

**The Acquisition of Comedic Skills as a Component of Growth and Individuation: Post-
Jungian and Psychoanalytic Perspectives.**

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Summary

This dissertation proposes the argument that the comedic performance triggers and utilises Jung's symbolic and archetypal processes. Stand-up comedy reflects social and psychological change in our society, towards class, gender equality and re-distribution of wealth and re-configuring social structures. Jungian theories are particularly pertinent to this study because they capture the psychological implications in both the inter and intra-psyche of the individual and social transformation. They examine the impact of the mythological and alchemical aspects of stand up comedy on the comedian whilst focussing on the archetype and the Amfortas Wound. While Freudian and post-Freudian theories prove to be more appropriate for examining the details of the agencies activated within inter and intra-psyche of the comedian during the performance.

Jungian and post-Jungian theory examines the social and mythological aspect of stand-up comedy. Stand-up comedy and in particular women as stand-up comedians become a litmus test for society's problems and issues and the rebalancing thereof social inequality. In the archetypal realm the comedy club becomes the 'vas', a symbolic sacred transformational space, in which stand-up comedy has the potential to become a transformative process for both the comedian and audience. Stand-up comedy is a transformative process for both the comedian and the spectator, while the comedy club becomes a vas, a symbolic sacred transformational space.

The stand up comedian's internal struggle is recreated into a personal comedic story, of individual versus the collective, Thanatos and Eros, personal versus social, responsibility versus irresponsibility, power, race, gender and hierarchy. The audience reflects upon these

comedic stories and by doing so whether the comedian is successful or unsuccessful the comedian also reflects upon it hence transformation occurs.

It is arguable that within this alchemical process the joke, on occasion, becomes the trickster. The trickster contains the ambivalent, contradictory, appropriately times message acting as a bullet for incisive revision or disruption of a commonly held social theme or belief. The trickster joke cuts through consciousness and is transformative and the most powerful becomes the Supra Joke. Plus the comedian is transmuted into a Supra Comedian who not only transforms himself but society also. The personal revelations of the comedian in the comedy club setting creates a self initiating, morphing and mutating imagery induced by the desire to create humour. Through this creative alchemical stand-up ritual individuation becomes viable.

This process can be explained using a range of Jungian theories; namely Individuation, Enantiodromia, Alchemy, Temenos and the Self.

The comedian's issues are exposed to the audience, and the changes to his psyche are being encouraged by the verbal transaction of the comedic practise comparable to the therapist and his client. The comedians' psychic development is being watched by a great number of people, and although the audience is not personally selected, they affect his development, and they monitor his or her progress by loving the comedian and thereby attaching themselves or, conversely, disowning and rejecting him. It is my contention that the audience is the symbolic mother and their response nurtures the attachment process and if successful encourages the comedian's secure base as defined by Bowlby.

The stand-up comedian's art consists of joke creation. The joke then becomes the tool of personal and social radical transformation. In the arena of stand-up my proposal is that the trickster is not the comedian, as is a commonly held view, but one perfectly united moment between the stand up himself and the joke, which he has created whose delivery and impact is swift, but the supra-joke. The comedian is in constant search to create the perfect joke in order to capture the audience. The joke breaks into our psyche and announces a profoundly altering viewpoint. It is in that moment that opposing (or at least unexpected) views, ideas and opinions collide, and laughter occurs. The Supra Ccomedians' personal issues are often bound within the problems of society; hence the audience is influenced, at times enraged and often enlightened by this comedic exchange. Chris Rock acknowledges this moment where he aims to 'incorporate more quiet moments into the show. To me, that's the best part of the show, to bring them down and then pow, hit them with an explosive line' (Ajaye, 2002:183).

The stand-up performance is an intense therapy like emotional and intellectual exchange in which neither the comedian nor the audience are omniscient or entirely in control of the situation. Humour can be regarded as a process of reparation, resolution and re-integration of personal and social conflicts. Whilst the stand-up comedians' focus is to make the audience laugh their ability to reveal themselves and to reframe their inner turmoil affects the audience. Furthermore, the process resonates through society. However, the impact of their material due to modern technology is far reaching.

However, not all comedians directly affect society, but those that do can make profound changes and on occasion can be prophetic; they can be termed Supra-comedian. Adapting Jung's definition of the medicine man in primitive society I propose that the Supra Comedian is 'an immortal daemon that pierces the chaotic darkness of brute light of meaning' (1959:

para 77). Their material can include changes that will occur in society or expose social and political activities or people, which at that time are dismissed by the media. They intuitively perceive the problems of society and mirror issues with humour and often they are successful comedians and may not be recognised in their lifetime as in the case of Bill Hicks.

It is clear that stand-up comedy is a unique phenomenon of a time of global social transformation how it affects the individual is dependent upon the individual. It is a process without boundaries and can be the most powerful artist medium for change.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How does the joke affect society? How does it affect the stand-up comedian? The premise of this thesis is that the comedian goes through transformational change on stage, and so does his or her audience. Humour is the medium, which enables this personal change, which Analytical Psychology termed as the individuation process. The performer uses creativity as a way of examining his Self and social issues. The audience participates in the comedian's jokes because both share or recognise the same issues. As Andrew Samuels reminds us that the individual's problems and social issues are closely related (Samuels, 2001: 5). This dissertation argues that the stand-up genre can be seen as a form of psychotherapy both for the comedian and society. In fact the two happen simultaneously, as the audience reflect on the issues mentioned by the comedian in his performance. The psychotherapeutic and deep unconscious revelatory components of the stand-up performance are of paramount importance for the comedian to define himself as an individual and for the audience to engage with the comedian. Individuation is intrinsically linked to society, and this link can be explored through the medium of comedy. The audience, alongside the man on stage, go through the four stages of the therapeutic process as defined by Jung: confession, elucidation, education and transformation (Jung CW16: para. 55).

Each stand-up comedian has his own perspective on the world, which must have the capacity to resonate with the audience. In their performances, comedians demonstrate their ability to interpret the world through the uniqueness of their own experience. Their personal lives become the foil for their analysis and criticism of society. They use storytelling methods and are raconteurs who manage to draw the audience into their creative aura. The intensity of this

complex interaction, which involves a web of projections and introjections between the performer as the stand-up comedian and the outside world means that there are various therapeutic processes being activated.

This dissertation is an attempt to deconstruct and define the psychological exchanges between the three participants of this interaction, the Stand-up, the audience and the comedy club, as the 'vas,' or the 'Third Space'. Although our primary interest is the comedian's own personal transformation, the audience's reaction to comedy and the reaction of the outside world are vital as they act and interact one upon the other. Particularly important is the recent upsurge of interest in comedy because it is a genre, which reflects the individual's struggle with the collective. Comedy debates the issue of individual identity in our times of globalisation, mass production, corporate structures and the patriarchal hierarchical reconstruction and a shift towards integrating matriarchal values.

1. Definitions

1.1

The Roots of Stand-Up Comedy

Comedic performance presented before an audience is a very ancient phenomenon. Plato in *Philebus* considered humour as based on malevolence and envy, which was an act of hostility. This theory was highlighted by Ludovici who remarked 'in laughing we bare our fangs' (Krichtafovich, 2006: 16).

Aristotle in his *Poetics* (430 BC) gave a basic analysis of the psychology and purpose of professional comedy. Aristotle defines comedy by comparing it to another genre, tragedy. From his view, all arts are based on the process of imitation (II). However, while tragedy

aims at presenting men as better in actual life, comedy presents them as worse (I). In fact, comedy exaggerates the worst components of human character to make them more noticeable. Aristotle writes that comedy is ‘an imitation of characters of a lower type not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain’ (V). While tragedy aims at arousing fear and pity in the spectator, comedy merely highlights the imperfect in human beings (XIV). Fundamentally he believed that humour also separates humans from animals.

The Oxford Dictionary defines comedy as:

- 1** A narrative poem with a happy ending. obs. exc. in *The Divine Comedy* [tr. *La Divina Commedia*] of Dante. **b** A drama (on stage, film, or radio) with a happy ending, chiefly representing everyday life and of a light, amusing, and often satirical character; any literary composition with similar characteristics.
- 2** A genre of drama etc. characterized by its depiction of amusing characters or incidents and an informal style. **b** Humour; humorous behaviour.
- 3** A humorous or farcical incident in life; such incidents collectively.

In his book *The Death of Comedy* (2001), Erich Segal delves into the etymology of the word ‘comedy’ to provide its definitions. He reminds us that for the Greeks comedy consists of two words: *koma* (sleep) and *oide* (song). Segal then writes that ‘comedy is a night song. It was born at night’ (Segal, 2001: 1). His analysis of comedy is close to our own vision of comedy as an avenue through which a cluster of complexes and defences are conveyed forming the basis of a therapeutic process. Comedy, therefore, is rooted in the unconscious. Segal argues:

What then would a Nightsong be? Perchance a dream. On several occasions Freud equalled the psychodynamics of the comic and the oneiric, once alluding to his

essays on jokes and dreams as ‘twin brothers’. These mental actions have many important features in common, among which are punning word-play, the relaxation of inhibition, and the liberation of ‘primary process thinking’. Nightsong thus represents a temporary return to childhood, which Wordsworth called ‘the glory and the freshness of a dream’.

In both dream and comedy, the impossible wish comes true. In each case the aim is pleasure, and the joy comes with no loss of energy or pang of conscience – the normal experience of spirit borne free. [...]

(Segal, 2001: 1)

Moreover, he argues, ‘koma is a rare word with rare connotations, whenever it appears instead of the more common hypnos. It can have an erotic sense of letting go, not merely nodding off. In The Iliad, for example, Hypnos, the god of sleep, declares that he has covered Zeus with an especially soft slumber (melakon koma) – just after Zeus and Hera have made love. The sense of indulgence and release adds a metalinguistic validity to the alleged etymology of comedy’ (2001: 4).

I certainly agree with this view because comedic performance is a heightened exchange between human beings; between the performer and the audience. It is the highest form of human exchange without the physical contact. It involves elation and revelry both on the part of the performer and on the part of the audience. Quintilian hypothesised that humour contains a certain amount of truth and lies, whereas Immanuel Kant in his critique of pure reason states that in humour and jokes there is nothing of value, it is an empty intellectual jostling for meaning or depth; ‘laughter is an emotion which is born from the sudden change of an anxious expectation into nothing’ (1892: 223). This view can be challenged in light of the socially and personally provocative content of the median and Supra Joke.

John Morreall separates all theories of comedy and laughter into three groups: Incongruity theory, Superiority theory and Relief theory. Incongruity theory includes, for instance, the

views of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. They theorised that the comic is born out of the tension between the external, so-called 'normal' reality and the possible alternative perceptions of it. For instance, in his work Critique of Judgement, Kant wrote: 'in everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing' (Morreall, 1987:47). Schopenhauer's view of the psycho-philosophical origins of laughter is similar to that of Kant. According to him, humour has its roots in human ability to perceive the absurd and the incongruous in seemingly 'normal' things. In his essay 'On the Theory of the Ludicrous' he argues that:

... the source of the ludicrous is always the paradoxical, and therefore unexpected, subsumption of an object under a conception which in other respects is different from it, and accordingly the phenomenon of laughter always signifies the sudden apprehension of an incongruity between such a conception and the real object thought under it, thus between the abstract and the concrete object of perception.

(Morreall, 1987: 54)

In his analysis of comedy, the existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard also determined contradiction and incongruity as being the principal ingredients of the comedic experience. In the essay 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript' he wrote that

The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction.

(Morreall, 1987: 83)

The Superiority theory, which encompasses, for instance, the views of Thomas Hobbes, states that human beings laugh at all things that they perceive as 'lowly' and 'ugly'. In Leviathan he writes that the human race is an instant power struggle. And that it should not be surprising

that victory goes to one who laughs. He also suggested that ‘laughter is an expression of sudden triumph, caused by a no less sudden feeling of superiority over others or over one’s past’.

Mikhail Bakhtin explains folk humour and forms of laughter in various spheres of human creation. Folk culture invented carnival; it is characterised by serious overtones, as it was their only method of expressing truth and other important things. Laughter contains the history of society and conception of the world. In the renaissance epoch laughter always conquered fear. Victory over fear was believed to come through laughter.

Igor Krichtafovich states that, during public executions, jesters and fools entertained the crowd whilst people distributed food and drink and were generally festive. He also suggests that when Jesus was dying people were laughing and joking around him.

‘When Jesus was dying on the cross many among the crowd found this amusing, and exchanged jokes. They found it funny.’

(Krichtafovich, 2006:28)

This indicates that sheer joy in the macabre is potentially inherent. There have been many theories about the use of humour about its purpose and affect. This dissertation aims to establish that the emergence of the stand-up and contemporary humour is more than a series of verbal constructs and individual affectations incorporating a number of psychological variables. I aim to demonstrate that the comedian’s humour is created within the Self, activated by the spirit agency the ‘daemon’, as it’s individual driving force, within the psycho-physical world view. It can affect the individual, socially and in the collective as Jung termed within the alchemical process the ‘anima mundi’, within the ‘unus mundi’. It contains the ‘selfness in all mankind,’ and even creates the objective world by the power of wisdom,’

which is also activated from within the Supra Comedian (1970: para 93). The Supra Comedian recognises and re-unites ‘the unio-mentalis’ with the body as only from her can complete conjunction be attained, union with the unus mundi.’ (1970:para 679) All elements have to be activated to realise the spirit of the world, once aroused and observed the process of integration precipitates his individuation.

1.2

Stand-up Comedy as a Genre

Stand-up performance, however, is a distinct genre with clear characteristics. In his study of stand-up comedy as a genre, Robert Stebbins writes:

Stand-up comedy is the art, initially developed in the United States, of humorous dialogue presented before an audience. The talk itself is memorized, and, today, usually expressed in a spontaneous conversational manner, as if the performer were speaking to friends. Although it tends to be one-sided, there may be interaction between performer and audience, which the former does not always want. [...] The typical narrative consists of anecdotes, narrative jokes, one-liners, and short descriptive monologues, which may or may not be related.

(Stebbins, 2003: 3)

The chief characteristics of stand-up comedy are the domination of verbal content over any other component of performance (Stebbins, 2003:3-4). In stand-up comedy, the verbal supersedes any other physical manifestation of humour. Stebbins argues: ‘Verbal content is the essence of stand-up comedy. Other stock-in-trade aspects of legitimate theatre – notably costumes, scenery, and make-up – are either avoided or considered minor (Mintz, 1985: 71). Although stand-up comedy was originally presented only to live audiences, later it became available over radio and still later on television and long-playing records’. Stebbins also goes back to the genre roots of stand-up comedy. He writes that in its pure form it is ‘a type of

variety comedy, which is, in turn, one area of the variety arts. There are variety arts that are entertaining but not humorous, such as dance routines and feats of skills, and although it has clowns, the circus, a series of variety acts is not a particularly humorous form of entertainment' (Stebbins, 2003: 4).

However, there are similarities and differences between stand-up comedy and variety performances. Unlike the variety genre, stand-up comedy does not necessarily require props (although some comedians choose to use them). As genre, stand-up is entirely dependent and focused on the personality of the individual comedian. His personality is paramount and different comedians can perform the same script in totally different ways. The reaction of the audience also depends on the delivery of the joke. The flexibility of the comedian is also essential, as they have to adapt their material to the audience. In other words, comedic performance staged in this kind of setting is never entirely predictable; the outcome depends on the combination of the particular audience and the comedian's persona. The persona is the first impression the comedian makes on the audience, his appearance, his accent, his social class and what first appearance he chooses to show to the audience. Jung developed Psychological Types, which defined and structured the persona as a psychological conduit of conscious understanding. There are other ingredients in the stand-up performance, which cannot be predictable or planned with precision. For instance, the flow between the comedian and the audience depends on a number of things, including the amount of alcohol consumed by the audience.

In this dissertation I am going to use my thirty-three years' experience of working in the UK comedy scene and owning the Jongleurs chain. My parents were post Second World War prisoners of war under the Russian labour camps and entered the UK as political refugees.

Both joined the British army and fought against the Nazis and entered the UK as affiliated army officers. We experienced hardship of political refugees; six of us lived in one room for my early years. Both parents had families who were killed during the war, which meant that along with the joy of survival my father, in particular suffered from posttraumatic stress and survivors guilt. My mother, who was a mathematician, made Christmas crackers and my father, who was training to be a barrister, worked in various factories to survive. They sacrificed their ambitions for our existence and I recognised that they responded to their everyday lives in seemingly polar opposite behaviour. The dichotomy of their pain and shame of their below intellectual work was alleviated by the humour from television and jokes from the crackers. My childhood became the basis of my drive to understand the psyche and personality of mankind and the formation of Jongleurs encouraged a positive and entertaining lens into the psyche.

Jongleurs was pivotal in the expansion of stand-up comedy in the UK. A number of famous comedians have performed for Jongleurs since its creation in 1983, including Stephen Fry, Eddie Izzard, Michael McIntyre, Rory Bremner, Al Murray, Stephen Coogan, Mike Myers, Jack Dee, Frank Skinner, Arthur Smith, Ben Elton, Harry Enfield, Lee Mack, and Russell Brand. The English-speaking comedy scene has been expanding since the nineteen eighties. The genre of Stand-up Comedy started in the USA nineteen seventies with Lenny Bruce, Woody Allen and in England Alexi Sayle and Ben Elton. Although Jongleurs has been instrumental in development and promotion of the comedy talent, I am not going to look exclusively at this particular chain but analyse the stand-up comedy phenomenon in the English-speaking world. I will argue that this unprecedented expansion of comedy has occurred because it answers a psychological need in our society today. Social and cultural expansion is a threat to the individual is represented by the key late capitalist institutions such

as mass media and mass culture. They represent rebellion in the face of these engulfing mass structures. It could be said that we are engaging in a time where ‘the comic spirit’ (Lemma, 2000: 10) recognises the ‘inescapable difficulty of being’.

1.3

Definitions of a Stand-up Comedian

A stand-up comedian is an entertainer who has the ability to reframe a situation through the use of humour with the aim of arousing laughter in the audience. From the psychological point of view, the comedian can be seen as activating the unconscious material (both personal and belonging to the audience i.e., collective) for purposes of humour. The term ‘stand-up’ will refer to the stand-up comedian and is used to define both female and male performers. In this dissertation the term will be used in relation to both sexes, but will be used in masculine gender.

It is important to differentiate the stand-up comedian as a profession from other forms of comedic entertainment involving humorous encounters. The stand-up works with his own material. This material is personal; he edits the intimate information internally and turns it into his performance. By contrast, I define the comic, not as the Freudian term of ‘comic affect,’ which defines the humour within the expression of the comedic i.e. what is funny, the subject, or the object within the joke and thirdly to whom it is imparted. But the comic is a person who primarily works with pre-structured material, which is repeated in a manner similar to that of an actor. The joke can give pleasure in its own right; it is an entity in itself and can be taken away from the comedian. The joke, as was deconstructed by Freud can give pleasure in it’s own right, it is totally separate from the joke-teller. It is a word play, a pre-

configured verbal structure usually with a set-up and punch-line. Freud suggests the joke is a word play, “the contrast between ‘sense and nonsense’”. He continues ‘a new joke acts almost like an event of universal interest; it is passed from one person to another like the news of the latest victory (Freud, 1885:143).

The Joker, differs from the comedian in that he operates purely in the social sphere and this verbal humorous manipulation of is called ‘banter.’ He uses humour for verbal sparring in order to seduce his social circle. His intention is to form attachment through what Bowlby termed, ‘engagement of emotion’, by means of interacting with humour in order to create affectionate bonds.

The stand-up as a profession is different from that of the Jester/Clown/Fool. The Fool uses the preposterous to highlight the truth by showing the absurd aspect of the social order. According to Ulanov, ‘the Fool, the Clown ‘alternates between destruction and restitution, between wreckage and reparation. He personifies our worst and hidden fears of inferiority’. Historically, the court jester, had distinctive comedic apparel was give a role in the Royal Court where he was permitted to mock the royal rulings. B. Otto informs that John Heywood, a court jester for Henry V111, ‘I tried to put my ideals forward to my ruler, but I couldn’t succeed by direct means, so I started joking, hoping that one in ten thousand times I might say something edifying so is it any wonder I was called a jester (2001:178).

Whereas, the clown wore both a distinctive costume and exaggerated make-up whose habitat was predominantly the circus. His humour was in the form of mime and ridiculous movement. The stand-up closely resembles the court jester, whose role has been adapted to the democratic society. Therefore, his clothing is undifferentiated from every-man and wears

every-day attire. The thesis is expounding the statement from Freud of “the factor of bewilderment and illumination’ too leads us deep into the problem of the relationship of the joke to the comic.” Freud also states: ‘on the whole humour is closer to the comic than to jokes.....on which we have not yet laid more stress’(1905:224).

Comedy actors, in sketch shows deliver prepared script depicting social events or satire. Whereas the improviser has an independently chosen topic determined by the host or audience, within a time frame, which determines the comedy actor’s delivery of humour. It is a spontaneous humorous electrically charged engagement where the fast paced communication and anticipation of free-flowing delivery enthrals the audience. The stand-up has to be a combine the skills of both of these performers. Therefore, one could say that the stand-up comedian is the contemporary court-jester with skills of a comedy actor and improviser. The psychosocial imperative for a contemporary storyteller in a comedic form is apparent in the growth of the stand-up comedy industry.

One popular medium of entertainment comparable to stand-up comedy is discussed by Hauke in his book *Invisible Minds* where he discusses the emotional response to contemporary film that, ‘ popular stories and narrative film often provoke powerful emotions that leave the viewer or reader quite out of control. For many years especially for men in Western industrial societies, being surprised by emotions can be exposing. There tends to be a sense of shame in revealing a vulnerability on being moved, especially when the emotion is in reaction to events and people with whom there is no personal connection,’ in this case, ‘a movie.’ My argument is that the stand-up comedian gives that closer connection and gives permission for men to reveal their emotions (2014:57).

1.2 Basic Premises of the Dissertation

1.2.1

Chapter Outline

The emergence of stand-up comedy as a widely enjoyable form of entertainment has an individual, psychosocial and archetypal resonance. My thesis is observing the complex psychic agencies that are activated in the comedian during the concentrated and creative moment of performance. My earlier work as a Pilot Study of Psychological Types in Stand-up Comedy (2004) encouraged my further interest in the psychological dynamics of the comedian and his relationship with society. This thesis is exploring the contents of the stand-up's wound whereby he transforms his repressed unconscious material into jokes, whilst advancing in his personal development and potentially activating what Jung termed as the individuation process. The stand-up has to create laughter; during this process he seeks an oceanic connectedness with the audience, which in turn can form a psychological base for healing.

To construct my argument, I will be drawing on a combination of ideas and theories: Jungian Analytical Psychology (Carl Gustav Jung, Marie Louise von Franz, Erich Neumann, James Hillman, Jolande Jacobi), Psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein), cultural anthropology (Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Hynes and Doty) and theories of humour (Martin A. Rod, Fisher and Fisher). I will employ an integrative approach, which involves using a constellation of concepts by different theorists. Jungian theories in particular the individuation process, alchemy, the transcendent function, archetypes, enantiodromia, the wound.' form the core of this thesis; Freudian ideas are used in relation to the act of stand-up which gives the dramatic form to the comedic framework. The framework is the club setting,

the audience, the time slot and structure and rhythm of the stand-up's on stage performance. The dramatic form is the spoken content within a time constraint. This encompasses his descriptive narrative and delivery, which are unconsciously prompted by psychosexual stages of development and the cluster of complexes, defences and offences.

These concepts will be united by the principal idea of the stand-up's interaction with the audience and the psychological change triggered by this interaction. Jung's concept of individuation and the social and collective psyche will serve as a theoretical canvas for my research. The decision to use an integrative approach is influenced by the fact that all comedians differ in their relationships with the audience. I argue that, with the right comedian, the Supra-comedian, the stand-up performance is a form of collective therapy. This is dependent upon the stand-up's own psychological awareness, his social knowledge and ability to relate to the audience.

Freud and the post-Freudians, especially Melanie Klein, define childhood complexes, early experiences, the construction and deconstruction of developmental stages and the aggressive aspects of human nature (greed and envy, attachment and seduction, and sexual libido). In his essay, 'Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious' (1905), Freud links human propensity to generate humour to aggressive and sexual impulses; as a form of release for the energy otherwise not acceptable in a civilised society.

At the same time, this thesis insists that the Freudian approach to humour does not take into consideration the transformational aspects of comedy. This thesis is the first of its kind as it develops a Jungian theory of humour, and even attempts to go beyond it and into the realm of the social. A key argument of this theory is that the joke is one of the primary media of social

and personal transformation. As Christopher Hauke argues in his book *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* (2000),

... Freudian psychoanalytic theorising of society comes under some strain which certain approaches from the Jungian perspective are able to avoid. This is partly due to the Freudians' less critical attitude to prevailing consciousness and an overvaluing of the ego-function, but, connected with this, it is also due to a further major difference between the Freudian and Jungian perspective. Whereas in the former there is an emphasis on past causes – the reductive point of view – the Jungian position emphasises the understanding of phenomena – including social conditions – by asking 'Where is this heading? What are these conditions – or 'symptoms' – leading us towards?'

(Hauke, 2000: 57)

Chapter 3: 'Jungian and Post-Jungian Ideas in Relation to the Comedian' explores the transformative aspects of comedy and humour. It introduces the concepts of the Supra Joke and the Supra Comedian. It also argues that, during a live comedic performance an alchemical individuation takes place, which is a two-way process during which both the comedian and the audience alter each other psychologically and change each other's personal, political and social views. 'The relationship is between the stand-up and the audience symbolically becomes the 'child/mother and society,' as leaning towards the feminine within society and the movement towards a matriarchal society.

Chapter 4: 'Stand-up Comedy and the Freudian Legacy,' will explore the central concept of Freud's psychology and how the Oedipus complex is played out in the comedy club setting. The chapter will argue that the relationship between the comedian and the audience is that of the child and the mother (speaking symbolically), and the issues that arise during the process of performance concern the comedian's conflict with the mother and father figure in various manifestations.

Chapter 5: 'A Jungian Theory of Comedy,' gives a fresh approach to the premise of humour linking with the comedian within the alchemical setting which is transformational. The Supra Joke is defined as an inseparable union of the comedian, society and audience. Whilst the Supra Comedian stands apart from the successful comedian as both creating humour and making a marked effect on the world. The trickster figure is discussed as a symbol within the modern world.

In Chapter 6: 'Creativity and The Stand-up Comedian,' the stand-up comedian's creative process is discussed, and linked to the audience's psychological transformation. It argues that creativity forms a big part of the performer's individuation process; as well as assisting the audience in its self-analysis and self-reflection. The creative process is, essentially an alchemical process as it makes something out of dark matter via transmutation. Ultimately, comedy is a giving profession as it entails making other people better by making them laugh, by sharing one's creativity with them.

Chapter 7: 'Going On Stage: the Inter and Intra-Psychic Matrix of Stand-Up Comedian' demonstrates how the inter and intra-psychic mechanisms are activated within the comedian during the process of the performance. This includes the preparation for the performance in terms of his material and his persona, plus reflection upon his past performance/s. The psychological agencies are considered, that are activated depending upon a number of interdependent factors, which vacillate between comedian and audience. This study includes psychoanalytic theoretical approaches: by referring to Melanie Klein and John Bowlby. I revisit the Oedipus complex in order to explore the comedian's relationship with the symbolic mother. I use Klein's object relations' theory, her concept of phantasy and John Bowlby's ideas on attachment to explore the immediate and intense dynamic between the comedian and

the audience during the performance. This chapter also deals the performer's relationships with other comedians as he competes with them for the attention of the symbolic mother (the audience).

Chapter 8: 'The Comedian and Depression' unveils the dark aspects of stand-up comedy: depression, mental health problems and suicide. It explores the observable link between mental health issues and stand-up comedy as well as gives accounts of famous comedians' encounters with mental health problems. It also investigates why the adulation of the audience is often not enough to cure the comedian's depression.

Chapter 9: 'Gender, Culture and Comedy' explains the core political issues in relation to stand up comedy as a genre. These issues include the female voice, sexist and patronising treatment by the male representatives of the industry, male envy, the compatibility of comedy and femininity, of the material of female jokes, gender identity on stage and dealing with aggressive audiences. Stand-up comedy is a male-dominated industry. It is still difficult for a female comedian to break through because she is immediately seen as someone who is trying to be too visible for her sex.

1.2.2

Stand Up Comedy as a Form of Therapy

One of the significant points of this thesis is the therapeutic role of stand-up comedy as a genre from both Jungian and Freudian perspective. Most people can tell a joke, telling a joke by itself does not imply the ability to individuate most importantly not all people are able to

laugh at themselves. It is only when a person is prepared to self-deprecate, self-reflect and self-analyse via the self-created joke does he become able to individuate.

The comedian Garry Shandling explains in an interview that the live creative process is cathartic and life changing for the stand-up.

I think it's incredibly cathartic for me. I think it still helps me find who I am. I've honestly had my therapist say to me. 'The same way you are on stage, you should be able to deal with your life like that.' Which is, if you have somebody heckle you, you don't just stop and complain, you just take care of it. And he said that's how you have to live your life. So I think it's not unusual for actors or comedians to use the stage as a way of feeling free and good about their lives and in the moment. It's an interesting experience.

(Ajay, 2002: 207)

Individuation means that our complexes no longer live in the shadow, and true individuating stand-up comedian illuminates his unconscious transforming his elucidation into jokes, which in turn has the potential to reveal the problems of their society. The true stand-up is comparable to the role of a therapist whose recognises that his own analysis is paramount.

