, appreciate ambiguities without looking for solutions as to what was *really* meant.[45] Thus, to a large extent, Mulkay's basic theory is an incongruity theory[46] mixed with a slice of discourse analysis. He draws heavily on the work of Koestler (1968) and other incongruity theorists such as Suls (1972) and Raskin (1985).

Unfortunately, although Mulkay's is the most extensive of frame theories, he is very reluctant to explain or examine how and when shifts in frame take place. He argues that vocal and physical cues are used and actions, gesture and inflections mark changes but his lack of systematic, empirical analysis does not establish what these systems of codes might be, or hypothesise how we recognise them. Instead he suggests that humour is somehow a mystical and delicate form of social interaction, the analysis of which is uniquely impossible or destructive.

[W]e must not forget that humorous discourse relies on subtle allusions and delicate nuances of meaning [...] Particularly in the course of informal, spontaneous humour, which will often be interspersed among stretches of serious converse, it would be quite inappropriate to mark the transition into humour in any explicit fashion, here the duality and allusiveness of the humour would be destroyed by attempts to furnish the kind of clear-cut interpretative instructions that might be suitable in certain serious contexts.

Mulkay, 1988, p.50

Mulkay suggests that any attempt to understand and isolate these changes or pinpoint a shift into the humorous mode is destined to failure. Adopting this position appears to echo quire uncannily the American humorist E. B. White's position: "Humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind." He suggests that any analysis of these shifts to the play frame would be one firmly based in the serious mode and therefore be incompatible with the humorous mode. This paradox, Mulkay argues, is proof of a schism between humorous and serious modes of discourse.[47]

The paradox that Mulkay does not recognise is if this were the case it would mean that these mysterious cues and signals were themselves part of the humorous mode and therefore appear after a transition in modes. As such these cues cannot, by virtue of their position, act as transitionary signals. If changes in vocal inflection are part of Mulkay's play frame, there must be something before them that acts as an indicator of shift. If we cannot observe and establish such signals, there is little alternative but to accept that Mulkay's version of the humorous mode is nothing but an academic construct. In short, it would appear that Mulkay is uncertain about where play modes actually start and end, whether they are essentially co-operative (i.e. needs at least two people) or whether it is possible to enter the humorous mode alone.

2.4 A Transformative Approach to Humour Research

Given these shortcomings and false starts offered by both sociological theories and classical theories of humour it is apparent that if we are move towards a more full understanding of humour, joking and laughter there is a need not merely for a

refinement or recombination of the theories and research outlined above but a fresh way of looking at humour. What this final section of this chapter does it to pull together a number of common themes that the above approaches share and illustrate how they are not only incorrect in their assumptions but unhelpful in understanding humour as a lived experience or laughter as interaction.

At the base of the research reviewed so far there is perhaps one underlying assumption, one governing concept that has, and continues to inform humour research. If there is one unquestioned and universally accepted truth it is probably this: **people laugh at things that are funny.** The research emphasis is on examining jokes, "humour acts" (Raskin), or "laughables" (Sacks 1992, Glenn 1995) and the laughter which is presumed to be inevitably associated with it. Of course, it is recognised that there may be circumstances which inform our appreciation of the events as the review of research on comedy audiences, Morreall's notion of "psychological shift", or Mulkay's "humorous mode" has shown but still these circumstances are understood as facilitating factors for the appreciation of humour rather than agents which contain humorous elements.

People may very well laugh at thing that are funny but making this *a priori* assumption raises a number of problems which humour research has tended to ignore. It is these that I will deal with throughout this thesis. Primarily it assumes a somewhat abstracted view of joking in which:

- **Jokes are told in an uninterrupted, linear and efficient manner.**
That is, one person tells a joke while hearers listen attentively to the narrative not adding to it, seeking clarification, or attempting to carry on the *serious* topic of conversation. The teller is assumed to start their joke at the beginning and progress logically through it without interrupting their own flow, going back to correct themselves, delivering the punchline too early or even temporarily forgetting it when they want to deliver it nor have anyone else deliver the punchline for them.

- **Jokes are told one at a time**

Again, the literature has assumed that once a joke has started being told, none of the hearers will compete for the joking space by attempting to deliver a topically linked joke nor will jokers nest individual jokes within a larger joke narrative or introduce a joke, leave it uncompleted and then return to it later.

- **Jokes are received by a willing and responsive audience**

Partly because joking, laughter and humour has been assumed to be such a positive force whether socially, physically or emotionally, there has been little investigation into how environments are negotiated or set up to make joking and laughter appropriate. By centring on the analysis of jokes or laughter at humorous texts, the idea the jokes may be told when others are not ready or willing to entertain them has been consistently unexplained.

- **Jokes are unknown to their audience**

Foundational to the classical theories of humour whether they be based in incongruity, superiority or relief is that jokes provoke their effect by a form of suddenness of revelation. Such revelations are reliant on jokes being previously unknown to the hearers or, as Morreall argues having the hearer discover new properties to the humour on rehearing. Work such as that of Raskin, Davies and Nilsen has demonstrated that jokes often can be found identical except for a change in its butt but does not pursue the implications of this.

- **Laughter arises at and only at the end of a joke**

As Palmer (1994) points out humour research often assumes that joking is always successful and this stimulus/response theorising assumes laughter can only be expected at the end of jokes, that is following the understanding and appreciation of the incongruity in the text. This ignores, and cannot explain, any laughing that may take place before or during the telling of a joke either by its audience or the teller.

- **Joke texts can be fully analysed outside their telling context**

Because of this emphasis on the joke text rather than its telling and the assumption that laughter is a response to and appreciation of the incongruity in the text, humour

research has tended to see jokes as being open to analysis beyond the circumstances of their setting.

Essentially within such a system jokes are told or humorous events occur and as a response we laugh at them. This is widely accepted to be a valid and truthful understanding of the processes that surround a person's reaction to a joke. Of course there are elaborations of this truism that develop theories of why it might be that we laugh at a certain joke, what psychological, social or intellectual processes take place but essentially, from Aristotle to Raskin, it is recognised that people laugh at things that are funny.

However, these criteria are rarely, if ever, all true. One of the few thorough transcriptions of a joke telling sequence can be found in what might what be known as *Harvey Sacks' Dirty Joke* (1992). Sacks' joke might be told like this:

> Three sisters marry on the very same day and decide to spend their honeymoon night in their mother's house. That night after the newly married couples have gone to their bedrooms the daughters' mother walks past each of the bedrooms and listens at the door. At the first door she can hear her daughter's groaning and so on she walks. At the second door she can here her daughter pant and she walks on to the third door where she listens. Although she stands listening she cannot hear any noises from her third daughter.
>
> The next morning at breakfast the mother asked her daughters about the noises. The first daughter said, "It tickled, Mommy." The second daughter said, "Oh, Mommy it hurt." The mother then asked the third daughter why there were no noises coming from her room the previous night. "Well, mommy," the daughter replied, "you always told me it was impolite to talk with my mouth full."

Such a telling, although removed from Sack's transcription would provide all the necessary information for which to undertake a conventional analysis of the joke.

If we were to do this we might just effectively put quotation marks around the text and assume that that was how it was told (regardless of if this was ever the case) and assume that the text was a discrete piece of spoken communication which was told to a passive audience. We would assume that the listener(s) were so impressed by the joke and the telling that they could not help but laugh and that this laughter was to be found immediately after the punchline. The identity of the joker and listeners would be irrelevant.
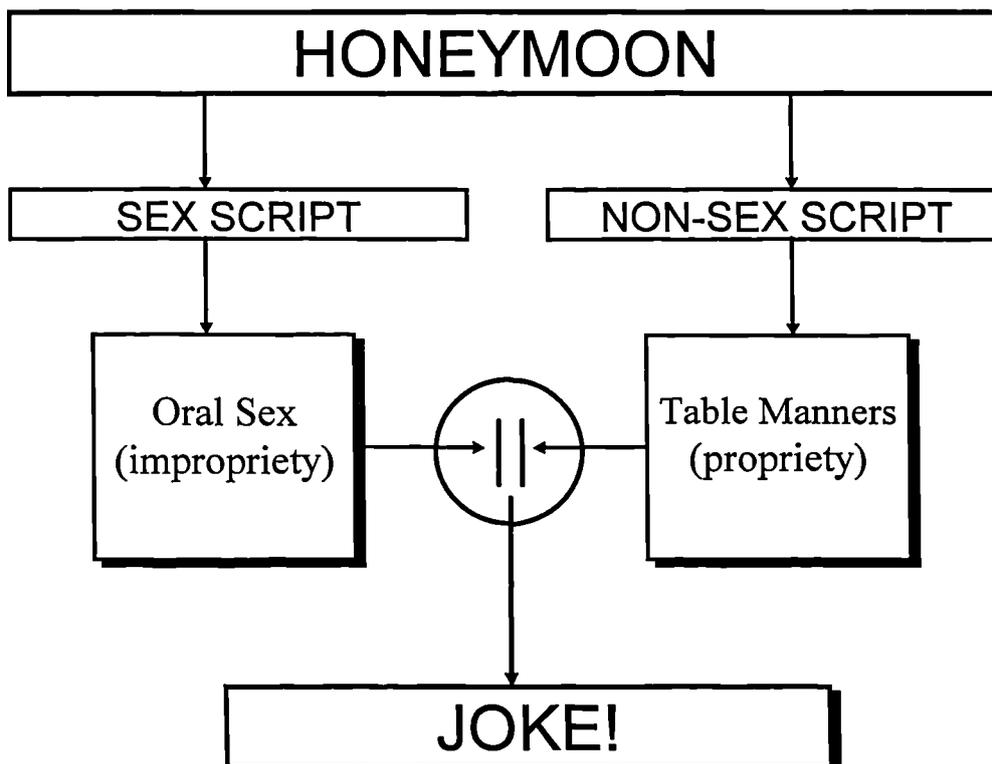
Figure 2-3: Script Structure of Sack's Dirty Joke

From here we could then begin to produce a script based analysis of the joke that might look a little like that depicted in Figure 2-3. Here the joke's narrative is unified by the Honeymoon script that includes notions of ritual, innocence, sex, family, etc. This script will sustain both the sexual script of the wedding nuptials and that which includes rules of behaviour under a parent's roof. That is, it will sustain these scripts until the punchline at which their incompatibility suddenly

becomes apparent and the incongruity of the narrative resolution is revealled. It is this point, in conventional joke theory, that the joke becomes apparent and we laugh.[48]

Although this analysis is cursory, it serves to demonstrate the usefulness of conventional humour and joke theories and such an analysis seems fairly logical and reasonable. However, by looking at the telling of the joke rather than the joke text the assumptions that earlier research has made start to appear a little previous. It becomes apparent that the telling of the joke is a far more complex and richly textured process than the joke text suggests and one which involves participation of hearers as well as the teller of the joke.

Extract 2-1: Sack's Dirty Joke

1	Ken:	You wanna hear muh-eh my sister told me a story last night.
2	Roger:	I don'wanna hear it. But if you must,
3		(0.7)
4	Al:	What's purple en' 'n island. Grape, Britain. That's w't iz
5		sis//ter -
6	Ken:	No:. To stun me she says uh (0.8) there wz these three girls 'n they
7		jis got married?
8	Roger:	ehhh//hehh hhh hhh
9	Ken:	A::nd uh
10	Roger:	Hey waita seco(h)nd.
11	Al:	┌(Heh!
12	Roger:	└(Drag th(h)at by ag(h)ai(h)n hehh//hehh
13	Ken:	There -
14	Ken:	There wz these three gi:rls. En they were all sisters. En' they'd jis
15		got married tuh three brothers.
16	Roger:	You better have a long talk with yer sister.
17	Ken:	Waita - waita min//ute
18	Roger:	Oh: // three brothers.
19	Al:	eheh
20	Al:	eh//heh!
21	Ken:	A::nd uh, so-
22	Al:	The brothers of these sisters.
23	Ken:	No they're different- mhh//hh
24	Al:	heh
25	Ken:	Y'know different families. // (No link-up)
26	Roger:	Th's clo:ser th'n before, // hhh
27	Ken::	┌So -
28	Al:	└heh! hh hh
29		(0.7)
30	Ken:	Quiet.
31	Al:	hh hh // hhhh
32	Ken:	So:, first'v all, that night, they're - on their:::: honeymoon the- uh

33		mother in law, says- (to 'em) well why don'tcha all spen'th'night
34		here en' then you c'n go on yer honeymoon in th'morning.
35		Th'firs'night, th'mother walks up t'the firs'door en' she hears this
36		uuuuuuuuuuhh! hh Second door is HHOOOOHHH! Third door
37		there's NOthin'. She stands there fer about twunny-five minutes
38		waitin' fer sump'n duh happen, -- Nothin'.
39		(1.0)
40	Ken:	Next morning she talks t'the firs' daughter, en' she s'z -- uh how
41		come yuh- how come y'went YAAA::: las' night'n daughter siz
42		well, it tickled Mommy -- second gi:rl, -- How come yuh
43		screa:med. Oh: Mommy it hu:rts. -- Third girl, walk up t'her. (0.7)
44		Why didn' y'say anything last night. -- W'you tol'me it wz always
45		impolite t'talk with my mouth full,
46		(1.5)
47	Ken:	hh hyok hyok,
48		(0.5)
49	Ken:	hyok
50		(2.5)
51	Al:	HA-HA-HA-HA,
52	Ken:	ehh heh heh // hehhh
53	(Al):	hehhehhheh hhh
54	Roger:	Delayed rea:c // tio(h)n.
55	Al:	hehh I hadtuh think abou//t it awhile you know?
56	Roger:	hhh heh
57		(1.0)
58	Roger	hehh hh hehh hhh You mea(h)n th(h)e dee(h)p (h)hidden meaning
59		there doesn't hitcha right awa-ay heh heh // hehhhhhh hehhhhh
60	Al:	hh hhh // hhh
61	(Dan):	(Yeh. I // guess so.)
62	Al:	What'e meant tuh say is the t - thet u:m
63		(0.5)
64	Roger:	Ki//nda got ps::ychological over//tones (to it)
65	Al:	( )
66	Ken:	Little sister's gittin' // older.
67	(Roger):	hehh hh hehh
68	Ken:	ehheh heh That's w't I m(h)ean tih // say,
69	Dan:	Sounds like it,
70	Ken:	Fer twelve years old tellin' me- I didn' even // know-
71	Roger:	How do yuh know she's jis' not repeating what she heard'n
72		doesn'know wha//t it means.
73	Al:	She haftuh explain it to yuh Ke:n?
74	Ken:	Yeah she have to explain it to detail to me,
75		(0.5)
76	Al:	Okay, good. Gladju gotta sister that knows // somethin',
77	Ken:	hh hhh
78	Ken:	She told me she wz eatin' a hot dog,
79		(0.3)
80	Ken:	hh
81	Roger:	Wha'does that mean,
82	Ken:	hh hh
83	Al:	Yeah come // on. Explain it // to us, hnhh
84	Ken:	heh
85	Ken:	heh

```
86  Al:    Explai//:n us - explain everything you kno:w Ken,
87  Ken:   hhh! Nuh I: D(h)ON'KNOW I j's' said tha(h)t.
88  Al:    Explain everything.
```

Sacks, 1992, p.471-472[49]

When compared to the bullets point I laid out above, it is apparent that the accepted model of understanding jokes does not withstand closer examination. Ken's telling of the joke is extensively interrupted (line 14-30) and provides the hearer with more information than is strictly needed for the joke text to function. Ken's attempts to tell the joke is pre-empted with Al's one liner (line 4) and Roger and Al appear far from enthusiastic about and co-operative with the telling of the joke (lines 2-9, 16-28). From the transcript it is not apparent whether Ken, Al or Dan have heard the joke before but we can see laughter throughout the telling of the joke (lines 7, 11, 25-27, 30). Most noticeably laughter is conspicuous by it absence immediately after the end of the joke.

```
42  Ken:  Third girl, walk up t'her. (0.7)
43        Why didn' y'say anything last night. -- W'you tol'me it wz always
44        impolite t'talk with my mouth full,
45                 (1.5)
46  Ken:  hh hyok hyok,
47                 (0.5)
48  Ken:  hyok
49                 (2.5)
50  Al:   HA-HA-HA-HA,
51  Ken:  ehh heh heh // hehhh
52  (Al): hehhehhheh hhh
```

Ken's delivery of the punchline is followed by 1½ seconds of silence (line 45) before Ken himself laughs. This in turn is followed by another ½ second silence before a shorter laugh from Ken which again is followed by 2½ seconds of silence before Al's sarcastic and overstated mock laughter. Ken's need to pursue the laughter along with the presence of laughter throughout the telling of the joke suggests that variations on the stimulus/response model of joking are inadequate when trying to study actual laughter as part of the joke telling interaction.

Further, this joke, told during a group therapy session in which Dan is the only adult present, is far from an example of the efficient communication of information; it is interrupted, the teller stutters and it is confused (e.g. it is unclear whether the matriarch is the brides' mother or mother-in-law?) Finally the joke is intertwined with the teller, the audience and their shared experience and knowledge as to make any attempt at unpicking very fraught indeed. Nowhere can we find the neat and tidy joke that succinctly manipulates incongruity between scripts or frames.

Sacks' analysis of this joke (and by extension other jokes) centres on the sequential form of the joking exchange and he breaks down the story into three basic sequences which he calls *the preface*, *the telling*, and *the response*. In the preface (lines 1-5) the topic of joking is introduced, a joke may be offered, it may be characterised, or its origins alluded to such that other participants in the conversation can decide whether to accept the telling of the joke.[50]

The telling sequence (lines 6-44) is interesting from Sacks' point of view in that the teller of the joke does not have to provide opportunity for other talkers to take turns. This is not to say that the teller always remains in control of the talking arena but that other participants who talk during the telling must do so through interruption and without usual turn taking organisation (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Interruptions of the telling sequence tend to be requests for clarification (or often, as in the example above, mock requests) and the sequence typically end with the delivery of the joke's punchline.

The response is usually a period of laughter. However, Sacks points out that although those involved in conversation tend to use turn-taking to minimise gaps, laughter does not always immediately follow the delivery of a punchline. The hearers of the joke have, according to Sacks, options to laugh, delay laughter or refuse laughter.

However, Sacks does not present this sequential ordering as a *de facto* organisation of a joking exchange in the manner that linguistic theory may do. The introduction of a preface into a conversation by one of its participants does not necessarily mean

that a telling and response will follow. Unlike the stimulus/response model this three-part sequence can fail to complete at any of its stages. This is important as unlike other conceptualisations of joke telling the assumption is never made by Sacks that the joke telling event is always uninterrupted, unproblematic or causal.

Sacks is able to reach and adopt this view primarily because although he examines the telling of a joke it is the telling rather than the joke itself which is central to his enquiry. The primacy given to the joke, whether it be in natural conversation, literature, stand-up routines or in graffiti, in other analyses of humour ignores the fact that a lot of humour is not based around this shibboleth of the canned joke. It ignores the fact that a lot of *joking* today does not involve punchlines (the slogans of Steve Coogan as Paul and Pauline Calf), presents incongruity without resolution (Reeves & Mortimer or Harry Hill), or is even without incongruity in any accepted sense (Roseanne quoting the jokes that made her famous). Although this is an argument I develop more fully elsewhere (Rutter 1996) it is my belief that, specifically but not solely, professional comedy has witnessed changes that have not been recognised by humour studies nor can be satisfactorily explained through any of the approaches outlined above.

Authors may debate why a particular reading of the joke is not only *the correct one* but the only one that truly explains the appreciation of humour. There is precious little acceptance in humour theory that two people may find the same thing funny for very different reasons. The problem is that very rarely is this concept of appreciation actually examined. The emphasis is so often placed on the interpretation of the humour act, the getting of the joke, the perception of incongruity that the entity of the joke's hearer becomes reduced to the vagaries of cognitive theory. The emphasis even in the work of sociologists such as Davis (1993), Mulkay (1988) and Sacks (1974) remains on an analysis of the joke text and a reasoning, derived from textual analysis, as to why people might find this funny. The analysis centres on establishing the formulae of humorous discourse and then validating it through hypothesising appreciation.

It is my contention that such a viewpoint is very much a cart before the horse scenario. How can we understand what a joke, gag, punchline or humour act is without focusing rigorously in the first instance on understanding appreciation and then moving backwards to an analysis of the comedy text? Morreall points out that not all incongruities are funny and humour studies undoubtedly accepts this. However, what is not discussed, observed or studied is the painful fact that not all jokes are funny, that a joke told by different people can be followed by widely different responses and that a lot of the things we actually laugh at are not in fact jokes, nor contain the incongruities central to much humour theory.

There is often an assumption in humour theory of a magical bond between joking and laughter, a false assumption that laughter follows neatly and without a gap after the presentation of a well-structured punchline. This, and the paucity of studies whose concern is actually to observe when people laugh, why they laugh and to what effect has fostered a belief that laughter is a response to humour, that it is a reaction to the stimulus of the text and therefore only exists as part of a textual reaction, socially isolated. However as Mulkay points out:

> [L]aughter is generated in the course of social interaction and [...] it can be used by participants to communicate about and to construct the meaning of such interaction. If one were to explore this aspect of laughter, one would be led to investigate how laughter varies with the social process underway and how it is fitted systematically into the ongoing interaction.

> Mulkay, 1988, p.95

It will be part of my aim to rectify this and other failings with previous research in humour studies. I will build an argument that places the experience of humour firmly within a social and sociable environment, that observes how the perception of and response to humour can vary immensely, that establishes just what sort of humour is being used and how it is being received and looks at the ways in which the rituals of humour are developed, manipulated and enacted. In order to start this investigation, in the next chapter I begin the shift from joke analysis disembodied from context to an in situ analysis. I look at audiences as an essential part of any

understanding of joking and stand-up and explore how venues for stand-up inform and shape the audience's stand-up experience.

Notes

1 See Nilsen 1993 for a suggestive list of such courses.

2 See Evans 1987, Nilsen 1992, 1993, and Rutter (1997) for more comprehensive bibliographies of humour research.

3 However, Victor Raskin pointed out in his keynote address "The State of the Art in Humour Research: Let's Amalgamate!" at the 1995 ISHS conference the *multidisciplinary* when applied to humour research has tended to mean parallel monodisciplinary investigations rather than truly multidisciplinary work.

4 As Raskin (1985) points out these groupings can also be characterised from a psychological perspective as *cognitive-perceptual* (Incongruity), *social-behavioural* (Superiority), and *psychoanalytical* (Relief). There appears no advantage to using these terms in place of the common categorisations.

5 Although this organisation corresponds with that used by Morreall (1983) alternative categorisations are used by Eysenck (1942) and Keith-Spiegel (1972).

6 For complementary reviews of humour theory literature see Piddington (1933), Keith-Spiegel (1972), Paulos (1980), Morreall (1983) and Lippitt (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

7 Gruner draws heavily on Rapp's *Phylogenic Theory* (1949) but prefers to use the term *aggression* when describing his theory of humour.

8 Morreall (1987) quotes the following translation of the passage: "There are some kinds of abuse which lawgivers forbid; perhaps they should have forbidden certain kinds of jokes."

9 Morreall (1986) states that it is Bergson who first introduces the idea that humour has a normalising social function, however Descartes (at least tentatively) alludes to this possible use.

10 Bergson argues that laughter is a uniquely human property in that it is only humans which laugh, and more significantly, it is only humans that can be laughed at. If we laugh at animals or objects Bergson suggests that it is through a process of anthropomorphism. What we laugh at is not the object or the animal but the human characteristic we give it.

11 See Zijderveld (1983, p.8-9) for a contemporary - specifically symbolic interactionist - perspective on humour as deriving from habitual/institutional behaviour.

12 It is the role of habit and experience that both Koestler (1964, p.47) and Zijderveld (1968, pp.21-22) appear to ignore in their critiques of Bergson. It is not

merely the combination of mechanical and organic that is found humorous but the social inappropriateness, unfamiliarity, or undesirability of the combination.

[13] "It is realistic to think that most things have a beginning." Gruner, 1978, p.38

[14] Interestingly, neither Rapp nor Gruner make reference to Stefansson (1913) and his description of Eskimo conflict resolution through battles of insults and witticisms.

[15] As both Rapp and Gruner acknowledge, the retelling of a primordial history in which laughter arises as indexical of victory cannot be verified. Although this is indeed a weakness to the theory, which Gruner attempts to justify through reference to children's humour, it is not necessarily proof that the theory is incorrect.

[16] This addition allows Gruner to argue that laughter at "victimless superiority" (p.85) in humour (such as elephant jokes) arises from the hearer's success in solving the riddle.

[17] See Douglas (1968) for an examination of the difficulties in separating insults and joking.

[18] It is these very issues that Davies (1982) returns to when pointing out that ethnic jokes tend to centre on peripheral groups and micro differences rather than alien cultures.

[19] For example Robert Holden's Laughter Clinic Project and his publications Stress Busters (1992), Laughter is the Best Medicine (1993), and Living Wonderfully (1994). See also Norman Cousins (1979).

[20] See Fry (1994) for a review of the literature on the effects of mirthful laughter on health.

[21] See Decker (1993) for an empirical examination of this "weight judging paradigm."

[22] "The tension is suddenly relieved and exploded in laughter" (p.33).

[23] "Humour appreciation varies inversely with the favourableness towards the agent or entity disparaging it. Appreciation should be maximal when our friends humiliate our enemies and minimal when our enemies manage to get the upper hand over our friends." (pp.100-101)

[24] Hutcheson recognises the temporal and cultural specificity of the emblematic nature of the humorous object. His analysis of Homer's Ajax and Ulysses points out the distinctive importance and superficiality of the emblems used to the nationality and time of the author (and first audience). This points towards much contemporary work on humour and culture (e.g. Mintz - 1985, Boskin - 1979 and Davies - 1990).

[25] For further discussion and development of Koestler's theory of bisociation and how it may be profitably linked with frame theory, see Norrick, 1986.

[26] A script is defined by Raskin as:

> a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Every speaker has internalized rather a large repertoire of scripts of "common sense" which represent his/her knowledge of certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations etc.

Raskin, 1985, p.81

[27] Raskin employs quite a broad use of the term "opposite" and should not be confused with the idea of binary oppositions. For Raskin not only are "good-joke" and "bad-joke" opposites but so (according the text of particular jokes) are "employee" and "lover," "doctor" and "lover, " "animal" and "abuse.

[28] For the thorough analysis of this joke, see Raskin (1995) pp.117-127

[29] It is perhaps a realisation of the increasing problems of traditional humour theory that prompted calls during key note speeches from both Avner Ziv and Victor Raskin at the 1995 ISHS conference for humour research to concentrate on replication and (laboratory) validation rather than developing different approaches.

[30] See for example, Mulkay's (1988, pp.93-114) discussion of Koestler, Morreall and Anthony Chapman and his criticisms of their work as providing incomplete social theories and lacking sociological empiricism.

[31] For example see Radcliffe-Brown (1949, 1940), Zijderveld (1968, 1983), Davies (1982, 1990), Fox (1990).

[32] For a review of literature concerned with the functions of humour see Graham, Papa & Brooks (1992). A more ad hoc systematisation of social functions can be found in Koller (1988) and a list of "uses and gratifications" in Berger (1995).

[33] See Davies, 1982 and 1988 for more complete lists.

[34] Davies does not account for the humour that was observable in much anti-Hitler British propaganda of World War II.

[35] Flaherty is similarly an advocate for *harmless* humour: "For it to be amusing, an attempt at humour must have no grave consequences with respect to person, role or situation." (1984, p.76). See the discussion above.

[36] Sacks (1974) makes a similar observation about the communication of dirty jokes although reaches his conclusion via a different route.

[37] Husband (1988) examines the problem of textual intention and audience interpretation of racial comedy in his analysis of, among other programmes, Till Death Us Do Part.

[38] Problems with this idea of consensus in humour are returned to below.

[39] This is not to say that works such as those referred to above do not have any sociological importance, nor does it mean to ignore work done in neighbouring fields such as anthropology by authors including Christensen 1963 and Hammond 1963. Nor is this assertion an oversight of the work done in social psychology and the specific work environment investigates of Coser (1960) and Goodrich *et al* (1954),

[40] This same point is made similarly in Zijderveld 1969 p.286

[41] This organisation of humour to limit response and minimise the possibility of undesired actions is one that I will return to, later in this work when looking at stand-up comedy.

[42] See Ziv and Gadish (1990) or Palmer (1987) for further perspectives on "only joking" caveats.

[43] See also Jefferson (1979)

[44] Mulkay builds his argument from an analysis of improvised, everyday, ongoing interaction. However, at times, he examines canned jokes as though they existed outside this framework and develops his framework from this perspective. I feel Mulkay never satisfactorily unifies his two perspectives.

[45] Mulkay's analysis is reminiscent of Grice's (1989/1975) system of bona-fide and non-bona-fide communication.

[46] "Incongruity is an essential and persistent feature of humour. The basic bisociative structure of humour is designed to create and display this feature." Mulkay, 1984 p.35.

[47] Mulkay does not enter into any debate to show that this paradox is not merely a product of his conceptualisations of these oppositional modes.

[48] Compare this to Figure 2-1 from Koestler.

[49] A slightly different transcription of this joke appears in Sacks (1974), pp.338-340. The line numbers have been added here for additional clarity.

[50] In Goffmanian terms this may be seen as the establishing of a joking frame.

CHAPTER 3

"YOU'VE BEEN A GREAT CROWD": AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND LAUGHTER

"Comedy, like sodomy, is an unnaural act"
Marty Feldman, 1969

At the closing of the preceding chapter I argued that the history of humour research had created a situation which emphasised an unsubstantiated emphasis on the importance of jokes as a textual entity. Moreover, because of this most of the research based within the three schools of humour theory namely superiority, incongruity and relief were failing to understand and account for the varied and complex phenomenon of contemporary humour. Starting with this chapter I will begin to build a broader picture of that complex phenomenon by providing a review of Mulkay's "social interaction" model (1988) specifically here the experience of being part of an audience for a 1990s stand-up performance. I will show by the end of this chapter that going to see stand-up involves a varied set of negotiations and draws upon a whole ranges of knowledges and expectations from every person involved in the live experience. I will demonstrate that the joke text that has previously received centrality in the concerns of humour researchers is intimately intertwined as just one part of the practical experience of seeing comedy and attending venues.

In order to do this I will present an overview of the elements of humour research that have begun to investigate the comedy audience and highlight the major concerns they have displayed. Through this I will both draw out the useful and informative findings of the research and point out ways in which elements of this audience research have retained a central assumption of humour as a stimulus to which laughter is the autonomic response. Building on this I will further inform my argument by drawing parallels in the development of humour research's concern

with text and audience with the history of audience research in general. Looking at the evolution of audience research from the stimulus-response models of Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) through to the ideological models of Hall (1980) and into the ethnographic investigations of researchers such as Lull (1990) I will suggest that the transformations from stimulus to interaction which I argue for in humour research are part of a wider movement in other sociological concerns.

Upon this foundation I will build in the last section of this chapter a detailed description and analysis of what going to see comedy at a venue involves and the ways in which it is unique among experiences of public performance. I will show that a commonality between venues and the organisation of the event within them exists and that it is recognised and utilised by performers, proprietors and audience alike. Finally I will argue that this regularity between venues and the recognition its receives by members of the stand-up experience all allow me to build a framework which can take the specific performances and venues covered as part of this research and apply them to performances and venues generally. This will enable me to move on to the next level of my study.

3.1 THE COMEDY AUDIENCE

Although the frequent citation of Jack Morrison's 1940 paper on comedy audiences in even recent papers is indicative of the scarcity of research on audiences, there is, however, a small body of humour research which identifies the experience of being exposed to humour in a group situation[1] as a valid area for research. A review of this body of mainly psychological work shows that whilst some interesting results and hypotheses have been produced there are still assumptions encoded into this research that make it problematic when approach from a sociological perspective. Taking these I will highlight a number of the implications from this research that have not been pursued and areas of the comedy experience that are still neglected

Although investigators from disciplines as diverse as zoology, psychology and sociology have examined either comedy audiences or (more commonly) reactions of

groups to comic stimuli this research has concentrated almost exclusively on a small number of common themes: spatial variables, group laughter and recorded laughter.

Using this triptych I want to arrange the research as follows: Under the umbrella of **spatial variables** I have included those research projects which have attempted to isolate the physical environment in which humour is experienced as their main variable for investigation. Therefore work included in this category includes research into audience size, seating arrangement and density of audience. **Group laughter** has been identified as work that have a central concern in laughter as part of social interaction and as influenced by the company of other individuals. Finally, the largest of the three categories, **recorded laughter**, includes work that has looked at the effects produced by and responses received by exposure to laughter itself either on as part of a soundtrack on a comedy tape or in ways associated with exposure to humour.

3.1.1 Spatial Variables

Morrison (1940) is probably the first research study to concern itself specifically with comedy audiences and remains unique in this review in that it undertakes the study of audiences in a natural environment rather than aiming to study in a controlled situation. By monitoring a series of performances of <u>Playboy of the Western World</u> and recording the size of the audience, the number of laughs of greater than one second, and the total duration at laughter for the performance he showed that there is a general correlation between audience size and audience laughter. He demonstrated that as the audience size increases so to does the number of laughs from the audience per performance and that, moreover, the length of time the audience spends laughing also increases with increasingly larger audiences. Morrison did discover also, however, that this relationship between size of the house and the audience's laughter is not governed by a constant as similar sized audiences do give varied laughter responses. Which again suggests that any natural science charting of a stimulus-response model has sever limitations when understanding he natural audience and interaction.

In Morrison's study the size of the venue and the comedy watched remained a constant whilst the size of the audience was an uncontrolled variable. In their 1983 paper the psychologists Aiello, Thompson and Brodzinski construct a series of experiments in which both audience size and room size are varied to investigate how the "loss of personal control" (p.194) affects the individual's enjoyment of humour. In agreement with Morrison, Aellio *et al.* found that "high spatial density was found to *enhance* subjects enjoyment of the humour passages," (p.205) but also that those subjects who were exposed to the humour throughout the test reported "...having greater vigour, less fatigue, more interest, and more involvement" (p.204). Interestingly they also report that the group who experience greatest social density and were exposed to humour felt the most crowded and confined which would seem to suggest the effect of crowding on humour appreciation has an optimum level beyond which exposure to humour actually becomes less amusing and more irritating.

There is noticeable a shift not only in methods from Morrison to Aellio *et al.* and other more recent studies but also in what is actually being studied. Morrison is specifically interested in laughter whereas research coming out if the psychological model is interested in *arousal* as a measurable and quantifiable value. Yates and Miller (1982) are similarly interested in the links between arousal caused by environment and the appreciation of humour but they link it to seating orientation and to Berlyne's (1972) hypothesis that higher arousal prior to being exposed to humour increases the appreciation of it.[2] Building on research that suggests that females prefer to sit next to a liked other and are most uncomfortable when strangers occupy that position, while conversely males prefer to sit facing a 'liked other' and feel discomfort when this position is taken by a stranger, Yates and Miller hypothesised that women would appreciate a series of jokes more when sat side by side with a stranger (i.e. in a situation of higher arousal) whereas male subjects would appreciate the jokes more when sat facing a stranger. This proved to be only partly correct. The female subjects did rate the jokes as more humorous when sat side by side with a stranger, however, so did the male subjects.

Yates and Miller put forward two suggestions as to why this may be the case. Firstly, the subjects were closer to each other in the side by side situation rather than the face to face situation. As the smaller distance would constitute a greater invasion of personal space it would produce a greater arousal than the face to face situation and therefore produce higher humour ratings.

Secondly, males prefer to maintain greater distance between themselves and others in comparison to females. Therefore, suggest Yates and Miller, although the males found the closer situation more threatening (arousing) this was offset as they were in their preferred side by side seating situation, whereas the female subjects were less aroused by the proximity but were threatened by the side by side seating. As such "[t]he over-all effect of this condition then may have been to produce an increase in arousal of similar magnitude in each gender." (p. 575) Both the explanations, however, can be seen to rely for their appropriateness on the validity of Berlyne's concept of arousal jag.

Regardless of whether we accept or reject Berlyne's arousal jag this discussion from Yates and Miller does serve to highlight a specific methodological problem of their approach. They, like many other psychologists working in humour research, claim to be studying laughter/arousal in a controlled, observable and unbiased manner in which cause and effect, stimulus and response can be identified, manipulated and used to produced quantifiable results. However, the results themselves have no value without debate to place them within a broader and more general context and because this debate is essentially opinion and hypotheses it works to undermine the concept of neutrality of this natural science model.

Regardless of this what Morrison, Yates & Miller and Aellio *et al.* do demonstrate within there own parameters is that the situation in which comedy is experienced does have profound effects on the way the comedy is perceived, how much it is enjoyed and what laughter it evokes. While none of the above researchers is necessarily calling for a study of humour which is context sensitive their findings do add weight for my call for such a shift. A knowledge of their observations that

audience size and density influence laughter make is impossible for the analyst of stand-up comedy to ignore the geography of the venue and the real life experience of attending a comedy club.

3.1.2 Group Laughter

If local environment can effect laughter as shown above then it must be recognised that laughter is not the stable response to a humorous stimulus but a process which negotiates with and it responsive its local context.[3] Such an approach emphasises that laughter is an act of social communication and interaction. This once again supports a movement from study of the joke text towards a more holistic analysis of the comedy club experience itself. Once this shift has started it becomes rapidly apparent that unlike the pattern of joking represented by a stimulus-response model which implies a single agent at each end of the humour process laughter in the stand-up venue is essentially a group process. Pursuing this idea of group laughter and turning now to work that has concentrated on the effect of exposure to humorous stimuli in a group situation I can begin to open up my second category of audience research in humour studies, that of group laughter.

Provine (1992) suggests that laughter is "a unique and ancient mode of prelinguistic auditory communication" (p.1). Arguing that laughter has many features which link it to bird song and other animal calls he suggests that *call-like laughter* is universal and species typical to humans. He argues that its form is simple and temporally symmetrical enough to be strongly recognisable when heard in reverse all of which suggest "a strong genetic basis" (p.1). These atavistic properties of laughter he argues are strong enough that the laughter itself will produce laughter and smiles in those that hear it (see also Chapman, 1973).

To investigate this he exposed three classes of undergraduates to a laughter stimulus produced by a *laugh box* - a small mechanical toy which plays a laugh-like sound. Using self-reports his subjects recorded whether they laughed or smiled in response

to the sound. The process was repeated a total of ten times with each group. Provine reported that laughter did inded precipitate smiles and laughter in those exposed to it but that the amount of these decline rapidly with the repetition of the same stimulus to a point where most of the subjects (approximately ¾) found the stimulus 'obnoxious'. He suggests that contagious laughter causes replication or mimicry in the hearer and hypothesises that:

> the strength of the negative response seemed to exceed what might be expected from the repeated exposure to a generic auditory stimulus and suggests a reaction specific to laughter.

Provine, 1992, p.3

However, because of the stimulus-response basis of much of the work on comedy audiences and its concern with manufacturing and observing controllable variables and quantifiable stimuli the rich notion of laughter as shared, negotiated and responsive has often been replaced in the laboratory with pre-recorded laughter.

Provine and Fischer (1989) build on data given in the log books in which 28 subjects recorded hourly for a week all instances of laughter, smiling and talking they experienced alongside a record of their activities (including exposure to various media and sleep) and who they were with during these activities. Most relevant is the finding that - if interaction with media is excluded - people are thirty times more likely to laugh in social situations than in solitary ones. They also found that smiling is six times more likely to take place in social rather than solitary situations, and talking which was approximately four times more likely in the company of others. The probabilities of laughing, smiling and talking including solitary situation both in which the subject was and was not exposed to one form or media or another are given below.

	LAUGHING			SMILING			TALKING		
	Media	No Media	Total	Media	No Media	Total	Media	No Media	Total
Alone	.072	.012	.082	.064	0.74	.130	.130	.168	.250
Social	.064	.397	.428	.106	.473	.538	.281	.721	.814
Total	.129	.395	.494	.169	.514	.624	.359	.781	.900
n	28			22			22		

Table 3-1: Probability of awake subjects laughing, smiling, or talking in different social and media environments.

From Provine and Fischer, 1989, p.297

These results place smiling and especially laughing firmly in a social and interactive context especially as instances of these actions were related to individual events rather than any ongoing feeling of well being, euphoria or spontaneous outburst. Further, although Provine and Fischer do not detail what their subjects laughed and smiled at while exposed to media, it does raise issues about the definition of social interaction and its possible extension to media. For example did subjects laugh at portrayals or characters and situation or, as in the canned laughter experiments below, feel motivated to laugh because of interaction with an imaged companion audience.

Either way it reinforces the observations of other researchers that laughter and smiling are not solitary activities but profoundly interactive and social ones. For example, Smyth and Fuller (1972) make reference to Giles and Oxfords' (1970) "social laughter", laughter which is associated with the laughter of a member of a group such that both bouts of infectious giggles and polite laughter at a work mate's jokes are both social. Also, there is the implicit recognition of laughter as social when we notice that Young and Frye (1966) are concerned with the manipulation of "social environment" (p.747) in order to observe the way in which responses to humour are mediated when in the company of others who display discomfort with

the humour. However, despite its rarefied foundation this body of work can be seen to provide useful pointers not only in understanding people's inter/reaction with canned laughter in sitcoms but their relationship to laughter per se.

3.1.3 Recorded Laughter

Canned laughter, i.e. the use of pre-recorded laughter to highlight and supplement programmes such as sitcom, is, anecdotally at least,[4] ever present in TV and radio comedy shows and used with the intention of highlighting comic moments and encouraging laughter in the home audience. Testing whether canned laughter does indeed have this desired effect Leventhal and Mace (1970) examined the effect on individuals of viewing films with and without the addition of canned laughter following humorous incidents. They found a positive, but weak, correlation between the insertion of canned laughter and the rise in laughter responses from the subjects.

Assuming that the rapidly diminishing effects of Provine's atavistic laughter stimulating laughter can not be responsible for additional laughter received throughout a film extract the increase in audience laughter must be related to some other concept of laughter as a shared experience. It is this exploration of the way in which exposure to laughter encourages a sharing of laughter that can be found in Smyth and Fuller (1972). They reported that the amount and duration of laughter was significantly correlated to the use of the canned laughter, and that the two segments from the Private Eye Christmas Record (1970) that had a laugh track added were rated higher by the subjects. Supplementing these investigations Nosanchuk and Lightstone (1974) found that not only did the canned laughter produce higher ratings for humour but that low laughter for good jokes reduced the ratings they received whilst inappropriately high levels of laughter for poor joke increased substantially their reception. More recently the positive correlation between the use at a laugh track, smiling and laughter has been established by Martin and Gray's study (1995) of British students listening to a radio programme, Gruner's (1993, 1994) investigations of humorous speeches with and without laugh tracks, and the

study of dubbed and undubbed comedy routine by Bush, Barr, McHugo & Lanzetta (1989).

From this research it is apparent that laughter is a group process, which generates a temporary consensus (see also Young & Frye, 1966). The implications for this thesis are great as it highlights the interactional nature of group laughter in public and the wllingness of individuals to negotiate a group action in the stand-up environment.

The possibilities of connections between laughter, canned laughter and group conformity are explicitly examined by Nosanchuk and Lightstone (1974) who hypothesised that subjects who heard what they believed to be the live responses from peers to the stimulus jokes would change both their response and judgement of the jokes in accordance with the believed reactions of the others. Throughout the experiment subjects were asked to rate the funniness of the jokes they heard but they were also - unknown to them - filmed in order to monitor their laughter responses. This was in recognition of the separation, discussed above, of physical response and intellectual evaluation. However, Nosanchuk and Lightstone place this in the context of public conformity and private conformity.

What Nosanchuk and Lightstone found was that both the level of private conformity, as given by the written ratings of the humorous anecdotes, and the level of public conformity, as given by the laughter responses, are greater on exposure to the canned laughter than those without.[5] Noticeably though, the increase in favourable ratings indicated by laughter responses were higher than those given by written evaluations.

It would appear clear then that the use of canned laughter increases the number and duration of laughs that a comedy sequence receives from an audience (Leventhal & Mace 1970, Smyth & Fuller 1972, Chapman 1973, Nosanchuk and Lightstone 1974) but the reasons that the literature offer for this remain not so clear cut as a number of processes are argued to influence the situation: Response to the laughter itself (Provine 1990); a desire by individuals in an audience to conform to the expected judgement of a text (Nosanchuk & Lightstone 1974); and an individual' s reaction to the audience as a humorous stimulus (Smyth & Fuller 1972). However, within the

remit of my thesis these attempts at explanation are neither helpful nor centrally important for a number of reasons: Firstly, they once again reaffirm that laughter is the effect upon individuals of an external stimulus. Secondly they imply that this response is involuntary or in such a way sufficiently unconscious as to evade modification, control or recognition by the individual. Thirdly, because of their basis within the stimulus-response model they take laughter as a final result rather than one component within an ongoing real life situation.

3.2 AUDIENCE RESEARCH AND HUMOUR STUDIES

It is at this point useful to provide a brief overview of the history of audience research so as to develop a contextual backdrop again which to view the development of humour research. More rigorous examinations of audience research's development can be found elsewhere (e.g. Moores 1993, Nightingale 1996) but here I will suggest that the evolution of audience research has gone trough three separate stages and that these are *Effects Model, Encoding/Decoding, Ethnographic Approaches*. Taking each in turn I will look at their basic premises and show how they may parallel moves in humour research.

3.2.1 Effects Model

The effects model of audiences is notable in two primary ways - it has a pivotal belief in the power and influence of the (usually television) text and the passivity of the audience. Such a view of audiences sees them as undistinguishing in their consumption and ultimately absorbent of all that passes before their eyes. It sees the media they watch as degenerate either in its lack of cultural capital, its excess of

violence, or the very fact that if prevents the susceptible from pursuing more profitable pastimes.

Within the effects model the media text is seen to have a measurable influence (either short- or long-term) on the behaviour or beliefs of those exposed to it. Moreover, this effect is inevitably constructed as a negative one. Media audiences are open to the constant threat of moral and ideological decay in that the watching of depictions of violence would lead to violent behaviour, exposure to sexually explicit material would precipitate sex crime, viewing of political discourses would cause insurrection or changes in voting patterns, and so forth. The media text is seen to have a message which is passed directly and unproblematically into the consciousness of members of the audience.

Because of this neat and simple view of audiences and its strong behavioural appeal work based on this model has been profoundly influenced with laboratory based research. As the message contained within a programme or film is seen as a stimulus all that needs to be done to analysis its effect is to codify the message and records its effects either via before-and-after questionnaires or observation so that quantitative data can be produced as evidence. The main thrust of effects research has been to establish what texts *do* to their audiences.

Such a methodology can be seen to have strong parallels with much of the social psychological work on humour discussed above. They share a belief in the predictability of individual's response to a nominated stimulus contained within a text and that because of this the stimulus can be understood by removing it from the surrounding text and context and abstracting it from real life experiences.

3.2.2 Encoding/Decoding

Growing out of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS) in the 1970s and 1980s the encoding/decoding model proposed a move away from the effects model with a more complex view of media. Like the effects based approach to audiences encoding/decoding models are concerned with the relationship between mass audience and the broadcast texts they consume. However where it differs from previous viewpoints is in its recognition of members of an audience as active in their consumption and understanding of media texts and its basis within a semiotically influenced form of sociology..

In many ways the research focus for the encoding/decoding model is an ideological one. It recognises that media audience is not homogenous and that not only do people's viewing of television differ according to the social or sub-cultural group so do the way they view the programmes they see. It related viewing practices to issues of power and dominance. Developing a new perspective on the audience-text relationship with their initial studying of television audiences the BCCCS recognised that people did not necessarily view programmes in the same way. Morley (1980) linked socio-economic position to subject's understanding of the news programme Nationwide. He showed that although there may indeed be a dominant message encoded into programmes different social groups would view the text with a distinctly oppositional stance. The realisation that people met with texts they saw through negotiated or oppositional reading began the recognition of the complexity of audiences.

Although the encoding/decoding model has been extended and refined by other (e.g. Fiske 1989) an number of primary problems with this approach still exist. For example this model tends to have a basis in data collected after and separate from the viewing experience. The assumption has to be made that in group interviews organised by the researcher and existing outside the natural environment of members of an audience are aware of and be able to articulate the sort of views wanted by the researcher; that views expressed are indeed "true" and not developed solely as part of

the focus group exercise; that these views actually reflect the audience experience for the individuals concerned. Further the encoding/decoding model still does not fundamentally question the assumption found in the effects model above, that media texts contain "a message", an identifiable, encoded meaning that is responded to by the audience .

3.2.3 Ethnographic Approaches

Recent approaches to the understanding of the audience have shifted their site and focus of research from textual investigation to the context of textual consumption. Rather than exploring macro-social concept such as class and power it looks at the local importance of the setting for consuming media and being an audience. For example Lull (1990) works on the premise that as the home is the principle site in which television is watched and that the family is the basic home unit that this should be the focus of an understanding of television use. Based in family homes for long periods of time and becoming involved in the daily goings-on of the household Lull's participant observation sought to get as unmediated view as possible of the way families interacted with television and video.

Unlike psychological, literary and linguistic based methodologies which seeks to understand media by abstracting elements from it or by creating environment in which to watch responses to pre-organised events this ethnographic approach to audiences seeks to observe the audience in a manner which does not effect, alter or organise its activity.[6] Against such a background the importance of the text emphasised in the approaches outlined above become greatly reduced even to the extent where some researchers question whether we can safely identify an rarefied object recognisable as "a text" (see, for example, Bennett & Woollacott, 1987). The object of study becomes not what the text does, or how the text may be understood or mediated but how the text is consumed and what these consumers do with it. This shift has led into the development of a growing literature of fans and their

relationships to television programmes, comics, films, etc. Authors such as Jenkins (1992) have explored the way in which television texts take on their own life within the activities of fans as they produce their own artwork, songs, narratives that draw on, but are not part of, any "official" text.

This, I want to suggest, is the most appropriate audience research paradigm from which to start an exploration of stand-up. It looses the insistence on a stimulus-response found in effects models but is not held back in examining local events by the larger social agenda of the encoding/model. Further, its relegation of notions of a set text with its layers of authorial intention allows a both theoretical and methodological dovetailing with my interactional concerns. However, as I will point out in more detail below, although humour research has begun to shift into this later view of stand-up as a process rather than a text based response it is still, for the most part, firmly wedded to the outmoded effects model.

3.2.4 Humour Audiences

In line with other areas in audience research, research into comedy audiences has recently[7] demonstrated a positive development in work that seeks not to establish how the comedy experience effects audience members but what an audience does with the comedy text. Pollio & Swanson (1995) and Hunt & Pollio (1995) have marked a shift from a stimulus → response model of audiences to something akin to a psychological variation of Hall's Encoding/Decoding model (1980). Rather than looking at laughter or humour evaluation both these papers attempt to examine issues such as whether the audience is attentive to the performance they are a part of (in these cases recordings of Richard Pryor, Bill Cosby and Whoopi Goldberg), what they think while listening to comedy, whether the experience is different with a group of friends as opposed to strangers.

Pollio & Swanson (1995) and Hunt & Pollio (1995) (see also Martin & Gray, 1995) can be seen to be challenging of the emphasis usually placed in humour research on

the telling of "standardised jokes" (Mulkay p.8) and the importance of deciphering the punchline - "getting the joke" - and are moving towards an argument for the study of comedy in a *natural environment*, in which setting and interaction can be seen as contributing factors in the holistic experience.

> [A] good deal of humor and joking, not to mention other antecedents of laughing and smiling, seem to depend, even in the case of formal jokes, on the nature of the social setting in which the joke or humorous event took place. Indeed the standard explanation for a funny remark that evoked laughter in one situation but tailed to evoke it in a second situation is: "Well. you had to be there..."

> Pollio & Swanson, 1995, p.6

However, although Pollio & Swanson highlight the importance in performer-audience interaction in stand-up, their research still takes place within the psychology lab, it involves the playing back of pre-recorded performances, and the flow is interrupted by breaks to allow the completion of self-report forms. This means that in practical terms there can be no interaction between performer and audience because of the comedian's absence. The audience cannot influence the delivery of the comedy just as the performer cannot alter their act to include audience response. Despite movement in the right direction the experience remains essential and artificial, sterile and non-contextualised one.