The stand-up must be able to mock himself, a willingness to become part of the joke, and to see oneself from the point of view of the audience is essential. It also gives them the ability to be subversive without alienating the audience. This phenomenon is called the self-participating joke. The stand-up who are elevated psychologically are termed the Supra-comedian who have a powerful urge to use themselves and their jokes to confront their own and social issues. This differs from the narcissist who uses their fame as a spotlight on their social commentary. Their commentary is short lived as it has no self-analysis or self-deprecation and palatably shallow. It is possible that comedians possess an almost unstoppable drive to individuate, one of the key concepts of Jungian psychology. The humour

produced through the constant conflict of self-evaluation and self-revelation between the personal and the collective impacts on the audience. The process of unveiling oneself is both serious and psychologically dangerous because it can create a vulnerability and potential isolation from the increasingly despotic collective. Jung saw the individuation process as both serious and dangerous because it inevitably involves dealing with the collective: ‘are we going to let ourselves be robbed of our individual freedom, and what can we do to stop it?’

(Jung CW10: para. 718). Individuation is;

... a process informed by the archetypal ideal of wholeness, which in turn depends on a vital relationship between ego and unconscious. The aim is not to overcome one's personal psychology, to become perfect, but to become familiar with it.

Thus individuation involves an increasing awareness of one's unique psychological reality, including personal strengths and limitations, and at the same time a deeper appreciation of humanity in general. As the individual is not just a single, separate being, but by his very existence presupposes a collective relationship, it follows that the process of individuation must lead to more intense and broader collective relationships and not to isolation.

(Smith et al., 2012: 141).

The self-participating joke is a form of self-sacrifice, the social scapegoat, which gives them the ability to be subversive whilst engaging the audience. The laughter creates a cushion against hurt of vulnerability of the personal revelation whilst empowering the defenceless psychic component, which has divested itself of strength relieving the painful instinct of anger. This form of joke announces the individual's attributes, which distinguish his self from the mass. His distinctiveness is revealed with his unique humour bound within his personal complex where the archetypes emerging from his collective unconscious are being woven into a socially accepted humorous framework juxtaposed against social norms and expectations. The Supra Comedian is the master is aware of his elevated status along with its power and weaves his self-created humorous material to make a social comment, thus making

a multi-layered impact. For the Supra Comedian making an impact through the social commentary is more important than the narcissistic reward of an adoring audience.

It will be argued in this thesis that the multi-layered effect of the comedian has profound significance upon the personal and socio-psychological and archetypal aspect of mankind. It is a unique phenomenon arising from the need to adjust to the forces of change sweeping across all strata of society. By joking, the comedian individuates, and by individuating, they heal themselves and their society. These two processes are inseparable, and both are of paramount importance for the psychological health of society.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The emergence of stand-up comedy as a widely enjoyable form of entertainment has individual, psychosocial and archetypal resonance. However, there is relatively little psychotherapeutic literature observing the complex psychic agencies activated in the comedian during the concentrated and creative moment of performance. In my dissertation I will attempt to explain the psychosocial and psychotherapeutic bases of and stand-up performance and outline the psychological process that drive the stand-up in his drive for the stand-up in his quest for perfect connection with the audience. The creative process is overt and immediate, unlike any other creative art. As Adams points out that, art is often been seen as an ‘illuminating encounter’, even offering it as a dynamic of psychological development, ‘in absentia’ (2003:2). The dramatic arts including the comedic are pre-scribed which are removed from the creator when viewed and reflected upon. Whereas, the stand-up expresses his idiosyncratic issues and feelings, which are often taboo in the spheres of relationship, politics, culture and personal events. In order to engage with their audience, his material must be immediate so they often rely on current politics, relationships and observations of contemporary life. The comedy club setting is conducive to therapeutic illumination. Lemma confirms, ‘the therapist and the comedian may perform their task on different stages, but otherwise they share a lot of common ground’ (2000:1).

To construct my argument, I will be drawing on a number of theories from several branches of the humanities: psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein), analytical psychology (Carl Gustav Jung, Marie Louise von Franz, Erich Neumann, James Hillman, Jolande Jacobi), cultural anthropology (Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, Hynes and Doty) and theories of

humour (Martin A. Rod, Fisher and Fisher). The reason why I employ a patchwork of concepts instead of using one theory for my analysis of stand-up comedy is because psychological and psychotherapeutic literature on the subject of humour is inconsistent. Firstly, psychotherapy does not have unified concepts of either psychological origins or therapeutic effects of humour. Secondly, every branch of the humanities that has ever attempted to define humour – mainstream psychology, Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, Jung’s analytical psychology, cultural anthropology, mythology and folklore – has its own, predictably narrow, angle on the issue. My task, as I see it, is constructing a psychotherapeutic model of the inter-and-intrapsychic processes within the comedian.

These concepts will be united by the principal idea of the comedian’s interaction with the audience and the psychological change triggered by this interaction in the performer. Comedians have a unique perspective on their world and since the individuation process is without gender, class or creed and the route is complex, broad and difficult to delineate, however, it can be possible to recognise their development through their comedic material.

In my analysis of stand-up performance, I will mostly concentrate on the figure of the comedian and his or her side of psychological exchange with the audience. However, one of the chapters of my thesis will be devoted to the social role and political resonance of humour in general, and stand up comedy in particular.

2.1

General Psychological Literature on Humour

Humour is defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as ‘a type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex’ (Humour, 2010: <http://www.britannica.com>). However, the exact functioning of the mechanisms and processes that trigger laughter in humans remain unclear. A number of branches of psychology have approached the phenomenon of humour scientifically, and attempted to explore and explain these mechanisms.

General psychological literature about humour can be divided into several categories. One of these categories deals with the social importance of humour and jokes. A number of recent studies (Martin (2007); Martin and Kuiper (1999); Provine and Fischer (1989); Ruch (1992; 2007)) have concentrated on the role of humour as an inherent element of social interaction. As the psychologist Rod A. Martin writes,

We laugh and joke much more frequently when we are with other people than when we are by ourselves [...]. People do occasionally laugh when they are alone, such as while watching a comedy show on television, reading a humorous book or remembering a funny personal experience. However, these instances of laughter can usually be seen as ‘pseudo-social’ in nature because one is still responding to the characters in the television program or the author of the book, or reliving in memory an even that involved other people.

(Martin, 2007: 5)

From the point of view of social psychology, humour operates as a facilitator of interaction between members of a community and eases internal and interpersonal tensions. Several researchers (Martin, 2007; Morreall, 1991) have noted the importance of laughter as a form of social play assisting human beings in social communication and influence which also acts as a coping mechanism and an effective tension relief system. A number of empirical studies have measured (however impossible it may sound) the degree of creativity necessary for humour appreciation and humour production (Babad, 1974; Brodzinsky and Rubien, 1976;

Clabby, 1980). Some investigators (Doris and Fierman, 1956) even found a correlation between humour appreciation and anxiety. The famous German-British experimental psychologist Hans Eysenck (1942; 1943) devised a series of experiments measuring individual differences in the perception of jokes (Ruch, 2007: 35). Other attempts to develop an objective and empirically based theory of sense of humour have been made by Cattell and Luborsky (1947), Levine and Abelson (1959) and Willibald Ruch (1992).

Theories of humour investigating its social aspect are important for our argument because the stand-up performance, at its core, is an intense social interaction. The fact that it is planned, framed and controlled in a certain way raises the questions of why audiences seek this particular type of stimulation, and why the performer seeks contact with the audience by provoking in them the sense of exhilaration (Ruch, 2007: 205) or the emotion of mirth (Martin, 2007:9). It is obvious that the audience and the comedian are moved by different psychological needs when they engage in this kind of interaction. It is our aim to investigate these needs and to determine the psychotherapeutic mechanisms of the emotional exchange happening between the audience and the comedian.

Where experimental psychologists concentrate on the social side of the comedic interaction, psycholinguists attempt to define the exact linguistic processes behind the production of jokes. Thus, they are more concerned with the 'joker' and the techniques he or she employs to achieve the desired result (to elicit the emotion of mirth, to use Rod A. Martin's expression) rather than the audience's reaction to these techniques. For instance, Alan Partington (2006) uses methodologies and software derived from Corpus Linguistics (the study of language as expressed in samples) and integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches in his study of

‘laughter-talk’. His aim is to pinpoint the exact linguistic triggers (for instance, wordplay, sarcasm or facework) of bouts of laughter. Other psycholinguistic approaches include, for instance, General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo, 2001; Attardo and Ruskin, 1985). Whereas the linguistic theories of humour and laughter are interesting and important, semantics of humour is not included in the scope of this thesis.

Of all empirical investigations of humour, thematically closest to this thesis is the qualitative study by Fisher, (1981) who began their research with comedians. They attempted to understand young children, with relatively mild adjustment problems’, who were often the class clown. They interviewed a group of performers drawn to this profession, collectively referred to as ‘comics’, and drew a number of conclusions about the personal conflicts which links to the concept of the ‘wounded child’.

As a result of early transactions with their parents they feel obliged to soothe others and to interpose themselves against the bad things, ‘out there’. They are weighed down by a poignant sense of duty to help those who come asking for the antidote provided by humour against the human misfortune.’

(Fisher and Fisher, 1981:1)

Not all comedians come from a dysfunctional or neglected background, as is commonly implied, there are a few who through their own makeup are in need of adoration or attention and found that humour gave them the limelight they inherently require. The celebrity Lee Evans was brought up in the theatre and as such an apprentice to performance.

The theoretical apparatus is also borrowed from cultural anthropology, i.e. the trickster and rites of passage. By eliciting a response from the audience, the comedian attempts to heal himself, to close the wound, while at the same time potentially healing and educating the audience as in the case of Chris Rock and George Carling.

2.2

Jungian and Post-Jungian Theories

2.2.1

The Concept of Individuation

To further investigate the theme of psychological woundedness and the metaphor of ‘lost wholeness’, we will employ a number of Jungian and post-Jungian theories. Central to the thesis is Carl Gustav Jung’s concept of Individuation – which, in its core, means becoming oneself while also dealing with society’s pressures and demands. According to Jolande Jacobi, individuation is a ‘spontaneous, natural process within the psyche,’ which is ‘potentially present in every man, although most men are unaware of it’ (Jacobi, 1973: 107). However, this process does not merely mean finding oneself – its ultimate aim is to create an independent thinking, unique individual who would at the same be ‘a member of collectivity’. The aim of the individuation process is not the individual’s supposed individuality as opposed to his collective obligations but ‘the fulfilment of his own nature as it is related to the whole’ (1973: 107). Thus, individuation does not mean some kind of narcissistic loneliness, but always presupposes involvement with one’s fellow human beings (CW7: para. 267).

As Christopher Hauke (2000) notes, for Jung, individuation is

...nothing more or less than being fully oneself. This means including parts of oneself that have been lost or neglected not only due to circumstances or personal history – parents, upbringing and so on – but have also been lost or neglected due to the collective conditions of the era and culture [...] However, the personal and the collective, as well as the past and the present, are difficult to differentiate and separate in any final way.

(Hauke, 2000: 109)

This aspect of individuation is relevant to our idea of the wounded child, as the stand-up, who feels incomplete and therefore chooses an unusual, creative and very public way of exposing his shadow ‘including the neglected parts of oneself,’ in order to dis-integrate and re-integrate. Thus, the performer turns the process of solving his intimate problems into a social act. The comedian’s individuation, observable in his stand-up performances, is a painful and a public form of self-therapy. Thus, the ‘wound’ is opened and examined publicly, during and after the performance, which accents the process of individuation.

2.2.2

The Wound Metaphor

Closely related to the idea of individuation in stand-up comedy is the metaphor of the wounded Fisher King (the Amfortas wound). Amfortas is the king from the Grail Legend who ‘suffers from a wound which cannot be healed; he cannot recover and hand over the authority to Parzifal’ (Von Franz, 1998: 274). In his essay on the Child archetype, Jung reminds us that in many myths and fairy tales the child is often abandoned. He explains that the motif of abandonment is linked to the child’s creativity (CW 9/I: para. 285). He writes that the child archetype symbolises the future personality. The motif of abandonment represents separation from the mother; loss of security, and a break-up of primal relationship. However, this kind of pain is necessary for the child’s future progression and maturation. Pain is part of the person’s individuation:

‘Child’ means something evolving towards independence. This it cannot do without detaching itself from its origins: abandonment therefore is a necessary condition, not that a concomitant symptom. The conflict is not to be overcome by the conscious mind remaining caught between the opposites, and for this very reason it needs a symbol to point out the necessity of detaching itself from its origins.

(CW 9/I: para. 287)

The idea of pain and abandonment in relation to the child archetype has been developed by a number of Jung’s disciples. For instance, Marie-Louise von Franz argues that ‘the true process of individuation – the conscious relationship with the great inner man or one’s own psychic centre – usually begins with an injury or some suffering, which represents a kind of vocation which is not often recognised as such’ (Von Franz, 1994: 300). In his book *The Child: Structure and Dynamics of the Nascent Personality* (1973) Jung’s disciple Erich S. Neumann writes about the primal relationship (which, for him, is the initial relationship between the mother and the child) and links the emergence of creativity in individuals to various disturbances in this relationship. This cluster of ideas is very important for our argument because it throws light on the comedian’s desire for love and appreciation. According to Neumann, the ‘abandoned’ (‘injured’, ‘wounded’) child feels unwanted and grows up gasping for love and acceptance. Some children who were abandoned find repair in other familial figures or recognising innate archetype, which fulfils their need. However, narcissism is also borne out of the neglected child, who retaliates by demanding attention and chooses the persona of a comedian to obtain the adoration required to fill the narcissistic void. The ‘other’ becomes an object for narcissistic need. Neumann writes: ‘The guilt feeling of the matriarchal phase, deriving from a disturbed primal relationship follows the formula: “To be good is to be loved by one’s mother; you are bad because your mother does not love you”’ (Neumann, 2002: 87). Some abandoned or wounded children become isolated and reject any form of love and attention, as it is unrecognised or too painful. This is beyond the narcissistic defense it

borders on psychopathy; where in the psychopath can laugh at the world but cannot engage in laughing at himself.

It is also arguable that the inherent masculine guilt borne out of the Oedipus Complex or the spiritual quest as the tenet of the Amfortas Wound also instinctively gives the stand-up the drive to find the creative outlet. Following this argument, creativity is born out of a negative primal relationship, out of the necessity to ‘bring back’ the mother (we will discuss the post-Freudian take on this phenomenon in section 2.3). For Jung the root of creativity is a primordial archetypal psychic urge. As such there are performers who have the drive to release their creative instinct in the manner of stand-up comedy. It may be suggested that the creative drive is a psycho-evolutionary process, an inherent drive to move forward. One could say that individuation is an evolutionary process.

‘A “creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work by giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art; it constantly at work educating the spirit of age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is almost lacking”.

(1966:82)

James Hillman (1987) establishes a link between the motif of the wounded hero in mythology and the hero’s problem with his parents. He also links the hero’s wound to his drive and creativity. Interestingly enough (and appropriate for our analysis of the male stand-up comedian), Hillman’s puer is male rather than female. Instead of fleeing castration, Hillman’s puer is initiated by his wound (1987: 114).

According to Samuels, Shorter and Plant, ‘from the puer we are given our sense of destiny and meaning.’ Thus the individuation vein the wound cluster as the stand-up is bravely

displaying his deep pre-oedipal pain. The less idealised definition of the puer is given by Von Franz of ‘men who had difficulty settling down, were impatient, unrelated, idealistic, event starting anew, seemingly untouched by age, appearing to be without guile, given to flights of imagination” is also appropriate for the stand-up comedian who consistently examines early conflicts, as the destruction and re-construction of his psychic agencies, in adult setting. Although Jung did not define individuation as a gender specific he focussed on the male psyche of the ‘puer’ and Von Franz did nothing to re-dress this omission. However, the female psyche as puella; ‘is only beginning to be observed and the imagery explored’ (Samuels, Shorter, and Plant 1982:).

Metaphorically speaking, ‘healing the wound’ can be seen as part of the process of healing the father image in a patriarchal society. I believe this change will transform the ‘Amfotas wound,’ which Jung called the ‘eternal split in the male psyche’ (CW6: para. 150).

2.2.3

The Trickster Archetype

The Trickster as archetype is often referred to as the comedian. In his essay on the Trickster archetype (CW9), Jung gives it a number of definitions. According to one of them, the trickster is ‘a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level’ (CW9/I: para. 465). According to another, this archetype is the remainder of an earlier stage of human development; its task is to remind highly conscious and civilized human beings of their animal roots. Jung also notes the trickster’s link with the divine. It represents ‘God, man and animal at once’. It is both ‘subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness’ (CW 9/I: para. 472). The

trickster figure metaphorically represents the psychological principle that makes human beings question cultural imperatives thus allowing them to individuate and start thinking independently. As it stands for the flexibility of thinking and the fluidity of perception, the trickster resists rigid definitions. Writing about the trickster in myth, William Hynes notes that ‘to define (de-finis) is to draw borders around phenomena, and tricksters seem amazingly resistant to such capture, they are notorious border breakers’ (Hynes and Doty, 1993: 33).

Jungian-orientated scholars of film and media have broadened Jung’s definition of the trickster figure in myth, fairy tales and non-mythological narratives. These findings, since they deal with the trickster’s manifestations in contemporary culture, are important for our project. For instance, Ricki Stephanie Tannen (2007) writes about the representations of the female trickster in media and film; Terrie Waddell’ (2009) is interested in the role of liminality in various television series, while Helena Bassil-Morozow (2012) analyses manifestations of the trickster in contemporary film.

2.3

Psychoanalysis and the post-Freudians

2.3.1

Humour as a Defence Mechanism

We will use Jung’s idea of individuation within the realm of alchemical process, is the focus of the body of ideas. Analysis of the agencies and mechanisms of stand-up performance will come from the Freudian and post-Freudian school of thought. These will on occasion overlap at times with Jungian concepts including mythology and symbolism is the focus for our body

of ideas. However, our analysis of the agencies and mechanisms of stand-up performance will come from the Freudian and post-Freudian schools of thought. While Jung's theorising of humour is limited to his analysis of the trickster archetype, Freud actually produced his own theory of humour. In his book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), he outlined his theory of humour as a defence mechanism and a form of sublimation of instincts. Basing himself on the current philosophical theories of humour (Jean Paul Richter, Theodor Vischer, Kuno Fischer and Theodore Lipps), Freud examined the psychosocial role of the joke. He came to the conclusion that the role of the joke in society is to protect the social order from the surge of the instinctual. He writes that 'brutal hostility, forbidden by law, has been replaced by verbal invective' (1975: 102) and 'though as children we are still endowed with a powerful inherited disposition to hostility, we are later taught by a higher personal civilization that it is an unworthy thing to use an abusive language; and even where fighting has itself remained permissible, the number of things which may not be employed as methods of fighting has extraordinarily increased' (1975: 102). On occasion jokes help us to deal with our own aggression.

In 1927 Freud further expanded his analysis of the psychotherapeutic aspects of the comic in his book simply entitled *Humour*. In it he continues to develop his early concept of humour as a defence mechanism helping the ego to cope with the unpleasant and difficult external and internal realities. For instance, he writes that 'the grandeur [in humour] clearly lies in the triumph of narcissism, the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability. The ego refuses to be distressed by the provocations of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world' (Freud, 1961: 162). Freud's vision of humour as a way of dealing with personal problems taps into our idea that, by using humour,

the comedian is defending his narcissistic wound. Humour also becomes a kind of harbour for the comedian's narcissistic needs.

The role of humour as a defence and coping mechanism, which can be successfully employed in psychotherapy, has been discussed by other authors including Barron (1999), Kulhman (1994), Lemma (2000), Bergmann (1999), Streaan (1993; 1994) and Bollas (1995). These authors tend to discuss humour in terms of its direct psychotherapeutic outcome for the client. Lemma (2000) examines humour in terms of 'space,' which adds a component of 'distancing' as an attitude whereas Kohut (1991) sees it both as 'defensive' and 'offensive'. The stage setting creates and encourages a physical distancing and the attitude therefore is woven into his material, which is unconsciously transmitted. Kulhman (1994) concludes that humour provides detachment necessary for distancing oneself from pain and suffering associated with the wound. He postulates that 'detachment strategies seek to move the client *away* from a problem, to decrease the client's investment in or preoccupation with it' (Kulhman, 1994: 59). The stand-up does it by creating a 'humorous construct' (the joke), which the audience can then criticise as an entity that is separate from the comedian. The joke offers a glimpse into the individual's psyche with a defensive caveat of relinquishing ownership of the content with the announcement, 'its only a joke', if the audience does not laugh or does not agree with the concept. Streaan points out that 'jokes and the emergence of a sense of humour, which represents ego strength, paralleled psychosexual development and the development of mature object relations' (1999:73).

Christie (1994) mentions that sometimes the 'defence' aspect of humour can be drawn into the service of manic defence, or into providing slightly modified avenues for destructive impulses such as obscenity and sarcasm (1994: 479). Comedians often pick on (or even start

verbal fights with) members on the audience, which can be interpreted both as a way of making a connection and as a way of announcing their superior position.

To sum up, the whole performance demonstrates his paradoxical need to reveal and defend his wound and primary instinct. Paradoxically, he comes on stage in order to reveal his problems. The stand-up attempts to split himself off from his humour as if the humour does not really belong to him and includes other defence mechanisms as, detachment and sublimation.

2.3.2

The Oedipus Complex

The idea of humour being used as a means to challenge the social order and the so-called ‘civilized behaviour’ is closely linked with Freud’s Oedipus complex (Freud first wrote to Fleiss regarding this concept and later published in, 1910). By using humour, the (predominantly male) comedian attempts to displace the Father figure in its many incarnations. He challenges several Father figures at once: the internal father, other male comedians (by challenging them to a competition) and, ultimately, the social order.

Although Freud did not write directly about the Oedipal colouring of jokes and humour, his analysis of jokes as a defence mechanism is steeped in the Oedipus complex. Freud theorised that the Oedipus complex (1905) comprises the third stage of child development, preceded by the oral and the anal stages. As Laplanche explains

oral stage is the first stage of libidinal development: sexual pleasure at this period is bound predominantly to that excitation of the oral cavity and lips which accompanies

feeding. The activity of nutrition is the source of the particular meanings through which the object relationship is expressed and organised: the love relationship to the mother, for example, is marked by the meanings of eating and being eaten.

(Laplanche, 1973: 292)

The oral phase of libidinal development will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.6. Freud's second stage of libidinal development occurs approximately between the ages of two and four. Laplanche writes that 'the stage is characterised by an organisation of the libido under the primacy of the anal erotogenic zone. The object relation at this time is invested with meanings having to do with tension of defecation (expulsion/retention) and with a symbolic value of faeces. The anal-sadistic stage sees the strengthening of sado-masochism in correlation with the development of muscular control' (Laplanche, 1973: 345).

Strean (1993) links all three stages in humans' relationship to humour when he writes about the pleasure both the teller of the joke and the listener derive from participating in the humours exchange. He theorises that joke-telling is psychologically similar to engaging in sexual activities: 'A fulfilling sexual encounter is usually initiated by words and kisses (oral), accumulations of tension (anal), and consummation in penetration (genital). When the teller and listener are together in the sensually loving, the mutual laughter that evolves from a joke can be similar to mutual orgasm. In telling and listening to a joke (oral) lead to tensions (anal), which result in laughter (genital)' (Strean, 1993: xiii).

The Oedipus complex is basically the desire for death of the rival (the parent of the same sex) and sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex. The child's identification with the same-sex parent leads to the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. However, according to Freud, the complex is subsequently revived at puberty (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 283).

Lemma (2000) expounds on the role of humour in the resolution of the Oedipus complex. From her view, humour acts as a mechanism that manages the internal Oedipus complex. She writes that:

Healthy humour ... rests on the capacity to tolerate antithetical ideas, to manage opposites. This capacity is won at a cost. We can have to tread the arduous route and endure dis-identification from our parents. This rests on a relinquishment of an exclusive relationship with both parents along with the acknowledgement that they have an exclusive relationship with each other. If the child negotiates the Oedipal stage in a relatively healthy way he acquires an internal model of an intercourse (between the parents), which is, on the whole, a creative activity.

(Lemma, 2000: 57)

We can theorise that at puberty the Oedipus complex reaches a new stage. The idea of the 'father' shifts from the physical parent and onto the social order as a system. As such, comedy may be said to be all about provocation of the 'masculine' binary opposition in society. Following this train of thought, making comedy is all about 'Oedipal revival'. His desire to make comedy and to create jokes may be interpreted as the Oedipal desire to challenge and overpower 'the father' as the joke is a tool created to seduce 'the mother'. However, the joke, can, also, be seen as a tool to defend himself from castration by the 'father'. Thus, it can be assumed that there are two principal libidinal drives at work during the stand-up performance: the drive to question the order by joking about it (kill the father) and the drive to attract the mother (receive love and attention from the audience). Following Lemma's idea, the comical process can also be regarded as an attempt to lessen the tension, which comes with an unresolved Oedipus complex (an attempt at resolution which, in fact, is the attempt to close 'the wound').

2.3.3

Freud's concept of libido

Freud's concept of libido is also crucial to our argument. As Freud defined it in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), libido is 'the energy regarded as a quantitative magnitude of those instincts which maybe comprised under the word "love"' (quoted in Laplanche and Pontalis, 239). It is also 'the dynamic manifestation of [the sexual instinct] in mental life' (quoted in Laplanche and Pontalis, 239). Thus, it can be theorised the comedian sublimates his sexual energy and aggression in his performance, and transforms them into jokes. The comedian uses the framework of stand-up performance to express his creative aggression and individuality in a relatively safe environment.

By making fun of prohibitions and serious things, the joker challenges the superego imposed on him or her by parents as representatives of society and civilization. A number of authors from different branches of the humanities have expanded on the relation of the Oedipus complex to humour. For instance, Mahon, following Arieti (1967) argues that 'humour is a result of the secondary revision that may be needed in order to displace the meaning a little further from the Oedipal core' (Mahon, 1992, quoted in Barron, 1999: 74). Simon Critchley points out that 'in humour the childlike super-ego that experiences parental prohibition and Oedipal guilt is replaced with a more grown up super-ego, let us call it super-ego II' (Critchley, 2007: 102-103). Drawing on Freud's ideas, Lemma (2000) writes that it is during the Oedipal phase that the infant's appreciations of humour develop. Most of these researchers, however, did not analyse the Oedipal element of humour in detail but only mentioned that the Oedipus complex can be used as means of explaining the human desire to create and perform jokes. One of the aims of this thesis is to explore the Oedipal (father-challenging) dimension of humour.

2.3.4

Lacan and the Symbolic Order

Jacque Lacan's ideas concerning the Symbolic Order are also important in our analysis of the psychological dimension of humour. In 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' (1956) Lacan discusses the Symbolic Order as having many manifestations, including the law and the language. In *The Seminar. Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique* (1953) Lacan refers to Symbolic Father as the Name-of The-Father. Reworking the Oedipus complex, Lacan states that the Symbolic Father is also the dead father, the father of the primal horde who has been murdered by his sons (Evans, 2001: 62).

From Lacan's perspective (1938), the figure of the father is oxymoronic as it incorporates two conflicting functions: the protective function and the prohibitive functions. Also, the Oedipus complex is nothing less than the passage from the imaginary (pre-Oedipal) order to the symbolic order, the conquest of the symbolic relation as such (Evans, 2001: 127). Thus, it may be said that the comedian's personal issues extend (via Oedipus complex) onto the symbolic order. By re-working his conflict with the father, the performer also identifies and attempts to resolve the current issues of society. By breaking the taboos imposed on him by the personal father, the comedian breaks the taboos currently prevalent in his or her culture. This theory has equivalents in cultural anthropology. Anthropologists (including Victor Turner (1968); Hynes and Doty (1993)) regard the trickster's desire to thwart the social order ('kill or de-throne the father') and replace it with a new version ('possess the mother') as an indispensable part of society's development, which ensures its progress and renewal. This also links with the idea of Amfortas Wound and its mytho-sexual implications. Jung ascribed the mythic narrative to Wagner's opera *Parsifal*. The priest King Amfortas languished

wounded for many years from a wound to 'thigh' –it was argues that his 'thigh' was a polite reference to the penis. It is a reparative analogy for the male integration of feminine to heal the masculine instinct, rather than to overpower or usurp the masculine position of the Oedipal guilt.

Interestingly enough, the comedian uses language (Lacan's language) – the Father's weapon of choice – to attack the Symbolic Order from within. In appropriating language, the comedian alters the order and opens up a new perspective on the world. It is not only the social order (symbolic order, the law) that is being challenged by the 'wounded child', but also the language pattern itself. The comedian re-works the patriarchal structure by attacking it from within.

2.3.5

Melanie Klein and the pre-Oedipal Issues

If Freud's Oedipus complex can be useful for analysing the comedian's Oedipal dilemma and his dialogue (or fight) with the 'order' in its many incarnations, Melanie Klein's ideas can throw light on the influence of pre-Oedipal issues on the comedian's creativity. Before the arrival of the 'order' (in whatever form) there was the unity with the mother (real or symbolic). A secondary desire is to challenge the symbolic father (other men, social, the internal patriarch), which has its roots in the Oedipus complex. If the comedian's desire to challenge the symbolic father (other men, social order, the internal patriarch) has its roots in the Oedipus complex, the origin of his wild desire for love from the audience is largely

related to 'oral' ('feeding') issues. The performer's hunger for love and attention becomes sublimated in his or her attempt to 'seduce' the audience.