Another problem with such research from a sociological perspective it still rests on *a priori* assumptions concerning cause and effect; a belief that the interactive web can be unpicked and its parts studied in isolation. This leads to rarefied experiments in which an "official stimulus" is of critical importance and every attempt is made to insulate the psychological subject from the noise of other stimuli such that the possibility of subjects responding to the laughter or smiling of their companions rather than a recorded routine is often seen as a problem. Such experimentation not only creates a false environment for the hearing of comedy but removes the process of preparation that is vital to our real life experience of stand-up comedy.[8]

The research on humour outlined above has concentrated primarily on trying to establish the processes involved in the evaluation of what is to be laughed at. It most commonly assumes a belief in a behaviourist model of the joke-sharing experience in which the following model has been assumed.

```
┌─────────────────────┐        ┌───────────────────────────┐
│  Joke-as-Stimulus   ├───────►│   Laughter-as-Response    │
└─────────────────────┘        └───────────────────────────┘
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Figure 3-1: Stimulus-Response Model of Joke Telling

The process of comedy is restricted to one involving the creation of the humorous text and then a logical reaction to it. However, as Stearns (1972) points out, the use of the term 'stimulus' is so vague and variable between even different medical specialisations as to become almost useless. Instead, he argues, stimulus becomes an assumed value derived from the labelling and observation of a response.[9] This jump of logic is highly problematic. This does not prevent the usually rigorous Raskin (1985) from defining the conditions for humour thus:

> [S]omething must happen in a humour act. An utterance has to be made, a situation should be presented and responded to humorously. The natural term for this obligatory factor is the **stimulus**.

Raskin, 1985, p.4

Koestler (1964) talks of "seeing the joke [...] solving the problem" (p.91) and Mulkay (1988) suggests that on hearing a joke our "task is to appreciate the bisociative structure" but any brief examination of transcripts of actual joking interactions (such as those supplied in Sacks 1974, Jefferson 1979, 1984) shows that laughter is found throughout the telling of jokes. That the reverential respect that linguists show for the development of the joking structure and narrative is not shared with hearers of jokes. Hearers will interrupt the flow of the joke and rearrange the sequence of turn taking with their own comments, questions and witticisms. Hearers may well finish the joke started by somebody else, provide alternative endings or

even change the subject enough to prevent completion of the joke. This does not interfere with the humorous experience because **it is** the humorous experience.

Similarly, Fry (1963) suggests the primary question in humour research is, "What is it that *makes* people laugh?"[10] (p.27: my emphasis), Koestler argues that laughter is "a true reflex" (p.30) and even when approaching humour from a sociological vantage point Flaherty (1984) asks "How do human beings manufacture amusement in one another?" (1984, p.72). The belief is expounded that if only people can learn to respond to the ruling structure that is the stimulus in the comedy text they can acquire a sense of humour. Humour, laughter and social bonding become reduced to acquiring stereotyped responses to the incongruous comedy text. This might be compared with the hypodermic theory of media audiences in which exposure to a specific text has a direct, unmediated and unnegotiated effect upon a viewer.

In stimulus-response theories the assumption is usually implicit that laughter is always involuntary (even hysterical). From Cicero's (55BC) assertion that laughter "bursts out so unexpectedlv that, strive as we may we cannot restrain it" to Sidney's "We shall [...] laugh sometimes to find a matter quite mistaken and go down the hill against the bias, in the mouth of some such men, as for the respect of them one shall be heartily sorry, yet he cannot choose but laugh" and Morreall's (1983 p.46) "Even the shift from a neutral emotional state to simply *thinking* about something that arouses positive emotions can be enough to trigger laughter," humorous laughter is seen as reactive, unstoppable and unchannelable.

However, the departure from traditional concerns of the humour researcher that I'm suggesting and has been seen to have begun to develop does echo the history of development in audience research. It too has begun to move from a paradigm based in notions of cause and effect (the humour research equivalent of what I have labelled the stimulus → response model) through to a current view of media as an item which is *used* in a real world context.

The world that the laboratory-based psychological experiments remove comedy from is the comedy club. The venue is the site of stand-up performance and one that as

such cannot be untangled from any thorough understanding of the comedy that goes on within it. For this reason I move next onto looking at the comedy club, providing a description of what they look like and how they are organised, and how audience members recognise the rules that operate within them.

3.3 STAND-UP IN THE VENUE

The emphasis on the study of jokes in much humour research makes it tempting to view stand-up comedy as just a collection of jokes, funny stories and witticisms and to relegate any move towards understandings its environment as irrelevant. Although it might be argued that the prime purpose of stand-up is the telling of jokes by a performer for the entertainment of a gathered audience, such a simplification ignores not only the social processes that make this possible but also guide the actions of both performer and audience. To ignore the real world environment that stand-up comedy, its performers and audience inhabit is to ignore a number of important phenomena which mark the stand-up comedy experience as separate from informal joking, that make it more than the stringing together of a series of jokes, and which place it within a particular social frame. Although these points may appear self evident they are pointedly absent from previous investigations of comedy audiences reviewed above.

Live stand-up is a public rather than domestic form of entertainment, it happens outside of the home and it involves being in the company of strangers for a period of time. Individuals who make up the audience for comedy have no power over the site that is used for the performance nor do they have any control over its duration or who else will attend. Although they can choose to attend gigs by their favourite comedians, they cannot influence who else will perform on any particular night or choose the running order for the night's performers. The decision to go to watch. stand-up comedy is one that inherently calls on the members of the audience to trust all those others who are involved in the production process as such a decision involves investment of time, effort and money and so has an element of a risk associated with it.

There is a whole series of processes that have to be gone through before an audience arrives at a venue and the performance begins. The fact that both performer(s) and audience converge at the same place at the same time for a common experience is itself the result of a multitude of social organised processes. It takes thought, planning, decision making and the involvement of others besides the individual of the audience and the performer. Acts must be booked in advance, a compere organised, flyers must be commissioned, designed, printed and circulated and publicity such as listings or newspaper advertisements must be organised. All this, Cohen (1991) argues in relation to rock gigs, creates "a sense of occasion and expectancy" (p.94) and although the pattern of this production is not my focus here it does serve neatly to demonstrate the difficulty of viewing stand-up as a live, spontaneous event in which jokes are told, laughs are shared and beer is drunk. It highlights the fact that a complex set of social actions must be gone through before the live event can come into being.

And just as the system of production has a pre-history to the performance, so does the audience. To attend a stand-up performance involves a conscious series of decisions that are not part of being exposed to conversational humour at home, in the workplace, in a social gathering, or in any other impromptu situation. Friends must be notified, a consensus to go and watch comedy must be made, travel to the venue must be arranged, weather must be contended with, cash points have to be visited, parking has to be found or public transport negotiated, money must be paid to gain admission, and seating must be taken in an arranged environment. Even on the smoothest of nights, phone calls will probably have had to be made for times and places to meet to be arranged. All of these actions will entail some sort of specialist knowledge and a certain amount of taking on of responsibility. The process that makes up this venture may appear complex or apparently relatively simple but they must be gone through and in turn they work towards positioning our expectations for the evening and mark the experience of watching and performing stand-up as distinct from conversational joking.

Just as the act of reaching a venue effects an audiences relationship to the comedy they see within it so does the geography of the venue itself. Stebbins (1990) recognises the broader context when he suggests the physical layout of the comedy venue is pivotal to a full understandings of stand-up comedy in situ. Indeed it can be seen that both the exterior and interior of comedy venues in Britain function towards shaping an audience's expectations and consumption of the stand-up comedy that takes place there. Further, venues that play host to stand-up comedy can be understood not only by an analysis of what can be seen to be but by contrasting them with other sites of performance such as theatres, cinemas, sports arenas etc. and hence understanding some of the uniqueness that is involved in attending stand-up comedy at such a venue. In Britain, stand-up comedy generally takes place in one large room in a pub.[11] Partitions, booths, columns and so on that might be part of the building's structure or serve other functions when the venue is being put to other uses are problematic for the stand-up performance. Sight lines can be poor and the room acoustically difficult. The comedy venue can be differentiated from other sites of performance on a number of counts not least of which is the fact that it is neither a purpose built space nor is it one that (normally) has undergone much of a conversion process.

In contrast to cinemas, theatres, concert venues, sports arenas etc. the amount of space that is marked out as *the performer's* in stand-up venues is minimal. In most venues where there is a physical stage it always less than a two feet high and usually only raised by a few inches. Similarly, although the performer is more intensely lit than the audience during their set unlike theatre performances the contrast is intentionally not stark enough that the performer is unable to see the audience, nor the audience clearly to see each other.

In further contrast the set up of stand-up performance areas is much more static than that of the theatre. It does not change from performance to performance instead each performer brings their act onto the same stage rather than recreating the staging space to meet their own needs. There are no changes of scenery, backdrops, or opening and closing of proscenium arch curtains. This means also that there is no pre-performance spectacle to observe before stand-up comedy as an audience waiting for

a gig to start is not faced with anything more or different than the usual open stage. Bennett (1990) points out how pre-set open stages are often used in theatre productions to alert an audience to the themes, tone, and style of a stage play.

> Elements of semi-fixed-feature relations are also part of the audience's experience at this pre-performance level. The condition of the stage set at the point of an audience's entry can provide an important first stimulus for the audience's perception of the play. Where it is available for consumption, it acts as the initiator of the decoding process and this inevitability has been exploited by many playwrights and director.

> Bennett, 1990, p.142

Rather than being presented with this taster of the forthcoming performance, the stand-up audience is met with a stage which is much the same whatever the venue. Instead its expectations of comedy are aroused with the omnipotent microphone on a stand and often with its associated sound system and speakers in the top corners of the stage.[12] This microphone stand demonstrates not only that the pub is going to be used for performance but more specifically that the performance is going to be stand-up comedy.[13] It has become iconic of stand-up denoting stand-up comedy on posters, books and video covers.[14]

Further in contrast to other performance venues, seating at stand-up comedy is not sectioned according to economics. Although concessions are usually available for the unwaged, ticket prices cover entry into the venue rather than allocation to a certain seat or area. Seating is usually allocated on a first-come-first-served basis with the most popular seats being in the middle of the venue and those closest to the stage being the least.

Chairs are placed around small tables and benches that run along the room's walls and have tables placed in front of then. This creates an environment both similar to that traditionally found in British pubs but on a more dense basis - once a venue has filled with its audience it is often difficult to negotiate a clear path through them to the bar, the toilet or exit. This layout, like that of the pub, is one that encourages group interaction as going to stand-up comedy, like going to the pub, is almost

invariably a group process. In contrast to traditional theatre which tends to appears to cater towards a concept of the bourgeois individual rather than encouraging the interacting, group, people do not tend to go to venues on their own unless they are planning to meet friends there. Whereas the comedy audience is usually not as intimate as the audience Cohen (1990) describes for rock bands,[15] groups will not only share the watching comedy, but discussion, laughter, buying of drinks in rounds, comment on performance and the taxi fare home. Sitting around a table rather than in the rows of a theatre auditorium allows and encourages this.

However, these interactional features of stand-up have to be actively balanced with aspects associated with being an audience. Going to see stand-up can sometimes intrude on the accepted methods of behaviour that apply to audiences for comedy. In the extract below, Adrian Cook notices a group at a table having, a conversation during his performance where one member of the group has his back to the stage.[16]

Extract 3-1: Adrian Cook (Simplified)

AC:	( ) What's going on over here'?
Heckler:	( )
AC:	There's a bloke sat with his back to me, you know.
	What a weird way to watch comedy.
	[Laughter]
	That's how you watch television is it'?
Heckler:	That's right.
AC:	"Haven't got a television - only got a radio.
	[Laughter]
	(Turns around)
	Fuck me, it's a television!"
	[Laughter]
	[Applause]

Although venues around Britain show a great level of similarity there is no natural link between their layout and comedy and it is important to understand that British stand-up culture is geographically and culturally specific. The similarity between venues and the interaction within them is produced by the people who manufacture, order and inhabit them though. This commonality is actively produced and culturally specific. For example, although Stebbins' (1990) initial description of *Foibles*, a

fictitious but typical stand-up club in Canada, initially sounds identical to a British club with its audience "seated at tables in a rectangular-shaped room with the stage [...] centred on one of the long sides" (p.35) as his description continues, distinct and important differences between *Foibles* and a typical British club become apparent.

> *Foibles* has a plain interior. Its black walls and ceiling direct attention towards that stage and help create a sense of density, an environment of contagion. Black and white show business photos hung here and there do little to alter the subtle persuasion.
>
> Stebbins, 1990, p.37

Such a description seems logical and natural enough; it is a site converted for the purpose of being a venue for comedy, it mixes traits of drama studio-black walls, cabaret seating and, with its bar, nightclub hospitality. However, what is implicit in the description Stebbins provides, but never brought to the fore, is that this room has the sole or primary function of housing stand-up comedy. In Britain this is not the case as venues play host to comedy as only one of a range of entertainment functions or uses. A room that is used for comedy during the weekend evenings may house live or jukebox music, a trivia quiz, the broadcast of a football match or a poetry reading on other evenings. It may he used for private functions ranging from birthday parties and works' Christmas celebrations to wedding receptions and during the day and on evenings when not used otherwise, rooms may just be part of the general flow of the pub. However, these events usually remain separate, hybrid evenings of entertainment such as a quiz-and-comedy night, or disco-and-comedy evening when they do take place tend to be fairly unsuccessful.[17] This demarcation appears more strict than with rock gigs at which disco and live performance can he part of a single package (Cohen 1991) and casinos in the United States where stand-up may be just one entertainment option available. With rare exceptions even clubs which are set up specifically as comedy clubs have to use their space for other purposes.

As most stand-up comedy in Britain takes place in rooms in pubs both the expectations of audience and performer are built around the linking of pub culture and stand-up comedy. This once again emphasises the need for the researcher

examining stand-up to place the research within the social context of the event and examine the broader experience of comedy interaction rather than a stimulus based conception of joking. By doing this it becomes apparent that the comedy, the performer and the audience negotiates, accepts and expects the set format that comedy in pubs promotes and that the live situation is inseparable from the comedy experience.

As such there is always a duality about the function of the contemporary British stand-up comedy venue. More often than not performances take place in selected rooms in pubs, in an upstairs function area, a back room or a specially partitioned area. However, unlike a traditional theatre production, the performance is not necessarily the primary focus of the evening's entertainment. For an audience the experience of going out is often more important to them then going to see comedy and going to be an audience at a stand-up gig may have just been one of the options that were considered in their planning. As such there is always a negotiation that takes place between the frames of practice applied to going to a pub and those relevant to going to stand-up comedy.

Stand-up venues are always both places for both drinking and seeing comedy. The bar plays a more important role in the evenings proceedings than American venues or the Canadian one that Stebbins describes. Even in the occasional dedicated venues that exist for stand-up comedy, the bar is omnipresent, open before, during, and (licensing laws permitting[18]) after the performance. The importance of the bar would appear to be far greater in British venues than elsewhere. Although people tend to refrain from going to the bar during the acts (especially if sat towards the stage) even headlining acts tend to limit their act to approximately twenty minutes long and sufficient time is left by the compere between sets to allow everyone to visit the bar before the next performer.[19] This means that the watching of stand-up is, although more active than watching a play, a somewhat static event especially when compared with watching a rock gig in which the bar can usually be visited at any time, and the audience is constantly moving.

The attitude to drinking at stand-up gigs, although encouraged, is regulated.[20] Although the bar will serve during performances it is accepted that people tend not to visit it. Hugh Dennis is not alone when he talks about the problems that he and his performance partner, Steve Punt, had with members of a audience that have come down at the wrong side of drinking-watching comedy balance:

> We had a bit of trouble at the Dominion, because we had twenty completely pissed Spurs fans in, who hadn't really come to see us. They'd come out for a night out after the Spurs game. They we all out of their heads and having their own show in the balcony.

Cook, 1994, p.164

This recurrent problem of inappropriate behaviour in stand-up venues is not surprising when placed against the nature of pub culture in Britain and the duality of comedy venues. Unlike the setting of the venues that Stebbin's (1990) describes Britain has a very strong pub culture and a broad acceptance of drinking and getting drunk as an acceptable and social leisure activity. Pubs carry with them in British culture a legacy of being men only environment in which groups of men could drink and socialise together without concern for their wives, partners or family (Hey, 1986). As such pubs, drinking and masculinity are closely entwined through tradition, culture and experience and the football fans that Punt describes are not in any way behaving in a manner unusual for a group of men in a pub after a match.

Negotiating the balance between being in a pub and behaving in ways usually associated with the pub experience such as drinking and getting drunk is one that has to be learned by performers as well as audience members. This negotiation between drinking and not drinking in the pub environment is one that comedians often talk about learning how to handle as part of their apprenticeship. Mark Thomas is typical when he describes the way in which drinking, group interaction, pubs and comedy are linked and the way in which he learns at his first gig to separate the two.

> There's a pub in Thornton Heath where trad jazz bands play every Sunday and all my family used to meet up there: my uncles, aunts, mum and dad and the people they worked with. They'd have a few drinks and then off to Sunday lunch. My dad had bought me God knows how many drinks, and I was desperately wound up about it. I'd been drinking all afternoon, and by the time I got to the club I was actually pissed. I shambled on, did fifteen minutes and got one laugh. [...] I thought. "I got one laugh. This is a start. At the next gig I won't be pissed and I'll try much harder."

Mark Thomas in Cook, 1994, p.127

This again marks being involved in stand-up as a unique social process. The relationship, both for audience and performer, to alcohol during other performances that take place in pub can be seen to be very different. Although Cohen (1991) describes a similar tightrope (p.97-98) in which a little alcohol is thought beneficial for both audience and performers but too much is detrimental, instances of drunkenness appear far more common among musicians than during stand-up:

> Tony, on the other hand, usually consumed such a large quantity of alcohol or drugs before a performance that he became, as his friends described it, "off his cake". [...] Tog described how Tony was so drunk at one gig he had to play while supporting himself against a pillar, whilst at another, Tony asked for two volunteers from the audience to hold him up.

Cohen, 1991, p.98

Similarly, although for the group of professional jazz musicians that White (1987) describes "drunkenness on stage was immediate grounds for dismissal" (p.2(05) it did not appear to get in the way of a ritual in which:

Upon arrival for the first set musicians were handed a drink. Then, using the interval everyone had a drink next door at the Castel Bar. Further the barman would often distribute free an expensive round of 'schnapps' which could not he refused without causing insult. This was intended to be consumed alone with Swiss beer which together formed what is known as 'Swiss Scotch'. The two drunk together are extremely potent. By the time they had returned to the Casa-Bar [the musicians' venue] a round of drinks had been prepared by the bar staff waiting to be taken on stage for the second set. Furthermore, the band was usually bought a round of 'shorts' during the set by a customer several times during the evening.

White, 1987, p.205

On the physical level this duality, the link between building-as-pub and building-as-venue often means that the exterior of venues are not as highly signposted as sites of performance as theatres, cinema, exhibition centres etc. The exterior of venues still connote *pubness*: they tend to be large, pre-war, brick buildings with small-paned windows, heavy wooden doors and the ubiquitous wooden signs illustrating the pub's name.[21] There is none of the openness of other venues, no glass doors or walls, no clear view of what is happening inside, no music playing on exterior speakers and no large coloured posters showing photographs of performers, announcements of times, prices and booking details. This closed nature of most pubs also increases the amount of risk involved in entering. Unlike the wide view that is offered of the foyer, booking office and central kiosks of a multiplex cinema, a stand-up venue has to be entered before any first impressions can be gathered about what might be going on inside.

Adding to this, entrances at venues tend to be smaller than those of cinemas, theatres and the like and limited usually to only one. There are no house staff or stewards to greet you on entry or point you in the right direction, there are no enclosed booking office, turnstiles or ticket collectors. Instead comedy goers tend to be met by someone sat behind a small temporary table selling admissions out of a bank box. There are no tickets but a small pile of leaflets giving a listing of forthcoming acts at the venue is usually there and often handed out to the audience with their change. The comedy venue therefore, appears more temporary, more amateur, more informal than other venues. It is always apparent that the site of performance is housed within

a centre for other entertainment. It is indicative of the positioning of the comedy as only secondary to the space's first function, that of being a public house. It hides the preparation that has gone on before the comedy night and encourages a certain familiarity in the audience, a more relaxed atmosphere than that of a theatre, but a more private character than that of the sports arena.

Bennett (1990) suggests that non-traditional places of performance are less formal or less structured. However, it must be remembered that, in the case of stand-up at least, this informality is not an indication that there are no governing systems in operation. As suggested above, behaviour and a knowledge of what is (and what can be) expected and accepted are governed by prior experience, the physical space and the pub/club interaction. The appearance of informality must not be confused with an absence of form. Just as an audience's expectations are developed prior to entering a West End theatre, a multiplex cinema, or a football stadium, the physical, spatial and cultural properties of the stand-up venue suggest a relationship that an individual may have with the venue which, in turn frames their view of the performance within.

The surprising aspect of the systems that are found in stand-up clubs is that despite their appearance of casualness they vary very little from venue to venue, which suggests a very routine system of management is in operation. In contrast to the non-traditional theatre performances that Bennett examines, stand-up utilises a sameness from venue to venue, from performance to performance (and like the social environment of the pub) this works towards creating a non-confrontational atmosphere, a situation which does not seek to challenge, de-centre or disturb its audience but put it at ease and encourage social interaction. This helps to compensate for the risk that is often involved in entering the venue in that no matter which venue comedy is seen in, or however unfamiliar, a set of accepted and identifiable traits can he used as an anchor and guide.

These standard traits that venues share are all too apparent to audiences as well as performers who quickly recognise and label venues that do not conform to the

accepted norms for stand-up and it is apparent that this formulation works for the benefit of' both performer and audience members.[22]

> Most comedy clubs are in pubs, but this one was actually in the bar itself - and it was free to get in. There was a tiny stage in the corner which was in a short bit of an L-shaped bar. The pub was crowded with people, and then the barman said. "After his next record, Donna McPhail." I thought, "This is fucking ridiculous!" I was standing in the corner of the pub with the majority of them completely ignoring me, because they couldn't see me - and a few blokes standing around with their beer.

Donna McPhail in Cook, 1994, p.156

Both performers and audience quickly become literate in recognising and accepting the set formula that is the social experience of being part of a stand-up performance. They become able to read the signs that are part of the venues set up, they acknowledge the behaviour that is deemed acceptable from them, they accept the responsibility for tasks they have to perform they understand the limits put on the social interaction and they negotiate the balance between pub and comedy venue.

It can be argued then that although every visit to a comedy performance can be a unique experience the joking that is found in stand-up is only one part of a system of production and consumption. It is a system made up of accepted norms based in specific cultural values rather than a system of canned jokes and audience responses and it is one which governs the routine of audience attendance, behaviour at the venue as well as the way in which comedians perform their act. Such an observation underpins the shift from an examination of jokes, punchlines and audience reading that has previously be central to the examination of comedy audiences to my view of stand-up comedy in its real world environment in which members of an audience as well as performers are part of a dynamic and developing interaction. It highlights the manner in which stand-up comedy, like any other form of interaction, is not natural but socially constructed and learnt rather than innate and it points to a number of issues which will be central to my investigation of stand-up comedy namely:

- **Commonality** - the way in which stand-up comedy performances, venues, and audiences share specific features

- **Mutuality** - the way in which these features work to the benefit of both performer and audience

- **Minimisation of Risk** - the utilisation of some of these systems to encourage trust and make individuals in the audience less likely to look awkward

- **Interaction** - the way in which both an audience and performer will demonstrate an awareness of its surroundings and other agents.

These issues will run through the chapters that follow and the research that it is built upon as I move on to exploring stand-up in the venue. In the next chapter I will outline a number of methodological and practical issues that are inherent in he study outlined before moving on to an in depth analysis of stand-up as performance.

Notes

[1] The notion or terminology of "audience" is not common to all the literature discussed below. Often it uses conceptualisations such as "subject group". However, given the breadth of definition applied to audience within cultural studies it appears an acceptable term to use here as it can equally encompass the viewing of a film in a group and being played a recording of joke telling.

[2] In his paper, Berlyne (in Goldstein and McGhee, 1972) suggests that for the hearer of a joke, an increase in arousal - arousal boost - is experienced which increases throughout the joke peaking at the punchline. If the hearer gets the joke a release occurs causing a lowering of arousal - arousal jag. If this so, then an increase in arousal prior to the hearing of the joke will contribute to and raise the total arousal experienced and thus heighten humour appreciation. As Yates and Miller point out although this can be verified through physiological tests, it is unclear as to whether this change in arousal is the cause or effect of the experience of humour.

[3] This claim will be substantiated not only for comedy venues but also for everyday laughter and smiling below.

[4] Canned laughter as such is very rarely used in contemporary programmes. Shows tend to be recorded before a live audience and their response is recorded. If any additions or editing have to be made the practice is to use segments of the live laughter rather than library material. Canned laughter is now more commonly found as a frame breaking device (see Harry Hill Live (1995) or segments of Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers (1994)).

[5] This difference between laughter at and evaluation of humour is also noted by Leventhal and Mace (1970), Chapman (1973), Cupchik & Leventhal (1974) and Young and Frye (1966).

[6] This point is returned to in Chapter 4 during a discussion of conversation analysis' approach to naturally occurring events is discussed.

[7] This has its antecedents in Murphy & Pollio (1975).

[8] I shall return to this issue later in this chapter.

[9] The emphasis on a building a methodology which seeks to establish how individuals order and manage systems *in situ* rather than the researcher producing a system for conceptualising that interaction is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

[10] Chapman & Foot (1977) refer to the observation made by the successful British comedian, Ken Dodd at the 1976 International Conference on Humour and Laughter that "no-one can "make" anyone lese laugh. " p. XI

[11] This is, of course, not the only venue for stand-up comedy in Britain but Donna McPhail points out it is the accepted norm:

> Any gig that isn't in a comedy club is impossible -- like doing a gig in cinema or a conference centre where there're no lights and no stage and the mike comes out of the disco deck.

<div align="center">Cook, 1994, p.173-4</div>

As such I have taken it as the focus of my study. Contrary examples, such as comedians in theatres, at conferences, or as street performers, can be then judged against this norm.

[12] Unlike the musician, the comedian is not usually responsible for sound checks, rigging equipment or setting the stage.

[13] Stebbins mentions the importance of the microphone as a tool for the stand-up comedian:

> One of the most widely used props [in stand-up] is the microphone. Always hand-held, it can be removed from its stand to serve as a rope, a club, a penis (see Eddie Murphy's film Raw), an electric shave and so on.

<div align="center">Stebbins 1990, p 43</div>

[14] In addition to the microphone in its stand, the brick back wall has become part of the iconic system for marking a stand-up comedy performance venue in the States.

[15] Audiences in which people tend to mostly know each other in which performer and audience are acquainted, and in which there is considerable overlap between performers and audience are more common at stand-up venues on amateur nights. These appear very similar to the audiences Cohen 1991 describes for local bands.

[16] Quotations from performances in this thesis are presented in a manner which transcribes audience response as well as the comedian's performance. It employs a form of transcription developed out of conversation analysis in order to give a picture of crucial qualities such as stress, pronunciation and timing. For further discussion see Chapter 4 and Appendix 1.

[17] A Manchester example was the short-lived Alternative Club at which admission to the venue covered the early evening comedy and the late licence/disco which followed it.

[18] Sometimes extensions to licences are only granted on the proviso that food is served to those wishing to drink after 11pm. This has led to some venues providing free food and stamping people's hand as they collect it.

[19] Although venues are often organised either by a comedian or a comedy enthusiast, the manager of the pub will stop the comedy nights if it does not generate sufficient income or sponsorship is removed.

[20] This reframing of drinking and controlled behaviour in venues is often not completely resolved and is potentially open to problems as pub behaviour infringes on venue behaviour. A number of clubs display signs announcing their right to refuse admission to large groups of young men.

[21] This observation is specific to Manchester, the site of this thesis' research, but has a general, although not total, application to areas elsewhere in Britain.

[22] And by extension that of the venue's owner/manager.

CHAPTER 4

"COMEDY CANNOT, AND SHOULD NOT, BE ANALYSED"...
INVESTIGATING STAND-UP

The preceding chapters have provided a foundation on which to begin the study of stand-up comedy. They have also pointed towards a distinct lack in humour research literature of any sustained attempt to understand the stand-up environment as the complex, social and interactive experience that it is. There has been demonstrated a absence of research that has moved out from the stimulus-response model, out from the laboratory, and out from preconceived ideas of what humour does and how it does it. There is still a distinct need for research dedicated to the examination of humour and laughter in the comedy environment of the stand-up venue. None of the humour work reviewed in Chapter 3 has fully adopted the lead shown by audience research and sought to examine the comedy experience as anything other than as a rarefied and controlled entity. It has not viewed comedy as a profoundly live and interactive experience nor sought to examine this vitality with appropriate *in situ* research.

Previous work that has conceptualised stand-up and comedians tends to have fallen into the categories of political actors or activities (Frailberg, 1994), or seen stand-up as a window on or mirror to society (Koziski, 1984; Mintz 1987, 1992; Paton, 1988; Stebbins, 1993) as a historical and economic enterprise (Sheppard,1985; Stebbins, 1990). Some studies have looked for psychological (Pollio, Edgerly & Jordan, 1972, Janus, 1975, Fisher & Fisher, 1981) or biographical (Franklin, 1979) insights into the comedian themselves. Further those studies which have attempted to fuse an understanding of performance and audience (Hunt & Pollio, 1995; Pollio & Swanson, 1995; Martin & Gray 1996a. 1996b; Derks, Kalland & Etgen, 1995) have come primarily from a social psychological perspective and, has been discussed above, attempted to observe reactions to comedy in the laboratory environment rather than stand-ups natural setting.

Both because of this and beyond it there is also a lack of analytical and methodological tools suitable to such a venture. To overcome this this chapter will not only provide a brief overview of common deficiencies with previous research into stand-up but suggest an new approach to the subject. It will argue an approach with draws upon and develops conversation analysis and show why this particular approach is not only useful for the study of live stand-up but specifically addresses traits and issues associated with it. Having done this I will move in this chapter onwards to the practicalities of my the fieldwork on which this thesis is based. I will discuss the importance and difficulties in collecting primary data for my research and provide a history of the practicalities of my fieldwork.

4.1 ESTABLISHING A METHODOLOGY

Where they do exist attempts to understand stand-up within the live context, they tend to share features similar to Hezrich's (1990) pragmatic "trichotomy" for the rating of comedians. His analysis delineates the comedian's performances into three discrete categories which, he argues, can be used to analyse the qualities that make a good stand-up routine. These can be summarised as text, delivery and characterisation but more comprehensively as:

> 1. The "L" factor, or the Literary Quality of the comedy. Parsimony was discussed as one of the important components of this factor. A one- or two-word punchline is, all other things being equal better than a longer punchline. Esoteric or unusual words are better than commonly used words.

> 2. The "T" factor, representing Timing or Technique. Arrhythmic is, all other things being equal, usually funnier than rhythmic.

> 3. The "P factor, referring to Persona, Perspective, or Point of View. This is the most important, yet least understood factor. It is not easily concretized; e.g., you can't advise a Stand-up Comedian [...] to take on a particular persona because that persona is generally funnier than other personae.

<div align="center">Hezrich, 1990, p.76</div>

These empirically unqualified assertions offer a step towards a better understanding of stand-up comedy as they are firmly emphasis stand-up performance in the live context and recognise the extra-textual importance of joke telling. What is happening with such a system is an acknowledgement that stand-up performance is not an indivisible whole which can be accepted as unproblematically complete but is the result of a number of different factors and potential variables. Also it sees that stand-up performances are open to investigation in terms of the regular, repeatable and predictable manner in which they are organised.

However, to be ultimately useful for a thorough analysis such attempts to produce a system need to be rethought and taken further. Although it does represent a development similar to audience based analysis of stand-up it serves also to re-highlight a number of major weakness in humour research. Namely, although it attempts to develop a systematisation features of stand-up performance, it does not address any issues surrounding how an audience act or react to the performance. As such the system aligns itself with the early audience research and the stimulus-response models of reception. Once again the audience becomes subsumed as passive and unquestioning to the performer's delivery rather than reactive to. The live relationship between performer and audience remain unexplored and unproblematic. Such systems are allied with other humour research which assumes that audiences are passive from the start of a joke's delivery until its end when they provide the joke teller's desired response. It fails to question the importance of the role of audience in the stand-up situation and it works with the assumption that efficient delivery of a joke by a stand-up will necessarily produce the expected laughter in an audience.

What such a limited change accomplishes is a reassertion that laughter is dependent on a cognitive process of analysing and understanding the dislocations of the joke text but places it within the start of social environment. With its introduction of socio-cognitive elements that mediate between stimulus and response this change only builds on the basic stimulus-response model discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, returning to the diagram first presented in that chapter we can see that the shift implied by Hezrich involves a move from:

```
┌────────────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────────────┐
│    Joke-as-Stimulus    │─────────▶│   Laughter-as-Response   │
└────────────────────────┘          └──────────────────────────┘
```
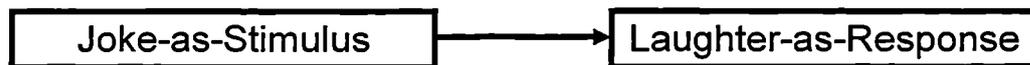
Figure 4-1: Stimulus-Response Model of Joke Telling

to:

```
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │    The joking frame is established        │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │           The joke is told                │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │   The incongruity is recognised as a      │
        │   joke and its intentions understood      │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │           The hearer laughs               │
        └──────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
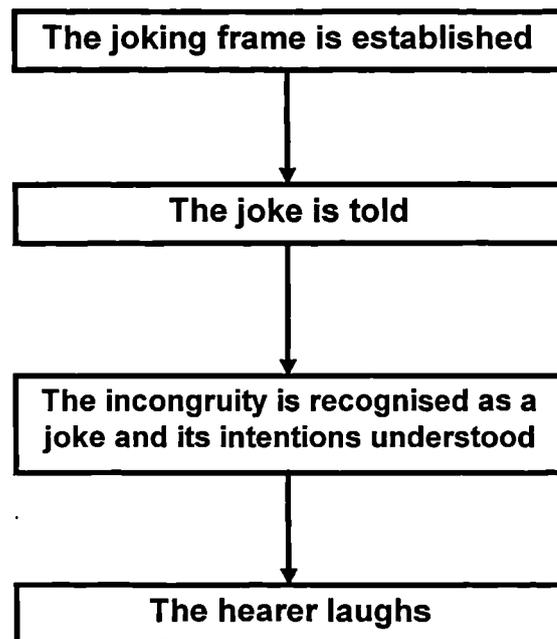
Figure 4-2: Assumed Structure of Joking

The essential elements of Figure 4-1 are reproduced as the second and fourth stages of Figure 4-2. They are not problematised or questioned by the refinement of the system. The additional elements do not question the inevitable flow of the diagram and the assumption of laughter following the joke.

The shifting of the site of humour research although essential and commendable is not enough of a conceptual and methodological transformation to bring humour research into line with other areas of contemporary audience research and other sociological analyses of live communication.

Another problem with such a taxonomy is that owing to the primacy given to the joke teller it does not provide any insight or analysis into just what qualitative or quantitative judgements audience's make when arriving as decision as to which jokes and performances are "funnier" or "better" than others. For example, Hezrich constructs a set of criteria by which to judge stand-up but not the scale by which to judge them. His system's history as a tool for judging a stand-up competition suggests that these values are primarily subjective and based upon personal experience rather than any organised empirical observation of the audience.

To move into the next stage of humour research any analytical system must contain a method for understanding responses that lies beyond the instinct of the analyst. In the past the social psychologists have held sway over such systems and have developed a rich range of humour response measurements ranging from ad hoc Likert-style scales to the widely used Situational Humor Response Questionnaire (SHRQ) developed by Martin and Lefcourt (1984) and Svan Svebak's (1974) comprehensive Sense of Humor Questionnaire (SHQ).[1] However, an adoption of a system such as these with their emphasis on enumerating results from questioning abstracted from any natural comic experience would only raise once again the arguments presented in the previous chapter against retrospective and in-laboratory systems of research.

Also in such a conceptualisation there is no recognition of anything but an assumed homogeneity within audience response. As such systems are so closely allied to the stimulus/response model they can only handle a very limited range audience reactions. With the joke providing a single stimulus there is an in built assumption that the single subject of study, namely the audience, will respond in a unified and consistent manner. That is, following a joke an audience will laugh as a whole or withhold laughter together.[2] This assumed homogeneity also hides from the conceptual framework other audience actions that can be offered in the developing dynamic of stand-up performance. Laughter is not the only response that a joke might receive in its performance. Responses might be any from a range including laughter, applause, whistling, booing, heckling, other verbal comments such as disgusted "erhhs!" or affiliative "Yeahs!".

Partly because of previous humour research's assumption of audience homogeneity and its failure to recognise that audiences can interact with themselves as well as with the performer there are currently no tools developed specifically for developing a comprehensive understanding of what audience's "do". It seems strange that although humour research has focused on stand-up comedians its understanding of stand-up audiences is still in its infancy. There has previously been no attempt to record or transcribe their laughter or explain its placement, intensity or duration.

For the effective study of live stand-up an approach is needed which not merely supplements the weaknesses of the research outlined above but suggests a complete new way of understanding the phenomenon. Such an approach or system of analysis would have to satisfy and incorporate the following criteria:

- **It must recognise that live stand-up is organised and understandable.**
  Embedded in the system must be the foundational premise that comedy is not a mystical art or a practice that exists only in the ether and so is impossible to analyse and understand. It must be able to show that although stand-up styles, performances, and audiences may vary that the performing and consuming of stand-up in all situations shares common and recognised form.

- **It must give priority to understanding of the live performance.**
  Unlike a development of joke theory or a reconceptualisation of one of the classic approaches to humour outlined in Chapter 2 any new approach to understanding stand-up must have is methodological roots in the study of live events. It must be an approach which rather than looking at comic narratives and the appreciation of texts seeks to understand what is unique and specific about stand-up which separates it from experiences such sharing jokes in a work environment, reading cartoons, or watching television.

- **It must recognise the importance of an interactive audience.**

  Further, a new system must both recognise and have a set of tools for understanding the interactive nature of live stand-up That is it has to be able to account for behaviour in comedy audiences which effects the delivery of the comedian rather than assuming that the effects run solely from performer to audience.

- **It must be based in the study of real rather than idealised examples.**

  Linked to this, at the heart of an approach to stand-up must be the insistence that the researcher draws their primary source material not from comedy scripts, laboratory experiments, field notes or anecdotal recollections. Only by employing such a method of data collection can the researcher begin to see in substantial detail what actually happens during stand-up performances.

- **It must use a rating for *funniness* which is derived externally from the system.**

  If "funniness" or the success of individual jokes or stand-up elements are to be approached within a system of analysis there must be a method for drawing such evaluation which is totally independent from the sense of humour or cultural perspective of the researcher. While social-psychological notions of "funniness ratings" are not useful because of their detachment from the live event their must be a consistent way of measure a stand-up effectiveness or audience's appreciation. With live stand-up it seems logical that the response of the audience be the measure at against which funniness is evaluated.[3]

- **It must recognise the complexity of audience response.**

  In looking at live audiences a new approach to stand-up must be able to break out from the pervasiveness of the single stimulus, single response model. By looking at audiences it must be able both to recognise and account for the variety of action beyond unified group laughter which are part of being an active audience.

- **It must provide tools for reproducing and reviewing data after the venue event.**

  Finally, all the above falls apart unless the researcher has the means by which to repeatedly analyse their data after the event and to share it with others.

Like the development of audience research overviewed in the previous chapter, arguing for such a set of criteria implicitly stresses and requires a shift from large scale models of consumption to localised and contextual ones. Further it places the audience not a passive respondents but at the centre of an active and interactive experience. I am arguing that a shift from the macro to the micro, from the responsive to the interactive and from the general to the actual is necessary in order to improve our understanding of comedy in general and stand-up. However, what this methodological shopping list does not do is help provide an immediate answer to what methodological approaches are available to satisfy it. Owing to humour research's previous biases there is little work that has attempted to establish a framework for doing this and it becomes necessary to look more broadly into sociological approaches for a reliable set of tools and a rigorous approach that can be employed.

I believe that the solution to this research criteria can be found in a method based on the approach originally developed by Harvey Sacks along with Gail Jefferson and Emmanuel Schegloff - that of conversation analysis (CA). In the next section I will present the initial points in my ongoing argument that a CA-based approach to the study of stand-up is both applicable and useful. I will briefly outline some of CA's primary concerns and assumptions before pointing out how the CA methodology and the study of stand-up dovetail in this project.

4.2 IMPORTANCE OF CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

It is my basic belief that stand-up is like a conversation between comedian and the audience and that because of this CA research methods and findings can be generalised to it. That is, although simplified in form, stand-up still involves the taking of turns between performer and audience to build up the flow of the performance and are organised to a large extent following the same rules laid out by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) for the organisation of conversation.[4] As Sacks *et al* declare that "[I]n any conversation we observe the following," (1974, p.700) before providing their rules governing turn taking it is fairly safe to assume that forms of interaction other than natural conversation that display these rules can be contained as a sub-category of conversation.

Furthermore, like conversation, stand-up is a "collaborative production" (Atkinson, Cuff & Lee, 1978, p.136). That it is not a merely a situation which involves those presents but which is made possible by the active involvement of those that make up the interaction. Just as those present at a meeting order their behaviour based on the knowledge that the business on the agenda is the proper focus of their interaction people attending a comedy venue are co-orientated towards the stand-up. Drawing on Goffman (1963), Schiffrin (1977) describes this as being "'alive' to a situation" (p.679).

Even despite these overwhelming similarities between stand-up and conversation it may be suggested that the study of a routinised interaction is not an appropriate use of CA perspective. However, although originally designed as a tool for the analysis of naturally occurring conversation CA's application to stand-up is in no way deviant when held against the discipline's broader history. CA derived projects have included investigations of political speechmaking (Atkinson 1984, Heritage & Greatbatch 1986, Clayman 1992,1993), televised interviews (Clayman 1988, Heritage & Greatbatch 1990), courtroom hearings (Atkinson & Drew, 1979), professional-client interaction (ten Have 1991, Coupland, Robinson & Coupland 1994, Bogoch, 1994) as well as other workplace environments (Drew & Atkinson

1992). These projects have included within their parameters talk that carries with it many of the same structures as stand-up comedy. For example in speechmaking the orator delivers a largely prepared and rehearsed contribution, s/he addresses a large audience rather than a small number of individuals, the meeting takes place outside the audience's regular environment and the interaction is ordered in a manner which is recognised and marked as different from natural talk.

Although it is not appropriate here to give a thorough overview of CA, its methods and applications,[5] nor spend time examining the findings of the CA body[6] it does seem appropriate to provide a brief context to the discipline. This can be done using Psathas' (1995) concise distillation of the foundational assumptions of the CA approach.

1. Order is a produced orderliness
2. Order is produced by parties in situ; that is, it is situated and occasioned.[7]
3. The parties orient to that order themselves; that is, this order is not an analyst's conception, not the result of the use of some preformed or preformulated theoretical conceptions concerning what action should/must/ought to be, or based on generalising or summarising statements about what action generally/frequently/often is.
4. Order is repeatable and recurrent.
5. The discovery, description, and analysis of that produced orderliness is the task of the analyst.
6. Issues of how frequently, how widely, or how often particular phenomena
• occur are to be set aside in the interest of discovering, describing, and analyzing the *structures*, the *machinery*, the *organized practices*, the *formal procedures*, the way in which order is produced.
7. Structures of social action, once so discerned, can be described and analysed in formal, that is structural, organizational, logical, atopically contentless, consistent, and abstract, terms.

<div align="center">Psathas, 1995, pp.2-3</div>

This list of CA concerns can be seen to apply to the organisation of stand-up comedy as well as naturally occurring conversation and this extract from Psathas serves to highlight the differences between an application of CA to stand-up and previous research on humour: It recognises that the actual performance/audience event is ordered and that this organisation is manufactured by the parties involved rather than

through analytical abstraction. It believes that the specific ordering of unique events are made up of common structures, i.e. although gigs may vary from venue to venue and performer to performer structures can be seen to reappear and be repeated across them. Also, in contrast to social psychological projects, CA is not interested primarily in extrapolation from the specific to the general or providing accounts of frequencies or distributions. Therefore, although this thesis is not specifically devoted to a CA analysis of stand-up comedy, CA plays an important role in the development on my arguments, is a useful theoretical framework and methodological approach with which to build my analysis of stand-up performance.

Therefore it can be seen that CA is specifically important to my analysis of stand-up for a number of reasons each of which help to overcome some of the limitations of previous work on joking, laughter and stand-up discussed above.

- **Studies the *impure***

  Unlike the analyses of joking represented in my discussion of joke theory in Chapter 2 that approximates to a Chomskian view of language in which natural talk is seen as a debasement of ideal linguistic structures CA is firmly rooted in the recording, transcription and analysis of real conversation. Instead of working with data of idealised or role-play derived sentences CA sees the *impurity* of actual talk as germane to the organisation and utilisation of talk between individuals. Further, this emphasis on speech as it actually occurs encourages a Garfinkel-like emphasis on the ordinary, shared experience as the emphasis is on the *in situ*, the everyday and the apparently mundane and from Sacks onward the primary emphasis in CA has tended towards analysis of common experiences such greetings, phone calls, invitations, compliments, conversation closings, etc.

- **Stresses the live context**

  This in turn leads on to the emphasis in CA of the context in which the recorded interaction took place. It suggests the talk is more than an exchange of phonemes, words, or sentences but a specific, local and time bound experience. As such all talk is not just the utterance of information but actions that are situated in a specific context. This means not only does the environment influence the

development of talk but also the ongoing development itself influences the interaction, utterances have different implication depending on their place within a conversational sequence. By both observing and generating data from the live situation CA rejects and replaces the tendency towards the laboratory based experiments of social psychologists working in the humour field. The artificiality of experimental environments, stimuli, and coding are avoided through a foundation in the *in situ* with an emphasis on actual interaction. CA's source for primary data collection is always events that would have existed without the presence or intervention of the researcher.

- **Based on mutual knowledge**

Finally this leads to an inclusion of mutuality within the CA schema in which all parties involved in a conversational interaction are active in maintaining the ongoing development of the talk. Parties whether they talk, do not talk, or choose not to talk do so with a working knowledge of a set of common and accepted rules. By recognising and sharing a system which guides everyday interaction individuals can then judge the appropriateness of their actions before they are made, assess the risk of deviating from an accepted set of guides, or know how to repair conversation if somehow the interaction should start to become uncertain. It is central to the CA project that although interaction is ordered it is not preformed, that is although observable structures can be noted they are applied in real time by each of the parties to an interaction. This mutuality also means that parties in a conversation are both held responsible for maintaining the smooth running of the interaction and accept this responsibility.[8]

- **Stresses on sequential organisation**

This mutuality and the ability for contributors to the interactive sequence to both assess the organisation of the developing interaction and determine the suitability of their own contributions implies a sequential ordering of conversation. It highlights a format in which utterances project a preferred response and a response tends to follow a summons. This notion of sequentiality is important in the analysis of stand-up in that provides another method for seeing beyond the idea of causality between joke and laughter. CA argues that such events are

correlative rather than causal, their linking being associative rather than responsive.[9]

Methodologically CA is also useful in its insistence on the audio or video recording of source material and then its close transcription.[10] As has been noted, many works create idealised jokes for analysis or claim to *retell* jokes heard or read[11], rarely is laughter included in transcription and where it is (for example Double, 1997) the laughter is recorded as a single event rather than transcribed in detail. What CA transcription recognises is vital differences between the spoken word and written language and rather than seeing the former as a debasement of the latter views it as distinct. What CA notation attempts to do is not provide a replica of the real life conversation experience but a valid and reliable representation of it. The successful CA transcription is able to provide indication of the sound of a quoted extract as well as highlight notable features. It records not only *what* was said but more importantly *how* it was said. This can provide a view on paper of a specific interaction such that the reader does not remain at a major disadvantage for not having access to the live talk or a recording of it. As Goodwin and Heritage (1990) point out the transcription system developed initially by Jefferson "is a time consuming method of data collection, but it permits permanent records of the social world to be examined and re-examined" (p.289). This fundamental tenet of CA is surprisingly rare in analyses of stand-up and joke telling.

4.3 PRIMARY DATA

By placing my emphasis on the study of the live, interactional experience of stand-up, I am firmly positioning my analysis within the natural environment of the comedy performance and I become dedicated to looking at the reception of told jokes shared within a specific social encounter. In order to study this in detail the use of a variety of stand-up performances recorded live and in front of an audience is essential. However, the shifting from the theoretical to the practical with the move to the collection of such data raised a number of issues which must be recognised.

It is can be seen that performers whether through initiative, investigation, or mimicry have at some stage learned the tricks of their trade. That is, whether on an informal basis or not that have acquired and developed the use of techniques for maximising the amount of success that their jokes, and hence their acts and themselves, receive. This assertion is supported by performers own histories which invariably include poor early performances as they developed their material, technique and presentation and the fact that at least one of the venues in this study held occasional stand-up workshops at which comedians would pass on advice and insights to people new to performing. The fact that stand-up is learned and it techniques can be taught indicates, even on a casual level, that there must be an establishable pattern or formula behind it. Also, further than this, that the techniques which are shared are vital in the creation of a successful interaction between comedian and audience.

Given this, it may seem appropriate to base my study on the available work of Britain's most successful comedians, after all there is an abundance of both audio and video tapes commercially available recording live performances. It might be argued that they are ideal sources as most of these tapes are not recordings of performances instigated solely for the purpose of taping the artist, nor are they recorded in a studio but taped before a paying audience in an established comedy/theatre venue. Such a rich and freely available recourse would appear to be a humour researcher's dream.

However, problems exist when attempting to accept these recordings and their use is something of a double edged sword. Whilst studying top performers would ensure some sort of insight into the zenith of the profession, the post-production of such tapes involved in packaging them for release may involve deletions of and additions to the material. For example, separate performances may be edited together to give the impression of a single recording (e.g. Sean's Tape);[12] chunks of physical comedy or non comic material may be edited out of the release audio tape (e.g. Jerry Sadowitz's Gobshite); expletives may be deleted (e.g. Lenny Bruce: The Legendary Berkeley Concert); laughter may be dubbed on tapes which are compilations of artists to give the impression of natural breaks (e.g. Just For Laughs), or material

may be edited to fit the a desired format (e.g. <u>Woody Allen: The Nightclub Years</u> 1964-1968). More difficult to spot, however, and therefore carrying greater implications for this study, is the possibility that, whether for technical or aesthetic reasons, supplementary laughter is added to a recording in order to augment the originally recorded response.

Although this potential makes commercial tapes unsuitable to be used to form the main body of primary data in this research there is evidence that the current tendency for the transition of live recording to shelf product appears to prefer minimal post production. Comedians as diverse as the *bloke*-ish Frank Skinner and the smooth Bob Monkhouse both maintain that the video tapes available of their performances are in the main very accurate records of live performance.

> The editing of the live show which you have on video [<u>Frank Skinner Live</u>] is minimal. We have taken one or two shots from an earlier performance to drop in when we thought that, for example, a gesture was better captured there, and edited out a couple of minutes of banter with the audience as this can sometimes be boring for the viewer at home. The main body of the show is untouched and reflects accurately the experience of the live audience.
>
> Similarly none of the audience laughter has been changed or enhanced.

<div align="center">Frank Skinner, 1995, Personal communication</div>

and similarly:

> I am happy to assure you that the 70 minute performance which I give on the VVL Video cassette title BOB MONKHOUSE EXPOSES HIMSELF [...] is almost entirely unedited and represents the exact record of my life [sic] performance at the Lakeside Country Club, near Camberley last June.

<div align="center">Bob Monkhouse, 1994, Personal communication</div>

There is of course the problem that what may be seen as a minor adjustment by a comedian and their production crew may appear as a major revision when analysed through an academic perspective rather than a commercial one.[13] However, the use of material that was not recorded especially for analysis but is found available in the

public domain has a valid academic tradition including Atkinson (1984), Heritage & Greatbach (1986) and Clayman (1992) who have used broadcast tapes of political conferences, televised debates and excerpts found on news reports. Given this it appears appropriate to include commercially available resources within my data but given their potential ambiguities it does not seem analytically rigorous to make them central to my research. Instead, recordings that cannot be certified as unedited are used in this study below as additional resources, that is all initial analysis has been done on verified recordings which provide primary illustration and other sources are then used to supplement the range of illustration. The effect of this is that structures can be observed in verified recordings and additional quotation demonstrates the regularity of these structures and their use in differing contexts. It is the obtaining of these verifiable recordings that I will turn to next along my personal experience of negotiating access to make such recordings.

4.4 FIELDWORK AND ACCESS

Although Psathas' asserts that in CA research "[t]he types of interaction studied are so common and so recurrent that refusals are not a problem because, generally speaking, there are various alternative sources available" (1995, p.46) this betrays an American perspective bias based in a stronger culture of freedom of access to information. This is not the necessarily the situation in England and not the case in my experience of studying live stand-up. The task of getting unedited tapes of live performances was a surprisingly complex task although a number of avenues were explored during the early stages of my research. Initially two approaches were attempted simultaneously - investigating whether any comedians had their own tapes they would be prepared to share and gaining access to stand-up venues in the Manchester area.

The first approach provided little success. Letters to comedians via their agents while met largely with encouragement but did not unearth a pot of stand-up gold. Agents largely responded to the letters themselves, on behalf of their clients, and

briefly stated that there were no unedited live tapes available. However, a number of replies did raise the issue that the recordings that did exist often belonged to television or production companies rather than the performer, and so they had no right of access to them. A number of performers told me that they did have tapes of their performances but felt uneasy about granting access to them as they were seen as their personal tools for reviewing their act or learning new routines. They did not feel happy about sharing work they thought was not necessarily up to their own personal standards.

Although disappointing, this early lack of success was not devastating as I thought that my best chance for getting raw tapes was to record them myself in venues. However, when this proved problematic and a rethink was called for. When initially trying to gain access to stand-up clubs I approached club organisers, explained my situation and intention and asked whether, assuming the agreement of the performer, taping would be feasible. However, for various reasons I was turned down. Most of the club organisers were acting on their performer's behalf by assuming they were protecting them from having their act plagiarised or finding tapes of themselves for sale at boot sales.[14] However, one organiser took great delight in telling me how he always refused permission to tape performances whether the taping was for commercial, academic or broadcast purposes. Broadening my search from the immediate area to the larger North West region did not provide any greater success.

In order to make headway I tried to cut out negotiation with the venue organisers by approaching comedians directly at the venue and requesting permission to tape their performance. One major problem with this somewhat unorthodox method of requesting permission was that talk with the performers had to take place at the venue on the night of the performance attempting to obtain last minute permission to tape rather than a more customary written agreement. This meant that I was approaching performers as a stranger at anxious moments just before they went on stage and, not surprisingly, I was receiving quite a high refusal rate. The problems of acquiring the primary data for research hampered my initial work for some months.

During this period I became a regular customer at Manchester's comedy clubs gaining a familiarity with there layout, operation and oral history. At the commencement of my research Manchester had two regular comedy venues: in the city centre there was **The Frog and Bucket** run by landlord Dave Perkins and, a few miles outside the centre the longer established, **The Buzz** run by performance poet Agraman.[15] The Buzz has the longer history and at the beginning of this research tended to play host to performers on a higher rung of the comedy circuit ladder than The Frog. However, this has changed somewhat over the last couple of years with The Frog rapidly gaining a reputation for good stand-up and towards the end of my research moving to a new, larger venue. Now they play host to many of the same comedians[16] although The Frog has a greater reputation for encouraging and supporting local talent, and encouraging experimentation and innovation.

This period of attending the clubs regularly slowly meant that I became recognised by club staff, comedians and other regulars. Ironically, by doing apparently very little the research impasse I had met was eventually broken. After all the pro-active approaches I had tried I began to receive permission to record performers pretty much by just hanging around. By getting to be known by the local comedians who performed at the Manchester venues on a regular basis I began to earn their trust and their interest in my research. Performers recognised that my interest was in studying them rather than plagiarising them or stealing their comic talents through the magic of tape recording. This meant they were happy for me to tape them, often asking for copies of their tapes or transcriptions of their performances. Although I attempted to gain permissions to tape performers from outside the Manchester group[17] throughout my research this was never really successful.[18]

The turning point was the response from performer Martin Bigpig. This frightening-looking Irishman was the first to allow me to tape. Proving how deceptive looks can be he showed a real interest in the research, asking for copies of draft papers and discussing work he had done with drama students. From here Bigpig acted as something of a gatekeeper for me. Having received his trust he would effectively vouch for my credibility. Being seen talking to him allowed me to be introduced to

other regulars of the Manchester circuit and soon performers such as Tony Burgess, Johnny Vegas, and Adrian Cook we happy to let me tape them on various occasions.

The taping itself was a fairly simple procedure. Done with a Walkman and a small microphone the recordings were done from within the audience usually from the table I was sat at.[19] Only performers who had given agreement were recorded. This allowed me to begin to build up a reservoir of data which fell neatly into three categories:

- One-off recordings done by myself of performers
- Recordings done by myself of a single performer with different audiences
- Commercially available recordings of well established comedians

This organisation provided opportunity for a combination of data that is both broad (containing a range of performances) and deep (same performer and act with different audiences) which has worked together to produce a, hopefully, complete view. The taping of a range of performers has allowed my to view a cross-section of different comedians, performance styles, and audience responses whereas multiple recordings of a performer on different occasions has allowed me to draw conclusions about the malleability and adaptability of the performance interaction. The supplementation of these with available professional material allows me to demonstrate the techniques and order found through my own fieldwork are common to stand-up as a broader phenomenon rather than restricted to the group I have studied.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Having in this chapter built up a methodological and theoretical framework it is possible now to begin to establish a more complete understanding of stand-up comedy in those that follow. I have begun to demonstrate that stand-up and the traits that make a good comedy performance are not as intangible as is often assumed,[20] and that they can be isolated, studied, manipulated and empirically tested. Having shown that tools and methods do exist to understand stand-up in the live situation it is a logical move to examine those aspects of which are linked directly to the performance of an act. I will continue in my exploration of the interaction between performer and audience to gain insight into the styles, techniques and methods which convert an incongruous text into a successful stand-up performance.

What I will do in the chapters that follow is demonstrate that the laughter of audiences watching stand-up comedy is arranged into recognisable patterns and that these show that meaningful interaction and negotiation takes place between audience and performer and among members of an audience. I will look at the routine way in which openings and closings of acts are manufactured and how this is contributed to by both audience and performer. I will also suggest ways in which the successful comedian uses rhetorical techniques to aid and support this negotiation and describe how these techniques are valued both by performer and audience.

As such the next chapter form a basis for this and will present an analysis of joking and laughter based on a rigorous dissection of social interaction which challenges many of the presuppositions inherent to earlier explorations of joking exchanges and constructs a new framework for understanding. This interactional focus will permit exploration of joking and laughter in naturally occurring exchanges between performer and audience.

Notes

[1] A review of the development of the SHQ can be found in Svebak 1996

[2] The refusal of audiences to laugh during a performance or after specific jokes is another area of neglect in the study of humour and joke telling yet it is of vital concern to both amateur and professional joke tellers.

[3] Although coming to the issues of evaluating funniness from quite an unusual direction Powell also subscribes to the point of view that it is a joke's audience that define a situation's funniness.

> It would be possible to paraphrase and slightly corrupt any of these authors' [Becker, Lemert and Erikson] well-known observations on deviance and use them to represent the views on humour expressed in this chapter. Thus á la Becker: "The humorous is that to which the label has been successfully applied; humorous behaviour (or communication) is behaviour that people so label." Or: "It is the audience which eventually determines whether or not an episode is labelled humorous."

> Powell, 1988, p.103

However, this apparently logical perspective is by no means universal within sociological investigation of humour. Mary Douglas takes the following contrary position:

> First, let me bracket aside the whole subject of laughter. It would be wrong to suppose that the acid test of a joke is whether it provokes laughter or not.

> Douglas, 1968, p.362

[4] Exceptions it may be argued, are "(8) What parties say is not specified in advance" and "Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance." (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). However, although comedians do pre-script or routinise their performances improvisation does regularly occur and audience reaction can effect whether material is delivered, how it is presented or the duration of the performance. Also, although performers take up more of the performance time speaking than does audience action (usually a performer will be speaking for approximately two thirds of the performance time) their is no strong evidence that they take more turns.

[5] Such overviews of CA can be found in, among others, Psathas 1995, Goodwin & Heritage 1990, Levinson 1983 pp.284-369.

[6] Individual issues will be discussed in detail as they become relevant to the developing argument. See for example the discuss on *adjacency pairs* in Chapter 5 as one manner to conceptualise the joke-laughter sequence and review of previous CA work on conversational laughter..

[7] Schegloff & Sacks (1973) emphasise the issue that order in an element observed in and manufactured by parties involved in local interaction in the opening to their discussion of conversational closings:

> If the materials (records of natural conversations) were orderly, they were so because they had been methodically produced by members of the society for one another, and it was a feature of the conversations that we treated as data that they were produced so as to allow the display by the coparticipants to each other of their orderliness, and to allow the participants to display to each other their analysis, appreciation, and use if that orderliness.

> Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p.290

And later in the same paper, "These basic features [...] are intended, in this account, not as analyst's constructs, but as descriptions of the orientations of conversationalists in producing proper conversation" (p.293).

[8] This is why, unlike other research methods previously employed in humour-research a CA approach pivots on the "member's perspective" (Psathas, 1995, p.49) rather then bringing a previously established framework of coding to classify the individuals, their action, or texts.

[9] The notion of sequential organisation also opens up investigation into management of transitions, overlap and selection of speaker.

[10] See Appendix 1 for key to notation

[11] Whereas they may be used to add colour recollected or reported extracts are not accepted in CA as reliable evidence or illustration.

[12] See Appendix 3 for a fully list of commercial tapes referred to.

[13] The editing of tapes need not undermine the argument I will develop throughout this thesis. It can be fairly assumed that any editing done is an attempt to enhance the comedy value of the recorded performance rather than detract from it. Given this it seems valid to assume that the editing process will involve an attempt to intensify or repair the structures and techniques that I suggest below guide the stand-up interaction.

[14] The fear that a comedian's own material would find its way either into other people's acts was the greatest obstacle in gaining permission to tapes live stand-up. Assurances were always provided that the transcriptions from the recording would

only feature in this academic work were always stressed by myself and often insisted upon by the performers.

[15] During the course of the research a number of other venues in Manchester started to host stand-up comedy but none of the continued to do so for any extended period or provide the variety and quality of performers found at the other venues.

[16] It is now not that unusual to see a comic from outside the North West area playing The Buzz on a Thursday night and The Frog on a Friday and Saturday.

[17] I use the term "Manchester Group" loosely here. Many of the comedians were from outside the area including Sheffield and Warrington but played Manchester regularly enough to know the Manchester comedy scene and associate with the people on it. Also the term does not look to indicate that these performers played only in the Greater Manchester area in fact during he research not only did comedians play at venues around the country a number went of fairly substantial tours and supported tours of big name stand-ups.

[18] Another methodological idiosyncrasy worth addressing her is the gender of performers. Although females are distinctly under represented in stand-up the breadth of my sample may slightly accentuate this. This is because of the problems of a single male approaching female performers. I was very aware that whereas buying a drink for a male comedian is seen as a friendly show of appreciation of their help (see the discussion of pubs and drink in Chapter 3) it can often carry other unwanted implications in the pub environment for women. Again, my growing familiarity with local comedians did often act as a verification of my legitimacy.

[19] Unfortunately, it was only towards the very end of my fieldwork that I learnt the value of a good microphone as far as clarity of recording are concerned

[20] The belief that humour is so much a will-o'-the-wisp that any attempt to understand it is destined to failure is not an uncommon one. Part of a response received from one of the directors of a major entertainer's agents summarises this viewpoint: "I'm afraid comedy is not an exact science, and really cannot, and should not, be analised [sic] to extremes" (personal communication, 1994) as is the often quoted remark from E.B. White, "Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind." However, throughout my research I did not come across a single performer who shared this viewpoint. Indeed many showed a very rigorous analytical approach when reviewing their own performances.

CHAPTER 5

FUNNY, HA HA: LAUGHTER AS PART OF STAND-UP INTERACTION

> "No man would listen to you talk if he
> didn't know it was his turn next"
> Edgar Watson Howe

This chapter will provide an analysis of the system of turn-taking that operates between performer and audience in stand-up comedy. Like conversation, the rules of interaction in the stand-up environment are learned by both performers and audience, and they are upheld as a way of maintaining the order of the performance and minimising the embarrassment associated with failures, glitches or breakdowns in the system. This management is even more important within the stand-up environment than in conversation, if only for the reason that during stand-up the perceived penalties for failing to follow the established format, allowing errors in the systems, or failing to pick up on cues are so great. For the performer there is the risk that they and their act will be badly received, for members of the audience there is the threat that they will be made to look foolish, held to ridicule or ostracised.

What I will do throughout the course of this chapter is demonstrate that things are not as simple as has been assumed by researchers investigating jokes, laughter, and humour and build an argument for one fresh way of exploring comedy. In order to do this I will provide a manner of understanding stand-up performances and the laughter therein that rejects many of the views offered by other forms of humour research analysis and instead looks at stand-up as a live, context-bound, and negotiated experience. In the first section of this chapter I will provide an overview of relevant literature from conversation analysis which begins to explore laughter in conversation prying it away from notion of response instead arguing that laughter is

part of an interactive flow which has specific value and order not only to what precedes it but what comes subsequently. Next I will demonstrate that laughter in stand-up too is rigorously and regularly organised and that its form is consistent across performances, audiences and venues. Meshing these two analytical tools I will explore not only how laughter in stand-up can be viewed as turn taking in a similar way to that found in natural conversation but examine how this turn taking is organised, maintained, and how deviations when they arise are handled.

5.1 LAUGHTER AND JOKING

At first glance it might seem that stand-up comedy has little in common with natural conversation due to stand-up being dominated by a single participant who has the major control over duration of turn, topic, turn allocation and repair of errors. However, I will show that conventional notions of turn taking are applicable to stand-up comedy, that allocation of turn taking is far from the sole prerogative of the performer and that there is a distinct and regular form which guides the appropriateness of various actions.

The idea that laughter is not a involuntary response to a humorous stimulus but part of conversation maintenance and turn taking procedures is proposed by Jefferson (1979). She argues that laughter is "invited", that a speaker will use various techniques in order to signal that a laughter response is preferred. She refuses to adopt a view of laughter as a "natural" or automatic response to a humorous incident suggesting that, like any other contribution to a conversation, it must be negotiated, worked towards and contextual. Laughter in this case is "worked into" a conversation rather than erupting from it. As Glenn (1989) argues, "people organize their interactions to provide opportunities for sharing laughter" (p.127).

The technique Jefferson focuses on is the use of laughter by a speaker to request laughter in others. This may take the form that which she calls "post-utterance completion laugh particle", that is where the "speaker himself indicates that laughter is appropriate, by himself laughing, and recipient thereupon laughs" (1979, p.80).

Extract 5-1

```
1   Dan:   I thought that wz pretty outta sight didju
2          hear me say'r you a junkie.
3                      (0.5)
4   Dan:   hheh heh  ⌈
5   Dolly:          ⌊hhheh-heh-heh
```

Jefferson, 1979, p.80

Dan's witticism does not receive the laughter he expects for it and when none in forthcoming from Dolly and there is a silence (line 3) he retrospectively redefines the comment as humorous and reinforces the preferred response of laughter by himself laughing. This is enough for Dolly to recognise the situation and add her laughter. Here the action that precipitates laughter is not the humour but the request for laughter. This dislocation between laughter and punchline illustrated in Extract 5-1 is similar to that found in Sack's dirty joke discussed above. Again the joke's punchline fails to receive any laughter from the teller's audience. Instead their is a silence (line 7) followed by the teller's laughter which acts as a further invitation to laugh to the hearers.

Extract 5-2: From *Sack's Dirty Joke*

```
1   Ken:    Next morning she talks t'the firs' daughter, en' she s'z -- uh how
2           come yuh- how come y'went YAAA::: las' night'n daughter siz
3           well, it tickled Mommy -- second gi:rl, -- How come yuh
4           screa:med. Oh: Mommy it hu:rts. -- Third girl, walk up t'her. (0.7)
5           Why didn' y'say anything last night. -- W'you tol'me it wz always
6           impolite t'talk with my mouth full,
7                       (1.5)
8   Ken:    hh hyok hyok,
9                       (0.5)
10  Ken:    hyok
11                      (2.5)
12  Al:     HA-HA-HA-HA,
13  Ken:    ehh heh heh // hehhh
14  (Al):   hehhehhheh hhh
15  Roger:  Delayed rea:c // tio(h)n.
```

Sacks, 1992

Such use of laughter from the teller of a joke as a signpost that laughter is expected may also be found as *within speech laughter* in which elements of laughter are placed by the speaker within the closing section of their turn. Again, the use of laughter by the speaker acts to invite laughter in the hearer. In the following example from Jefferson, B inserts laughter into their speech towards the end of the sentence. This is recognised by E so rapidly that B does not have to completely finish the word "program(me)" before E start to laugh.

Extract 5-3

```
1   B:    Dju watch by any chance Miss International
2         Showcase las'night?
3   E:    N:no I didn'  ┌I wz reading my-
4   B:                  └You missed a really great
5         pro(H)  ┌
6   E:      ──➤   └ O(hh)h I(h)t wa(hh)s?=
7   E:    ╱  =ehh heh heh heh!
```

<div align="right">Jefferson, 1979, p.83</div>

Although Sacks suggests there are three possible responses to a joke (i.e. an invitation to laugh) that of laughter, delayed laughter and no laughter Jefferson (1979) adds on another component to this trio of candidates. The invitations to laugh are, Jefferson argues, so effective that to decline the invitation by refusing to laugh is not enough to allow conversation to progress without repair. In order to bypass the invitation to laugh "the recipient does not simply refuse to laugh, but, while declining to take up one aspect of the utterance." (p.84) Thus part of the refusal to laugh will be the immediate continuation of the topic of conversation as in Extract 5-4 below. Vic declines James' invitation to laugh (line 2) by carrying on with the serious topic of conversation.

Extract 5-4

```
1    James:  I don'mind eh pullin'em but he comin at
2            me-dat needle's what I can't stand.
3            HAH ┌
4    Vic:         └Use- Tellim ga:s.
```

Jefferson, 1979, p.84

Again, the possibility of such a turn which not only refuses laughter but also prevents the pursuit of it questions the validity of accepting an unquestioned link between the exposition of punchline and delivery of laughter.

The importance of this work for the study of stand-up comedy is that it opens up the study of laughter and its live relationship to talk as a vital, yet within most humour research, largely ignored area for study. It points out that there systematic organisation of both joking and laughter in which not only do jokes have a recognisable structure to them but so does laughter. It highlights the existence of techniques which request laughter or signpost points at which laughter is expected and further it show that hearers look for and respond to these cues when making decisions about laughing. Finally, it raises the issue omnipresent in the comedians' mind but rarely approached in humour studies that even though laughter may be the preferred response it is not necessarily forthcoming.

In short it indicates that far from being involuntary, laughter in a joking context is part of a similar responsive vocabulary to that of verbal conversation. The laughter of individuals in conversation and, as I will show, in audiences for stand-up comedy is aware of and responsive to the progress of the ongoing discourse. It is timed and placed in an informed manner so that position, duration, and amplitude are all appropriate to the laughable context.

5.2 LAUGHTER AND STAND-UP

Although conversational joking and stand-up comedy are different social and interactive experiences they do share a common set of foundations not least of which is the fact that they are both live experiences which rely not only on input from the joker but from their audience also. Further they are both shared experiences and, more often then not, group experiences (Glenn 1989, Provine & Fischer 1989) that make demands on the participants not only as interpreters of a text but as negotiators of a specific social environment. As live interaction, stand-up and audience laughter, like talk in natural conversation, is structured and ordered. As such I will show below that the structure of laughter during stand-up performances has a consistency not just throughout individual performances but between audiences, performers and venues.

This conceptualisation of audiences as utilising a conversation-like but simplified form of interaction has been recognised elsewhere outside humour research and used to study a similar form of audience interaction namely applause to a podium performance. Investigating the ordering of applause to political speakers Atkinson (1984) reports that its duration is so tightly structured that rounds of applause outside the range of seven and nine seconds are notable in their scarcity. He suggests not only that individuals acting as an audience use this to form a consensus of when it is appropriate to finish a round of applause, but also, that speakers will often interrupt applause that looks as though it might continue beyond the mid range, eight second mark. Such an observable and defined format reinforces the observation that features of audience interaction are governed by rules and expectations rather than an involuntary response or reaction in any natural science sense. It suggests that audience actions are socially informed and performed rather than being the effect of a stimulated response.

Such an orderliness can also be demonstrated in the action of stand-up audiences further suggesting that audiences' laughter is ordered. In order to do this I will take

two complete, but contrasting, performances from different comedians[1] playing contrasting sizes of audiences in vastly different venues and show that, as in Atkinson's observations, a consistent pattern in audience action can be seen. However, I will further demonstrate that this ordering, although consistent, is notably different from Atkinson's findings on applause to political speakers.

Firstly I will examine the American comedian Bill Hick's last performance. This show was recorded commercially by Channel 4 before a capacity audience at the Dominion Theatre in London. It was broadcast and released on video in Britain as Revelations. Using this source material I will look at the distribution of audience laughter and its duration throughout the performance. This will then be compared to a recording of the semi-professional Manchester comedian Adrian Cook recorded at The Buzz as part of my own fieldwork. Similarities in the duration and distribution of both sets of laughter will be highlighted as will contrasts with Atkinson's findings on audience applause.

The Hicks' sample has 501 occurrences of audience laughter[2] giving a total duration of over 23 minutes which is almost $^1/_3$ of the total performance time.[3] Looking at the range of duration for which the laughter lasted we can see that the comedy audience is a little less rigid than those of political conferences in the scope that they give to the duration of their appreciation. Further, we can seen that this range is not by any means uniform or, conversely, random - It has a negative skew such that 73% of the occurrences of laughter are of a duration are less than 3.0 seconds long with a range of 0.6 to 3.0 seconds.
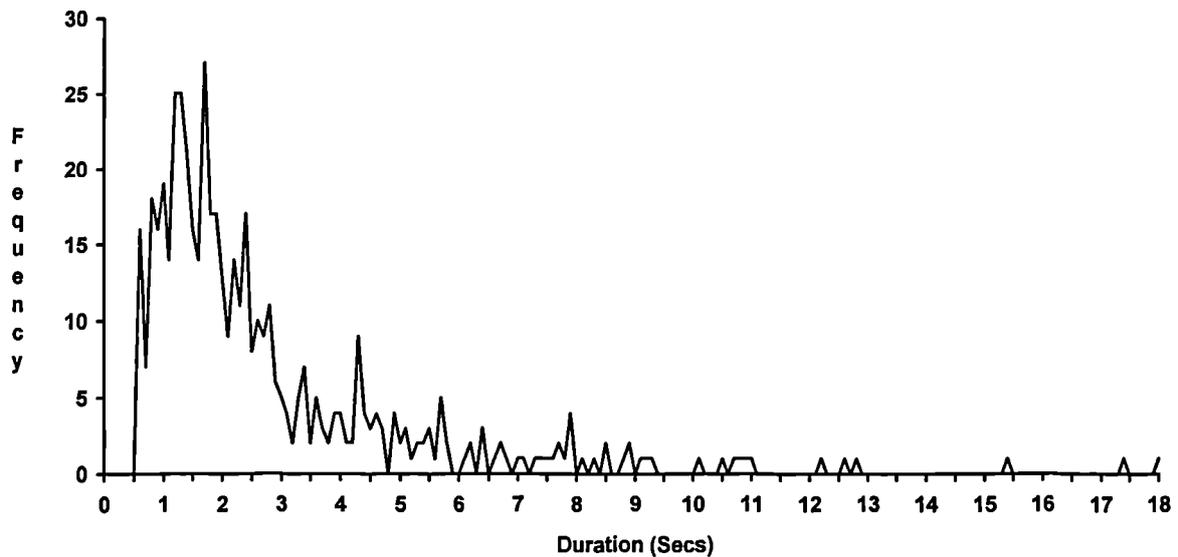
Figure 5-1: Frequency of Laughter Durations for Bill Hicks

This would suggest that although there is an established average length of time for laughter to last, even extreme deviations from this are not that unusual.[4] Although it is my intention here to demonstrate that it is technically and methodologically possible to assume that stand-up laughter is organised and ordered rather than fully explain individual specifics several explanations may account for this.

In Extract 5-5 the extended laughter at line 36 is manipulated primarily by the physicality used to highlight the joking. This action serves not only to highlight a humorous crux of the performance but functions to extend it. The duration of the 18 second laughter covers almost the entire span of the physical action. As the duration of physically influenced humour can be more variable than the length of a punchline, so too are the laughter periods that accompany it.

Extract 5-5: Bill Hicks (Simplified)

1	BH	But I'm looking at your British hard-core pornography which I
2		just spent hard-core fucking dollars for.
3		[Laughter 0.9]
4		And I'm going something's wrong with this.
5		[Laughter 1.5]

6   "Goat Boy will figure it out!"
7   [Laughter 3.1]
8   I realise it's porno yeah just what we
9   know and love, but there's blue dots covering all the good shit.
10   [Laughter 2.0]
11   Woah, whaaat's going on?
12   [Laughter 0.8]
13   There's a guy standing there like this.
14   ((Stand legs astride, hips thrust forward, hand on hips.))
15   [Laughter 4.9]
16   There's a woman kneeling well I believe she was like this.
17   ((Kneels, holds microphone to mouth like fellatio)
18   [Laughter 5.7]
19   And there's this big blue dot right here.
20   ((Indicates area of microphone/penis))
21   [Laughter 2.1]
22   What the fuck!
23   [Laughter 1.1]
24   This comes off I hope.
25   [Laughter, Applause 4.9]
26   What you gotta buy the blue dot eraser separately. what the fuck?
27   [Laughter, Applause 3.0]
28   I'm an adult. Don' t protect me. Let's go!
29   [Laughter 1.7]
30   "Goat Boy wants his money back."
31   [Laughter 2.6]
32   You know. And then I see a club in the West end that has this
33   marquee sign, says "Live Sex Show On Stage". I thought what a
34   bummer actually have to be the guy that holds the blue dot.
35   ((Mimes moving a blue dot up and down))
36   [Laughter 18.0]

A second explanation (already touched on in footnote 3) for the potential variability of duration in audience laughter lies in the density of laughter during stand-up compared with that of applause for political speaking. For example, data used by Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) in their extended study of political rhetoric and audience applause draws upon all the broadcasted speeches made by the three main British parties during their conferences in 1981. This provides a total number of 2,461 "applause events" (Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986, p.118) within 41.75 hours of podium talk. This provides and average audience applause rate of approximately 59 per hour. This compares to over 422 bouts of laughter gained by Hicks per hour of his performance and approximately 405 per hour for Cook. This has the effect

that two or more potentially individual rounds of laughter can run into each other forming an a burst of elongated duration.

This distribution of laughter duration can be compared to a comedian of vastly different style, experience and status playing a contrasting venue and audience. Looking at the laughter that Adrian Cook gets from an audience at an above-pub venue a number of startling similarities with Hicks and his theatre audience can be seen. During this 16 minute and 45 seconds set Cook receives 113 separate round of audience laughter (241½ seconds) which amounts to approximately ¼ of his performance time.
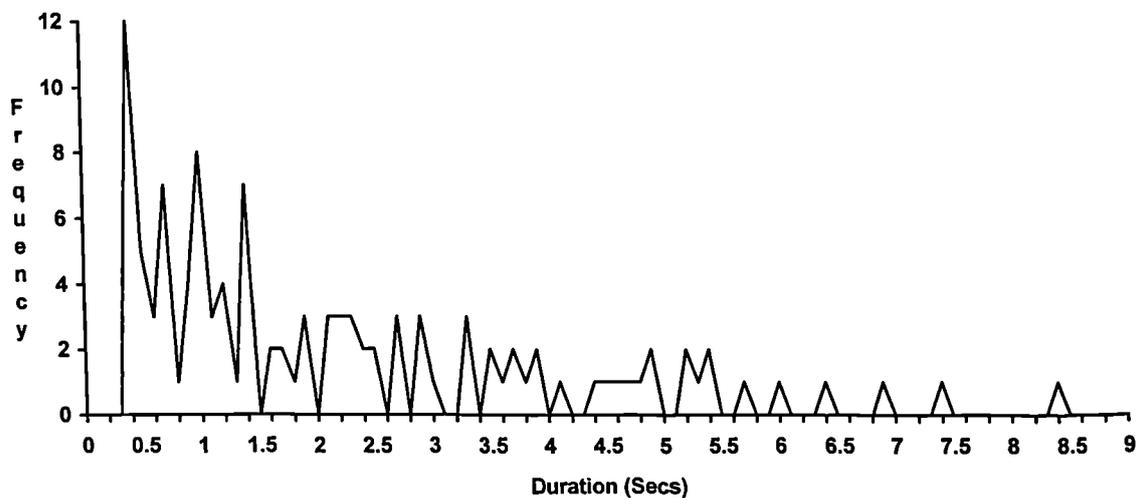
Figure 5-2: Frequency of Laughter Durations for Adrian Cook

As can be seen in Figure 5-2 the distribution of the laughter provided by Cook's audience shares a remarkably similar distribution to Hicks'. Despite the range of laughter durations being smaller for Cook (0.4-8.4 seconds as opposed to 0.6-18.0 seconds) there is still a noticeable negative skew such that the sub 3.0 seconds range contains 73.5% of the total audience laughter (with and actual range of 0.4-3.0 seconds) which differs from the Hicks' sample by only 0.5%.

When the laughter received by both these comedian is represented as a percentage of their total laughter, as in Figure 5-3, the correlation between the two becomes even more apparent.
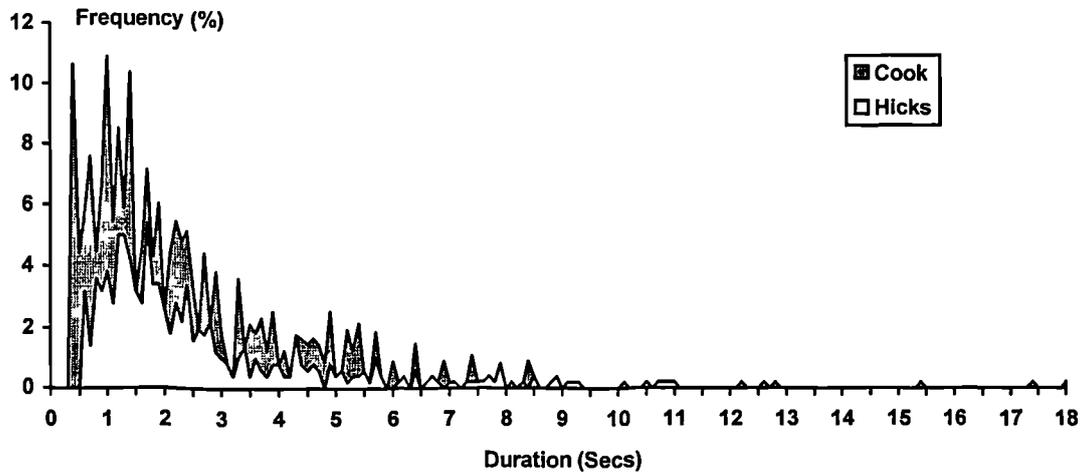
Figure 5-3: Percentage Distribution of Audience Laughter Received

by Cook and Hicks

This would suggest that a system of organisation not directly linked to the style, quality or venue of performance nor the make up of the audience is in operation within stand-up venues. This reinforces the notion introduced at the end of Chapter 3 of commonality between venues and performances as well as growing out of the fundamental interactional nature of stand-up.

For such contrasting situations as the Hicks and Cook performance to demonstrate such similarity of audience laughter it must be the case that audiences do not only allot their laughter according to the quality of the joke text but also via a common and learnt sense of how laughter is appropriately ordered within the stand-up environment. Further this shows once again that the audiences at stand-up venues do not simply wait for the comedian to produces a punchline and then react by laughing but are conscious off their allotting of laughter and are responsive to the negotiated

and ongoing interaction both between performers and audience and between members of the audience themselves..

It is this negotiation and ordering that is recognised and maintained by both audiences and performers that I will turn to in the following section. Drawing further parallels with conversation analysis literature I will look at how the transitions between the comedian's talk and audience laughter are organised. Exploring both the shift from the comedian's talk to audience laughter and from laughter back to talk I will show how all involved parties demonstrate a complex and active knowledge of the ordering of such transitions and the ability to respond to a variety of mutations of the basic transitional forms.

5.3 LAUGHTER AND TURN TAKING

Unlike most telephone conversations (Hopper 1991), stand-up comedy is not a form of communication which takes place only amongst two people. But what interaction during a comedy performance tends towards is a situation in which it appears *pseudo-dyadic* - individuals in the audience allow themselves to interact as part of the group rather than on a person-by-person basis. By mimicking the structure of a two party conversation the audience and performer can have a greater chance of understanding, predicating and acting appropriately to different turn-taking situations.

This temporary suspension of individual interactive potential in the audience has the effect of greatly simplifying the interactive process as dyadic conversation is a relatively efficient, easily structured, and simply followed form for communication to take. Thus it is not surprising that stand-up comedy, like political speaking, tends towards the illusion that it involves only two participants which follow the rules of turn-taking outlined by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). Stand-up consolidates individuals in the audience into adopting a single role within the communication process. The audience expect, and are expected, to act and react as a single body as

much as possible and discourage individual actions or deviations. This involves maintaining a frame in which the appearance is of two conversational parties engaged in the comic exchange

One of the reasons this is technically possible from an interactional perspective is because laughter (like applause) is one of the few exceptions to the one-speaker-at-a-time rule of conversation. Laughter can either be produced by a single party or by any number of individuals concurrently. Although laughter does not have the prolonged vowel structure of cheers which allows individuals to join in at any point during its duration (Atkinson, 1984) it does, like applause, have a regular and repeating form (Provine, 1990) which serves a similar function. This has the effect that members of an audience can join in ongoing laughter at almost any point during it duration without negative consequences.

Instances of deviation in which an individual in the audience makes themselves audible at a different time from the collective action are often remarked upon by the comedians. They tend to be discouraged as being *noise* in the system. For example a person who applauds separately from the rest of the audience is highlighted in one performance by Harry Hill - "One person clapping by themselves. Always a bit embarrassing. Particularly after sex I find." In a similar fashion a comedian may often pick up on a member of the audience whose laughter can be heard above or outside other members of the audience.

In Extract 5-6, Eddie Izzard returns to his stand-up show after the interval at The Ambassador's Theatre in London. He focuses on a member of the audience (Aud1) who makes themselves apparent by their loud, rapid laughter outside that of the rest of the audience (lines 4, 11, 15, 20, 22, 28).

Extract 5-6: Eddie Izzard

```
1  EI:    Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.  So ur::::::hm e. the first
2         time >y'know< when I looked as though as though I was late,
3         I wasn't actually late.  But this time a was late. Er:::hm=
4  Aud1: =>huhuhuhuhuhu<
5  EI:                        S'always quite fun ↓jus' to be late, y'know, (.)
```

```
6            an jus t- c- >k'now< an' oo-erhhhhh .hhh
7   Aud1:                                huhuhuhu
8   Aud:                                 hHHHHhh
9   EI:                                        Oh:: yes hm
10          right.
11  Aud1: >huhuhuhuhuhuhu<
12  EI:                 >Good laugh at the back. Well done. Thanks.<
13  Aud:                        HHHHHHHHHHHH=
14  Aud:   =HHh-h
15  Aud1:   >huhuhuhuhuhu<
16  Aud:               HHHHHHHHHHHhh
17  EI:                           Have we got that on a
18          tape ↓loop?
19  Aud:            HHHHHHh
20  Aud1:              >huhuhuhuhu<
21  Aud:                        HHHHHHHHHHHHhh=
22  Aud1: =>huhuhu<
23  Aud:            H-H-H-H
24  EI:                   Is- jus- One of those things that you turn over.
25  Aud:   h-h-HHHHHHhh-h-h
26  EI:    You can jus tu-
27          (.)
28  Aud1: >huhuhuhu<
29  Aud:             HHHHH
30  EI:                 You can even turn over imaginary ones.
31  Aud:   h-h-h-h
32  EI:            Wha- ↑Where were you the ↑first half?
33  Aud:                                 H-HHHHHHHHh
```

Besides its illustration of the active working of both audience and performer towards encouraging, adopting and maintaining a state of pseudo-dyadic interaction the Izzard sequence demonstrates also how the state of this interaction cannot be taken for granted without constant maintenance and how easily the appearance of a two party interaction can dissolve. The isolated laugher is apparent three times before Izzard takes it as the topic of his talk in line 12 onwards and this highlighting inadvertently prompts a further breakdown in the preferred interaction form. What happens is that a interaction dissolves such rather than a system in which performer and audience interact, Izzard interacts with the lone laugher, Izzard interacts with the rest of the audience and the audience interact with the laugher. In lines 13-14 and 19 it is the audience laughter following Izzard's comment on the lone chortler which

prompts him to laugh. This in turn is reacted to by group laughter from the rest of the audience (lines 16, 21).

The awareness and negotiation that goes on in audiences can occasionally be seen to be extended to a state in which a small passage of interaction takes place among groups within the total audience with little involvement from the performer. In Extract 5-7 Jerry Sadowitz's bad taste joke received mixed responses (lines 4-7):[5]

Extract 5-7: Jerry Sadowitz

```
1    JS:    And er (0.4) I am in fact a cross between ↑Eric Morecambe
2           and Ernie ↓Wise (.) I'm dead boring
3                            (0.6)
4           ⊢———4.1———⊣
5    Aud:   HHHH-hahahahhh[6]
6    Aud:    oh oh
7    Aud:      x-x-x[7]
```

This joke concerns one of the most famous and most loved comedy duos of Britain and is told only a short time after Eric Morecambe's death. Such topicality receives a strong response from the audience who, after a significant pause, laugh loudly. This loud group laughter (line 5) is interrupted by mild objection to the joke (line 6) after which the laughter dies to quiet individual laughter. However a section of the audience respond to the objections by applauding the joke and group laughter resumes. It is notable that the negative audience involvement (line 6) only commences after the laughter has begun as such it can be seen as one section of the audience commenting on a separate section. Similar negotiation between audience groupings which have differing opinions can be found in political speeches. In the example below light audience booing (denoted by Clayman by "b-b-b-b") commences after light laughter as Bush's attack on the Democrat government:

Extract 5-8

(2) [Bush-Dukakis 2: 1:03:50]
GB: ...And I believe the answer to the agricultural
economy .hh is not to: .h get the government further
invol:ved, but to do what I'm suggesting. .hh First
place never go back to that democratic (0.2) grain
embargo. .hh That liberal (.) democrat (.) grain
em[bargo .hh that k- kn(h)o(h)cked the markets=
AUD: [h-h-h-h- [h-h (1.1)
AUD:→   [b-b-b-b-b (0.9)
GB: =.h right out from under us'n made Mister Gorbachev
say to me when he was here, how do I know you're
reliable suppliers. . . .

Clayman, 1992, p.38

Clayman usefully divides audience responses into two categories namely affiliative (applause, cheers, supportive laughter) and disaffiliative (booing, heckling, derisive laughter) and suggests that the audience booing in the above extract is a "defensive posture" (p.39). That is it does not happen directly as a consequence of the politician's speech[8] (as would disaffiliative booing) but as a manner but to register disapproval of the "hostilities initiated by the speaker" and the affiliative laughter.

The issue here is that both sequences demonstrate that a real time interaction takes place between members of an audience and thus shows that the audience is alive to the situation, responsive to is development, and base decisions about how to act on the developing flow of both speaker and other hearers. Given this, it again becomes increasingly difficult to accept a conceptualisation of audience laughter in the stand-up environment as a stock response to joke telling or as only a signal of recognising the incongruities in a joke text.

However, given this, it is important not to see such intra-audience interaction as active breaks from a passive state of "audienceness" in which individual relinquish personal identity and agency in order to allow the progression of the performance. As in natural conversation members of an audience must constantly and actively negotiate not only when to contribute a turn to the ongoing interaction but also when not to in circumstances where it is either inappropriate to do so or when it might

interfere with another speaker. Similarly, decisions not only about when to laugh but a recognition of when it is not appropriate or desirable to do so have to be made throughout the stand-up performance.

Given that audience laughter is regular, organised and common from performance to performance and that its maintenance is attended to by both performer and audience it now remains to take a look at how this pseudo-dyadic organisation in negotiated. To this end I will look first at the change in turn from performer to audience before looking at the reciprocal transition. This I will do with illustration both from examples drawn from my own fieldwork and once again support these with illustration from commercially available recordings in order to demonstrate the solidity of my conceptualisation of commonality as part of the stand-up interaction.

5.3.1 Performer to Audience Transitions

It can be seen that speech and laughter tend to have their overlap minimised such that the onset of one will usually result in the termination or postponement of the other. Although speech and laughter often do overlap (but not necessarily so) one will give way to another so as to minimise the amount of synchronicity. This parallels Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) assertion about natural conversation that "Over-whelmingly, one party talks at a time".

Looking at the following extract from Sheffield comedian, Roger Monkhouse we can see that the commencement of laughter (line 4) coincides with the finishing of Monkhouse's "right" and not, as might be expected by conventional joke theory, after the delivery of the punchline. Even though the laughter is predominantly isolated it is enough for Monkhouse to pause during his delivery. The amplitude of "from" (line 3) is noticeably quieter than the proceeding talk as he adjusts the laughter interruption giving the laughter precedence over his talk.

Extract 5-9: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:   Bu what's weird thou↓gh is a'itudes av changed so much (.) coz I
2         was reading ↑at the ↓time about ANcient Spartan worri↓ors,
3         right, °from°
4   Aud:       h-h-h-hhh-h
5   RM:                  From Sparts: or where °ev'r°.
6   Aud:                             hHHHHHHHHHhhh-h
```

Similarly, in line 5 the finishing of, "or where ever" can be seen to have its volume adjusted in recognition of the audience laughter even though the end of the sentence is reached. However, the relationship between the comedian's talk and audience laughter is not an equal one as laughter can be seen to take priority over speech. When laughter and a comedian's talk **do** overlap most often it is the comedian who gives way in order to allow the audience's laughter to continue. This applies even if the laughter arises before the comedian's joke is complete or whilst the punchline is being delivered. This happens during lines 3-4 of Extract 5-9, the isolated laughter that comes from the audience is unexpected, it has not been foreseen by Monkhouse and comes as a surprise. Monkhouse, however is still compelled to respond to this interruption by pausing so that he does not overlap with the laughter unnecessarily. This has the effect of delaying delivery of the punchline and interrupting the joke's completion. The arrival of an unexpected laughter means that he pauses in his delivery, waits for the laughter to subside, and then carries on with his topic picking up from the point at which he left off.

The minimisation of overlap can again be seen to be maintained by Harry Enfield in Extract 5-10. Even though he has finished the semantic structure of his sentence the audience laughter arrives before the end of his sentence. Enfield responds to this by lowering the volume of the last two words of his sentence in line 2 in an attempt to minimise the potential break in the interactional organisation.[9]

Extract 5-10: Harry Enfield

```
1    HE:   My brother was very tough. OhuhH >yes yes s< 'ry
2          tough °my bother°.
3    Aud:            HHHHHHhhhhh
4    HE:                        Wha↑a:y's. He was- (0.6) He was so tough
5          that, d'y'know for ↑break↓fast (0.4) .hh he used to eat not one,
6          not two but three nuclear weapons:. 10
```

In a similar situation, Chris Hughes aborts his attempt at recommencement in Extract 5-11 before repeating the beginning of his line at a better point. The laughter in line 6 can be seen to be declining which prompts Hughes to attempt to start his next turn. However, a bout of loud, isolated laughter rejuvenates the audience laughter for a short time.

Extract 5-11: Chris Hughes

```
1    CH:   They sa:w something in ↓me (.) >that they wanted me to be
2          in the prison service.<=
3    Aud:                   h-h-hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-h=
4    CH:                        =They saw something in me that was
5          special.
6    Aud:  =h-hHHHHHHHHhhhhhh-H-H-HHhhhhhh
7    CH:                 >Jus' because< (0.8) Jus' because (.)I ↑think
8          (0.7) of my ability- I 'av trainin' in things.
```

Responding to this and giving the resurgent laughter priority, Hughes pauses until both the isolated and group laughter begin to subside and then repeats "Jus' because" as a way of commencing his next period of talk.

Similarly, if laughter appears at an appropriate point but is longer than expected the comedian will allow the audience precedence over their own talk. Below Spike Milligan talks about experiences he has had at a hotel while on holiday in France. After various complaints about the quality of the hotel and the buildings structure he talks about breakfast the first morning at the hotel.

Extract 5-12: Spike Milligan

```
 1   SM:    Next >mor<ning after a breakfast of porridge an' ↑frogs
 2           |————1.4————|
 3   Aud:   hHHHHHHHHHHhhhh
 4   SM:                        Plus a steaming bi>det< of coffee::=
 5           |——————————————11.0————————————|
 6   Aud:  =hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhh
 7   SM:           I-              I- .hh .hh        .hh .hh
 8   SM:                                                       (.h)It
 9           does.(h)n't be(.h h)ar thinking about (      ) does it?
10   Aud:   hHHHHhhhh
11   SM:              I joined a group >of impoverished English tourists< on
12           the thirty-centime-all-in-tour.
```

After approximately 1 ½ seconds laughter (line 2-3) for his first description the second period of laughter, at eleven seconds, is unexpectedly long (lines 5-6). This causes Milligan to pause in his narrative for the duration of the laughter. The extract also illustrates how extended laughter while not interrupted is "padded" by comedians. That is, often they do not remain silent throughout the laughter but suggest that they are ready to progress by repeating the first one or two syllables of the next sentence in their planned topic. In this case it Milligan repeats the "I" (line 7) which is the start of "I joined a group" in line 11.[11] This may be an error in the stand-up/audience interaction but its frequent occurrence in such elongated portions of laughter suggests otherwise. Rather it would appear to act as a technique for highlighting the laughter as unexpected.[12] These mock startings during prolonged laughter can be seen as "modesty syllables" - that is they play with the notion of interrupting unexpected laughter without actually doing so while suggesting that the laughter is over-kind but still welcome.

Such modesty syllables can also be found delivered by Harry Enfield in Extract 5-13. Here, Enfield recommences his delivery after the audience laughter and applause of lines 3-4. However, his routine receives an apparently unexpected period of laughter (line 7) which, as audience laughter has priority over performer's talk, causes Enfield to interrupt his delivery. This interruption does not lead to Enfield stopping his delivery too abruptly however. What happens is that Enfield inserts an number of modesty syllables as "it i- i-" (line 6).

Extract 5-13: Harry Enfield

```
1   HE:                 An' ev'ry time he broke win:t. (.) we used to have to
2         leave the h↑ouse f' forty years.
3   Aud:                          hHHHHHHHHhhhh
4   Aud                           x-x-x
5   HE:                                    It was MOST
6         incoconvenient it i- i-
7   Aud:                 HHHHhhhhhh
```

Thus we can see that the transition between performers talk and audience laughter is negotiated so as to minimise overlap and during changes in turn that laughter tends to take precedence over talk. Moreover the change between speakers is negotiated in real time and both parties actively response to the cues embedded in the behaviour of the other. Now I will move on to exploring the reciprocal transition and explore audience to performer transitions.

5.3.2 Audience to Performer Transitions

The shifting in turns between performer and audience is well illustrated in Extract 5-14 by the comedian Sean Hughes we can see that audience laughter at lines 4, 7, 9 and 11 has very little, if any, overlap with Hughes' talk. The interaction between performer and audience is such as to minimise the amount of time in which both are contributing to the turn taking. Also, it can be seen that Hughes picks up his topic thread after each section of laughter just before the laughter finishes. Thus the performer maximises the amount of laughter he receives and allows the audience laughter to run full course without suggesting any need for it to be terminated.

Extract 5-14: Sean Hughes

```
1   SH:    >↑WHY is it as well whenev- yuv Any problem with a
2          relationship< you always (your) advise (.) of your sad single
3          friends:.
4   Aud:              hhhHHhhhh
5   SH                          The (sick) people who've never been out with
6          anyone in their whole ↑life.
7   AUD:                          hhhhhhh
8   SH:                                      THEY:'ll be the one's to arsk .h.¹³
9   Aud:  hhHHHHHHhhh
10  SH:                   They're b↑ound to know ↑aren't ↓they?
11  Aud:                                              HHHHHHhhh
```

As laughter takes precedence over the comedian's talk in the stand-up interaction it is important that the comedian does not interrupt the audience's laughing such as to curtail the laughter or make an audience uncertain about their reading of the humorous situation.   Conversely it is also important that "gaps" do not appear between the points of transition from audience to performer and that periods of silence are avoided during the stand-up performance. This means that the comedian must time the start of their turn so as to prevent a silence but not cause undue overlap. This is done by the performer through exploiting the structure of audience laughter endings.

Although laughter has a varying set of "shapes" the end of audience laughter invariably follows the same pattern. That is laughter fades out rather than coming to a sudden end. Constantly, the amplitude of group laughter decreases as it approaches its completion. Looking closer at the laughter in Extract 5-10 (reproduced below as Extract 5-15) it can be seen that the audience's laughter starts quietly but rapidly builds in amplitude before tailing off at end.

Extract 5-15: Harry Enfield

```
1   EH:    not one, not two but three nuclear weapons:.
2                          (.)
3   Aud:  hHHHHHhhhh
```

This can be depicted diagramatically as in the figure below in which the graph line rises steeply during the first moments of the laughter as the volume rapidly builds to its peak (1). The volume then forms a plateau (2) during which the audience's laughter remains approximately constant before its amplitude fades to silence again (3).
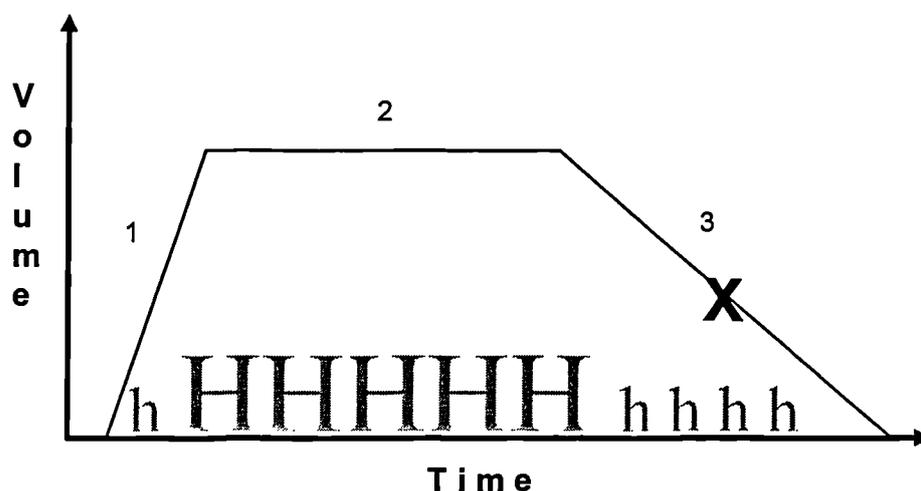
Figure 5-4: Basic Structure of Audience Laughter

This might be considered the basic shape of audience laughter and parallels that of audience applause as explored by Atkinson (1984) which shares the same pattern of rapid attack rate, a consistent sustain level and a release rate slower that the attack. Thus, he argues:

> [t]he commonly used phrase "a burst of applause" is thus a remarkably suitable description, in that applause does indeed "burst" forth very quickly from its point of onset. Similarly, the rather more gradual slope as it comes to an end is aptly reflected in everyday expressions like "the applause subsided", "died down" or "faded away".

Atkinson, 1984, p.24

This can be seen also in the following example from Jo Caulfield in which the laughter in line 4-5 and 8-9 although of differing duration follow the same basic pattern of short build up → plateau → longer dénouement as illustrated in the figure above.

Extract 5-16: Jo Caulfield

```
1    JC:    I'm erh a little bit ta knackered coz I've juster jus driven up from
2           London. (.) .hh Ur:m wh- which was alri↓::ght y'know (    )
3           scared the shit outta the drivin' instructor actchully.
4           |——1.4——|
5    Aud:   hhHHHhhh
6    JC:                    I mean the introductory lesson's ↑free, I thought
7           (Manchester). No. °I din't know. Y'know°
8                          |————2.3————|
9    Aud:                  hHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhh
```

A variation on this can be seen in the Roger Monkhouse extract previously quoted.
In this exchange that audience laughter follows the established basic pattern but a
single element of isolated laughter is appended to the end of the sequence.

Extract 5-17: Roger Monkhouse

```
1    RM:         From Sparts: or where °ev'r°.
2    Aud:                     hHHHHHHHHHhhh-h
```

A variant on a comedian's mock attempt at restarting their pre-set delivery can be
seen in Extract 5-18 (quoted more fully and discussed in detail in Chapter 7) in
which Ben Elton comes towards a sequence on the privatisation of British utilities
during the late 1980s. His speculation that the government's enthusiasm in putting
things on the market will lead to them selling his household furniture received a loud
burst of audience laughter and applause.

Extract 5-18: Ben Elton

```
1   BE:    I confidently expect to see my ↑sofa (.)
2          advertised on the ↓telly
3          |————————————9.8————————————|
4   Aud:   HHHHHHHHHHHh
5   Aud:          xxxxxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXXXXXXxx
6   BE:            The Ben's      (6.0)      The Ben's (.) Sofa (.)
7          Share (.) ↑Opportunity
```

At first glance it appears as though Elton makes a premature attempt to recommence his delivery while the laughter is still at its peak (line 6). However, given the notion of modesty syllables as a mock interruption we can see that Elton's series of mock re-commencement, pause and then re-commencement is not a breakdown in the system which needs repairing but a sequence which highlights the richness of the stand-up interaction. We can see that the audience laughter in line 4 does not diminish in its amplitude when Elton says, "The Ben's" for the first time and the applause continues and grows. This is responded to by the audience not by a rapid decline in laughter volume as might be expected but by the beginning of applause which as it progresses and grows in amplitude takes the place of the laughter. Given this situation Elton does not attempt to continue with his attempt at re-commencement. Instead he remains silent for six seconds letting the audience's laughter and applause continue. Only then does he offer a more a more forceful attempt at re-commencement which results in the subsidence of the audience's applause.

These deviations from typical ending to laughter sequences are discouraged so as to simplify the judging of the re-commencement of the comedian's talk after a period of laughter. In order to minimise the potential for silence after laughter comedians will start their talking before the laughter has ended but towards the end of the audience response. The ability to do this is provided by their recognition of laughter growing quieter. Performers learn to look for this feature of laughter and respond to it, the listen to the audience so as to forecast when the laughter will end. Having done this they commence the turn just before it has done so. This point is marked by the "X" in Figure 5-4 above.

The example from Lucy Porter in Extract 5-19 shows how the stand-up comedian is alert to the laughter of an audience. The laughter in line 9 begins to fade out and Porter recommences her act. However, not only does Porter begin her turn as she hears the audience's laughter start to die down but when a single syllable of isolated laughter is concurrent with her re-commencement she alters to accommodate this. Not wishing to recommence while the audience is laughing Porter delivers her attempt at re-commencement at a volume which makes it unclear. Only when she realises the laughter is not going to continue does she restart her turn.

Extract 5-19: Lucy Porter

```
1   LP:    >Achully, my brother Andy he still lives at home with my mum
2          and dad and he phoned me up the other day very upset because
3          they'd had a break in< and they'd had tv and ↑video sto↓len.  And
4          (as he was) saying, the wors thing about it for him, was that he
5          knows some local drug deal↓er is going to benefit from that
6          burglary.  (.) But I said to him, look ↑Andy if mum and dad want
7          to spend their insurance money on ↓crack
8                     (0.4)
9   Aud:  hHHHHHHHhh-h-hhh
10  LP:                  (Understand) understand.
```

It is worth recognising at this stage that as with most accepted modes of behaviour the tendency towards a minimisation of silence during stand-up can be consciously ignored for effect. Occasionally silences will be allowed to occur by the performer as in this example from comedy poet Hovis Presley. This extract is taken from the very beginning of Presley's act. A popular local performer, he is greeted by an enthusiastic round of applause along with cheers and whistles after his introduction by the compere. However, in contrast to expectations Presley does not start his act as the applause in line 1 dies down but instead leaves a considerable silence. This silence is not an error in the interaction but rather a planned exception to the accepted rules. The gap is left so as to create a foundation for the opening of his act. Presley uses the silence along with his dour characterisation and slow, broad Bolton accent to build a sequence in which he explains that he is going to leave the stage

and come back on again. He asks the audience to give him a less enthusiastic welcome on his return to the stage.

Extract 5-20: Hovis Presley

```
1   Aud:   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxx-x-x-x
2   Aud:        ((      Cheers     ))
3   Aud:           ((Whistles))
4                (5.8)
5   HP:    That reception wuz a bi too w↓A:::rm >fur me<.
6   Aud:                                          HHHhhh
```

Similarly, having been recognised, excepted and practised by all parties the rule governing the minimisation of overlap can be excepted. There are occasions in which both audience and performer recognise as being open for the potential for overlap. These are points at which contrary to the norm, laughter and talk do co-occur and during which no attempt is made to rectify this or attempt any sort of repair for this apparent infringement of the turn taking order. As an illustration we can look at Extract 5-21. In this sequence taken from towards the beginning of Martin Bigpig's act he starts the preparation for a routine in which he cuts a carrot lying in the palm of a volunteer's hand in half with a machete.

Extract 5-21: Martin Bigpig

```
1    MB:   Ok wha ma gonna d↓o: (0.6) Am gonna showya summi really
2          danger↓ous: (0.7) I have here a dangerous i:↓um. (1.0) >Am
3          goona put that there downt fuckin touch it, ↓right.<
4    Aud:                                          ha-hhh-ha-ha
5    MB:   >OK whama gonna do - wit the danger<↓ous item: (0.3) I'm
6          gonna demonstra↓::te (1.0) my am↑a:↓zin: self cotro↓wul. (1.0)
7          >Not that I've demonstrate any so f  ⌈ar.=
8    Aud:                                       ⌊h-h-h-h-h
9    MB:                               =But I'm gonna
10         demonstrate my amazing sel contro.< I'm gonna ↑do this using
11         (0.9) that person the::re.
12   Aud:                 ha-ha
13   MB:              >Yeh, up ya come.
14         Com- come °(over here)°<
15   Aud:         hHHHHHHHhhhh-h
16   MB:                       As he come up give him a a- a big roun
17         of appl↑ause.
18   Aud:         XXXXXXXxxxx-x-x
19   MB:                     °(Have we met before?)° H- have we
```

```
20          met be↓fore?
21   Vol:          No:, we aven't
22   MB:                    OK, that's good, coz what av got here.
23          Is got a samurai ↑so↓word (1.4) I've got a gullible wanker from
24          the audience.
25                 |——————2.2——————|
26   Aud:          hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhh
27   MB           >°No I haven't. No I haven't.°< N-. No °no° (.)
28          Down hit me coz this is expensive, right.
```

Martin Bigpig is an unusual stand-up performer whose acts owes as much to new circus as it does to stand-up. He is a large Irishman with a shaved head and long dark beard who performs shirtless to reveal extensive tattoos on his shoulders and chest along with pierced nipples. I have quoted at length to provide a context for the section 22-27. During the section Bigpig's "volunteer" from the audience has arrived on the stage and a mock-depreciating joke is produced with the volunteer as its butt. This produces a section of audience laughter, however, rather waiting for the laughter to subside as would usually be the case Bigpig continues with "No I haven't. No I haven't" (line 27) without any gap in his delivery.

Extract 5-22: Martin Bigpig

```
1   MB:                              OK, that's good, coz what av got here.
2          Is got a samurai ↑so↓word (1.4) I've got a gullible wanker from
3          the audience.
4                 |——————2.2——————|
5   Aud:          hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhh
6   MB           >°No I haven't. No I haven't.°< N-. No °no° (.)
7          Down hit me coz this is expensive, right.
```

Further, there is no indication in the manner in which Bigpig continues (line 7) nor subsequently in the act that this apparently infringement needs repairing. There is no attempt by the performer to repeat or clarify the information in line 6 which might have been obscured by the audience laughter nor is there apparent any curtailing of the audience's laughter.

A similar situation can be found in the following extract from the American comedian Emo Philips. Part of a sequence in which Philips talks about his

experiences of baby-sitting he tells the audience about trying to clean the child's nappy. His surreal onomatopoeic representation of a baby swirling around the bowl of a flushing toilet (line 10), overlaps considerably with the audience laughter of line 11-12. Again there is no apparent indication that this overlap is a misordering. There is no attempt by Philips to curtail his demonstrative wailing nor does the audience laughter drop in volume or appear foreshortened.

Extract 5-23: Emo Philips

```
1    EP:    I ↑ta:ke him ho↓me am tryin to rinse out his diaper in the ↓tiolet
2           >you ever rinse out a ↑ba:b↑y's diaper in the toilet?< .Huuuuu:::aI
3           accidentally let go of his ↑FOOT.
4                              (.)
5                                         |————3.3————|
6    Aud:                                 hhh-H-HHHHHHHhhh
7    Aud:                                            x-x
8    EP:    An he's spinning around.
9           |———————————3.1————   ————————|
10          ↑Oo-↓oo-↑oo- ↓u.hw-↑oo-↓oo-↑oo-↓oo-oow↓hhh.
11               |—————————3.4—————————|
12   Aud:        hh-H-HHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh
13   EP:                                           Tryin' to get
14          him out with a ↑plun↓ger cos you can't ↑uhse Draino - that
15          ↑HhURtsa kid.
16   Aud:             HHHHHhhHhhhhhhh-h-hhhh
17   Aud:                              If you have ↑any
18          mater↓nal insticts.
```


How then can such substantial exception to the basic one-at-a-time rule be accounted for? What these sections of the Bigpig and Philips extracts have in common is that in certain ways both sections of performer talk is phatic. That is it doesn't actually add anything to the understanding of the joke text. If viewed, for a moment, through the analytic spectacle of traditional joke theory it is apparent that both the comments that overlap laughter are addenda to the joke itself rather than an integral part of the joke's narrative. Neither of the comments are essential or even contributory to an audiences understanding of the incongruity in the joke text.

In the Martin Bigpig example, the joke relies on the breaking of the magic/theatre/ circus performance convention of not insulting the person from the audience who help with the performer act. There is a conflict between frames which govern accepted behaviour and Bigpig's actual behaviour.[14] Therefore, the joke text actually terminates on the completion of, "...from the audience" at line 24 and so Bigpig's retraction of the insult is essentially not part of the joke and so can effectively be ignored for the purpose of turn-taking.

Similarly the joke which runs from line 1-12 in Extract 5-23 relies primarily on a pun, that is the dual meaning of "toilet" both as the room where the bathroom fixture is housed and the amenity itself. Once the incongruity between these two similar, but ultimately incompatible meanings, becomes apparent the joke text is complete and laughter is appropriate. Again, Philip's vocal impression of a baby in a flushing toilet is not part of the joke text when traditionally understood.[15]

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

One of the primary aims of Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) work on audiences at political conferences is to establish how the risk of isolation that individuals have to take in applauding during a political speech is minimised through the cues given through the rhetorical devices of the speakers. They assert that any individual member of an audience has to make the decision as to whether to applaud a statement or not in real time and effectively within a second of the statement being made (p.112). As such members of an audience look for clues giving guidance as to when applause is necessary, desired or appropriate and the rhetorical devices of the speaker are one area which is rich in these signposts.

Similarly, laughter is an affiliative act and to be seen laughing at jokes, especially those which contain judgements on sensitive areas, involves a risk of revealing one's allegiances. Reciprocally, the refusal to laugh during situations in which peers in a group are laughing also invokes the risks of both isolation and being thought of as not having the socially valued sense of humour. In an audience for stand-up comedy

the expectations for laughter are institutionalised by the setting. Performers expect audiences to laugh and audience expect that they will be able to provide this.

Taking this it is now possible to suggest a system of understanding laughter in stand-up comedy venues which supplements the gaps inherent in traditional joke theory and previous work on stand-up comedy. It is possible to build a scheme which both arises from and informs the study of stand-up comedy *in situ*.

If such a viewpoint of organisation for laughter outlined above is adopted the individual/audience dichotomy present in certain research discussed in Chapter 3 is alleviated as an understanding of how individuals are complicit in becoming an audience is developed. The surrendering of individuality and a movement towards group response and consensus is - in the live stand-up arena - advantageous for both the performer and members of the audience. The temporary transformations becomes one that is mutually advantageous for both parties. The performers can predict response patterns and the individuals in the audience are relieved of the decisions of risk taking. As such the relationship between teller and hearer, orator and audience, becomes more egalitarian than the Stimulus/Response model in which the power lies externally at the disposal of the joke's teller.

As such, the view of a responsive and active audience will inform the next part of this work as I look in turn at the openings, middles and closing of comedy acts.

The following three chapters centre specifically on an in depth analysis of comedy performances and as such together form the second part of this work. Using live audio and video recordings as their source materials, these chapters will illustrate and support the understanding of the stand-up comedy event as suggested by the four categories of commonality, mutuality, minimisation of risk and interaction as outlined in the Chapter 3. The next chapter will examine the openings of comedy routines looking at their order and maintenance. Chapter 7 will consider the middles of these performances looking at the manner in which jokes, witticisms, and humour are performed using a set of common devices and structures not previously examined in conventional joke theory and Chapter 8 will investigate the manner in which acts

are brought to a close through the co-operative ordering of both performer and audience.

Throughout these chapters, in keeping with the framework already established, my project will deal not only with establishing common features of comedy in venues but in highlighting the roles that these features play. Central to my thesis is not the originating of a theory of comedy text but rather the development of a perspective in which this is just one section of an interactional system. The emphasis is not on the performer as sole player in the joking experience but rather how the telling of jokes, the use of certain forms, or the use of various rhetoric effects the ongoing development of the performance.

Notes

[1] Full texts of both performances can be found in Appendix 2

[2] Although the total number of instances of audience laughter during the show is 507, the analysis of duration's is based on 501 as six instances are of indeterminable length due to lack of local audio clarity.

[3] The relative importance of audience response between political speech making and stand-up can be noted when comparing the time spent by Hick's audience laughing and Clayman's (1992) observation of less than forty audience "responses" in a ninety minute Presidential debate.

[4] This is supported by Morrison's (1940) observations on audience laughter which recorded a bout of laughter of 18.4 seconds.

[5] The complex interaction in the audience shown in this extract contradicts Heritage and Greatbach's (1986) assertion that individuals in an audience are unable to judge the appropriateness of response through those of other members of an audience. Responses here are not only being evaluated through and in response to other audience members but being done in real time.

[6] The mode of transcription for laughter used here is developed from that of audience applause at political speeches developed by Clayman (1993, 1992). Lower case (h) indicates quiet group laughter, upper case (H) indicates louder audience response. Isolated laughter is show as -h- or -H- depending on intensity. See Appendix 1 for a complete list of transcription notation.

[7] Following on from Clayman (1992) audience applause is transcribed here by "x" and follows the same conventions as those outlined for laughter namely that capital "X" denotes louder applause than lower case "x" and hyphens between the letters indicate isolated rather than group applause.

[8] The audience makes the decision not to respond to certain comments in this way.

[9] This suggests that the audience are laughing not at the word of the joke but some other feature that happens earlier in the sentence. It is my contention that they are laughing at "OhuhH >yes yes s< 'ry" and I will substantiate this in Chapter 7.

[10] This plays on the advertising slogan for the breakfast cereal Shredded Wheat used for a long time in Britain in which masculine characters/personalities were shown to eat/not eat "Not one, not two, but three Shredded Wheat".

[11] Milligan's own laughter in line 7 is similar to Jefferson's observations (1979) on tellers laughter particles in natural conversation. This type of laughter tends not to be found in contemporary stand-up although casual observation suggest that it may be more common in earlier stand-up performances.

[12] See below for a discussion of why audiences allow certain overlaps without compulsion to stop laughing.

[13] This breath can be seen as a "post-utterance completion laugh particle" which acts to invite laughter but by itself may be recognised as either the commencement of laughter or some other exhalation such as a cough or heavy breath.

[14] Alternative analyses of this joke are, of course, possible and may employ superiority theory (Bigpig's status over the member of the audience) or relief perspectives (perhaps the joke actually eases the volunteer). However, they would still recognise the parameters of the joke text I have outlined above.

[15] However, this is not to suggest that the two elements of talk are unimportant in the stand-up comedy perspective. Indeed is apparent that although not a joke in any conventional sense the laughter of Philip's audience in line 12 is specific to his noises in line 10 and receives approximately the same duration of laughter as the toilet joke itself.

CHAPTER 6

OPENING LINES: THE COMMENCING OF STAND-UP ACTS AND THEIR INTRODUCTIONS

> "It was a vicious place. They'd give you fifteen seconds
> and then start booing you offstage."
> Jenny Eclair in Cook, 1994

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I begin my analysis of comedy performers and audiences in their natural setting with an exploration of how the telling of jokes becomes a stand-up performance. I will examine a number of the routinised sequences that can be recognised in performances and demonstrate that these structures are regular enough to be present in stand-up regardless of venue, performer, or audience but flexible enough to be moulded to specific situations. That is, rather than representing a deep structure such as those suggested by Propp (1984) or Wright (1977), these structures are both "context shaped" and "context renewing" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990, p.289) in that although they are produced within a specific local context they in turn contribute to the development and shaping of that context.

This chapter will show that despite an apparent diversity of stand-up openings they demonstrate, in keeping with notion of commonality, similarity in their organisation drawing on a viewable set of moves. First it will look at how comperes break the flow of their own act and organise their introduction of other comedians. It will establish and support a system of looking at stand-up openings which is based around a series of six turns each of which plays a specific role in either passing on information or involving the audience. Next I will move onto examining the first

few moves of the comedian's act itself again demonstrating a recognisable regularity that works towards smoothing out the opening as well as minimising interactional risk.

6.2 THE STRUCTURE OF OPENINGS

The importance of act openings for the subsequent reception of the act is recognised by performers as the Jenny Eclair quotation which opens this chapter shows. They realise the necessity to produce a good, organised and well-received opening which makes an impression on their audience and gives them a strong starting point from which to develop their act. This is not too dissimilar from Schegloff's (1986) view of the important role played by telephone conversation openings which he suggests, "provides a base (I will call it the 'anchor position') for the introduction of 'first topic'" (p.116). As the beginning of the telephone talk provides a foundation on which to place the first topic, so the opening sequence of stand-up comedy creates a base on which to build the first joke. In stand-up the opening provides a point of commencement for the interaction between performer and audience and establishes sets of expectations in both the audience and the performer. It allows the audience to sample the comedian's style while the performer gains an impression of the responsiveness of the audience. Vitally, the successful opening demonstrates that the people associated with the commencing interaction are both willing and ready to participate. It confirms that they share a common set of rules for structuring that interaction and are willing to order their talk by those rules. As such, if the opening is unclear, misunderstood, or rejected, the comedian is immediately at a disadvantage and therefore a successful opening is essential to a comedian in order to provide the optimum conditions for the rest of their act.

When it is considered that the opening of a comedian's act may take only a few seconds from a twenty minute routine such claims may seem overstated. However, I will show below that not only are routine openings organised[1] but that this organisation is remarkably similar from performance to performance. As such

openings fulfil the stand-up need for commonality as outlined at the end of Chapter 3.

This in no way means that all openings are the same and, as can be seen from the extracts below, the opening to stand-up acts are often incredibly varied at first glance. They can range from the efficient, concise and almost impersonal to the meandering, whimsical and apparently unplanned. Performers such as Tony Burgess (Extract 6-1) can produce an opening which is energetic and rapid:

Extract 6-1: Tony Burgess

```
1  TB:   G'evenin!  (0.9)  G  ┌ood evening.
2  Aud 1:                     └Evenin
3  Aud:                    ((General response))
4  TB:                                      Oaaarhh
```

Other comedians such as Whoopi Goldberg can be playful and unassuming:

Extract 6-2: Whoopi Goldberg

```
1  WG:  Hi.
2  Aud:  HI:::
3  WG:      Hi
4  Aud:      Hi
5  Aud:        Yeah!
```

However, despite this diversity I will show in this chapter that the openings of all these acts can be seen to share a number of important similarities. A primary observation is that the openings of stand-up routines are, unlike the act that follows them, consistently non-humorous, they do not contain jokes and rarely[2] even contain humour or witticisms. Performers do not start their act by going into the first of their canned jokes, instead they go through a series of turns in which the audience begins to be drawn into the performance narrative. This non-comic opening sequence may be viewed as a parallel to the opening of telephone conversations in which the initial turns have an apparently perfunctory nature bearing very little connection to the topic(s) of the later conversation. Specifically Schegloff (1986) suggests that there

exists a "core" opening sequence to telephone conversations. This, he demonstrates, is made up from four sequential sequence types namely the *summons/answer* sequence in which the recipient of the phone call is called to talk by the telephone ringing, the *identification* (and/or recognition) sequence in which cues to people's identity are gathered and/or offered, the *greeting*, and the *"howareyou"* sequence in which enquiry is made about parties' well-being. These can be best explained through the use of an illustration. Extract 6-3 represents a canonical telephone conversation opening and displays all of Schegloff's sequence types.

Extract 6-3

0		ring	] Summons
1	R	Hello	] Response
2	C	Hi Ida?	]
3	R	Yeah	Identification
4	C	Hi,= This is Carla	]
5	R	Hi Carla	Greeting
6	C	How are you.	]
7	R	Okay:.	
8	C	Good. =	HowAreYou
9	R	= How about you.	
10	C	Fine. + First topic	]
11		'Don wants to know'	

Schegloff, 1986, p.115[3]

By supplementing Schegloff's transcription with the notation in the right hand column of Extract 6-3 it is possible to rapidly illustrate the moves being taken by both caller and recipient. For Schegloff the ringing of the telephone at line 0 is the first turn of the opening sequence as it summons the recipient to the phone and has the preferred "Hello" response (line 1). The sequence that take place in lines 2 and 3 demonstrates that identification may be made by offering one's name but often also happens by the recognition of a sample of talk. The adjacency pair which forms the greeting sequence (lines 4-5) and the *howareyou* continue the opening sequence and provide the anchor position for the opening of the first topic (line 10). This sequencing is vital in its establishing of commonalties and relationships between parties and like the telephone conversation (or professional-client meetings), the openings of stand-up routines serve a similar function. Further, like these other types

of openings, stand-up openings are made up from a small range of available turns or sequences which appear in a sequential order and preface what is recognised by all parties as the commencement of *business proper*.

In conventional stand-up, there are seven moves which can be identified as potentially present in the start of an act:

Compere's Introduction in which prior to the entrance of the comedian they are introduced to the audience by the compere.

Audience applause which accompanies the departure of the compere and welcomes the stand-up onto the stage.

Greeting of audience by the comedian.

Comment on the setting in which the stand-up makes comment on one of four locally specific areas: the audience, the venue, their own act or a meta-comment on the act.

Request for action where the comedian asks the audience to perform a specific act as a group.

Response to request by audience during which the audience comply with the comedian's request.

First canned joke, the final move in the opening sequence in which the stand-up begins their "routine proper" by delivering the first of their pre-scripted humorous sequences. This can be seen as paralleling Schegloff's first topic.[4]

It is tempting here to continue to draw comparisons with Schegloff's (1986) categorisation of sequences that are evident in the beginning of telephone conversations in which applause might serve the same function as the telephone ringing, and the greeting of the audience could be seen as part of the identification-recognition sequence etc. However, while the work of Schegloff is important in conceptualising stand-up openings, an attempt to construct absolute parallels between the opening of telephone conversations and stand-up comedy is unprofitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, it cannot account for the place that any one stand-up set has within an evening's performance at a venue, how it is marked out as separate

from the other acts and the compere's links. Whereas a telephone conversation can be seen to have a distinct beginning and end marked by the ringing of the phone and the replacement of the handset, stand-up has a place within the flow of a night's entertainment. Secondly, although as discussed in Chapter 5, stand-up interaction tends towards the pseudo-dyadic, as we also saw it is not exclusively so. Unlike most telephone calls stand-up involves groups of people acting as an audience who rather than act independently must negotiate a consensus when producing a next turn and must deal with the implication of this turn taking as a public act. Finally, Schegloff's examination of telephone conversation has a tendency to equate a turn with a single move so that an utterance cannot fulfil more than one function at a time. This then, does not allow for the potential for multi-functionality that sequences can demonstrate in stand-up.[5]

To support and concretise the sequence of stand-up opening, I've presented above what I will do below is examine each of these seven moves in turn. As well as breaking these moves down into further categories where necessary, I will provide varied illustration of how these moves are presented, how they fit into the development of an opening and what happens when they are missing from the sequence or presented in an inappropriate manner.

6.3 COMPERE'S INTRODUCTION

In comedy venues, proceedings are managed and organised throughout the performance by a compere who acts as an anchor for the evening's events in the venue. Comperes are more than just an announcer who brings on the acts. They provide continuity between acts who often have divergent styles and or different performance skills; they perform routines between acts using their own material; they pass comment on the performers; they share details of the evening itinerary, they may run a joke competition[6] for the audience, and they encourage the audience's

participation. In short the compere acts to frame a series of performances into a single event.

However the interaction of performers at the end of each of their sets is a pivotal function of the compere and one the play a major role in maintaining the organisation of comedy nights. Roger Monkhouse provides a typical introduction by a compere is presented in Extract 6-4 below.

Extract 6-4: Roger Monkhouse

```
1    RM:   >I wan you t show< HUge ↓love an appreciation for awl
2          the ↑acts as they come on tonight particularly for (the next
3          man) who's doing a short spot for you.
4          He's ↑POPin in on his way UP to Edinburah >just to keep
5          the Edinburgh (theme) going<
6    Aud 1:                    YAA:::
7    RM:                              Way:::
8    Aud:                                  hahhhhhhhhhh
9    RM:                                             So ↑you'll be
10         >able to understand him< (    which is nice).
11   Aud:                              hahahahhhhhahhhh
12   RM:                                          Please
13         welcome (.) O::n t the stage. All the way >from over there<
14         The excellent (.)
15         Graham Swanson.
16         Y- roundov applause please.
17   Aud:                           x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxx-x-x
```

It is immediately apparent just from this example that a number of different moves are utilised to create an introduction such as the one Monkhouse give Swanson. Such sequences are not introductions in their most rudimentary form as they routinely contextualise and appraise the oncoming performer in addition to merely introducing them. Further it is noticeable that the introductory sequence is not made up merely from one turn produced by the compere. The audience contribute collectively with laughter and applause and lines 6-8 demonstrate an unplanned addition to the interaction of the opening sequence.

Taking these two rudimentary observations as a starting point I will refine the understanding of compere's introductions and demonstrate that the manner in which

comperes introduce acts tends to adhere to comedy's bias towards commonality as mentioned in the previous chapter. Venue to venue, performer to performer the features that structure the compere's spiel remain observably similar and contain a set sequence of components. Each sequence in which a compere introduces a comedian is invariably constructed from the following:

- Contextualisation
- Framing of response
- Evaluation of comedian
- Request for action
- Introduction
- Audience applause

Each of these will be described and illustrated below.

6.3.1 Contextualisation

Contextualisation is provided by a compere when they offer the audience with a piece of background information related to the comedian who is being introduced. This information is generally biographical in nature and as such often includes mention of information such as where the comedian is from. This form of contextualisation is offered in the first line of Extract 6-5 when not only is the context of home town offered but the implication that Clough has made the journey from one town to the other especially to perform on that particular night.

Extract 6-5: Alex Boardman

    1   An' welcome ↑all the way from >H↓uddersfield< (.)
    2   ↑Andy ↓Clough

Line 2 of Extract 6-6 also deals with geography but in a slightly more complex way in that it gives not only the comedian's current home town but also their country of origin.

Extract 6-6: Roger Monkhouse

1   I'm gonna introduce our first act for to↓night.
2   Erm: this is er ooh an American London person (whose bin)
3   giggin' away in London. First time in Manchester.

However, the geographical base of the performer is by no means the only biographical information that can be offered by a compere as part of their contextualisation of the oncoming comedian.   Contextual details may include what the performer's daytime job is or as in Extract 6-6, line 3 a view of their previous success or familiarity with the venue. Further, these contextualising snippets of information may while still being present be slightly reframe so that they are presented as information about compere still give a background to the performer.

Such contextualisations can be recognised in that the compere will make some reference to their own relationship to the comedian such as whether they have performed together before or that they have known each other for some time. An example of this is given in Extract 6-7

Extract 6-7: Roger Monkhouse

1   I am now goin' to introduce
2   the first of the acts that I'm going up to Edinburgh with
3   >later on this week in fact<.

In these two lines Monkhouse passes on at least four pieces of information in lines 2-3 that contextualise the comedian about to enter.   He points out that:

i. he is going to the Edinburgh fringe festival

ii. the act about to come on is going to the Edinburgh fringe festival

iii. they are going to (an by implication performing at) Scotland together

iv. this performer is not the only one joining Monkhouse on his trip

Importantly, none of these pieces of information are vital to the appreciation of the act that follows. Through a standard linguistic analysis of the humour that follows none of them can be seen to effect the audience's understanding of the joking. None of them can be seen to have any importance to the comedy that follows using any the standard methods of understanding humour outlined in Chapter 2. Yet their ubiquitous nature in stand-up comedy introductions suggests that they do play an important role if not in the distribution and appreciation of joking itself then in the performance that marks stand-up as a different interactive experience from conversational joking.

It is only by recognising this difference and incorporating both the performative and interactive aspects of stand-up into an analysis that the importance of such regular, but overlooked, features of stand-up not only become apparent but have the role of their presence comprehended. Against such a background the use of contextualisation becomes a device similar to those observed by Atkinson (1984) which are "deployed by effective public speakers [and] thus appear to be designed to attract, sustain or upgrade the attentiveness of audience members" (Atkinson, 1984, p.11).

It is part of the role taken on by the compere that they not only "warm-up" an audience but arouse their interest and expectations of a comedian before their entrance. Contextualisation is one way of doing this. It plays its part within a developing exposition by the compere in which various pieces of information are given about the comedian before they are introduced and their identity revealed. Contextualisation gives "clues" to a performer's identity as well as developing a context in which to understanding the developing interaction.

6.3.2 Framing of Response

With framing of response the compere suggests an appropriate manner in which the audience should welcome the comedian's performance. This often takes the form of a request for some action but unlike Atkinson's "appreciation in the usual manner" (1984, p.17) the request is highly specific and often includes a suggestion of a response in which the audience is not only asked to perform an action (usually a greeting) but directed to do so in a particular manner. This may range from the enthusiastic requests to "go wild, go crazy" to the rather more non-committal "please welcome" or to the rather less supportive "give him the benefit of the doubt".[7]

6.3.3 Evaluation of Comedian

This move continues the building up of expectations for a comedian's entry as the compere passes a professional judgement of the performer waiting to come on. This evaluation is almost invariably favourable even in instances in which comperes introduce performers that they know to be poor or who they do not like. In rare cases where evaluations are not positive, they tend to be framed as satirical. Although the compere's judgement is assumed to be informed, and presented as such, it is not always the case. In situations where a compere has never seen the act they are introducing perform before, they will still provide a positive evaluation of their comic ability. The evaluation may be less hyperbolic than it sometimes can be but it is none the less encouraging.

For example Alex Boardman compering in Extract 6-8 and Extract 6-9 passes on a very positive view of the performers he introduces. He uses the superlative descriptions of "brilliant" and "fuckin' good" as a frame which the audience develop an expectation of the oncoming comedian

Extract 6-8: Alex Boardman

1   Welcome the ↑brilli↓an'   ] Evaluation
2   (0.6)
3   ↑Nick ↑Finne↓gan

Extract 6-9: Alex Boardman

1   An' welcome onto the stage
2   This one's fu ckin good   ] Evaluation
3   his name's Steve (Keyworth)

In Extract 6-10 Tony Burgess introduces a performer new to the Frog and Bucket for an open mike spot on an amateur night. "Chris" has sat towards the stage throughout the performance and been the responsive butt of both Burgess' and Boardman's jokes throughout the evening. His set is the last of the evening a spot traditionally held for the principal performer although Chris has never performed at the venue before nor come with any credentials as a comedian other than those gained that evening.

Extract 6-10: Tony Burgess

1   TB: N' Chris there jus' goin' "When the fuck am a gonna get
2   up?" huh ↑ha
3   Aud: hhhhhhhhh
4   TB: ↑Why am I gonna get up. Coz gonna come
5   on all Oscar Wildte an they're not gonna gedit.
6   Aud: h-h
7   TB: But I   ⌉
8   reckon you'll sto::rm it. Because he'll be grea::t. >'E's be- | Evaluation
9   'e's bin grea::t tonight an' i?< NO. coz ri- cus 'e's bin- =   ⌋
10 Aud: =x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxxxxxxxx-x-x-x=
11 Aud: ((Whistles   ))
12 TB: 'An I think (   ) Keep that round ov applause
13   goin'.
14 Aud: =x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX=
15 TB: Welcome onto the stage >keep it goin'<
16 Aud: =XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
17   ((Cheers and whistles   )).
18   The one 'n' only Chris the prison officer (Hughes)

The first three moves in the compere's opening sequence can be seen to contribute to a "building up" of the stand-up that is about to come onto to stage. Without sharing details of who is about to perform the compere creates a series of expectations in the audience. They act towards raising expectation for the comedian and provide a positive basis for the compere to make his next move in the opening sequence that of a Request for Action.

6.3.4 Request for Action

Like the Framing of Response, the Request for Action is a technique for inviting and precipitating a certain contribution from the audience. However, unlike the Framing of Response, the Request for Action has no directive connotation associated with it and is noticeably more singular in its intention. Whereas a range of responses might be sought by a Framing of Response, the action required by a Request for Action is always applause. This request may take the literal form of a solicitation of applause as in line 3 below:

Extract 6-11: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:   Please welcome (.) O::n t the stage. All the way >from over
2         there< The excellent (.) Graham Swanson.
3         roundov applause please.
4   Aud:                      x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x
```

Or it might be more routinised or cryptic as in the implicature in :

Extract 6-12: Johnny Vegas

```
1   JV:   Ladies an gentlemen, please give
2         a MASSIVE Frog and Bucket  welcome to:: ()
3         PATR↑I::::ck
4   Aud:                      x-xxXXXXXXXXxxxx-x-x-x
```

.