One of the most prominent features of the comedian's relationship with the audience is its emotional intensity. From my view, the mystery of this intensity can be explained by the ideas borrowed from Klein's object relations theory. My proposition is that during his stand-up performance, the comedian perceives the audience as a symbolic mother, and seeks to establish a relationship with 'her'. The connection with this kind of mother figure can turn out to be either good or bad.

In order to describe the infant's relationship with its primary caregiver, Klein used the metaphors of the 'good breast' and the 'bad breast'. These 'breasts' are part of the object world of the child (Klein, 1988: 141), play an important part in the formation of the ego (Klein, 1988: 50) and symbolise, respectively, the caregiver who keeps the child well-fed (literally, physically, emotionally), or the one who lets the child 'starve' (literally or metaphorically). Thus, the 'breast' is an object,' which the child internalises along with a constellation of anxieties and defences. These primal instincts and emotional responses can re-occur and replay consistently through out life. The infant's survival depends on the attention the caregiver is willing to give the relationship between the 'breast' and the child is very intense. 'In early connection, predominantly oral in character, originates the child's subsequent ability to adapt to interact with external world'. (Klein, 1988:59) The baby's survival depends on the relationship between the 'breast' and the child is very intense. In this early connection, predominantly oral in character, originates the child's subsequent ability to adapt to and interact with the external world (Klein, 1988: 59).

Klein's theory runs parallel to the more optimistic model of mother-infant relationship proposed by Neumann (1973), presents audience interaction as a reflection (or a repetition, a return) of the primal relationship.

The primary attachment of the Self to the thou as mother, as embodiment of that which confers security, is the child's first model for the experience of its own Self.'
(1973:60)

Speaking metaphorically, the comedian ('the child') seeks the attention of the audience ('the mother' who can give him 'milk'). The condition of a child seeking his mother's approval is consistent with Klein's view of repetition of the Paranoid Schizoid position characterised by splitting, projection, identification, idealisation, omnipotence, denial and paranoid anxiety, i.e. persecution in the consistent search for reverie. As, Klein (1935) points out, 'they are potentially present at any time in the here and now, 'a position,' is always available state, not something one passes through' (1986:11).

It is Klein who reminds us why the early infant bonding is crucial, 'psycho-analysis can trace this anxiety of dependence back through countless situations to the very early one experienced by us all in babyhood that of the child breast' (1964:8). It is the consequence of the child's expectations not being met that creates the anxiety and split in the psyche, which has a prolonged effect on the child.

Similar to the Kleinian breast concept, the audience is not always reliable. Sometimes she provides the comedian with love and attention he or she craves, and sometimes she goes cold and unresponsive (withdraws the 'breast'). The infant regards bad objects as 'internal persecutors' (1988: 116-17). The infant's way of dealing with them includes introjection,

projection, expulsion and denial of external reality (1988: 117). We can certainly apply Klein's ideas regarding defence mechanisms to the comedian's behaviour on stage as they tend to split off their unsuccessful performances and regard them as something separate from themselves. They also tend to project the sense failure onto the audience ('they are a bad audience'). Stand-up comedians often react aggressively to any verbal challenge from members of the audience in order to avoid real or imaginary failure. These instances bring to mind Klein's theory of the depressive position (1935) – a defensive state in which the child dreads persecutors ('bad objects') and tries to ward them off by attacking them (1988: 117).

Klein wrote that the feeding breast is regarded by the baby as a source of creativity (Klein, 1997a: 331). Seen in this light, the comedian wants to attract the audience's attention in order to keep his creativity alive; it is as if the audience 'feeds' him or her with their laughter. Klein theorises: 'For the talent to develop ... in fixation to the primal scene (or phantasies), the degree of activity which is so important for the sublimation itself, undoubtedly also determines whether the subject develops a talent for creation or reproduction' (Klein, 1997a: 103). In *Envy and Gratitude*, she argues: 'we find in the analysis of our patients that the breast in its good aspect is the prototype of maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity, as well as of creativeness. It is these phantasies and instinctual needs that so enrich the primal object that it remains the foundation for hope, trust and belief in goodness.' (Klein, 1997a:180). Moreover, as many comedians (whose interviews are provided in the forthcoming chapters) admit, humour is born out of the sense of loss, and links into Klein's idea concerning the depressive and his attempt to reconnect with lost and broken objects.

The 'breast' element of the object relations theory has also been adopted by psychologists and psychotherapists researching humour. For instance, Chris Bollas (1995) writes that the

mother-baby relationship is one of farce, not only because the mother's behaviour towards the infant is full of mimicry, vocalizations and all sorts of comical exaggerations – but also because the mother is full of good milk and good humour (quoted in Barron, 1999: 39-40). According to Bollas (1995), the mother can be regarded as the first clown. Lemma also observes that 'the shared laughter rekindles the pre-verbal memory of similar exchanges in infancy, when the mother's smile and face lit up and conveyed that there was nothing to fear, that we were understood and loved' (Lemma, 2000: 57).

Closely linked with the 'audience as a mother' metaphor is Klein's idea of phantasy, which can be defined as a form of therapeutic play. Phantasy is both 'activity and its products' (Klein, 1988: 23). Klein's own treatment of her little patients consisted of triggering their phantasies (with the help of toys), and then observing and examining them. This is very similar to triggering a psychotherapeutic creative process and analysing its contents. Lemma notes that Klein's method was 'a prototypical example of the sublimated activity which represented the symbolic expression of anxieties and wishes' (Lemma, 2000: 47-48).

Seen in this light, the comedian's union with the audience can be represented as a kind of phantasy of the ideal primal relationship. The performer phantasises about 'the ideal' audience and 'the ideal' (and plentiful) love they give him or her. It is as if they 'replay' this relationship during the performance. The stand-up also plays out their own anxieties and phantasies in the hope to heal or modify them. Several of Klein's ideas, including phantasy, wherein the stand-up creates his material, has an illusory nature of both the positive nature and negative destructive nature. In essence phantasy for the stand-up accommodates and demonstrates his shadow, which carry his anxieties and disruptive instincts. Whereas, the depressive position is consistently enacted through the process of attachment to the 'mother'

and also by completing his set on stage and removing himself from the oceanic comfort of oneness. The concept of the good/bad objects can be used to analyse the comedian's intensive, tense and sometimes even aggressive and controversial relationship with the audience.

2.3.6

Attachment Theories

Attachment theories connect with the metaphor of the 'wounded comedian'. During the performance, the comedian establishes a relationship with the audience, which is short-lived but very intense. The performer does not see the audience as a conglomeration of individuals but regards it as a kind of volatile mother figure. Bowlby assists me in the construction of our seduction as a means of attachment argument. Attachment is defined by Bowlby as 'a form of instinctive behaviour that develops in humans, as in other mammals, during infancy, and has as its aim or goal proximity to a mother-figure' (Bowlby, 2010: 106). In his essay 'Separation and Loss Within the Family' (1970) Bowlby writes that, while attachment behaviour is directed towards the child's actual parents, 'it none the less continues to be active during adult life when it is usually directed towards some active and dominant figure, often a relative but sometimes an employer or some elder of the community' (2010: 106).

Seen in this light, the audience becomes a psychological extension of the mother figure. The comedian needs to positively attach himself to the audience in order to gain a reinforcing reaction. In the essay 'Childhood Mourning and Its Implications for Psychiatry' (1961), Bowlby theorises that 'in infants and young children the experience of separation habitually initiates defensive processes which lead to yearning for the lost person and reproach for desertion both becoming unconscious' (2010: 69).

The desire to become a stand-up can be regarded as originating in the disruption of an emotional bond or bonds, while the desire to win over and retain the audience can be seen as an urge to recover the lost person. 'If all goes well', Bowlby writes, 'there is joy and a sense of security. If it is threatened, there is jealousy, anxiety, and anger.' (2005: 4). This can be used as a metaphor for the stand-up performance because, while on stage and seeking a secure connection with the audience, the comedian feels emotionally fragile and vulnerable. The perfect connection brings with it the feelings of being loved and even 'omnipotent'. However, when things go wrong, the comedian feels deflated and depressed. Comedy performers tend to blame the audience for the failure. They use a 'stock' phrases such as 'they are not a good audience,' 'tough crowd' when describing their failure to please the audience.

The 'lost' person is not a concrete person or a real 'lost carer' in the stand-up's life, but rather a symbol of the lost mother, a symbol of the primal unity, something that stands for the individual's ideal paradisiacal relationship with the world. This, again, brings us back to Neumann's theorising (1973) on the disruption of the primal relationship, its psychological implications for the individual, and its influence on the individual's creativity.

Bowlby's ideas on aggression (1958) and secure base (1988) are also pertinent to our argument. He postulates (1961) that the biological function of aggression is to achieve reunion with the lost person. In 'Effects on Behaviour of Disruption of an Affectional Bond' (1978) he writes that 'behaviour of an aggressive sort plays a key role in maintaining affectional bonds' (2010: 85). Bowlby writes in 'Psychoanalysis and Childcare' (1958) writes that 'an aggressive child is acting on the basis that attack is the best means of defence' (2010: 13). This directly relates to our analysis of the performer-audience relationship. Comedy club

is a space where verbal aggression is permitted. However, the stand-up has to establish what Bowlby terms (1973) as a 'secure base' – an attachment figure, who can provide the individual (child) with a safe emotional environment. Before displaying any aggression in jokes (aimed against the symbolic father), the stand-up has to establish a secure emotional connection with the audience (the symbolic mother). Once this connection is established, the stand-up is safe to express aggression in his jokes and in his physical performance as long as this aggression is not directed against the audience. The attack has to be 'detached' from the audience and aimed at the 'father': the social structure, the law, and the symbolic order. However, the stand-up may become offensive towards the audience when he or she feels that the audience is apathetic, unresponsive and generally hostile. The idea of 'attack on the father' also links with Turner's concept of ritual (1968) as a way of renewing and challenging the established order of things.

The Oedipal attack on the father is in order to remove the father from the mother. However, anthropologically it is inherent that the father must be overpowered in order the succession of the son, has to continue the lineage and the social construct, which needs to be as Turner identifies challenged and renewed. However, in some instances the tyrannical father has to be removed and the son has to replace the father and continue with his structure or establish a new order. On a spiritual level (and in the long term), stand-up comedy and creative processes associated with it allow the comedian to individuate by exploring his 'Amfortas wound' on stage. Psychologically, in order to activate his creativity, the stand-up delves into his unconscious and extracts any material that has the potential for creating tension, laughter and release also in the audience. Archetypally, the performer is the mouthpiece of the trickster principle challenging social norms, regulations and mainstream values. The comedian's keenness to break taboos ensures the psychological health of society as he releases repressed

material and discusses any issues that are silenced. Thus, the comedian's urge to challenge 'the father' outgrows his personal dimensions and expands towards the collective; political and social aspects.

CHAPTER 3

JUNGIAN AND POST-JUNGIAN IDEAS IN RELATION TO THE STAND-UP COMEDIAN

Jungian theories are particularly pertinent to this study because they capture the psychological implications of social transformations. In this thesis, I will argue that the comedic performance triggers and utilises Jung's symbolic and archetypal processes. The term archetypal is used as an organising principle.

Only by discovering alchemy have I clearly understood that the Unconscious is a process and that ego's rapports with the unconscious and his contents initiate an evolution, more precisely a real metamorphoses of the psyche.....I arrived at the central concept of my psychology: the process of Individuation. (1961: 235)

Progoff amplifies Jung's concept 'fluid..... like deep dreams and myths that provide a living connection to the elusive transpersonal reality of the universe' (1973:12). She continues, 'there is a dimension of human experience that is not external to us in the sense that it can be directly and tangibly grasped. it is within us, but the world within must also be understood metaphorically.....It reflects a depth in us as human beings and also a depth in the universe. Perceiving one we perceive the other (1973:13). Progoff questions the limitation of the concept of the stand-up having the ability to affect change, as the archetype is not limited and has collective symbolism, and that the individual can only grow within his own authentic 'roots.' It is also apparent that historic change occurs organically and is identified through the archetypal constellations. The premise of the thesis lays in the connection between the organic evolution of society and archetypal inspiration which prompts social change. It is more than synchronicity, as a meaningful co-incidence, it is the

quantum effect of colliding thoughts in an appropriate space to propel the forward motion of social psychological insight. The divine is activated.

Progoff reminds us that within the amplification of the individual psyche the revelation of archetypes are aroused and indicate the individual's psychological state and encompasses the collective. This process unveils what Jung calls the 'cosmic character,' which influences and resonates with both the personal and the collective. It carries with it qualities of authenticity, divinity and the numinous. In order to individuate the individual needs to relinquish his de-integrate the negative psychic components and re-integrate and repair his separate his unique psychic matrix and recognise the archetypes activated within in order to truly effect the world.

The proposition is that stand-up comedy can be regarded as a metaphorical litmus test for society's problems and issues. The term 'litmus test' is a scientific test, but adapted as a metaphor in this thesis to highlight a historical event or series of events, which pinpoints psychological pivotal social, cultural and political change exemplified as the acceptance of women as stand-up comedians. (Discussed further in Chapter 9)

The comedy club can become the alchemical term 'vas' a transformational space wherein the audience and the stand-up are uniquely connected. If the transformational space is not established or the comedian does not engage with the audience there will be no 'participation mystique' defined by Jung as:

The further we go back into history, the more we see personality disappearing beneath the wrappings of collectivity. And if we go right back to primitive psychology, we find absolutely no trace of the concept of an individual. Instead of individuality we find only collective relationship or what Levy-Bruhl calls participation mystique.
([1921] 1971: par 12)

Transformation through art is negligible without the unconscious connection.

Freud define the joke as being independent from the individual, it has to stand-alone. It can be passed on like a gift-wrapped in an eloquent comedic construct and intonation. The resonance is cerebral not ontological. However, the significant connection must be a cohesive and revelatory truism resonating beyond his character, beyond the joke, beyond the space. He must entertain the collective unconscious.

Freudian and post-Freudian ideas prove to be more appropriate for examining the anxieties defences detailed projections and introjections, which have immediate resonance with the audience. Jungian and post-Jungian theory explores the social and mythological aspect of stand-up comedy. This thesis applies a variety of Jungian ideas to the analysis of stand-up comedy: Individuation, the Self, the Persona, Enantiodromia, the Amfortas Wound, Temenos and the Trickster.

3. 1

Individuation

Jolande Jacobi defines individuation as a ‘spontaneous, natural process within the psyche,’ which is ‘potentially present in every man, although most men are unaware of it’ (Jacobi, 1973: 107).

Jung states that the individuation process is driven by the Self – the centre of the personality and is also a transpersonal centre. Jolande Jacobi helps define the individuation process as an individual uniquely placed to affect the mass.

‘Only a man who can consciously assent to the power of the inner voice becomes a personality. And only a personality can find a proper place in the collectivity; only personalities have the power to create a community, that is, to become integral parts of a human group and not merely a number in a mass. For the mass is only a living organism that receives and bestows life. Thus self-realisation, both in the individual and in the extrapersonal, collective sense, becomes a moral decision, and it is this moral decision, which lends force to the process of self-fulfilment that Jung calls individuation’.

(Jacobi 1942:106)

Jung writes in ‘Psychological Types’:

In general [individuation] is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality.

(CW6: para. 237)

Thus, individuation does not mean some kind of narcissistic loneliness, but always presupposes involvement with one’s fellow human beings (CW7: para. 267), which

Edinger explores further;

‘one is a separate, unique world of being there can be no norms, since a norm is an average of many. The individual psyche is and must be a whole world within itself in order to stand over and against the outer world and fulfil its task of being a carrier of consciousness. For the scales to be balanced, the individual must be of equal weight to the world’.

(Edinger, 1994: 9)

In his turn, Edinger defines individuation as the ‘world-creating quality of consciousness’. He argues that ‘the individual psyche is and must be a whole world within itself in order to stand over and against the outer world and fulfil its task of being a carrier of consciousness. For the scales to be balanced, the individual must be of equal weight to the world. Its ultimate aim is to create an independent thinking, unique individual who would at the same be “a member of collectivity”’. I suggest that person is the Supra Comedian.

The stand-up comedian’s creative process itself plays a significant role in his individuation. The individual who has responded to the process and understands the bridge between himself and the collective can enjoy the comedic art to its fullest effect without being pulled into the crevice of despair of occasional disillusionment and potential depression caused by the aloneness of the individuation process.

Individuation is a two-way process, which involves sharing and canalizing personal psychic complexes (comedic material) with the audience in a socially acceptable form. It is closely related to what Edinger termed ‘canalization’ (replaced ‘sublimation’). Edinger defined canalization as:

... the conversion or transformation of libido as it performs various mental activities. The transfer of psychic intensities or values from one content to another. Canalization sets up a gradient so instinctual energies can do productive work. It does so via the symbol, which offers a steeper gradient than the natural one. The transformation of instinctual energy is done via an analogue of the object of the instinct: a psychic mechanism imitates the instinct and thereby captures its energy (like a power station at a waterfall). The first achievement of this by primitive man is magic.

(Edinger, 1994: 81)

During the performance, the comedian is able to divulge his personal anxieties, neuroses, and, at times, wounds. The transference and counter-transference that takes place between the performer and audience is the pivotal transformational process. This is explored further in Chapter 6: Going on Stage: Inter and Intra-psycho matrix of the Comedian. It is during the performance the three stage process that the daemon is activated. Jung specifies that the Self as archetype is the ‘daemon and genius of the personal human being the archetype’ (CW1: para 743). He continues, ‘ there are not a few who are called awake by the summons of the voice (CW1:para 302). Jung continues in Memories Dreams and Reflections, ‘a creative person has little power over his own life. He is not free. He is captive and driven by his daemon. Perhaps I might say: I need people to a higher degree than others, and at the same time much less’ (1875-1961.1995). In this thesis I propose that it is an inner voice that calls for a vocation, which seeks the Self.

3.2

The Amfortas Wound

Jung acknowledged a connection between Wagner’s Parsifal (1882) to the feeling type (Volume 6, Psychological Types). The concept of the Amfortas Wound is important for this thesis because it can be seen as a allegory for a ‘question of attitude by which every activity, including the sexual, is regulated’ (CW6: para: 373). It is the attitude to the ‘sexual or power instinct’ not just the raw instinct itself that the comedian is forced to reflect upon depending upon the audience as being a representation of their Self and society. It is an integral part of male individuation, and is therefore pertinent to our study.

Wagner's opera is loosely based on Wolfram von Eschenbach's poem *Parzival*, dated to the first quarter of the 13th century. In Wagner's version, King Amfortas was given guardianship of the Holy Spear, by his father, and is seduced by the witch Kundry. Klingsor, who castrated himself because as he could not control his sexual impulses and hence was rejected from the Knights of the Grail, disguises Kundry as an alluring woman who seduced Amfortas. Klingsor then grabbed the Spear and stabbed Amfortas: this wound caused Amfortas both suffering and shame, and would never heal on its own.

In the last act, he is brought before the grail shrine and his father's coffin. He implores his dead father to grant him rest from his pain. The Knights urge him to reveal the Grail, but Amfortas refuses to do this. He asks the Knights to kill him in order to end his suffering. Parsifal, who had refused to yield the Holy Spear in battle, touches the king's side and heals him. The Grail is then revealed.

The Amfortas Wound can be regarded as an allegory for the male crisis and for the general quandary associated with societal patriarchy. The myth implies the dichotomy of instinctual urges – sex and power. Jung states that healing of the personal or social rift can only take place in unison with a higher attitude – and this is exactly what is revealed in the Holy Grail legend. Jung writes: 'It is purely a question of attitude by which every activity, including the sexual, can be regulated' (CW16: para.373). It can be argued that stand-up comedy can be seen as the search for the Holy Grail capable of healing the performer's personal wounds as well as the wounds of his society. Humour becomes the tool with which the comedian can probe different aspects of his deeply buried, disowned contents of his personal wound; and it is during this process of exploring his pain that the audience relates to him. In a way, the

audience and the comedian are united by the comedian's personal pain, comparable to the compassion Parsifal felt for Amfortas.

Socially, it is important for the contemporary male to examine the complexity of his multi-layered personal, social, inter and intra psychic relationships, and the stand-up arena enables him to engage with his projections and enables de-integration and re-integration to occur. As Fordham explains: 'States of integration and deintegration can be observed objectively in behaviour or subjectively as feelings of good and bad, love and hate....' (1985:31). Stand-up comedians are able to create their own narratives and identify their neuroses through their work. This process of exploring the intimate contents of the male psyche enables the comedian to examine and influence the transformation of masculinity's role in contemporary society. I propose that the healing of the Amfortas wound by Parsifal is the metaphor for the potential healing of the wound in the masculine psyche. The masculine wound, which Jung touched upon during his exploration of psychological types, is dominated by the difference between thinking and feeling types. The male predominantly is the thinking type who is rational and active. The feeling type Jung attributed mostly to the female is passive, empathic and communicative. Parsifal whilst considering his mothers' death awakened his conscience and empathic feelings reflected by his question, 'whom does the grail serve?' Robert Johnson proposes, that the myth of Parsifal, 'has presented the healing of the wounded feeling function in mythological language.....since it is the feeling function, which is so neglected and wounded in our culture.' (1995: 47/49)

The allegory of the Amfortas Wound can be viewed in the programme 'Jim Breuer: Comedy Frenzy. More Than Me.' The stand-up comedian recounts taking his elderly infirmed father on tour with him and 'sharing a simple and powerful message that he learned from, and with,

his dad'. You don't have to hide from life's uncomfortable truths – sickness, death and fear – you can look them in the eye, laugh and move on.....He knew I'd get mortified when I'd say certain things in public. He'd go off on that.....the laugh was always the healer' (Huffington Post 19/06/2015). Breuer explored the relationship between his father and himself, 'I learned so much from taking care of my dad I wouldn't trade it for the world'.

In the archetypal realm and in the case of stand-up comedy, the personal is closely related to the collective and the two always communicate with one another: 'The dialogue on the personal level has led to the activation of the collective unconscious, whereby a direct experience of the transpersonal dimension becomes possible' (Edinger et al.: 91).

3.3

The Ego and the Self

The search for the Self is part of the individuation process. Jung defined it as 'a sort of atomic nucleus about whose innermost structure and ultimate meaning we know nothing' (CW 12, para: 249). Jung, as Marcus West points out, regarded the Self as the centre of the psyche. It is the totality of the psyche. The Self is the archetype of wholeness, the regulating centre of the psyche. It is also the organising and guiding principle, steering the individual's development (West, 2007: 164). West writes that

The self also represented, for Jung, the unconscious goal of development, a potential toward which the personality naturally unfolds. As the guiding principle of the psyche, Jung held that the self was never itself manifest, but remained an archetype, guiding the individual from the unconscious. Experiences representing or approximating to an experience of the self are imbued with a sense of wholeness, thought to represent the experience of integration of the different parts of the personality.

(2007: 164-5).

The Ego is conceptually different from the Self. Jung writes: ‘The Ego is, by definition, subordinate to the self and is related to it like a part to the whole. Inside the field of consciousness it has, as we say, free will. [...] it finds its limits outside the field of consciousness in the subjective inner world, where it comes into conflict with the facts of the Self’ (CW9/II: para. 5).

Comedians are constantly in search of their unique comedic voice, or essence which they achieve during the performance, when they are accepted and loved by the audience. During the stand-up performance the comedian gets a glimpse of the Self. It becomes manifest when the audience feeds parts of the personality back to the comedian, making him, or her albeit briefly, feel whole. For Jung, the encounter with the Self-archetype, whenever it happens, is similar to a numinous experience. It feels like an encounter with ‘the will of God’. The term ‘God’ here being understood as ‘the mighty daemon ... expressing a determining power which comes upon man from outside, like providence or fate, though the ethical decision is left to man’ (Jung, 1951: para. 51).

The creative process that occurs during a stand-up performance involves very close interaction with the audience – which means that the emotional exchange between the viewer and the comedian is at its most intense. As the American comedian Garry Shandling notes, the result of this interaction is often very cathartic. It is, in fact, a form of therapy:

I think it still helps me find who I am. I’ve honestly had my therapist say to me: ‘The same way you are on stage, you should be able to deal with your life like that’. Which is, if you have somebody heckle you, you don’t just stop and complain, you just take care of it. And he said that’s how you have to live your life. So I think it’s not unusual for actors or comedians to use the stage as a way of feeling free and good about their lives [...].

(Ajaye, 2002: 207)

3.4

The Persona

Jung defines the Persona as ‘that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is. In any case the temptation to be what one seems to be is great, because the persona is usually rewarded in cash’ (CW9/I: para. 221). The Persona is thus a mask, an artificial façade created and employed for the purpose of gaining social benefits. As Elie Humbert puts it, ‘the Persona is charged with the task of inserting the subject into a social network of communication’ (Humbert, 1996: 51). As she points out, “‘Persona’ originally referred to the mask actors wore in the theatres of antiquity. This mask made the actor’s voice resound ... while it allowed the audience to recognise the role that the actor played’ (1996: 51).

Stand-up comedians accentuate a part of themselves that become a part of their Persona. This mask is usually an exaggerated part of his personality and it has the dual function of attracting the audience and protecting his inner vulnerability. The humour style and physical attitude, social characterisation, chosen by the stand-up is their persona and becomes a layer of protection of the comedian’s psychological inferior, which is hidden and powerless. Alternatively the persona can be used as a shield to attack the audience when they do not respond favourably. If the on-stage persona is very successful, the performer may become reluctant to take it off even off-stage. This is a psychologically dangerous moment because he may eventually lose the ability to differentiate between his real Self and the artificial mask. What used to be a part of his genuine personality becomes a rigid, exaggerated, oversized psychological façade.

In his book, *Comic Insights: the Art of Stand-Up Comedy* (2002), the comedian Frankin Ajaye warns his readers about the dangers of developing an on-stage persona – and about taking it too seriously. He advises budding comedians to ‘be themselves’ while on stage. In his view, genuine humour is based on genuine personality, not on an over-inflated, fake mask:

Don’t be concerned too much about developing an image or persona when you’re starting out. In fact, never consciously try to create one if you are trying to do humour based on your true point of view of life, society, the world, etc. Whatever you are will emerge naturally, though it will be in reality somewhat heightened when you’re on stage. On stage, you are you plus fifteen percent. Richard Lewis, Richard Pryor, Woody Allen, Elayne Boosler, Bill Cosby, Garry Shandling, and many others have very distinct personas and comedic images that have emerged over the years. These personas are very close to the person that they are when they’re not performing.

(Ajaye, 2002: 36)

Some stand-up performers, such as the British comedian Jenny Eclair, have the opposite opinion about the comedian’s behaviour on and off-stage, and on the size of their Persona. She admits to her ego being fed – through the Persona – by the audience’s reaction, the elation and the success. The adrenaline, the psychological over-inflation, the sense of omnipotence become addictive, they become drugs. Eclair admits that withdrawal of these drugs leaves her depressed. Her on-stage Persona and actual personality are almost inseparable:

I’ve had a few gigs at Hackney Empire when I’ve come off-stage feeling completely omnipotent. I’m ghastly to live with. I overdose on adrenaline sometimes. It’s a downfall for a lot of comics. You get so hyped up that when you come down to reality, you can’t actually deal with it. When I came back from Edinburgh, I took a couple of weeks off to be a mother again, and come eight o’clock at night on a normal night in, I thought, ‘What do I do now? I’ve got to cook a meal, stay in? I missed that winding up, the gearing up before a gig. I’m only really happy when I’m working. Otherwise, I get so depressed that I have to go back to bed. I don’t actually like it.

(Cook, 1994: 187)

Speaking metaphorically, when the stand-up over identifies with the Persona, he becomes, 'full of hubris'. The mask represents the attitude and fully identify with God. If the stand-up over-identifies with that mask, their (Jungian) ego becomes blurred. They have made a connection with their Self, but they have become seduced into believing they are the archetype, with themselves as the centre it is grandiose narcissism. There is no dialogue between of the Ego and Self; he prefers to remain in the heightened state of hubris; identifying with a God-like image projected by the audience. In this state there is no need to question the ego or the audiences belief in their self. The grandiose persona replaces 'reality'; the Persona, fed by the unconscious forces, becomes out of control. Mario Jacoby writes about the dangers of over-identification with the Self: 'If the Self may be experienced as an image of God, the distinction between the Ego and the Self is extremely important for psychic health. For I am not God, and God is not I. An identification between the ego and the self means delusions of grandeur such as become manifest in certain psychoses' (Jacoby, 1985: 70). As Joseph Henderson lucidly argues, 'the Ego must continually return to re-establish its relation to the Self in order to maintain a condition of psychic health' (Jung, 1978: 75).