Occasionally, the moves of Introduction and Request for Action may be combined into the same utterance:

Extract 6-13: Johnny Vegas

```
1    JV:    Ladies 'n gentleman (4.3) .hh for your entertainment tunight.
2           Please (0.8)
3           >don't listen to the name its no indication of 'is ↑act.< The
4           one an ownly (.) Mister Robert ↑Pain
5                  |————6.7————|
6    Aud:   (0.6) x-XXXXXXXXXXxxxx-x-x
```

However this is more common in other forms of public introductions than in comedy and one that Atkinson (1984) centres on when examining applause in other forms of podium talk. Introductions which are followed by applause such as the one in Extract 6-14 are described by Atkinson as "favourable references to persons" (p.35)

Extract 6-14

(8) (Conservative Party conference, 1978)

Speaker: . . . I beg to support the motion.
               |————(8.0)————|
Audience: x-xxXXXXXXXXxxx-x
Chair: Now it's my pleasure to invite Mr Michael
               Heseltine, the member of Parliament for Henley,
               Shadow Minister for the Environment, to reply to
               the debate.
               Mist ⌈er Heseltine |————(9.0)————|
                     ⌊ x-xx-xx-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxx-x

Atkinson, 1984, p.35

However, the conceptualisation of this as favourable references is something of an over general term. Whereas this lauding may be the predominant method of introduction in other forms of podium talk, its presence is by no means overwhelming in stand-up as can be seen from Extract 6-11 - Extract 6-13. All these examples are hardly effusive in their favourable references. Monkhouse in Extract 6-11 refers to Swanson as "excellent" (line 2) but Vegas in Extract 6-12 is somewhat

noncommittal and in Extract 6-13 somewhat unenthusiastic. This is why I choose to label this move in the introductory sequence around its function rather than around its textual evaluation.

6.3.5 Introduction

For most of the compere's introduction the name of the next act is not announced and known only to the compere and the acts themselves. The introduction is the point of revelation in a compere's introductory sequence in which the identity of the performer is revealed. This invariably takes the simple form of the announcing of the comedian's forename and surname. Even though compere's style and performance persona may vary considerably, each adheres to the basic format of introducing comedians examples of which are represented in the extracts.

In Extract 6-15 Roger Monkhouse introduces a comedian who performed at The Frog and Bucket for the first time the previous night and who is the first act on that night. After doing sections of his own material, Monkhouse encapsulates the format that the proceedings are planned to take that evening.

Extract 6-15: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:  Right! (.) We do have, as I say, a (forfeit) of comedy.
2        We ha' er- three thirds to the show so >the will< be ↑ample
3        opportunity to go to the ↓bar, go to the toilet, do whatever
4        you want to enjoy yaselves >°durin the interval food
5        obviously will be available°<  but (.) in the ↑meantime I'm
6        gonna introduce our first act for to↓night.
7        Erm:: this is er ooh an American London person (whose bin)  ⌉ Context
8        giggin' away in London.  First time in Manchester.          ⌟
9        An I want you to show ↑lo::ve, appreciation an HUGE          ⌉ Framing
10       warmth (.) as I introduce you to (0.3)                      ⌟
11       the comedic talents of                                      ⌋ Evaluation
12       (.) NEIL MASTERS                                            ⌋ Introduction
13       HUge applause please (0.3) huge applause.                   ⌋ Request
14  Aud:            xxxXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x                       ⌉ Applause
15  Aud:            ((cheers))                                       ⌟
16  (RM)                      (      ) how about that!
```

This overview of the general running of the evening at the venue is specific to this first introduction sequence rather than a general trait and to a large extent it appears phatic. Pieces of the announcement such as the forecasting that comedy will be performed (line 1) would appear self obvious, the uses of "three thirds" is tautological[8] and (in line 3-4) Monkhouse appears to be reiterating a point to those already familiar with the conventional set-up at the venues when he says, "during the interval food obviously will be available."

The introduction sequence can be seen to start at line 6 when a contextual background is supplied by Monkhouse for the performer who is about to appear. It is noticeable that this background is always developed before the name of the comedian is announced. This serves both to provide a background against which the comedian can be understood when their identity becomes known and also it involves the audience by gaining their attention with a puzzle.

Extract 6-16: Roger Monkhouse

1	RM:	I am now goin' to introduce	
2		the first of the acts that I'm going up to Edinburgh with ⌐	Context
3		>later on this week in fact<. ⌐	
4	A- ⌐	She is excellent.	Evaluation 1
5	⌐	Please welcome	Framing 1
6		on the stage doing her ten minute spot,	
7	B- ⌐	please welcome,	Framing 2
8	⌐	the ↑excellent one-an-↑only (.)	Evaluation 2
9		Lucy Porter!	Introduction
10		Yeah! Lu:::c↑y Por↑ter:	Request
11	Aud:.	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx-x ⌐	Applause
12	Aud:	((Cheers))	

Extract 6-16 is significant in that it contains all six of the common features of a compere's introduction but there is a repetition of both the framing of response and the evaluation of the comedian. Monkhouse introduces Lucy Porter by providing a context to let the audience know that she will be part of the show due to run at at the Edinburgh Festival. However, contrary to expectation, Monkhouse follows this not

with a framing of audience response but rather with an early evaluation. When Monkhouse says, "She is excellent," (line 4) before suggesting that the audience "welcome" the comedian. By doing so he has reversed the customary ordering of the evaluation and framing (section A). However, section B (lines 7-8) uses the conventional patterning of framing followed by evaluation. This can be seen as an attempt by Monkhouse to repair the error of the mis-ordered sequence in section A and as such adds credence to the observation that the rules of a sequenced organisation govern the structure of an compere's introduction of a comedian.

This patterning of the compere's introduction is noticeably consistent even when comedians with unusual or eccentric styles are examined. In Extract 6-17 Johnny Vegas delivers an unusually long and apparently unstructured introduction for a new comedian on an open mike night. From St. Helen's, Vegas has rapidly built a strong following among comedy goers in the Manchester area. A heavy man with a thick local accent, Vegas plays the part of some sort of cross between a worn out pub singer and seventies Vegas star caught out of time and geography. His act is often highly improvisational but also filled with surreal similes,[9] gushing clichés,[10] mock attempts to flirt with female members of the audience and claims that, as he sings snippets from music standards and the Love Boat theme, he is "an entertainer" rather than a comedian. Vegas is known for his meandering narratives when compering but even in the following (Extract 6-17) the core features of a compere's introduction can be seen.

Extract 6-17: Johnny Vegas

1	JV:	Ladies and gentleman, our next act in this ↑'alf. (1.4)	⌉ Context1
2		I don't know him from Adam. (2.7)	⌡
3		But (0.6) he assures me >he's brilliant< (2.7)	⌡ Evaluation1
4		((A bang is heard))	
5		Mi:nd. (0.8) So we've gotta believe tha' (1.2) even though	⌐
6		there's a niggly naggly thing in >the back of ya mind<	
7	Aud:	x-x-x-x	
8	JV:	called "The Tru::th".	
9	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHHHhhh	
10	JV:	Saying "he could	
11		be shit,"	Framing 1
12	Aud:	hHHHhhhh	
13	JV:	But he might not.	

14	Aud:	h-h-h	
15	JV:	↑if you want that <u>niggly</u>	
16		<u>naggly</u> thing to go away (son) you'll ↑give ↑him ↑the	
17		↑benefit-	
18		LADIES AN GENTLEMEN, GIVE HIM A <u>ROUND</u> OF	Request1
19		APPLAU::SE	
20	Aud:	x-xxx-x-x	Applause1
21	JV:	°We'll give him the benefit of the doubt.	
22		He can come up here and kill himself in public if he wants	
23		↑to::. °	Framing2
24	Aud:	HHHHHhh	
25	JV:	And if he does (.) we're gonna fuckin' enjo::y it	
26	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHhh	
27	JV:	Allri::te. (1.1) S:'our next victim.( )	
28	Aud:	HHHHHHHhh	
29	JV:	I din write tha gag. (1.0) S'why I ma:de it obvious	
30		it was s' bhad.	
31	Aud:	h-h-h	
32	JV:	((Points to back of audience))	
33		Ya sacked. (.)	
34		LADies an' gentlemen. (.)	
35		Er:: Is- He's only got one n↑a::↓me (0.6)	Context2
36		but loadsa ga:gs. (0.9)	Evaluation2
37		Er::: >Let's not make it a night owt for the young man< let's	Framing3
38		ma:ke it a memor.hhy. (1.1)	
39		((A member of the audience that Vegas has been pretending	
40		is his long-lost son returns from the bar))	
41		>Welcome back, son.<	
42	Aud:	HHHHHHHHh	
43	JV:	((To an audience member who had been heckling earlier))	
44		Not you (.) yuv not be ↑<u>any</u> good.	
45	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHh	
46	JV:	I jus mean	
47		that in a kindov y'know (.) <u>friend</u>↓ship wa::y. (0.9) >Don't	
48		be afraid of Johnny< (0.9) You <u>do</u> appreciate it (0.6) so ↓you	
49		°should°. (1.9) You never spoke to me in schoowul.	
50	Aud:	hhhhh	
51	JV:	Now you wanna be me <u>fuckin'</u> ↑ma:<u>te</u>.	
52	Aud:	HHHHHHhhhhhh	
53	JV:	°Two-fa::ced bastard °	
54	Aud:	HHH	
55	JV:	Ladies an gentlemen, please give	Request2
56		a MASSIVE Frog and Bucket welcome to::	
57		PATR↑I::::ck	Introduction
58	Aud:	x-xxXXXXXXXxxxx-x-x-x	Applause2

The same set of six features are present in this 58 line extract as between line 7 and 15 in Extract 6-15 of the more efficient example from Roger Monkhouse. However, compared to Monkhouse, the ordering of Vegas's compering in somewhat unconventional, as is the amount of repetition of introductory sequences. Vegas provides two instances of contextualisation (lines 1-2 and line 35), evaluation (line 3 and 36), request for applause (line 20 and lines 55-56) along with three instances of a framing of audience response (lines 5-17, lines 21-25 and lines 37-38) and there are two episodes of audience applause (lines 20 and 58).

However, this unusual ordering is not without its cost. Looking again at lines 15-23 of Extract 6-17, reproduced below as Extract 6-18, it is noticeable that having provided a context and evaluation Vegas guides the introduction through the sequence Framing → Request → Applause.

Extract 6-18: Johnny Vegas

```
1    JV:                            Tif you want that niggly      ⌐ Framing
2          naggly thing to go away (son) you'll ↑give ↑him ↑the   │
3          ↑benefit-                                              ⌙
4          LADIES AN GENTLEMEN, GIVE HIM A ROUND OF    ⌐ Request 1
5          APPLAU::SE                                   ⌙
6    Aud:            x-xxx-x-x                           �Ⅰ Applause1
7    JV:             °We'll give him the benefit of the doubt.    ⌐
8          He can come up here and kill himself in public if he wants │
9          -to::. °                                                   │ Framing 2
10   Aud:        HHHHhh                                              │
11   JV:             And if he does (.) we're gonna fuckin' enjo::y it ⌙
```

The reversal of the usual pattern of framing followed by evaluation is similar to that found in Extract 6-16 but unlike Monkhouse, Vegas omits an introduction before making a request for applause (lines 4-5). This omission appears to have an effect on both the amplitude and duration of the audience's applause in line 6 which is isolated and foreshortened when compared to the applause received in line 58 of Extract 6-17. It is apparent that Vegas has not succeeded in utilising the accepted ordering of introductions and therefore not provided the audience with the signposts that they are looking for.

Without the signposting that the introduction of a comedian by the compere provides, Vegas' audience is unable to provide a satisfactory preferred response to the request for applause requests. This is recognised almost immediately by Vegas and in line 7 of Extract 6-18 he resumes the process of introduction with hardly any gap between the finishing of the line, "...round of applause" and the commencement of "We'll give him the benefit..."

Extract 6-19: Johnny Vegas

```
1   Aud:                    HHH
2   JV:                     Ladies an gentlemen, please give ⌐ Request 2
3        a MASSIVE Frog and Bucket  welcome to:: ()          ⌐
4        PATR↑I::::ck                                          ] Introduction
5   Aud:          x-xxXXXXXXXxxxx-x-x-x                        ] Applause2
```

From here it is possible to refine the outline of a compere's introduction by supplementing the following rules for the sequence type that make up a stand-up opening:

i.   ˙ The compere's introductions always contain the sequence Contextualisation, Framing of Response, Evaluation of Comedian, Request for Action, Introduction and Applause.

ii. The first move of a compere's introduction is always Contextualisation.

iii. The general order of Framing → Evaluation may be reversed

iv. The general order of Request for Applause → Introduction may be reversed

v.   Neither Request for Applause nor Introduction will be found between Framing and Evaluation

vi. Framing, Evaluation or Applause will not be found between Request and Introduction

vii. The pairing of Framing/Evaluation always precedes Request /Introduction

viii. The final move of the introduction sequence is always Applause

ix. An introduction sequence which fails to achieve appropriate applause may be re-attempted

This is represented diagramatically in Figure 6.1 in which the heavier path shows the preferred ordering of a compere's introduction but the lighter lines show alternative (but dispreferred) options for the sequencing.
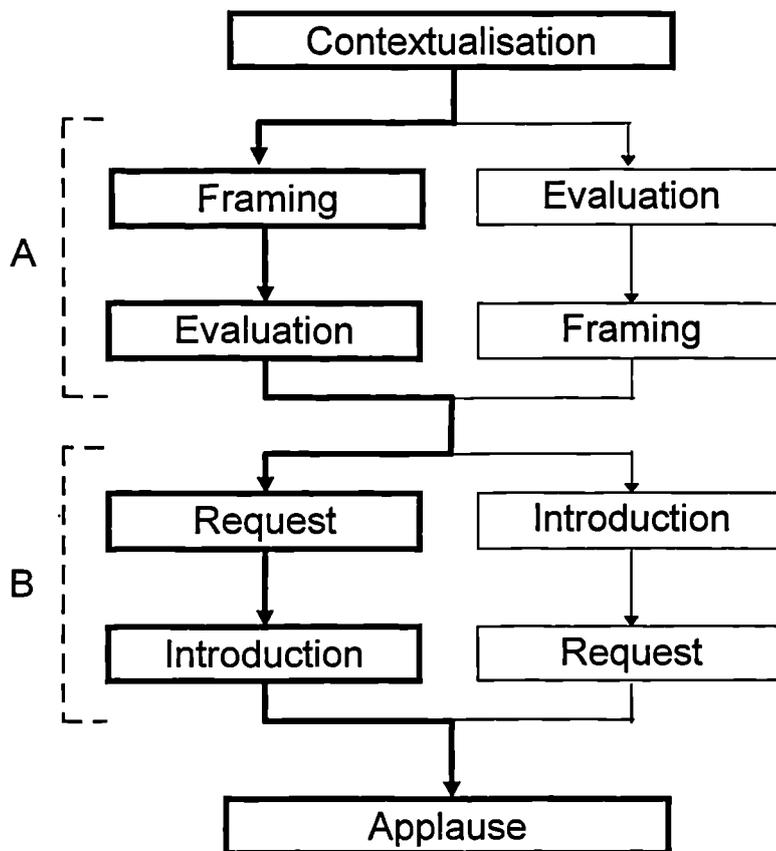
Figure 6-1: The Preference Structure of Introduction Sequences in Stand-up

A compere could start with Contextualisation and then proceed down the left hand side of the diagram before reaching the audience's applause which is usual.

However, they might also, but less commonly, sequence their introduction by following the right hand path going through a Context → Evaluation → Framing → Request → Introduction → Applause order of performance. Alternatively an introduction may change sides of the diagram for example Context → Framing → Evaluation → Request → Introduction → Applause. A compere will not mix features from level A and level B.

6.3.6 Audience Applause

The applause that follows either the introduction of a comedian or a request for audience applause from the compere is significant for a number of reasons: its invariable presence, its dual nature as both a reply to a request and as a summons to the entering performer; its rarity during comedy; and its value as one of the few periods of applause during stand-up which tally with Atkinson's (1984) mean duration for audience applause of six to eight seconds.

The audience applause which leads into and accompanies the entrance of the comedian appears without exception in the comedy performance. An audience will applaud a comedian's entrance regardless of their status, fame or perceived competence. Even newcomers to performance trying to develop an act with an open mike spot on an amateur night can expect and will receive applause. Unlike the applause at the beginning of a political speeches which is a special acknowledgement reserved only for highly regarded speakers, applause for comedians is more egalitarian in its distribution. Although the amplitude and apparent enthusiasm of the applause received by new performers may vary from that given to established and known performers, the duration of the applause does not. The comedy performer will receive a summoning round of applause regardless of their status, talent or reputation.[11] In Extract 6-20 Robert Pain an inexperienced and new performer at an amateur night receives almost seven seconds of applause.

Extract 6-20: Johnny Vegas

```
1   JV:    Ladies 'n gentleman (4.3) .hh for your entertainment tunight.
2          Please (0.8) >don't listen to the name its no indication of 'is
3          ↑act.< The one an ownly (.) Mister Robert ↑Pain
4          (0.6)
5          |————6.7————|
6   Aud:   x-XXXXXXXXXXxxxx-x-x
7   Aud:           ((Cheer))
8   RP:    (                 )
```

Despite the presence of a noticeable (and unusual) pause between the compere's introduction/request for applause (line 4) the duration as well as the structure of the applause is very similar to that received by semi-professional and regular performers at The Frog and Bucket such as Adrian Cook. Both rounds of applause last seven seconds +/- ½ second, start with quiet applause before rapidly building up, and finish with isolated quiet applause.

Extract 6-21: Adrian Cook

```
1   Aud:   xXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxxx-x-x
2          |————7.2————|
3   AC:                        Thanks erh: that wuz a nice
4          roundov applause.
```

This suggests that the applause given to comedians at the beginning of their act serves not only as an indication of an audience's attitude towards the performer, as might a true greeting, but serves other purposes within the opening interaction. Audience applause at this point in stand-up acts not only as a welcoming but as a 'bridging turn' that joins the conversation between compere and audience and the one that takes place between audience and comedian. In terms of the pragmatics of performance management, audience applause helps to cover the exit of the compere from the stage area and the entrance of the comedian onto it.[12] It smoothes the transition between performers and acts as a bridge between compere's performance and the oncoming comedian's turn.

On an interaction level this applause serves a dual function: first it acts as a turn completion to the compere's request for applause but it also acts as a summons to the performer.[13] This dual-purpose role is represented in Figure 6-2. The applause from the audience is the preferred response to the request for applause from the compere and as such it fulfils Pair A. However this same applause also acts as the first part of a (mock) summons/answer pair[14] in which the audience's applause acts as a call for the comedian to enter.
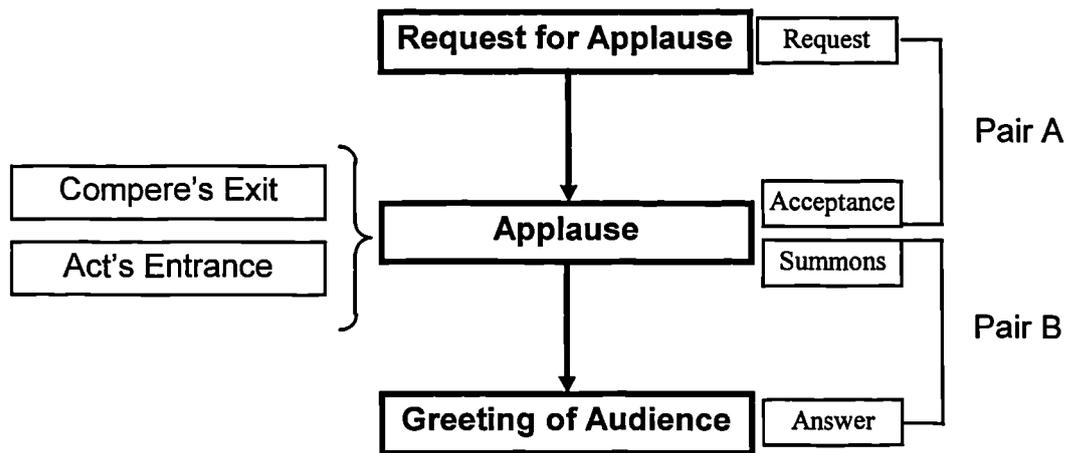
Figure 6-2: Dual Function of Applause

The applause which completes pair A in the diagram above can be seen as similar to the applause that is given to other kinds of a person introduced onto a stage.[15] This he describes as a *claptrap* (p.49) a rhetorical device which is recognised by an audience as a cue for applause. An example of such a claptrap is given in the extract below in which the revelation by the announcer of the name of a prize winner immediately prompts a round of applause.

Extract 6-22

(26) (British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards ceremony, 1980)
Announcer: ...SHIRLEY RUSSE ⌐LL FO ⌐R YANKS
Audience: └HOOR ╞AAAAAAAAAY
Audience: x- └xxXXXXXXXXX...

Atkinson, p.27

In this example there is no direct request for applause unlike Extract 6-23 in which Vegas specifically requests applause from the audience the delivery of the announcement and Shirley Russell's name in Extract 6-22 acts as an indirect request.

Extract 6-23: Johnny Vegas

1	JV:		'Tif you want that <u>niggly</u>
2		<u>naggly</u> thing to go away (son) you'll ↑give ↑him ↑the	
3		↑benefit-	
4		LADIES AN GENTLEMEN, GIVE HIM A <u>ROUND</u> OF	
5		APPLAU::SE	
6	Aud:	x-xxx-x-x	

The range of roles that this single section of applause plays is even more interesting when the rarity of applause during comedy is considered. Whereas a third of a successful performer's stage time may be taken up with audience laughter, applause is a lot rarer and is most often associated with extended sections of laughter. Sections of applause unaccompanied by laughter in comedy are practically non-existent[16] outside the opening and closing of acts and so can be assumed to be of special importance.

6.4 THE STAND-UP OPENING

Having delivered the introductory sequence for the oncoming comedian the compere leaves the stage as the comedian enters onto it to begin the next section of the stand-up flow. Just as the compere's introduction has a recognisable order to it so does the opening of the stand-up's act. This order is based around the moves introduced

above of greeting of audience, comment on the setting, request for action, response to request by audience and the first canned joke. In the sections that follow I will address each of these moves in turn providing illustration of each and exploring their place within the developing sequence. This in turn will lead to developing a cohesive overview of how the interactional ordering of stand-up openings are organised.

6.4.1 Greeting of Audience

The presence of audience greeting, like audience applause, is a remarkably stable feature of opening sequences. Almost invariably the first thing a performer does is greet the audience. Although this greeting may take a variety of forms, it is an introduction. Usually the performer's entrance has been preceded by a short sequence from a compere who will have introduced the comedian and instigated a round of applause. If the performer was to re-announce their name again here it would appear redundant. Instead a more informal, at times quasi-conversational approach is used in which the performer gives the impression that they are opening up a dialogue with the audience.

Comedians not only issue a greeting but expect an appropriate response in return. In Extract 6-24 Whoopi Goldberg plays with this greeting/response turn sequence at the beginning of her HBO special recorded at the Comedy Act Theatre in Los Angeles.[17] After the applause and cheers which welcomed her onto the stage have eventually begun to die down Goldberg, as is usual, greets the audience and the audience respond (section A).

Extract 6-24: Whoopi Goldberg

```
1   WG:   Hi.                 ] A
2   Aud:      HI:::
3   WG:         Hi
4   Aud:           Hi          ] B
5   Aud:              Yeah!
```

Although the response the Goldberg receives for her greeting is enthusiastic she plays with the audience by repeating her, "Hi". The association between the performer's greeting and the audience's reply is so strong that the second, "Hi" from Goldberg is not only responded to by the audience but, with the addition of vocalisations, responded to more enthusiastically than the first (section B). This is noteworthy not only because of the repetition of greeting but also because turn B cannot seen as a true greeting sequence in Schegloff's sense. The parties to the interaction have already gone through a reception routine, they have made contact and established a commonality and so the second turn must be either redundant or accomplish some further social act.

What happens with this repetition of greeting by Goldberg illustrates the importance of "constructing liveness" in stand-up comedy openings. What Goldberg is doing is repeating the greeting not because of any deficiency with the first but instead as a demonstration that she is aware of and responsive to the audience. This highlights the unique, here-and-now nature of the live stand-up interaction. This idea of the performer as responsive, interactive and alive to the situation, of "playing the audience" is one not previously explored in humour researcch and often ignored in work on other forms of podium talk. Both Atkinson (1984) and Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) place the onus of liveness onto the responsive audience. This not only highlights the local and intimate nature of stand-up but the centrality of response and interaction when contrasted with political speaking.

Although Schiffrin (1977) suggests that parties to a conversation should demonstrate that they are "'alive' to a situation" (p.679) and Atkinson (1984) argues that applause can be seen as "a barometer of attention and approval" (p.13), the level of audible activity required and its relation to the perceived success of the interaction is specific to comedy. Stand-up is judged by the audible response of the audience, it is a form which encourages and requires vocal input from the audience and as such, even at this very early stage in the act, it can be seen that the response to the greeting is very important to the comedian. It not only demonstrates that the comedian is being

understood but that the audience recognise and are willing to accept their role within the dialogue.

If this dialogue is not properly established no reply to the greeting is received the comedian will often try the greeting again in an attempt to repair the break in the system. In Extract 6-25 Tony Burgess' "G'evenin!" greeting fails to get the expected response, he pauses to wait for a reply, but as the silence gets longer it becomes apparent that the audience has not picked up the cue which nominates their turn. Burgess repairs this by repeating his salutation and a response is returned even as he is completing his phrase.

Extract 6-25: Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:    G'evenin!  (0.9)  G  ⌈ood evening.
2   Aud 1:                      ⌊Evenin
3   Aud:                      ((General response))
```

Again this demonstrates the importance for the comedian to establish both that they and the audience are prepared to take their responsibilities in maintaining and developing the comedy talk and are willing to display those responsibilities in an audible manner. Thus through the initial moments of the stand-up routine, the comedian will work to establish a basis of mutual communication which can then be maintained and built upon throughout the act.

6.4.2 Comment on the Setting

In addition to the greeting and reply sequence, an attempt to establish a common frame of reference between performer and audience and consolidation of liveness is often noticeable. This section of the opening sequence has the least appearance of being prescripted and is always local/topical to the environment of the venue that evening. Comedians will comment on the venue or location. These comments can be broadly understood in terms of a reference to the current environment (i.e. the time and space of the live performance) but it can be manifested in a number of different ways:

    i.   Comment on the audience

    ii.   Reference to the geography of the venue

    iii.   Self-reflexive remarks on the act

    iv.   Meta-comments based on the above.

These features perform a number of tasks in that they further establish the performance frame as separate and different from a joking frame

Vitally these comments on environment assist in the construction of the stand-up comedy event as live. Comedian will often travel up and down the country playing more or less the same set in many different venues. The jokes they tell, the running order of their set and even where they can expect laughter can vary very little from venue to venue, week to week. However, comments on the setting by their very nature are performance specific and comments on the city, audience, staff at the bar etc. are marked as non-transferable.

These comments on the setting may or may not be improvised - comments on a city are more likely to be scripted whereas comments on a member of the audience are more likely to be improvisational. However, the issue is that they have the appearance of being fresh and new and demonstrate a familiarity with the home environment of the venue's patrons. They have the effect of reinforcing the

foundation of commonality between the performer and the audience, a commonality which exists as a specific and unique live experience.[18]

6.4.2.1 Comment on the Audience

This form of comment on setting is the most regularly improvisational as it relies upon the comedian focusing upon a member of the audience and passing comment on them. A representative illustration can be found delivered by Roger Monkhouse in Extract 6-26.

Extract 6-26: Roger Monkhouse (Simplified)

```
1   RM:      It's nice
2   Heckler: Huuuh!
3   RM:      Manchester, How are you?
4            ((A member of the audience gets up and walks away from the stage))
5            He's- he's off already. What's happened? Gone to the loo? >Straight
6            away 'e's gone.<
7   Aud:              hhhhh
8   RM:                  Too much for him (    ).
9   Aud:                                   hhhh-h.
```

After Monkhouse's geographically specific question of "Manchester, How are you?" a member of the audience gets up and walks away towards the bar or toilet. This unplanned and contextual specific event draws Monkhouse's comment as he shifts topic to centre it briefly on the departing individual.

Such a technique might appear serendipitous and is often described as such by performers. However, in actuality such interaction at the expense of members of the audience appears to rely on the chance happening of the performer on an interesting member or section of the audience. The technique is sufficiently frequent as to suggest that the skill in the performer is not in spotting a particularly outstanding character but spotting an activity carried out by an audience member and making them appear outstanding.

For example, whilst compering and open mike night Tony Burgess and Alex Boardman focus on a couple of men in rugby shirts and discover that one of them is from Holland. This leads into a long improvised sequence building on ideas of European-ness and Burgess' lack of geographical understanding. Halfway through the sequence Burgess proclaims "We've just got a fuckin' comedy god just shine on us" (Extract 6-27, line 73) alluding not only to the comedy potential of the Dutch rugby player but suggesting that somehow there is an inbuilt comedy reservoir in the situation that is there not only to be tapped but could be liberated by any performer.

Extract 6-27: Tony Burgess and Alex Boardman (Simplified)

1	TB:	I've never seen so many respectable looking rugby player
2		together. (That's cool.) Glasses on an' everything. That's
3		nice. That's nice.
4	AB:	Quite polite aren't ya?
5	:	
6	AB:	Are yous two out of the Bramhall[19] rugby team are you
7		or somethin'? ( ) couple of Cinzanos
8	TB:	Are you Ancoats rugby?
9	AB:	No, they don't have rugby in Ancoats, do they.
10	TB:	No, they just have fightin'.
11		Which rugby team ya from?
12		[One of the men points to the front of the other's shirt]
13		Wha- what. You play rugby inside his stomach
14	Aud:	[Laughter]
15		Up the colon - whaaay! So no where do you play.
16	Aud 1:	Rotterdam
17	AB:	Rotter- Rotterdam?.
18	TB:	We've got an Amsterdam person here.
19	AB:	Well Rotterdam most likely.
20	Aud:	[Laughter]
21	TB:	Oh. Me geography's not so good?
22		Did you say, "Rotterdam"? That's Germany isn't it Alex?
23		I'm- I'm thick as fuck sometimes.
24		[Burgess lets off a party popper]
25		Whaaay. We've got the European contingent. Its "Going
26		For Gold".
27	Aud:	[Laughter]
28	AB:	Shall I tell Tony where Rotterdam is then?
29	TB:	No let me do this, "What am I?"
30	Aud:	[Laughter]
31	TB:	No where abouts- Can ya- can ya speak English or have you
32		just bin staring at us. ( ) "What are those Manc
33		bastards talking about there?"

```
34  AB:  You must think we're really friendly.  We've got everyone
35       to look at ya (          )
36  :
37  TB:  We've just got a fuckin' comedy god just shine on us, Alex.
38       For the whole hour of the set.  "Take me to your comedy
39       heaven".
```

However, what has actually happened is that whilst looking for a butt of his jokes at the beginning of an act Burgess has centred on a number of people with varying comedy success. Having not found much to accentuate in a young couple sat near the stage he offers in a one of his more revelatory moments:

Extract 6-28: Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:  Thi:s a couple the:re thinkin', "Why 'ave they picked on us?"
2        Wha'? What? Wha' is it?  What's up with us?"
3        It's jus' tha' I sa:w ya thought >fucking 'ard blo::ke< down
4        there.  Think I'll leave him alone.
```

Extract 6-26 above demonstrates the filtering that comedians go through when choosing to comment on member of the audience. They must not only spot a happening or person in the audience but also assess the humorous potential and its appropriateness in the developing order. In Extract 6-26 the potential is there for Monkhouse to comment on the inarticulate heckler of line 2 however, he chooses to ignore it and goes on to make a local reference to the location of the venue (line 3) before then going on to make a comment on the audience as someone gets up out of their seat. The skill employed by the successful stand-up is not spotting the essentially unusual in an audience[20] but in taking a mundane event or circumstance and making it appear as though it is something highly unusual or comic.

Clothing of members of the audience is a common focus for performers and it is this which gains Frank Skinner's attention when he points out two shirt-and-tied men in the front row (Extract 6-29). It is noticeable in this extract and in Extract 6-30 below that the performers do not focus on an extreme member of the audience but rather

takes representatives of the everyday and by foregrounding then makes them appear humorous.

Extract 6-29: Frank Skinner

```
1  FS:   Two blokes wi- with shirtzan ties in the front row. (.)
2  Aud:            hhhh-h
3  FS:             Birmingham Social Security?
4  Aud:                               H-HHHH-hhh-h
5  FS:                                           No? Ye:s:?
6        No. Great.
```

This, for Skinner, could have been an inroad for a lengthy routine of abuse but it is kept to a minimum and in which the members of the audience are offered (but decline) the last word. Similarly Julian Clarey takes the unremarkable presence of a member of the audience wearing jeans and a denim jacket as the focus for his topical comments.

Extract 6-30: Julian Clarey (aka Joan Collins Fan Club)

```
1   JC:   Am strangely drawn to this punter .hhere.
2   Aud:                              hHHHHHHHHHhh
3   Aud:                                   XXXXXXx-x
4   Aud:                                   ((Cheers)).
5   JC:   Even if this early stage of the ↑ga↓me
6   Aud:                         h-h-h
7   JC:   >Is this your jacket here?<
8   Aud:               (    )
9   JC:                      'S your denim ↑ja↓cket.
10  Aud:  hHHHHHHHHhhh
11  JC:            In fact you're a ↑symphony in denim this ev'ning.
12  Aud:  hhhhh-h-h
```

What Clarey, like Skinner, Burgess and Monkhouse, is doing is marking the opening of his act as specific and unique to that particular performance and time. This use of comments on the audience in order to do this are not there primarily as testaments to the comedians' observation, wit or improvisational skills (the humour value in each of these extracts his hardly novel) but highlights the liveness of the stand-up event. The comments on rugby, demin, shirts and toilet going are entirely context reliant.

They only work both as humour and relevant topics because the are concerned with events happening there and then and are part of a live experience shared only by those present.

6.4.2.2 Reference To The Local Geography Of The Venue

Like a comment on the audience, references to the geography of the venue are a way of establishing the uniqueness of a particular performance. By making comment on specific features of the performance surroundings the performer reinforces the liveness of the stand-up act. By being not only topical but specific, the comedian's comments are marked not only as unique to the current performance but concerning the interaction with the current audience. Morecambe and Wise in Extract 6-31 provide an example of this as they comment on the size and shape of the venue.

Extract 6-31: Morecambe & Wise

```
1   EM:   Or::: ( ) Marv- >av we got time for any more?<
2   EW:   Yeah, I think so.
3   Aud:          hhhhhhhhh
4   EM:                        O:: luvly.
5   EW                                ( )
6   EM:   Luvly. Whatta place, he?
7   EW:                 Ha? (0.8) I've never worked in an aircraft hangar before
8   EM:          N:o::
9   Aud:             hhHHHHHHHhhh-ha
```

This comment on Croydon's Fairfields Halls even when viewing the video tape of this show years later places the performance within a specific time and place in which the show was live. Similarly Jo Caulfield (Extract 6-32) highlights her performance as live and responsive to the local environment when she chooses to comment on the manner in which the periphery of the venue is filled with people rather than the empty seats in front of the stage.[21]

Extract 6-32: Jo Caulfield

1	JC:	Tha::n kyou: ver:y much. >Well there's ↑loads<
2	Aud:	↑Yeah
3	JC:	You all packed in tha
4		cor↓na. (0.6) Thatswierd. Why you all packed in there?
5	Aud:	h-h-h
6	JC:	Stra::::n:g peopuw. An hello, hello to you all in corners azwell.
7		(Kinda) corner place. ↑Love↓ly.

Lucy Porter in Extract 6-33 makes a specific comment on the geography of the venue but she takes a slightly more circuitous route in doing it. Rather than commenting on the venue directly or picking out a member of the audience she places herself as a home town performer, allies herself with the audience and implicitly recognises the location of the venue as Mancunian.

Extract 6-33: Lucy Porter

1	LP:	Hell↑o::, erm my name IS Lucy and I do:, I live in Manchester
2		actually >like most of you here tonight< an- gettin a bi' fed up
3		at the moment with the bad press that Manchester's getting
4		>y'know< jus coz erh: nuns get mugged in broad ↑day↓light.
5		Apparently.

Just as the other comedians set up situation which highlighted both a liveness and the existence of a shared experience so too does Porter. Although the reference to geography is less specific that the others it performs the same function within the comedy opening. What each of these comments does is to make a comment about idiosyncrasies of the settings without passing criticism on the venue. The apparently neutral position of the comedian as impartial observer appears central to this establishing of the common frame.[22] At this opening stage of the stand-up interaction the performer and audience are effectively strangers and so it is not surprising that the one common experience they share (i.e. the here and now) becomes central to the base of the interaction.[23] Comments on the venue are usually wrapped up as observable facts rather than opinions and even the comments of aggressive comedians about members of the audience tend towards jovial observation rather than caustic attack.

The environmental comments listed above cannot be seen as mutually exclusive, as on occasions comedians will employ more than one approach. In Extract 6-34 Frank Skinner makes an evaluative comment on the opening of his act (lines 1-3) and then follows it with an observation about members of the audience.

Extract 6-34: Frank Skinner

```
1    FS:    What a fuckin openin that was, eh?
2    Aud:                            hahahaha-h
3    FS:    Its the most exciting (.) I can't ↑breathe.
4    Aud:                            h-h-ha-ha
5    Aud 1:                                   (    )
6    FS:    Show↓biz.
7    Aud:    hhhhHHhhh
8                    -x-
9    FS:    Two blokes wi- with shirtzan ties in the front row. (.)
10   Aud:            hhhh-h
11   FS:                Birmingham Social Security?
12   Aud:                                H-HHHH-hhh-h
13   FS:                                            No? Ye:s:?
14           No. Great.
```

Although this use of multiple techniques if not planned is controlled by Skinner there are times when performers attempt to employ one method but somehow it becomes impossible or impractical to follow it through and so change tack to another manner of environmental comment. This most often happens because of an unplanned interjection by a member of he audience. Although in theory this could be a late entrant or an accident at the venue's bar, in practice it tends to be the more destructive influence of a heckler.

Extract 6-35: Tony Burgess

```
1    TB:    G'evenin! (0.9) G      ⌐ood evening.
2    Aud 1:                  └Evenin
3    Aud:                ((General response))
4    TB:                            Oaaarhh  (Gotta as:k)
5    Aud:                                (        )
6    TB:    I-ya ma:te.  Ya jus showted me na:me.
7    Aud:                            h-h
```

```
8   Aud 2:                                        'E's called Tony.
9   TB:     Oh:: r.hhigh.  Is tha- Tha waz a grayt star wern it? Ye.ha.hh
10  Aud:                                                         hhhhh
11  TB:     Come on stage while I tell a few gags an' er::  .h.h ↑"Tony". 'e's
12          callt Tony? (0.8) ↓°Ri:::ght°
13  Aud:                                hHHHHh
14  TB:                                         Bittov a comedy cul de sac
15          down there mate
16  Aud:                    HHHhh-h
17  TB:                            So. Erm er- no- tha's cuz a:: h.  Has
18          anyone ever seen me before?  By roun' ov applaus::e=
19  Aud:    =(( Cheers ))
20  Aud:           XXXXxx-x-x-x
21  TB:                        O:::h. Je::sus Chri::s. So I'll jus plough through
22          this shit an er:::  .h .h ha an' then we'll all get pissed.  A'right.
```

6.4.2.3 Self-Reflexive Remarks On The Act

This method of constructing the sense of liveness in an act's opening involves the comedian taking a metaphorical step back from their own performance so they can pass comment upon it. It involves a disruption in the flow of the act as the comedian changes from a performance frame to a critical frame and it allows the performer to make an observation on part of their opening which has already taken place.

In Extract 6-36 Chris Addison uses a poorly ordered opening as the basis for his self-reflexive remark. He does not greet the audience or make a local remark but launches straight into making demands on the audience (lines 1-6). This unconventional opening does not receive the response that, presumably, Addison had hoped for: there are silences in lines 2 and 5 and the laughter in line 6, 9 and 12 is short lived and predominantly isolated.

Extract 6-36: Chris Addison

```
 1  CA:   Yeah, Evrybody say yEAHHH
 2            (0.7)
 3  Aud:    Yeah
 4  CA:   Evrybody say WE DOWNT WAN NO
 5            (1.6)
 6  Aud:    xXXXXxxxx
 7  CA:              You were shit on demos wern ya? (        )
 8          Gotta geyt pOlitica:::l ma::n.
 9  Aud:                   h-h-h
10  CA:   Gotta get owt an demonstr↓a::te don't know what
11          about (.) Price a lettuc::e,
12  Aud:                 h-h
13  CA:                        shit. Right, good, excellent.
14          So new beginning to the act. >Completely improvised<
15          Well done.
16  Aud:          HHHHHHHHHHHhHHHhh
```

Recognising this unsuccessful opening, Addison makes a self-reflexive remark on his act (line 14-15). He lets the audience know it was improvised and that he recognises its failure. This use of a self-reflexive remark can been seen as a repairing of the act that has proceeded. However, through this, like the techniques above, he manages to establish a that there is a experience shared between himself and the audience. His success in demonstrating that the event is unique to that performance and privy only to those assembled allows him to continue with his act.

6.4.2.4 Meta-Comments

Meta-comments may be viewed as somewhat similar to self-reflexive remarks in that they involve a changing of frame by the comedian such that they can comment upon their own performance. However, meta-comments can be distinguished from self-reflexive comments in that they highlight a *falseness* in the progress of the stand-up performance. That is they do not comment on the act or the performance but rather comment on a **potential** or **stereotypical** act or performance. They are a step further removed from the ongoing performance than self-reflexive comments. For example previous to his opening lines in Extract 6-37 Franks Skinner has made an unusually theatrical entrance for a stand-up performer. While the theme music from Rocky

was playing he has entered from the back of the auditorium wearing the silk gown and gloves of a boxer. Surrounded by a group of bouncers in dinner suits Skinner has shadow boxed his way down through the audience and onto the stage while being traced by a set of follow spots. He arrives on stage, removes his boxer's garb and smiles at the audience before delivering the following meta-comment opening:

Extract 6-37: Frank Skinner

```
1   FS:        What a fuckin openin that was, eh?
2   Aud:                                    hahahaha-h
3   FS:        Its the most exciting (.) I can't ↑breathe.
4   Aud:                                    h-h-ha-ha
5   Aud 1:                                        (    )
6   FS:        Show↓biz.
7   Aud:           hhhhHHhhh
8                  -x-
```

Skinner's opening comment of his act (Extract 6-37) is on his pre-opening and as such involves a shift of frame from performance to comment on performance. What happens in Extract 6-38 is the creation of a mock-performance which in turn is commented on. In effect a meta-comment in a reflexive comment on a reflexive comment.

Extract 6-38: Steve Punt & Hugh Dennis

```
1    HD:    Can: I just ↓say:::
2    SP:              Whoo!
3    Aud:                     whoo
4    HD:    Can I jus say what a please it is for both S:teve ↑AND FOR ME::
5    Aud:   (  ) hhhhhh
6    HD:         to be here with YOOOOO ALL
7    Aud:                               hhhhhhh
8    HD:                                   >in Bristul< °Yeah°
9    SP:    Please don't. (.) Please don't say that cos, I me- its just so (.)
10          obvious that tha is just showbiz bullshit, I mean °y'konw°
11   Aud:                                  hHHHHHHHHhhh
12   SP:                                          It is just so:
13          obvious tha we just say that wherever we ar:, I mean it °bjjahh:: °
14   HD:    S'but this time we're actually in Bristul.
15   Aud:                             hhHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhh
```

The welcoming comments made by Dennis are highlighted in their delivery as ironic, unnatural, or insincere through the elongation of selected sounds (lines 1 & 6), unusual intonation (line 4) and amplitude (lines 4 & 6 or noticeably over emphasised whereas "Bristol" in line 8 in under stressed.) As such they are signposted themselves as having metatextual implications. Dennis leaves the audience in no doubt that his gushing greeting is not intended as an actual greeting but as a comment on stereotyped show business *which does not take place within the opening itself.* Unlike Skinner who comments upon an event which has just taken place, Dennis' opening is both the act itself (it is really a show business opening) and a comment upon the act it mimics (it satirises the insincerity of some performers' relationships to the audience.) As such it highlights both the routine organisation of openings and marks certain aspects of those routines as absent.

Similarly in Extract 6-39 Graham Swanson's mock declination of applause (line 6) is both a comment on clichéd declinations of applause and a comment on the absence of an over enthusiastic applause. Again there are clues presented in the delivery which mark Swanson's ironic line. Notable here is the once second pause (line 5) between the conclusion of applause and the beginning of the speech which claims to interrupt that applause.

Extract 6-39: Graham Swanson

```
1    RM:  Please welcome (.) O::n t the stage.
2         All the way >from over there< The excellent (.) Graham Swanson. Y-
3         roundov applause please.
4    Aud:                    x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x
5         (1.0)
6    GS:  >No no please en↓uff you're embarrassin' me< Aler:mm: (0.4) So, erh,
7         good evenin' >all the punters< (an) people, kids, hi:.
8    Aud:                                              ha-ha-hh
9    GS:  U.hr:m:: (0.3) How many peepul (.) were (0.4) alive (0.7) durin
10        ↑East↓er:?
```

As was shown in Chapter 5, laughter is a local response and acts as marker for understanding (Sacks, 1974; Glenn, 1989) and hearers are therefore concerned to

make it apparent to what their laughter is a response to. This has the effect of minimising the gap between punchline and laughter and therefore it is standard practice that the end of collective audience responses (in the case of comedy usually laughter) are overlapped by comedian's recommencement of talk. As such silences between audience and performer's turns are minimised. The significant pause created by Swanson[24] successfully highlights the incompatibility (incongruity) between his canned request for applause to die down and the evidence that the applause has already subsided.

Contemporary stand-up is at times highly self-reflexive and transtextual[25] which makes possible openings such as that in . Such openings play with a shift in frames: it presents an established technique (in this case a comment on the setting - lines 4-8) and then highlights its *un-naturalness*, its unspontaneity, its function as a tool of the stand-up performer (9-14).

6.4.3 Request for Audience Action

As suggested in Chapter 5 audience members are highly reluctant to take the risks associated with acting individually. However, it is essential for the successful running of comedy that individuals do act as an audience. This is why performers attempts to unify the audience and establish a common frame of reference and then in addition to this encourage them to act as a whole. The request for audience action is a method of encouraging the change from individual agent to audience member and developing a group identity.

The consolidation of this transition is generally accomplished in just one turn during the opening sequence: first the comedian asks for an action and then the audience provides that action. For example, Adrian Cook asks the audience to cheer where as Chris Addison implicitly asks members of the audience to say, "yeah".

Extract 6-40: Adrian Cook

```
1   AC:   Let's, let's warm are selves - have a big cheer on the count of
2         three. Ready one-two-three.
```

Extract 6-41: Chris Addison

```
1   CA:   Yeah, Evrybody say yEAHHH
2         (0.7)
3   Aud:  Yeah
4   CA:   Evrybody say WE DOWNT WAN NO
5         (1.6)
6   Aud:  xXXXXxxxx
7   CA:            You were shit on demos wern ya?
```

Both these are traditionally considered fair warm-up techniques. However it is difficult to establish that these short bursts of response actually do warm-up the audience in any significant manner and Tony Burgess' opening in which the greeting and request for audience action are elided is in no way warm-up material in any usual manner.

Extract 6-42: Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:   G'evenin!  (0.9)  G  ┌ood evening.
2   Aud 1:                     └Evenin
3   Aud:                       ((General response))
```

What the request for action does do is encourage the audience to respond collectively and in a manner which can be recognised and utilised by the performer. In Extract 6-43 Hovis Presley uses the ability of audience to respond collectively in an unusual and humorous manner. A performer who enjoys playing with established form Presley waits for the audience's applause to finish, pauses for a considerable time and then make his request for action.

Extract 6-43: Hovis Presley

```
1   Aud:   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxx-x-x-x
2   Aud:   ((      Cheers      ))
3   Aud:         ((Whistles))
4          (5.8)
5   HP:    That reception wuz a bi too w↓A::rm >fur me<.
6   Aud:                                        HHHhhh
7   HP:    Jus go over heya when I come back I'd likya to be a lo mo:re indiff'rent
8   Aud: hHHHHHhh
9   HP:            'o::v↑is Pres:l↓ey
10  Aud:                      ((Grumblings))
11  HP:                                    ↑Thanks (.) I feel more a 'ome
12         now.
```

Although he appears to invert normal stand-up convention and organisation not only by leaving such a large period of silence but by requesting not affiliative responses but something far more non-committal Presley actually demonstrates a sensitive awareness for the organisation of openings. His reflexive opening manages to issue a very successful and innovative request for audience action and so encourage group identity in a manner which also highlights his comedy persona very early on in his performance.

However, the request for audience action is notable in that its effectiveness can only be evaluated in conjunction with the next move in the opening sequence, that of response to request by audience. That is the request for action by its very nature as a solicitation has a very strong preferred response. A call for applause that does not receive that response from the audience will be noticed as a severe breakdown in the opening sequence.[26] This being the case, it is the response to request and it role within stand-up openings that I will explore next.

6.4.4 Response to Request by Audience

The strong relationship between request for action and the audience's response is important because it once again highlights the manner in which the stand-up interaction whilst not being pre-scripted or pre-ordered does have an underlying structure. Further it shows that this structure is recognised by all parties in the

interaction and are seen as common organising moves in the stand-up environment. In the openings of stand-up this request-response turn can take employ varying forms of request which, in theory at least, can be for practically any action.[27] However, this variety does not cause difficulties for the stand-up audience who respond interactively with whatever request is made. In fact, this variety reinforces the liveness that is an important construct of stand-up openings: not only is the request addressed specifically to a performances audience but the response is one unique to that interactional sequence.

Looking at Extract 6-44 we can see how Cook's opening uses a fairly standard request for applause (lines 1-2) but then, like Hovis Presley in Extract 6-43 above, having utilised the form and demonstrated that it is excepted toys with the move sequence to humorous effect (lines 5-8).

Extract 6-44: Adrian Cook (Simplified)

1	AC:	Let's, let's warm are selves - have a big cheer on the count of
2		three. Ready one-two-three.
3	Aud:	((Cheers))
4	AC:	Oh, brilliant. And a bit of research I'm doing, lets er, big shout
5		on the count of three this time. Think about this very carefully,
6		big cheer on the count of three, for all the people here - who
7		are good in bed.
8	Aud:	((Cheers)) ((Laughter))
9	AC:	Big, little cheer from some one who's so good in bed they
10		didn't wait for me to clap count.
11	Aud:	((Laughter))
12	AC:	"I'm a sexual athlete, I'll cheer straight away!" OK. One-two-
13		three.
14	Aud:	((Cheers))
15	AC:	Ah, that's better isn't it?

The request that Cook issues is not only for a round of applause but he adds the condition that it be immediately following the count of three. In line 3 the audience correctly respond to this with their cheers thus satisfactorily completing the request/response turn. The response by an audience to both Cook's and other performer's request for action not only demonstrates the live interactional

relationship between the comedian and audience but the completion of the turn demonstrates an the operation of a number of practical considerations. What is happening is that the request for audience action and its following response establishes that the audience:

- can hear the performer
- will respond audibly
- will act as a group
- accept the performer as conversational leader

Each of which are basic prerequisites to the successful running of the comedy performance. Together they show that successful interaction can take place. They verify that the people in the audience are aware and responsive to the commencing performance, that individuals are prepared to be addressed and perform as an audience and that rather than developing their own topics and ordering they are willing to accept that provided primarily by the comedian.

Although the culmination of establishing of these criteria is within the request/response turn they are implicit within other sections of standard stand-up comedy openings. However, having laid the interactional foundations for the performance it is possible for the comedian to move out of the opening and into the scripted section of their act. This transition from opening to "performance proper" is marked by the introduction of the first canned joke. It is this move that I will explore next before drawing the above together into a systematic overview of comedy openings.

6.4.5 First Canned Joke

The first canned joke signal both the end of the introduction sequence and the beginning of the main section of the performer's act. Essentially it is the first joke that is both pre-scripted and not used in the construction of liveness as part of the

opening. This joke is the beginning of the main middle section of the act the delivery of which varies little from performance to performance once the comedian has developed their routine. It is similar to a first topic in a conversation in that, given the right context, its topic can be anything from the weather to politics.

It would be easy at this stage to except the placing of the first canned joke after the introduction sequence as an apparent truism and a "natural" ordering for stand-up. However, as I suggested at the beginning of the chapter and have demonstrated throughout it the introductory sequence is vital to the acceptance of the commencement of the first and subsequent jokes. The placement of the first canned joke at the end of the introduction demonstrates that the comedian has been successful in establishing a successful and topical ongoing interaction with the audience[28] and that both performer and audience are ready to carry on and develop the stand-up interaction.

Without this groundwork neither performer nor audience would have the shared knowledge and understanding of what was taking place to judge how jokes should be told or responded to. Neither party would have developed a reasonable perspective through which to the actions and interactions of the other. In addition to this the first canned joke carries additional importance when approaching the understanding of stand-up comedy namely that is also marks the commencement of traditional academic interest in stand-up comedy.

As has been stated above tradition humour research has tended to focus primarily on the joke text as a way of understanding humour, laughter and stand-up. However, as can be seen from the above performances without several instances of audience laughter before the firth canned joke is delivered are conspicuously rare. As such it becomes impossible, as joke theory does, to see the first joke (or any of the act's subsequent ones) as isolated from the whole ongoing interactional process which differentiate the telling of jokes from the performance which is stand-up.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

Having established the features that are available in the interactive process of creating an opening to a stand-up comedy routine, it is now possible to develop a mapping of this process. Across performers, venues and audiences openings are, as standard, made up in accordance to the following set of features:

1. Openings are proceeded by a compere's introduction
2. Audience's applause bridges the compere's introduction and the entry of the comedian
3. Comedians start their act by greeting the audience
4. Liveness will be constructed through local reference
5. First joke will be delivered

When represented as a diagram as in Figure 6-3 below the flow between these moves becomes more apparent and the fluidity of the construction of liveness with the middle of the opening is visible.

When taken as a whole process the opening of stand-up comedy performances appear less rigidly organised than the compere's introduction was when analysed in isolation. Whereas the compere's introduction has a preferred ordering this appears less the case in openings as a complete sequence. Whereas during compere's introductions framing/evaluation always proceed the request/introduction pair the same cannot be said for the central section of comedians openings. Comment on setting may proceed or succeed the request for action (and the audience's response) but the opposite is also common. Also it is possible for either to be absent from the sequence.[29] Further, there is no evidence to suggest that either of these orderings is preferred or dispreferred.

```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Compere's Introduction  │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Audience Applause     │
└─────────────────────────┘
             │
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Greeting of Audience   │
└─────────────────────────┘
```
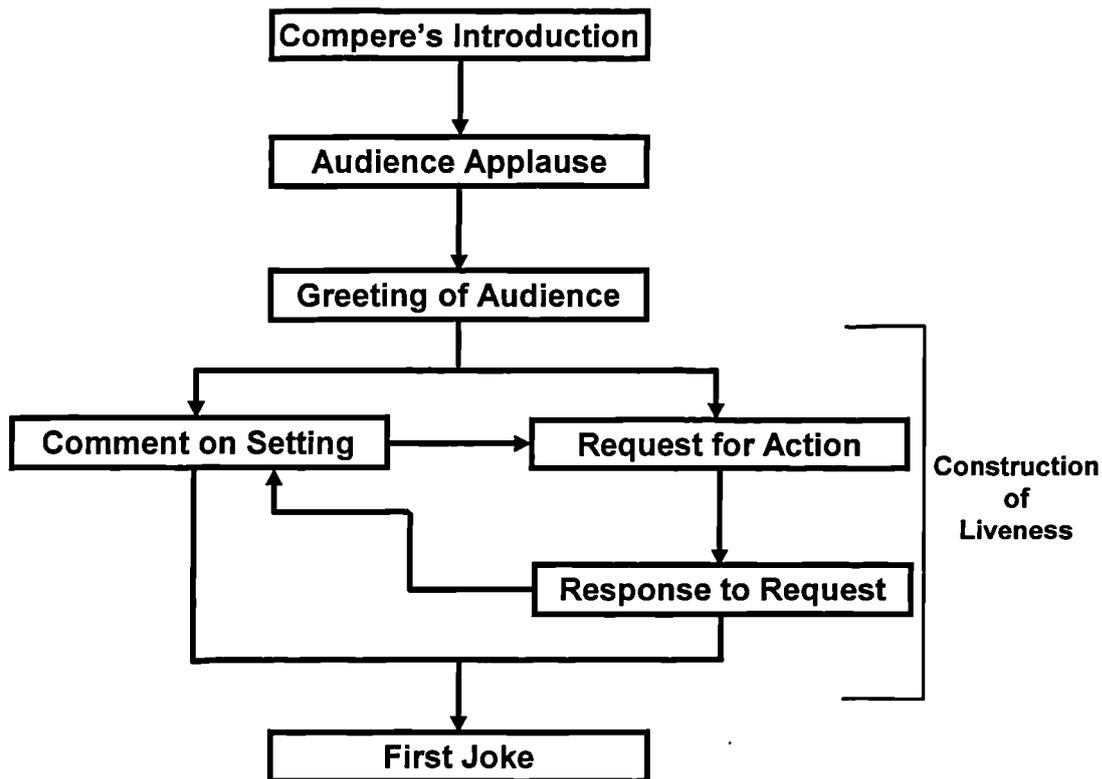
Figure 6-3: Structure of Openings

However, what is undeniably and invariably a feature of stand-up openings is their position as forerunners to the comedian's first canned joke and the work they do in preparing the audience along with establishing conventions and expectations for this joke to take place. As such the first joke cannot be seen as an isolated text hermetically separated form the ongoing performance or developing interaction. The first joke like all that follows it has a certain place within the stand-up performance. It has a set of moves and sequences that precede in and in turn leads into and informs further movements. Moreover, part of the joke telling context in stand-up performance in their very liveness and the fact that they are delivered to a specific audience at a unique time.

Through this shift, which is ingrained throughout this thesis, questions arise both about the link between the telling of these jokes as part of the stand-up performance

and their relationships to members of an audience. I have already shown how an audience laughs such as to avoid interrupting the performer and how the performer recognises when the right time is to re-commence talking after laughter. However, following on from the view of performance provided by this chapter a previous questions becomes apparent and central. Namely, how do audience recognises that laughter is requested and appropriate at specific points within the flow that is stand-up comedy? It is this most fundamental of issues that I will address in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] As such the may be regarded as what Schegloff (1986, p.113) refers to as *orderly practices*

[2] Those openings that do intentionally contain humour are associated with performers who have achieved some level of fame as comedians. This ability for star comedians to successfully manipulate openings is returned to below.

[3] Reproduced and simplified in Hopper, 1992, p.55

[4] These moves are sequential in that applause always happens first and the first joke happens last but all of the sequences do not necessarily have to be present for the successful opening.

[5] For example see Extract 6-24 in which the greeting (line 1) demands a response and as such also functions as a request for audience action.

[6] Joke competitions usually take the form of the compere providing a theme, subject, personality, or joke stem for which the audience write down suitable jokes on paper provided. The jokes are read out by the compere and often judged by the audience through round of applause, booing, etc.

[7] This runs contrary to Clayman's (1992) observations on American Presidential debates in which rather than being encouraged to interact:

> moderators in each debate urged audience members to restrain themselves. Admonitions to "please hold it down," "please keep your responses as quiet as possible," and the like were not uncommon. (p.36)

[8] This is reintegrated later in the evening when Monkhouse labels the show's thirds as part one, part two and part three and a member of the audience asks if they are going to be in that order.

[9] For example, Vegas warns a couple that displays of affection are not acceptable in public and that they should spend time with other people:

> You need outside interests, and I don't mean me, love. OK. You need something so you spend some time apart, but not too much time that you become strangers. 'Coz outside interests are like public conveniences, an occasional necessity but no reason to stop going at home. Honey, I'm the lavatory of love.

[10] At the beginning of his act and after dealing with a drunken and abusive heckler, "Thanks for making us your number one choice in socialising" and at the end of his act "Remember, I hold the mike but you make the magic."

[11] The level of initial applause may be accompanied by cheers, whistles etc. depending on the comedian's status in the audience's view.

[12] Unlike, for example the change over of DJs on a radio station, compere's and oncoming comedian will not appear in the performance space or interact with the audience together. Although words, handshakes or glances may be exchanged as they pass each other offstage this remains firmly outside the performance frame.

[13] This may be better understood as a *mock summons*. Unlike the ringing of the telephone, audience applause is expected and if absent would not prevent the performer's entrance. The mock qualities of such applause is often manipulated in stage performances for children in which a performer refuses entry until the applause is loud enough.

[14] This is not a true summons/answer pair in the manner discussed by Schegloff. It is hypothetically feasible that in a situation in which the audience withheld their applause for some reason the comedian would still make their entrance.

[15] However, whereas Atkinson (1984) suggests that applause duration both at introduction and throughout a performance are regularly of a duration of seven seconds +/- one second the applause from comedy audiences, like laughter, appears far more malleable. For example in the following extract Keith Allen receives applause of over seventeen seconds.

```
      |————————————————17.3————————————————|
Aud: xxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
Aud:    ((                    Whistles                    ))
Aud:      ((                  Cheers                    ))
     ((Allen's voice is heard but he does not appear on stage))
      |————9.7————|
KA:                           Than ky.hou, ( ) thank you ( ) Yaaaa::y ha ha
         Than kyou thank you very very much indee:d (.) >ladies n gentlemen<
Aud:                                                     hHHHHHh.
```

[16] Occasions where applause happens within stand-up performances follow non-comic events such as the blunt putdown of a persistent and/or aggressive heckler by the compere or the announcement of a competition winner.

[17] Released on video as Chez Whoopi in 1994.

[18] Similarly quiz show hosts will often attempt to develop this sense of commonality with contestants when they chat with them about their background and attempt to display knowledge of/interest in their home town, profession, hobby, etc.

[19] An upper middles class area outside Manchester.

[20] Of course if something unusual does happen such as a member of the audience asleep then the comedian will latch onto it and often return to it throughout their act.

[21] Comments of this type are common in the opening of performers, especially those of comperes. For good performance reasons (see Chapter 3 on audience density) comedians prefer audiences to centre close in front of the stage. Audiences (aware of the aggressive comedian) tend to opt for seats safely away from the stage and its lights.

[22] This echoes Schiffrin's (1977) observation of two strangers, *MS* and *J*, briefly meeting after one has mistakenly identified the other. The mistake discovered the short conversation uses the subject of the mistake of identity as its sole topic. "Thus *MS* shares with *J* the only experience which is theirs to share, the misidentification." (p.683)

[23] The assumptions of unfamiliarity in the ordering of stand-up openings may explain a number of irregular opening made by successful comedians playing a home audience.

[24] A similar though even more extended silence is allowed by Hovis Presley in Extract 6-43. Again this acts as a highlighting of a particular feature of the comedian's opening. However, unlike Swanson, Presley's comment is on the actual quality of the audience applause and it marks its presence rather than the absence marked by Swanson.

[25] See Rutter (1996) for development of this observation.

[26] The relationship between these two moves in the opening sequence are so strong that exceptions, although hypothetically possible, have not been found.

[27] Although not taped as part of my fieldwork I have seen a performer request and receive a pint of Guinness from the audience as part of their opening.

[28] Or at least is satisfied that this has been established to the best of their ability.

[29] Occurrences in which both the comment on setting and the request for action are absent from an opening have not been found in the venue environment. However, such absences are common in televised/video taped routines. This further suggests that these devices are used to construct the liveness not relevant to broadcast performances.

CHAPTER 7

"IT'S THE WAY I TELL THEM" - THE RHETORIC OF JOKING

> "The secret of great comedy is timing.
> For example, you the audience come here tonight
> and I arrive one week later - that's bad timing."
> Arnold Brown

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the amount of organisation and cohesion observed in stand-up comedy serves to question certain fundemental understandings of standard humour theory it does not begin to comprehensively answer one of the basic questions laid out at the beginning of this work: *what is it that stand-up audiences laugh at? How does the laughter ball start rolling?* More specifically, how is laughter and its associated risk managed in a manner which does not interfere with or is intrusive to the basically leisurely pursuit of watching stand-up comedy? In what way can individuals in an audience measure the appropriateness of laughter? Further, if laughter is such a major social risk and if, as Clayman suggests "responding to a speech is, first and foremost, *an elementary form of social action*" (1993, p.110 italics in original) or, as Glenn asserts, "laughing is fundamentally a social activity" (1989, p.127) how and why do individuals take the initiative to start laughing? Previous chapters established patterns in the comedy club experience, audience laughter shapes and the systematic shape of the openings to stand-up performances. In this chapter I wish to suggest some solutions to these questions by means of an examination of the main body of comedians' acts.

My interest in this chapter is not primarily in how jokes are structured to deliver powerful punchlines and enhance incongruity. Such issues have be well covered by script theory authors such as Attardo *et al* (1994), Attardo and Chabanne (1992),

Attardo and Raskin (1991) and Raskin (1985)[1]. Rather I will look at the skills employed by the comedian in telling jokes and the role of the audience in the joke telling interaction.

What I will do in this chapter is to focus on the process of joke telling and explore how the manner of joke performance shapes audience response. Continuing a theme first suggested in Chapter 3 and developed subesequently, I will explore how the live experience of attending a comedy venue is manufactured and experienced and is, as an audience experience, radically different from joking and humour in other realms. Specifically, I will look at the way in which the successful comedian rewrites, manipulates and delivers a joke text in a manner which shows an awareness and consideration for her or his audience and is the manifestation of the conversion of a joke text into a performed piece of comedy. By looking at how a joke is told rather than analysing the joke text I will demonstrate the existence and regular use by comedians of a series of rhetorical devices which correlate starkly with audience laughter. Through this chapter I will continue my argument for a shift in emphasis in humour research from the analysis of incongruity or content to one of the investigation of performance rhetoric, I will argue a shift from the analysis of text to that of performance and from a position in which the comedian is sole author to one of mutual interaction between comedian and audience.

The shift from the traditionally accepted viewpoint of the joke's teller as sole author who retains control over the text to one in which the joke's telling is only one aspect of an interactional experience, a shift which is important for a number of reasons. It once again highlights the weakness of a stimulus/response model of joke telling and it entails a situation in which, while the joke teller may "manage" (Clayman, 1992) the audience, s/he ultimately has no control over it. As in conversational interaction neither party in the stand-up interaction can govern the other's actions or contributions nor be responsible for those events external to the interaction that may occur. In the comedy venue any number of things may occur which alter the direction of the performance - glasses might be dropped, a microphone might fail or a fire engine might roar past the venue's doors none of which could have been (fully)

anticipated. Also, although slightly more predictable on occasions, an audience may withhold laughter or hecklers may shout comments.

One way in which the audience can become more manageable is, as already been discussed, their tendency to act as a collective as the stand-up interaction becomes pseudo-dyadic. Part of the process of becoming an audience for stand-up as with other live performances invloves the individual's temporary sublimation of their unique agency in favour of a interactive persona as part of an audience. This process entails a readiness to accept the responses of other members of the audience as appropriate and then to actively adopt them. Group laughter in audiences is as much a product of mutual trust as a reaction to a humorous event.[2] Individuals will follow responses of others in an audience by replication and without the direct influence of other stimulus or suggestion. For example, watching video-taped audiences during and stand-up performances it is not unusual to see someone lean across to the person sat next to them and ask for clarification of what a performer's punchline was *while still laughing*. In such a circumstance the laughter cannot be a response to a humorous stimulus as in effect the member of the audience has not yet received this piece of information. Instead laughter must be a reaction to the laughter of others.

A further example of this can be found in a review in The Big Issue for a performance given by Johnny Vegas. Just as the most memorable segments of speeches given by politicians tend to those which received the longest applause and it is these that are most often chosen for quotation in the media (Atkinson 1984, Heritage & Greatbatch 1986, Clayman 1992) the reviewer for The Big Issue chose to quote a line from Vegas' show which it claimed was received by huge audience laughter. The line quoted was, "Life's a postman but you've got a vicious dog called Clive" which is indeed a Vegas-like metaphor but is not Vegas' line. The misquotation is drawn from a section in which Vegas tells the audience about asking his psychologist out for a date and being turned down by her. Having had his request denied Vegas tells the woman, "**Love's** a postman but you've got a vicious dog called **pride**". The point here is that it apparent that the reviewer's response is not based solely on the joke text. The misheard version while perhaps amusing does not combine the **postal workers** script (postman and dog) with that of **emotion** (love

and pride) and so lacks, according to joke theory, a neat incongruity/resolution structure. As such, again according to traditional theory, the reviewer could not have found this "mis-formed" joke as funny as others in the audience and so would have a little reason to quote it as an example of Vegas' successful joking.

As such, it is apparent that members of an audience look for and respond to cues giving guidance as to when laughter, applause or cheers are necessary, desired or appropriate. They are responsive to the actions of those around them rapidly identifying the beginnings of laughter or applause and then contributing to that response. Audience members pick up on cues such as the raising of hands to begin applause or the beginning of the applause itself such awareness is highlighted by Clayman as "mutual monitoring" (1993, p.112) and it is this that firmly reconceptualizes the audience as active, as a group which not only responds to suggestive cues in the developing performance but demonstrates a self-awareness.

7.2 COMMON RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

Studying applause to speeches at political conference Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) point out that audience members make a decision to applaud on an individual basis. This means that the risk of being alone in applauding has to be faced. However the positive value of this affiliative act increases as more members of the audience join the applause. To help over come this negative potential Heritage and Greatbatch argue that the rhetorical formats of political speeches are not only stylistic niceties used to keep an audience attentive and interested but also serve to forecast the completion of a political point, and more importantly for this discussion, to signpost that applause is expected and appropriate. They assert that any individual member of an audience has to make the decision as to whether to applaud a statement or not in real time and effectively within a second of the statement being made (Heritage and Greatbatch 1986, p.112). These signposts then assist in that decision making process by making apparent not on that audience contribution to the interaction is

required but what the preferred response is. This assists in the voluntary transformation of individuals into an audience and makes it both possible and profitable to see the audiences as a collective agent.

These devices not only work towards consolidating the decisions made by an audience during their mutual monitoring but they increase their efficiency by allowing audiences to move towards "independent decision-making" (Clayman, 1993, p.112). By recognising the projected point of completion an audience member can make decisions as to the appropriateness of varying responses in advance of the event and without recourse to other spectators. In the comedy context, if a comedian employs a device which signifies that not only is the end of a sentence coming up but also the end of a conversational turn, and that the preferred response is laughter, audience members can (if they choose) laugh as soon as the punchline is delivered. Thus, through the utilisation of these rhetorical techniques, the risk involved in starting to applaud or laugh is minimised. By providing individuals in the audience with cues built into the structure of their text, the podium speaker alleviates the risk audience members take and increases their own chance of gaining the applause they desire.

A comprehensive step towards establishing the rhetorical techniques used in public podium performance can be found in Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) study of British political oratory. Their success in not only identifying these format but establishing a correlative link between their use and audience response can be usefully employed as a starting point in the discussion of comedy performance an audience. In brief, their research identifies six distinct rhetorical formats present in political speech making namely:

- Contrast
- List
- Puzzle-solution
- Headline-punchline
- Position taking
- Pursuit.

Each of these can be found present in stand-up performance making up something similar to Freud's "auxiliary technical methods" (1976, p.208) in that they can be seen as not "necessary conditions [to the joke] but only as encouragements to the process of joking" (p.208). Taking each of these encouragements in turn I will look at their basic structure and illustrate how they are used and manipulated in stand-up.

7.2.1 Contrast

In political speaking, contrast allows the speaker to present an argument twice - once in a "negative" form and then in a "positive" form. However, in comedy the technique can be associated with the presentation of contrary scripts such that a state of affairs is established and then a contrasting viewpoint is presented. Thus in Extract 7-1 Anita Wise presents an opposition between men's objectification of women and men's readiness to act foolishly.

Extract 7-1: Anita Wise

```
1    AW:   >Unfortunately it's ↓true, a lot of men judge women
2          on their b↓od↑ies:.< I'm not saying its conscious but a lot
3          of guys do that °li-°
4          Like they think tha the lar:ger a woman's breas:ts:        ]←Ⓐ
5          are (0.6) the less intelligen she ↓is:.
6    Aud:        Yeah
7    AW:   >I dow think it works like that< (0.4) °.h° I think if
8          anything its the opposite (0.3) .hh
9          I think the lar:ger: a women's breasts: are (0.4) the less   ]←Ⓑ
10         intelligent (.) the men become.
```

The repetition of "large a women's breasts" (lines 4 and 9) and "less intelligent" (lines5 & 10) and the repetition of the ordering serve to highlight the rhetorical contrast between the script concerning women's intelligence and that concerning men's. This makes this delivery very neat and closely parallels it to Freud's (1976) example of jokes that use a "alteration of arrangement" (p.66) in similar text is rearranged slightly to form a contrasting meaning:

> Mr and Mrs X live in a fairly grand style. Some people think that the husband has earned a lot and so has been able to lay by a bit [*sich etwas zurückgelegt*]; others again think that the wife has lain back a bit [*sich etwas zurückgelegt*] and so has been able to earn a lot.

> Freud, 1976, p.66

In a way similar to Wise's joke the Freud example takes a phrase, in this case "lay/lain back a bit" and rearranges the order to accentuate the contrast and emphasise a creation of incongruity. However, the use of contrast in joke telling is not limited to use of this reordering technique. In Extract 7-2 Roger Monkhouse employs a contrasting pair to signpost a preferred laughter response but he does so in a slightly different manner.

Extract 7-2: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:   >How many people here watched Wimbledon (.) on
2         the telly coz that's a national institution?<
3   Aud:  ((Isolated "Yeahs" and groans))
4   RM:   (Not) hugely responsive you lot are you?  I know its hot,
5         people have been sucking (   ) all day 'aven't ya?
6   Aud:                                    hhhhhhhhh
7   RM:   YE::::S! EV'rybody watches Wimbledon. I mean °(     )
8         ladies tennis (    )°.
9         WHY DO WOMEN, (.) >why do women< grunt so much    ]←Ⓐ
10        when they play tennis on television?  Why is that?
11  Aud:                                        h-h-h
12  RM:                                            Coz
13        they never do that in real life, do they?           ]←Ⓑ
14  Aud:                          hHHHhhHHHhhh
```

```
15  RM:                                                    Perhaps
16          it just depends on the quality of service
17          they're gettin'
18  Aud:       HHHHHHHHHH
19  RM:                            Don't look at me like that that's a top
20          joke tha actually.  °I was delighted when I
21  Aud:        hHHHHHHHHHHHHHhh
22  Aud:                         x-x-x.
23  RM:                                         wrote that.°
```

Rather than rearranging a phrase which suggests one viewpoint and set of assumptions into one which carries a contrasting meaning Monkhouse creates a contrast with one of the scripts in the sequence namely that of television/reality. Although, like Wise, Monkhouse presents an observation which is framed as part of common or accepted knowledge, his contrast is not a reversal of the statement premise. "Why do women grunt so much when they play tennis on television?" (line 9-10) is structured such that it implies that women do indeed grunt while playing tennis, that men do not,[3] that this is somehow sexual and that this has been seen to be true by the audience while watching television. His line, "Why do women grunt so much on television?" could be a feed for a tradition question/answer joke structure but his tagged ending gives the indication that this is not the case, that some other rhetorical format is being used and it is one that makes contemplation of the question vital.[4] The laughter in line 11 is isolated, short lived and quiet as most of the audience realise that this observation is not the intending signal for laughter. The main laughter arises when Monkhouse presents the second part to the contrasting pair. Having asserted that women grunt on television he contrasts that with an assertion that this is not the case with women "in real life" (lines 12-13).

Although associations evoked by use of the term contrast may carry with them specific meaning in the context of humour theory and its links with various conceptualisations of incongruity, I wish to avoid these at present. By doing so I will include within the concept oppositions such as night/day, good/bad, us/them which in themselves are not part of the humorous opposition of scripts or texts.

For example in Extract 7-3 as part of his act Martin Bigpig bring a member of the audience onto the stage in order to cut a carrot in the volunteers hand in two with a

machete. Once the volunteer has arrived on stage he contrasts the two primary tools needed for the routine: the blade and the member of the audience.

Extract 7-3: Martin Bigpig

```
1   MB:   °av we ↑met be↓fore°A- av we me' be↓for::e.
2   Aud:  No we avn't
3   MB:   >OK that's good< cause what av go' here is a        ]  ←Ⓐ
4         ↑Samurai ↓sword
5         (1.3)
6         Av go' a >gullible wanker from the audience.<     ]  ←Ⓑ
7   Aud:                                        HHHHHHHHHHHHHHh
```

Now from a linguistic point of view that might inform a joke theory analysis of this event and the laughter that follow it is a little unclear which ideas or scripts are being contrasted here by Bigpig. Is he building an opposition between animate and inanimate prop for the routine, between the reliable sword and the gullible volunteer; between the routine nature of the blade and the performance specific individual volunteer? However, when viewed s a rhetorical contrast which signpost the preferred response of laughter such an issue becomes redundant. It is evident from the transcript with the long pause of line 5 and the contrast in intonation at the end of the first part of the contrast and the change in pace in line 6 that an opposition is being made. It is this that the audience respond to rather than encoded incongruity when deciding to laugh.

7.2.2 List

Lists of three are by no means unique to stand-up comedy. They have been observed in both natural (Jefferson 1977) and rhetorical talk (Atkinson 1984, Heritage and Greatbatch 1986). When speakers use a list of three, others in the interaction recognise the third clause or part as the completing element of the list. The implication is that performers can once again forecast a point of completion before it is actually reached. For example, Atkinson (1984) gives a number of examples from British speech making which utilise a list of three as a way of eliciting applause[5], including the following from Margaret Thatcher:

Extract 7-4

(34) (Conservative Party Conference, 1980)

Thatcher: This party has demonstrated (0.4) that we are a party united in
1 →   ↑purpose
           (0.4)
2 →   strategy
           (0.2)
3 →   and re↓sol ┌ve.
Audience: └Hear ┌hear |————(8.0)————|
Audience: └x-xxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx-x

Atkinson, 1984, p.61

In this extract the list of made up of "purpose", "strategy" and completed with "resolve" and the completion of the list is met with an immediate call of "Hear hear" which overlaps with the commencement of audience applause. The list is emphasised by the leaving of pauses between each of its parts which allows the audience even more cues to the approaching point of completion. However, although the third part of a list of three is emphasised in the above example with the used of the conjunction, "and", this is in no way essential as demonstrated in the this second example:

Extract 7-5

(35) (Fringe meeting, Labour Party conference, 1980)

Heffer:	The National Executive decided (0.8) that we <u>agreed</u> in <u>PRINCIPLE</u> (0.8) that we <u>MUST</u> <u>AGAIN</u> <u>TRY</u> AND <u>GET</u> SOME <u>CONSTITUTIONAL</u> <u>AMENDMENTS</u> (0.5)

1 → BE ↑ <u>FORE</u> YOU
(0.2)

2 → <u>AT</u> CONFERENCE
(0.2)

3 → <u>THIS</u> ↓ <u>WEEK</u>

Audience:	┌SO THAT YOU CAN <u>STILL</u> MAKE ┐ └xxxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX ┘ =
Heffer:	= ┌YOUR <u>MINDS</u> UP └XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX (TV editor's cut)

Atkinson, 1984, p.64

Although Heffer carries on with his speech the audience recognises the list of three and responds with applause after its competition with, "this week". The use of this performance device is so effective as to practically render the closing line of Heffer's turn, "...so that you can still make your minds up" unnecessary if considered as an example of successful speech making.

The use of list of three is also common in successful stand-up comedy performance.[6] However, where the technique is used by politicians to generate audience applause the preferred response for comedians is laughter. Also the use of the listing without the conjunctive is very much the norm rather than the exception in stand-up. For example, a non-conjunctive list is presented in Jo Caulfield's discussion of the television programme <u>Gladiators</u> in Extract 7-6.

Extract 7-6: Jo Caulfield

```
1    JC:    It's the stu↑pid ↑na::mes they have >on Gladia↓tu's
2           that's wha' really ↑annoys me.< Like this - Things like
3           "Scor:pio"              ←①
4           (.)
5    .      "Night↓shade"           ←②
6           (0.5)
7           "U:lrika Jons↓son"      ←③
8                          |———1.5———|
9    Aud:               XXXXXXXXXXXxx-x
```

Here Caulfield emphasises the list in two separate ways. First she places emphasis on the opening syllable of each part of the list in lines 3, 5 and 7 and secondly she places pauses of incremental lengths between the three parts of the list (lines 4 and 6). List of three can also are not only found in the pre-scripted elements of the stand-up performance but as can be seen in Extract 7-7 in sections of the act whose placing has not been pre-planned.[7] In this extract Adrian Cook constructs an effective[8] list as a put down for a heckler:

Extract 7-7: Adrian Cook

```
1    AC:      Ah (.) SO, >well here we are, listen.< °(     ) ready
2             and warmed-up for the rest of the -
3    Heckler:                     Thought you'd finished!
4    AC:      Oh, thankyou. Er::: () T'night's comedy and for t'night's
5             set we're gownna toower o the h↓uman body. Uh, we started
6             with the ar:sole.
7                           hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhh-h-h
8                             x   x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXxxx-x
9                               ((Cheers & Whistles))
10   AC:      ((          ))
11   Heckler             (   )
12   AC:                   Wha'? 'Ello, 'e's go' somethi else to-
13   Heckler: Finish with the bollocks::
14   Aud:                     hhhhhhhhhh-h-h
15   Aud:                 x-x-x
16   Cook     >Thiz always one comedian, isn't there?< (.)        ←①
17            And its me -                                        ←②
18            so >fuck off:!<                                     ←③
19   Aud:           hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
20   Aud:            x-xxxxxxx-x-x-x
```

As in the political speeches considered above Cook emphasises the three sections of the list by leaving short pauses between the individual elements. Although the pauses are much shorted than those found in political rhetoric (in this case < 0.3 seconds) the laughter and applause which follows "so fuck off!" (line 22) shows that larger pauses are not essential in stand-up comedy. Indeed in Extract 7-8 Lucy Porter leaves no pause at all between elements when she uses a list of three adjectives to describe the particular sort of men's underwear she dislikes:

Extract 7-8: Lucy Porter

1	LP:	I do- <u>Erm</u> >I'm a bit obsessed with men's pants actually< an I
2		have <u>one</u> particular hatred amongst men's pants which are
3		(0.5)
4		the christmas, ←①
5		novelty, ←②
6		boxer shorts. ←③
7	Aud:	hHHHHHHhhh

The underwear are not just shorts, undies or pants but specifically described suing a list of three adjectives as "Christmas", "novelty" and "boxer". The list is highlighted in this case by Porter's pause before its delivery which means that not only does list of three give the audience a better illustrated description of the clothing but ensures that the laughter in line 7 arrives simultaneously with the end on "boxer".

However, unlike political rhetoric, it is possible in stand-up for a successful performer to get an audience response for each part of their list of three. In Extract 7-9 below, Jerry Sadowitz receives three lots of laughter for his list of three. Each period of laughter is of similar duration to the others.

Extract 7-9: Jerry Sadowitz

```
 1   JS:   Entertainment in ↑Scot↓l'nd so different frum the
 2         entertainment  anywhere else in the world (.) You know
 3         .hh
 4         If you can stand in a pub in Gla:s:↓gow on a Saturday      ⌉
 5         night right .hh Have a few pints (0.4) sing a so::ng and    |
 6         then piss into your trousers:                               | ←①
 7              (1.0)                                                   |
 8   Aud:        h-h-h-h                                               |
 9   JS:            that is you >considered an entertainer<           ⌋
10   Aud: ├──────4.3──────┤
11        hHHHHHHHHhHhh
12   JS:                   Sing a song without pissin inta ya trousers ⌉
13        youra >fuckin variety artist<                                 ⌋ ←②
14                                    ├──────4.5──────┤
15   Aud:                            HHHHHHHHHHhh
16   Aud:                                    x
17   JS:                                        Stan dup after  ⌉
18        eleven thirty you are alterna↓tive                     ⌋ ←③
19                              ├──────4.6──────┤
20   Aud:                      x
21   Aud:                            HHHHHHHHHHhh
22   JS:                                      GET THAT
23        MAN AN AGENT!
```

This malleability of the list of three can be see to be stretched even further in Extract 7-10 in which Ben Elton produces a set of three lists of three:

Extract 7-10: Ben Elton

```
 1   BE:   Now Aw::l the imagery would not madder: (0.5) if they
 2         were still advertising kinda friendly products like y'know
 3         Oxo n Ariel> <Well we thought it was friendly until we
 4         realised what it was doing to the eco-system.<< But is
 5         would it wouldn't matter (0.6) if if they hadn't changed
 6         what they're advertisin' b'cause the're beginina advertise
 7         (0.8) things tha (0.4) well f (.) personally things I thought
 8         I ↑owned (0.7) Y'know I'm havin real trouble with this
 9         y'know s s surreal experience whenya (0.2) watchin the telly
10         >a suddenly there's an advert for somethin you thought was
11         already ↓yours< Y'know
12         there's the (0.2) telecom,                                   ⌉ ←①
13         then thes the gas hn (0.3)                                   ⌉ ←②
14         then thes water                                             ⌉ ←③
15         an I'm saying to ma girlfriend I canna sworn that was ours (0.4)
16         ├─0.7─┤
17   AUD:  hhhhh
18   BE:       I thought that was↑o↓urs (0.6)
```

```
19        I though those sewers n that system was dug in the      ⎤
20        nineteenth centry by British c::itizens our forebears .hh n .hh  ⎦ ←①   ⎤
21        an i it was maintained by British taxation over the          ⎤         ⎥ ←②
22        last hundered years                                          ⎦ ←②      ⎥
23        n (.) defended in two world wars by British soldiers     ⎤             ⎥
24        I thought mean it was ↑ours (0.4)                        ⎦ ←③      ⎦
25        But ↑NO (0.6)


26        >Parently that means we gotta buy it back .hh        ←①   ⎤
27        and if we don't some Japanese investors ul buy it    ←②   ⎥ ←③
28        a then won't we feel silly. (.)                      ←③   ⎥
29        .hhh I confidently expect to see my ↑sofa(.)<             ⎦
30        advertised on the ↓telly
31        |————————9.8————————|
32  Aud:      HHHHHHHHHHHh
33  Aud:          xxxxxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXXXXXXxx
34  BE:          The Ben's     (6.0)       The Ben's (.) Sofa (.)
35               Share (.) ↑Opportunity
```

Importantly though, Sadowitz builds a joke that has three punchlines (lines 4-9, 12-13, 17-18) and involves three periods of audience laughter, none of Elton's lists directly precedes audience response. However, what they do do is form a pre-sequence for a line which is followed by near ten seconds of laughter and applause. Elton has, in Extract 7-10, skilfully guided the flow of interaction so that the audience wait until after the list of three made up of lists of three is completed and the punchline added. Elton uses his lists as non-comic rhetoric in order to contrast with punchlined moment: "I confidently expect to see my sofa advertised on the telly" (lines 32-33).

7.2.3 Puzzle-solution

The puzzle-solution format is recognised by the comedian's asking of a question or the posing of a puzzle and then immediately after providing the solution to the puzzle as the end to their turn. This serves not only to stimulate the audience's attention[9] but also adds emphasis to the punchline/solution. In joke telling, the puzzle-solution format can take the obvious 'riddle' format in which the puzzle is set and the solution provided in the punchline. In its most simple form the puzzle-solution may look something like the one manufactured by Tony Burgess in Extract 7-11 in his talk about poverty.

Extract 7-11: Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:   No, see it in the paper now it's nearly as bad for
2         students. (Some here tonight lads - full of students.)
3         Students are now so poor that they're havin' to tu:rn
4         to ↑cri::me to support themsleves. Hah!
5         Like wha' like?                                        ←Ⓟ
6         <R.h am raiding s:ecund-hand ↑Book ↓shops.>            ←Ⓢ
7   Aud:                                         hhhhhhh
```

Here Burgess, in his role of "scally", creates a puzzle by asking a question of what sort of crime would a broadly law-abiding group such as students commit that would be worthy of concern to broader society. [10] The answer resides in the worse scenario he can summon up that of ram raiding of bookshops. The puzzle is posed by the performer and the solution is given at the point of the turn's completion so that the solving of the puzzle and the request for applause coincide.

Returning to the Adrian Cook extract quoted more fully in Extract 7-7 we can see that in addition to the list of three that Cook constructs with his putdown a puzzle-solution format similar to Burgess' is to be seen also:

Extract 7-12: Adrian Cook

```
1   AC:   >Thiz always one comedian, isn't there?< (.)    ←①  ] ←Ⓟ
2         And its me -                                      ←②  ⌐
3         so >fuck off:!<                                   ←③  ⌐ ←Ⓢ
4   Aud:              hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
5   Aud:                  x-xxxxxxx-x-x-x
```

The tagging of "isn't there?" (line 1) is important in this delivery in order to convert the common statement "there's only on comedian" into a question. By the nature of the puzzle-solution format the question is essentially a rhetorical one which allows Cook the rapid opportunity (i.e. before the heckler may have a chance) to deliver the answer to the question, the solution to the puzzle. This goes some way to explaining why Cook not only receives loud audience laughter after this comedy turn by also a round of applause.[11]

Like the Cook sequence quoted in Extract 7-7 and Extract 7-12 another look at the Lucy Porter sequence in Extract 7-8 reveals a complex combination of rhetorical techniques not common to political speech making. Not only does her description of men's underwear form a list of three but her suggestion that there is a particular type of underwear the earns here despise and the pause after this revelation serve to create a puzzle.[12] The solution to this puzzle is provided in lines 6-8 and greeted with laughter..

Extract 7-13: Lucy Porter

```
1   LP:   I do- Erm >I'm a bit obsessed with men's pants
2         actually<
3         an I have one particular hatred amongst      ⌐
4         men's pants which are                        ⌐ ←Ⓟ
5            (0.5)                                        ⌐
6         the christmas,               ←①                │
7         novelty,                     ←②                │ ←Ⓢ
8         boxer shorts.                ←③                │
9   Aud:       hHHHHHHHhhh                              ⌐
```

Puzzle-solution is a malleable format. In certain sequences a puzzle can be produced in which information is given, or statements made which cannot be fully understood without the addition of the solution. Thus, puzzles can be formed by the providing of information that is incongruous *within a comedy frame* such that what may appear in one context a valid or complete statement becomes a puzzle as members of the audience "wait for the joke".

Extract 7-14: Jo Brand (Simplified)

1	JB:	Anorexic people look in the mirror and think they	]←Ⓟ
2		look fat...	
3		[Pause]	
4		[Laughter]	
5		And so do I - so I must be.	]←Ⓢ
6		[Laughter]	

Here Brand plays on her body shape and her regular self-deprecatory themes of obesity which act as a frame through which the audience interpret line 1. Against this here observation that "anorexic people look in the mirror and think they look fat" becomes incongruous and therefor a puzzle. The puzzle is further emphasised by her pause before the delivery of the punchlined solution in line 5. Similarly, Tony Burgess takes it up himself to make the following confession to his audience:

Extract 7-15: Tony Burgess

1	TB:	(You know) A:::'m ta:kin' stuff at the moment tu:::	]←Ⓟ
2		h↑elp me heroin addiction.	
3		Videos,	]←①
4		T.V.'s	]←②
5	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHHHhhh	
6		(Microwaves)	]←③

(←Ⓢ bracketing lines 3-6)

Like, Brand's comment on her weight, Burgess' supposed drug taking confession only becomes a puzzle because of its apparent inappropriateness within the stand-up context. Such self-exposition as the first turn of a topic and its context as part of

Burgess' persona serves to create a puzzle within an audience the solution to which is provided by the list of three in lines 3-6.

This tendency towards a slightly more obtuse manner or presenting puzzle-solution constructions than that provided in a standard question/answer format has the effect of enhancing the "tease" provoked by the puzzle. As in Extract 7-16 Chris Addison's puzzle (line 1) is provided without context and as a change of topic such that the audience has little real knowledge of what is to follow.

Extract 7-16: Chris Addison

```
1   CA:   The ↑si::gns on toilets rea::ly bug me (.) righ'.        ] ←Ⓟ
2         B'cause although they're obviously a man an a woman.  ⌐
3         I dowknow why they p- p- depicted in tha aspect.  W' y' ⌐ ←Ⓢ
4         go a man goin', "↑LOOK NO ↑HANDS!"                 ⌐
5   Aud:                                       hHHHhhhhh
6   Aud:                                    x-x-x
7   CA:   Woman going, "Yes:, we can do it standin' up."
8   Aud:  hHHHHHHhh  HHHHHHhhhh
9   CA:                    (Right on sisters) °Don't forget ya
10        pa:per.°
```

The tagging of "right" at the end of line 1 implies a change from statement to the puzzling introduction of a new topic which again encourages alertness in the live audience. Without context the line cannot be full understood on its own and begs a solution in the form of the further information provided in lines 2-4. The use of the puzzle-solution format to pique an audience's interest is also seen in Extract 7-17. Swanson tells the audience of his childhood ambition to get on the television show Jim'll Fix It and his numerous failed attempts to do so. Ironically it is the introduction of an apparent solution to his childhood ambition that forms the puzzle for the audience.

Extract 7-17: Graham Swanson

```
1   GS:    °When I was young° I tried ↑every >trick in the book<
2          to get on "Jim'll Fix ↓It."
3   Aud:                      hhhhh
4   GS:                                  Ya' know like erh, "Dear
5          Jim, as a blind ↑or↓phan I've never been on a ↓bus,"=
6   Aud:   =HHHHHHHHHHHHHhhHHhh-h-h-hHHHHh-h-h
7   GS:                         Dint get anywhere.
8                                        Then -     ┐
9          (0.4)                                    │ ←Ⓟ
10         then I (hit on) something.               ┘
11         I wrote to Jim and said, "Dear Jim,      ┐
12         (0.9)                                     │ ←Ⓢ
13         please will you fix it for me to be felt up by a seventy │
14         year old DJ                              ┘
15  Aud:          hhHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhh
16  GS:                              Got on!
17  Aud:                                xXXXXxx
18  GS:    BASTard got me Alan Freeman.
```

Technically as far as communicating the narrative of his story is concerned line 9 and 10 in Extract 7-17 are not needed. They don't add further information to the story nor help its communication. However what they do accomplish is the creation of a puzzle which postpones Swanson's exposition of the solution to his childhood ambition and creates an alert curiosity in the audience.

One unusual use of this rhetorical technique is illustrated by Bill Hicks in Extract 7-18. This example is worth quoting at length as it again demonstrates the malleability of techniques used in stand-up interaction and especially that of the puzzle-solution format. In his extract Hicks appears to be setting up the use of a puzzle-solution when he poses the question, "You know what the Iraqis did with that?" in line 24. However, it transpires that this question is purely a rhetorical one when Hicks pointedly refuses to provide a solution to it.

Extract 7-18: Bill Hicks (Simplified)

```
1   BH:    Every one of your papers says that you guys sold Iraq
2          machine tools - [Laughter 4.2]
3          which Iraq then converted [Laughter 4.4]
4          into military equipment. [Laughter 1.0]
```

```
5          [...]
6          Our papers in the States have the same thing.  We sold Iraq
7          farming equipment [Laughter, Applause 4.3]
8          which Iraq then 'converted'.
9          [...]
10         Farming equipment which they converted into military, okay,
11         you got me I'm curious, exactly what kind of farming
12         equipment is this? "Oh okay, well it's stuff for the farmers of
13         Iraq."
14         [Laughter 2.0]
15         Yeah?
16         [Laughter 2.5]
17         What!
18         "Ooh okay, ar well ooh one of the things we gave him was for
19         the little farmer, a new thing we came up with called er the er,
20         flame-throwing rake.
21         [Laughter 2.6]
22         No it was for the farmer see. He would rake the leaves and then
23         just turn around Boooo."
24         You know what the Iraqis did with that?                ]  ←Ⓟ
25         [Laughter 6.4]
```

Hicks' question bears the hallmarks of the beginning of a puzzle-solution format in that it functions towards involving the audience in a guessing game however Hicks' puzzle is one to which the audience are encouraged to provide the humorous solution. In a similar fashion, Lucy Porter in Extract 7-19 offers a puzzle in lines 2-3. Her announcement that she has a theory on men's genitals serve to pique the interest of the audience as they wait to hear it. He refusal to share this theory, like the Hicks extract, coincides with the revelation of the puzzle's weakness.

Extract 7-19: Lucy Porter

```
1          And I mea- maybe you can tell me why men do this,
2          I dow know but my theory on it is if god had intended  ⌉
3          men's genitals to look stupid                          ⌋ ←Ⓟ
4          (1.2)
5    Aud:  h-h-hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
6    Aud:  xxxxx-x-x-xx-x-x
```

The laughter that follows these refusals to provide a solution suggests that the a resolving text is not needed for the body of this puzzle in order to function as a

working part of the comedy interaction. The use of the technique to alert the audience that the preferred response at their next turn is laughter is sufficient.

7.2.4 Headline-punchline

Although bearing a similar structure to the puzzle-solution format, the punchline to the headline-punchline format is more predictable than solutions often are. Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) define Headline-Punchline as "Here, the speaker proposes to make a declaration, pledge, or an announcement and then proceeds to make it." (p.128). In this example from Revelations Hicks introduces the subject of Basic Instinct (Dir. Verhoeven, 1992) (line 2) announces that he will encapsulate it (line 2) - and then does so (line 3):

Extract 7-20: Bill Hicks (Simplified)

1	BH:	But you know I saw this movie this year called last	
2		year called er 'Basic Instinct'.	
3		Okay now. Bill's quick capsule review.	←Ⓗ
4		Piece-of-Shit. Okay now.	←Ⓟ
5	Aud:	((Laughter))	
6	Aud:	((Applause))	
7	Aud:	Yeah, yeah, end of story by the way. Don't get	
8		caught up in that fevered hype phoney fucking	
9		debate about that Piece-of-Shit movie.	
10	Aud:	((Laughter))	

Like puzzle-solution, headline-punchline attracts audience alertness by promising the revelation of information. However instead of posing a puzzle, headline-punchline is explicit in announcing what follows. Although Hicks make the announcement that he will do something and then immediately does it this in not always the case. In Extract 7-21 Chris Addison uses a headline-punchline technique but between the headline and its punchline there is diversionary talk on things that annoy him and the newspaper he is about to discuss.

Extract 7-21: Chris Addison

```
1   CA:   Two questions before I- 'fore I fuck off.              ←Ⓗ
2   Aud:                                    h-h-h
3   CA:                                         'Cuz I've
4         been on for Owers.  Er:: before I go away.
5         One of which i- >These are the things that really bug
6         me.< One of which is The Daily Sport. 'N someone's
7         got  copy of the Daily Sport over THERE ( ) Coz this
8         is the kinda pub this is.  Intellectual, we know -       ⎤
9         >yeah.<                                                  │ .
10        So, >˚The Daily Sport˚< The Daily Sport.  WHY-           │
11        How can a woman doing THIS!                              │
12        ((Turns back to audience. Sticks his bottom out          │
13            Looks over his shoulder)).                           │ ←Ⓟ
14  Aud:                                hHHHHHHHhh.                │
15  CA:                                       >Be                  │
16        headline news every ↓day.<                               │
17  Aud:                              HHHHHHHHHHHHHh                ⎦
18  Aud:                                x-x.
```

However, although common in Heritage and Greatbatch's sample, Headline-Punchline would appear to figure very seldom in stand-up comedy performance. When this format is uses in stand-up it tends not to be used directly for comic effect.[13]

7.2.5 Position Taking

Position taking represents a technique in which the speaker or comedian will make a statement and immediately after make an overt evaluation of it.[14] Heritage and Greatbatch found that position taking is the "most effective single rhetorical format" (p.131) available to political speakers. Position taking is recognised by the exposition of a state of affairs by the performer which is then followed by and evaluation of that situation.

(2) (Liberals: Tape 3: Rural Areas: Geraint Howells: ST)

Howells: I quote one example .hhh that has recently caused
great concern to my constituents .hh and to many
other rural dwellers throughout Britain: .hh And
that is the decision of the Post Office to declare:
.hh certain telephone kiosks in the rural areas

uneconomical .hh and threaten to withdraw: (0.5)
them unless the community council is willing to pay
↓ fo (0.2) their retention.
(0.4)

(PT)→   This is disgraceful in my view.
(0.2)

Audience: ⌐ hear hear
              ∟Applause (5.6 seconds)

Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p.131

In stand-up this personal exposition of viewpoint is often manifested as a short and to the point expletive construction. For example in Extract 7-22, Lilly savage leave the audience in little doubt over her view of the royal family when discussing the fire a Windsor Castle.

Extract 7-22: Lily Savage (Simplified)

1   LS: I wasn't going to mention the Royals, but fuck. It's Windsor
2   Castle. I've got to bring that up - sorry. I've got to record this
3   for posterity. When that woman, the Queen, was in the Daily
4   Mirror in her wellies and a little head scarf with a corgi on the
5   back.
6   Aud: [Laughter]
7   LS: And a pair of them crossed riding crops, going, "This is my
8   home."
9   Aud: [Laughter]
10 LS: God love you, what's going to happen? Are the council going to
11   put you up in sheltered accommodation over the Christmas?
12 Aud: [Laughter]
13 LS: Fuck off!   ←(PT)
14 Aud: [Laughter]

Savage creates an opposition between the wealth of the Queen and the realities of everyday poverty for many. This opposition, Savage's reference to the Queen as "that woman" (line 3) and her caricatured impersonation of the royal (lines 7-8) leaves little doubt over her view of the situation. Savage receives a number of rounds of audience laughter as she builds up to the laughter in line 12 but the comment she makes in line 13 cannot be understood as a joke in its own right. Savage's, "Fuck off" aimed at the Queen once again contains no recognisable joke of humorous

content but still prompts audience laughter. The laughter is, like the applause that follows position taking in political rhetoric, an affiliative display. It allies the audience with Savage's view point and reinforces a common frame between those involved in the stand-up interaction.

Similar ribald language is used to present a position taking by Adrian Cook in Extract 7-23 as part of his deceptively complex putdown already looked at above.

Extract 7-23: Adrian Cook

```
1    Cook   >Thiz always one comedian, isn't there?< (.)    ←①   ←℗
2           And its me -                                     ←②
3           so >fuck off:!<                                  ←③  ←Ⓢ  ←℗Ⓣ
4    Aud:              Hhhhhhhhhhhhhh
5    Aud:                 x-xxxxxxx-x-x-x
```

Again, the laughter that follows the position taking is highly affiliate as well as appreciative.

Some of the most intense and prolonged (not necessarily coincident) periods of laughter seem to be associated with jokes that produce or highlight a statement of belief with which the audience wish to show agreement. These are often political in the broadest sense. These statements may refer to party political positions (pro or anti), they may also be more oblique references to sexual politics (e.g. feminism/AIDS awareness etc.), or they may invoke notions of constitutional politics (as in the following example's references to the Royal Family).

The use of this technique of explicitly combining humour and politics can be seen very much as a gamble on the part of a comedian (most especially comedians who are still trying to establish themselves) as the production of possibly contentious statements in an act can offend an audience and thus kill the laughter as well as contribute to a very successful joke reception.

In Extract 7-24 Jo Caulfield avoids talking this political risk by taking up her position not in relation to politics but the slightly less controversial topic of animals

and their owners. When talking of how she doesn't get on with her new driving instructor she gives both a reason for not liking him and an indication of his character.

Extract 7-24: Jo Caulfield

```
1   JC:    But er: I'm gonna change him coz we're no gonna get on coz
2          he's one of those >I don't know if there's any in tonight< one
3          of those dog ↓luvers.
4          (0.6)
5   JC:    "Man's best friend is a dog."
6          Sad fuck with no life I ↓think (anybody who said that) personally. ⌉
7          personally.                                                          ⌡ ←ⓅⓉ
8   Aud:                          XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
```

Her comments in lines 6-7 not only contrast with the sentiments contained in the aphorism abbreviated in line 5 but also makes her personal view on both the phrase and the people who say it clear.

7.2.6 Pursuit

At its most fundamental pursuit involves the 'recompletion of a previous point' (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986, p.133) but may also take the form of a summarisation of a passage of text or a change of footing. In stand-up pursuit often occurs after a round of audience laughter and takes the form of the comedian passing comment on their previous joke. For example in Extract 7-25 delivers his comic comment on drugs and receives both laughter and affiliative applause for it. His comment, "There is a difference" (line 7) also is followed by laughter but cannot be understood through conventional joke or classical humour theories.

Extract 7-25: Bill Hicks (Simplified)

```
1   BH:   But, you know. [Pause] Pot, right. [Laughter 1.7] Aaah, they
2         lie about marijuana. Tell you pot-smoking makes you
3         unmotivated. Liiie! When you're high, you can do everything
4         you normally do, just aw well, you just realise it's not worth
5         the fucking effort
6         [Laughter, applause 7.6]
7         There is a difference.              ←(Pursuit)
8         [Laughter 1.9]
```

Hick's pursuit isn't a joke. There is no punchline, no incongruity, no superiority there isn't even any humorous or witty content to the line so the audience laughter must be linked some other feature unexplored by humour research. Following Heritage and Greatbatch it seems safe to presume that the audience response is linked to their recognition of the pursuit that a request for laughter.

Similarly in Extract 7-26 Burgess pursues the already commenced laughter of the audience. After a puzzle/solution pair and the laughter that follows it Burgess' words, "Your job's pretty safe then," overlap significantly with the audience laughter. However, what is noticeable is that although, as would be expected, the audience laughter dies in volume after Burgess' recommences his talk it regains its volume at he end of the pursuit.