Without reflective and self-critical processes, the Ego is weakened and much of its identity is the persona as a need to please the 'other'. The bridge between the Self and the Persona is established at the expense of the Ego. The ego-Self axis is a constant shift between the inherent drive to develop the Self and how the Self is developed. This oscillation between Self-care systems must exist continuously or over-inflation will occur. Such a powerful relationship of two 'collective' entities ignores the valuable function of the ego to supervise the unconscious, which can be subsumed and eventual psychological disorientation and depression can occur. It overlooks the reality of the individual's life, as well as his or her identity. As Jacobi writes, paraphrasing Jung, regarding identification with the Persona

‘would allow self-esteem to be fed by collective roles instead of being grounded in genuine personality’ (1985: 88). This detachment from reality equals a loss of impact from the ego. A comedian can be seduced by the audience into being successful with a persona which would be difficult to adjust or remove and consequently trapped by his need for success rather than his need to be his Self. He therefore, may hinder or indeed forfeit his own development in terms of becoming individuated in order to maintain his successful adored status. Also, ‘identification with roles defined by society may not only procure the pseudo-satisfaction of a person’s need for self-esteem – at the cost of his genuine individuality. There is also the danger that contents of an archetypal nature originating in the collective unconscious may lead to inflation’ (1985: 88). This detachment from reality equals the (relative) loss of the Ego: ‘Since the Ego, as the centre of consciousness, also exerts a reality-testing function, the inflation – i.e. the blowing up of the ego with archetypal contents – leads to a loss of the sense of reality. It may be said that Ajaye advocates keeping an eye on reality, being grounded in ‘here and now’; being realistic – even on stage; to be able to control the Persona and the inflation of the ego. In fact, this is about being in control of one’s creative process. However, this is an ideal situation, as not every stand-up performer can control his or her spontaneous creativity.

3.5

Enantiidromia

Jung proposed that the psychic balance is consistently in question and various psychic agencies vie for power or primary position. He termed the transformation from one extreme to another enantiidromia. This is very important for our analysis of stand-up comedy and related psychological processes.

The comedian activates enantiodromia by focusing on various aspects of his life. Neuroses are demonstrated through his material and then projected onto the audience, for instance, through the popular subject of personal relationships. This intra- and extra-psychic comedic material becomes a debate, and at times polemic, with the audience. The comedian accommodates the audience's reaction (positive or negative) to his material; the reaction is then absorbed into the Self in a form of reconciliation of opposites. The opposites are in constant conflict internally and enantiodromic mechanism will naturally but suddenly shift to the opposite. The stand-up will find acceptance in the reconciliation of the opposites.

As Jung argues, enantiodromia is the play of opposites in the course of events – which reflects the view that everything that exists turns into its opposite: ‘construction and destruction, destruction and construction – this is the principle which governs all cycles of natural life, from the smallest to the greatest’ (CW6: para. 708). The stand-up Roseanne confirms in one of her interviews that this interplay often occurs in comedic performances. A show can be ‘like heaven and hell’ and ‘good and evil, that battle is always here’ (Ajaye, 2002: 190).

Humorous narratives can pose emotional ambiguity for the audience, and by laughing at something that is very personal or socially unacceptable (a taboo), the audience creates and supports an internal dialogue through which conscious recognition emerges. It is this recognition of a personal attitude that has the potential to activate the transcendent function. When it is activated, it can lead to the union of opposing forces within the performer and the performance. It is the principle of enantiodromia that operates in this situation. The material at which the audience laughs can, in some cases, create an enantiodromic reaction. It can also make the audience member realise the power of the thought process within the humour.

The dynamic of enantiodromia is an internal regulator which is intrinsic to the individual's interaction, internally and externally, consciously and unconsciously, when ethical decisions are made.

3.6

Temenos

The comedy club becomes a holy place, or Temenos, for the comedian. In ancient Greece Temenos was a piece of ground surrounding or adjacent to a temple (Oxford Dictionary Online). Jung used Temenos as a symbol with multiple meanings to describe a number of psychological processes. For him – symbolically – Temenos is a place that contains. And it can contain a number of different things. For instance, it can be used to describe ‘a sense of privacy that surrounds an analytical relationship’ (CW18: para. 410). He also writes in The Tavistock Lectures that Temenos is ‘a taboo area where [the man] will be able to meet the unconscious’ (CW12: para. 63). The philosopher Mircea Eliade envisages Temenos as a ‘territory of radical difference. [...] the sacred has nothing to do with redemption and understanding. It is a space where the subject is altered and ”othered”’ (Yarrow, 2007: 38). The anthropologist J. Huizinga calls Temenos ‘a sacred space, a temporarily real world of its own’ (Huizinga, 2002: 15).

The comedy club is a space, a Temenos, where transformation happens both in the performer and the audience. The audience is affected and potentially altered through the process of what Levy Bruhl; called ‘participation mystique,’ which ‘denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects and consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to a

particular identity (Jung [1921] 1971:para781). Humour gives performers permission to say whatever they want; it gives them a licence to explore their own unconscious; it gives them permission to push the boundaries – psychological, personal, social and political. The stage becomes a place where anything can happen; where everything is allowed. Taboos can be explored on stage.

The comedy club can be compared to Temenos for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a place where the comedian can express his thoughts and ideas – make them known to the world. His creative output has an effect not only on the audience but also on the society. On the persona level, the comedian uses the space to reveal his personal wound, his unconscious and his conflicts. On the social level, he enters into a reciprocal exchange with the audience and an archetypal connection is established. As Philip Yarrow explains, ‘the rationalistic or logocentric viewpoint of monotheistic theology perceives the sacred in transcendental terms as the space where God reveals himself through language’ (Yarrow, 2007: 39). This is certainly true of stand-up comedy.

3.7

The Trickster

The Trickster is the embodiment of the force that disorientates the established line of thought, forcing the psyche of the individual and the collective psyche to reconfigure its stance. The notion of the Trickster is pertinent to our argument because the comedian’s material is transformative as it embodies ‘the truth’. The joke, being sharp, provocative and at times indecent, challenges the audience to change their view of the world.

There are many definitions of the Trickster. For instance, Paul Radin defined it as ‘creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself’ (Radin, 1972: xxiii) while Karl Kerényi calls the Trickster figure ‘the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries’ (Radin, 1972: 185).

Jung’s essay, ‘On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure’, discusses the different guises the trickster takes in literature, folklore and myth. Jung writes that this archetype is ‘a faithful reflection of an absolutely undifferentiated human consciousness, corresponding to a psyche that has hardly left the animal level’ (CW9/I: para. 465). The Trickster is connected with the divine – he is ‘God, man and animal at once [...] both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness’ (CW 9/I: para. 472).

The stand-up is often symbolised as the contemporary trickster. Historically the trickster was an instinct expressed in an anecdote as an anthropomorphic or distinguishable character. The trickster is without boundaries and gives the incongruity and irrationality of life a psychological meaning. In myth form is he is contained within various anecdotes and adapted by various cultures. As contemporary culture has progressed, it is arguable that the manifestation of the form of the trickster symbol has changed.

Stand-up comedy can be seen as an inclusive form of rebellion; as institutionalised radical freedom. The Trickster does not respect boundaries and as such the contemporary trickster needs to reflect this change. My argument therefore, is that the trickster is the joke, which

slips into the psyche bypassing the critical faculty of the conscious mind. Laughter is created through the friction of disorientation. This is the trickster as the joke is born. The joke itself recognises a personal or social 'truth', which is then distorted and challenged. The joke is almost like an attack; it is aggressive in nature; and the response to it is a form of spontaneous release.

The intention behind the joke is very important. The process that takes place during the stand-up performance is transformational both for the audience and the stand-up, it can be said to be mercurial. Jung aligns the Trickster figure with the alchemical figure of Mercurius (Samuels, 1985: 242). Donald Kalsched defines Mercurius as both 'diabolical and symbolical'. As a threshold deity, 'he either dissociates or associates various inner images and affects. [...] He is totally amoral, like life itself, instinctual, underdeveloped, a stupid blockhead, a practical joker, a hero who aids mankind and changes the world' (Kalsched, 1996: 40).

Edward Edinger explains in his book *Alchemical Symbolism in Psychotherapy* that Mercurius serves as a metaphor for 'the autonomous spirit of the archetypal psyche, the paradoxical manifestation of the transpersonal Self. To subject the Spirit Mercurius to coagulatio means nothing less than the connecting of the Ego with the Self, the fulfilment of individuation' (Edinger, 1985: 85). This links well with our idea of stand-up comedy as a form of individuation for the comedian and society. Like the Spirit Mercurius, the joke has both personal and collective links. On an archetypal level, it resonates with the cultural and symbolic parts of the collective psyche. It has to make sense collectively in order to be transpersonal and transcendent.

On the personal level, the joke transforms the comedian and individual's levels of the audience; on the collective level it symbolises and vocalises the need for change in society and culture. In this sense, the joke-trickster is the reflection of our inner world, the world of the unconscious. It reflects the potential of the individual and the individual's social milieu. The stand-up becomes the mouthpiece of the trickster principle challenging social norms, regulations and mainstream values. Bassil Morozow states that 'from the point of view of the trickster principle.....the natural, instinctual, unpredictable trickster is the enemy of structure' The stand-up's keenness to breakdown taboos ensures the psychological health of society as he releases attitudes that are suppressed and discusses any issues that are silenced. At the same time, the joke is profoundly individual.

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the stand-up comedy is a form of therapy, both for the comedian and society as the trickster is also a healing archetype. The joke, despite its aggressive qualities, also has viable therapeutic qualities. Through its paradoxical structure and forceful mercurial nature the joke can undermine and overturn a long held belief and create a differing viewpoint. Jung writes in *On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure* that this archetype has a lot in common with the shaman and the medicine-man for he, too 'often plays malicious jokes on people, only to fall victim in his turn to the vengeance of those whom he has injured' (CW9/I: para. 457). He is the 'wounded wounder' who is the agent of healing and the sufferer that takes away suffering (CW9/I: para. 457).

The joke communicates with audience members as representatives of the community, revealing the false nature of social norms, questioning morality and civilization. The joke-trickster tests the limits of rules and laws, whether moral, political, social or perceptual. By bringing up and discussing complex and often controversial issues, the comedian triggers

self-healing processes in the social psyche, as well as in the psyche of the individual.

Therefore, as Jung reminds us that any:

‘.....creative process so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious action of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work by giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work education the spirit of age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking’.

(CW15:p82)

The joke is a symbolic intruder; it exposes or disorientates in order to reveal the truth. The joke breaks into our psyche and announces a profoundly altering viewpoint. This oxymoron, simultaneously debasing and socially responsible nature of the Trickster is confirmed by professional stand-ups themselves. The joke is paradoxical in its intentions; it is both playful and aggressive, wounding and healing, masculine and feminine. Like the Trickster, the joke has the miraculous ability to infiltrate restrictive structures embedding contrary, or at least unexpected, points in image and verbal form which collide and spontaneous laughter occurs.

For instance, Roseanne Barr (stage name – Roseanne) admits that, although the language of comedy is seemingly aggressive, this power is part of the essential ‘attack’ to break through any stale values individual members of the audience may harbour: ‘You hit them [the audience] with it. If you look at the language of comedy, it’s kinda like a violent attack on their consciousness in a way. I think we want to hit people in the head, so their head will open up. We know that people don’t buy the crazy shit in the world because we don’t’ (Ajaye, 2002: 189). At the same time, this kind of verbal violence is the agent that breaks the false belief of cognitive dissonance; something that changes people and their environment, Roseanne claims: ‘I think it’s calling from a higher consciousness that shows through to the audience when they see your commitment to what you’re saying’ (2002: 189).

This view is echoed by another stand-up performer, Jim Barclay who says that his motto (or rather war cry before going on stage) was “challenging and denting the audience’s prejudices,” not laying on them my own, but challenging theirs’ (Wilmot and Rosengard, 1989: 4)

CHAPTER 4

STAND-UP COMEDY AND THE FREUDIAN LEGACY

Freudian and post-Freudian ideas illuminate and amplify the internal and external dynamic of the comedic performance. Whereas, Jung's theories discuss the symbolic value of the performance. All psychoanalytic theorists agree that an unrestrained self-expressive area is needed for primal instincts to be released. Freud developed free-association and Klein, developed play therapy for children. The comedy club can also be a paradigm for adult verbal play. The inspiration to become a stand-up, can lie in the comedian's personal anxiety stemming from Oedipal crisis, projected into the world. Freudian and post Freudian theories illuminate the internal and external dynamic of the comedic performance and his projection onto the current social environment. Lacan's concepts of language and composition structure are also pertinent.

In this chapter I will engage a number of Freudian and post-Freudian ideas, including humour such as Freud's concepts of Oedipus complex and libido; Jacques Lacan's concept of symbolic order; Melanie Klein's envisioning of the relationship between the mother and the child; John Bowlby's analysis of attachment and separation; Heinz Kohut's concept of the Self and his analysis of narcissism and, finally, Donald Winnicott's and Christopher Bollas's theorising about mirroring and attunement from audience as 'mother' to stand-up as 'child. These processes affect personal formation and self-evaluation whilst influencing the developmental process of creativity.

The principle aim of the chapter is to draw all these disparate theories together in order to show the complexity of stand-up performance as a therapeutic process in which the audience plays the role of the mother and therapist; and in which it provides the comedian with sufficient mirroring and attunement to allow him to deal with his personal problems. During the creative moment the stand-up feels omnipotent and to uphold the illusion of omnipotence.

If the audience, as mother, fails to provide perfect mirroring, the stand-up may regard it as a form of aggression and attack the audience. Seen in this light, humour is both a defence mechanism, which is engaged to shield the psyche and an offence mechanism, which is an attack on the perpetrator as a release of aggression. .

4.1 Freud

4.1.1

The Oedipus Complex

The idea of humour being used as a way to challenge the social order, and the so-called civilized behaviour, is closely linked with Freud's Oedipus complex (first mentioned in Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis, 1910). In order to continue with his concept of the Oedipus Complex Freud decide to abandon the Seduction Theory, which he wrote to Fleiss in 1897. Anna Freud wrote to J M Masson, which he states in his book The Assault on Truth:

‘..keeping up the seduction theory would mean tot abandon the Oedipus Complex, and with it the whole importance of phantasy life, conscious or unconscious phantasy. In fact, I there would have been no psychoanalysis afterwards’. (1984:112)

By using humour, the (predominantly male) stand-up attempts to displace the father figure in its many incarnations. He challenges several father figures at once: the internal father, other male comedians (by challenging them to a competition) and, ultimately, the social order.

The term Oedipus complex does not make its first appearance until 1910. Freud made the actual discovery of the Oedipus complex during his self-analysis – though the ground had been prepared by the analysis of his patients (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 283). Freud

writes in his essay 'A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men' (1910) that. When the boy learns that his parents are not ideal beings and that they too have sexual intercourse, he

...tells himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is not after all so very great, since basically they do the same thing. The enlightening information he has received has in fact awakened the memory-traces of the impressions and wishes of his early infancy, and these have led to a re-activation in him of certain mental impulses. He begins to desire his mother herself in the sense with which he has recently become acquainted, and to have his father anew as a rival who stands in the way of his wish; he comes, as we say, under the dominance of the Oedipus complex. He does not forgive his mother for having granted the favour of sexual intercourse not to himself but to his father, and he regards it as an act of unfaithfulness. [...] As a result of the constant combined operation of the two driving forces, desire and thirst for revenge, phantasies of his mother's unfaithfulness are by far the most preferred; the lover with whom she commits her act of infidelity almost always exhibits the features of the boy's own ego, or more accurately, of his own idealised personality, grown up and so raised to a level with the father.

(Freud, 1960: XI, 171)

Simon Critchley points out that 'in humour the childlike super-ego that experiences parental prohibition and Oedipal guilt is replaced with a more grown-up super-ego, let us call it super-ego II' (Critchley, 2007: 102-103). Drawing on Freud's ideas, Lemma (2000) writes that it is during the Oedipal phase that the infant's appreciation of humour develops. Most of these researchers, however, did not analyse the Oedipal element of humour in detail but only mentioned that the Oedipus complex can be used as a means of explaining the human desire to create and perform jokes. However, Freud's theory of Jokes and the Unconscious has very little about sexuality other than the sexual ambiguity in the double-entendre joke.

By making fun of prohibitions, taboos and ethics, the stand-up challenges the superego imposed on him by his parents as representatives of society and civilization. The world of stand-up comedy can be seen as a stage on which the Oedipus complex is played out. The whole process is very masculine. On the one hand, the performer on stage challenges

assumptions, rules and rituals prescribed by the social system. Speaking metaphorically, in being disobedient and rude to the father (society), he challenges the patriarch. On the other hand, the audience becomes the symbolic mother who the comedian, ideally, tries to seduce. The symbolic mother is expected to mirror the comedian and the laughter reminds the comedian of similar exchanges in infancy (Lemma, 2000: 57).

The release of the Oedipal tension depends on the success of the show and the reaction of the audience. In her book *Humour on the Couch: Exploring Humour in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (2000), Alessandra Lemma expounds on the role of humour in the resolution of the Oedipus complex. From her view, humour acts as a mechanism that manages the internal Oedipus complex. She writes that,

Healthy humour ... rests on the capacity to tolerate antithetical ideas, to manage opposites. This capacity is won at a cost. We can have to tread the arduous route and endure dis-identification from our parents. This rests on a relinquishment of an exclusive relationship with both parents along with the acknowledgement that they have an exclusive relationship with each other. If the child negotiates the Oedipal stage in a relatively healthy way he acquires an internal model of an intercourse (between the parents), which is, on the whole, a creative activity.

(Lemma, 2000: 57)

Lemma implies that the comedian learns to deal with the ambiguity and the ambiguous response. Her view is that a 'wise' comedian, whose Oedipal conflict has been resolved or weakened with the help of therapy, will not look upon the audience as a symbolic mother and will demand undivided attention and acceptance from it. However, this does not usually work in the business of stand up comedy. In reality, the audience's ambivalence creates an antagonistic and aggressive reaction in the comedian and he leaves the stage to retaliate (be funnier) next time. Most often than not, the comedian goes into an, 'Oedipal overdrive' (he becomes angry and loses self-control) which may even result in an abusive verbal row with

the audience. However, the dissolution of the Oedipus complex is still a possible long-term outcome.

Another Freudian concept I would like to use in relation to stand-up performance is the genital stage. According to Freud, the genital stage constitutes the final phase of Oedipal development. This stage can be defined as a 'stage of psychosexual development characterised by the organisation of the component instincts under the primacy of the genital zones' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 186). This stage is also characterised by 'a distinction between Oedipal demands and the degree of biological development reached' (1973: 187).

In my view, stand-up performance can be seen as a re-enactment, or symbolic realisation, of the genital stage. During the performance the comedian acts out the undeveloped stages and concludes with the genital phase. By re-enacting it, the performer receives an opportunity to ease the Oedipal tension (the immediate outcome) or dissolve the Oedipus complex altogether (the long-term solution).

Stand-up performance can be regarded as a 'live' creative process of high emotional and cognitive intensity. Moreover, this intensity is aggravated by the fact that the process is interactive. That is why all the deep-seated emotional issues are often triggered during the performance. According to Freud, jokes drag the repressed material from 'the realm of the unconscious' (Freud, 1960: 258) and re-activate the jokes' ancient dwelling place that is the comedian's childhood (1960: 210).

4.1.2

Freud's Concept of libido

Freud's concept of libido is also crucial for my argument. As Freud defined it in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), libido is 'the energy regarded as a quantitative magnitude of those instincts which maybe comprised under the word "love"' (Freud, 1960, Vol. 18: 111). It is also 'the dynamic manifestation of [the sexual instinct] in mental life' (Freud, 1960, Vol. 18: 111). Seen from this perspective, the comedian sublimates his sexual energy and aggression in his performance, and transforms them into jokes. The comedian uses the framework of stand-up performance to express his creative aggression and individuality in a relatively safe environment.

It was Jung's announcement of his definition of Libido as fundamentally different to that of Freud, which had catastrophic consequences for their relationship. Jung used the terms 'energy and 'libido' interchangeably. For him, libido was not necessarily about sex, or sexual excitation – it was more about the amount of psychic energy a person possesses, engages and directs. The psychic energy, 'libido', is a motivational force, which encourages spirituality, the intellect, creativity, pleasure can become conscious, fundamentally an individual's urge of life.

My vision of libido combines both Freud's and Jung's views. I suggest that both Freud's and Jung's definition of libido are displayed by the comedian during the performance. They are expressed in the physical and verbal aspects of the performance where both definitions have a transformational quality; in the *dromenon* (the Greek word for 'ritual'; 'something performed'). This new libido can be named 'performance libido.' The stage presence the stand-up adopts or portrays has both the seductive and creative elements emitted through his movements. It can be seen as the mating ritual of the stand-up comedian. His libido during his performance is both progressive and regressive. Regressing back to the cleavage called the

mother and progressing towards the 'symbolic mother'. Both are manifested simultaneously when the stand-up comedian is in rhythm with the audience.

It can be argued that this combination of the sexual and the creative causes a frisson between the stand-up and the audience, and thereby interactivity is born which is a pivotal drive to the process of the comedian's self-realisation. If the comedian falls backwards to the mother cleavage without the progressive symbolic mother, he can fall into despair of emptiness of being stuck in 'wonderland,' then depression can occur. As Aziz states in *The Syndetic Paradigm*;

'There most certainly are men for whom the attraction to the comfort of maternal like containment has entirely consumed their wills, thus putting them at odds with the nature-driven task of incarnating in this life. Maternal containment may take many forms. It may be sought in the confront of the unconditional love or, perhaps more accurately still, the unconditional approval of a woman.....the common experience of these men is that their passion for the comfort of a womb like place of hiding from the world exceeds their passion to incarnate, that is to say to enter and hold space in this life in the fullness of their personalities.'

(2007:174)

4.2 Lacan and the Symbolic Order

4.2.1

The Phallus

According to Lacan, the Phallus is the signifier (Lacan, 1998: 89). This concept of the signifier goes back to the French linguist Ferdinand De Saussure who proposed that the linguistic sign consists of two parts: the signifier (form; word) and the signified (content, subject). Saussure argued that the relationship between these two parts is not fixed but arbitrary. For instance, when we hear or see the word 'cat' without the cat itself being present,

we all imagine different cats. The signified is always personal and the signifier represents the 'linguistic glue' that holds together the social order. The difference between Saussure and Lacan is that, for Saussure the signifier and the signified are mutually interdependent while, for Lacan, the signifier is primary and produces the signified: 'The more the signifier signifies nothing, the more indestructible it is' and also 'it is these indestructible signifiers which determine the subject; the effects of the signifier on the subject constitute the unconscious, and hence also constitute the whole of the field of psychoanalysis' (Evans, 1996: 186). Lacan used the term 'signifier' to denote a range of linguistic and symbolic phenomena united by their 'phallic' properties: words, units smaller than words (morphemes and phonemes), units larger than words (phrases and sentences), as well as non-linguistic things such as objects, relationships and symptomatic acts (Evans, 1996: 187).

According to Lacan, signification is an aggressive process during which the signifier 'strikes the signified, marking it as the bastard offspring of this signifying concatenation' (1998: 89). Signification, as described by Lacan, can also be seen as a metaphor of the sexual act. The signified is thus defined, raped and stifled by the signifier during the process of signification (the sexual act). The subject, Lacan argues, 'designates his being only by barring everything he signifies, as it appears in the fact that he wants to be loved for himself; a mirage that cannot be dismissed as merely grammatical' (1998: 89).

Thus, Lacan's ideas are firmly grounded in sexual dichotomy. Signification is an intrinsically male process – and, in order to perform it, one must have phallic properties. He writes that 'the man finds satisfaction for his demand for love in the relation with the woman, in as much as the signifier of the phallus constitutes her as giving in love what she does not have' (1998: 90). Meanwhile, if a woman wants to take a proactive role in the signification process, she

must reject her femininity: ‘In order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, ... a woman will reject an essential part of her femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade’ (1998: 91).

This directly relates to the psychological dynamic between the comedian and the audience. The comedian creates and owns the word – and then directs it towards the audience. The audience is the Other that has to be seduced and impregnated with the signified that is close to the comedian’s own vision. So, in a way, one could say that, in Lacanian terms, laughter is like orgasm. The comedian’s word becomes the Phallus that cuts through the audience, which metaphorically represents the feminine. The listeners are seduced; they fall in love with the comedian; they are supposed to give themselves to the performer. During the entire signification process they remain passive yet tantalised and responsive.

The feminine that is the audience is also supposed to be attuned enough to the comedian’s internal processes and have instinctive knowledge of his life in order to respond favourably to his joker. This means that what the signifieds’ imagine when they hear the jokes, closely match those owned by the performer. Female stand-up comedians, and their ‘phallic’ and creative processes will be dealt with in a separate chapter (Chapter 9).

4.2.2

Phallus as the Signifier and the Symbolic Order.

The idea of the Phallus as the signifier, which bars and controls the signified is closely linked to Lacan’s concept of the Symbolic Order. This concept was inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss’s idea that the social world is shaped by certain laws that regulate kinship relations

and the exchange of gifts (Evans, 1996: 201). Evans writes that ‘since the most basic form of exchange is communication itself (the exchange of words, the gifts of speech; S4, 189), and since the concepts of law and structure are unthinkable without language, the symbolic is essentially a linguistic dimension. [...] The symbolic is the realm of the Law which regulates desire in the Oedipus complex’ (1996: 201-202).

Comedy, whose primary weapon is the word, can be said to belong to the realm of the patriarchal; to the Symbolic Order. Jimmy Carr echoes this in his book *Naked Jape: Uncovering the Hidden World of Jokes* (2006):

Are men better at telling jokes than women? Well, perhaps – the aggressive, point-scoring aspects of stand-up comedy certainly seem to come naturally to them. But then men are also better at football, fighting and forgetting significant dates. These special masculine talents are undoubtedly partly chemical – a side-effect of that red fog of testosterone that enshrouds the male brain. But there’s a large degree of cultural conditioning at work, too. A patriarchal society moulds men into hearty jokers and claims this as a virtue. The impulse to tell jokes seems to spring in large part from a certain competitive, attention-seeking quality which contemporary Western culture still tries to breed out of its womenfolk, despite the valiant efforts of Germaine Greer and the Spice Girls.

(Carr, 2006: 167-168)

In *The Seminar Book I. Freud’s Papers on Technique* (1953) Lacan refers to Symbolic Father as the Name of The Father. The boy has to identify with the father symbolically in the final stage of the Oedipus complex, which gives rise to the formation of the ego-ideal. Thus, the boy completes his passage into the symbolic order, becomes like the father – avoiding castration and annihilation by the father (Evans, 1996: 81). Lacan distinguished between the Symbolic Father (the base of the symbolic order), the imaginary father (the construct imagined by the child), and the real father (the biological father) (Evans, 1996: 61-63). In

relation to stand-up comedy, the male performer may be regarded as attacking the Symbolic Father (or a constellation of fathers) and defending himself from castration at the same time.

Although the comedian operates with the word – and thus acts within the realm of the symbolic – it can be said that he also re-works the patriarchal structure by attacking it from within. Lacan states that the Symbolic Father is also the dead father, the father of the primal horde who has been murdered by his sons (Evans, 2001: 62). The comedian uses language (Lacan's language) – the father's weapon of choice – to attack the Symbolic Order from within. In appropriating language, the comedian alters the order and opens up a new perspective on the world. It is not only the social order (Symbolic Order, the law) that is being challenged by him, but also the linguistic pattern itself.

Many comedians cite the father – whether real, symbolic or imaginary – as the bedrock of their creative conflict. Becoming a comedian is often has an element of rebellion in it. For instance, Dominic Holland says about his relationship with his parents:

I had a very funny upbringing – very Catholic, very disciplinarian father. He was a lecturer in French at London University. Now he's retired. He was very strict and quite draconian. He didn't like me living with my girlfriend. We're a very traditional family. My two brothers are both lawyers; my sister has a Masters in Philosophy. Now she's a town planner. I've got an MBA, so we're all very education-orientated. I'm the only person who's taken a novel career path.

(Cook, 1994: 77).

Another comedian, the American George Carlin talks about his problems with authority – the Symbolic Father, 'I'd been thrown out of three or four schools, I had quit the Air Force, I'd got kicked out of the altar boys, the Boy Scouts – anything where there was a lot of authority, I was very soon gone. But I had this dream of getting into the movies, so I assumed that you

had to play their game. So there I was in a suit and tie with a mainstream attitude' (Ajaye, 2002: 82).

4.3 Melanie Klein and the Object Relations Theory

One of the most prominent features of the comedian's relationship with the audience is its emotional intensity. From my view, the mystery of this intensity can be explained by ideas borrowed from Klein's object relations theory. My proposition is that during his stand-up performance, the comedian perceives the audience as a symbolic mother, and seeks to establish a relationship with 'her'. The connection with this kind of mother figure can turn out to be either good or bad.

According to Klein (1935), the infant possesses a number of psychic defence mechanisms for dealing with bad part-objects such as unreliable breasts. The infant regards bad objects as 'internal prosecutors' (1988: 116-17). The infant's ways of dealing with them include introjection, projection, expulsion and denial of external reality (1988: 117). We can certainly apply her ideas regarding defence mechanisms to the comedian's behaviour on stage; as they tend to split off their unsuccessful performances and regard them as something separate from their own persona. They also tend to project the sense of failure onto the audience ('they are a bad audience'). Stand-up comedians also tend to react aggressively to any verbal challenge from members of the audience in order to avoid real or imaginary failure. These instances bring to mind Klein's theory of the depressive position (1935) – a defensive state in which the child dreads persecutors ('bad objects') and tries to ward them off by attacking them (1988: 117).

4.3.1

Audience Responsiveness: The Good Breast and the Bad Breast

Klein also theorised that children internalised different parts of the maternal body and then used them as metaphors in their psychological life. Klein writes that, for the man, the breast is not a merely physical object: ‘The whole of his instinctual desires and his unconscious phantasies imbue the breast with qualities going far beyond the actual nourishment it affords’ (Klein, 1997a: 180). The breast represents ‘maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity, as well as ... creativeness’ (1997a: 180).

These breasts are part of the object world of the child (Klein, 1988: 141). They play an important part in the formation of the ego (Klein, 1988: 50) and symbolise, respectively, the caregiver who keeps the child well fed (literally, physically, emotionally, attention-wise), or the one who lets the child ‘starve’ (again, literally or metaphorically). Thus, the breast is an object, which the child internalises regardless of its modality. Because the baby’s survival depends on the amount of attention the caregiver is willing to give it, the relationship between the ‘breast’ and the child is very intense. In this early connection, predominantly oral in character, originates the child’s subsequent ability to adapt to and interact with the external world (Klein, 1988: 59).

In the context of stand-up comedy, the audience is expected to be the good mother and the good breast, and to offer them validation of their existence by accepting their creativity. Non-approval of creativity usually triggers aggression, withdrawal or over-compensation on the part of the comedian. Using the Kleinian theoretical framework, it can also be said that the

comedian, similar to a baby, is greedy for any attention whether positive or adverse. Most comedians go on stage on their own because they know that whatever response, good or bad, they extract from the symbolic mother, this response belongs entirely to them as they have all of their 'mother's' attention. Their need is so voracious that it becomes greed and they accept any form of attention. They own and introject or internalise the good and although they aim to deflect the bad, they have still absorbed the negative attention. Klein writes:

Greed is an impetuous and insatiable craving, exceeding what the subject needs and what the object is able and willing to give. At the subconscious level, greed aims primarily at completely scooping out, sucking dry and devouring the breast: that is to say, its aim is destructive introjection; whereas envy not only seeks to rob in this way, but also to put badness, primarily bad excrements and bad parts of the self, into the mother, and first of all into her breast, in order to spoil and destroy her. In the deepest sense it means destroying her creativeness.

(1997a: 181)

If the 'mother' believes she is more creative or too reflective or too critical, there is no space for the comedian's creativity. He cannot perform to the best of his ability and the fight for attention begins. The overall aim of the stand-up is to entice the 'mother' to influence 'her' into giving him her undivided attention. At this point he can express his work in a productive manner with the audience on a mutually creatively fulfilling engagement. The stand-up must be heard and if the mother is too powerful and hence neglecting and self-absorbed, the stand-up will do anything within his range of performance skills to attract her attention even if it fills the stand up with guilt shame or remorse. He may become aggressive and attack or choose material, which does not fit his Self.

If the 'mother' is not responsive, or is too proactive/creative itself (for instance, when the comedian is challenged by members of the audience), it becomes the bad breast, which has to be punished for its lack metaphorical milk as acceptance, praise and love. Like the notorious

Kleinian breast, the audience is not always reliable. Sometimes it provides the comedian with the love and attention he craves, and sometimes it is cold and unresponsive (withdraws the breast). The stand-up may feel: 'how dare you fulfil your own needs instead of mine? If you don't give me your milk (as a metaphor for attention), I am going to attack you and I will make you give it to me'.

Klein theorises: 'For the talent to develop ... in fixation to the primal scene (or phantasies), the degree of activity which is so important for the sublimation itself, undoubtedly also determines whether the subject develops a talent for creation or reproduction' (Klein, 1988: 103). In another of her essays, *Envy and Gratitude* (1957), she argues: 'we find in the analysis of our patients that the breast in its good aspect is the prototype of maternal goodness, inexhaustible patience and generosity, as well as of creativeness. It is these phantasies and instinctual needs that so enrich the primal object that it remains the foundation for hope, trust and belief in goodness' (Klein, 1997a: 180). Moreover, as many comedians, including Charlie Chaplin (1964), have observed, humour is born out of the sense of loss, and exists for the purpose of helping human beings deal with this lamentable state. This certainly taps into Klein's idea concerning the depressive and his attempt to reconnect with 'lost', 'disintegrated' and 'broken' objects (1997a: 144).

It also runs parallel to the image of the wound and the stand-up performance, as humour becomes a radical method of confronting the wound; a means of both sublimating and compulsively recreating the trauma, which Freud termed *Zwang*. *Zwang* is the term for the compulsion to repeat a trauma or neurosis. Freud calls it 'the Fate neurosis,' similar to the Oedipus Complex of an internal force which is repeated, but the individual struggles against it (LaPlanche and Pontalis 1973:77). The American stand-up comedian Garry Shandling

explains the origins of his creative inspiration: ‘...so much of humour comes from pain. So, unfortunately, I still tune into my pain and write funny stuff because I can tune into my pain. [...] I think the average person probably is in pain in life, but they cover it, so you don’t know they’re depressed. Artists who are expressing their pain are at least not in denial’ (Ajaye, 2002: 208).

Psychologists and psychotherapists researching humour have also adopted the breast element of the object relations theory. For instance, Chris Bollas (1995) writes that the mother-baby relationship is one of farce – not only because the mother’s behaviour towards the infant is full of mimicry, vocalizations and all sorts of comical exaggerations – but also because the mother is full of good milk and good humour (quoted in Barron, 1999: 39-40). According to Bollas (1995), the mother can be regarded as the first clown. Lemma also observes that ‘the shared laughter rekindles the pre-verbal memory of similar exchanges in infancy, when the mother’s smile and face lit up and conveyed that there was nothing to fear, that we were understood and loved’ (2000: 57).

The Bad breasts such as hecklers are punished by comedians in a variety of ways they have to be robbed of their dignity and potential power. Hecklers dare to divert the attention of the audience from the performer onto themselves. This is similar to what Klein describes as ‘sadistic impulses directed against the mother’ ‘I found that aggressive impulses and phantasies arising in the earliest relation to the mother’s breast, such as suckling the breast dry and scooping it out, soon leads to further phantasies of entering the mother and robbing her of the contents of her body’ (1997a: 142). The comedian Arnold Brown provides a good example of such aggression when he reminisces of an incident he had during his performance at the Tunnel Club: ‘I believe there is a dark, violent side to me – and this is why I do

comedy. At the Tunnel Club, most of the audience were behind me, and this guy at the front seat started shouting, ‘You’re rubbish!’ It wasn’t the odd heckle – it was every other second. I was so angry that I grabbed him and got him in an arm lock. I actually got a laugh from it. I help him, and carried on doing my act, and the audience half-forgot him’ (Cook, 1994: 218).

The British comedian Mark Thomas provides another example of rage at the bad breast. When he was compering in a workingmen’s club in Kensal Green, the club treasurer heckled him. This incident triggered a cycle of rage and abuse from both sides:

As the evening continued I was getting progressively more and more belligerent. I went on stage and said: ‘Right! How many of you lot are in short-term housing? How many of you are in squats? How many of you are in council house flats? How many of you have moved into the area? I want to find the new money and the old money, and I want to find those who haven’t got any money’. Half the audience were Ladbroke Grove squatters who’d bunked in with mates who were helping out with the catering. They started cheering, and the regulars started going mad. One of the waitresses started heckling. I grabbed the fire extinguisher and fired it at the front table. All these side salads went scooting off everywhere. The treasurer turned my mike off, and it turned into a running battle.

(Cook, 1994: 222)

Some comedians even enjoy battling against the bad breast – or dealing with it in a more mature way, which does not involve immediate destruction. For instance, Rob Newman describes his attitude towards hecklers:

I’ve always loved heckles, I’ve always welcomed them – and I’ve always enjoyed playing around with them. At the Alley Club [which Newman run for a year] it was hecklemania – not like at the Tunnel. There it was brutal – it was about trying to destroy the comic. Only twice have I asked the hecklers for a fight, and that was because I wasn’t really being me. Doing Comedy of Hate, you have to be larger than life. [...] The thing I love most is coming off the script, and you can’t do it if you’re in a super-aggressive mode. I have comics who take a heckle as an affront to their authority. You’ve got to work with the heckle, you’ve got to say yes to it.

(Cook, 1994: 217)

By contrast, when the audience acts as a good breast, it is successfully internalised and its responses are utilised for the purposes of self-therapy. The comedian is euphoric and elated, he feels on top of the world. Speaking metaphorically, he feeds on the attention and laughter offered to him by the listeners. And he does not need to share his happiness, success and achievement with anyone. According to Klein:

the good internalised breast acts as a focal point in the ego, from which good feelings can be projected on to external objects. It strengthens the ego, counteracts the processes of splitting and dispersal, and enhances the capacity for integration and synthesis. The good internalised object is thus one of the preconditions for an integrated and stable ego and for good object relations.

(1997a: 144)

The good audience is the submissive audience; the audience that accepts the comedian and his creativity, do not question or criticise his creative output. The ideal audience should not be subtle in their responses, they should express their emotions openly and positively – which is similar to the mother mirroring the child. For instance, the so-called theatre audience may like what is happening but will not show their approval of the performance – this is not good for the comedian's self-esteem because he needs to see and monitor the audience's reaction all the time.

4.3.2

Trauma and Phantasy

Klein's concept of acting out; re-living the trauma and acting out this trauma over and over again is paramount to this thesis. Klein uses this concept to describe the relationship between the patient and the therapist – but it can also be applied to comedy as a form of therapy. In

acting out, he the patient has to ‘deal with conflicts and anxieties stirred up in the transference situation’ (Klein, 1997a: 55). During this stage ‘the patient may turn away from the analyst as he attempted to turn away from his primal objects; he tries to split the relations to him, keeping him either as a good or as a bad figure: he deflects some of the feelings and attitudes experienced towards the analyst on to other people in his current life...’ (1997a: 55-56). Similarly, performers project their inner experience onto their immediate environment, including the audience. This is a creative moment. They recreate their inner life in a playful way.

Closely linked with the audience, as a mother metaphor is Klein’s idea of phantasy, which can be defined as a form of therapeutic play. Phantasy is both activity and its products (Klein, 1988: 23). Klein’s own treatment of her patients consisted of triggering their phantasies (with the help of toys), and then observing and examining them. It is similar to triggering a psychotherapeutic creative process and analysing its contents. Lemma notes that Klein’s method was ‘a prototypical example of the sublimated activity which represented the symbolic expression of anxieties and wishes.’ (Lemma, 2000: 47-48).

The comedian’s union with the audience can be represented as a kind of phantasy of the ideal primal relationship. The performer phantasises about the ideal audience and the ideal (and plentiful) love they give him. It is as if he or she replays this relationship during the performance. The stand-up comedian also plays out his own anxieties and phantasies during the performance in the hope to healing or modifying them.

4.4 John Bowlby and Heinz Kohut – Attachment and the Formation of the Self

4.4.1

Bowlby

Attachment theories are important to the stand-up comedian performance. He has to quickly make a connection with the audience in order to be heard. Should this not occur the audience can chant him off stage, In his article *The Evolution and History of Attachment Research* (1995) Grossman explains the importance of attachment for the individual as a foundation of all future relationships:

Attachment is not one relationship among others; it is the very foundation of healthy individual development. More, it is the precondition for developing a coherent mind, even if it is, finally, insufficient by itself for understanding the whole mind. Scientifically, attachment theory has done nothing less than bridge the gap between individual experience and objective research.

(Grossman, 1995: 116).

Bowlby (1973:1979) can assist us in constructing the argument. Attachment as defined by Bowlby as ‘a form of instinctive behaviour that develops in humans, as in other mammals, during infancy, and has as its aim or goal proximity to a mother-figure’ (Bowlby, 2012: 106). In his essay *Separation and Loss Within the Family*’ (1970), Bowlby writes that, while attachment behaviour is directed towards the child’s actual parents, ‘it nonetheless continues to be active during adult life when it is usually directed towards some active and dominant figure, often a relative but sometimes an employer or some elder of the community’ (2012: 106). The audience becomes a psychological extension of the mother figure. The comedian needs to positively attach himself to the audience to have a reinforcing reaction. In ‘*Childhood Mourning and Its Implications for Psychiatry*’ (1961). Bowlby theorises that ‘in infants and young children the experience of separation habitually initiates defensive processes which lead to yearning for the lost person and reproach for desertion both

becoming unconscious' (2012: 69). In this sense, the desire to become a stand-up comedian can be regarded as originating in the disruption of an emotional bond or bonds. This disruption may also symbolise the rebelliousness as separation from childhood, where he is protected and permitted to make mistakes into the realm of adulthood and need to take responsibility. While the desire to win over and retain the audience can be seen as an urge to recover the lost childhood as well as the person. . 'If all goes well – Bowlby writes – there is joy and a sense of security. If it is threatened, there is jealousy, anxiety, and anger' (2005: 4). This can be used as a metaphor for the stand-up performance because, in seeking a secure connection with the audience, the comedian feels emotionally fragile and vulnerable. The perfect connection brings with it the feelings of being loved and even 'omnipotent'. However, the unsuccessful comedian feels deflated and depressed. The lost person is not a concrete person or a real lost carer in the comedian's life but rather a symbol of the protection from the lost mother, a symbol of the primal unity, something that stands for the individual's ideal paradisiacal relationship with the world.

Bowlby's ideas on aggression (1958) and secure base (1988) are also pertinent to our argument. Aggression is also a reaction to loss – real or perceived. In 'Effects on Behaviour of Disruption of an Affectional Bond' (1978) he writes that 'behaviour of an aggressive sort plays a key role in maintaining affectional bonds' (2012: 85). Bowlby writes in 'Psychoanalysis and Childcare' (1958) writes that 'an aggressive child is acting on the basis that attack is the best means of defence' (2012: 13).

The successful stand-up attachment process has various stages from proving to be worthy of the attachment, keeping interest and attention to building trust adding further creativity and stability towards total engagement in a safe space. Should the stand-up process be ambivalent

his route is a continuous roller coaster to proving worth is building trust; secondly damaging, breaking trust and repairing trust. Or finally the disconnected stand-up finds it difficult to build trust and creativity is rejected, damaged and broken and repair is difficult.

Stand-up comedians use aggression as a defence mechanism and paradoxically in order to repair the attachment bonds. The principal aim is always to elicit a response from the audience, whether positive or negative. In any case, the audience must not remain passive 'she' should either love or hate the comedian a response is needed in order to activate the reparation process. To be ignored has the potential to annihilate the stand-up.

Hardy also explains why he sometimes becomes angry with members of the audience and how his behaviour is shaped by the audience's responsiveness or non-responsiveness. What he describes here sounds like defensive measures aimed at preventing narcissistic injury:

I've provoked people who I probably should have left alone. I had a drunk guy who was asleep in the front row, so I started doing some stuff about the fact that he was asleep. I wanted the audience to know that he was already asleep, so they didn't think I'd put him to sleep. And then I thought it'd be fun to try and get the audience to wake him up. So we all woke him up, but he was so drunk that he wouldn't shut up all night, and it became very irritating. I thought, 'Oh God, I should have left him alone'.

(1994: 208)

The comedian's unconscious aim is to 'unite' the audience into an object, which they can control and manipulate into demonstrating the desired response. Aggression is one of the tactics used. Another comedian, Steve Hunt says: 'It's almost unheard of for an entire audience to be hostile, and if a small group decides to, you can cope with that because at least it's a response' (1994: 213). The 'mother' responds to verbal and emotional aggression of the performer because she may feel guilty – or even 'responsible' for the performer's emotional

states. Any aggression and anger aimed at the ‘mother’ during the performance can have as their final goal acceptance and containment – the two components of self-discovery. Should the bond disintegrate and the stand-up would have to begin to re-build this connection, should the ‘mother’ reject the stand-up he would have to survive his rejection, If the comedian is pushing the boundaries through the use of aggression he may be asking ‘How much do you love me?’ Meanwhile, the ‘mother’ is thinking ‘Am I good enough?’ Both are dissatisfied, but the impact on the stand-up is greater.

If aggression can be seen as metaphorical emotional violation of the audience, ‘seduction’ is a milder way of establishing what Bowlby terms (1973) ‘secure base’ – an attachment situation aimed at providing the individual (child) with a safe emotional environment. Before displaying any aggression in jokes (directed against the symbolic father), the comedian has to establish a secure emotional connection with the ‘mother.’ Once this connection is established, either by aggression or coercion, the comedian feels safe and accepted. The best comedians seduce the audience and thereby they connect with the audience.

In this sense, Bowlby’s theories explain certain tactics applied by performers to the audience for the purpose of binding the audience together and making them response in predictable ways. This can even be seen as a form of psychological conditioning on behalf of the comedian.

4.4.2

Heinz Kohut

According to Heinz Kohut – who primarily worked on the issues of narcissism and the self – humour is indelibly linked to narcissism and primary omnipotence. In *The Analysis of the Self* (1971) Heinz Kohut links creativity and humour via the concept of narcissism (Segal, 1995: 62). His argument is that ‘the creative individual has the child-like capacity to play imaginatively with that individual’s surroundings, because such a person tends to be less psychologically separate from the surroundings. The creative work becomes part of the self (1995: 62). What is more, humour is a transformation of narcissism not only as an expression of ‘denial of the melancholy,’ which initiates the compensatory grandiosity and elation, but the ‘recognition of transience’ as an acceptance of not only immortality, but a oneness with mankind and dissipation of omnipotence (1995:62). Humour enables painful feelings to be inoculated in a creative fashion. However, the successful use of humour can also inflate the ego and any dissipation of omnipotence is replaced by the exaggerated self-belief. Stand-up comedy, in particular, allows the performer to convert the personal pain into something socially acceptable, and even into an attractive commodity. As Julia Segal writes, ‘pain is not directly observable in the way that behaviour is (1995: 222). Stand-up comedians may be said to rationalise their pain, the feelings; and to re-imagine, re-fantasise it in a new way; shape and mould it into a performance. They project their pain onto an experience and the audience’s reaction only becomes a problem when the comedian is rejected. Fantasy, in terms of imagination, is about adding a new dimension to your life; it is bridging the gap between reality and human desires; the ideal version of ourselves. It fills the void; it also acts as a replacement for the missing components in people’s lives. Kohut argues that

the capacity for genuine humour constitutes yet another important – and welcome – sign that a transformation of archaic pathogenetic narcissistic cathexes has taken place in the course of analysis of narcissistic personalities. The humour of which the narcissistic patient becomes capable is, I believe, the complement to another favourable result in the course of the analysis of these patients: the strengthening of their values and ideals.

(Kohut, 2001: 324)

Mario Jacoby writes: ‘Kohut ...postulates the existence of a ‘narcissistic libido’ that forms and transforms to eventually stimulate the maturation of the personality in the course of a lifetime. Under favourable conditions, this process of maturation results in qualities he describes as empathy, creativity, humour, and wisdom’ (Jacoby, 1999: 112).

Seen in this light, performance becomes a form of the object-relation paradigm. The audience can be seen as a self-object for the comedian with whom, like a child, tries to internalise the object securely and favourably. However, formation of the ‘narcissistic libido’ may also indulge the stand-up and a grandiose self may emerge deterring self-reflection. Kohut writes:

...the child does not build up an inner sense of self-confidence; it continues to need external affirmation. [...] But ... we do not see merely fixation on a small child’s need for mirroring – the traumatic frustration of the normal need intensifies and distorts the need: the child becomes insatiably hungry for mirroring, affirmation, and praise. It is this intensified, distorted need which the child cannot tolerate and which it therefore either represses (and may hide behind pseudo independence and emotional coldness) or distorts and splits off. [...]

In the narcissistic transference, the infantile need for self-object is remobilized.

(Kohut, 2011: 558)

Rejection, by the audience, is regarded by the comedian as a narcissistic injury; the response to which might take the form of ‘fight’ or ‘flight’. Kohut also writes that human creativity follows the necessary pattern of intense and quiet periods: ‘one might say that a phase of frantic creativity (original thought) is followed by a phase of quiet work (the original ideas of the preceding phase are checked, ordered, and put into a communicative form, e.g., written down), and that this phase of quiet work is in turn interrupted by a fallow period of procreative narcissistic tension, which ushers in a phase of renewed creativity, and so on’

(Kohut, 2011: 816). Creativity becomes a form of therapy for the comedian because it allows him to explore, recreate and fantasise about his inter and intra-psychic structure on stage.

Moreover, according to Kohut, pleasure-seeking and self-expression tendencies in individuals are not incompatible. They often coincide and assist in the creation of a psychological equilibrium in human beings. There is certainly no conflict between them, and they do not exclude each other. In other words, the artist's narcissistic tendencies constitute an important part of his life: 'there appears to be no major conflict between the pleasure seeking and the self-expression sectors of the personality. One might be inclined to assume that the absence of conflict is due to the fact that that these two major strivings are of equal strength, that equilibrium of forces exists' (2011: 760). This concept is certainly applicable to many comedians who suffer from depression and drug addiction. Their creativity goes hand-in hand with problematic behaviour (both on and off stage) and even (rarely) suicide.

Yet, stand-up comedy as a live experience can have a socially responsible motivation. The reasons for the comedians to go on stage, create jokes and engage the audience is short-lived but intense relationships don't always have narcissistic roots or lead to vanity and self-love. The pleasure-seeking man' is narcissistic in that he cannot create but only absorbs the psychic energy of others, by contrast, stand-up comedians are eager to both announce themselves and change the world. The nature of stand-up comedy, whose root was political, is concerned with highlighting and mocking socially accepted norms and ideally transforming attitudes within the world, as well as establishing oneself. Performers of live comedy push the boundaries of the world. Their genre gives them the opportunity to challenge taboos in order for the audience to review and adjust them. Comedians always check with the audience whether they

have overstepped an important boundary or a taboo. For instance, they might joke that they have slept with their grandmother, and then ask the audience: ‘Have I gone too far?’

There are certainly parallels between Kohut’s vision of the audience’s reasons for enjoying comedy, and the idea of the audience’s reaction to the jokes created on stage. The audience seeks to be transformed, not just entertained. Good stand-up comedy has the potential to enable the audience to be self-reflective. The comedian has to offer the audience something that is relevant to their everyday experiences. Meanwhile, the people in the audience seek self-renewal by reflection, by going through someone else’s creative process and then absorbing its results.

For instance, the American comedian Bill Hicks is often described as rebellious and scandalous. Andy Fyfe writes in *The Telegraph*:

In Edinburgh, he reduced an audience of 300 to hysterical tears, with an assault on the modern world that was as brutal as it was brilliant. The first Gulf War? “That wasn’t a war. A war is two sides fighting each other. Iraq: 150,000 casualties. USA: 79. Does that mean if we had sent over 80 guys we woulda still won?” Abortion? “Pro-lifers, don’t link your arms around clinics. Link them around cemeteries. Let’s see how committed you really are.” The Media? “By the way, if anyone here is in advertising or marketing, kill yourself. Seriously, there’s no joke coming, you are Satan’s spawn, filling the world with bile and garbage. Kill yourself now; it’s the only way to save your souls. Now, on with the show...

(Fyfe, *The Telegraph*, 12 May 2010)

Many comedians also see themselves as being socially responsible, and think that their creative endeavours is the result of social responsibility. Some of them even have strong political views and, as a result, their material is politicised. For instance, the eccentric stand-up comedian Jim Barclay used to open his performances at the Comedy Store by openly proclaiming his political views: ‘...now, is that everybody? Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jim Barclay, and I am the wacky and zany Marxist-Leninist

comedian; and it's my job to come on here and tell you jokes which precipitate the downfall of capitalism and bring an end to tyranny and injustice wherever it rears its ugly head, so 'ere we go with a starter for ten' (Wilmot and Rosengard, 1989: 27).

Another comedian, Jack Dee, speaks of the importance for the stand-up comedian of reaching out and engaging all strata of society during the performance. According to him, the performer should always bear the social in mind when writing and compiling the material:

There's no point being a comedian if you're going to deliberately appeal to your peer group. There's a certain amount that will always make your peer group laugh and you have direct access to that. You can talk about taking drugs and being a student – to a certain extent, you've got a ready-made set. But when you actually appeal to people from a completely different background and age to you, then you're being funny – you're doing it.

(Cook, 1994: 194-5)

Some stand-up comedians do not aim to be openly political but still want their jokes to be socially committed. Ben Elton says:

Irishmen are not stupid, and it's not funny to say they are – you can pretend for ten minutes and after that your cover's blown. Women's tits are not funny and it's not funny to say they are. So where do you look? You look around you, inside your heart and in what you're doing – that's where the comedy is. And inevitably that becomes social – you have to take a line, and my line is socially committed; but it's not because I want to be political, it wouldn't be funny. For example, I'm not preaching about the little squirrels who don't have a home because MacDonal'd's have cut the trees down to grow the grain to feed the cows to make the hamburgers – it's *funny* that this organisation that has a clown giving blind children money as a logo is in danger of unbalancing the entire eco-structure of the planet!

(Wilmot and Rosengard, 1989: 93)

To use Kohut's terminology, the guilty narcissist in stand-up performers feels responsible for his own behaviour as well as for the behaviour of people in his community, and therefore exposes and challenges dangerous behavioural patterns. Comedians often attack and provoke

the social order – even knowing that it may result in repercussions – because challenging authority is part of being socially responsible. By doing this, they also announce their position in the world and achieve a new status.

4.5

Mirroring, Attunement and Shame

Mirroring and attunement theories developed by the British independents such as Donald Winnicott as well as are also of utmost importance for the analysis of the comedic performance. In this sub-section we will link the concepts of mirroring and attunement to the concepts of shame and object control.

4.5.1

Mirroring and Control

The contact the performer establishes with the audience can be metaphorically seen as an extension of his relationship with the mother. In fact, the quality of the contact directly reflects the performer's confidence and ability to establish secure connections. It can be said that the comedian regards the audience's reaction to his skills in melodramatic terms: 'It's either they love me or I die'. This directly relates to the British paediatrician Donald Winnicott vision of the early mother-baby bond and his concept of the 'good enough mother'. The audience is asked to be a good-enough mother for the baby that is the comedian. Winnicott writes in *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (1965):

The good-enough mother meets the omnipotence of the infant, and so she repeatedly. A True Self begins to have life, through the strength given to the infant's weak ego by the mother's implementation of the infant's omnipotent expressions.

The mother who is not good enough is not able to implement the infant's omnipotence, and so she repeatedly fails to meet the infant gesture; instead, she substitutes her own gesture which is to be given sense by the compliance of the infant. This compliance on the part of the infant is the earliest stage of the False Self, and belongs to the mother's inability to sense her infant's needs.

(1990: 145)

The False Self, according to Winnicott, is a form of ego-distortion, which corresponds to social compliance and social masks. It can be healthy (polite and mannered social attitude) or unhealthy (a set of superficial social masks concealing profound fragility) (1990: 143). By contrast, the True Self is the healthy aspect of the ego – the genuine character core. From the True Self, 'come the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can be real' (1990: 148).

Seen in this light, the audience becomes for the comedian a good-enough mother who allows the baby to express his self creatively on stage. The stand-up comedian may divert from his true self in order to please the 'mother' and create a character/mask, which will please the 'mother,' which can be the first step to a false self on stage. If the audience fails to engage in the 'two and fro' aspect of the performance (joke followed by laughter), the (male) comedian may become offensive. Offence is also his arrogant way of showing power or annoyance at the 'mother' for not accepting the 'False' self of the stand-up. Failure to connect is regarded by the performer as a form of aggression; as a failure to take care of him. The mother is therefore seen as bad, neglectful, and deserving a verbal attack. The good enough 'mother' is supposed to love the comedian unconditionally. This love takes the comedian to the state of omnipotence; to the stage where he is able to address his fragmented areas and re-build himself from scratch psychologically. By contrast, failure to establish a perfect connection

with the audience is felt by the comedian as a lack of opportunity to exercise his creativity, to display and confirm his True Self – which is responsible for the feelings of ‘reality’ and ‘existence’. Unable to display his True Self, the performer metaphorically ‘dies on stage’.

It can be said that the mirroring exchange should be regarded as the core narcissistic dynamic in which ‘a subjective element is safeguarded within a holding maternal structure’ (Wright, 2009: 5). The audience is asked to ‘hold’ the fragile psyche of the comedian. Kenneth Wright writes that ‘in the absence of inner maternal holding, every contact with an external form (symbol, view, interpretation) risks repeating the original trauma of impingement...’ (2009: 5). At the same time, Wright argues, creativity can be seen as a way of re-creating the lost connection with the primary caretaker in childhood; as a replacement for the lost warmth, understanding and feeling of attuned and connected to the mother (2009: 69). For instance, often the creative artist is someone who ‘has suffered a relative deficiency in mirroring and attunement perhaps a disruptive loss of the mother’s responsiveness or destroyed by the subjects own attacks. His creativity is an aim to repair the relationship with the object by recreating it in his mind. Also he can make up for the lack of success in earlier social and personal relationships, which has made him feel that security lies in becoming one’s attuning ‘other’ (2009: 69). Wright gives as an example the poet Rilke whose mother used to dress him as a girl to make up for the disappointment of having a son instead of a daughter. However, ‘Rilke succeeded in keeping himself alive and discovered in himself a means of creating and finding the forms that he needed. His poetic calling can be seen as acknowledgement of his most important task: to create and recreate the responsive mother he had lacked’ (2009: 69).

As far as recreation of the maternal figure is concerned, stand-up comedy is even more complex. The specifics of stand-up comedy lie in emotional and special closeness of the entertainer and the audience; in the immediacy of mirroring responses that the comedian expects from the 'mother'. What the comedian tries to connect to is his sense of self. Comedy routine becomes a healing component for him. It is a way of getting in touch with one's lost or broken self, or creating the new self; as well of his changing his status in the world. It is also about trying to elevate one's status – 'the more you love me, the better I become'.