Extract 7-26; Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:   Go' the British ↑National Pa::r↓ty >here now.<   (Actually)
2         some guy ↑from the BNP (.) leaf let in' in Manchester the other
3         week. N' and he thing is they say the ↑most s::tupid ↑thin's
4         >don't they like,< (.) "EH we don't like blacks:: 'coz they're after
5         a::::r jo:bs::::."
6         And what's ↑your occupa↓tion?                       ]←(P)
7   Aud:                                   -h-
8   TB:                                   "Who me? I:: ↑leaf↓let for the ]
9         B N P."                                               ←(S)
10
11  Aud:   HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhhhhhhhhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhHhhhh-h
12  TB:                   Your job's pretty safe then        ]←(Pursuit)
```

Again the audience appear to be responding to the rules governing the rhetoric of the interaction rather than being influenced by the response to the joke stimulus.

From the exploration of general rhetorical techniques it is evident that stand-up comedy makes use of them in a way comparable with their use in other forms of podium talk. However, this in not only finding within its own right but carries with it serious implications for previous humour research and strengthens my argument for the development of a new approach to joking. Not only do the rhetorical format explored above occur in joke punchlines and so coincide with points where traditional joke theory would predict laughter but they also occur prior to audience laughter which follows apparently non-joke talk. There is a link between use of rhetorical techniques and laughter which exists beyond that which can be explained by previous humour research. If, as I have suggested, researchers are forced to accept the responses of the live, in situ audience as the only true indication of what is and what is not funny in a specific performance then the link between punchline and laughter as opposed to rhetoric and laughter becomes increasingly weak.

7.3 AUDIENCE RESPONSES

Having established that during live stand-up comedy both the audience's reaction and the presentation of the performer's material are structured it remains to investigate how these two might mesh. Although neither the focus nor intention of this thesis is to develop a quantitative understanding of the interaction of stand-up performance it is useful at this point to take a broad overview of the area. Although it is an approach I do not want to sustain in the long run what I want to do below is substantiate my claim that the rhetorical format outlined above have a significant presence and importance in stand-up and provide a view of their possible spread. To this end the sections of texts in <u>Revelations</u> which proceeded each audience laugh were categorised using Heritage and Greatbatch's (1986) taxonomy.

The frequency of Heritage and Greatbatch's rhetorical formats in sections of the performance text followed by laughter is recorded in Table 7-1 below.

	Total n	Total %
Contrast	36	7.10
List	63	12.43
Puzzle-solution	52	10.34
Headline-punchline	1	0.20
Combination	16	3.16
Position Taking	30	5.92
Pursuit	28	5.52
All Formats	226	44.49
Misc	281	55.42
Total	507	100.01

Table 7-1: Frequency Distribution Of Rhetorical Formats

From this data it is apparent that a little under 50% of the 507 periods of audience laughter were associated with performance texts which utilised any of Heritage and Greatbatch's rhetorical styles. The rhetorical formats that did occur prior to audience action are predominantly concentrated in the first three of the format - Contrast, List and Puzzle-solution - which account for 67% (151 of 226) of all occurrences of rhetorical formats. This contrasts with Combination, Pursuit and Position Taking which account for a third (74 of 226) and Headline-punchline which is observable in only one instance.

These results are compared with those drawn from a pilot sample[15] (column 2) and with the results gained by Heritage and Greatbatch for M.P.s speaking at conference (column 3) and all speakers at conference (column 4) in Table 2.

	COMEDY		POLITICS	
	REVELATIONS	SAMPLE	M.P.s	ALL SPEAKERS
FORMAT (%)				
Contrast	7.1	17.9	24.8	24.6
List	12.4	22.2	8.0	6.5
Puzzle-solution	10.3	13.6	3.4	3.2
Headline-punchline	0.2	0.0	6.7	5.3
Combination	3.2	6.8	9.4	9.6
Position Taking	5.9	5.5	6.2	6.7
Pursuit	5.5	11.7	13.1	11.7
All Formats	44.6	77.7	71.6	67.6
Misc	55.4	22.2	28.4	32.4
Total (%)	100.0	99.9	100.0	100.0
Total (n)	507	162	596	1588

Table 7-2: Comparison Of Distribution Of Rhetorical Formats

At least five observations can be made about the data in Table 7-2:

1. The percentage of miscellaneous instances in Revelations is significantly higher than the results achieved from political speakers at conference. This is surprising given the results of the previous comedy sample which suggests a structure even more rhetorical than the political speech. At this stage it is tempting to link the apparent lower reliance on rhetoric to arguments surrounding feminine forms of stand-up (Rutter 1994) which would be more apparent in this study of Hicks, but the development and study of feminine forms is not the main concern of this thesis and further work must be undertaken at a later stage to explore whether this is so.

2. The use of lists to forecast an appropriate action point is higher in both Revelations and the sample of other comedy performances than for the political speakers which is not surprising when considering the range of functions that lists can play in humour as discussed above.

3. Examples of Headline-punchline are practically non-existent in the comedy performances which is perhaps to be expected when related to the specifically political function of this format. Headline-Punch line is about presenting a commitment to action, it is a demonstration of intent, it is the rhetorical equivalent of a manifesto pledge. Comedians tend not to be motivated towards currying favour with such pledges to action, the favour a stand-up comedian wins is gained through the quality of their actions during their performance rather than the procrastination of political oratory. Audiences tend not to be looking toward comedians to provide anything outside or beyond the performance environment in the way that the same audience might with a politician.

4. Although the frequency of the rhetoric tools described is much lower for Revelations than for the other text (approximately 1/3) the occurrence of Position-Taking is approximately equal. This is perhaps linked not to humour per se but to Hicks' own style of mixing political didacticism and humour. Hicks often deals with political subjects and leaves us, as member of the audience, in no doubt as to what side of the fence he positions himself on.

5. A higher level of Puzzle-solution is apparent in the comedy texts than in political speeches. A number of the examples of the puzzle-solution format from the comedy samples were traditional type jokes whether they be riddle or incongruous statement (puzzle) followed by resolution punchline (solution) and this was perhaps to be expected because of the nature of humour structures. However there are also instances in which the frame of the stand-up comedy convention turned apparently neutral statements into puzzles, or in which the puzzle is in fact a rhetorical question the implied answer being part of the joke text (see above).

7.4 STAND-UP SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

Taken together, these five points suggest that although Heritage and Greatbatch's list of rhetorical formats are found in stand-up, there are elements of the performance which are not explained by their system. Although Heritage and Greatbatch's system of techniques provides a specific understanding of political speaking is can be also seen more generally as an outline of the general features of podium talk. To develop an understanding of the specificalities of stand-up it is necessary to move on from their work and explore the existence of a number of stand-up specific devices. Therefore, I want to introduce four new stand-up specific techniques which demonstrate more specific relevance to the comedy field. Again, in turn, I will define and provide examples of the additional categories of:

- Re-Incorporations
- Alliteration and Assonance
- Intonation
- Adoption of Voices

7.4.1 Re-Incorporations

A re-incorporation, in this sense, is the reappearance of one element of a joke (usually not a punchline) later on in a stand-up performer's set. That is a comedian will introduce a topic at some point during their performance and then drop it only to return to it later in the act. The re-incorporation then becomes a signposted point for laughter. The thematic reappearance of a line, idea or comment is recognised by the audience as an appropriate spot for laughter to follow.

Usually these two moments are separated by minutes, although the separation can span the length of an act[16] making it difficult to give full examples. Extract 7-27 below, from Woody Allen, gives an unusually short example of this technique. In this example it is the appearance of a paraphrased version (line 26-7) of, *And there's a law in New York State against driving with a conscious moose on your fender - Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays* (line 8-10) which contributes to precipitating the laughter that follows it.

Extract 7-27: Woody Allen (Simplified)

```
 1   WA:   I shot a moose once. I was hunting up state New York
 2         and I shot a moose. and I strap him onto the fender of my
 3         car and I'm driving home along the West Side highway.
 4         But what I didn't realise was that the bullet did not penetrate
 5         the moose, it just creased his scalp knocking him unconscious
 6         and I'm driving through the Holland tunnel
 7   Aud:  ((Laughter))
 8   WA:   and the moose woke up.
 9   Aud:  ((Laughter))
10   WA:   So I'm driving with a live moose on my fender
11   Aud:  ((Laughter))
12   WA:   and the moose is signalling for a turn, you know.
13   Aud:  ((Laughter))
14   WA:   And there's a law in New York State against driving       ⎤
15         with a conscious moose on your fender - Tuesdays,         ⎟
16         Thursdays and Saturdays.                                  ⎦
17   Aud:  ((Laughter))
18   WA:   And I'm very panicky and then it hits me, some friends
19         of mine are having a costume party. I'll go, I'll take the
20         moose, I'll ditch him at the party - it won't be my
21         responsibility.
22   Aud:  ((Laughter))
23   WA:   So I drive up to the party and I knock on the door. The
```

24		moose is next to me. My host comes to the door. I say
25		hello - you know the Solomons.
26	Aud:	((Laughter))
27	WA:	We enter. The moose mingles.
28	Aud:	((Laughter))
29	WA:	Did very well.
30	Aud:	((Laughter))
31	WA:	Scored.
32	Aud:	((Laughter))
33	WA:	Some guy was trying to sell him insurance for an hour and
34		a half.
35	Aud:	((Laughter))
36	WA:	12 o'clock comes. They give out prizes for the best costume
37		of the night. First prize goes to the Berkowitzes - a married
38		couple dressed as a moose.
39	Aud:	((Laughter))
40	WA:	The moose comes in second.
41	Aud:	((Laughter))
42	WA:	The moose is furious. He and the Berkowitzes lock antlers
43		in the living room.
44	Aud:	((Laughter))
45	WA:	They knock each other unconscious. Now I figure here's my
46		chance. I grab the moose, strap him on my fender and shoot
47		back to the woods, but I got the Berkowitzes.
48	Aud:	((Laughter))
49	WA:	So I'm driving along with two Jewish people on my fender.
50		**And there's a law in New York State**
51	Aud:	((Laughter))
52	WA:	**Tuesdays, Thursdays and especially Saturday.**
53	Aud:	((Laughter))
54	WA:	The following morning....

In any form of analysis based on traditional humour theory the audience laughter of lines 51 and 53 is difficult to fully explain. For example one approach may suggest that the idea of bylaws prohibiting the carrying of people on cars on specific days raises laughter because of the incongruity of the image. However, this text based analysis is limited. It cannot explain the relationship of line 49-52 to the rest of the quoted passage or suggest why the phrase is reused by Allen and why this technique marks the joke as in anyway different from its use in lines 14-16. A more contemporary example can be found in Extract 7-28. Here Tony Burgess uses re-incorporation when talking about the clichés that his father would use when talking to him.

Extract 7-28: Tony Burgess

```
 1   TB:   (          ) say stupid things.
 2          If I cut myself on a piece of paper - this really pisses me off.  ⌐
 3          I just wanna be alone for a while.                                  ⌐
 4          Me dad's just chirpin' on in the background,
 5          "Oh paper cuts them are the worst type of cuts, aren't they.
 6          They're only small but they're the worst type of cuts ya can
 7          get. They are the worst type of cuts ya can get."
 8          So I, erm, stabbed him with an army knife just to prove a point.
 9   Aud:  ((Laughter))
10   TB:   (Which would you say was worse?) If paper cuts are the
11          worst type of cuts you can receive why is it you don't see
12          more gangs armed with sheets of A4
13   Aud:  ((Laughter))
14   TB:   "Giz us all ya money punk,"
15   Aud:  ((Laughter))
16   TB:   "We've got a sheet of Basildon Bond (and we know what
17          to do) with it."
18   Aud:  ((Laughter))
19   TB:   Its one of these social clichés that. (If any) girl got pregnant
20          round our way at the age of thirteen. (Right away) me
21          dad's like,
22          "Oh, it's bloody disgusting. I mean how did she get pregnant
23          in the first place? I blame the parents."
24   Aud:  ((Laughter))
25   TB:   I'd keep those allegations to yourself
26   Aud:  ((Laughter))
27   TB:   "Thing is most parents don't know what's going on under
28          their very noses."
29          Yeah, I agree, dad. Er, pass us those Rizlas.
30   Aud:  ((Laughter))
31   TB:   "Oh and son."
32          Yeah, dad, yeah.
33          "Watch it with them Rizla papers. Might cut yourself.        ⌐
34   Aud:  ((Laughter))
```

Burgess' re-incorporation is somewhat more complex than Allen's in two ways. Firstly unlike Allen's re-incorporation Burgess's does not repeat phraseology but rather re-introduces a theme. Whereas Allen uses repetition of the phrase beginning "And there's a law in New York State..." Burgess' re-incorporation works with the reintroduction of the theme of paper cuts within a new context. Secondly, Burgess' re-incorporation takes place not after a continuation in a single narrative in the way that Allen's does but after a thematic diversion.

It is apparent hat although joke theory cannot recognise the relationship between both Allen's and Burgess' re-incorporational joking and the rest of the rest of the flow of the performance narrative. Because previous research into joking has tended to remove joking from its communicative and interactional surrounding it cannot create a framework which links these re-incorporations with their previous joking introduction. However, it is apparent that the comedy audience does this without any difficulty. When re-incorporations are used the audience can be seen to recognise the previous use of the reintroduced phrase and realise that this re-introduction is a request from the performer for laughter from the audience.[17]

7.4.2 Alliteration and Assonance

A number of authors have commented on the way that excessive rhyme or alliteration can itself be humorous. However, this is not my concern here as that is a method of joke production rather than a performance technique and indeed, the success of this technique relies a great deal on not being excessive. What I am suggesting is that, surprisingly often, joke punchlines are structured by the performer to include alliteration, assonance or, more rarely, rhyme. In the jokes to which I am referring the meaning communicated by the punchline, or laughter stimulus, is not reliant on the literary device used. The uses of this technique, like those already discussed, acts as a signpost to the audience. Its coincidence with the punchline of joke of other points of humour highlights that the comedian's turn is nearing completion and that laughter is the preferred response from the audience.

An example of the use of alliteration can be seen in Extract 7-29. Talking about the censorship of traditional children's rhymes Double delivers a complexly organised sequence in which he offers a list of three different rhymes (line 6, 8, and 12). The first two of these stand in contrast to the third which in turn also uses alliteration and forms the punchline to the joking sequence.

Extract 7-29: Oliver Double

```
1    OD:    'Parently lot of this censorship comes from these born again
2           Christian groups in The Sates right, >an' this is true.  Read
3           about this recently.< They want to ba:n primary school text
4           books cause they say they turn little kids to depravity.  Righ-
5           An a couple of genuine examples (that I        wanted to r-)
6           "Rain, rain, go away come again another day," coz thy say that's
7           a prayer to the pagan weather god.  Right.  They also want to get
8           rid of "Lavender blue, dilly dilly, Lavender green," coz they say
9           its turning little kids to homosexuality coz of the last line "When
10          I am king, dilly dilly, you shall be queen." Well, y'know if they
11          can make that out of that, what are they going to make out of
12          "Little boy ↑blue come blow on your ↓ho::rn"?
13   Aud:                                            hHHHHHHHHHHHh
14   OD:                                                         That's
15          what I wanna know.
```

The words "little boy blue come blow your horn" uses a repetition of "b" which have been italicised in the transcript. This is further emphasised by Double by his placing of stress on "blue" and the "b" of "blow" (line 12). This combination of rhetorical techniques leads successfully into audience laughter. Although simpler in construction a similar use of alliteration can be seen in Extract 7-30. Here Enfield uses the repetition of "s" to signpost his point of completion.

Extract 7-30: Harry Enfield

```
1    HE:    But, Er:: (0.6) But when I was ↓born a- I was so UGly
2           that my mother was sent to ↑prison for seven years for
3           having ↓me.
```

I want to suggest that the a basic joke text (Perhaps: I was such an ugly baby that my mother was put in jail) is made more successful in performances by the alliteration of 'sent' and 'seven' and the sibilant in 'years' and 'prison'. The simple replacement of 'seven' by 'eight' would, I believe reduce the success of the joke and its replacement by 'six' would also effect the humorous response, as whilst the alliteration is maintained the assonance with 'prison' and 'seven' is lost.. Further, it may also be the case that if 'sent to' was replaced by 'put in' - which retains an alliteration, the joke would suffer as the technique becomes more apparent.

Further example is taken from the Ben Elton discussed as Extract 7-10 above. Like Enfield the repeated sound is the sibilant.

Extract 7-31: Ben Elton

```
1   BE:    .hhh I confidently expect to see my ↑sofa(.)<
2          advertised on the ↓telly
3   Aud:        HHHHHHHHHHHh
4   Aud:              xxxxxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXXXXXXxx
5   BE:          The Ben's      (6.0)      The Ben's (.) Sofa (.)
6          Share (.) ↑Opportunity
```

Finally Jo Brand in Extract 7-32 also uses alliteration to support her punchline. Like Double she creates her signposts by the alliteration of three words. However, unlike Double this, in keeping with stand-up's tendency to greater complexity than other forms of podium speaking, the use of alliteration coincides is combined with a position taking (line 10).

Extract 7-32: Jo Brand

```
1   JB:    I even- even though t.a ↓Cindy Craw↑ford had joined in
2          as well cos I saw paper erh yesterday an:: i there was a
3          headline, "Cindy Crawford, My worse nightmare." (0.5)
4          .hhh an I though' what's that? ↓Nu↑clear War? (0.4)
5          Kids starvin in ↑Africa? (0.7) No:p ↓Spot on he face
6          on the day of a photoshoot.
7   Aud:                              h-HHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhh
8   JB:                            Good one there Cindy.
9          (1.4)
10         Politically correct or what? Ya fuckin thin ole fucker.    ] ←℗
11         (.) ur::m::
12  Aud:       HHHHHHHHHHHH
13  Aud:          xx - xx -xxxxx-x-x
14  Aud:            ((whistles))
```

7.4.3 Intonation

The last of the stand-up specific techniques I want to explore is, even more than the others, performance specific. That is it is only evident when the joke text becomes a performance. It is not part of the text of the joke and therefor cannot be understood by joke theory or other previous form of humour research. However, the use of intonation is no less important to the understanding of stand-up joking because of this. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the study of performance and the performance arena is the only site of study which can hope to give a full understanding of stand-up and as such the use of intonation is an essential area of study.

One of the most striking and omnipresent characteristic of stand-up comedians' performance is their use of intonation. The changes of pitch in their delivery is used not only to provide a varied and interesting tune to their script, but also - and more fundamentally for the comedian and my argument here - to signpost the completion of jokes and create an invitation to laugh. Also notable about the use of intonation in stand-up is that more than any other format its level of presence means that is work in regularly operates in tandem with other formats.

There is often present a contrast in tone between the principal stress in the sentence that sets up the joke and a principal stress in the punchline. This usually takes the form of a fall in intonation[18] followed by a rise. This can be seen in Extract 7-33 in which Oliver Double talks about the joys of swearing.

Extract 7-33: Oliver Double

1	OD:	Apart form anything else I like swearin'. Y'know I enjoy a
2		good swea::::r Y'know >its great fun swearin'.< ( )
3		Obviously it pisses my mum off which is a great top reason to
4		do it. I was going over to (Lincoln seriously) I was going along
5		in the car with her trying to annoy her, right, I was going "Bu:m,
6		poo, willy, wee-wee, dickcheeseontoast, >knobby, knobby,
7		knob.< Right.
8	Aud:	HHH

9	OD:	An she goes, "Oh, Oliver (.) What <u>have</u> I do to
10		deserve ↓<u>you</u>? I said, "Ya ↓<u>fu</u>cked ↑<u>da</u>:dt."
11	Aud:	hHHHHHHHHHHh
12	Aud:	x-x
13	OD:	She quite liked that one .has w.hell actually.
14	Aud:	H-H-H

In line 10 Double delivers his punchline, "You fucked dad" which is followed by loud audience laughter. Notable about the way in which the line is delivered is the contrast in intonation between the last two words. "Fucked" receives a downwards intonation while "Dad" is said with a notable rise. Moreover this contrast is highlighted with the emphasis placed on the beginning of each of the words. Thus the change in stress and the contrast in intonation combine to signpost the end of the turn and that the preferred response is immediate audience laughter. The same pattern of a fall and rise contrast in intonation supported by the stressing on the pertinent words is found in Extract 7-34. Here Monkhouse is talking about the Glastonbury Festival which had taken place the week before in very hot weather. The festival had been shown on television for the first time.

Extract 7-34: Roger Monkhouse

1	RM:	Was it me though- cuz- >(pictures) of Glastonbury on Channel
2		Four.< Was it <u>me</u> (.) or was it unduly cynical of Right Guard
3		Antiperspirant to advertise their product during the commercial=
4	Aud:	hHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH=
5		=HHHHHHHHHhhh.
6	RM:	=break when Channel Four are showing Glaston-. I mean that's
7		sick isn't it that. That's like advertising for ↓<u>BU</u>PA durin'
8		↑<u>C</u>asualty.
9	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhhh

In line 7 Monkhouse stresses the beginning of "BUPA" and gives it a downward intonation compared to the rest of the sentence. This is contrasted by him with the upward rise for "Casualty" in line 8 which again has the stress placed on the beginning of the word.

In both Extract 7-33 and Extract 7-34 the contrast in intonation does not highlight a contrast in ideas. Unlike the use of contrast as a means of rhetorical signposting discussed earlier in this chapter the contrast is not text-based but performance-based. Monkhouse is not offering a contrast between the private healthcare company and the television medical drama just as Double is not contrasting "fucked" and "dad". These contrasts can only be noted and there use observed by an analysis of the individual live performance.

7.4.4 Adoption of Voices

Jokes, both those told in natural conversation and those told in a professional stand-up context, feature the adoption of accents, mimicry of vocal attributes, and the creation of characters through vocal qualities. These changes in voice act not only as indicators of who said what in the telling of a narrative but, in stand-up especially, as tools for ordering the interaction. I want to suggest that stand-up comedians use the adoption of voices in two different ways in performance to enhance the success of a joke. The first of these is stand-up specific and can be labelled *voice as costume*. The second, *voice as prop*, is found in both natural conversation as well as stand-up.

Voice as costume is a technique employed by stand-up comedians who adopt a voice different to their own ordinary diction for the duration of their act. Such a technique is employed by comedians who base a lot of humour around the characters they create for the routine and so they may have only one character which they adopt as their performance persona (as in Emo Philips) or they may adopt differing characters for different routines in their whole act (such as Rowan Atkinson as Mr. Bean). What is important is that the voice is used by the comedian to create a character which they play for the entirety of a narrative sequence.[19]

The term voice as prop refers to the voice that is adopted by a stand-up performers for only a short period of time within a stand-up sequence. It is usually associated

with either the quotation of a character in a narrative (as in Extract 7-35 taken from Greg Proops' show at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe) or the creation of a character in a narrative (as in Extract 7-37). As part of telling his story Proops uses two different instances of voice as prop the first (line 7-8) is his idea of how he must sound to the Edinburgh taxi driver. This he contrasts with the second instance of voice as prop which is a caricature of the taxi driver's Scottish accent (line 10).

Extract 7-35: Greg Proops (Simplified)

1   I was doin the festival. Every night I was doin a show. Every
2   night (.) after the show I would get in a cab ask to go to my flat and they
3   would take me fuckin ANYWHERE but my fla:t.
4   Ended up in Aberdeen half the time, you guys. They couldn't
5   understand me, I couldn't understand them I couldn't understand their burr
6   they couldn't understand my west coast I must ov just sounded like THIS
7   **nyee nyee nya nyee n SHIT n- nyaa nyaa nyaa nyaa WRO::ONG**
8   **WaY: Nya nya n turn here tarten dude.**
9   Coz this is what they sounded like to me
10   **Hu her ha:r:::: ity a u aaa-uh:: uhah:: ar:ahah u a SPECCY GET.**

In a similar fashion Sean Hughes uses voice as prop to quote another person who he has contact with as part of the comedy narrative. However, in contrast to Proops Hughes only portray one character but he offers more instances of this characters speech. Hughes begins his sequence by talking about being alone in the house while a child and the fear that someone is in the house with you. He talks about shouting around corners to scare the imagined intruder and checking in cutlery drawers for no apparent reason.

Extract 7-36: Sean Hughes

```
 1   SH:    An ya there like an >the f the- the fact< is like y'know. A used
 2          to ↓luv it as well like cuz- >the thing is< if there's a psycho in
 3          your house (0.7) <ya dhhead> (0.6)
 4   Aud:                              hhhhhhh
 5   SH:                              Yer j- Yer ↑dead
 6   Aud:   hhhh
 7   SH:    >WHAT'S IT DO?  Ya gonna OPEN the closet an he's there
 8          with a hatchet an e goes< (.)
 9          "Ya got me hhh!"                                        ]←Ⓤ
10   Aud:             HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHhhh
11   Aud:                       XXXXXXXxxxx
12   SH:                              "Nor:: here's the        ]
13          hatchhhet ya go' (me)"                              ]←Ⓤ
14   Aud:             hhhhhhhhhhhh
15   SH:    >"I wuz gonna ↑hide under the bed wouldjav looked under   ⌐
16             there?< Un:: Yeah:::                                  |
17   Aud:             hhhhhhhhh                                      |←Ⓤ
18   SH:    I was gonna HAtchet you to d- °(oh dear)°.               |
19   Aud:                       hhhhhhhhhh                           |
20   SH:                              (.) Arr: Hey::"               ⌐
21   Aud:      hhhhhh
```

Hughes offers three instances of voice as prop (line 9, 12-13, 15-20) which form the basis of the imagined conversation with his intruder. Each of these are followed by audience laughter and yet cannot be fully explained by an analysis that does not include the performance of the humorous sequence rather than the text itself.

Whereas both Proops and Hughes use voice of prop as a way of quoting characters in a narrative in Extract 7-37 Bill Hicks employs a slightly different approach. He uses voice as prop to play the character in his story rather than quote them as he plays the roles of an imaginary alter ego and a (American) child. Hicks alternates between the two characters for the period of the imagined dialogue:

Extract 7-37: Bill Hicks (Simplified)

1	BH:	I am available for children's parties >by the way<
2	Aud:	((Laughter))
3	Aud:	((Applause))
4	BH:	Kno some o ya'll might have a young um coming of
5		↓a::ge an not want to got to the traditional >clown
6		balloon animal (rap) this year< (.) might want to look
7		me up (.) ↑Beelze ↓bozo (0.5)
8	Aud:	((Laughter))
9	BH:	Clown form ↓hell
10	Aud:	((Laughter))
11	BH:	(Hyuck) It's Beelze ((Adopting American South accent))
12		**bozo ↓tim::e. (1.1) Tell me some'in who here outta you** ⌐ ←(VaP)
13		**younguns (.) has never ↑smoked a ciga↓rette? >C'mere** ⌐
14		**↑kids<**
15	Aud:	((Laughter))
16	BH:	**Whatsya na:me.** ⌐ ←(VaP)
17		(("Child's" voice)) **To:mmy.** ⌐ ←(VaP)
18		((South)) **Tommy. How ↓o::le dar ↑ya? (1.1)** ⌐ ←(VaP)
19		((Child's)) **↑Five.** ⌐ ←(VaP)
20		((South)) **Five years old ! an you mean to tell Beelzebozo** ⌐ ←(VaP)
21		**you not snokin cigarettes ↑yet?** ⌐
22	AUD	((Laughter))
23	BH:	**C'mere Tommy. p.hh p.h p.h p.h** ((Wheezes twice)) ⌐ ←(VaP)

Hicks alternates between the two characters playing them both in conversation but a more simple approach is adopted by Sean Hughes in Extract 7-36.

It is apparent that these additional rhetorical devices will have wildly varying presence within any one performance. For example, by the very nature of introduction, intermission and re-introduction, re-incorporations will be very infrequent when compared with the use of contrasting intonation. This does not mean to say that they are any less valid when considering the negotiation of turn taking that goes on between performer and audience. However, to examine empirically just one of the four formats I have introduced, it can be seen that voice as prop provides added indication of signposting that is not included in Heritage and Greatbatch.

Indeed adding Voice as Prop (VaP) to the list of rhetorical formats used in Revelations reveals that this format is by far the most common single method of signposting points of humour. Table 3 shows that almost 50% of pre-laughter texts

included VaP (this is approximately equal to the sample findings). This means that VaP was included in as many humorous segments as the other seven formats though not necessarily the same ones.

	Voiced (n)	% of Format
Contrast	15 of 36	41.60
List	36 of 63	57.14
Puzzle-solution	18 of 52	34.60
Headline-	0 of 1	0.00
Combination	5 of 16	31.25
Position Taking	5 of 30	16.67
Pursuit	13 of 28	46.43
All Formats	92 of 226	40.71
Misc	148 of 281	52.67
Total	240 of 507	47.34

Table 7-3: Distribution Of VaP Amongst Other Formats

Further, the frequencies of VaP within the other formats were loosely grouped together with the exception of position-taking which again may be linked to Hicks' keenness to accept responsibility for his political stance taking.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has demonstrated that there are a number of rhetorical and performative tools that are used by comedians as part of the acts. Further, it has shown that these techniques are strongly linked to audience laughter and account for instances of laughter which cannot be explained by previous approaches to joking and laughter.

Taking this, and its associated support for my argument for seeing stand-up as an interactive process, it is possible to gain insight into the manner in which text,

performance and audience fit together during live stand-up. It is possible to take any piece of stand-up performance and see its flow in a manner not previously possible. As an example I will look in detail at Extract 7-38.

Extract 7-38: Chris Addison

```
1   CA:   Pre-sliced mushrooms!  (0.8)                              ←①
2         Why are they there?  (0.7)                                ←②
3         What room have they on our supermarket shelves? =         ←③
4   Aud:  = h-h
5   CA:   Wa- who are they for? Is there actually a market of
6         people who go, "I rea:lly fancy some mushrooms ( ) an
7         I just ca::n't be a:rsed
8   Aud:                    h-h
9   CA:                        slicing them!"                       ←VP   ←P
10  Aud:                              hHHHHHhh
11  CA:                                    "(The
12        fa:g!) God! (0.7) How >boring!<"                 ←PT      ←VP
13  Aud:                    -h-            h-h-h
14  CA:   >How they grow the fuckers anyhow? What do they do
15        .hh Do they, do they slice the spores               ←A
16        or do they grow them under ↑ra↓zors? <=              ←B
17  Aud:  =hHHHHHHHhhh
18  CA:                    I think personally, I think its for
19        vegetarians who have a >very high, erh, mushroom          ←S
20        intake but low energy<
21  Aud:                    -h-
22  CA:                        <"I (.) mus::t (.) chop (.)>
23        mushroo::ms:"                                         ←VP
24  Aud:              hHHHHH
25  Aud:              -x-x-x-x-x-x-x
26              ((Falls over))
27  CA:                        "Oh,God too late.  Feed me
28        Quorn! Feed me Quorn!"                                ←VP
29  Aud:                    HHHHHHHhh
30  CA:                        Yeah, yeah.  What ya gonna
31        put (on your) black eye, mate, tofu?
32  Aud:                        -h-
33  CA:                        I don't think so.
34        Go on!                              ←A   ←①
35        Piss off!                           ←B   ←②      ←PT
36        An' take your Levellers t-shirt with ya.    ←③        ←Pursuit
37  Aud:                        HHHHHHH=
38  Aud:                    -x-
```

Employing the tools this chapter has outlined it becomes apparent that this short section from Addison's act is surprisingly complex in its organisation but still maintains a structure which is understandable and contributed to by the audience. At the opening of the extract Addison poses a question about why pre-sliced mushrooms have a place on supermarket shelves. This is evidently the first part of a puzzle-solution pair. It raises a question and involves the audience in the puzzle before supplying the answer. This puzzle takes up the first 15 lines of the extract while Addison cleverly postpones providing the solution while he plays with other ideas concerning pre-sliced mushrooms. As such this puzzle section is combined with a number of other techniques: There is a list of three (lines 1-3) two instances of adoption of a voice as prop (lines 6-9 and 11-12), and a contrast (lines 15-16). Each of these is followed by a period of isolated audience laughter.

The second part of the contrast coincides with the end of the puzzle sequence and as such it becomes a self-contained rhetorical unit whose completion allows the delivery of its solution after the audience laughter of line 17 dies out. Addison then delivers two further instance of voice as prop (lines 22-23 and 27-28) both of which are followed by loud bursts of audience laughter and the first also linked to applause. The extract finished with a three line (34-36) move which is composed of four separate rhetorical techniques. Addison offers a contrast between "on" and "off" as well as a list of three. The third part of the list is a pursuit linked to the first two parts of the list and taken together the whole list is a position taking. The layering of these performance techniques ensures that Addison receives loud audience laughter and some applause immediately after he finished his turn.

The extract demonstrates not only that the techniques explore in this chapter are present in stand-up performances but that they are linked to the laughter of audiences. This suggest that although such stand-up is notably (and regularly) more complex than other forms of podium talk this complexity is something that the audience too is involved in and understands as a natural part of the interactional organisation.

Notes

[1] For a brief review of joke theory see Chapter 2.

[2] Fine (1983) argues laughter in group situations not only becomes part of the group's culture but acts as a method through which cohesion is developed.

[3] Or if they do, they do so in a significantly different way.

[4] It is worth noting that the delivery of contrast completed in line 12-13 is recognised such that the audience begin to laugh before Monkhouse has completely finished his turn. The use of the tag line "do they?" (line 13) is superfluous to the joke itself but is useful in the performance as it minimises any potential silence during the change in speakers.

[5] Atkinson uses the term "claptrap" to label such rhetorical techniques used to encourage applause from an audience. (1984, p.47)

[6] In many joke lists of three are built into the narrative structure. In *Sack's Dirty Joke* there are three sisters, three brothers and three doors to listen at. Similarly, British ethnic jokes traditionally feature an Englishman, Irishman and a Scotsman. This is because three is the minimum number for any action or situation to be introduced (1st example), established as the norm (2nd example), and then humorously transgressed (3rd example). Any less examples would not establish any state of events as normal within the narrative logic of the joke, and any more examples would be tautological to the telling and understanding of the humour.

[7] This is not to suggest that comedians do not use stock line to put down hecklers but that their placement within the act is responsive to the behaviour to the audience rather than having a pre-planned place.

[8] This segment of performance is effective for a number of reasons in addition to its use of a list. These reasons will be discussed below where this extract is returned to.

[9] The importance of rhetoric as a method of maintaining an audience's attention is emphasised by Atkinson (1984).

[10] Burgess is from Salford an inner city area with a high crime level. Like the residents of many University cities and towns, young native Salfordians traditionally dislike the students.

[11] There is a further element to be discussed below which adds to the success of this apparently simple turn.

[12] This complexity in which distinct rhetorical formats are combined in a single term appears more common in stand-up than in political speech making.

[13] This point will be returned to in the next chapter in which the ending of acts are discussed.

[14] According to Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) position taking may be either simple or complex: Simple position turning takes the basic form of statement → evaluation → applause without any additional rhetorical technique. Whereas in complex position-taking, the statement made will use one or more of the list, contrast, puzzle-solution, headline-punchline formats. Due to the tendency for greater complexity of rhetoric in stand-up as a rule (e.g. Extract 7-13, Extract 7-23) I see no advantage in retaining this distinction.

[15] A similar categorisation was performed on a random sample of stand-up comedy extracts drawn from 37 extracts from 20 different performers of varying styles, countries of origin, audience sizes, periods, and gender. This sample contain 162 instances of audience laughter.

[16] Ben Elton takes re-incorporation beyond the act length limit by referring in a routine on adverts to a famous routine he had done in the past about people fighting for a double seat to themselves on trains.

> It took place on a train, OK, that was the advert, OK. 'S beautiful train, it a train in heaven. Its so gorgeous it should be going from St. Peter's gate to the thrown of god it's so splendid right. And its rolling through the most gorgeous countryside and everyone on board is all lazing and stretched out an they're all reading their books and playing chess and nodding off. And never mind the double seat they've all got four seats to themselves.

[17] Discussing re- incorporations whilst talking to the improvisational comedian Neil Malarkey during my research he told me that when teaching improv and theatre sports he advised performers to go back to something they had said before in the performance when short of ideas.

[18] Following standard conversation analysis notation (see Appendix 1) upward and downward shifts in intonation are indicated by arrows (↑ and ↓) prior to the change.

[19] I don't wish to dwell on this performance technique here beyond highlighting its existence. This I do for a number of reasons: Firstly, the adoption of voice as costume takes stand-up away from is position as the ground zero of performance comedy. The overt adoption of character and the taking on of costume which is often associated with it makes the step from stand-up, which has been the focus of this thesis, to a more theatrical style of performance. Secondly, because of its rarity especially among the performers who contributed to this study, it is uncertain what effects, if any, the adoption of a voice as a costume has on both the ordering and delivery of performance and the relationship this precipitates with the audience.

CHAPTER 8

"THANKS FOR STARING" - CLOSING OF STAND-UP PERFORMANCES

> [Frank Carson] was saying "I've never died - I've never died."
> "You must have!"
> "Never! Once they weren't listening, so I walked off ."
>
> Rob Newman in Cook 1994

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will demonstrate that the closings that stand-up comedians use to bring their acts to an end have a common structure. I will start by showing that this structure is in many ways similar to that found in natural conversation by researchers such as Schegloff and Sacks (1973), Button (1987) and Hopper (1992). Building on this I will explore the specificalities of stand-up closings noting the ways in which they are unique when compared with other forms of face to face closings. Using this I will put forward a basic eight turn structure of stand-up closings which can be seen to consistently order stand-up performances from the commencement of a closing through to the end of the act and beyond into the post-routine entrance of the compere. I will describe and provide illustration of these closing turns as well as giving examples of performances where the basic order has not been employed and explore the consequences of such deviant closings. Finally in this chapter I will provide both a graphic and rule-based method for understanding how the eight turns of the standard stand-up closing fit together in actual performance

In the same way as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) point out that a conversation "does not simply end, but is brought to a close" (p.289) stand-up comedy does not finish without any signalling that completion is imminent.[1] Just as the approach of joke

endings are signposted by comedians for their audiences so too are the impending closings of acts. As I will show, below closings are not recognised merely by an audience noticing that the comedian has stopped performing but by a set of established turns which forecast that the act is close and anything that follows that finish is to be considered as outside the performance. Further, not only can there be seen a distinct pattern in stand-up closings but also that they are regularly ordered and maintained by the turn taking that goes on between both performer and audience. This means that the closings of acts are not just understandable in retrospect from the defining feature of their position as final turn but also they are recognised and structured in real time by both comedian and audience together.

The closing of a stand-up set, like the closing of a natural conversation, involves active participation and negotiation by all parties involved in the local interaction. Whilst the "closing problem" (Schegloff & Sacks,1973, p.290), that of moving from ongoing talk to the end of talk and out of it, could in theory be solved in any number of ways in practice there is a regular pattern of moves which mark this feature of stand-up. Such an observation allows a return to a recurrent set of themes which inform much of this thesis in that although there may be variations of the presentation of closing patterns there is a commonality at the basis of them.[2]

The interactive sequences that I outline below can be seen to reoccur from performer to performer playing in front of a range of audience's in a range of venues. This allows an audience safely to discount as an ending silences that may happen throughout the act[3] (minimisation of risk) and the performer to rely on receiving an appropriate response to the end of their act (mutuality).

8.2 STAND-UP CLOSINGS AND CONVERSATION CLOSINGS

It is useful at this opening stage in this chapter to look briefly at the closing of a conversation (Extract 8-1) and hold it up to comparison with the closing of a stand-up performance (Extract 8-2). In this way I can once again reaffirm my argument about the close relationship between naturally occurring conversation and stand-up interaction as well as illustrating a basic common order to both types of closing on which to build and open out the arguments contained in this is chapter.

The conversation extract, taken from Button (1987) is offered by him as a classic formation (*"archetype closing"*, p.102) of a conversational closing in that it is made up of four conversational utterances (lines 4-7) which in turn make up a pair of closing turns (lines 4-5 and 6-7).[4]

Extract 8-1

(1) [Erhardt:8:4]

```
1           Pam:     hh Oh  ┌well than:ks  ┌any way┐
2           Vicky:          └I: 'm so so   └  rry Pa┘ :m
3                           (.)
4    *→     Pam:     Okay, =
5    *→     Vicky:   = Okay =
6    *→     Pam:     = Bye =
7    *→     Vickey:⁵ = Bye.
8                       . . . . end call . . . .
```

Button, 1987, p.102

The important work being done here, according to Button, is that the two pairs of turns follow on sequentially from each other and are both equally necessary in organising a successful closing. The first of the closing turns legitimises the continuation of the closing process by demonstrating that both parties understand and agree to the ongoing closing and that there are no "unmentioned mentionables" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p.303) yet to be introduced into talk. This then allows the second closing turn to take place and facilitates the successful completion of the move which terminates the conversation.

Comparing this structure to the example of a stand-up closing provided in Extract 8-2 it can be seen that a similar sort of ordering in being developed. The act does not suddenly stop nor the closing just happen. Rather, there is a change in the flow of he act as the focus of Elton's talk moves from comic narratives to a (self-)reflexive comment on the performance itself and the locality of the venue before beginning a closing sequence similar in many ways to Extract 8-1.

Extract 8-2: Ben Elton

```
1    BE:    .hh >Ladies 'n' gentlemen I gotta tell ta < (.) six nights at
2           Hammersmith⁶ am re::al proud. I hope ya enjoy:ed all the
3           new material .hh because I enjoyed doin it for you:.
4           I'd like to say thank you.
5           >My name's Ben Elton.<
6           GOOD NIGHT!
7    Aud:              xXXXXXXXXXXX
8                     ((   Whistles   ))
9                              :
10                             :
11               [Applause fades out on tape after 19 seconds]
```

This closing from Ben Elton is in no way out of the ordinary when compared to other closings for stand-up performances and can be seen to be made up from five separate parts. Elton makes a retrospective assessment of both his performance and the venue and announces his hope that it has been received favourably (lines 1-3), he then thanks the audience (line 4) before going onto his usual and recognisable two part closing namely, "My name's Ben Elton" (line 5) and his closing farewell in line 6. The final part of this closing is the long and loud audience applause in line 7.

Looking at sections of Extract 8-1 and Extract 8-2 side-by-side as in Table 8-1 it becomes apparent that the structure observable in the Elton closing closely parallels a single sided version of Button's closing.

1	**Pam:** hh <u>Oh</u> well <u>than</u>:ks any way	**BE:** I'd like to say <u>thank</u> you.
2	**Vicky:** I: 'm so sorry Pa:m	
3	**Pam:** <u>O</u>kay,	**BE:** >My name's Ben Elton.<
4	**Vicky:** <u>O</u>kay	
5	**Pam:** Bye	**BE:** GOOD NIGHT!
6	**Vickey:** Bye.	

Table 8-1: Comparison of Conversation and Stand-up Closing

In particular line 1 of both closings start with thanks from the person leading the closing to the other party in the interaction (Pam thanks Vicky and Elton thanks the audience) and line 5 of both extracts includes a terminal closing which is a farewell. Further, although the "okay" and "My name's Ben Elton" of the extracts may not appear to similar they both in effect manage to retain a consistent order between the two closing by separating the show of appreciation and the farewell remark.[7]

These similarities further reinforce my argument that stand-up interaction is a sub-set of conversation and as such displays many of the features of naturally occurring talk. However, as has been seen in previous chapters, this part of the sub-set often display differing or simplified structures and the closing of stand-up sets are no exception to this rule. Like other forms of podium talk and service encounters, in stand-up while the ordering of certain events, such as closings, may have "conversation-like" qualities the actual structure can be seen as something of a less complex form of face to face interaction. For example, to return to Table 8-1, an identical three part structure can be seen as far as far as the ordering of turns goes but there is evident a distinct lack of adjacency pairs within the stand-up closing.

As far as the comedian is concerned though this simplification of the normal conversation closing is something of a double edged sword. The simplification of the interactive structure of the closing may well place the performer in charge of the closing, allowing them to introduce it at their own convenience and pace for their own benefit but it also places the majority of responsibility for successful structuring and completion of the closing sequence on to the comedian. This means that unlike openings, which I have shown are more interactive in Chapter 6, the performer will find it almost impossible to repair an ill-ordered closing.

It is now possible safely to examine the structure of stand-up closing in the knowledge that they are derivative of conversational closing. However, despite sharing a similar ordering structure, like other forms of podium talk the distribution of talk is weighted in favour of the performer rather than the audience. This distribution places unusual additional responsibilities on the performer for maintaining the smooth running of the interaction. It is not surprising then that stand-up closings tend to be very tightly structured, that this structure is common from performer to performer and is recognised both by comedians and audience members alike. In order to explore this I will in the next section outline the basic eight turn structure of stand-up closings. I will give an overview of each of the separate turns and show how they are used and what part they play in the sequential development of the successful closing.

8.3 THE STRUCTURE OF CLOSINGS

One thing that becomes apparent when studying the closing of stand-up routines is their similarity. That is not only do they share the same features but they tend towards being in the same order and without much deviation or repetition. Unlike a number of the openings reproduced and discussed in Chapter 6 (for example Extract 6-9) which introduce features of opening in an unorthodox order and then proceed to repeat and/or repair this irregularity deviant closings are rare[8] and the consequences of them are, in stand-up comedy terms, great. This means that both performer and audience develop an awareness of how a closing is structured[9] and so can produce and respond to them.

Because of this regularity it is possible to identify a eight turn structure that forms the building blocks of stand-up routine closings:

Pre-closing in which the proximity to the end of the act is signposted by the comedian and a final humorous sequence it delivered. The performer uses one of two devices not necessarily to begin the closing sequence but to notify the audience that the closing sequence is imminent.

Audience laughter is the first active turn that the audience take during the typical stand-up closing[10] and marks the commencement of the closing proper.

Comment on audience is often the first element of the closing proper and the first of a number of reflexive comments made by various parties during the typical closing sequence. Typically the comedian will make some remark on the audience commenting on their quality or making a locally specific observation.

Re-introduction in which the performer repeats the name by which they were introduced to the audience at the beginning of the act.

Appreciation is the apparently compulsory turn in which a performer will thank the audience before moving on to their closing turn.

Exclamatory closing is usually the last thing said by a performer before they leave the stage. It makes use of standard British closing phrases such as, "goodnight", "bye", "cheers", etc. but unlike their standard use in everyday conversation these closing words are usually emphasised both by amplitude and stress.

Audience applause which accompanies the exit of the comedian from the stage.

Compere's outro which is the first element within the flow of the stand-up to stand outside the performance of the comedian. It can be recognised as the first turn taken by the compere after the comedian's exit and it often a reflexive comment on the performer who has just left the stage.

Like the structure of openings the turns that make up a standard closing are typically sequential but not necessarily linear. That is each of these turns is discrete and follows on from the previous one but are not necessarily always performed in the exact order suggested by the listing above. However, before I look at the ordering of these turns I will first look at each of these turns individually and in more detail giving particular emphasis to the more complex pre-closing.

8.3.1 Pre-closings

Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have pointed out that conversation closing commence with the introduction of a "pre-closing" (p.303), a non-topical utterance such as, "well", "OK", or "so" which because it introduces no new topic of conversation into an ongoing interaction allows another party a "'free' turn" (p.304) with which they can introduce any the previously unmentioned mentionables. If no further topics are introduced then the proper closing of the conversation can take place. In a similar manner to this the closing of stand-up comedy is signalled before the actual closing begins. The pre-closing acts not only as a signpost to the audience that the act has begun to move towards its end but also as a cue to the imminent appropriateness of applause.[11]

However, unlike Schegloff's pre-closings, this turn in stand-up is not a suggestion to close nor an indication that closing of a conversation is desired by one party. The comedy pre-closing indicates that the act is going to close and that closing will happen after the closing sequence. Unlike the conversations reported by Button (1987) there is no moving out of a stand-up closing once it has been signposted by the performer. The audience do not have the option of introducing new topics into the interaction nor bringing in new mentionables as they might in a natural conversation. The option to close remains firmly the prerogative, and responsibility, of the performer.[12]

The most basic method of starting the closing of a stand-up routine is for the performer literally to announce to the audience that they closing section of their set is about to commence. This can take a very straight forward form as in Extract 8-3 below in which as part of the ongoing act the comedian announces their intention to finish the performance soon. This announcement is placed within the flow of the act on usually integrated into a change of topic as the performer moves towards the final section of joking of their act. Bigpig announces that he is going to finish his act as a *fait accompli* which once again reinforces the upper hand of the performer in placing the closing sequence.

Extract 8-3: Martin Bigpig

```
1    MB:   Anyroad.  That's ↑all am gonna ↓do:: (.)
```

The performance context of this act is useful to mention in that the performance, and hence the closing, was largely improvised by Bigpig. He hadn't been booked to perform that evening but had turned up at the venue looking to do a short spot with which to try out a new radio microphone he had bought. Despite this improvisational nature of the performance and its brevity compared to Bigpig's full set, he manufactures a well formed standard closing (which is quoted more fully in Extract 8-13) reinforcing the applicability of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's observation (1974) that order in talk is locally organised to stand-up comedy.

However, unlike Schegloff and Sacks' pre-closings such announcements tend not figure immediately before the closing of a set but instead as introductions to the final section of the stand-up performance. For example in Extract 8-4 and Extract 8-5 both Brand and Monkhouse announce that the sequence they are about to start is going to finish their act as well as begin their final section of humour. This in itself is noticeably different from the content of stand-up openings in which the absence of humour is conspicuous.

Extract 8-4: Jo Brand

```
1    JB:    Uh::m so  what I'll do is I- I'll finish off with a little
2           something for the ↓boys.  >I think so.< ↑Hay ↑yes, let's talk
3           about periods:.  Hurrah!
```

Jo Brand commences a closing section that is organised thematically around menstruation by marking it as the beginning of the closing of her act as the part of her set that will "finish off". She announces her intention to close before beginning a pre-closing humour sequence. Similarly Monkhouse combines the announcement of his intention to close with the commencement of his finial sequence.

Extract 8-5: Roger Monkhouse

```
1    RM:    An' I read this in "The Guardian" recently -
2           I might finish on this actually -
```

He does however deliver his announcement almost parenthetically as he begins the final section of his act and then only half a line into it delivers the casual, "I might finish on this". This serves to emphasise the duality of the announcement of intent to close: it serves both as a literal signpost from the performer to the audience that the act is beginning to close but is also functions as a device to ease change of topic from one set of thematic humour to the next.

Extract 8-6: Roger Monkhouse

1	RM:	An' I read this in "The Guardian" recently -
2		I might finish on this actually -
3		I read this in "The Guardian" right, so fuck it must be
4		true ( ). Nowadays. Right. Nowadays in certain parts
5		of the country because family planning clinics and G.P.s
6		are increasingly weary or prescribing contraceptives to the
7		under sixteens. Young teenagers in certain parts of the
8		country are now having to resort to using Mars bar
9		wrappers as condoms, right.
10	Aud:	hHHHHhhhhh
11	RM:	Which is a very disturbing
12		thought. That is nasty isn't it Mars bar wrappers an
13		particularly its disturbing to think young teenagers
14		nowadays have penises that big quite frankly.
15	Aud:	HHHHHHHhhhh
16	RM:	The little
17		scamps. Coz in my day, I seem to remember, in my
18		day a finger a Fudge used to be enough.
19	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHh
20	Aud:	x-x-x-x x-x
21	RM:	An' you
22		didn't spoil your appetite during foreplay as well.
23		My name's Roger Monkhouse.
24		You've been a fun audience.
25		Thanks very much. Goodnight!
26	Aud:	x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxx=
27	Aud:	((Cheers))
28	Comp:	Roger
29		Monkhouse
30	Aud:	=xxxxxxxxXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x-
31	Aud:	((Cheers))

Right margin annotations:
- Lines 2:] Pre-closing
- Lines 3–18: Final Humorous Sequence

A similar announcement can be seen also in the open mike spot done by a new amateur comedian, playing at The Frog and bucket for the first time, Chris Hughes. The joking immediately before the commencement of Extract 8-7 has been about bizarre and ridiculous ways to die. Hughes shifts this slightly for his closing section by talking about a man who was found having committed suicide by sawing half way through his neck (and suggesting how he might have come to do this and carpentry tips which might have improved his chances of getting all the way through). With a structure identical to the semi-professional Monkhouse, Hughes begins the final humorous section of his set, stops half a line through the first sentence, and announces his intention to close with, "I'll finish with this" before carrying on with the pre-closing humour.

Extract 8-7: Chris Hughes

```
1    CH:    An::: >but probably the wors' one< °I'll finish with this° (0.5)
2           as a moral to you ↑all.  Is there w'z I guy I heard about, who
3           was foun' dead >he committed suicide< uhm with a ↑saw >a
4           carpenter's saw< half way through his neck.
```

This format of integrating the announcement of intention to close with the commencement of the closing humour sequence can be seen to operate in Extract 8-8 but the method of announcing intention to close is slightly different. Whereas the comedians in the above extracts signposted that closure was becoming immanent and that they are going to finish the act, Porter uses as more apologetic turn of phrase by excusing her self from the stage.[13]

Extract 8-8: Lucy Porter

```
1    LP:    Well, I'm gonna go off now coz I'm gonna meet my friend
2           Alex.
```

However, this does not effect the way in which the announcement of intent to close is recognised and understood by the audience in the venue.[14] Neither does the unusual reversal of subject in the Roger Monkhouse's closing in Extract 8-9 in which rather than announcing that he is going to finish or that he is going to leave the stage he suggests that it is the audience that is going to leave first.[15]

Extract 8-9: Roger Monkhouse

```
1    RM:    Er::m, j- Jus' one little word before ya go
```

The intention to close is often announced but remains separated from the final closing sequence (discussed below) by a section of act. This section can be significant in its duration so long as sufficient signposting is given by the performer to the audience of its role in the closing sequence. This is found in stand-up routines

in the use of reintegration as a closing move. This involves the comedian returning to a topic covered earlier in their set and using that return to as a rhetoric device.[16] This topic might be aural or physical and may or may not has been flagged earlier as a point that would be returned to.[17]

This is a recognised form of initiating a closing of conversation and its use in stand-up can be seen to parallel Schegloff and Sacks' (1979) observation of the manner in which conversation closings "make use of conversationally developed materials" (p.310). The example they provide is one of a telephone conversation in which talk of the television programme Daktari reappears as part of the pre-closing sequence.

Extract 8-10

> B: Are you watching Dakta:ri/
> A: N:no
> B: Oh gosh Officer Henry is ul-locked in the cage wi- (0.4) wi' the lion,
> hheh

And several minutes later, the caller initiates the closing with

> A: Okay, I letcha go back tuh watch yer Daktari

<div align="right">Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p.311</div>

A similar use of re-integration in stand-up which uses a topic introduced towards the beginning of the interaction and then returned to as a method of opening up the closing can be seen in Extract 8-11. In this example Oliver Double introduces a topic, in this case a joke in which he pulls a paperback out of the back of his trousers after claiming that everyone go one novel inside them:

Extract 8-11: Oliver Double (Simplified)

> 1 OD: It's funny when you do this sort of gig, cuz, y'know,
> 2   you go on an an and like, a an an ev'rybody's thinkin', "Is
> 3   this guy good, or is he <u>shit</u>. Right. An so you do top jokes
> 4   a the beginnin' of the act, right, and the don't really get the
> 5   proper response. So in. Just for example, jus for example.
> 6   That joke with the book, ya know, I'm just saying, right,

7		that joke with the book, right. That was <u>fuckin'</u> awsome
8		that was! Now I don't think it got the proper response. I'm
9		gonna put that back in there. I'm gonna do that same joke
10		later in that act and <u>Next</u> time I wan't some proper fuckin'
11		response, alright?

Whilst doing this though Double provides extensive indication that not only will this topic reappear in the act but what sort of response is preferred for it. He alerts that audience to the fact that he's "gonna do that same joke later in that act" (line 9-10) and that he expects a better (i.e. louder) response. Also, he mentions the current position within the development of the routine as being "the beginning" which implies that the gag may well find it more appropriate response by reappearing at the end.[18] The part this reintegration play in Double's closing can be seen in Extract 8-12

Extract 8-12: Oliver Double

1	OD:	Great. Erh:: >N'ya know they sa::y tha evryone's: got<
2		one great ↑nov↓u:l inside them. (0.3)
3	Aud:	hHHHHHHhh
4	OD:	(Well I have here)
5		Have, look! (0.7)
6	Aud:	((Cheers))
7		x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
8	Aud:	((Cheers))
9	OD:	Thankyou (and) goodnight!

Like the standard form of reintegration discussed in the previous chapter this use requests and receives the preferred response of laughter (line 3) but in addition to this it provides an opening into Double's closing (line 9). This mean that he can signpost the approaching end of the act, receive a good response from the audience to his last joke and begin his closing while the audience is still laughing (lines 2-3).[19] What is notable about this use of reintegration as an announcement of intention to close is that the reintegration is found immediately prior to the main closing sequence rather than being separated by a further turn. This would suggest that the act of floating a topic and then reintegrating it provides enough of a signposted order that a further turn is not necessary.[20]

It would be tempting at this point to suggest that the period of performance between the introduction of a topic and its reintegration as an announcement of intent to close in effect acts metaphorically as an extended turn. That the performance that takes place between Double's announcement that he will repeat the joke and the repetition of the joke itself replaces the thematically linked humorous section seen in the extracts above. However, looking at the use re-integration in Extract 8-13 it can be seen that Bigpig uses both an announcement of his intent to close (line 1) and then immediately afterwards a reintegration of the topic of his new microphone (lines 1-4) which leads straight in to the remainder of his closing sequence.

Extract 8-13: Martin Bigpig

```
1   MB:    Anyroad. That's ↑all am gonna ↓do:: (.) Thanks fer listenin'
2           come an tes' ma microphone (up here) I won't- I wo- I
3           know you want me to do- but I won't run to the bar again.
4           A really w↓on't.
5   Aud:                    hhhhhhh
6   MB:                          Um. My name's Mar:tin Bigpig. Hope
7           you've enjoyed this ↑li↓ttle bit from me 'coz I've enjoyed bein'
8           here. >Enjoy the rest of the night.
9           Thanks for watchin'.< (0.5) G'NIGHT!
10  Aud:                         x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXX
11  Aud:                                    ((Cheers))
```

In such an structure it appears that the re-integration itself plays the part of the final humorous sequence which opens up the final closing (line 6-9). Indeed in certain circumstances it is apparent that there needs to be hardly any time lapse between the introduction of a topic and it re-integration as part of a signposting of imminent closing and that reintegration may be almost immediate however.

This "compressed" reintegration in which the separating marker is only the end of a sentence or intonational unit can be seen in Extract 8-14.

Extract 8-14: Frank Skinner

```
1   FS:    Anyway, I was gunna play you a s↓o:ng from my New: album
2          to↓night.
3          >Er< I only bought it yesterday.
4   Aud:                                   (.) hhhhh
5   FS:                                            An it's alright- but I am gonna
6          go now. You've been a great audience. >Thanksa lot. Cheers!
7          GOODNIGHT!<
8   Aud:                     XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
```

Skinner introduces the topic of his "new album" (line 1-2) and then after a hesitant "Er" his next sentence reincorporates that topic as the form of a punchline. The reintegration is almost instant and its placing strategically flags the approaching end to the set (5-7) as well as being followed by audience laughter.

So both the announcement of intent to close and re-integration may be used to signpost that a closing in imminent but both these turn types are essentially pre-closings. They function towards alerting the audience to prepare for a closing and to deliver the applause that is expected of them but, especially in the case of announcement of intent to close, may be separated from the actual closing by some time. In effect they prepare the ground for the closing sequence proper and it is this sequence of turns that I will examine next

8.3.2 Audience Laughter

Like other sections of audience laughter this contribution to the closing sequence is vocal rather than linguistic. That is the audience's laughter doesn't contribute to any development of topic or provide any additional information to the ongoing discourse but its presence is no less important to maintaining the closing sequence's structure. Although the audience laughter itself is not distinctive or has any features which necessarily differentiate if from other periods of laughter that have taken place throughout the performance after humorous sequences or re-integration its presence at this point is vital.

This again illustrates that rather than being merely a stimulated response the laughter of audience members at this point has a specific role in the closing sequence. What this laughter does is demonstrate that the audience maintains a collective agency and will respond together as an audience rather than as individuals. It also shows that both as individuals and as an audience, they are alert, focused and responsive to the interaction. The receipt of audience laughter at this stage, therefore, is a marker of successful interaction as much as successful comedy. Therefore the laughter at the end of the final humorous sequence or reintegration is an indication to the comedian that the closing sequence can continue

Although the audience laughter does not differ from that discussed in Chapter 5 the way the performers tend to respond to it does. I showed in Chapter 5 that comedians time their recommencement of talk after laughter so that it overlaps only with the dying tail of the laughter. However, comedian's re-commencement after the laughter in the closing sequence is the first of a series exceptions to this rule which inhabit the closing sequence. What happens is demonstrated by Rob Newman in Extract 8-15. Rather than waiting for the audience laughter to run its duration, Newman begins his final turn (line 9) while the laughter is still at a peak.

Extract 8-15: Robert Newman

```
1   RN:    I grew up among Italians. Uhm and erh >can remember when I
2          was a kid< (1.2 ) there was this one house when I'd walk by (1.0)
3          a ma::n (.) used to come out onto the doorstep n go,
4          ((Italian accent)) "Eh YOU! (1.3) I fuck your ↑ma:↓ther."
5   Aud:                                              HHHHHHhhhh
6   RN:    "I fuck your ma;ther. I FUCK your.h mather."  And I shout back
7          "Hello dad."
8   Aud:       hHHHHHHHHHHH
9   RN:            >Thanks. G'night. Cheers!<
10  Aud:                      x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX ⌐ [To fade on tape]
11  Aud:                      ((        Cheers        )) ⌟
```

The apparently premature re-commencement might be seen as part of a malformed closing sequence. However, the cheers and applause that overlap the loud audience group laughter do not in any way suggest that this is the case. There is no evidence that either Newman or the audience perceive that any breakdown in the interaction

has occurred or that any repair in the closing sequence is necessary. Indeed this extended overlap of audience laughter and performer's talk can be seen to be the normal construction of the change in turn at this point.

Another professional comedian, Eddie Izzard, uses an almost identical timing of his closing sequence as Newman. Although the audience laughter has the standard fading tail discussed in Chapter 5 Izzard chooses not to let the laughter reach that point before delivering his next line, "So thanks very much" (line 5).

Extract 8-16: Eddie Izzard

```
1   EI:    >°So there you go ↓Tue::s↑day°<  (1.5) So ↑tha̲:t's my littul ↓show.
2          Erhm:: i:::i:  yeah, erh:: yeah. Hope yuv enjoyed it. If you haven't
3          then there waz the interval. (0.6) Urh::m
4   Aud:                                    HHHHHHhhh
5   EI:                                              So thanks very much (.)
6          and good night. °Cheers°
```

Further support for the standard nature of this overlap is found in Martin Bigpig's closing in Extract 8-17. Before this closing Bigpig's performance has re-integrated the theme of his testing of a newly bought radio mike and moving around and outside the pub venue to test its range. As such it is no surprising to see it reappear in his closing sequence. Like Newman and Izzard, Bigpig recommences his closing sequence at a very early stage of the audience's laughter.

Extract 8-17: Martin Bigpig

```
1   MB:    Anyroad. That's ↑all am gonna ↓do:: (.) Thanks fer listenin'
2          come an te̲s' ma microphone (up here) I won't- I wo- I
3          know you want me to do- but I won't run to the bar again.
4          A really w↓on't.
5   Aud:                  hhhhhhh
6   MB:                       Um. My name's Mar:tin Bigpig.
```

The rapidity of movement during this exchange of speaker would suggest that the overlap is used by performer, and recognised by the audience, to indicate or reinforce the that performance is reaching its closing moves. In a case of where intent to close

has not been delivered and the last humorous sequence involves re-integration this may be the first indication from the performer that the act is reaching its end. As such the apparently inconsequential overlap should not be overlooked when considering its importance in management of the performance interaction.

8.3.3 Comment on Audience

While the audience laughter is still taking place a successful closing involves the stand-up beginning their turns towards the closing of their routine. These turns are rapid in their succession and while they are malleable in their content do demonstrate a remarkably consistency from performance to performance. Most commonly the first of these turns is the comedian's comment on the audience. This usually involves the performer praising the audience and suggesting that they have been a "good crowd". A typical example is Extract 8-18 in which Burgess congratulates the audience with "you've been sweet".

Extract 8-18: Tony Burgess

```
1   TB:   O:::::kay: yuv bin really sweet.
2         My name's Tony Burgess.
3         GOODnighta:!
4   Aud:      XXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxx
```

Similarly in the Frank Skinner extract (originally seen as Extract 8-14 above) praises the audience as having been "great":

Extract 8-19: Frank Skinner

```
1   FS:   You've been a great audience. >Thanksa lot. Cheers!
2         GOODNIGHT!<
3   Aud:           XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
```

and Roger Monkhouse uses the slightly more unusual formation of praising the audience for being, "fun".

Extract 8-20: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:   My name's Roger Monkhouse.
2         You've been a fun audience.
3         Thanks very much. Goodnight!
```

The same sort of comment on the audience can be found even in performers known for their idiosyncratic performance style.   Although Johnny Vegas is known for his apparent comic meandering while on stage and his ability to work improvisationally with the audience, the closing he uses in Extract 8-21 is as concise as Burgess', Skinner's or Monkhouse's and contains a similar single line comment on the audience.

Extract 8-21: Johnny Vegas

```
1   JV:   >Ladies and gentlemen, yuv bin great fun.<
2         ↓G'↑NI::::GHT
3   Aud:  x             XXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxxxx
4   Aud:                ((   Cheers  ))
```

Such praises are found in closings regardless of how the performer actually perceived the audience.[21] However, although the "You've been xxxxx" is the most common formation of this turn it is by no means the only one and variations can be seen such as those in Extract 8-22 and Extract 8-23. Swanson below places an ironic and self-reflexive spin on his comment on the audience. Playing on the clichéd nature of the comments on the audience found in the extracts above and their formulaic praise of an audience after a very successful set Swanson congratulates the audience for a quite different skill.

Extract 8-22: Graham Swanson

```
1   GS:    I er-  (1.3)  ↑thanks for ↑star↓in'.
2   Aud.           H-H
3          Erm (1.0) >My name's Graham Swanson.
4          Thank you bye.<
5   Aud:              x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
6   Aud:                 ((Cheers))
```

Occasionally comments on the audience can be more complex and extended than the short praises above. In Extract 8-23 Caulfield verges on and then moves out of the closing (Button 1987) with her comments on the one particular member of the audience (lines 4-12).

Extract 8-23: Jo Caulfield

```
1   JC:    Anyway I'm un h ↑ramblin' now coz I uh, ya know,
2          >↑forgot↓ten< what's goin' ↑on.
3   Aud:                               [hhhh                    ]  Laughter 1
4   JC:                                └.hh And but erh- uhm
5          you've been loverly.                                    Comment 1
6          You've got remARkable eye↓brows              ┐
7          I've been meaning to say that all ni↓gh:t and er:: >they really │  Comment 2
8          ↑are.< .hh                                    ┘
9   Aud:            hhHHHHHhhhh                          ]  Laughter 2
10  JC:                     No, y- you wear that proudly, you really  ┐
11         ↑do °yeah°.                                    ┘  ←(Pursuit) 1
12  Aud:        hhhhh                                     ]  Laughter 3
13  JC:            Saw then s:oon as I g't round >the corner there<.  ]  ←(Pursuit)2
14         And er:: so thanks ever so much.
15         Really enjoy th- the rest of the nigh'.
16         Thanks a ↓lot.
17                   (0.7)
18  Aud:              xXXXXXXXXXXXxxxXXXXXxxxxxxxxx
```

Her comment that the audience has been "lovely" in line 5 is a standard formation of comment on the audience but it has been separated from the audience laughter in line 3 by her hesitation so that there is no overlap between the laughter and commencement of the performers closing turns. This may explain why Caulfield feels the need to extend her comment on the audience. In an attempt to repair the closing by gaining more audience laughter before recommencing her closing she

changes from a general audience comment to a more specific one namely the eyebrows of a member of the audience. Indeed Caulfield does get another two lots of audience laughter (lines 8 & 11) before recommencing her closing but fails to make use of them. She chooses instead to try to build on the audience response by pursuing the eyebrow observation in line 9-10 and 12.[22]

This extract from Caulfield is useful as it highlights that the comment on audience is the last of the standard closing turns which is open to a certain level of malleability to the comedian.[23] The last turns taken by the performer discussed below tend to be very regular, brief and rapid. The re-introduction, demonstration of appreciation and the exclamatory closing, while sometimes appearing perfunctory, do have a routine about them and are both context sensitive and context free.

8.3.4 Re-Introduction

The use of re-introduction has already been seen in Extract 8-2 (the relevant section of which is reproduced below as Extract 8-24) as well as in a number of other extracts and simply involves the performer reminding the audience of their name. It is a very simple and brief turn in the closing sequence in which the performer will remind the audience of their name before leaving the stage.

Extract 8-24: Ben Elton

```
1   BE:   I'd like to say thank you.
2         >My name's Ben Elton.<
3         GOOD NIGHT!
```

Ben Elton does it in line 2 of Extract 8-24 after he has thanked the audience[24] (see below) whereas Chris Addison reverses this order in Extract 8-25 below.

Extract 8-25: Chris Addison

```
1   CA:   My name's Chris Addison. (.)
2         Thanks very much.
3         Goodnight.
```

Similarly, Chris Hughes uses this more conventional pattern with his own re-introduction in line 1 of Extract 8-26:

Extract 8-26: Chris Hughes

```
1   CH:    Chri:s Hu::ghes.
2          Thanks very ↓much.
3          B' bye
4   Aud        ((          Cheers       ))
5   Aud:          xXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
6   Aud:               ((        Whistles    ))
```

as does Roger Monkhouse below.

Extract 8-27: Roger Monkhouse

```
1          My name's Roger Monkhouse.      ←Ⓐ
2          You've been a fun audience.     ←Ⓑ
3          Thanks very much.
4          Goodnight!
```

Monkhouse's closing is especially neat as not only is it rapid and economical in the way the closing is manufactured but he uses a contrast to further emphasis the two closing moves in lines 1 and 2. "My name" and "you have" both receive emphasis from their identical place at the beginning of short sentences.