4.5.2

Transitional Objects in Stand-up Comedy

It can be argued that before going on stage the comedian's material becomes the transitional object, which keeps the entertainer's broken self alive while 'the mother' is absent. It saves the comedian from total depression and keeps the anxiety in control. From Winnicott's view, the baby endows the transitional phenomena with special significance because they symbolically stand for the missing mother. Therefore, they have special meaning. Wright writes:

Typically, the transitional object is the comforting bit of blanket that the infant mouths and caresses. Winnicott called this the 'first *not-me* possession' but he also saw it as a special object, which the infant had imaginatively *created*. This root of creativity is central to his theory of personal development for in his view it underpins the quality of later experience. Only when the baby is allowed such an early experience can the world be endowed with personal meaning, and only then can there be creative involvement with it in later life.

(2009: 39)

For the stand-up comedian, it is about putting everything that is 'the most pronounced part of me' into words and symbols; into jokes. As Wright notes, between the communication of raw

emotion (e.g. baby crying) and the full development of symbolic expression lies Winnicott's transitional area:

Transitional functioning allows an emotional experience to be 'held' (contained) within a sensory form or concrete object; the particular object is emotionally invested because it *evokes* the needed experience through its analogical structure.

(2009: 21)

The 'mother', and her reactions, can also be regarded by the stand-up as transitional phenomena that is expected to demonstrate a range of expected reactions. The principle term is also 'in touch with feelings that are contained within a form or object'. Here the stand-up dissects and distinguishes his feelings towards people and situations. The phenomena 'contain' the comedian during the performance while he is trying to replay and re-live the early emotional and psychological dramas. During this 'mirroring' stage the stand-up comedian goes back to the pre-Oedipal stage. The process is both regressive and progressive. On one level, the performer hopes that the audience will be loving. If they are not, the detachment/rejection drama is re-played. This is an important point for the comedian because he will be pushed into dealing with rejection and the shame that comes with it. This is exacerbated by the fact that they will have to deal with shame and helplessness in an exposed environment and immediately.

The moment of rejection is when all projections in a relationship between objects are withdrawn. This moment is emotionally dangerous as it may provoke emotional violence triggered by the sense of shame within the comedian. The audience's reaction is a projective form of confirmation of the comedian's existence. For instance, Jimmy Carr says about the audience: 'The great attraction of stand-up as a balm for the fragile ego – as opposed to, say, writing a book or appearing in a radio play – is the instantaneous nature of the audience's

feedback. Do they love me? Yes, they must do – they're laughing' (Carr and Greeves, 2006: 114). Carr also famously said that 'you're only ever as good as your last joke. Not even your last show – your last joke' (2006: 115).

Rejection by the audience is regarded by the comedian as the failure of the transitional object to work; as another loss of the mother figure. When the creative person seeks mirroring and attunement from the audience, he actually seeks to repair the damaged primal relationship. Creativity, through an emotional dialogue with the audience, allows the comedian to re-organise his world anew; to regain the control over their internal and external world. For instance, the stand-up George Carling states that, 'the thing that most comedians need to remember when they go on stage is that they're really the boss. But my feeling is you gotta believe in yourself, and now what your attitude is what your observations are based on (Ajaye, 2002:85).

The comedian's aggressive reaction to being rejected by the audience can also be explained using the concept of shame. Shame is a realisation that one is a separate individual not omnipotent but left to his own devices, abandoned by the 'primary carer'. Shame is a reaction to not being understood, accepted and mirrored. When surrounded by like-minded people, we feel safe, understood, cared for. We feel omnipotent, in charge of things. Mario Jacoby who is a post-Jungian clarifies the correlations between shame and mirroring and explains in *Shame and the Origins of Self-Esteem*, shame is relieved by mirroring by quoting the detective writer George Simenon describing the correlation between shame and mirroring: 'Everyone has a shadow side of which he is more or less ashamed. But when I see someone who resembles me, who shares the same symptoms, the same shame, the same inner battles, then I say to myself, so I am not alone in this, I am no monster' (Jacoby, 1996: xi).

This explains why comedians who feel rejected by the public feel angered and ashamed as if they ‘died’ on stage. Jacoby writes that

...anxiety is always at work when we anticipate potential shame-producing situations. This is the case when examination-anxiety, stage-fright, fear of meetings with important persons, or certain forms of sexual anxiety. It is the anxiety associated with the prospect of getting into shameful situations in the near or distant future. [...]

Discussion group leaders, givers of toasts, actors, musicians, lecturers all subject themselves to the expectations that they have something to offer that is worth the public’s hearing or seeing. When they fail, their disgrace is compounded by the embarrassment of having their high opinion of themselves revealed for all to see.

(1996: 5)

Denial of shame or projecting shame onto the ‘mother’ by creating shame response from the ‘mother’ can account for the violent language the stand-ups use to describe this attitude. The use of violent language can be an example of grandiosity and narcissistic behaviour, indicting the overpowering need and greed for laughter. Jimmy Carr notes that the language of professional comedians is full of violent expressions and metaphorical references to death: “‘He dies on stage tonight’ being the nadir, and “‘He really killed out there’” being the pinnacle of achievement. Woody Allen once said that he preferred doing stand-up in nightclubs to TV shows, because “‘you’ve got all the time in the world to kill the audience ... over the course of the show you can kill 99 per cent of them’”. Jimmy Carr’s vision of this is even bleaker: It’s as though a comedy club is the chosen arena for a fight to the death, where either the audience or the comic gets out alive – but never both (Carr, 2006: 115). Another comedian, Shelley Berman, notes that sometimes the comedian ‘makes the mistake of developing hostility towards the audience – which is a common thing: You have to fight the desire to become hostile. The comedian who says, “‘These are the jokes, folks’” is making a mistake, but we are all prone to make an error of this kind’ (Wilde, 2000: 90).

Shame drives the creative individual to become an agent – to act, to do something, to leave his mark on the world. The biggest nightmare of the agent is the fear of exposure – fear of being a nobody with nothing to offer to the world: ‘...it may be just uncomfortable to allow others to see that one is an inhibited person with nothing to say, someone whose light is under a bushel. In this respect, it can be shameful not to be noticed, to stand on the side-lines, to feel like an uninfluential nothing. Thus, a vicious circle gets started: fear of shameful vulnerability produces shyness, and feelings of shyness produce shame’ (Jacoby, 1991: 6). At the same time, the defining aspect of the active agent is the ability to deal with shame – the ability to act without fear, to attack, and to deal with the consequences of failure if the desired result is not achieved.

The comedian David Baddiel provides a good example of how a comedian feels when the audience is rejecting him:

I’ve been booed off twice, but only once after I was well established. I died terribly at the Comedy Store. My only excuse is that I hadn’t slept the night before, and I went on at a time when the audience were completely gone. I remember people shouting and screaming and then hearing through the general roar of abuse, somebody shout, ‘The walls are closing in!’. And it was true. I remember thinking, ‘Is that a heckle or is it God commenting on the event?’. And that was when I decided to leave. It was a late night show on Friday, and I was doing the entire weekend – but I came back the next night, and did one of the best nights I’ve ever done. When you’ve been booed off, the next gig you do you’re really wired for it, and it can be really a great gig.

It’s brilliant to go on next after someone dies. When I got booed off at the Store, Jack Dee went on next and absolutely stormed it. I was really friendly with Jack then and really pissed off with him for doing that. But I’ve done that as well. I’ve gone after comics who completely died, and thought, ‘This is going to be an absolute stormer!’. And it practically always is. Most audience’s bloodlust is satiated by one comic dying – except at the Tunnel.

(Cook, 1994: 159)

Failure of connecting with the audience feels, for the comedian, like the dissolution of basic trust. It can be seen as a form of separation anxiety. The comedian regards the rejection as a hard blow; as an attack on his personality core. The comedian often associates with his outer persona – his identity as an entertainer. He expects that the audience will confirm this ideal image of himself, which corresponds to what Kohut and Winnicott call ‘the False Self’. It is as if he needs a label to define himself. This means that if his skills as an entertainer are not accepted, if he is ‘no good’ in what he does, he feels as if the ‘caretaker’ – into which role the audience is pushed – abandoned him for being an ‘imperfect child’. Non-acceptance is felt by the performer as an aggressive act; as an attack on his integrity as an individual. Consequently, his identity is lost or dissolved and has to be rebuilt again, and the cycle is repeated. For instance, the comedian Jerry Seinfeld writes that stand-up performers have ‘embarrassment anxiety’ and stage fright in the face of failure or survival: ‘People think of comedians as people who are outgoing and comfortable in front of people, when in fact it’s just the opposite. What you are trying to become skilled at is “embarrassment”’ (Ajaye, 2002: 199). Rejection by the audience is unconsciously regarded by the comedian as a break of basic trust.

Mario Jacoby writes about trust:

‘I must trust that the others will respect my self-esteem and integrity if I decide not to conceal from them the naked truth of who I really am. Fear of being hurt by an intimate encounter has to do with the fear of being exposed, ridiculed, and shamed – whether in an obvious or a subtle way. Interpersonal contact requires that one develops a high degree of sensitivity to the “right” balance of closeness and distance – a job in which the feeling of shame can be of substantial help. How often have I been tormented by the shame of having revealed too much about myself to someone whom I later decided had not earned my trust?’

(Jacoby, 1991: 22)

Rejection by the audience may shake one’s internal world – but comedians tend to

overcome the shame and come back stronger than before. Comedians who manage to survive on the circuit get their fair share of being loved, supported and mirrored. The American comedian Franklyn Ajaye argues: ‘As you continue to perform, your routines and jokes will have the stamp of your “uniqueness”. People will not only laugh at your material, they will be fascinated at the workings of your mind and look at the subjects you cover in a different way. Then when they think about that subject, they will think about what you said. Soon, they’ll want your “take” on things, and eventually in their minds your material and point of view will become indelibly linked’ (Ajaye, 2002: 11).

Lack of mirroring leads to regression as the performer is reverted into the state of being neglected, unaccepted and unnoticed. It reminds him about the threat of psychological annihilation, the state of non-existence. The comedian Richard Lewis explains it in this way: ‘...we feel we need too much attention, we’re babies, we’re introverted, we’re convoluted. [...] Like a lot of comics, we can be on and feel accepted, and other times we can go into a shell and want to shoot people’ (Ajaye, 2002: 136).

Thus, the comedian’s relationship with the audience is characterised by a complex emotional interaction that involves mirroring, attunement, shame and the desire for control. Failure to establish a connection with the surrogate ‘mother’ results in a mini narcissistic crisis while a successful connection confirms the comedian’s sense of existence and self-worth.

CHAPTER 5

A JUNGIAN THEORY OF COMEDY

This chapter offers a new perspective on the comedian and the joke. This new approach to humour is heavily influenced by Jungian theory and post-Jungian theory, and utilises the concepts of individuation and alchemy to argue that the comedian reflects and influences social processes in the humour he generates. A Jungian perspective of the audience as ‘mother’ is the symbolic mother, which includes society. Hence the Jungian term is the ‘matriarch’ who encompasses both the ‘mother principles and the maternal in society.

Arthur Asa Berger reminds us in his book *An Anatomy of Humour* (1999) that there are many theories of humour, all of which approach the subject from different perspectives (Berger, 1999: 3). Humour also serves the function of exposing the shadow, thus robbing it of its destructive potential and turning it into a positive force as the manifest content has to be reviewed and reflected upon. It is a phenomenon that combines the paradox of sadness, with the recognition of realistic personal limitations, and the joy of awareness as experienced by others.

Alessandra Lemma writes in *Humour on the Couch* (2000), Freud’s later conceptualisation of humour brands it as ‘the triumph of narcissism’, that is, ‘a reassertion of narcissism via adaptive regression’ (Lemma, 2000: 33). In other words, ‘humour allows the individual to triumph over the forces of repression or the pain of reality’ (Lemma 2000: 33). As a result, ‘a psychoanalytic perspective highlights humour’s psychically integrating function bringing together the contradictions and conflicts that are an unavoidable part of being human. The humorous vision facilitates a psychic elaboration and mastery of unpleasant and incongruent conflictual situations or emotions’ (2000: 34-5). Freud’s conclusion was that ‘jokes are from

their nature to be distinguished from the comic and only converge with it, on the one hand in certain special cases, and on the other hand in their aim of obtaining pleasure from intellectual sources' (Freud, CW 8: 208).

Semiotics offers us another perspective on humour. The semiotic theory of humour (and jokes) argues that humour is best discussed in the context of 'communication, paradox, play and the resolution of logical problems' (1998: 4). Semiotics deals with the correlation between signs and their meanings, as well as with the systems of signs and the meanings they generate in various sign combinations. For instance, the American psychiatrist William Fry helps identify the linguistic construct of reversal within the punch line as a mechanism to arrest the conscious mind which allows the humorous message to be affective, in his book, *Sweet Madness* (1963): 'During the unfolding of humour, one is suddenly confronted by an explicit-implicit reversal when the punch line is delivered. The reversal helps distinguish humour from play, dreams, etc. [...] but the reversal also has the unique effect of forcing upon the humour participants an internal redefining of reality. Inescapably, the punch line combines communication and meta-communication' (Fry, 1963: 158). There is also the incongruity theory which argues that the main technique of all humour is thwarted expectations, and it's this sudden change that we enjoy and at which we are prepared to laugh: '... we have to recognise an incongruity before we can laugh at one' (Berger, 1998: 3).

W.C. Fields was famous for delivering the incongruous: 'Do you believe in clubs for young people?' 'Only when kindness fails'.

Many of today's stand-ups use one-liner jokes:

John Moloney 'I wasn't always this fat; I used to be 7lbs 6oz'. (Live at Jongleurs, 1998)

Alison Ross in her book *Language of Humour* demonstrates the differing linguistic models used in humour. The linguistic humorous construct preference is accumulated through socially accepted communication. The stand-up endeavours to de-construct and reconstruct the language with immediately identifiable effect. However, the linguistic mechanism may indicate the stand-up's psychological type preference in his performance delivery rather than his personal psychic content.

5.1

The Supra Joke

The Jungian approach to the joke and humour states that the comedian and the joke are inseparable; it is their union, which makes transformation occur. The joke has to be adapted to society and society's expectations. We cannot have a joke without society. The comedian's individuation triggers and influences the individuation of society as a whole. In the *Recovery of Self*, Feaveux (1994:88), Kris defines creativity in two stages 'inspiration' and 'elaboration,' which he denotes are representative of regression and progression. The inspiration is not as she saw it as the creative only the excavation of the unconscious in a controlled manner. The elaboration process lifts the inspiration out of the 'precarious unconscious' and into what Jung called, 'child's land,' where the skill is attached to the inspiration'. Freud's premise is that reparation can be completed when the Oedipus complex is resolved. For Jung the past can be identified and integrated, humour can facilitate the repair and the on going resolution. Humour becomes the artist's vehicle for progressive 'reparation and regeneration' as the individuation process is life long.

Moreover, Jungian vision of humour does not contradict Freud's analysis of jokes. The Jungian approaches humour with a more optimistic and reparative view. They have social and anthropological properties, which are born out of the story telling approach of the stand-up comedian who is often the subject and the voice of the joke.

In order for the comedian to individuate on stage he needs the audience as a participant in the dialogue. The comedian and the audience jointly own the joke. In order to be born, the joke needs to be absorbed, introjected and reflected by external participants. By itself, without the audience, the joke does not exist because it is a combination of the personal and the social; of the individual and the collective. The comedian creates the joke not only to reflect upon his or her own problems, but also to discuss the problems that are pertinent to a particular society. Sometimes a joke becomes so attuned to the problems of the community in which it is born that it becomes a Supra Joke. This happens when the comedian strikes a cord within the audience. In order to become a Supra Joke, comedic material needs the following specific qualities:

- Social relevance: it has to reflect the current social and cultural issues.
- Novelty: It has to be a revelation for the public
- Transformational qualities: it has to make the unconscious material conscious, and to transform the 'dark matter' of hidden social issues into comedic material.
- Therapeutic qualities: the transformed material has healing properties as the issue is announced, and prised out of the shadows.
- The stand-up comedian has to be aware of cultural tension and inherent political and social themes, which he can reflect and transform. He has to be self aware and know

who he represents sociologically, has to detach himself enough to become an observer with a social conscience with a participatory voice.

- Therapeutic qualities: the transformed material has healing properties as the issue is announced, and prised out of the shadows. The healing properties are the amplification of the problem being socially recognised, yet not announced. Here Chris Rock takes his role as host of the 2016 Oscars and brings the difficult issues to the public domain in a humorous manner. The juxtaposition of humour with social awareness makes awareness palatable and healing touching the sensitive with the occasion and his personal attitude and structure to comedy with profound affect.

‘There’s all this controversy. There are no black nominees. People say to me Chris you should quit, you should quit. Why is it only unemployed people who tell you to quit something? No one with a job every tells you to quit. Then I realised they’re not going to stop the Oscars if I quit. It will happen anyway. And the last thing I need is to loose another job to Kevin Hart. the big question why are we protesting this Oscars it’s the 88th academy awards, which means the whole no black no nominees thing has happened at least 71 other times.

In the in memoriam package is going to be black people shot by the cops on their way to the movies. Yes there I said it.....

We want opportunity; we want black actors to get opportunities?

(Chris Rock: 2016 Youtube <https://youtu.be/kqhVNZgZGqQ>)

- Making the illegitimate legitimate: taking the edge off otherwise concealed, inappropriate and controversial subjects by presenting them in a humorous manner.

To create a Supra Joke, the comedian, who is continuously inspired by personal events, needs to present both the archetype and the actuality; as well as connect the personal and the collective. Within the collective archetypes our personal interpretation and cultural attachments also impact on the tone and specific characteristics of that primordial image. The key to the Supra Joke is in harnessing archetypal behaviour and patterns, which are depicted within the relevant social scenario entwined with the personality of the individual comedic voice creating the joke form.

Jung writes:

The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who does down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is. For what comes after the door is, surprisingly enough, a boundless expanse full of unprecedented uncertainty, with apparently no inside and outside, no above and no below, no here and no there, no mine and no thine, no good and no bad. It is the world of water, where all life floats in suspension; where the realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this *and* that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me.

(Jung CW9/I: para. 45)

The joke is thus capable of transferring itself, rather like water, from the personal level to the collective very quickly. It can reach the deepest layers of society's psyche. This is because we are never fully ourselves, separated from our society; we are never fully separated from the collective unconscious. Jung argues:

The collective unconscious is anything but an encapsulated personal system; it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. There I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly at one with the world, so much a part of it that I forget all too easily who I really am. 'Lost in myself' is a good way of describing this state. But this self is the world, if only a consciousness could see it. That is why we must know who we are.

(CW9/I: para. 56)

The stand-up must engage with the audience, and at the same time distinguish himself from it. It is in that moment that he creates the profound explosive impact of the Supra Joke. Supra Jokes are often controversial – this is how they make an impact. Once we have a universal joke, it means that society is becoming more unified. When society becomes unified by a controversial joke, it matters whether it made people laugh or choke with anger. They can be shocked, disgusted, delighted or enlightened. This process of sudden illumination can even be called call it Supra Individuation. It does not necessarily have to happen via delight and laughter – it can also happen via negative feelings such as shock, is when the individual is prompted by the comedian joke into activating the joke into personal and collective significant realisation. He recognises the truth in the supra-joke, which elucidates and educates him and prompts him to question the existential meaning of life. In relation to the term of Individuation as ‘ a person’s becoming himself, whole and indivisible and distinct from other people or collective psychology (though also in relation to these) (1886:760).

Supra Jokes are so powerful that they expose the subjects which society otherwise prefers to keep hidden; under lock and key of censorship. Exploring politics in stand-up can have such an effect. Samuels affirms that ‘politics is the governance of society and as such the ‘political psyche’ implies a ‘social psyche’. We are never fully separated from our society and as such from our collective unconscious. The joke has to be the arrow, which drives through all assumptions expectations and beliefs, and twists it into a new concept with humour. The audience laughs and thinks about the concept behind the joke. This challenges their beliefs and assumptions, leaving the remnants of transformational attitude to become embedded within the psyche.

It is not surprising that many Supra Jokes come from black comedians as they feel different, and are keen to challenge the assumptions and societal expectations about their race. A good example of such a joke can be Chris Rock's politically incorrect and challenging monologue about self-racism:

Now we've got a lot of things, a lot of racism in the world right now
Whose more racist? Black people or white people?
Black people.... You know why? Cause we hate black people too
Everything white people don't like about black people
Black people really don't like about black people
(youtube <https://youtu.be/f3PJFOYE-x4>)

Another example of a controversial Supra Joke is Gina Yashere's monologue about being stopped by the traffic officer: 'I think I'm the only black person in America that is not afraid of the police. In fact I pull them over. I do. I did it recently. I said – "Excuse me, officer, I can't help but notice that you have been following me for eight miles". And the accent confused him. He was like that: "Oooh, I'm sorry, mam, I thought you were black"'.

Deliso Chaponda, a black comedian from Malawi, generates jokes along similarly controversial lines. (This monologue is from the *Comedy Night* BBC TV):

My name is Deliso Chaponda. I'm from Malawi. I've been living in the UK for seven years and I still don't fit in. England legitimately is a nation of complainers. Everybody hates their jobs they hate the weather, the biggest complaint is financial crisis. I'm from Africa, what are you talking about?' How dare you over-privileged b***** call that a crisis!
(www.bbc.co.uk/programme/p028jqdn)

Andi Osho, a black female comedian of Nigerian descent, tackles the controversial subjects of race and depression:

Let me just check all the black people in the house make some noise. [...] As a black comic, you see a sea of white faces staring at you, and it feels like an auction.
.....Depression that's a disability. They should get a guy sitting in a sandpit at the end of the long jump crying, 'what's the point'?
(https://youtu.be/ezW_4RjLPuQ?list:)

Paul Merton continues the point of depression by combining truth with humour in his jokes. It is this element of personal revelation mixed with self-deprecating and self-unveiling humour creating the vulnerability that also adds to the humour. In this way, the comedian is no longer a distant and removed God like figure, but a mortal who can be find empathy within the audience. He exposes his weakness and pain which echoes the pain of the audience, and the frisson of honest despair wrapped within the humour creates the Supra Joke:

One day they said to me ‘There’s a trainee psychiatrist. Can he have a bit of practice, a bit of an interview?’ Sometimes a sense of humour is not necessarily your best friend, it’s misinterpreted, and towards the end of the hour I got a bit bored, and I thought I would liven it up a bit. I said: ‘you haven’t asked me about my father. He said ‘why should I?’ I said ‘Because he’s the Duke of Edinburgh’. He said: ‘That’s very interesting, I’ll write that down’. I said: ‘No don’t write it down, it’s a joke’. He said: ‘I’ve got to write it down because you said it’. I said: ‘No, don’t write it down’. He said: ‘I’ve got to write it down’. I thought: ‘Fuck, I’m here for another month!’

(<https://youtu.be/58sXGK3Ejac>)

Tanya Lee Davis is a 3 foot 6 inches comedian. She has had a number of shows, including ‘Abnormally Funny’ and ‘Little Comedian, Big Laughs’. Her jokes often touch on the public’s reaction to disability and all kinds of difference: ‘Don’t feel sorry for me ‘cos I’m ginger; I spend most of my day watching people watching me. I love children, I love their reaction. What happened to you, were you in an accident? No, I didn’t eat my vegetables when I was your age you little shit’.

Bobby Mair is another generator of Supra Jokes who likes the idea of producing scandalous, insulting and rude texts. Here he talks about ‘family issues’ in his trademark loud and controversial way:

I really want Justin Bieber to sing at my funeral just that for my friends at the funeral my death is the second worst things that’s happening there. Like People genuinely want

you to feel sorry for this kid 'cos he was raised by a single mom. What's way more depressing than these two miserable people getting a divorced? It is two miserable people staying together and raising the comedian you see before you. You know why I moved here? So that the physical distance between me and my family matched the emotional one. [...]

I'm adopted and so I've never met my mum and I don't know what she does for a living, and that makes it really hard for me to enjoy a lap dance. Some men want a beautiful stripper; I just want one who didn't have my nose.

(<https://youtu.be/eL.Chj/MragEg> Russell Howard TV Show)

Similarly, Ian Stone, one of the most controversial comedians on the UK circuit, is not afraid to mention subjects that would normally be silenced: 'I am a Jew. If I was a practising Jew, I would find a Muslim and occupy their seat. I say 'occupy'; but if there are any Americans in, I mean liberate, obviously' (<http://Infiniteexcursions.wordpress.com/category/stand-up-comedy/>).

Often comedians tap into the psyche of their society even before that society is ready to accept the truth. When a Supra Joke is announced, the reaction to such a joke can be positive or negative, but the reaction itself is always powerful in one way or another. Jung stated that, 'art has a way of anticipating the future changes in man's fundamental outlook' (1933:205) For instance; in 1997 the then-obscure comedian Jerry Sadowitz made a joke about Jimmy Saville being a paedophile. Due to its scandalous nature, the joke was soon hushed up and the album containing it was also withdrawn. This is how it sounded: 'There have been serious allegations of child abuse in Cleveland. To my mind there is only one way to find out whether this is true or not and that's to ... CALL IN JIMMY SAVILE! You can't afford to f*** about! Bring in an expert! Am I right? A friend of mine reckons Jimmy Savile is a paedophile. Rubbish — he's a child-bender! That's why he does all the f***** charity work: it's to gain public sympathy for when his f***** case comes up' (Samuel, 11 October 2012, *Mailonline*).

5.2

The Supra Comedian

Comedians that use Supra Jokes are the ones that affect social change; they bring into the open the complex and taboo subjects, which are otherwise avoided in the everyday context. The stand-up comedian can individuate via telling jokes only when they are prepared to participate in the joke, when they are able to include his Self in the material to create laughter. This ability is key to becoming a Supra Comedian, for they see themselves as part of their society, they are prepared to laugh at themselves as well as laugh at the social processes in which they participate. This happens because no one exists outside of their society. The individuation process is about linking oneself to the people around you, and seeing oneself within the political and social processes. As a result, to engage in a joke often means making light about oneself. Not everyone who tells jokes is able to individuate and to self-reflect via this process.

Not all successful comedians are Supra Comedians, although they share some of the traits. The Supra Comedian has to be experienced. The Supra Joke is a powerful message and it requires a strong person to deliver it. The Supra Comedian is like an alchemist who dares to walk into the world of darkness, extract the hidden material and transform it into comedic gold. The Supra Joke, would become dangerous and brooding if not transformed into a comedic text. The Supra Comedian brings back the equilibrium, and they also find hope for their society.

In order to do this successfully, Supra Comedians should have a definite, clear, original and powerful comedic voice. They know that the audience will love them. It is only out of this confidence that they can deliver the Supra Joke, and it is by creating the Supra Joke can they become the Supra Comedian. They know that they stand alone when they are deliver this message. They should be able to differentiate themselves from others, to see themselves clearly as individuals. As a result, they are not easily influenced and question everything. Jung writes in *The Red Book* (2009): 'If we do not differentiate, we move beyond our essence, beyond creation, we fall into non-differentiation, which is the other quality of the Pleroma. We fall into the Pleroma itself and cease to be created beings. We lapse into dissolution and nothingness. This is the death of the creature. [...] Hence the creature's essence strives toward differentiation, and struggles against primeval, perilous sameness. [...] This principle is the essence of the creature' (Jung, 2009: 347).

The Supra Comedian is that very 'creatura' who strives to stand out of the collective and to differentiate via jokes. Their humour is not prescribed, it is created anew, and is a unique product delivered in the unique manner.

The audience is ready to hear the Supra Comedian. The public has already accepted him, he is 'good enough' (to use Winnicott's term). And he has found, as Bowlby has named, it his 'secure base.' The Supra Comedian, and his unique attitude and personality are recognised and accepted by the some of the audience although he is not always the most famous. Some stand apart from the other comedians as they have the propensity to engage with dangerous and controversial issues and on occasion they are placed into 'cult status' as in the case of [Bill Hicks and Jerry Sadowitz.

Personality is key of the Supra Comedian's success and to his 'Supra' status. Jung stated that 'personality is the supreme realisation of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being. It is an act of high courage flung in the face of life, the absolute affirmation of all that constitutes the individual, the most successful adaptation to the universal conditions of existence coupled with the greatest possible freedom for self-determination' (Jung CW 17: para. 289). It is the expression of the psychic structure of the comedian in terms of storytelling, which captures the audience. They identify with the comedian. The compelling difference is his vision of the future or his vision of the individual within the collective.

The Supra Comedian has a unique ability to construct a differing transformational view based on the reality, the collective truth of society and the collective unconscious. He intuitively recognises incongruity, anomalies and deception in society and has the courage to announce the truth within his set using the comedic voice. He announces these as prophetic realisations with his comedic attitude for the audience to absorb and internalise. It is within the collective unconscious that the archetypes reside, are understood and manifest their energy. It is the Supra Comedian who brings the paradox of the collective unconscious to light and transforms the ego. He becomes more than an 'artist' who composes the language of laughter. He becomes the leader who is brave enough to say something that others are reluctant to say – or even don't see at all. Supra Comedians are almost elevated to the status of heroes. In fact, they are called 'comedy gods' on the circuit.

The Supra Comedian is able to highlight social deficiencies or corruption through their compelling humorous rhetoric anomalies, which paradoxically, have healing qualities. Their revelations often confirm the intuition of various members of society who do not have the courage to announce their claim. Not all Supra Comedians are remembered by the public as

their revelations are so dangerous that it can create upheaval in major corporate and political entities. As Progoff states, 'we often see it to be the case in history that great innovators cannot avoid paying "paying the penalty for taking the lead". Moving very far out in front make them vulnerable and places them in positions that are easily misunderstood (1973:16).