This re-introduction appears to be stand-up specific. It is not found in political speaking or other forms of podium talk, nor is it common to natural conversation or service encounters. Similarly, unlike the Appreciation and the Exclamatory closing, it is not found in other forms of public performance such as the rock gigs discussed in Chapter 3 above.

8.3.5 Appreciation

The penultimate of the comedian's turn that make up a closing is the Appreciation in which the performer will thank the audience. In keeping with the growing consistency of both order and form that develops as the stand-up closing progresses appreciation is overwhelmingly present in stand-up closings. Extract 8-28 is a representative example of appreciation in that before closing his act Cook offers a non-contextualised "Cheers, thanks".

Extract 8-28: Adrian Cook

    1   AC: >Cheers, thanks.< Goodnigh:'.

Similarly in line 5 of Extract 8-29 Izzard while talking directly to the audience

Extract 8-29: Eddie Izzard

    1   EI: >°So there you go ↓Tue::s↑day°< (1.5) So ↑tha:t's my littul ↓show.
    2   Erhm:: i:::i: yeah, erh:: yeah. Hope yuv enjoyed it. If you haven't
    3   then there waz the interval. (0.6) Urh::m
    4   Aud: HHHHHHhhh
    5   EI: So thanks very much (.)
    6   and good night. °Cheers°
    7   Aud: xxXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Extract 8-30 is interesting in that after a normal pre-closing and final humorous sequence it unusually combines the usual declaration of appreciation with the comment on the audience (line 14).

Extract 8-30: Roger Monkhouse

```
 1  RM:   Er::m, j- Jus' one little word before ya go obviously      ] Pre-closing
 2        (we've) all bin drinking an tuff like that un () If anyone  ┐
 3        does here tonight accidently end up, ya know, and end up    │
 4        having casual (.) unprotected sex (      ). Please, please,  │
 5        please. Very dangerous ladies an gentlemen, please, please  │ Final
 6        please do remember, if that does happen to you, please do   │ humorous
 7        remember to wear (.) one of those little red ribbons        │ sequence
 8        on your lapel.                                              │
 9  Aud:     hhhhHHHH-h                                               │
10  RM:         'Simportant the other person doesn't think           │
11        you're irri-sponsible. >Y'know what  mean.=                 ┘
12  Aud:                        hHHHHHHHHHhh
13  RM:                              =Anyway. ()
14        Erh >thanks for coming tonight< yu'v bin lovely.
15        My name's Roger Monkhouse.
16        Goodnight.  See ya
17  Aud:     xXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXx
18  Aud:         (( Cheers and Whistles )).
```

It is important in stand-up that it is the comedian who thanks the audience, the professional who thanks the customer. This is unlike other (specifically American) encounters such as those between a shop assistant and customer in which it is overwhelmingly the customer who thanks the employee (Aston 1995). This raises the question of what the comedian is thanking the audience for. For example, in Extract 8-31 Porter offers the audience a "tip for you" (line 13) yet she still closes with a thank you.

Extract 8-31: Lucy Porter (Simplified)

```
 1  LP:   Well, I'm gonna go off now coz I'm gonna meet my friend
 2        Alex.  And erh, I should tell you that Alex has just has her
 3        clitoris pierced. Which make me wanna cross my leg I don't
 4        know about you.  But not only has she got her clitoris pierced
 5        she's get her belly button pierced, her nipples pierced, she's
 6        covered head to toe in tattoos.  Coz her philosophy basically is
 7        that the human body is a blank canvas just waiting to be
 8        adorned with works of art.  I think that's a gorgeous sentiment
 9        'n everything but its a bit painful for me all that tattooing and
10        piercing so what I do and you might like to do actually is learn
11        stick fuzzy felts shapes into my public hair
12  Aud:                                         HHHHHHHHHHhhh
13  LP:   So with that tip for you now I'm going to go. Thank you.
14        Goodnight.
```

This would suggest that the show of appreciation found in the closings of acts is another tool for managing the closing rather than an expression of actual gratitude.

This would account for the practical omnipresence of appreciation in stand-up closings and also goes some way to explain why, apart from instances in which breakdowns in the closing sequence occur, the only regular instances in which appreciation is omitted is when very popular comedians play a familiar, "home" audience. In such circumstances where the performer is known and popular with the audience and the comedian is playing a venue they are familiar with there would appear to be very little need for the show of appreciation as a method of alignment of performer and audience before closing the interaction.

Examples of such absences can be found in the following closing from Johnny Vegas and Tony Burgess. Vegas moves directly from his comment on the audience to his closing "Goodnight" without a separating appreciation:

Extract 8-32: Johnny Vegas

```
1    JV:    >Ladies and gentlemen, yuv bin great fun.<
2           ↓G'↑NI::::GHT
3    Aud:   x          XXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxxxx
4    Aud:              ((   Cheers   ))
```

And the same order can be seen in Extract 8-33.

Extract 8-33: Tony Burgess

```
1    TB:    O:::::kay: yuv bin really sweet.
2           My name's Tony Burgess.
3           GOODnighta:!
4    Aud:        XXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxx
```

Neither of these closings demonstrate any need for repair, or hesitation from the audience despite the absence of comedian's appreciation. However, Vegas's

comment on the audience that "yuv bin great fun" and Burgess', "yuv bin really sweet" suggest that even when thanks can legitimately be omitted the implication of thanks is necessary to allow the turn of appreciation to be missing from the closing sequence.

8.3.6 Exclamatory Closing

The exclamatory closing can be seen as the effective closing of a performer's set. It is the short, loud farewell that is rapidly appended to the pre-closing remark. Its simplicity is notable as the exclamation is usually just a couple of syllables. The exclamatory closing can be seen in performers as diverse at Andrew "Dice" Clay in Extract 8-34 and Adrian Cook in Extract 8-35.

Extract 8-34: Andrew "Dice" Clay

```
1    ADC:  Dis show has bin: >for ladies ownly<  You've bin a great
2          crowd.  Thanks for cummin owt.
3          Gu'night!
```

After thanking the audience both performers finish their sets with an almost identical, "Goodnight" in line 3 of both extracts..

Extract 8-35: Adrian Cook

```
1    AC:  OK. Thanks very much.
2         Chee::rs.
3         Goodnight!
```

Exceptions to the issuing of an exclamatory closing are rare in professional stand-up and where present tend to indicate a profound breakdown in the smoothness of the closing sequence and its effectiveness. Even the surreal Johnny Vegas who on the occasion of the taping of Extract 8-36 below finishes his act with a rendition of Please Release Me rapidly tags on a re-introduction (line 2), comment on audience

and appreciation combined (line 3), and finishes with his exclamatory closing, "Goodnight!" (line 4).

Extract 8-36: Johnny Vegas

```
1   JV:    ((Singing)) "And let me love agai::::::::n"
2          >Ladies 'n' gentlemen I've been Johnny Vegas
3          you been (beautiful))
4          Goodnight!<
5   Aud:   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
6   Aud:       ((        Cheers        ))
7   Aud:               (( Whistles  ))
```

However, a counter example to the use of the exclamatory closing can be found in Extract 8-37 in which Jo Caulfield's poorly constructed closing sequence (quoted more fully above as Extract 8-23) fails to delivers her final exclamatory closing.

Extract 8-37: Jo Caulfield

```
1   JC:    And er:: so thanks ever so much.
2          Really enjoy th- the rest of the nigh'.
3          Thanks a ↓lot.
4                      (0.7)
5   Aud:                    xXXXXXXXXXXxxxXXXXxxxxxxxxx
6   Comp:                           Jo Caulfie::ld .hhh
```

The absence of the exclamatory closing in this malformed closing has its consequences for Caulfield. The effect of this can be seen in the 0.7 second silence in line 4 which fills the gap between her pre-closing and the audience applause. In such a situation despite the absence of the exclamatory closing the audience applause can be seen as an attempt by the audience to repair the closing. It is also an indication that the audience recognise that a standard closing form exists and that applause is the next move in a standard sequence.

8.3.7 Audience Applause

The audience applause in a stand-up closing is unique in that no matter how poorly structured, misformed or unplanned a comedian's closing sequence it is the only element of the standard closing sequence which s always present. Although the duration and enthusiasm of this applause allotted to any performer can vary, like the applause at the beginning of an act, it is inevitably offered.[25] With his strong local following the closing of Johnny Vegas' act receives applause of more than 15.6 seconds in the extract below.

Extract 8-38: Johnny Vegas

```
1   JV:    ((Singing)) "And let me love agai:::::::n"
2          >Ladies 'n' gentlemen I've been Johnny Vegas
3          you been (beautiful)
4          Goodnight!<
5          |——————15.6——————|
6   Aud:   XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
7   Aud:      ((        Cheers        ))
8   Aud:             ((   Whistles   ))
```

The applause overlaps considerably with the exclamatory closing and as it progresses it becomes accompanied by cheers and the whistles from the audience. When such contributions happen they appear not only to indicate the success of the comedian's performance but as an indication of the performer's status amongst the audience. The higher the popularity and familiarity of the performer with the audience the more probable it is they will receive cheers, whistles, and so forth and that they will be louder and of longer duration.

Similarly in Extract 8-39, the 10.4 seconds of applause that Martin Bigpig receives both demonstrates the overlap of applause and exclamatory closing and is accompanied by cheers after the applause has reached is maximum intensity.

Extract 8-39: Martin Bigpig

```
1   MB:                        Um. My name's Mar:tin Bigpig. Hope
2          you've enjoyed this ↑li↓ttle bit from me 'coz I've enjoyed bein'
3          here. >Enjoy the rest of the night.
4          Thanks for watchin'.< (0.5) G'NIGHT!
5                            |————————10.4————————|
6   Aud:                     x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXX
7   Aud:                                 ((Cheers))
```

It would appear that the duration of the applause a performer receives it not directly linked to how well their routine went. For example, although his performance had been painfully poor, in Extract 8-40 the American performer Neil Masters receives over 13 seconds of applause after his closing.

Extract 8-40: Neil Masters

```
1   NM:   Anyway I'll see you again.
2         I'm Neil Masters
3         Thanks for listening
4         (.)
5         |————————————13.4————————————|
6   Aud:  x-xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx-x-xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
7   Comp:                    °>That was Neil Masters<°
8         Well done audience I think there. >Well done<.
9         More therapy than comedy wasn't it?
```

The unusually caustic remark from the compere, Roger Monkhouse, gives an indication of the problems that the act had.[26] However, this didn't stop him receiving a longer length of applause than local favourite Martin Bigpig although it is noticeably not accompanied by cheers..

Although it utilises separate sections the performer's signalling and farewell may be regarded as a single turn and the adjacent pair to that turn can be seen to be the audience's applause. Like the closing of a conversation (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) the utterance from the second part is essential to defining the ending of the encounter. If an audience were to refuse applause[27] it would demonstrate that they had missed the performer's signposting of the ending and in turn the performer would recognise that their attempt at closing had been unsuccessful. However, such

deviant cases are very rare and it would appear that the closing of stand up routines, although flexible, are far less varied than the ending of both telephone and face to face conversations.

This is due, in part at least, to the control over the timing of the ending which always remains with the performer. As such it is almost impossible for an audience to reject a performer's attempt to close the performance dialogue. Even if a comedian's performance is greeted in a manner so hostile as to make them curtail their performance, the decision to end always remains with the performer. In such circumstances, although the comedian has not reached the end of their act, the sequence that act as a closing will attempt to retain a recognised structure and the audience will attempt to respond reciprocally. In Extract 8-41 Adrain Cook decides not to finish his act after a group of drunken hecklers had been consistently abusive and offensive throughout his and others' sets.

Extract 8-41: Adrian Cook

```
1   Hecklers   (Tell us a joke)
2   AC:             Tell ya a joke?
3   Heckler:   (Yeah, come on, tell us a joke)
4   AC:        I wancha to fuck off ac-tuly.
5   Heckler:   Yes::
6   Heckler:      Yes
7   AC:              Right  (3.8)   >↑Than↓kyou<
8   (Hecklers):            x-x-x-x
9               (1.4)
10  Heckler:   Welsh pu:bs, Welsh pubs °Welsh pubs°
11              (2.0)
12  Aud:       x-x-XXXXXXXxxxxxx-x-x-x-x
13  Compare:                Pi::ty that erh: A::drian
14             had to fuckoff (0.5) ac.tually (0.7) >know what I ↓mean<
```

Here, although Cook decides to finish his act earlier than planned[28] He still delivers his appreciation (line 7) and, after the hecklers have quietened, the audience do applaud him. Thus, even under such unusual and hostile conditions in which Cook quits the stage rather than closing his act we can see that both performer and audience will attempt to maintain some sort of accepted structure to the closing. The

act is not just allowed to finish by any of the parties involved in the interaction and attempts to repair the breakdown in the interaction flow of the comedy are instigated. The compere's entrance in line 13 as the next standard move in a closing sequence continues this recognition that the accepted structure should, if possible, be returned to and continued with and although his comments are somewhat non-standard at this juncture they do make a move towards the gear-up back to normal interaction.

This section of audience applause can be seen to effectively mirror that found at the beginning of acts. Like the compere's exit the audience applause is the preferred response to a move by a performer (i.e. the exclamatory closing - Pair A) and also the first part of the summons/answer pair in which the audience's applause acts as a call for the compere to re-enter (Pair B). Again this applause also serves the pragmatic function of covering stage business. It covers the act exit and the compere's re-entrance.[29]
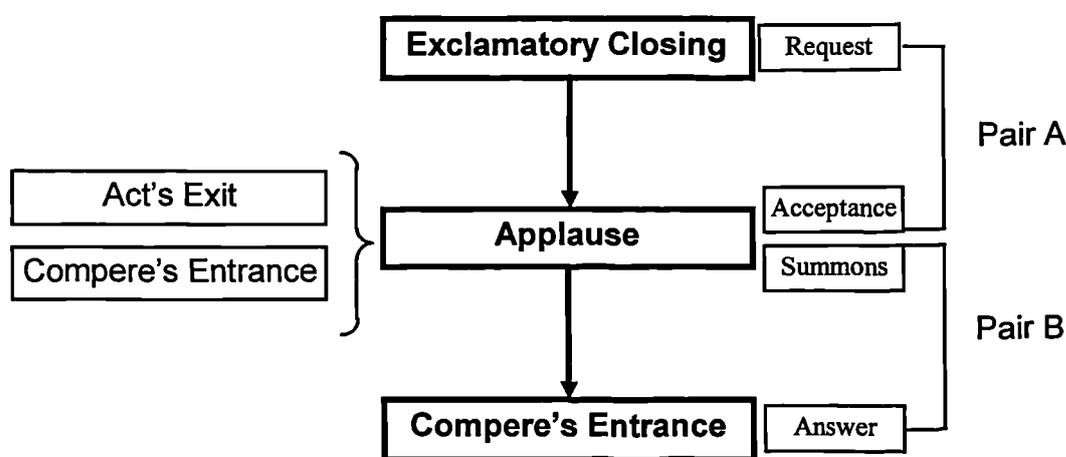

Figure 8-1: Dual Function of Closing Applause

Against such a perspective the entrance of the compere in Extract 8-41 can be seen as being in total keeping with an attempt to repair the organisation of the closing. The re-entrance of the compere and the compere's outro is the final element of a stand-up sequence and therefore it is this move which I will explore next.

8.3.8 Compere's Outro

In stand-up, the audience applause inevitably leads to the re-entry of the compere. It is part of the accepted compere role to top and tail the acts providing (as discussed in detail in Chapter 6) a flow to the evenings proceedings. The accepted "naturalness" of this organisation makes it easy to overlook its routine occurrence. While other forms of audience situations from political conferences to talent show will employ a person to anchor the proceedings and contextualise the events as they happen this is by no means omnipresent in all forms of audience events. For example, rock bands performing will often not be introduced nor in turn introduce each number in their set; films running consecutively in a cinema will not be provided with a compere, separate sports events at a field and track meeting will not be introduced by a central personality. Indeed in videos, tapes and television programmes which feature a collection of comedians (such as the British television shows The Comedians and Stand-Up) comperes will be seen as unnecessary or edited out.

Therefore its overwhelming presence in stand-up must be noted and seen a being part of the accepted pattern of interaction. The compere's outro follows the growing tendency as this stand-up closing progresses for homogeneity of form. That is the outro almost invariably takes the form of the compere restating the name of the . performer who has just left the performance area. Extract 8-42 provides a typical example in lines 6-7.

Extract 8-42: Roger Monkhouse

```
1   RM:   My name's Roger Monkhouse.
2         You've been a fun audience.
3         Thanks very much. Goodnight!
4   Aud:        x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxx=
5   Aud:                          (( Cheers ))
6   Comp:                                           Roger
7         Monkhouse
8   Aud:  =xxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x-
9   Aud:           ((Cheers))
```

As part of the tendency towards overlapping which is observable in closing sequences the re-introduction of Monkhouse takes place while the audience are still applauding and finishes before the audience end their applause. The same organisation can be seen in Extract 8-43 in which the announcement of the performer's name shown no indication of prompting a reduction in the volume or duration of the audience's applause.

Extract 8-43: Graham Swanson

```
1   GS:    Erm (1.0) >My names' Graham Swanson.
2          Thank you bye.<
3   Aud:                x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
4   Aud:                    ((Cheers))
5   Comp:                      Gra' am Sawnson!
```

Indeed, as can be seen in Extract 8-44 the compere's outro can rejuvenate audience applause which is on the wan. The announcement of Caulfield's name at a point at which the audience applause is beginning to die down has the effect of temporarily increasing its volume and extending it duration.

Extract 8-44: Jo Caulfield

```
1   JC     And er:: so thanks ever so much.
2          Really enjoy th- the rest of the nigh'.
3          Thanks a ↓lot.
4                  (0.7)
5   Aud:           xXXXXXXXXXXXxxXXXXXxxxxxxxx
6   Comp:                    Jo Caulfie::ld .hhh
```

On occasions this ability for the compere's outro to rejuvenate dying audience applause may be specifically recognised.

Extract 8-45: Oliver Double

```
1   OD:    Great. Erh:: >N'ya know they sa::y tha evryone's: got<
2          one great ↑nov↓u:l inside them: (0.3)
3   Aud:                      hHHHHHHhh
```

```
4   OD:                                              (Well I have here)
5              Have, look! (0.7)
6   Aud:                      ((Cheers))
7                                 x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx
8   Aud:                                  ((Cheers))
9   OD:                              Thankyou (and) goodnight!
10  Comp:   Not loud enough not loud enough. O-llie Double yeah:::
11             (.) >C'mon<
12  Aud:                  ((      Cheers      ))
13                          xxXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxx-x-x
```

In the Double extract above what happens is that the compere is late with his re-entrance onto the stage and the audience applause has finished by the time he is ready to deliver his outro. To repair this he invites the audience to re-start their applause with the "Not loud enough not loud enough" of line 10. There is no indication that the applause was in any way too quiet but this, along with the additional encouragement of "come on" (line 11), is the way the compere tries to rectify the lack of overlap.

8.4 CONCLUSIONS

Having reached this point and examined the moves that make up and make unique a stand-up closing and seen how these turns are used, order and responded to as well as seen ways in which the basic turn-taking rule are put into practice it is possible to build a broader view which takes in the picture of the closing of stand-up performances as a whole. It is possible now to represent graphically not only how the above turns fit together but how the basic sequence can be varied and broken.

The diagram below (Figure 8-2) represents what might be considered an extended closing. It includes all the possible elements that build up a stand-up closing from the triumvirate performer, audience and compere and includes the standard variations that are permissible within a legitimate closing. Thus a comedian could legitimately start from either of the pre-closing points on the level bracketed as "A" and use either

an announcement of intent to close followed by a final humorous sequence or a the single turn of reintegration in order to move to audience laughter.

A

| Announcement of Intent to Close | ReIntegration |

Final Humorous Sequence

Audience Laughter

B

| Comment on Audience | Re-Introduction |

| Re-Introduction | Comment on Audience |

Appreciation

Exclamatory Closing

Audience Applause

Compere's Outro
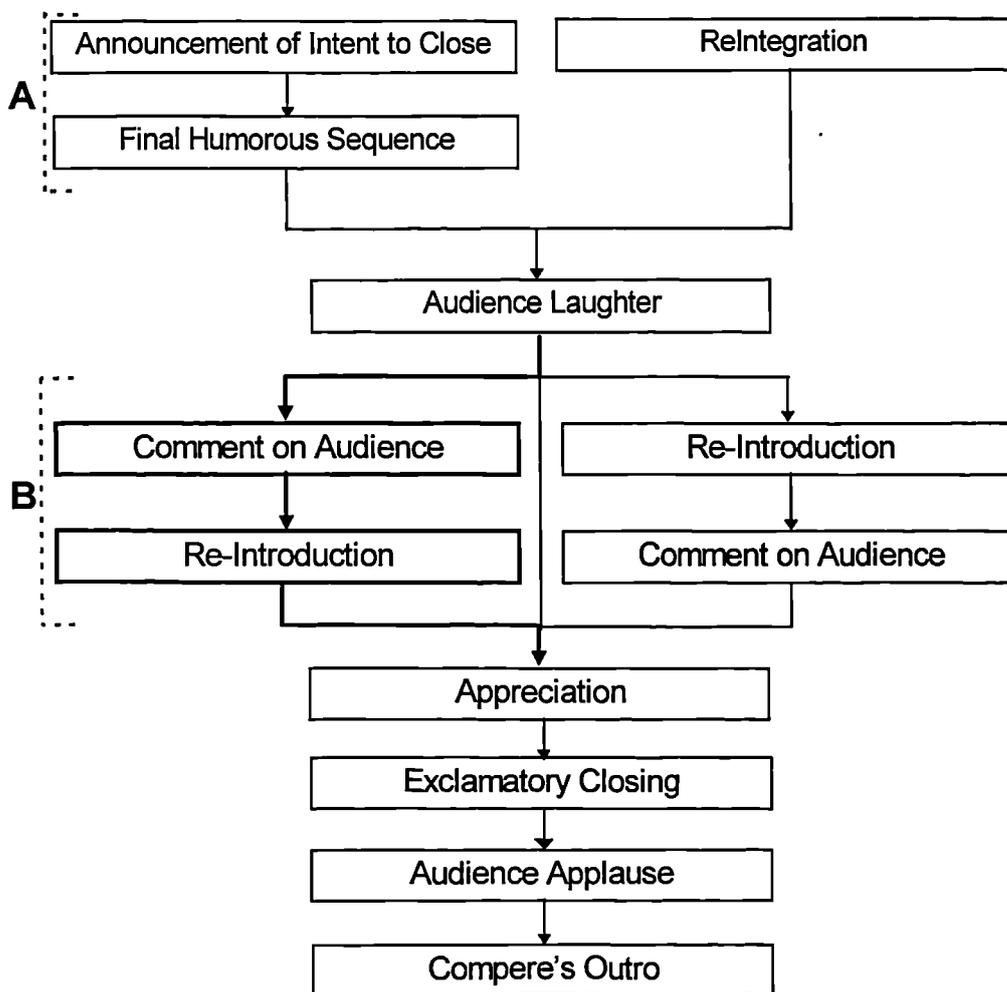
Figure 8-2: Structure of Closings

After the laughter (i.e. bracketed as "B") there is a preferred structure in which the comedian will comment on the audience and then re-introduce themselves. This is the preferred form in that it is the most prevalent rather than meaning that other structures are necessarily illegitimate.[30] For example, a performer may reverse the comment on audience → re-introduction order without being under any pressure to repair the inversion. Similarly they may move directly from audience laughter to appreciation without causing any break in the smoothness of the closing interaction. Should a comedian take this "shortcut" the closing might be considered contracted but in no way inferior. The final collection of moves that finish the closing are made

up from the comedian's show of appreciation and exclamatory closing followed by

the audience applause which overlaps the compere's outro. All these are found in as

standard in a closing and retain the same order.

This overview of the organising structure of stand-up closing can be concretised

with the analysis of a complete closing used as a worked example. Below in the form

of Extract 8-46 is a closing from Roger Monkhouse quoted partially elsewhere in the

chapter.

Extract 8-46: Roger Monkhouse (Simplified)

1	RM:	An' I read this in "The Guardian" recently -		
2		I might finish on this actually -	]	Intent to Close
3		I read this in "The Guardian" right, so fuck it must be	⌐	
4		true ( ). Nowadays. Right. Nowadays in certain parts		
5		of the country because family planning clinics and G.P.s		
6		are increasingly weary or prescribing contraceptives to the		
7		under sixteens. Young teenagers in certain parts of the		
8		country are now having to resort to using Mars bar		
9		wrappers as condoms, right.		
10	Aud:	hHHHHhhhhh		Final
11	RM:	Which is a very disturbing		Humorous
12		thought. That is nasty isn't it Mars bar wrappers an		Sequence
13		particularly its disturbing to think young teenagers		
14		nowadays have penises that big quite frankly.		
15	Aud:	HHHHHHHHhhhh		
16	RM:	The little		
17		scamps. Coz in my day, I seem to remember, in my		
18		day a finger a Fudge used to be enough.		
19	Aud:	HHHHHHHHHHHH=		
20	Aud:	x-x-x-x x-x		
21	RM:	An' you		
22		didn't spoil your appetite during foreplay as well	⌐	
23	Aud:	=HHhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh	⌐	
24	Aud:	x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x		Aud Laughter
25	Aud:	hhhhHHHHH=	⌐	
26		=My name's Roger Monkhouse.	]	Re-introduction
27		You've been a fun audience.	]	Com. on Aud
28		Thanks very much.	]	Appreciation
29		Goodnight!	]	Exclam. Clos.
30	Aud:	x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-XXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxx=]		Aud Applause
31	Aud:	((Cheers))		

```
32  Comp:                                            Roger  ⌐ Comp's Outro
33        Monkhouse                                         ⌐
34  Aud:   =xxxxxxxxXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x-                    ⌐ Aud App (cont)
35  Aud:              ((Cheers))
```

When referred back to Figure 8-2 it can be seen that Monkhouse produces an extended closing which starts at the top left of the diagram with his announcement of intent to close (line 2) and final humorous sequence (lines 3-22). After the audience laughter at line 23 he uses one of the dispreferred orderings by moving to the right hand of level B in the diagram with a re-introduction at line 26 followed by a comment on the audience with "You've been a fun audience" (line 27). Monkhouse then closes with a standard appreciation (line 28) and exclamatory closing (line 29) before the audience applause (line 30/34) during which the compere enter and performs the outro (lines 32-33).

The importance to this study of such an overview is not simply that a scheme can be developed which demonstrates a system underlying both the openings, middles and closing of stand up acts but that these acts are ordered by the participants involved and that this ordering is mutually beneficial. The ordering of these opening and closing sequences and the employment of rhetorical signposts serves not only towards maintaining the framing of the stand up performance but also to underline and emphasise the roles that are adopted by those involved in the interaction. The ease with which both audiences and performers order and maintain the order of stand-up interaction and their ability to recognise and adapt to variations of it make it apparent that this ordering of the turns is routinised but simultaneously negotiated in real time. Both audience and performer share a familiarity and responsibility with this ordering of the stand-up experience, an ordering which is socially constructed through exposure to the pattern of comedy routines.

This works towards reducing the possibility of misunderstanding for both performer and audience and minimises any threat that is associated with contributing to the discourse by individuals in the audience. Thus the re-enactment of established sequences ensures (as much as possible) an efficient, smooth and non-threatening

stand up performance in which roles and responsibilities are recognised. [31] In the stand-up environment categories are formed not only around social, gender and ethnic class but (as has been my primary focus here) on the categorisation of the comedian as performer and spectating individuals as an audience. In the openings of a stand-up performance role are concretised very early on: the audience assume their roles by applauding the performer[32] and the performer assumes his by accepting the summons and greeting the audience.

Notes

[1] Or at least very rarely does so. Exceptions are associated with profound breakdown in the smooth interaction between performer and audience. See Extract 8-41 and the associated discussion of it below for an example of such a breakdown.

[2] As Sacks (1987) points out: "That is to say, it [an observable pattern of talk] not only works in a gross number of cases, which fit directly, but even when it does not work, you can see it working." Sacks, 1987, p.59

[3] Conversely that the absence of talk from the comedian after the end of their act is not mistaken for a inter-act pause or silence.

[4] Line numbers added here to assist discussion.

[5] Sic. Dual spelling of Vick(e)y in original.

[6] Hammersmith Odeon, London - venue for the performance.

[7] As will be seen below the self re-introduction by stand-up performers is a regular feature of comedy closings.

[8] It is also apparent that the variety of closings found in conversation is greater than those in stand-up and that this variety often displays the malleability of the conversation closing rather than the rate at which closings are misformed. (See for example Button, 1987 and Frank, 1982)

[9] Although this current work has not sought to focus or quantify it, there can be made a general observation that new comedians learning how to perform and develop their act acquire control over closings later than how to order openings.

[10] This is not to say it is the first part the audience plays in the closing. The previous turns in which the performer is active are only possible because of the audience's willingness to remain passive during them.

[11] In a similar fashion Aston says of a 'pre-request' that it "not only negotiates the conditions for a request, but it paves the way for that request by prospecting a certain development in the discourse." (Aston, 1995, p.59)

[12] The advice often offered to new comedians that if they're doing badly they should close the act and leave the stage whereas if they are doing well they should close the act and leave the stage recognises, implicitly at least, that the ability to choose when to close the at remains firmly with the performer.

[13] Possible reasons for this are discussed in Rutter 1994.

[14] As can be seen from the more complete transcript in Extract 8-31.

[15] This can only be done from the vantage point of Monkhouse's role as compere that evening and so being the last performer on stage. In actuality it is not the audience who leave first but Monkhouse. He leaves the stage while the audience are still applauding rather than remaining their until the audience have drunk up and left.

[16] As has be seen in Chapter 7 reintegration is often used to signpost comic points of interaction. However this is not necessarily the case during closings see for example Extract 8-11 in which Eddie Izzard returns to the topic of the audience being a "Tuesday audience".

[17] Although the sample of openings collected as part of this thesis suggest that announcement of intent to close is the more common method of opening up a closing there is no evidence to suggest that the use or re-integration is deviant, less successful or dispreferred.

[18] Schegloff & Sacks (1973) suggest that such self-awareness in the production of interaction helps "reinforce our [as analysts] understanding of the orientation of conversationalists to 'a single conversation' as a unit." (p.311)

[19] This has links with the concept of the *big finish*, a musical number, stunt or trick that finishes the act. Such ending are increasingly rare but can occasionally be seen by performers working within a music hall tradition such as Johnny Vegas, Lee Evans and Spike Milligan.

[20] This would imply that any successful reintegration could form the basis of a closing and indeed there appears to be no apparent difference of form in reintegration that functions as the basis of closing and those that do not except for their very relationship to the closing. However, like the use of "OK" in conversation which may appear throughout the conversation without being intended or recognised as a possible pre-closing the re-integration must appear at what is recognised by participants as the end of a topic or humorous sequence.

[21] Conversation with performers after they have performed has often made apparent the diversity between the praise they gave the audience and how they felt the audience responded and the closings they produce for "good" and "bad" audiences will not differ significantly.

[22] It may be because Caulfield's pursuit receives diminishing laughter that she is unable to satisfactorily finishing he closing. The issue is returned to in the discussion of Caulfield after Extract 8-37.

[23] See also Extract 8-29 lines 1-3 which features a similarly extended comment on audience but does not encounter the same problems as Caulfield's.

[24] This idiosyncratic ordering of appreciation followed immediately by re-introduction appears specific to Elton and may explain why this form of closing has become so closely associated with him.

[25] Anecdotally comedians talk of dying on stage and walking off in silence. Even after the worst acts witnessed during the course of this research there has always been some applause even if noticeably quiet and short.

[26] Speaking to Monkhouse after the performance he explained the dilemma involved as a compere in making such a comment. He explained that part of his responsibility was to be positive about the acts he introduced but sometimes they were so bad that there was little he could do but sympathise with the audience by commenting on it. This suggests that maintaining a shared frame or reference with the audience is more important than performance ethics.

[27] It is conceivable, although not observed during the course of this research, that applause might be replaced by booing or some other negative response. However, this too would serve the function of completing the turn and satisfy the functional criteria of the adjacency pair.

[28] This was the first time Cook had shortened his act due to hecklers. He returned to the stage and finished the performance after the venue's manager had intervened and the hecklers left.

[29] This role of the audience applause may go some way to explaining the difficulty in predicating the duration of audience applause for acts of differing success or status. The reluctance in the audience to allow silence into this stage of the interaction **may** mean that performers and comperes who take longer to leave and enter they stage receive longer periods of applause.

[30] As there are no apparent consequences for not adopting the Comment on Audience → Re-Introduction route rather than its reversed form this is not strictly a preferred structure in the true CA sense. However, because the majority of closings use this ordering it seems as useful way to conceptualise the structure even with the necessity of this coda.

[31] This is not to say that dramatic deviations from the standard structures are not possible. However, when they do occur it is necessary for innovative comedians (such as Harry Hill or Jerry Sadowitz) to explicitly reframe, recontextualise and respond to audience uncertainties until the new frame is established. For example, although Harry Hill has now had his own television and radio series and played a number of national tours he has talked about having problems in getting audience's to respond to his act:

I did a gig in Norwich on the National Comedy Network. When you do a student gig, you realise how old you are. [...] I went on and did about ten minutes to complete silence, so I stopped and said, 'Does anyone have any questions at all?' And someone shouted out, 'You're too abstract for us!' So I said 'Oh, well,' and left.

Harry Hill quoted in Cook (1994) p.151

[32] The compare also often applauds the oncoming comedian - this signals his change in adopted roles from that of performer to that of audience member.

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CHAPTER 9

"HELLO, I MUST BE GOING" - CONCEPTUALISING STAND-UP COMEDY

> The trouble with facts is that there
> are so many of them
> **Samual McChord Crothers**

At the end of Chapter 2 I argued that what humour research needed was a theoretical perspective and methodological approach which moved beyond traditional assumptions about joke telling and the organisation of laughter. Further, I said that such a transformative approach needed to be based first and foremost upon on the specific observation of the humorous situation and a detailed analysis of the event and its place within the ongoing interaction. The body of this thesis has been devoted to constructing, justifying and illustrating such an approach. Taking the stand-up environment and its associated practices as its basic example what I have done is offer a new way of analysing humour, laughter and joking.

From the broad frame the thesis has employed I now wish to draw out the main implications for future study and to indicate the relation of the perspective employed to the broader field of audience research. To do this I shall focus on three ideas which have been woven into the analyses of the previous chapters: **Performance, Interaction** and **Liveness**.

9.1 PERFORMANCE

At the root of stand-up comedy is the notion of performance. At a level even prior to the introduction of comedy to the event stand-up is marked out from the everyday

events which surround it by virtue of its position as a performance and as an activity that is performed.

The notion of performance is not only a way to label the comedian's routine itself but a method of packaging the whole process of consuming and experiencing an evening of stand-up. The idea of performance goes beyond a framework offered by the introduction of context into understanding joking. Performance does not only encompass observation of who said what to whom and what the situation was at the time of utterance but a broader temporal and social context.

That is, stand-up takes place within specific markers and boundaries: it has a routine base in the form of the venue; it inhabits a pre-specified time and duration; its organisation is out of the hands of the audience; the audience has as economic relationship to the show in that they pay for admission to the event. These traits along with other features discussed in the last section of Chapter 3 contribute to the place, recognised by audience as well as throughout this thesis, of the stand-up experience as part of a performance experience. The structures which bind the performance, from the process of travelling to the venue to the layout of the venue itself, all contribute to the keying of stand-up as a performance. They act as guidelines framing what behaviour is expected and how the interaction within should be interpreted.

However, when studying stand-up the notion of performance extends beyond the conceptualisation of it as a social event for the audience or professional experience for the performer. It has a profoundly modifying experience on both the telling and hearing of jokes. There is a distinct difference between jokes shared in an informal setting between friends and those told by a comedian to a paying audience and the notion of performance helps to understand this.

While not the entire story, a large component of stand-up comedy is pre-scripted or canned jokes. However, these jokes are not fundamentally specific to stand-up nor mark it as performance. The text of a joke may be shared by professional and amateur tellers, in workplace banter and venue performance. Further the text of a performance is not the performance itself and as such any attempt to make it the central focus of humour research is fundamentally flawed. As Richard Bauman argues on the performance of play texts "[I]t is also clear that a neutral performance of a received and authoritative text is an idealist fiction" (Barnouw *et al.* 1989 p.263). Now, while all such jokes are in some way, performed when they are told to their audience their place within a stand-up performance affects not only the audience's expectations but their responsibilities. Far more than in other joking situations the stand-up comedy audience expects to be amused, to laugh and to be entertained. They expect "to get their money's worth."

However, the implications of laughter within this performance context are large. For the performer laughter is the barometer by which they, and others, monitor their success as comedians. For members of the audience the maintenance of performance being organised by rules and routines separate from normal joking makes the laughter in the company of strangers a risk-laden activity. This means that as individual's move from sharing jokes in their own conversational flow to watching stand-up comedy the implications of their laughter changes. Withholding laughter as much as offering it has distinct implications for the performer and performance and as such emphasises that audience members are not passive consumers of the humorous stimuli but active contributors to the building and maintaining of the stand-up performance.

9.2 INTERACTION

The recognition of the active role played by members of the audience during stand-up differentiates the work in this thesis drastically from joke theory and other text and stimulus-response based theories of joking. Many of the research findings presented here are based upon the fundamental observation that people do not lose or suspend their everyday ability to be alert and responsive to situations during stand-up. In Chapters 6-8 we saw how surprisingly complex structures are found to be manufactured between, and recognised by, both audience and performers. It was clearly demonstrated that what happens in stand-up is not the reproduction of set routines but the live, responsive and interactive organisation of sequences formed through the application of accepted patterns and rules. As such deviation or breakdowns in these sequences is always incorporated, repaired or responded to.

With a methodology based on close observation and analysis of the stand-up performance not previously exploited by humour researchers it has become apparent that members of an audience negotiate their behaviour and assess their contributions to the flow of the stand-up performance. The rich flow of communication that takes place in stand-up does not flow merely from the comedian to the homogenous audience but rather through all the parties involved as audiences offer feedback to the performer and respond to each others actions.[1] Through this it becomes possible to understand not only the mechanics of joke telling but the dynamics of stand-up. The research reported here has brought to the foreground the rich, conversation-like complexity of stand-up which contrasts sharply previous simplified models of laughter and joking.

With the introduction of interactive individuals into the study of comedy it has, for the first time in the study of stand-up, become possible to question assumptions about the manner in which the telling of jokes and the laughter of audiences are linked. Instead of working from a position it which the professional comedian is

seen to expose an homogenous and basically passive audience to their jokes, and by pressing the right comedy buttons make them laugh, this research has demonstrated that the nature of the relationship between comedy club, performers and audience is unquestionably two way. Rather than following the school of thought that accepts that laughter follows the telling of a joke and from there extrapolating that it is the joke's punchline which causes the laughter, this research has been able to look at where laughter occurs during stand-up, what events it has a local proximity to and consider the importance of its sequential placement. Such observations serve to undermine traditional frameworks based on the stimulus-response model discussed in Chapter 3.

The analysis presented in preceding chapters has recognised the performance malleability of even pre-scripted jokes. Given this, the idea that there exists with told jokes a distinct, clean and identifiable stimulus in any sense comparable to a natural scientific conception of the term becomes difficult to maintain. This thesis has shown the manner in which jokes, when placed in the performance environment, become intricately influenced by audience action, response and comment and transformed as the performance unfolds. This means that any understanding of stimulus in this context is merely an unhelpful metaphor.

Further, by understanding that the stand-up experience is essentially interactive for all parties involved we can see that a framework based around stimuli becomes untenable and that the traditional concept of the joke text becomes redundant. This has significant methodological implications for the researcher of stand-up (and spoken humour in general) as it becomes apparent that the idea of a text in the theatrical sense, as a transcription of the words said, is distinctly inadequate in understanding the interactive nature of humour. The importance of interaction is the manner in which it is not merely as a means through which to deliver stand-up comedy but the very process that makes it possible. Once this is recognised, the idea that a text which include the mechanics of the jokes but exists independent of an

understanding of that interaction can significantly or illustratively be used for developing an understanding of stand-up becomes unlikely. Traditional text-based analyses cannot record, and therefore facilitate, the exploration of the interactional nature of humour. They do not incorporate even basic but important features such as pace, laughter duration, overlap, intonation, and so forth.

The observation of audience laughter at stand-up performances has demonstrated that it does not just happen, nor does it erupt spontaneously or uncontrollably. Chapter 7 especially has shown that audiences "place" their laughter at signposted points in the interaction and that the appropriateness of laughter at these points recognised by both audience and performer. Performers and audience are alert to the movements of each other and respond and react to each others moves as they work together to facilitate laughter in stand-up.

The realisation that those involved in the stand-up interaction are alert and alive to each other leads neatly into the third of my concluding categories, liveness.

9.3 LIVENESS

Stand-up is a time-based medium. Unlike cartoons, comic novels or even comedy film, stand-up shares the same time frame as its audience. Its progress in time is the same as that of those that watch it, there is no editing, no separation between plot and story and it can never be repeated in the same fashion again. To state the stand-up is a live event may appear self-evident, however it is this vital aspect of comedy which is invariably left out or removed when humour researchers approach stand-up. Previous studies have dislocated stand-up from its live, situated, *in situ* social context[2] either by attempting to extract elements from the whole interactive performance and then relocate them in isolation within the confines of the psychological laboratory or by discarding audience, event, and experience while searching for the elusive (and as we have seen ultimately misleading) joke text.

The sharing of liveness as part of an audience is part of what differentiates the watching of a performance recording from being there. The act of taking part in such a live stand-up performance places a particular interactional onus on the audience. It not only makes them become involved in the developing flow of the act in an active and responsive manner but makes them responsible for their contribution. As we saw in Chapter 5 laughter is not a neutral interjection but a placed and affiliative contribution to stand-up interaction. Further, Chapter 3 demonstrated that not only is laughter a group experience but so is attending a comedy venue and the sharing of the live event is crucial in both an everyday and academic understanding of stand-up. Although talking of theatre Jean-Louis Barrault (1972) highlights the so often ignored importance of liveness as a quality in entertainment:

> Is it not surprising to come to realize that what men speak of most - the future and the past - is what does not exist, and that which exists - the present - is actually ungraspable. We need to find an amusement, a recreation, which will consist of enticing the present.

> Barrault, 1972, p.27

This sense of the present, of liveness, is a primary attraction of live stand-up. It incorporates, for both the audience and performer, a real and valid sense of the unexpected. Because, as we have seen, stand-up is interactional neither audience nor performer ultimately has control of the performance's progress the live performance carries with it the promise that what an audience sees at any show will be unique to them watching that comedian on that night. Even where a comedian tours with an act and plays the same set night after night across the country each performance will have its own defining characteristics and features. While an act stays the same the live performance can deliver a performer who may be on particularly good form, a group of drunken abusive hecklers, a late start to the gig or a special appearance by a comedian or a multitude of other variables which influence the experience. Liveness is what distinguishes the comedian's act from the stand-up performance. The act is just the joke texts, the running order, and the planned business that the comedian has prepared and which is carried around from venue to venue.

The work that this thesis has presented has shown not only the importance of liveness to an understanding of stand-up but that liveness can be systematically investigated and sociologically understood. Drawing on other fields and research I have demonstrated that the tools to pin down, examine and explain liveness can be developed and used to understand a local and temporally based performance.

NOTES

[1] A useful differentiation between an individual's interaction with the comedian during stand-up and their interaction with other audience members can be drawn from Goffman (1963). The relationship of the audience member to the performer is one of "focused interaction", the member of the audience watches the comedian and responds to their moves openly and directly. However, the view of other members of the audience is more diffuse, it is gleaned from a general sense of what is happening and as such can be regarded as "unfocused interaction".

[2] Audience research to too has demonstrated a distinct lack of concern with liveness as a topic for study. Partly dues to the history of the field, discussed briefly in Chapter 3, their has been a dominance of studies examining television programmes or printed text rather live events.

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APPENDIX 1

NOTES ON TRANSCRIPTION AND NOTATION USED

.

Throughout this thesis I have provide examples drawn from a wide range of performers. The manner of transcription has largely conformed to that generally accepted for use in conversation analysis (CA). This system originally developed by Gail Jefferson has been developed and refined by various other authors to meet their needs and highlight their particular research interests. As such there is no single definitive CA transcription cannon.[1] To clarify my extracts below is a guide to the transcription notation used within this thesis.

LINE NUMBERING

Throughout this thesis transcriptions have been given line numbers to aid reference to specific areas of the text. I have chosen to number each extract individually therefore their numbering does not indicate their original position within the whole performance. Similarly when elements of an extract are reused for further illustration or discussion the numbering sequence is renewed.

TRANSCRIPTOIN SYMBOLS

→

In a number of extracts quoted from other sources line numbers are omitted in the original. In such circumstances arrows are often used to indicate points of interest in the transcript.

(34) (Conservative Party Conference, 1980)

Thatcher:	This party has demonstrated (0.4) that we are a party united in
1 →	↑purpose
	(0.4)
2 →	strategy
	(0.2)
3 →	and re↓solve.

Atkinson, 1984, p.61

Instance in which vertical ellipses interrupt the transcription show that a section of the transcription has been omitted wither to save space of for clarity.

```
1    AC:    Oh, thankyou. Er::: () T'night's comedy and for t'night's
2           set we're gownna toower o the h↓uman body. Uh, we started
3           with the ar:sole.
4           .
5           .
6           .
7    AC:                        Wha'? 'Ello, 'e's go' somethi else to-
```

The presence of a colon indicates that the sound preceding it is prolonged. Multiple colons indicates incrementally longer prolonging. As such MB below can be seen to extend the final vowel of his sentence "That's all I'm going to do."

```
1    MB:    Anyroad. That's ↑all am gonna ↓do:: (.)
```

A hyphen indicates an abrupt breaking off of the word begun. Below TB begins the sentence with "He's been..." but interrupts himself before recommencing.

```
1    TB:    'E's be- 'e's bin grea::t tonight
```

An upward arrow indicate a rise of pitch in the sound that follows it. Similarly, a downward arrow indicates intonation lowering. In the example below JV rises in intonation of the "a" vowel of "name" before lowering for the closing sound of the word.

```
1    JV:    Er:: Is- He's only got one n↑a::↓me
```

Transcription surrounded °thus° indicates a lowering in volume of speech. As such JV can be seen to say "should" (line 2) notably quieter than the other talk that surrounds it.

.

1 JV: >Don't be afraid of Johnny< (0.9) You <u>do</u>
2   appreciate it (0.6) so ↓you °should°. (1.9) You
3   never spoke to me in schoowul.

h .h

"h" indicates an intake of breath whereas the symbol proceeded by a full stop

denotes an audible breath out as n line 1 below..

1 AW: I think if anything its the opposite (0.3) .hh
2   I think the lar:ger: a women's breasts: are (0.4) the less
3   intelligent (.) the men become.

>text<

Talk surrounded >thus< shows that the talk within is delivered at a notably

quicker pace that the talk which surround it.

1 EM: Or::: ( ) Marv- >av we got time for any more?<
2 EW: Yeah, I think so.

Conversely talk transcribed <thus> indicates a slowing in pace.

CAPITALS

Utterances in CAPITALS are notable in being louder than the surrounding talk.

SH's rapidly delivered talk raises in amplitude for the opening question, "What's

it do?" and similarly stresses, "open" with a rise in amplitude.

1 SH: >WHAT'S IT DO? Ya gonna OPEN the closet an
2   he's there with a hatchet an e goes< (.)

text

Underlining indicates a stress on the transcribed talk as in its repeated use in the

CA extract below.

1 CA: <u>Pre-sliced</u> <u>mushrooms</u>! (0.8)
2   <u>Why</u> are they <u>there</u>? (0.7)
3   <u>What</u> room have they on our supermarket shelves?

| = | In instance in which the talk of one speaker leads into the speech of another without any pause the continuing lines are linked with a "=". As such in the extract below the transcription indicates that audience laughter commences immediately after the completion of the comedian's talk. |

```
1   GS:                        Ya' know like erh, "Dear
2        Jim, as a blind ↑or↓phan I've never been on a ↓bus,"=
3   Aud:  =HHHHHHHHHHHHHhhHHhh-h-h-hHHHHh-h-h
```

| (0.8) | Numbers within single brackets denotes pauses in tenths of seconds. Line 2 of this extract demonstrates a pause of 1.2 seconds between "I was a kid" and "there was this one house" a 1 second pause between the end of line 3 and beginning of line 4 and a longer 1.3 second pause in the middle of line 4. |

```
1   RN:   I grew up among Italians. Uhm and erh >can remember when I
2         was a kid< (1.2 ) there was this one house when I'd walk by (1.0)
3         a ma::n (.) used to come out onto the doorstep n go,
4         ((Italian accent)) "Eh YOU! (1.3)  I fuck your ↑ma:↓ther."
5   Aud:                                            HHHHHHhhhh
6   RN:   "I fuck your ma;ther. I FUCK your.h mather." And I shout back
7         "Hello dad."
```

| (.) | Untimed pauses of less the three tenths of a second are transcibed as "(.)" as in the pause between "a man" and "used to come" in line 3. |

```
1   RN:   I grew up among Italians. Uhm and erh >can remember when I
2         was a kid< (1.2 ) there was this one house when I'd walk by (1.0)
3         a ma::n (.) used to come out onto the doorstep n go,
4         ((Italian accent)) "Eh YOU! (1..3)  I fuck your ↑ma:↓ther."
```

| (text) | Text within single brackets indicates transcription uncertainty over the talk enclosed often because of inaudibility. Empty brackets "(   )" indicate that talk took place but what was said was unintelligible on the recording. |

	1 MB: Thanks fer listenin' come an tes' ma microphone (up here)
((text))	Text within double brackets indicate elements of interaction for which either notation does not exist or would be unhelpful. In this thesis it is often associated with audience cheers or whistles (line 3): 1 RM: HUge applause please (0.3) huge applause. 2 Aud: xxxXXXXXXXXXXXXxxxxxxxx-x-x 3 Aud: ((cheers)) 4 (RM) ( ) how about that! However it is also used to describe stage business or changes in voice quality as in the adoption of an accent below: 1 BH: It's Beelze((Adopting American South accent))bozo 2 ↓tim::e. (1.1) Tell me some'in who here outta you 3 younguns (.) has never ↑smoked a ciga↓rette? >C'mere 4 ↑kids<

A number of non traditional symbols have been used within and others discarded to highlight specific stand-up features. The most notable of these is audience laughter. Although other author (e.g. Jefferson 1979, Glenn 1989) have attempted close transcription of individuals laughing during conversation the nature of laughter during stand-up performances as predominantly a group activity makes this approach inappropriate. Instead I have adapted the method used by Clayman (1993, 1992) to transcribe audience applause at political speeches. Building on Atkinson (1984), Clayman uses "x"s to denote applause and keeps with a similar basic pattern to the transcription outline above so that uppercase symbols indicate a rise in volume.[2] As such:

xxxx	Indicates quiet audience applause
XXXX	Indicates loud audience applause
-x-x-	Indicates quiet isolated applause from individuals in the audience
-X-X-	Indicates loud isolated applause from individuals in the audience

As such in this thesis audience laughter is transcribed as follows.

hhhh	Indicates quiet audience laughter such as received by RM's comment. 1 RM: He's- he's off already. What's happened? Gone to the loo? 2 >Straight away 'e's gone.< 3 Aud: hhhhh
HHHH	Indicates loud audience laughter: 1 RM: Coz in my day, I seem to remember, in my 2 day a finger a Fudge used to be enough. 3 Aud: HHHHHHHHHHHHH
-h-h-	Indicates quiet isolated laughter from individuals in the audience: 1 MB: >OK whama gonna do - wit the danger<↓ous item: (0.3) I'm 2 gonna demonstra↓::te (1.0) my am↑a:↓zin: self cotro↓wul. (1.0) 3 >Not that I've demonstrate any so f ⌐ar.= 4 Aud: └h-h-h-h-h
-H-H-	Indicates loud isolated laughter from individuals in the audience: 1 GS: I er- (1.3) ↑thanks for ↑star↓in'. 2 Aud. H-H

Such a system allows the transcription of changes in laughter. As such it can be seen that the laughter AC receive start quietly and rapidly build in amplitude.

1 AC: >Thiz always one comedian, isn't there?< (.)
2   And its me -
3   so >fuck off:!<
4 Aud: hHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
5 Aud: x-xxxxxxx-x-x-x

NOTES

[1] See Psathas and Anderson (1990), Button & Lee (1987) for discussion of the varying definitions of symbols and conventions used in CA transcription.

[2] Clayman denotes booing in a similar manner with the replacement of the "X" in applause transcription with a "B".

APPENDIX 2

TRANSCRIPTS OF PERFORMANCE EXAMPLES USED IN CHAPTER 7

ADRIAN COOK: THE BUZZ: 22.6.95

Cook:	[Applause]
	Ah so, well here we are, listen. ( ) all warmed up for the rest of the -
Heckler	Thought you'd finished!
	[Laughter 1.3]
Cook:	Oh, thank you. Tonight's comedy and for tonight's set we're gonna
	have a tour of the human body. Uh, we started with the arse hole.
	[Laughter, Applause 8.3]
Heckler	( )
Cook:	Hello, he's got something else to say
Heckler	Finish with the bollocks.
	[Laughter 4.5]
Cook:	There's always one comedian, isn't there? And its me - so fuck off.
	[Laughter, Applause 4.6]
	Let's, let's warm are selves - have a big cheer on the count of three.
	Ready one-two-three.
	[Cheers]
	Oh, brilliant. And a bit of research I'm doing, lets er, big shout on the
	count of three this time. Think about this very carefully, big cheer on
	the count of three, for all the people here - who are good in bed.
	[Cheers]
	[Laughter 1.0]
	Big, little cheer from some one who's so good in bed they didn't wait
	for me to clap count.
	[Laughter 2.0]
	"I'm a sexual athlete, I'll cheer straight away!" OK. One-two-three.
	[Cheers]
	Ah, that's better isn't it? But uh, (Pointing to hecklers) they were very
	quiet weren't they?
	[Laughter 2.6]

Fuck all to say then, didn't we.

[Laughter 1.1]

They're going, "We're shit in bed. What are we going to do? Were gonna sit there with our arms folded" So...

[Laughter 5.1]

They're gonna be back in work on Monday, won't they, going "I was fuckin' funny on Thursday night"

[Laughter 3.8]

As, so, right, its good to be, good to be in Manchester. I'm not being insincere when I say, "Its good to be in Manchester doing it." because erhh, I live here.

[Laughter 3.7]

And err, it's been one of those days, hasn't it? Its them days. One day in the year when suddenly all the old age pensioners in the country they change don't they? So three hundred and sixty four days of a year all the old age pensioners going "In it cold. Oh, in it cold"

[Laughter 3.2]

And then today, all of a sudden they'll all change their tune and all going, "In it hot"

[Laughter 2.6]

"Too hot for me."

[Laughter 0.9]

And they just do that, don't they, probably do that when they're dead. An everybody like take them to the mortuary, and er, they're all in there going, "Oh, in it cold"

[Laughter 0.9]

And shove in the crematorium, and "Too hot in it? Too hot."

[Laughter 0.9]

So, it's been a bit of a crap month the weather so far, hasn't it for June? May, was better. My favourite month May, two bank holidays - Good month May. Good month but, er, shit name - I always think, innit. May! Sounds a bit indecisive.

[Laughter 0.6]

You go, you go, "May!"

[Laughter 0.4]

"May not."

[Laughter 1.2]

I think they should change, I think they should give it a blokes name.

Give it something more manly, more macho - like Richard.

[Laughter, Cheers, Whistles 3.2]

Alright, or Terry, that'll do ( ) So then you have, what would it be,

January, February, March, April - Terry and June.

[Laughter 5.9]

Has a nice sort of ring to it.

So, we're in er, in Chorlton - Chorlton-cum-Hardy - which is nice.

Any one here from Chorlton?

Audience   [Isolated yeahs]

Cook: Oh, the Chorlton crowd's at the back there ( ). Ah, cause Chorlton-

cum-Hardy was described in er, in "City Life" as being "The new

Bohemia of Manchester". And go ahh that's a bit arty is it, "We live in

the new Bohemia of Manchester, ohh ay." And er, kinda ironic cause a

couple of years ago, for me holiday, I went to Czechoslovakia and

there's actually now a part of Prague that they're calling "The new

Chorlton-cum-Hardy of Prague."

[Laughter 3.6]

They've even know one of their Rococo cathedrals and replaced it with

half a dozen estate agent and a big Blockbuster Video.

[Laughter 2.2]

And a drive through Kentucky.

[Laughter 0.6]

( ) What's going on over here?

Heckler   ( )

[Laughter 0.3]

Cook:	There a bloke sat with his back to me, you know. What a weird way to watch comedy.
	[Laughter 1.1]
	That's how you watch television is it?
Heckler	That's right.
Cook:	"Haven't got a television - only got a radio."
	[Laughter 0.5]
	((Turns around)) "Fuck me, it's a television!"
	[Laughter, Applause 2.4]
	Er yeah, so where are the Chorlton people again?
Audience	( )
Cook:	"Ur no, he picks on people - don't say anything."
	[Laughter 1.6]
	Cause I just wondered like, living in Chorlton, do you, do you ever drink like here, downstairs, in the Southern Hotel? No, too fuckin right, fuckin rough here isn't it?
	[Laughter 1.5]
	No, this is a really - really dodgy pub.
	[Laughter 2.4]
	Cause about a year ago it got a really bad reputation for sort of being like the drugs den. People buying crack, getting shot.
Heckler	And Miller Lane.
Cook:	What?
	[Laughter 0.6]
	Oh, that a sentence then was it?
	[Laughter, Applause 5.6]
	Which one of your mates put your tie on for you?
	[Laughter 4.8]
	No, it er ( )
Heckler	( )
Cook:	Can I - can I carry on?
	[Laughter 0.4]

Heckler	You're getting paid for it, I'm not.
	[Laughter 0.6]
Cook:	Not getting paid much,
	[Laughter 0.8]
Heckler (2)	( )
Cook:	Nice to have drink afterwards wouldn't it? Oh hello, there someone over here now picking on him.

[Laughter 0.8]

There's fight. The hecklers and heckling the hecklers.

[Laughter 2.1]

No, they did, they really got a reputation for drug dealing and the brewery they got wind of this and sort of gone "Get rid of them, gotta drive out he drug pushers. Get rid of the drug pushers." And they did this, downstairs, at the Southern Hotel, they did this by reupholstering the furniture.

[Laughter 2.6]

Yes, and hanging up a couple of Victorian Prints, er -

[Laughter 0.3]

I don't know how its supposed to work. Witchcraft or something, I suppose.

[Laughter 0.3]

Bet you drug dealers come along and go, "I can't sell drugs in the Southern Hotel any more not - not now they've got Gabriel Rosetti's "Ophelia in the Lake".

[Laughter 0.7]

It does my head in.

[Laughter 0.3]

Bring back the old pictures. Bring back the dogs playing snooker.

[Laughter 1.8]

Uhhm. There been a lot of change in, in Manchester pubs. I don't know if you've noticed this - You'ld have a pub, in town - (To heckler) You don't you're not from Manchester ( ). You'ld have a pub in town

and uhhm, and like one minute your selling your Guinness, few people are in there having a drink, great, you know. And the next minute the brewery paint it Emerald Green, and they call it Mushy O'Shea's Docherty O'Flannagan's

[Laughter 0.9]

And the very next day there'll be a hundred students all queuin' up to ( )

[Laughter 2.8]

Going, "Oh my great great granddad, you know, he was Irish. Just like being back in old Dublin - even though I've lived all my life in Nantwich."

[Laughter 3.2]

I always think, like cause like yeah, you've got your English pubs - mock Tudor, people drinking stoat, and then you've got these Irish themes pubs - I noticed a little gap in the market, I think they should have Welsh theme pubs.

Audience   [Single yeah and isolated cheers]

Cook: Yeah! Let them sort out a little grey building, you know.

[Laughter 4.4]

Nothing much, you know, just a little grey building ( ) with "Evans" written across the top.

[Laughter 2.3]

In chalk!

[Laughter 1.6]

And you can go in you Iri - you go to your Welsh theme pub and they'd all be sitting round there. They'ld be a real Welsh atmosphere. Cause, they'ld all be sat round all with there arms folded, all sour faced, you know.

[Laughter 2.3]

Heckler   ( ) the sheep.

Cook: This - yeah - uhm, er

[Laughter 0.6]

And you got to the bar and you'd say, "Barman, I'll have a pint please, I'll have a pint of Welsh bitter, A pint of Welsh beer," and the barman would look at you, and he'd go: ((Welsh accent)) "This is a Welsh, Wesleyan pub. There's two things we don't serve here: Alcohol and Englishmen - so fuck off!"

[Laughter, Applause 3.8]

Yeah, uhhm, so, er, sort of - I'm not from here originally, myself actually. The north that is, not the Southern Hotel. Uhhm, no, I'm a Southerner, and [Cheers] ( ) There a tremendous stigma attached to how northern you can get, and you get, in Manchester you get this sort "I'm from Crutchley [Crumpsall] me, where you from? Timperley. You southern bastard!"