Off stage, Supra Comedians are ordinary people. If they fall into the grandiose narcissistic trap, they will lose their transformational qualities, and people won't trust them to be transformative. They must have 'feet of clay', in order to be transformational. "His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay' (Daniel 2:31-33) That's why many of their jokes are self-deprecatory. By announcing their own shadows, they relate to the audience and remain human. This is exactly what Eddie Izzard, Chris Rock, George Carlin, Bill Hicks, Trevor Noah, Ellen DeGeneres and Woody Allen do when they performing.

The Supra Joke is the result of a highly charged creative act which, Anthony Storr powerfully defines in Churchill's *Black Dog* when he speaks about creativity in relation to the depressive mind, 'The creative act is essentially integrative. Opposites are united; disparate elements are reconciled' (Storr, 1994: 266). Inspiration and illumination are often associated with madness but also with creativity. It is beyond the ego and ownership of the individual. It is this numinous instinct that comes from the collective unconscious embedded within the psychic structure of the comedian which is administered in Supra Comedy. The Comedian of this calibre takes the material to a different level; he or she elevates it, at the same time making it more accessible to the general public.

By speaking about the topical subjects, the Supra Comedian also deals with his own personal issues, his neuroses. His neurosis are bound within the subject he has chose to reveal and as a

result, he reveals moments of inspirational thought within the confines of humour, which can be used to absolve the comedian of its overwhelming power and effect on his unconscious. Humour also regulates the comedian's ego as he must constantly bring himself down to earth to interact with the audience. His true transformational quality comes in that moment of equality of becoming one with the audience and engaging in the moment of revelation, which can only come from a true connection. This is when the true spiritual encounter happens, 'spirits manifests itself, psychologically, as superior and more powerful than ego, perhaps conceived as an idea, conviction or hunch, but most frequently personified in someone with clarity of insight and kind of prophet or visionary (Samuels, 1986:141).

Supra Comedians are not afraid of introducing controversial and downright rude subjects into their comedic routine. For instance, Bill Hicks talks about a subject that is sacred for Americans, the JFK assassination:

Boy, I love talking about the Kennedy assassination, man. That's my favourite topic. You know why? 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 any way they ... Oh, sorry. Wrong meeting ... Ah [beep]. That's the meeting we're having tomorrow at the docks.

I love talking about Kennedy. I was just down in Dallas, Texas. You know you can go down there and, ah, to Dealey Plaza where Kennedy was assassinated. And you can actually go to the sixth floor of the School Book Depository. It's a museum called ... The Assassination Museum. I think they named that after the assassination. I can't be too sure of the chronology here, but ...

Anyway they have the window set up to look exactly like it did on that day. And it's really accurate, you know. 'Cause Oswald's not in it.

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 the boxes sitting there.

The Supra Comedian always chooses topical subjects. For example, in one of her speeches, Ellen DeGeneres discusses the pace of contemporary life:

Our attention span is shot. We've all got ADD or OCD or one of those disorders with three letters because we don't have time and patience to pronounce the entire disorder... That should be a disorder right there TBD Too Busy Disorder.

What's with this sudden choice of disorders we've got now when I was younger we just had crazy people, just crazy people. now are for anti-depressants for Prozac or Paxil and they get you right away.

The Supra Comedian realises that he has the power for more than just humour. He carries the projections of a disenfranchised society. The accepted patriarchal system of entertainment which anarchic, disruptive view are permitted and in some instances welcomed as a container for the marginalised voice. He is the voice of the common man against the patriarchal power although he uses the accepted patriarchal system to change its direction. In a way, the supra comedian is a therapist for his or her society and he can encourage the processes of confession, elucidation, education and transformation within his performance, which the audience, as 'mother and society' can reflect upon. Jung wrote in 'The Aims of Psychotherapy':

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'My aim is to bring about a psychic state in which my patient begins to experiment with his own nature – a state of fluidity, change, and growth where nothing is eternally fixed and hopelessly petrified.'

(Jung, CW 16: para. 99)

Similarly, the Supra Comedian has to be fluid to resonate with his ever changing and evolving audience. He gives 'everyman' that he engages with an opportunity to review his life in comfortable, non-confrontational events, and to find his own understanding of the changes that are occurring. The present contradictory nature of the political-social-economic systems can confine the individual's development instead of enhancing it. The Supra Comedian announces these dilemmas and authenticates their existence; personally and socially. Without his social role he would be an entertainer even on a greater and higher scale, but nevertheless without the developmental influence socially, collectively and individually.

The Supra Comedian is identifiable through his playful nature as the most gifted of all comedians, but he must be authentic. He must be true to his onstage personality, or he will lose effect. Jung believed that ‘the personal life of the poet cannot be held essential to his art’, (1933:172) however, it is essential for the Supra-comedian for his art and art to connect.

While society is becoming increasingly cerebral in its evolution, it needs a mirror to reflect its core issues, changes and challenges. The comedian can make observation and analysis of situations, which cannot be made by an individual who is being navigated by social and personal requirements. It is the comedian who stands on the periphery of society and comments. His material and thinking is counter-culture. As Fordham announced in his book, ‘Exploration into Self’ (1985), ‘the self integrate had no means through which it could come into relation with its environment so disintegration was needed’. He disintegrates and reintegrates structures, religion, social norms, ethical boundaries inter and intra-personal relationships. While disturbing all these elements, he in turn disrupts his own psychic system, which he evaluates at the same time; hence he can individuate successfully if not fully.

5.3

Supra Jokes, Alchemy and the Transcendent Function

The creation of Supra Jokes can also be regarded from the perspective of alchemy and transformation. This approach to humour is radically different from that of Freud and the post-Freudians, who regard jokes as a defence mechanism; as something retrospective and looking backwards, rather than as something that can transform the life of an individual or his society. Jung defined the transcendent function as ‘the cooperation of conscious reasoning with the data of the unconscious’ (Jung, CW 18: para. 1554). In his view, ‘this function

progressively unites the opposites' (Jung, CW 18: para. 1554). He also argues that this psychological process 'facilitates the transition from one attitude to another' (Jung CW6: para. 828).

Essentially, the Supra Joke performs 'the transcendent function'. For instance, when one is torn between opposites, one has to transcend them. One has to transcend one's conflicts to accommodate the opposing forces in life; to make them work for you rather than against you. It is a decision-making process, and it is vital to the process of individuation. Without the transcendent function, people would be torn between the extremes, forever unable to make a choice, particularly in a complex situation. It is the expression of the comedian's collective unconscious, connecting to the audience and their collective unconscious, that pushes towards the transcendent mechanism in joke form, which is the Supra Joke. As Jung suggested:

From the activity of the unconscious there now emerges a new content, constellated by thesis and antithesis in equal measure and standing in a compensatory relation to both. It thus forms the middle ground on which the opposites can be united. If, for instance, we conceive the opposition to be sensuality versus spirituality, then the mediatory content born out of the unconscious provides a welcome means of expression for the spiritual thesis, because of its rich spiritual associations, and also for the sensual antithesis, because of its sensuous imagery. The ego, however, torn between thesis and antithesis, finds in the middle ground its own counterpart, its sole and unique means of expression, and it eagerly seizes on this in order to be delivered from its division.

(Jung CW 6: para. 825)

In Jung's view, the necessity to expose the conflicts, and then unite the opposites, comes automatically from the unconscious. It is possible that the stand-up has been called to a vocation in which case his aim unconsciously is to become the Supra-Comedian. His 'daemon' could have inspired him to learn the craft of powerful communication in order to make transformation possible. It is as if the unconscious detects the problematic areas, and offers solutions in the form of creative activity. The comedian wrestles with the two opposing

views that he is able to observe. The Supra Joke is the vehicle for the transcendent function. When delivered, it transforms the attitude of society towards a particular social issue. The job of the comedian is to be transformational; and the Supra Joke is socially transformational as well.

The birth of a joke (and particularly the Supra Joke) is also an alchemical process. Jung regarded the alchemical process as a metaphor as for psychological transformation.

5.4

Alchemy

Metaphorically speaking, live comedy can be seen as an alchemical composition as a conscious participation of the both the performer and audience. Their internal process are engaged in the emotional experience. Jung defines the alchemical process as ‘a process of chemical transformation’, which consists of four stages: melanosis (blackening), leucosis (whitening), xanthosis (yellowing) and iosis (reddening) (CW 12: para. 333). The goal, in the writings of different medieval authors, is either the white or red tincture, the philosopher’s stone, the panacea, golden glass or malleable glass (CW12: para. 335). The form and shape of the final substance does not matter, however, because – as Jung and von Franz argue – alchemical transformation is a metaphor for the process of individuation.

The key argument of this thesis is that stand-up performance is a form of Individuation for the comedian. Comedians may be said to be addicted to individuation and the heightened mental states that come with it. The state of euphoria is pivotal to

individuation. It can be observed in the stand-up whose experience is the euphoric moment of intense excitement and happiness in the realisation that he can be his Self, he can expose his shadow and still be accepted. As if he has fallen in love with the audience as they have with him. Moreover, Jung argues that individuation, like alchemical process itself is a seemingly chaotic and interminable process: "....., even in the midst of the disintegrating chaos of the unconscious there exists a germ of unity, symbolized in by a globe, which provides the impetus for a higher reintegration (CW14:364).

The stand-up can become addicted to the stage because the individuation process is interminable. To use the alchemical metaphor – to make something from nothing gives the comedian a sense of vitality. The comedian reconnects with the unconscious. The creative urge impacts both his physical and psychological energies. This causes a sense of euphoria in the comedian.

And it works both ways. The audience expects to receive new emotions and new perspective on the world, which by definition, presupposes engagement into intrapsychic exchange with the comedian. Because of the interactive nature of the process, to the comedian it feels the euphoria of a union of energies.

Alchemy is a powerful metaphor to use in relation to the live creative process. For the comedian, the gold is the joke. The alchemical process only occurs when the comedian successfully relates to the audience. The task of the comedian is to unite the audience and to ensure that it is not fragmented. This unity in itself is the comedy gold.

Several ingredients are needed for the creation of comedy. These ingredients are the comedian's personality, the energy drive, the warm attitude towards the audience and the accessibility of language. Combined with the skill of observation and the recognition of the collective issues. Their public self-exposure and evaluation are united in the joke and the performance. The American comedian Roseanne Barr explains how this kind of creative impulse works: 'It's just trying to put everything in its place. I think that's what we comedians try to do – to organise the world according to what we feel is right' (Ajaye, 2002: 189).

The comedian's persona and his confidence are probably the most important ingredients in the alchemical process because of his appearance and behaviour on stage depends on whether the audience will like him; whether the connection between him and the audience will be established at all. Being on stage for the comedian is almost like a child attending a new school. It is about establishing your position in a new social hierarchy and making a connection with a group of new people. It is also about psychologically, and even physically coping with this new, complex situation.

During the performance the comedian organises the audience; he is in control. He unites the world around him and weaves its elements into something new. He re-constructs the space around themselves and thus, metaphorically, re-creates the world. This is a complex and fragile process because anything can emotionally influence a comedian before a performance, and he will come on stage anxious, angry or tense, which means that he might start taking his anger out on the audience. As far as the public image is concerned, the comedian's task is two-fold – to establish his position both among the comedic brotherhood and amongst the audience.

The American psychiatrist Silvano Arieti uses the metaphor of alchemy to describe human creativity in three stages, which corresponds to my three-stage process ('before', 'during', 'after') of live creativity: 'For the primary process, all that glitters is gold. It will be the labour of the secondary process to discover that all that glitters is not gold. The tertiary process will do at least one of the two things: either it will create a new class of glittering objects, or, by bestowing the glittering on other substances, will beautify them artistically, as gold can do (Arieti, 1980: 453).

Thom F. Cavalli writes about the essential connection between humour and alchemy: '... an ounce of humour is good for the soul. A well-crafted joke cracks open a truth we've all known but were unwilling to openly admit. This element of humour is a function of the trickster' (Cavalli, 2002: 86). To this Cavalli adds that 'humour has a way of turning situations upside down and thereby creating new connections. Sometimes the alchemical vessel needs a good shaking to break up the mindless routines that drain its lifeblood. Laugh with, not at, your habitual way of doing things' (2002: 202).

The stand-up comedic phrase by itself is not necessarily funny, given to another performer it will not make sense, but from the original stand-up, the originator/creator blending with their ability to add rhythm, cadence, surge and accent and time delivers the humorous message, the joke that is ingested by the audience. The comedian has to be conscious of the audience all the time, is it the compassionate or the critical or the devouring or neglectful mother. It is only on stage, at one given moment, that he can adjust his material or his tone or give an adlib, which will transform a neglecting mother to a compassionate mother. The mother is waiting to be seduced.

The comedian as alchemist takes everyday material (prima materia) and translates it into a modern comedic language, which is the context of the ‘mothers’ understanding. In his interview with Larry Wilde, Woody Allen emphasises the point that alchemical unity of the performer, his persona, personality, rhythm, attitude are all more important for the success of the venture than a perfect text. He says:

Just don't make the mistake of falling into the material trap. To the degree you are a funny person, that's how much you'll succeed ... not what kind of material you have. When I first became a comedian, I thought, gee, I write funny material, I bet I could get up and just read this to people and they would laugh. I tried that. I took the sheets of paper out in the night club and it meant nothing to the audience. They wanted something else entirely. What they want is an intimacy with the person. They want to like the person and find the person funny as a human being. The biggest trap comedians fall into is trying to get by on the basis of their material. That's just hiding behind the jokes. It's not getting out in front of the audience and opening themselves up. It's all so ephemeral. Such a thin line of luck and intangibles. There is no real advice anybody can give on to what to do to become a comedian. The whole thing is such a rare combination of hereditary and environment and the audience that night and the temperature and the headlines in the papers and...

(Wilde, 2000: 27-28)

Live creative processes can be regarded as on-stage individuation – the comedian's personal development can only happen in alchemical union with the audience. At the same time, the connection with the audience must be authentic or he will not achieve the addictive feeling of elation that makes him seek encounter consistently. His task is to capture the authentic alchemical instant transforming the mundane into the extraordinary.

The on-stage individuation process gives the comedian an illusion of alchemical wholeness, a feeling of bliss and happiness. Sherry Salman writes that, in Jungian psychology, the notion of ‘contradictory opposites lying side by side, albeit partially repressed, revisions our picture

of mental health, and relativizes feelings of inferiority and pathology. Wholeness rather than perfection is the goal' (Young-Eisendrath and Dawson, 2002: 67).

Unification with the audience means the stand-up manages to capture the mood and says something that is relevant for the 'common people', as a result the performer feels temporarily whole and happy. This oceanic connectedness creates a feeling of wholeness, which is all enveloping, psychologically, physically and spiritually, which they miss when they come off stage. They were 'at one' with the audience, and they want to recreate this state of unity, understanding and acceptance. There are moments in the individuation process, which highlights his idiosyncrasies whilst being aware of their separate 'Self' in and to the world. The 'creatura' as distinct from the 'pleroma.' This is moment is short-term spark of individuation, which can become addictive.

In my recent interview with the British stand-up comedian Sean Meo, which took place on 13.03.13, I asked him about his creative process and his motivation to go on stage. The key words he used in his reply were: power, addiction, fame, fortune and money. He kept saying that creativity starts at the basics and it is a very simple process: it is all about getting a piece of paper with nothing on it, writing a few lines on it, reading it out loud and making the audience laugh. Meo compares the process of creating jokes to 'being in a cave full of dark material trying to find nuggets'. This is about the alchemical process as well – making something out of nothing; transforming dark matter into something more valuable.

Meo also mentions that, although challenging, this is a very emotionally satisfying process. It gives one 'sense of well-being' because 'you might fuck up in a lot of areas of life' but stage always feels good and addictive. He also says that, although, he often cannot focus his attention when dealing with other areas of his personal and professional life, he always

manages to focus on ensuring a good performance. He says that he just loves this process – for him, it is like a drug, he compares addiction to stage to ‘needing a fix’. This includes the audience response and the feeling of power over the audience. He feels both happy and privileged to do that.

Stand-up comedy is different from any other form of art because the change from love to absence of positive reaction may happen in a matter of seconds. The comedian does not know when this happens, or even what causes it. The atmosphere in the audience is always electric, and easily swayed by the smallest and most insignificant incidents.

The performance is the most intense stage of the comedian’s creative process. It triggers a range of inter and intra-psychic processes. Moreover, these processes are often closely linked, and indistinguishable from each other, because interaction with the audience is direct, explicit and dynamic. The comedian’s emotional and intellectual reactions are directly shaped and influenced by the audience’s reaction.

For the comedian, live performance is a good opportunity for the comedian to form a connection with the audience, and thus individuate. Jung defines the individuation process as driven by the Self: the centre of the personality. He writes in ‘Psychological Types’:

In general [individuation] is the process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality.

(CW6: para. 757)

However, individuation does not mean being individualistic and separating oneself entirely from society. This process is about becoming yourself yet remaining embedded on your community and giving something back to it:

Individuation is always to some extent opposed to collective norms, since it means separation and differentiation from the general and a building up of the particular – not a particularity that is sought out, but the one that is already ingrained in the psychic constitution. The opposition to the collective norm, however, is only apparent, since closer examination shows that the individual standpoint is not antagonistic to it but only differently oriented. The individual way can never be directly opposed to the collective norm, because the opposite of the collective norm can only be another, but contrary, norm. [...] Individuation, therefore, leads to a natural esteem for the collective norm, but the orientation is exclusively collective the norm becomes increasingly superfluous and morality goes to pieces. The more a man's life is shaped by the collective norm, the greater is his individual immorality.

(CW6: para. 761)

This is pertinent for our analysis of inter-and intra-psychic processes that occur on stage. The performer goes on stage in order to understand himself, to assert and affirm his or her personal narrative. Bruce Morton's reflection confirms the process.

"I don't think I've ever thought, 'if I go out and do a routine about this that'll help me understand my situation and deal with it better, but it has happened in retrospect. (Cook 1994: 289)

On the one hand, a solo performance certainly feeds the 'individual' part of the individuation process. On the other hand, one cannot go on stage and talk about one's problems as if it were a therapy session – regardless of what the audience thinks. 'Being yourself' is not necessarily funny. Individuation is not a selfish process. Linking to the society – and the audience – is a challenge. Personal transformation can only happen in close dialogue with the community and society.

Likewise, the comedian's individuation can only take place in dialogue with the audience. The comedian Jerry Seinfeld expresses a similar view when he says that the comedian's long-term goal is to 'become yourself' (Ajaye, 2002: 198). This is not easy because

...as human being, you are always changing. There's always others things that you want to talk about, and feel you're able to talk about, but I don't believe in searching for it. That leads to hooks and personas instead of human beings and three-dimensional people on stage, which I believe an audience enjoys seeing more than anything else. So I would say a person should write everything that they think about, and they'll naturally enjoy talking about a percentage of these things. Then they'll naturally start to edit out those things they don't feel comfortable about. But that takes time.

(Ajaye, 2002: 200)

Individuation, however, is not only personal – it is also social. The audience individuates together with the comedian. The alchemical process certainly concerns both sides. Members of the audience may have a particular thought pattern or a set of rigid ideas. The task of the comedian is to challenge these rigid ideas as well as any conformity and tendency towards artificial 'normality' the audience may have.

The alchemical individuation, which takes place during a live comedic performance is a two-way process during which the comedian and the audience alter each other psychologically as well as challenge each other's personal, political and social views. The flow of the material originates in the comedian, is absorbed by the 'mother', is integrated and transposed and re-absorbed by the stand-up comedian. By the end of the process, the original material is altered to suit both the performer and the audience.

Jung's concept of the container and the contained, which he associated with a marriage can be aligned with the comedy club setting. The container is the Comedy Club, with its inherent structure, including comedians, which, as Jung tells us, 'seeks harmony and unity', whereas

the contained is the audience seeking integration (CW 17: paras. 332-333). The stand-up comedian can be seen as having the ability to open the door to the inferior function of his psychological type, which is his weaker function in hidden in his unconscious and by doing so, encounters his shadow.

Esther Harding writes about the container and the contained: ‘... there is need of a vessel to contain the materials that must be fused together and transformed. These terms – vessel, material, fusing, transforming – are all alchemistic in origin’ (Harding, 1973: 422). Harding also writes that medieval alchemists looked for ways of uniting the materials, from which the ‘immortal stone’ was to be created. The materials were falling apart, and the alchemists needed a vessel, or a metaphor of a vessel, in order to bring them together:

They realised that they needed a means to join the constituents of their stone in such a way that they could never again be separated. As their custom was – they were often called natural philosophers – they looked around in nature to see whether they could not uncover there a secret way of uniting things and to adapt it to their purposes. They found various examples of such a process, three of which impressed them especially, indeed fascinated them; that is, these processes became to them symbols simply showing forth the unseen workings in the unconscious. They meditated on these natural transformations, trying especially to imitate them in their art, seeking thus to produce the miraculous effects they desired. These phenomena were the hatching of a chick, the baking of bread or cake, and the marriage of male and female.

(1973: 422)

The alchemical individuation, the result of which is live creativity, is a complex, unpredictable and intense process. Humour enlightens by challenging the stale concepts. The comedian creates a relationship with the ‘mother,’ whom he challenges and at times, is in an intense state of conflict with the audience. The stand-up knows that he might be attacked, which will involve thinking on one’s feet and reacting instinctively. The inexperienced comedian is ill-prepared for these moments of attack. He or she has not fully established the performance rhythm; has a lack of understanding of his or her personality; and is unsure

about how to shield himself, either psychologically or verbally, from the emotional attack coming from the audience. By contrast, the experienced performer has built-in mechanisms to instinctively protect himself from attacks of various kinds, including attacks on his own personality or material. He knows his rhyme, and is flexible in delivering his material. He is also confident in his ability to manipulate the audience and to respond to it, as well as in his stage persona (which must incorporate parts of his own character).

5.5

The Comedian as a Trickster and the Alchemical Transformation

The stand-up comedian publicly exposes social deformities, political unrest and cultural anomalies within a framework that has been encouraged and sanctioned by society. A global transformation and revolution is taking place, which represents the trickster principles. It could be said we are in the time of the Trickster. Every major revolution carries the trickster principle. The stand-up comedian has affinities with the attributes of the trickster, however, it is arguable that he is in fact a trickster.

The trickster is the reflection of our inner world, the world of the unconscious. Radin says in his book that the trickster 'can only become meaningful and intelligible'; if the 'mother' attempts, 'to solve his problems inward and outward' (Radin, 1969: xxiv).

Jung reminds us that in medieval history, there is a description of the devil as *simia dei* (the ape of God), which encompasses the playfulness of its meaning. It is within that unconscious realm that the archetype of the devil dwells who is not only a representation of evil, but as a playful shape-shifter, 'half-animal, half divine' who can tease the individual into the grip of

the shadow' (CW 9/I: para. 255). He is an amplification of the conflicting disruptive psychological and numinous elements within a socially recognisable framework that creates a disturbing shift in perception. He is both a mythical figure and an inner psychic experience. Where ever and whenever he appears and in spite of his unimpressive exteriors, brings the possibility of transforming the meaningless into the meaningful (1986:152).

Principally the trickster is recognised in the collective unconscious as psychological structuring patterns linked to instinct which has to have a manifestation. The archetype links body, psyche, image and instinct, which carries a potentially overpowering charge or force. As humanity evolves along with human consciousness the re-presentation and structure of the archetype will also evolve. As such the joke as I have stated the supra-joke (chapter 5) becomes the trickster. Psychologically, for the trickster image to be active means that a calamity has happened or a dangerous situation has been created. Radin also adds that 'if we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us.' (1969: xxv).

Society and individuals are struggling to keep inherent structures in place and technology is giving the individual the opportunity to speak against these structures, which are being re-positioned as corporate business is taking the place of cultural regulation. Politicians are being scrutinised, distrusted and disempowered. The battles between tyrannical establishments versus democracy are being staged. The ordinary man believes he has an impact on society his actions are encouraged but in fact his voice is tenuous unless it is in the correct influential context such as the schoolgirl Malala, who exemplifies and demonstrates against political inequality. The comedian has this context.

As Radin cites Karl Kerényi (1956); that the function of the trickster is ‘ to add disorder to order and so make a whole , to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experiment of what is not permitted.’

Radin explains that humour and irony go with everything the Trickster does, ‘ , yet its difficult to say whether the audience is laughing at him, at the tricks he plays on others, or at the implications his behaviour and activities have for them.....Is this a speculum mentis wherein is depicted man’s struggle with himself and with a world into which he had been thrust without his volition and consent.’

Basil Morozow discusses the trickster in contemporary film states that, ‘the best the carrier of the trickster principle can do, however, is to plant the seeds of tricksterism in the mass psyche’. She continues that if the individual creates oppressive systems within themselves then the trickster appears to break the internal psychic walls. Hence the impact of the trickster through film is powerful but is within a mythical context. Historically the tricksters principle is anthropomorphised or characterised within a mythological context.

Comedians create their own mythological context and therefore are a raconteur; a live storyteller. The story teller, much like the film cannot be the trickster. The figure of the trickster is far too easily attributed to the comedian, however contemporary comedy is an essential conduit for modern communication. The comedian creates his individual approach, which can embody of the polar opposites of nature and morality. The comedian can have fallen into the trickster journey but not become the trickster as he is in controlling. The trickster is symbolic within a mythical context.

The question is who is the genuine trickster in comedy. The trickster as Jung's archetypal imago can represent the divine and bestial, obscene and decent, violent and tender, dismissive and uncaring, loving and hating all these conflicting attributes can be contained within one image. The figure of the trickster is an embodiment of the polar opposites of nature and morality. It is the epitome of the human condition and, when explored in exaggerated form it creates tension and humour. The audience's reaction to both him and his exploits is, as Radin explains, 'prevaingly one of laughter tempered by awe' (1969: xxiv). Radin also adds that 'if we laugh at him, he grins at us. What happens to him happens to us.' (1969: xxv).

Speaking metaphorically, the trickster figure can be seen as consisting of three different archetypes: Mercurius, Hermes and the Trickster as such. These three aspects of the trickster figure are important for understanding the creative forces of stand-up performance. Mercurius is the essence of the joke; it is also its 'feminine' aspect, the Eros. Hermes is the intellectual form (logos) of the joke. The trickster is the outer form, the presentation of the joke.

Mercurius is the essence and instinct of the joke; it is also 'feminine' aspect of this androgynous concept; 'the pregnant space', which incubates the paradoxical concept. Mercurius when freed by the alchemist took the form in the hermaphroditic Philosopher's Stone but also represents the prima materia, For Jung, Mercurius symbolised the Self, also containing the archetypes of the anima and the wise-one; 'At the same time, he was "the universal and scintillating fire of the light of nature, which carries the heavenly spirit within it.' This fiery spiritual seed impregnated by the Virgin i.e. the feminine aspect of the hermaphroditic Mercurius. He was synonymous with divine water, "the spirit of life, not only indwelling in all living things, but immanent in everything that exists" (CW12:par 528).

Hermes who as Jung reminds us was the wind God and so what the Egyptian Thoth, who made the soul breathe. The name comes from Hermeneus, which means 'the interpreter'. As a Greek god he was the messenger and the interpreter known for his power of speech and could convince people. Hermes is therefore, related to the word as logos.

The trickster is the outer form, the presentation as a joke. It is an interwoven combination of the force of creation, structured within the comedic form and delivered with fire and provocative intent.

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Samuel's polemic is with the trickster in the political arena, this can be likened to the trickster in the Stand-up comedy circuit. It is the trickster who challenges the 'laws of time space and place'. He tests the limits of those laws, the bounds of their applicability and hence, the possibility of altering them. He was significantly anti social against the norm. Samuel's continues 'the genuine trickster cannot be omitted from politics,' He further announces that the trickster does , 'not have goals as such....they lie and cheat because that is how they are and who they are'. (1993:85) Samuel's maintains that 'involving the trickster in political discourse does not injure the trickster'. In fact, in an increasingly global and technological world, the trickster has to incorporate these aspects of living to be a viable healing archetype. The stand-up encompasses the necessary components to be paralleled with the trickster. He is also in the position of communicating with an audience as representatives of the community, bringing dual aspects of life, morality and civilisation into consciousness, however it is the joke as the trickster, 'tests the limits of those laws'¹, whether moral, political, social or perceptual.

Samuels does succinctly describe the trickster whose;

'capacity to make us laugh is a depiction of the tragicomic cast of life itself, his or her undermining of pomposity and received wisdom and depiction of what we would all like to do to parental figures, his or her sexual and gustatory excess a depiction of how to follow a certain kind of bliss, his or her economic and mercantile ingenuity a depiction of what is required to keep one's head about water.'

(1992:272-274).

The trickster, therefore is the Supra Joke which condenses the attributes of the trickster with its function of a yardstick and a spur to consciousness.

The trickster has the potential to expose the inferior function in the audience as they may find the joke represents their shadow, which is why they laugh so readily, partially through surprise and particularly through shame.

Members of the same audience will laugh at different aspects of a comedian's material and different subjects within that material. For each person there is a different realisation. Each decade delivers a new approach to comedy, just as different cultures laugh at different aspects of the same Supra-joke. It is so powerful that it will resonate with the individual's own psychic matrix.