[Laughter 4.8]

And it goes all the way down the country, doesn't it? "I'm from Manchester me, where you from? Stafford. You southern bastard!" If your from Birmingham - "You Southern Bastard!"

[Laughter 1.3]

But it doesn't you upwards, does it? It doesn't go the other way round: "I'm from Manchester, me, where you from? Scotland. Well fuck off back there then!"

[Laughter 3.7]

I'm from Southampton - so - [Cheers] You can't get much further south than that can you? In fact, we used to hang around the Red Funnel Ferry terminal where we stood going "Where you from? The Isle of White? You southern bastard!"

[Laughter 5.1]

You wouldn't do that cause they're all prisoners on there, you know.

[Laughter 1.3]

Arhh, tonight, so, here we are, uhmm. Yeah, my name's Ardian Cook and, erh, not Steve Ovett

[Laughter 4.0]

As this old lady thought in the Arndale Centre. Bit of a stupid place to go jogging really, isn't it?

[Laughter, Applause 3.4]

But a great place to go shoplifting though. Pick pocketing, no, great place pick pocketing. Especially if you pickpocket under where Warner Brothers show that big cartoon on the ceiling cause there's always like half a dozen people with big bags of shopping all stood looking at the cartoon on the ceiling. "Ooh, look at Tweety Pie"

[Laughter 0.9]

So I just help myself.

[Laughter 2.8]

I don't know. Aah so, that didn't go down very well did it? "( ) What you talking about?" Has any one been there? No? "No, we do all our shopping in the seven eleven cause we ( )" Well look, You have heard of it?

Audience	Yeah
Cook:	And you've heard of the Warner Brother's shop ion there?
Audience	Yeah
Cook:	You must of heard of that.
Audience	Yeah
Cook:	That good isn't it. You know what it's like. In the Warner Brother's shop they actually employ somebody, very American this, employ someone to stand outside the Warner Brother's shop and every time a customer goes in this person goes, "Hello!"

[Laughter 2.0]

What a sad way to make a living isn't it?

[Laughter 1.5]

And er, I've been watching this, and I've - they draw an invisible line just outside the shop. Draw an invisible line. And every time the the customer come in, when they get to that very line that is the point they go, "Hello". So what I've been doing is going out on a Saturday. Walking towards the line. Just as you get up to the line, just turn away,

like that...

[Laughter 2.1]

Don't make eye contact ( )

[Laughter 0.5]

They'll just be standing there going "Haaa...

[Laughter 0.4]

See that? What a bastard"

[Laughter 0.3]

So that's good. Uh, sso no, the Arndale's too big, isn't it? As well. Big place, Don't think. Cause I was - it's huge - I think it'd be a good place to go on holiday.

[Laughter 0.9]

If you were poor or something, like you, a student.

[Laughter 0.3]

Cause instead of going inter-railing you could go Arndaling ( ).

[Laughter 0.4]

( ) "Robert, Robert what are you doing for your holidays?" "Arh, we're going to go, er, Arndaling. Couple days in WH Smith's, a week in Boot's, climb the North Escalator, meet up with Casper and (Romer) who are coming round (the) Reject's Shop.

[Laughter 2.2]

Er, erh, anyway, so. ( ) I've been away actually, I not been to Amer.. so what's happened, anything? Anyone won the lottery? "( ) ten pounds and I'm not telling you."

Heckler   You haven't!

Cook: No, cause, cause if you would you wouldn't come out would you? Perhaps, not, I don't know, I've never won. But uhm, like If you did won, hypothetic question, how many people here, if they won the lottery would keep there day jobs.

[Laughter 1.1]

Nobody. Me, I would, I'd keep my day job. In fact I'd enjoy my day job because the rest of you would all be going to the pub (sic) on

Monday morning when you all get - Monday morning and you go, "Oh,

I' got to go to work. Hate my job." And I'd be skipping, "Crikey, I'm

gonna work, yeah brilliant." And I'd get to work and my boos would

go, "Adrian, could you read through all those files and have them

sorted out by lunchtime?" And I'd go, "No!

[Laughter 1.3]

No I don't think I'll be able to do that thankyou.

[Laughter 0.3]

I'll just sit here and look out the window."

[Laughter 1.3]

He'd go "You've been drinking!" "Yes, I've had five pints very nice

they were too."

[Laughter 0.5]

"You realise its company policy not to drink alcohol?" "Not any more -

I've bought the company. It's company policy to come pissed."

[Laughter 4.7]

He'll say, "Adrian, what we gonna do about the Thopmson contract?"

"Bollocks to the Thompson contract

[Laughter 0.6]

we're gonna get a huge Scaletrix set

[Laughter 2.1]

and we're gonna play scalectric till we go bust and you all loose you

job except me, course" So, that's a bit cruel isn't it? Erhh, what else?

Oh, there's an American coming on later, so that'll be goo won't it,

cause, uhm, quite quite scary thing to do, I think, cause they're two

different cultures and not necessarily the same sense of humour. No,

she could come rushing on stage and go, "Hey, I tell you the story

about the hah hogie and the chilli cokor. I said where's the stucco

schmuch, man?" What?

[Laughter 5.2]

What you on about? I didn't fuckin understand a word of that. And I

know a bit about this because, erm, I did a gig a gig on Friday last

week, and a lot of the audience didn't understand me because I did this

gig in Boston. Ahm, not Boston, Lincolnshire obviously - "Do some fuckin jokes about potatoes!"

[Laughter, Applause 7.3]

No, so I was doing this show in Boston, and erh,

[Laughter 0.3]

and I did the Terry and June gag.

[Laughter 3.4]

And there was complete silence, and I said, "You never heard of it? What you never heard of "Terry and June"?" Said "No, we've got cable television, you're just shit."

[Laughter 1.1]

And so, yeah, I was over there, urhm, is is err, it's weird. There's different words in America mean different things. Like in Boston they had this big exhibition of jellyfish, world's largest collection of jellyfish, quite interesting. And I would of gone, I would have gone. had it not been for the fact that the word for jellyfish in America is 'jelly'. So I'm walking round, there's posters everywhere saying "The world's largest collection of jelly".

[Laughter 0.4]

Well that's going to be fuckin exciting isn't it?

[Laughter 1.7]

"Ahh, Rowntree,

[Laughter 0.8]

Chivers,

[Laughter 0.9]

oh, another Rowntree

[Laughter 0.8]

Marvellous." Saw a very strange advert the other day, said, "There is now an alternative to the beef burger - the Linda McCartney burger." I thought I'd not seen here for a while.

[Laughter 2.8]

A was in hospital, saw a very strange notice on the wall, it said, "Hepatitis is a bloody menace." I thought, ooh, that's the medical

profession for you, they've come up with a pun on the word "bloody".

I can do better than that, can I, "Gonorrhoea is fuckin nuisance."

[Laughter 4.3]

I just taking us on a downward turn now hasn't it?

[Laughter 0.6]

Did di anyone see those, erhm, those adverts they had up for Club 18-30 holidays, that they got banned in the end.

Audience: Yeah

Cook: Really rude they were weren't they? Can you remember what they were? No, conveniently forgotten.

[Laughter 0.3]

No, the sign sort of urm, "Girls, fancy a package holiday"

[Laughter 1.3]

and erh, "Beaver Espania"

[Laughter 2.0]

"The summer of 69"

[Laughter 0.9]

So, you couldn't be more obscene if you tried, could you? Unless you had, "Club 18-30 - Fat Cock"

[Laughter 1.3]

"More snatch than you can wave a stick at."

[Laughter, Applause 3.6]

Oh found they're level.

[Laughter 5.3]

Heckler Harry!

Cook: There's an advert that always used to amuse me, on television. It's the army, army recruitment advert, I bet you remember that. I was on the telly and cinema. And er, it was this advert called, "To be Frank". Anyone remember it? No?

Audience Yeah

Cook: Oh you do, great. And er, this guy, he was in the army, and his to mates were sat in a café, in Birmingham, I think, and one would say to

the other, ((Brummie accent)) "I wonder what Frank's doing now?"

[Laughter 0.3]

And in the next scene they'ld be six blokes skiing down a mountain, having a really good time, with a big arrow coming out the sky going, "Here's Frank", you know.

[Laughter 0.3]

And back to the café, an it go, ((Brummie accent)) "Yeah, I bet it's something really boring" But no, cause in the next scene, they're all windsurfing - all having a good time, windsurfing along, and

[Laughter 0.3]

big arrow, "Here's Frank." And finally back to the café says ((Brummie accent)) "Yeah, but I bet he has no social life." Wrong! Cause in the closing scene there is Frank walking along the beach, sun setting in the distance with his arm around his bird cause, "every-body luvs a squaddie"

[Laughter 3.5]

And the reason I hate this advert because what they did not show was poor Frank crouching behind a wall in Sarajevo, cacking his fuckin pants.

[Laughter 2.2]

Cacking his pants cause at any moment there's gonna be a big arrow come out of the sky going "Here Frank!

[Laughter 2.9]

Shoot the fucker!"

[Laughter 6.8]

Errm, ( ) There's, there's been, erm, there been some weird, like I don't know, football season ended but there's loads of football stories in the news still. S'like Ray Parler, from Arsenal, I don't know read if you've read about this one. Ray Parler's in Singapore and er, he punched a taxi driver in the face ( ) and was fined three hundred quid. And he appeared in court and said to the judge, the reason he punched the taxi driver in the face was because he'd had twelve pints of beer to

drink, as an excuse. That not an excuse - that's an alibi, is it?

[Laughter 1.8]

"Officer, I didn't do it, I was in a coma."

[Laughter 6.3]

But, erm, I just show how football's been bought into disrepute, because in the seventies, you know, that would never have happened. George Best would never have drunk twelve pints of bee and punched a taxi driver in he face. He'd have driven home.

[Laughter 5.3]

So, I'll, I'll leave you with this little thought, there's uhm, why is it, on children's television programmes and sort of cartoons, and er, stuff like that, there's a, whenever there's a burglary, all the painting are left tilted.

[Laughter 1.8]

( ) like that.

[Laughter 1.0]

So how's that come about? You got two breaking in, one goes, "OK, Bob you grab the video recorder - I'll go round with the protractor"

[Laughter 1.0]

Thanks very much, good night.

[Applause]

BILL HICKS: REVELATIONS

	[Applause, Cheers]
Hicks:	You're in the right place.
	[Laughter 0.8]
Hicks:	It's Bill
	[Laughter 2.0]
Hicks:	I'm living out in Los Angeles now so you know I like coming over here, you know, for the weather.
	[Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	You guys have weather. Cool.
	[Laughter 0.6]
Hicks:	Los Angeles every day, hot and sunny, today, hot and sunny, tomorrow, hot and,
	[Laughter 1.3]
Hicks:	for the rest of the... hot and sunny, every single day, hot and sunny. And they love it. "Isn't great every day, hot and sunny?"
	[Laughter 1.8]
Hicks:	What are you, a fucking lizard?
	[Laughter 3.0]
Hicks:	Only reptiles feel that way about this kind of weather. I'm a mammal, I can afford coats, scarves, cappuccino and rosy cheeked women.
	[Laughter 2.9]
Hicks:	LA is the home of the pedestrian right of law. What this law is if a pedestrian decides to cross the road, anywhere or any time on the road, every car has to stop and let this person cross the road. Yes, it's only in LA is common courtesy have to be legislated. Ha ha ha
	[Laughter 3.2]
Hicks:	Every car has to stop. Pretty ludicrous in light of the city we're in now right, if someone steps in front of your car here, you speed up and turn your wipers on you know.
	[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: "Bum ch, bum ch. Bad call brother. Rrr."

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: "Must of had a bad day. I don't know."

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Stupid law. How may of y'all wondered like I did during the LA riots, when those people were pulled out of their trucks and beaten half to death. How many of y'all wondered like I did. Step on the fucking gas man!

[Laughter, Applause 10.7]

Hicks: They're on foot, you're in a truck

[Laughter 2.9]

Hicks: I think I see away out of this.

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: The pedestrian right of way law

[Laughter, Applause 5.5]

Hicks: People are driving home, a gang of youths stepped in front of their truck, Molotov cocktails, clubs in hand, everyone of these idiots Whoo.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: (Mimes waving people across road)

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: (Mimes pulling by hair)

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: I guarantee you got Reginald Denney, that truck driver. Never gonna stop again as long as he lives.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: Gimme me an old woman with a baby carriage crossing the road, he's Urrr, urrrrr.

[Laughter 4.6]

Hicks: "Not today baby."

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: Not a time to quit smoking kids, hahaha, but I fucking did it.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: And yes I miss' em.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: It is hard to quit smoking. Everyone of them looks real good to me right now. Every cigarette looks like it was made by God and rolled by Jesus

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: and moistened shut with Claudia Schiffer's pussy right now

[Laughter 17.4]

Hicks: Wwwww. "Golly that looks tasty"

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: Every time I'm here something weird happens. This time Bush lost. Cool.

[Laughter, Applause 1.9]

Hicks: People ask me where I stood politically you know. It's not that I disagree with Bush's economic policy or his foreign policy. But I believe he was a child of Satan here to destroy the planet Earth.

[Laughter, Applause 5.3]

Hicks: Yeah, I'm a little a little to the left there, I was. I was leaning that way.

[Laughter 3.6]

Hicks: Yeah you know who else is going, little Quayle boy. Little Damien.

[Laughter 3.1]

Its that guy Damien? Tell me those blank empty eyes aren't gonna glow red in the very near future. Stop making jokes about me. Nrrr. I'll spell potato any fucking way I want Nrrrr.

[Laughter, Applause 7.3]

Hicks: Rioters in LA, let's nuke them.

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: Bush was a pussy Nrr

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: He held me back.

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: Frightening people man. Bush tried to buy votes towards the end of the election. Goes around, you know, selling weapons to everyone, getting that military industrial complex vote happening for him. Sold 160 fighter jets to Korea and then 240 tanks to Kuwait and then goes around making speeches why he should be Commander-in-Chief because, "We still live in a dangerous world."

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: Thanks to you, you fucker

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: What are you doing? Last week Kuwaitis had nothing but rocks.

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: They're arming the fucking world man. You know we armed Iraq. I wondered about that too, you know during the Persian Gulf war those intelligence reports would come out. Iraq incredible weapons - incredible weapons. "How do you know that?" "Oh well

[Laughter, Applause 5.3]

Hicks: We looked at the receipts Haar.

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: Ah but as soon as that cheque clears, we're going in.

[Laughter 8.3 Continues till "We're going in for..."]

Hicks: What time's the bank open? 8 We're going in at 9."

[Cheers]

Hicks: "We're going in for God and country and democracy and here's a foetus and he's a Hitler. Whatever you fucking need, let's go.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: Get motivated behind this, let's go." Ohoh looks like Mr. Major's on the hot seat there for a second too.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: Little Iraqgate, little rapscallion he is.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: "Did we set, did I don't, did

[Laughter, Applause, Cheers 10.8]

Hicks: I have to check Maggie's old calendar."

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: What's funny about this. Every one of your papers says that you guys sold Iraq <u>machine</u> <u>tools</u> -

[Laughter 4.2]

Hicks: which Iraq then converted

[Laughter 4.4]

Hicks: into military equipment.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: I have news for you folks, a canon is a machine tool.

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: Your Orwellian language notwithstanding, it's a fucking machine, it's a tool.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Our papers in the States have the same thing. We sold Iraq <u>farming</u> <u>equipment</u>

[Laughter, Applause 4.3]

Hicks: which Iraq then 'converted'. How do they do this? "Sinalabim sinalabaim aa salabim sim sim sim salbim."

[Laughter, Applause 6.7]

Hicks: "Wow it was a chicken coop, it's now a nuclear reactor!"

[Laughter 3.0]

Hicks: "This war's for Aladdin." Farming equipment which they converted into military, okay, you got me I'm curious, exactly what kind of farming equipment is this? "Oh okay, well it's stuff for the farmers of Iraq."

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Yeah?

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: What!

"Ooh okay, ar well ooh one of the things we gave him was for the little farmer, a new thing we came up with called er the er, flame-throwing rake.

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: No it was for the farmer see. He would rake the leaves and then just turn around Boooo." You know what the Iraqis did with that?

[Laughter 6.4]

Hicks: There's no trees in Iraq, what are you sending them rakes for, you asshole?

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: "We could have done our research better perhaps yes."

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: What else did you sell 'em?

"Okay er one of the other things we gave 'em was a new thing for the farmer.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: The er armoured tractor.

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: No, farmers when they farm look over their shoulders at times and they won't see a tree and they'll hit it maybe and there'll be a wasps nest in the tree and the wasps will come in and sting 'em.

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: So we put four inches of armour all over the tractor

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: and a turret to shoot pesticides on the wasps.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Yeah but you know what the Iraqis did with that?

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: Can't trust 'em.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: I'm so sick of arming the world and then sending troops over to destroy the fucking arms, you know what I mean. We keep arming these little countries then we go and blow the shit out of em.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: We're like the bullies of the world, you know. We're like Jack Palance in the movie Shane.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Throwing a pistol at the sheep herder's feet. "Pick it up."

[Laughter 5.6]

Hicks: "I don't wanna pick it up mister, you'll shoot me."

[Laughter 4.5]

Hicks: "Pick up the gun".

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: "Mister, I don't want no trouble huh. I just came down town here to get some hard rock candy for my kids, some gingham for my wife.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: I don't even know what gingham is,

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: but she goes through about 10 rolls a week of that stuff.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: I ain't looking for no trouble mister."

"Pick up the gun."

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: Boom bom "You all saw him, he had a gun."

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Kennedy, I love talking about the Kennedy assassination because to me it's a great example of, er, a totalitarian government's ability to, you know, manage information and thus keep us in the dark anyway they. Oh sorry wrong meeting

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Ah shit. That's the meeting we're having tomorrow at the docks.

[Laughter 3.6]

Hicks: I love talking about Kennedy. I was just down in Dallas, Texas. You know you can go down there and, er, to Dealey Plaza where Kennedy was assassinated. And you can actually go to the sixth floor of the Schoolbook Depository. It's a museum called... 'The Assassination Museum'.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: I think they named that after the assassination. I can't be too sure of the chronology here but.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Anyway they have the window set up to look exactly like it did on that day. And it's really accurate, you know, cos Oswald's not in it.

[Laughter, Applause, Cheers 8.8]

Hicks: "Yeah, yeah so wow that's cool." Painstaking accuracy, you know. It's true, it's called the 'Sniper's Nest'. It's glassed in, it's got he boxes sitting there. You can't actually get to the window as such but the reason they did that of course, they didn't want thousands of American tourists getting there each year going

[Mimes looking out of window]

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: "No fucking way!

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: I can't even see the road.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Shit they're lying to us.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Fuck!

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Where are they?

[Laughter 2.1]

There's no fucking way.

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: Not unless Oswald was hanging by his toes,

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: upside down from the ledge.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Either that or some pigeons grabbed onto him,

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: flew him over the motorcade.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Surely someone would have seen that.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: You know there was rumours of anti-Castro pigeons seen drinking in bars

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Someone overhead them saying coo coo.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Coo. Unbelievable. And you know what's wild, people's er attitudes in the States about it. Talking about Kennedy, people come up to me. "Bill, you talking about Kennedy man. Let it go.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: It's a long time ago - just forget about it."

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: And like alright then don't bring up Jesus to me.

[Laughter, Applause 8.5]

Hicks: As long as we're talking shelf life here.

[Laughter 4.0]

Hicks: "Bill, you know Jesus died for you." Yeah, well it was a long time ago. Forget about it.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: How about this. Get Pilate to release the fucking files.

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: Quit washing your hands Pilate - release the godamm files.

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: Who else was on that grassy Golgotha that day.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: "Bill, it was just, you know hur,

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: taking over democracy by totalitarian government, let it go."

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: That's another good thing about Bush being gone man cos for the last 12 years with Reagan and Bush, we have had fundamentalist Christians in the White House. Fundamentalist Christians who believe the Bible is the exact word of God, including that wacky fire and brimstone Revelations ending

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: have had their finger on the fucking button for 12 years.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: "Tell me when Lord, tell me when.

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: Let me be your servant Lord."

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: Fundamentalist Christianity - fascinating. These people actually believe that the bi.., er, the world is 12 thousand years old. Swear to God.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: What the. Based on what? I ask them.

"Well we looked at all the people in the Bible and we added 'em up all the way back to Adam and Eve,

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: their ages - 12 thousand years."

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: Well how fucking scientific, okay.

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: I didn't know that you'd gone to so much trouble. That's good.

[Laughter 5.1]

Hicks: You believe the world's 12 thousand years old?

"That's right."

Okay I got one word to ask you, a one word question, ready? "Huhu."

Dinosaurs.

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: You know the world's 12 thousand years old and dinosaurs existed, they existed in that time, you think it would have been mentioned in the fucking Bible at some point!

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: "And lo Jesus and the disciples walked to Nazareth. But the trail was blocked by a giant brontesaurus

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: with a splinter in his paw.

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: And oh the disciples did run a shriekin'! 'What a big fucking lizard, Lord.'

[Laughter, Applause 6.8]

Hicks: But Jesus was unafraid and he took the splinter from the brontosaurus's paw and the big lizard became his friend.

[Laughter 1.7]

And Jesus sent him to Scotland where he lived in a loch for oh

[Laughter, Applause 4.0]

Hicks: so many years inviting thousands of American tourists to bring their fat fucking families

[Laughter, Applause Continuing till "Get this... 12.2]

Hicks: and their fat dollar bills. And oh Scotland did praise the Lord. Thank you Lord, thank you Lord. Thank you Lord." Get this, I actually asked one of these guys, OK, Dinosaurs fossils - how does that fit into you scheme of life?

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: Let me sit down and strap in.

[Laughter 5.7]

Hicks: He said, "Dinosaur fossils? God put those there to test our faith."

[Laughter 7.0]

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Hicks:	Thank God I'm strapped in right now here man.
	[Laughter 1.8]
Hicks:	I think God put you here to test my faith, Dude.
	[Laughter 2.7]
Hicks:	You believe that?
	"Hu huh."
	[Laughter 1.2]
Hicks:	Does that trouble anyone here? The idea that God might be fuckin with our heads?
	[Laughter 1.7]
Hicks:	I have trouble with that knowledge. Some prankster God running around, "Hu hu ho.
	[Laughter 2.8]
Hicks:	We will see who believes in me now, ha ha.
	[Laughter 1.6]
Hicks:	I am God, I am a prankster.
	[Laughter 1.1]
Hicks:	I am killing Me."
	[Laughter 2.4]
Hicks:	You know, You die and go to St. Peter. "Did you believe in dinosaurs?" "Well, yeah. There was fossils everywhere" Thuh "Arhhh"
	[Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	"You fuckin idiot.
	[Laughter 1.0]
Hicks:	Flying lizards, you're a moron. God was fuckin with you."
	[Laughter 1.8]
Hicks:	"It seemed so plausible, ahhhh!"
	[Laughter 2.8]
Hicks:	Enjoy the wake of fire, fucker!" You ever noticed how people who believe in creationism look really uninvolved.
	[Laughter 4.0]

Hicks: Ya ever noticed there eyes real close together, eyebrow ridges, big furry hands and feet.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: "I believe God created me in one day"

[Laughter, Applause 6.3]

Hicks: Look liked he rushed it.

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: They believe the bible is the exact word of God - Then they changed the bible.

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: Pretty presumptuous, hu huh?

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: "I think what God meant to say..."

[Laughter 5.0]

Hicks: I have never been that confident.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: Next we have a bible out called 'The New Living Bible', it's the bible in updated and modern English. I guess to make it more palatable for people to read. But its really weird, when you listen to it. "And Jesus walked on water, and Peter said, 'Awesome!'"

[Laughter, Applause 7.9]

Hicks: Suddenly we got Jesus hanging ten across the Sea of Galilee.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Christ's Bogus Adventure, you know.

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: Deuteronomy 90210, you know.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Such a weird belief. Lot of Christians wear crosses around their neck. You think when Jesus comes back he's gonna want to see a fucking cross man?

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: "Oaww" May be why he hasn't shown up yet.

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: "Man, there still wearing crosses. Fuck it I not goin dad.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: No, they totally missed the point.

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: When they start wearing fishes I might show up again,

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: but... Let me bury fossil heads with you Dad, Fuck em - Let's Fuck with them!

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: They're fuckin with me now, lets get em. Give me that brontesaurus head, Dad."

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: You know, kinda like going up to Jackie Onassis with a rifle pendant on, you know.

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: "Thinkin' of John, Jackie. We love him.

[Laughter, Applause 3.5]

Hicks: Tryin to keep that memory alive, baby."

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: Back and to the left, back and to the left, back and to the left, back and to the left. Which, by the way, that action you see Kennedy's head go through in the Zapruder film - caused by a bullet

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: ... comin from up there ha.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: "Yes, I know it looks to the layman or someone who might dabble in physics"

[Laughter 3.3]

Hicks: "This action here would be caused by a bullet coming from...

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Well...

[Laughter]

Hicks: (thinks)

[Laughter 12.6]

Hicks: Up here, did you see that?

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: Did everyone see that?" Yeah, but no. What happened was Oswalds gone went off causing an echo to echo through the buildings of Deeley Plaza and the echo went by the limo on the left up into the grassy knoll hitting some leaves causing dust

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: to fly out which 56 witnesses testified was a gun shot, cos immediately... Kennedy's head went over.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: But the reason his head went over is cause the echo went by the motorcade one the left and he went "What was that?"

[Laughter, Applause 3.9]

Hicks: "So there, we have figured out, go back to bed America, your government has figured out how it all transpired. Go back to bed America, you government is in control again. Here, here's American Gladiator. Watch this, shut up"

[Laughter, Applause 9.1]

Hicks: "Go back to bed America, here's American Gladiators. Here's 56 channels of it. Watch these pituary retards bang their fuckin skulls together

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: and congratulate you on living in the land of freedom. Here you go America, you are free to do as we tell you, you are free to do as we tell you."

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: Oh good.

"Honey, I heard on the news that they've figured out that the gun, what happened is, is that there was an echo and Kennedy was, er, asking

Jackie what it was, and that that's why his head flew u... Honey what time's Gladiators on? Are we missing it?

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: I'm so glad we're free, Honey."

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: This happen just a few weeks ago. All these articles in the paper. "Is Gladiators too violent? And what are we doing watching it? Is it really good for us to watch? Is it too violent?" NO! Fuck it! Give these guys chain saws! Let them fuck each other up good.

[Laughter 3.6]

Hicks: It's not violent enough. Let these fuckin morons kill each other in that God Damn pit.

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: Give them chain saws an... I want to see a fuckin railway spike go through their eyeballs.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: How about this? give everyone in the audience a pistol. "There you fuckers, bchh bchh, See who comes out alive, bchh." You know, I'm tired of this false fuckin sanctimonious morality about life. "Ain't life keen, haha.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Let's pat ourselves on the back." Fuck you!

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: They want to kill each other, I'm filming it.

[Laughter 3.9]

Hicks: You know. I had a great idea for the movies. No-one wants to fucking hear it, I don't know why. I was watching Terminator 2 and I'm thinking to myself, these are the most amazing stunts I have ever seen. A hundred million dollars it cost to make this film. How are they ever gonna top these stunts in a movie again? There's no way. Unless

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: they start using terminally ill people...

[Laughter 7.7]

Hicks: Hear me out,

[Laughter 3.8]

Hicks: as stuntmen in pictures.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Okay not the most popular idea ever,

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: but I preface it with that. What you know, some of will probably think that's cruel, don't you. "Ooh cruel,

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: terminally ill stuntpeople Bill. How cruel." You know what I think what cruel is? Leaving your loved ones to die in some sterile hospital room surrounded by strangers. Fuck that! Put 'em in a movie.

[Laughter, Applause 7.7]

Hicks: What? Do you want your grandmother dying like a little bird in some hospital room? Her translucent skin so thin you can see the last heart beat work its way down her blue veins.

[Laughter 5.5]

Hicks: Or do you want her to meet Chuck Norris.

[Laughter, Applause 10.1]

Hicks: Why be so selfish as to deprive her of that thrill? "Tom how come you dressed my grandmother up as a mugger?"

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: "Shut up and get off the set.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Action. Push her towards Chuck."

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Whurf.

[Laughter, Applause 4.7]

Hicks: "Wow he kicked her head right off her body.

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Did you see that? Did you see my grammie?

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: She's out of her misery. I just saw the greatest fucking movie of my life. Cool!" Okay not the most popular idea ever. All I'm saying is people are dying every day, and movies are getting more and more boring.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: (Webbs fingers together)

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: "I am the weaver." I don't know.

"Is American Gladiators too violent? Ooh I don't know."

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: Watch the fucking news man, it's frightening. What could be worse. You watch the news these days you know, it's unbelievable. You think you you just walk out your door, you're immediately going to be raped by some crack-addicted, Aids-infected,

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: pit-bull, you know.   [Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: Horrible news story, you know. "Honey, I'm gonna check the mail...

"Rrrr"

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: "Whaddya we stay inside tonight baby

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Let the pizza delivery guy deal with that shit out there.

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: Hello, pizza delivery, could you send another car over please. I know that's your third one, that last guy almost made it.

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: I can almost reach the pizza with the broom handle.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: How come those pit bulls are eating your driver but they're not touching that fucking pizza?

[Laughter, Applause 4.7]

Hicks:	What do they know that we don't know, hello?" Pretty soon we're all gonna be locked inside our homes with no-one on the street but pizza delivery guys [Laughter 0.7]
Hicks:	and armoured cars with turrets shooting pizzas through the mail-slots of our front doors. [Laughter 0.8]
Hicks:	Every house will glow with American Gladiators beamed in. "We are free - keep repeating, we are free." The news is just apocalyptic. Didn't you think with the Cold War being over, things should have gotten better. How many of y'all were as stupid as I am believing that? [Laughter 0.6]
Hicks:	Wow it's over - 40 years of threat of nuclear weapons - it's over, coo, coo. Wrrong. [Laughter 0.8]
Hicks:	Now 12 different countries have nuclear - it just got 12 times as bad, fuck you. [Laughter 1.1]
Hicks:	"Life is harder now. Work hard - oops jobs are scarce, fuck you, ha ha ha." [Laughter 2.4]
Hicks:	By the way if anyone here is in advertising or marketing... kill yourself. [Laughter, Applause, Cheers 7.9]
Hicks:	No, no, no it's just a little thought. I'm just trying to plant seeds. Maybe one day, they'll take root - I don't know. You try, you do what you can [Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	Kill yourself. [Laughter 1.9]
Hicks:	Seriously though, if you are, do. [Laughter, Applause 4.7]

Hicks: Aaah, no really, there's no rationalisation for what you do and you are Satan's little helpers.

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: Okay - kill yourself seriously. You are the ruiner of all things good, seriously. No this is not a joke, you're going, there's going to be a joke coming, there's no fucking joke coming.

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: You are Satan's spawn filling the world with bile and garbage. You are fucked and you are fucking us. Kill yourself.

[Laughter continuing till "Planting seeds.. 11.0]

Hicks: It's the only way to save your fucking soul, kill yourself.

[Applause, Cheers]

Hicks: Planting seeds. I know all the marketing people are going - he's doing a joke... there's no joke here whatsoever.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Suck a tail-pipe, fucking hang yourself, borrow a gun from a Yank friend - I don't care how you do it.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Rid the world of your evil fucking makinations. Machi... Whatever, you know what I mean.

[0.9]

Hicks: I know what all the marketing people are thinking right now too, " Oh, you know what Bill's doing, he's going for that anti-marketing dollar. That's a good market, he's very smart."

[Laughter, Applause 4.6]

Hicks: Oh man, I am not doing that. You fucking evil scum-bags!

[Laughter, Applause 3.1]

Hicks: "Ooh, you know what Bill's doing now, he's going for the righteous indignation dollar.

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: That's a big dollar. A lot of people are feeling that indignation. We've done research - huge market.

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: He's doing a good thing."

Godammit, I'm not doing that you scum-bags.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Quit putting a godamm dollar sign on every fucking thing on this

planet! "Ooh the anger dollar. Huge.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Huge in times of recession. Giant market, Bill's very bright to do that."

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: "God, I'm just caught in a fucking web. "

"Ooh the trapped dollar, big dollar, huge dollar.

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: Good market - look at our research. We see that many people feel

trapped. We can play to that and then separate them into the trapped

dollar..." How do you live like that? And I bet you sleep like fucking

babies at night, don't you?"

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: "What didya do tonight honey?"

"Oh, we made ah, we made ah arsenic ah childhood now, goodnight.

Nrrr woooow.

[Laughter, Applause 4.9]

Hicks: "Yeah we just said you know is your baby really too loud?   You know,

Nrr woow.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: Yeah, you know the mums will love it." Yeah woow. Sleep like

fucking children, don't ya, this is your world isn't it. But you know I

saw this movie this year called last year called er 'Basic Instinct'. Okay

now. Bill's quick capsule review. Piece-of-Shit. Okay now.

[Laughter, Applause 6.6]

Hicks: Yeah, yeah, end of story by the way. Don't get caught up in that

fevered hype phoney fucking debate about that Piece-of-Shit movie.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: "Is it too sexist, and what about the movies, are they becoming to ddddddd." You're, you're just confused, you don't get, you've forgotten how to judge correctly. Take a deep breath huuh, look at it again. "Oh it's a Piece-of-Shit."

[Laughter 4.0]

Hicks: Exactly, that's all it is. Satan squatted, let out a loaf, they put a fucking title on it,

[Laughter, Applause 5.4]

Hicks: put it in a marquee, Satan's shit, piece of shit, walk away. "But is it too, what about the lesbian conna ddddd."

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: You're, you're getting really baffled here.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Piece-of-Shit! Now walk away.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: That's all it is, it's nothing more!

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Free yourself folks, if you see it, Piece-of-Shit, say it and walk away. You're right! You're right! Not the fuckers who want to tell you how to think. You're fucking right!

[Applause]

Hicks: Sorry wrong meeting again.

[Laughter, Applause 3.7]

Hicks: I keep getting my days mixed up. tomorrow, it's the meeting at the docks. Tonight it's comedy entertainment with young Bill.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Horrible film. And then I come to find out after that film. that all the lesbian sex scenes, let me repeat that,

[Laughter 7.4]

Hicks: all the lesbian sex scenes were cut out of that film, because the test audience was turned off by them.

[Laughter 5.7]

Hicks: Ha. Boy is my thumb not on the pulse of America.

    [Laughter, Applause 3.9]

Hicks: I don't want to seem like Randy Pan, the Goat Boy,

    [Laughter, Applause 3.4]

Hicks: but er that was the only reason I went to that piece of shit.

    [Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: If I had been in that test audience, the only one out front protesting that film would have been Michael Douglas demanding his part be put back in, alright.

    [Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: "I swear I was in that movie. I swear I was."

    [Laughter 5.0]

Hicks: "Gee Mike, the movie started. Sharon Stone was eating another woman for an hour and a half.

    [Laughter 4.9]

Hicks: Then the credits rolled. I err

    [Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: I don't remember seeing your scrawny ass Mike."

    [Laughter 4.4]

Hicks: "Was Bill Hicks in that test audience?"

    [Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: ha ha h.

    [Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Goat boy told it like he saw it Mikey.

    [Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: You made your 14 mill, now hit the fucking road.

    [Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: Bill boy's invited some people over to see the video premiere of the Goat-Boy Edited Version.

    [Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha.

    [Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: I am Goat boy."

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: "Whaddya want Goat Boy? You big old smelly, shaggy thing?"

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: "Ho ho ho.

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: Goat Boy is here to please you."

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: "How?"

"Ha ha ha.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Tie me to your headboard,

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: throw your legs over my shoulders and let me wear you like a feed-bag

[Laughter, Applause continuing till "Hold onto my..." 15.4]

Hicks: Pnaar wwww."

"Aaargh!"

"Hold onto my horns."

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: "Goat Boy."

"Yes my love."

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: "You're a big old smelly thing."

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha."

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: I need professional help at this point

[Laughter 2.9]

Hicks: I think I need a priest at this point.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: "Forgive me Father for I have sinned."

"What have you done my son?"

"Well, I said the word 'fuck' gratuitously."

"Yes and what else, my son?"

"Er ha ha,

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: I lied."

"Yes and what else my son?"

"That's about all, oh oh one thing I keep thinking I'm a randy goat, fucking everyone. Ha ha ha."

[Laughter 5.5]

Hicks: Unless of course it's a woman priest in which case it'll go like this.

"Forgive me Father for what I'm about to do!"

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: Dodoby doo. People ask me what I think about that woman priest thing, you know. What, a woman priest! Women priests. Great, great. Now there's priests of both sexes I don't listen to. Ha, fuck, I don't care.

[Laughter, Applause 3.6]

Hicks: Have a hermaphrodite one I don't fucking care.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Have one with three dicks and eight titties,

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: I don't, I don't. You know have one with gills and a trunk. that would be cool.

[Laughter 3.4]

Hicks: I might Phaaa, I might go see that, you know but. You know I appreciate your quaint traditions and superstitions. I on the other hand am an evolved being

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: who deals solely with the source of life, which exists in all of our hearts. Ha ha That middle man thing, it's wacky and I appreciate it

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Gotta run, there's a voice a-callin' me.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha."

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Now you guys are totally weird sexually. Here's why. Oh yeah, coming from Goat Boy, oh boy.

[Laughter 7.5]

Hicks: "Yes Bill, it's how was that. That we have <u>human</u> sex? Does that bother you Bill?"

[Laughter 3.4]

Hicks: "Goat Boy finds that disgusting.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: Where is the fun in that?

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: Ha ha.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: Goat Boy loves young girls.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: 16 years old ooh Goat Boy, hello."

"Hi Goat Boy you big old smelly thing.

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: Ooh you smell like an old boot."

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha. I don't see you running away."

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: "I'm not scared of you.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Beside your eyes are really kind and peaceful.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Except for that fire that burns real hard deep inside of 'em."

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha"

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: "Oh Goat Boy, what's that?"

"That is my purple wand,

[Laughter 3.2]

Hicks: and my hairy sack of magic."

[Laughter, Applause 12.8]

Hicks: "You do tricks?"

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: "Ha ha ha."

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: "What can you do with that?"

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: "Goat Boy can make a bell ring in your stomach"

[Laughter 5.7]

Hicks: "What does that bell mean?"

"It calls Goat Boy to dinner Ha ha. Gnoor."

"Goat Boy, aargh!"

"Okay Bill, stop with the Goat boy thing, we get it alright.

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: It's kinda amusing but let's okay."

"You don't like Goat boy?

[Laughter 3.5]

Hicks: Goat boy is hurt by your indifference.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: He wanted you to come dance with him in the pastures. Ding ding.

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: Goat Boy wants to string flowers through your hair, and on your head.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: Do do do be do."

"Why do you like young girls Goat Boy?"

"Because you are beautiful. There's nothing between your legs, it's like

a wisp of cotton candy framing a paper cut. Ha ha ha.

[Laughter 6.2]

Hicks: Gnor. And turn you around and open your cheeks, it's like a little pink quivering rabbit nostril.

[Laughter, Applause 7.8]

Hicks: Oh how cute!

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: I bet your asshole tastes better than most girls' pussies. Come here. Gnor."

[Laughter 3.3]

Hicks: "Goat Boy."

[Laughter 4.1]

Hicks: "Gnor."

"Shaggy old thing."

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: I'm not going to kiss you, I don't know where your mouth's been."

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: "Do you want me to tell you?"

[Laughter 3.9]

Hicks: "Okay, Bill seriously this Goat Boy thing, it's getting weird."

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: Ha ha Except for some of my goat children.

[Laughter 2.5]

Hicks: "Lord, Father, more, more Goat Boy Father. We are your goat children. We too lay in the forest waiting for young virgins to come."

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: But you guys are weird, get this. I'm walking down thought the West End one day right and this bus-load of tourists from Iowa gets off the bus. big cow people right. Bump into me and I go flying into this adult bookstore.

[Laughter, Applause 7.1]

Hicks: And my hands were in my pockets and I took em out and money flew out of my hands

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: and wafted down onto the cash register and this guy hands me a magazine. How embarrassing. I go home immediately to the hotel and throw it away. Toward the garbage, it breaks open, face up on the bed. [Laughter 3.4]

Hicks: Give me a break, Lord. But I'm looking at <u>your</u> British hard-core pornography which I just spent <u>hard-core</u> fucking dollars for. [Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: And I'm going something's wrong with this. [Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: "Goat Boy will figure it out!" [Laughter 3.1]

Hicks: I realise it's porno yeah just what we know and love, but there's blue dots covering all the good shit. [Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Woah, whaaat's going on? [Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: There's a guy standing there like this. [Laughter 4.9]

Hicks: There's a woman kneeling well I believe she was like this. [Laughter 5.7]

Hicks: And there's this big blue dot right here. [Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: What the fuck! [Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: This comes off I hope. [Laughter, Applause 4.9]

Hicks: What you gotta buy the blue dot eraser separately. what the fuck? [Laughter, Applause 3.0]

Hicks: I'm an adult. Don' t protect me. Let's go! [Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: "Goat Boy wants his money back." [Laughter 2.6]

Hicks:	You know. And then I see a club in the West end that has this marquee sign, says Live Sex show On Stage. I thought what a bummer actually have to be the guy that holds the blue dot. (Mimes moving a blue dot up and down)
	[Laughter 18.0]
Hicks:	Alright but what's weird is, that's your hard core porno, then you go home turn on Channel 4 late at night, there's people fucking yeah they're right there.
	[Laughter 1.8]
Hicks:	No blue dot, just people fucking right there.
	[Laughter 1.5]
Hicks:	Free, no money, people fucking, no it's a foreign film, it's art all of a sudden. Hey.
	[Laughter 2.0]
Hicks:	Put some subtitles in there. Here's your pussy, here you got it. Everyone happy? There you go, it's art godammit. Alright, I see. You pay, you get ripped off - free you get it all. Dick it, love it!
	[Laughter 2.8]
Hicks:	I am available for children's parties by the way.
	[Laughter 4.5]
Hicks:	"Mommy, I want Goat Boy to come play at our house."
	[Laughter 2.2]
Hicks:	"Ha ha ha"
	[Laughter 2.9]
Hicks:	But you know. Pot, right.
	[Laughter 1.7]
Hicks:	Aaah, they lie about marijuana. Tell you pot-smoking makes you unmotivated. Liiie. When you're high, you can do everything you normally do, just as well, you just realise, it's not worth the fucking effort.
	[Laughter, Applause 7.6]
Hicks:	There is a difference.

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: "Hu hu hu. Sure I can get up at dawn,

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: hu hu, go to a job I hate, that does not inspire me creatively

whatsoever,

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: for the rest of my fucking life.

[Laughter 3.4]

Hicks: Or I can wake up at noon

[Laughter 3.7]

Hicks: and learn how to play the sitar."

[Laughter ?]

Hicks: Nging nging nging now. Pretty simple when it's spelled out in black

and white isn't it?

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: You know. Only thing I've ever heard about pot is that pot might lower

sperm count.

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Good.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: There's too many fucking people in the world.

[Laughter, Applause 1.7]

Hicks: Someone needs to say that by the way. Tired of this, "Hey hey aren't

we the coolest. Humans are so neat."

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: Too many of yer.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Quit rutting, just for a fucking day. Let's work out this food/air deal.

[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: Then go back to your rutting. But I'll tell you this. Where's this idea

that childbirth is a miracle came from. Ha, I missed that fucking deal

okay.

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: "It's a miracle, childbirth is a miracle." No it's not. No more than a miracle than eating food and a turd coming out of your ass.

[Laughter 3.0]

Hicks: It's a chemical reaction, that's all it fucking is. If, you you wanna know what a miracle is. Raisin' a kid that doesn't talk in a movie theatre. Okay, there, there, there is a goddam miracle. It's not a miracle if every nine months any yin yang in the world could drop a litter of muling cabbages on our planet.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: And just in case you haven't seen the single mom statistics lately, the miracle is spreading like wild-fire.

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: "Hallelujah!" Trailer parks and council flats all over the world just filling up with little miracles. Thunk, thunk, thunk, like frogs laying eggs. "Thunk, look at all my little miracles, thunk, filling up my trailer like a sardine can. Thunk. You know what would be a real miracle, if I could remember your daddy's name

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: aargh, thunk. I guess I'll have to call you Lorry Driver Junior.

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: Thunk. That's all I remember about your daddy was his fuzzy little pot-belly riding on top of me shooting his caffeine ridden semen into my belly

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: to produce my little water-haired miracle baby, urgh. There's your brother, Pizza Boy Delivery Junior."

[Laughter, Applause 3.4]

Hicks: "Hallelujah!" Hold on for a minute, let's figure out this food/air deal okay? Okay. It's weird you know. How about have a neat world for kids to come to? Ha haokay it's me, fuck it.

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Drop 'em like fucking flies, boom, just full up the world with em. I just don't get it you know, I mean I'm sorry man, you know kids are fine, just keep em away from me. Alright there alright.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Now get this, I've been travelling all over the country on British Air. No smoking on British Air. Now let me get this straight, no smoking right but they allow children.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: Little fairness, huh? "Well smoking bothers me." Well guess what?

[Laughter 6.1]

Hicks: I was on this one flight right, I'm flying, I'm sleeping on the plane, I'm fucking knackered.

[Laughter 4.4]

Hicks: Very tired right and I feel this tapping on my head.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: And I look up and there's this little kid -loose on the fucking plane,

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: he's just loose.

[Laughter 3.7]

Hicks: It's his playground in the he sky.

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: And he has decided that his <u>job</u>

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: is to repetitively tap me on the top of the head.

[Laughter 9.7]

Hicks: I look across the aisle at his mom. she's just smiling, you know.

[Laughter 2.6]

Hicks: Guy next to the mom goes, "They're so cure when they're that small."

[Laughter 1.0]

Hicks: Isn't that amazing, letting your kid run loose on a fucking plane. And then the kid runs over to the emergency exit and he starts flipping that handle to the door.

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: And the guy next to the mom starts to get up, and I go, "Wait a minute

[Laughter 6.4]

Hicks: we're about to learn an important lesson right here."

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: Kwuh. "Why you're right, the smaller he gets, the cuter he is.

[Laughter, Applause 8.9]

Hicks: God I wish I had a camera right now.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: With a telescopic lens.

[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Like to get a picture of his face when his pudgy little legs hit that farmhouse down there.

[Laughter 1.9]

Hicks: Aah, aah, kids. Ha hha.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Stewardess, since we got a breeze in here can we smoke now?

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: Fairly well circulated at this point." Wooh. True story. But you know. Why is marijuana against the law. It grows naturally upon our planet? Doesn't the idea of making nature against the law seem to you a bit paranoid.

[Applause, Laughter 5.1]

Hicks: You know what I mean, it's nature. How do you make nature against the fucking law. It grows everywhere. Serves a thousand different functions, all of them positive. To make marijuana against the law is like saying to God made a mistake.

[Laughter 2.9]

Hicks: You know what I mean, it's like God on the seventh day looked down on his creation - "There it is, my creation, perfect and holy in all ways. Now I can rest. (Mimes God looking around - spotting pot)

[Laughter 4.4]

Hicks:	Oh my me.
	[Laughter, Applause 4.3]
Hicks:	I left fucking pot everywhere.
	[Laughter 4.3]
Hicks:	I should never have smoked that joint on the third day ..shit.
	[Laughter 4.6]
Hicks:	That was the day I created possums.
	[Laughter 2.2]
Hicks:	Haha. Still gives me a chuckle.
	[Laughter 2.4]
Hicks:	If I leave pot everywhere that's gonna to give humans the impression they're supposed to use it.
	[Laughter 0.6]
Hicks:	Now I have to create Republicans."
	[Laughter, Applause 4.2]
Hicks:	And God wept. I believe is the next verse. You know what I mean. I believe that God left certain drugs growing naturally upon our planet to help speed up and facilitate our evolution. Okay not the most popular idea ever expressed.
	[Laughter 1.1]
Hicks:	Either that or you're real high and agreeing with me in the only way you can right now. (Blinks)
	[Laughter 5.2]
Hicks:	I forgot the code, is it two blinks yes, one blink no?
	[Laughter 1.8]
Hicks:	Do you think magic mushrooms growing atop cow shit was an accident.
	[Laughter 1.3]
Hicks:	Where do you think the phrase, 'that's good shit' came from?
	[Laughter 1.5]
Hicks:	Why do you think Hindus think cows are holy.
	[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Holy shit!

            [Laughter 3.3]

Hicks: Why do I think MacDonalds is the Anti-Christ?

            [Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: That's God little accelerator pad for our evolution. Let's think about

            this man. For billions of years, sorry fundamentalists,

            [Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: we were nothing but apes. Hahahaha.

            [Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: Probably too stupid to catch a cow, you know.

            [Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: (Mimes ape chasing and losing a cow)

            [Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: (Ape spots shit)

            [Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: (Wipes it offf foot)

            [Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: (Eat mushroom - begins to giggle)

            [Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: (Laughs)

            [Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: (Laughs)

            [Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: (laughs hysterically before lying back spaced out)

            [Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: "I think we can go to the moon."

            [Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: ('Thus Spake Zarathustra' plays)

            [Applause]

Hicks: That is exactly how it fucking happened.

            [Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Except for the marketing people whose belief is, "No it was proven that er it might be a good market on the moon and eer and a lot of people went up there, good numbers, good space numbers."

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: Urgh. Save your story of creation please. Not all drugs are good now. Okay. Some of em are great.

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: Just gotta know your way around em that's all.

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: Yeah I've had good times on drugs. I've had bad times on drugs too. I mean shit, look at this haircut.

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: There are dangers.

[Laughter 0.7]

Hicks: I think some of yer all have tripped here before perhaps yeah.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: I used to love tripping man. There's always one guy when you're tripping who wants you to do something to enhance the trip.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: You know what I'm talking about. "You're tripping, oh dude, you gotta play miniature golf."

[Laughter, Applause 7.9]

Hicks: Ha ha "Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking, man.

[Laughter 8.9]

Hicks: I'm just sitting over here watching the pyramids be built by UFOs right now,

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: but get me to that fucking golf course.

[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: I'm watching Jesus flying around on a unicorn,

[Laughter 0.6]

Hicks: but I bet that little miniature golf would be just the thing to make this trip peak.

[Laughter 4.1]

Hicks: So you guys can use your legs huh?

[Laughter 4.3]

Hicks: No, it's just that I'm turning into a fish right now and

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: er how 'bout I meet you there later?"

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: Thanks, I'm pretty fucking high right now. Thank you. You know. You just gotta be careful, I don't know what you gotta be, fuck it. We got pulled over tripping on acid one night, pulled over by the cops. Don't recommend it.

[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: Cops don't appreciate fish driving around.

[Laughter 3.0]

Hicks: They frown on that.

[Laughter 1.6]

Hicks: Long night man. Cops were tapping on this window. We're staring at him in this mirror.

[Laughter, Applause 10.5]

Hicks: "How tall are you?

[Laughter, Applause 5.1]

Hicks: A miracle, look at him. How does he drive that big fucking car?

[Laughter, Applause 4.6]

Hicks: Urr, there could be thousands of them, shit.

[Laughter 2.7]

Hicks: What are we gonna do. Let's put him in the jar."

[Laughter, Applause 5.8]

Hicks: Made perfect sense at that moment.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: Put him in a jar, poke some holes in the lid, leave him by the road.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: "You'll never get us copper. Haha.

[Laughter 2.9]

Hicks: We'll send some little firemen to let you out.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: Hey I bet they know where that miniature golf course is.

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: Boo! Ha Fuck it they scared us."

[Laughter 5.4]

Hicks: "Son d'you wanna stand up please?"

[Laughter 6.2]

Hicks: "I just found the driver.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: We don't need a driver, we're playing miniature golf."

[Laughter, Applause 5.7]

Hicks: True story. Now, later when I was released

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: I mean spiritually, I'd feel. Oh God. "I need to see some ID." "I'm me, he's him, you're you."

[Laughter 3.4]

Hicks: "Put your hands against the car please."

"Which one.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: The UFO, the unicorn or your cruiser?"

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: Drugs have done good things for us, if you don't believe they have, do me a favour take all your albums, tapes and CDs and burn em cos you know what, the musicians who made that great music that has enhanced your lives throughout the years. Rrrrreal fucking high, ha ha ha ho ho.

[Applause, Laughter 4.5]

Hicks: And these other musicians today who don't do drugs and in fact speak out against them. Boy do they suck!

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: What a coincidence.

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: Ball-less, souless, spiritless corporate little bitches suckers of Satan's cock,

[Laughter continuing till "We're rock stars..." 10.9]

Hicks: each and every one of them. Gnorr. "We're rock stars against drugs cos that's what the President wants."

[Laughter 1.5]

Hicks: "Well suck Satan's cock."

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: That's what we want isn't it, government approved rock n roll. "Whooh. We're partying now."

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: "We're rock stars who do Pepsi Cola commercials." "Gnorr. Suck Satan's cock

[Laughter 1.2]

Hicks: Put that big scaly pecker down your gullet.

[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: Drink that black worm jissum. Drink it.

[Laughter, Applause 2.3]

Hicks: Fill your little bellies.

[Laughter 2.0]

Hicks: Ha ha ha. Send in Vanilla Ice.

[Laughter, Applause 6.4]

Hicks: Hello Vanilla.

[Laughter 6.7]

Hicks: Says here on your application, you have no talent,

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks:	and yet you want to be a star. Whuh. I think something can be arranged.
	[Laughter 1.2]
Hicks:	Whuh. Suck Satan's cock. Gnoor.
	[Applause]
Hicks:	I will lower the standards of the earth. I will put 56 channels of American Gladiators on every tv. I will put all the money in the hands of 14 year old girls. They will think you are charismatic, deep and edgy. Gnnooor.
	[Laughter, Applause 8.5]
Hicks:	Send in MC Hammer on your way out.
	[Laughter, Applause 8.1]
Hicks:	Hello Hammer.
	[Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	Back again huh?"
	[Laughter 2.7]
Hicks:	Boy, that Hammer. There was another boat that left me on the island man.
	[Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	"Bill are you gonna get on the Hammer boat with us?" "No I'm gonna stay here and eat my own flesh."
	[Laughter 1.4]
Hicks:	Beep, beep. Totally mystifying, I mean, you know you could sit and explain it to me from now until well, the end of time and I'll go, "Fucking don't get it, man."
	[Laughter 1.5]
Hicks:	I Iiii it's geni it's con, genital?
	[Laughter 1.5]
Hicks:	it's err genetic. Maybe it is genital, Hay, wait a minute. Freud, come here!
	[Laughter 1.6]
Hicks:	"Hammer's a great dancer."

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: What the guy's gotta a sand crab in his knickers. (Dances)

[Laughter 5.8]

Hicks: He's not dancing, he's having a fit.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: That's Satan's sperm eating its way through the lining of his stomach.

[Laughter 9.6]

Hicks: Gnoor. "15 minutes almost up Hammer."

"Ooorgh argh."

"Ha ha ha. Send in Marky Mark."

[Laughter, Applause 3.3]

Hicks: And the beat goes on. I don't know. Good for the voice. Hu Hu.

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: Hey don't fuck with me man.

[Laughter 3.1]

Hicks: You know what I mean though, am I the only one that's fucking lost here.

[Laughter 2.1]

Hicks: You never see positive drugs stories on the news, do ya. Isn't that weird cos most of the experiences I've had on drugs, were rrreal fucking positive.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: Er. Who are these morons they're finding that's what I wanna know. I used to want to call the news, "Come on to our house,

[Laughter 3.3]

Hicks: Watch Tommy's, he's a pig, film him."

[Laughter 3.6]

Hicks: "Oink oink."

"Hee hee, he's been doing that for hours.

[Laughter 2.3]

Hicks: He's killing us. You getting all that?"

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: You know what I mean. Always that same LSD story you've all seen it. "Young man on acid thought he could fly, jumped out of a building. What a tragedy." What a dick, fuck him!
[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: He's an idiot. If he thought he could fly, why didn't he take off from the ground first.
[Laughter 3.8]

Hicks: Check it out.
[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: You don't see ducks lining up to catch elevators to fly South.
[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: They fly from the ground you moron. Quit ruining it for everybody. He's a moron, he's dead, good. We lost a moron, fucking celebrate.
[Laughter, Applause 2.7]

Hicks: Boy I just felt the world get lighter we lost a moron.
[Laughter 0.9]

Hicks: Put on the Hammer album, I'm ready to dance.
[Laughter 2.2]

Hicks: "We lost a moron." I don't mean to sound cold or cruel or vicious, but I am so that's the way it comes out.
[Laughter 2.8]

Hicks: Professional help is being sought.
[Laughter 1.1]

Hicks: How about a positive LSD story wouldn't that be news-worthy just the once. To base your decision on information rather than scare tactics and superstition and lies. I think it would be news-worthy. "Today a young man on acid realised that all of matter is merely energy condensed to a slow vibration. That we are all one consciousness experiencing itself subjectively. There is no such thing as death, life is only a dream and we're the imagination of ourselves.
[Laughter 2.4]

Hicks: Here's Tom with the weather."

[Laughter, Applause 7.9]

Hicks: You've been fantastic and I hope you enjoyed it. There is a point, is there a point to all of this? Let's find a point. Is there a point to my act? I would say there is.

[Laughter 1.4]

Hicks: I have to.

[Laughter 1.7]

Hicks: The world is like a ride in an amusement park. And when you choose to go on it you think it's real because that's how powerful our minds are. And the ride goes up and down and round and round. It has thrills and chills and it's very brightly coloured and it's very loud and it's fun for a while. Some people have been on the ride for a long time and they begin to question, is this real or is this just a ride and other people can remember and they come back to us, they say hey don't worry, don't be afraid, ever, because it's just a ride and we killed those people. Ha ha

[Laughter 1.8]

Hicks: "Shut him up.

[Laughter 1.3]

Hicks: We have a lot invested in this ride. Shut him up.

[Laughter 0.8]

Hicks: Look at my furrows of worry. Look at my big bank account and my family. This just has to be real." Just a ride. But we always kill those good guys who try and tell us that, you ever notice that. And let the demons run amok. But it doesn't matter because it's just a ride. And we can change it anytime we want. It's only a choice. No effort, no work, no job, no savings and money, a choice, right now, between fear and love. The eyes of fear want you to put bigger locks on your doors, buy guns, close yourself off. The eyes of love instead see all of us as one. Here's what we can do to change the world, right now, to a better ride. Take all that money that we spend on weapons and defences each year and instead spend it feeding and clothing and educating the poor of the

world, which it would many times over, not one human being excluded

and we could explore space

[Applause]

Hicks: together, both inner and outer, forever, in peace. Thank you very much, you've been great.

[Applause]

Hicks: I hope you enjoyed it. London you were fantastic, thank you, thank you very much.

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APPENDIX 3

LIST OF DATA   .

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Below is list of the commercially available recording used during the course of the research and quoted from in the body of the text. Dates used refer to copyright of the recording and not necessarily to the date of performance or issue and companies named are distributors and not copyright holders.

Allen Keith, 1990, <u>Keith Allen Live: I Love Keith Allen</u>, Castle Vision

Allen, Woody, 1990, <u>Woody Allen The Nightclub Years 1964-1968</u>, EMI

Brand, Jo, 1993, <u>Jo Brand Live</u>, Laughing Stock

Brown, Arnold, 1991, <u>Arnold Brown And Why Not?</u>, Laughing Stock

Bruce, Lenny, 1994, <u>Lenny Bruce: The Legendary Berkeley Concert</u>, The Comedy Club

Clary, Julian, 1989, <u>Julian Clarey a.k.a. The Joans Collins' Fan Club: The Mincing Machine Tour</u>, Virgin

Clay, Andrew, 1991, <u>Andrew Dice Clay: For Ladies Only</u>, Laughing Stock

Elton, Ben, 1993, <u>Ben Elton Live 1989</u>, Laughing Stock

Goldberg, Whoopi, 1994, <u>Chez Whoopi: Black and Blue</u>, Polygram Video

Hicks, Bill, 1994, <u>Totally Bill Hicks</u>, Channel Four Comedy

Hill, Harry, 1995, <u>Harry Hill Live From the Queen's Theatre London</u>, BBC

Hughes, Sean, 1994, <u>Sean's Tape</u>, Laughing Stock

Izzard, Eddie, 1993, <u>Eddie Izzard: Live at the Ambassadors</u>, Polygram Video

Milligan, Spike, 1994, <u>Spike Milligan Live at Cambridge University</u>, The Comedy Club

Monkhouse, Bob, 1994, <u>Bob Monkhouse Exposes Himself</u>, VVL

Newman, Rob, 1994, <u>Robert Newman: The Dependence Day Video</u>, Polygram Video

Philips, Emo, 1985, <u>Emo Philips: E=MO^2</u>, Epic

Punt, Steve & Dennis, Hugh, 1992, <u>Punt & Dennis from *The Mary Whitehouse Experience*: The Milky Milk Tour Live</u>, Polygram Video

Sadowitz, Jerry, n.d., <u>Gobshite</u>

Savage, Lily, 1993, <u>Lily Savage: Paying the Rent</u>, Paradox Films

Various, 1991, <u>Just for Laughs</u>, Laughing Stock

Wise, Eric & Morecambe, Ernie, n.d., <u>Eric & Ernie Live</u>, Polygram Video