Audience member's can relate to the archetype of the trickster who raises issues in his/her relationships. It is in the humour of the telling of the intimate events between the comedian and their partner that the audience finds transference. This process is a representation or carrier of the collective or individual member of the audience's unconscious conflicts. The audience member may temporarily need to see the comedian as a saviour in order for both transference and conscious recognition of their projections to occur, which can lead to the activation of the transcendent function.

Social forces have compelled the rise of the comedian as a collective force; the creation of the joke has been a signpost for social ambiguity and conflict whereas the supra-joke becomes the embodiment of deep psychological collective unconscious transformation.

CHAPTER 6

CREATIVITY AND THE COMEDIAN

The comedian is constantly creative and is updating his material live. His jokes are born in action. Creativity of this specific ‘active’ kind is the key ingredient of the comedian’s performance. It is also related to the comedian’s relationship with the audience. The audience becomes the performer’s supplier of attention and love, and the comedian’s behaviour depends on the audience’s readiness to supply him with positive emotional reactions. The absence of these reactions tends to colour the comedian’s creativity with a tinge of aggression and anger. This chapter analyses the nature and genesis of the comedian’s ‘live’ creativity. It will compare Freudian and Jungian definitions of creativity and determine their relevance for our analysis of live comedy.

6.1

Comedic Creativity from a Freudian View

Freud discussed creativity in a number of his works in which he psychoanalysed famous painters as well as works of literature. The idea was to expose the personal, sublimated content hidden in the work of art. Freud defines sublimation as ‘conversion of psychical instinctual force into various forms of activity’ (Freud, 2002: 22). For instance, in his essays about Leonardo Da Vinci, ‘Leonardo Da Vinci: a Memory of His Childhood’, he links the artist’s childhood memories to the imagery he would later generate as an artist. In this essay Freud is confident that psychoanalytic techniques can be used to fill the gaps in our knowledge of the artists’ biographies. For instance, he argues that Da Vinci’s dream of being visited by a vulture can be analysed and explained away:

.....as we now possess in the techniques of psychoanalysis excellent methods for helping us to bring this concealed material to light, we may venture to fill in the gap in Leonardo's life story by analysing his childhood fantasy. [...]

If we examine with the eyes of a psycho-analyst Leonardo's phantasy of the vulture, it does not appear strange for long. We seem to recall having come across the same sort of thing in many places, for example, in dreams; so that we may venture to translate the phantasy from its own special language into words that are generally understood. The translation is then seen to point out to an erotic content.

(2002: 33/76)

Jung criticised this approach for being too reductive. The idea that all aesthetic and spiritual results of creative activity in human beings have their roots in the basic side of human nature did not appeal to him. Jung wrote that, in his analysis of dreams and creative activity, Freud confused the two things that should not be confused: signs and symbols or he wanted the literal definition for his analysis. His sign/symbol ambiguity could also be a repercussion of the conflict between himself and Jung. If Jung would not his 'heir' they had to separate and identify their differences and fight for recognition through their work. Stand-up comedians often use metaphors in their humour especially about sexual relationships. Jung would see the characters as archetypes and items as symbols in dreams. The symbol would have to be amplified to recognise how Moreover, Freud saw the creative work of art as an escape from reality and a flight into the artificial world of phantasy; as an abnormal gesture. For him, an artist is akin to a neurotic in his denial of reality. The artist is therefore spending time on something that can be regarded as the psychological remnants of childish play. For instance, Freud wrote:

An artist is once more in rudiments an introvert, not far removed from neurosis. He is oppressed by excessively powerful instinctual needs. He desires to win power, wealth, fame and the love of women; but he lacks the means of achieving these satisfactions. Consequently, like any other unsatisfied man, he turns away from reality and transfers all his interest, and his libido too, to the wishful constructions of his life of phantasy, whence the path might lead to neurosis.

This essentially means that Freud reduced human creativity to infantile greed, sexual impulses and desire for power. The artist is a childish dreamer who turns away from reality because he is not mature enough to accept it. Instead, he loses himself in play and phantasy.

To counter this radical view, Jung argues in ‘Analytical Psychology and Poetry,’ (1922) that Freud was too literal in regard to the instinctive unconscious content and through his reductive in his restrictive analytic perspective mis-used the label of symbol:

The essential thing in Freud’s reductive method is to collect all the clues pointing to the unconscious background, and then through the analysis and interpretation of this material, to reconstruct the elementary instinctual process. Those conscious contents which gave rise to a clue to the unconscious background are incorrectly called *symbols* by Freud. These are not true symbols, however, since according to his theory they have merely the role of *signs* or *symptoms* of the subliminal processes.

(CW15: para. 105).

Freud’s view of humour is directly linked to his concept of creativity. From his view, jokes exist as outlets for human instincts – and particularly for sexual and antisocial urges. For instance, when one subconsciously wants to insult another person – one can transform his aggressive feelings into a joke. Thus, a negative emotion is transformed into a form of creative activity, and the content is supplied by the situation itself. The insult does not take place because of propriety and aesthetic culture, but the psyche still seeks pleasure – and it reshapes this pleasure into a more socially acceptable form: ‘Let us now suppose, however, that the possibility is presented of deriving a good joke from the material of the words and thoughts used for the insult – the possibility, that is, of releasing pleasure from other sources which are not obstructed by the same suppression’ (Freud, 2001: 136).

The Freudian theoretical framework is apt when applied to the stand-up as comedians act out their aggression towards other people on stage. For instance, a comedian may subconsciously harbour murderous intentions towards his father or fight a powerful urge to rape a woman. Instead of doing these horrendous things, he fantasises about them – and then sublimates these fantasies in his material.

Contentious and literal as it sounds, there are certainly examples of psychological literalism and direct treatment of material on the comedic circuit. For instance, the American comedian Louie Anderson says in an interview: ‘I think a lot of my act is working out the problems I’ve had with my family, my father in particular. And I think it really makes a difference. And I think it’s healthy and helpful’ (Ajaye, 2002: 54).

On the other hand, Freud’s view of humour and creativity is still reductive and simplistic. He takes creativity back to sexuality and the Oedipus complex. When comedians joke about their parents – particularly the father – they can be said to be expressing their aggression towards the powerful parent. However, it is not as simple as this. The audience does not come to listen to a man moaning about his parental problems. The stage is not just a therapeutic setting. Live comedy is the kind of creative process that engages the audience directly. It is transformational both personally and socially. This transformational process is almost alchemical in that the comedian converts his issue into something that has wider resonance than just ‘Oedipal moaning’.

Live comedy has to seduce and attract the audience – its aim is to make a connection with the listener. This involves transcendence of the personal and creation of an intermediate product – something ‘more general’ to which the audience can relate.

Jaques Lacan’s idea of three psychological orders, Imaginary, Symbolic and Real is also interesting as far as psychoanalytic approaches to creativity are concerned. The Imaginary order directly relates to the creative life of man. It is opposed to the Symbolic and the Real.

The Imaginary is the first of the three orders. It comprises imagination, feelings, dreams, deception, creativity and seduction. Laplanche and Pontalis write that the concept of the imaginary can be grasped initially ‘by the reference to one of Lacan’s earliest theoretical developments of the theme of the mirror stage. In his work on this topic, Lacan brought forward the idea that the ego of the human infant – as a result, in particular, of its biological prematurity – is constituted on the basis of the image of the counterpart (specular ego)’ (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 210). From the intersubjective point of view, this is a dyadic relationship in which the subject is merged with the object – with the mother or any other primary carer. This relationship is ‘based on – and captured by – the image of a counterpart (erotic attraction, aggressive tension). For Lacan, a counterpart (i.e. another who is me) can only exist by virtue of the fact that the ego is originally another’ (1988: 201).

The realm of the Imaginary is pre-Oedipal; it is a happy time for the subject because he or she can experience *jouissance* (or pleasure and enjoyment – it stands for Freud’s pleasure principle). Pleasure comes from ‘owning’ and being at one with the object – the mother. As Dylan Evans explicates:

.....the prohibition of jouissance (the pleasure principle) is inherent in the symbolic structure of the language, which is why 'jouissance is forbidden to him who speaks, as such'. The subject's entry into the symbolic is conditional upon a certain initial renunciation of jouissance in the castration complex, when the subject gives up his attempts to be the imaginary phallus for the mother; Castration means that jouissance must be refused so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder ... of the Law of desire'. The symbolic prohibition of enjoyment in the Oedipus complex (the incest taboo) is thus, paradoxically, the prohibition of something, which is already impossible; its function is therefore to sustain the neurotic illusion that enjoyment would be attainable if it were not forbidden. The very prohibition creates desire to transgress it, and jouissance is therefore fundamentally transgressive.

(Evans, 1996: 92)

According to Lacan, a human life is punctuated by a series of losses – all reflecting the loss of the primary object that comes with the arrival of the Symbolic order. Lacan designates lack of an object (1996: 96). Meanwhile, the subject is addicted to the time when it could experience jouissance without the constraints of the Symbolic order. This is how desire is born. Desire (*desir*) for Lacan is a continuous force experienced compulsively – it is the desire for the (lost) object. Desire, Evans explains in the English edition of Lacan's work 'Ecrits' (1977) is; 'the surplus produced by the articulation of need in demand; "Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need." Unlike need, which can be satisfied and which then ceases to motivate the subject until another need arises, desire can never be satisfied; it is constant in its pressure, and is eternal. The realisation of desire does not consist in being 'fulfilled', but in the reproduction of desire as such' (1996: 37). In addition, desire is born out of competition – what makes the object desirable 'is not any intrinsic quality of the thing in itself but simply the fact that it is desired by another' (1996: 38).

Desire is thus addictive and compulsive; it exists as an inexplicable force that takes the subject back to the now non-existent jouissance – the pleasure, which had been forbidden by the Symbolic order. It can be said, using the Lacanian loss-desire paradigm that the

comedian's addiction to stage and to performing is a form of compulsive desire for the audience (the metaphorical mother). The stand-up comedians' main tool is language – which, according to Lacan, is the principal instrument of the Symbolic order. However, they use this tool in a transgressive manner, thereby challenging the symbolic order – the bearer of the law and language. This unusual, creative application of an otherwise standardised and rigid mechanism cause outbursts of laughter in the audience. Like this, comedic language is a paradoxical and self-contradictory (as well as self-renewing) phenomenon.

Using Lacanian terminology and concepts, it is possible to theorise that the (male) comedian cannot escape the Symbolic order, which he joined when he was a boy. There is no way back for the adult man; and he cannot regain the lost *jouissance*. However, he can cause *jouissance* in the audience by verbally challenging the symbolic order (the social order), and thus causing the audience to laugh. The comedian himself does not laugh – he absorbs (via mirroring) the audience's pleasure which he knows he has caused. Thus, he reclaims and re-experiences the powerful emotions otherwise inaccessible to him, as they had been barred by the Symbolic order. Within the Oedipal paradigm, the comedian does not risk castration because his tool – the spoken word – belongs to the realm of the symbolic. However, he finds an alternative way of challenging the symbolic father by mis-using language and therefore undermining its rule-making and law-supporting properties. The law-giving father does not always recognise that the comedian has abused his rule-implementing instrument. Like this, the comedian engages the 'mother' (audience) in a mutual, incestuous pleasure exchange, and the father cannot recognise the dangers that this exchange implies for the Symbolic order.

It can be said, using Lacan, that the comedian becomes addicted to the process of receiving *jouissance* from the audience. It is as if he has a desire for the audience's reactions, which

lead him back to the Imaginary. Therefore, he challenges the symbolic on three different levels: first, by misusing language (thus causing the symbolic to laugh at itself), secondly by provoking an outburst of jouissance in the audience; and thirdly by enjoying jouissance ‘unlawfully’ via the audience. The desire to be on stage, receiving attention and feeling your own power, is addictive because one can express one’s own creativity, as well as absorb the visible results of the creative process.

The American comedian Jerry Seinfeld explains in an interview explains the origins of his desire to become a comedian:

I was about eight years old. I was sitting on my stoop with a friend of mine. We were having cookies and milk and we were talking and fooling around. I said something really funny and he laughed and spit the cookies and milk all over my face and hair and clothes. And I thought I would like to do this professionally. That moment of getting a laugh is when you know. Everybody has that in their life at some point or other, but when you feel that you can do that it is so powerful and addictive and fun. You just don’t want to do anything else.

(Wilde, 2000: 328)

Humour forces other men to engage with them. It is the best weapon comedians have for challenging the patriarchal society (or the Symbolic, to use Lacan’s term).

Having lost the paradisiacal state of being at one with the object, the artist keeps seeking psychological states in which he can experience it again. Thus, the creative artist rather like a child seeks jouissance when he is making a new object – a painting or a text. The creative process itself is very much like the encounter with the imaginary, and therefore generates jouissance for the artist and those consuming the work of art. The value of the work of art lies beyond the Symbolic and leads directly back to the Imaginary.

However, even though certain elements of Lacan's theory can be pertinent for my analysis of the immediate ('live') relationship between the comedian and the audience, overall I regard Lacan's body of theory too constricting, pessimistic and past orientated. Creativity is productive and is transformational whether it destroys something in the process it is a forward thinking process.

The British psychotherapist Melanie Klein regarded the creative process as inseparable from the impulse to destroy. Thus, in the psychic life of human beings creativity plays reparative and restorative roles. It has to do with guilt that comes with the baby's recognition of its own destructive phantasies and aggressive intentions. Creativity is born out of the fusion of erotic and destructive impulses. The ability to fuse these impulses is a sign of health (1999: 70).

Klein traced the impulse to re-create childhood problems. For instance, she talks about the artist Ruth Kjar, a talented female painter, who felt unhappy and empty. She felt particularly sad about the sale of a painting, which had been previously lent to her by her brother-in-law. She could not bear to look at the blank space on the wall because the empty space on the wall made her feel depressed. It reminded her of her own inner emptiness. Eventually, her husband suggested that she try to paint something on the wall, and she did. Unbelievably, she painted a masterpiece:

.....the portrait of an old woman and one of her mother. The last two are described by Karen Michaelis as follows: "And now Ruth cannot stop. The next picture represents an old woman, bearing the mark of years and disillusionments. Her skin is wrinkled, her hair faded, her gentle, tired eyes are troubled. [...]"

The daughter's wish to destroy her mother, to see her old, worn out, marred, is the cause of the need to represent her in full possession of her strength and beauty. By so doing the daughter can allay her own anxiety and can endeavour to restore her mother and make her new through the portrait. In the analyses of children, when the representation of destructive wishes is succeeded by an expression of reactive

tendencies, we constantly find that drawing and painting are used as means to restore people.

(Klein, 1998: 217/218)

Klein then concludes that ‘the blank space has been filled’ and that Ruth’s creativity is clearly the result of her destructive feelings towards the mother. At the same time, Ruth obviously felt guilty about this cruel wish, and found a way to ‘restore’ the mother she so wanted to annihilate. By painting the portraits, Ruth also wanted to restore herself since her brokenness and emptiness were clearly caused by the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship:

In another essay, ‘Love, Guilt and Reparation’ (1937) Klein expresses the view that feelings of guilt transform, into love on one hand and creativeness on the other. This, she says, is clear when one looks at how small children manifest their creativity. In children, the impulse to create is born out of the oscillation between fear and the ability to manage it; between being in and out of control over one’s internal and external reality:

In children, creative impulses, which have hitherto been dormant awaken and express themselves in such activities as drawing, modelling, building and in speech, which, by means of psychoanalysis fears of various kinds become lessened. These fears had brought about an increase of the destructive impulses, and therefore when fears are diminished, destructive impulses are also lessened. Along with these processes, feelings of guilt and the anxiety about the death of the loved person, with which the child’s mind had been unable to cope because they were overwhelming, gradually diminish, become less intense and are then manageable. This has the effect of increasing the child’s concern for other people, of stimulating pity and identification with them, and thus love altogether is increased. The wish to make reparation, so intimately bound with up with the concern for the loved one and the anxiety about his death, can now be expressed in creative and constructive ways. In psycho-analysis of adults, too, these processes and changes can be observed.

(1998: 335-6)

In this sense, adults are no different from children. Mature creativity, from Klein's view, is a paradoxical psychological phenomenon, which, on the one hand, aims at destroying and damaging the object and, on the other, at repairing it through love. The Kleinian child – like the Kleinian adult – sees the world as a source of pleasure and satisfaction on the one hand, and disappointment and pain on the other. The centrepiece, however, is a sense of guilt, which the child experiences when it fantasises about destroying the very object that sustains his life and gives him pleasure. According to Klein, creativity is born out of guilt and embarrassment that come with destroying an object on which one depends for physical and emotional security. The baby recreates the object, which it mentally destroyed or attempted to destroy in a fit of narcissistic vulnerability.

Examples of this attitude, as well as its link with live comedy, could be found in a number of comedians' interviews. For instance, in an interview with *The Guardian*, Frankie Boyle speaks about love and emotions in a rude and dismissive way. The interviewer, Rosanna Greenstreet, asks him a series of questions to which he gives short answers. When asked, 'Have you ever said "I love you" and not meant it?' Boyle replies, 'Only to my children'.

Other examples of being embarrassed about expressing emotions include:

What do you owe to your parents?

Realistically, about five grand of babysitting money.

What or who is the greatest love of your life? My kids. I think kids deliver on all the stuff romantic love only promises. I am in love every day.

What does love feel like?

It feels like a belt around my throat.

How often do you have sex?

I regularly have sex with someone I hate – or masturbation, as I call it.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/aug/24/frankie-boyle-comedian>)

The struggle between creativeness and destructiveness is clearly seen in the comedian's answers. To an extent, they sound crass and insensitive towards the children. At the same

time, it is clear that what the interviewee rejects is not the children, or women, but the very idea of love as a state of being emotionally dependent on the other. Inevitably, love involves being vulnerable and potentially rejected or broken. It is much easier to prevent this by rejecting love and emotional dependency altogether. Yet, at the same time, this attitude is potentially destructive for the object. With the object gone, the baby feels lonely, guilty and even more helpless than before it had destroyed it. In this interview, Boyle seems to attack the very people he loves – yet he simultaneously (in fact, within the same line) repairs the damage he does. In his humour, the two processes – destruction and reparation – are almost indistinguishable from each other.

To use Kleinian views on creativity, aggressive humour exists somewhere on the border between creativity and destruction; between the self and the object. It is a war zone in which the bond between the comedian and the audience occurs in the process of oscillation between love and hate; between a desire to connect and a fear of losing yourself. This is confirmed by Bill Hicks, whose angry performances were a testimony to the existence of destructive creativity, Klein-style. Andy Fyfe writes:

Cowboy-booted, chain-smoking Hicks was the most significant American comedian of his generation, the natural successor to Lenny Bruce and Richard Pryor.

He was rude, angry, uncompromising and saw within popular culture a conspiracy to dumb people down so that they could be more easily controlled. He died in 1994, at the age of 32, but still ranks high on most lists of the greatest comics of all time.

(Fyfe, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2010)

Jimmy Carr also articulates this in his book, *The Naked Jape* (2006). He seems to regard the stage as an emotionally dangerous but exciting place, where intense aggression occurs between the comedian and the audience:

Even if some laughs are bigger than others, there's no grey area in between getting a laugh and getting nothing. Live comedy audiences are ruthless and insatiable. If they smell fear you're done for. And you're only ever as good as your last joke. Not even your last show – your last *joke*. Every comic has a back-pocket full of 'bankers' – the funny lines that always get you out of trouble. But even one of those doesn't buy you very much time – thirty seconds of sympathy before they want the next one.

This sounds brutal and it is. It's no accident that the language of professional comedians is full of violence and death – 'He really killed out there' being the pinnacle of achievement.

(Carr and Greeves, 2006: 115)

Like Boyle and many other comedians, in his jokes Carr also scrutinises the issues of emotional dependency and the aggression associated with it. This is a joke that appears in one of his interviews for *The Mirror*: 'I hate those emails where they try to sell you penis enhancements. I got ten just the other day. Eight of them from my girlfriend. It's the two from my mum that really hurt' (<http://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/jimmy-carr-jokes-comedians-40-1323055>). Again, dependency on the object is associated with criticism, violence and emotional tension rather than with acceptance and love. In this case, the emotional and cognitive base of the joke is mutual rejection – of the object and by the object. It is a joke about mutual disapproval, dissatisfaction and disappointment. No wonder it leads back to the original object – the mother.

Thus, Klein's link between creativity and guilt, and creativity and destruction, proves to be useful for our discussion of stand-up comedy. Fantasy of destruction provides a distance between the subject and the object; and subsequent reparation keeps the bond between the subject and the object alive. The dual process of creative destruction/reparation is important for the child's psychosocial development, and it is also very clear in the way people create and perceive humour and jokes. In fact, humour, with its existential and psychological

edginess and the capacity for causing offence, is the perfect metaphor for the baby's attempt to simultaneously connect with the object and question its dependence on it. Comedians test the audience like the baby tests the mother – 'Let's see if they really love me' and 'Let's test the limits of their love'.

6.2

A Positive View of Creativity in Comedy: Carl Jung, James Hillman and Otto Rank

Freudian and post-Freudian theories imply that creativity means survival. The creative person is seen as traumatised and wanting to dissipate the trauma by replaying it in the safe form of a creative act. Freudian theory always attributes the creative power to the parents they 'produce' the child both physically and psychologically. Thus, any creativity that is born out of the child as the artist is reactive rather than proactive. The child is not born with creativity but ends up feeling the need for sublimating the tension caused in him or her by a range of Oedipal issues. Creativity of any sort then becomes a kind of therapy, which although devoid of a higher ('Godly') purpose, only serves to relieve the artist's psychological pain, as well as to mollify obsessive behaviours.

By contrast, Jung presupposes that creativity exists in human beings regardless of any personal issues experienced by them. Jung sees creativity as a gift from above; as a mark of uniqueness, of being 'chosen'. It originates in the collective rather than the personal unconscious and culminates in the Self. He also has a different view of the 'pain' constituent of creative life. Even though he recognises the pain element of creative existence, he stresses that this pain is an unpleasant but important element of the artist's life.

In his essay about the child archetype Jung argues that the motifs of abandonment, mistreatment, isolation and hardship of the miraculous child are valuable aspects of personality development. Unpleasant feelings are necessary for developing the personality. He writes that 'the child is all that is abandoned, and exposed and at the same time divinely powerful; the insignificant, dubious beginning, and the triumphant end. The "eternal child" in man is an indescribable experience, an incongruity, a handicap, and a divine prerogative; an imponderable that determines the ultimate worth or worthlessness of a personality' (CW9/I: para. 300). Forced into isolation, the child seeks a way out of his miserable existence thus seeking and finding creative solutions to life's problems.

The creative person, who is rooted in his humble beginnings, and of insecurity and angst recreates and re-gathers the core self, the personality centre in the creative act. Thus, although the child's destiny has been pre-determined by gods or God (as it is in Christianity), the miraculous baby still has the right to re-make it by gathering and organising fragments of his experience. Thus, creativity is an important part of the individuation process.

The creative act, according to Jung, is a force of nature that 'achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of the nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle.' The work of art is a 'living thing implanted in human psyche' (CW15: para. 114).

Interestingly enough, Freud's disciple Otto Rank is closer to Jung than to Freud in his views on creativity. Like Jung, he thinks that being creative is a spiritual state that takes the artist beyond oral drives and basic needs. In his book *Art and Artist: Creative Urge and Personality Development* (originally published in 1932), Rank asserts that forming of the personality is

the first manifestation of the creative impulse (1989: 37). Moreover, Rank – contra to his influential teacher – thinks that creativity has nothing to do with sexuality: ‘... the creative impulse which leads to the liberation of forming of the individual personality – and likewise determines its artistic creativeness – has something positively antisexual in its yearning for independence from organic conditions’ (1989: xxiii).

Rank also links the emergence of individual creativity to the gradual development of individualism in the West in modern times:

The individual artist, whose growth from the creative conception of a god has been sketched out, no longer uses the collective ideology of religion to perpetuate himself, but the personal religion of genius, which is the precondition of any productions by the individualist artist-type. And so we have primitive art, the expression of a collective ideology, perpetuated by abstraction which has found its religious expression in the idea of the soul; Classical art, based on a social art-concept, perpetuated by idealization, which has found its purest expression in the conception of beauty; and, lastly, modern art, based on the concept of individual genius and perpetuated by concretization, which has found its clearest expression in the personality-cult of the artistic individuality itself.

(1989: 45)

Furthermore, Rank insists that ‘in creation the artist tries to immortalize his mortal life’ (Rank, 1989: 39). Accordingly, a work of art is a by-product of a whole range of impulses, and its intention is to immortalise himself against the transient experience of time. It is also a refuge against immortality. One of these impulses is the urge to create one’s personality, which is also the urge to follow the individual ‘creative will-principle’ that is spiritual in nature. Rank changed his view about Freud’s definition of art being sexual as a limitation and begged the question, in his book *Art and Artist*, ‘we have here something different, higher and symbolical’ (1932:26). His stance aligned closer to Jung’s view. Creativity becomes a form of individualist spiritual legacy, which brings together the selfish-individualistic and

collective aspects of the artist's life. However, in relation to a stand-up comedian his legacy now lasts in video or film content. But primarily Rank is appropriate for the art as the creation of personality. According to him, a work of art is a by-product of a whole range of impulses, including the individualistic desire to assert oneself and to assure one's separateness from the crowd. One of these impulses is the urge to create one's personality – to be born as a separate person, which is also the urge to follow the 'creative will-principle' that is spiritual in nature. In other words, creativity becomes a form of individualist religion, which brings together the selfish-individualistic and collective aspects of the artist's life.

Similarly, Jung regards the work of art as coming from an inexplicable spiritual source. Far from being the direct result of childhood problems, the psychological origins of a work of art are mysterious. Jung insists that the origins of creativity lie deeper than the artist's personal issues; it grows out of the collective unconscious. This living thing is an autonomous complex, a split-off part of the psyche. When launched, it can be so powerful that the artist may entirely lose control over his own psyche, and find himself following the powerful creative impulse. When this happens, the artist's task is to shape and channel the impulse in the right direction and use its might and creative energy correctly. The artist becomes a vehicle obeying the power of the creative force.

Moreover, because the impulse is born in the collective and not the personal unconscious, the artist may not recognise it as 'his': 'Depending on its energy charge, it may appear either as a mere disturbance of conscious activities, or a supraordinated authority, which can harness the ego to its purpose' (CW15: para. 115).

This can be related to the experiences of the stand-up performer on stage. Whereas Freud and Lacan are too limited in their views on creativity, Jung allows creativity to remain a force of its own; to live and breathe. Many comedians regard their creative process as something that happens by itself, independently from the performer. For instance, the American stand-up comedian Louie Anderson says:

I haven't been able to figure out [whether comedy comes out of sadness or pain]. I think that comedy just comes out of you. And I think whatever kind of person you are, that's the kind of comedy that comes out. I think that half of how a joke is formed, is the right mixture of a lot of different things in the individual. It's like ingredients go into you, like maybe a rough childhood, an oversensitive heart, an intelligent mind, and then maybe a defiance and rebellion. And I think all those things go in the right combination, and then they come out as a joke or as a monologue.

(Ajaye, 2002: 54)

Marie-Louise von Franz writes that 'it is generally the creative artist who creates the future. A civilization, which has no creative people, is doomed. So the person who is really in touch with the future, with the germs of the future, is the creative personality' (Von Franz and Hillman, 1979: 11).

The archetypal psychologist James Hillman wrote extensively on creativity in different aspects of human existence. For instance, in *Re-Visioning Psychology* (1975) he argues that the psyche is creative and that contemporary obsession with 'scientification' of life stifles psychic images and restrains their flow (Hillman, 1992: 2). In *The Myth of Analysis: Three Essays in Archetypal Psychology* (originally published in 1960) Hillman writes that psyche is, in fact, a great creative achievement of human beings (1999: 20). Hillman follows Jung in his assessment of creativity and expands Jung's idea of the 'creative instinct; the ability of human beings to actively change themselves and their environments. This instinct is not some

kind of 'special gift' – it is present in everyone and manifests itself to everyone willing to explore one's own soul. Hillman writes:

Jung affirmed often enough that the creative instinct is *sui generis* and independent of neurotic psychodynamics. It is not a gift or special grace, and ability, talent or trick. Rather it is that immense energy coming from beyond man's psyche which pushes one to self-dedication via one or another specific medium. Creativity impels devotion to one's person in its becoming through the medium, and it brings with it a sense of helplessness and increasing awareness of its numinous power. Hence our relation to creativity fosters the religious attitude, and our description of it often uses religious language. Our experiences of the force of individuality and its relentless pressure upon each soul to realise its potential are difficult to distinguish from experiences of the immanent Gods in their creator roles. For the Gods, too, are ectopsychic, 'beyond' the soul, neither wholly in it nor of it.

(1999: 35-36)

The creation Gods are also the destroying Gods, Hillman adds (1999: 36). This is certainly true of comedic creativity, which is generally more destructive than the creative instinct at work in other arts. Comedic creativity can be definitely seen as being both positive and negative because during the performance the comedian attacks the audience, the people he uses in his jokes (including his family and spouse) and even himself. In fact, successful comedy is always aggressive. By its very nature, it is a very male art. A number of famous comedians (such as Frankie Boyle and Sam Kinison) have built a career on aggression and controversial behaviour.

Comedians also support the idea that creativity is closely linked to destruction – including self-destruction. The comedian Dana Gould says:

Firstly, the same brain that makes the good stuff makes the bad stuff. Is it really so shocking that an engine that can propel a car from zero to 100 mph in six seconds can do pretty much the same thing in reverse? Comedians dwell on things. They ponder, stew, obsess and spin out scenarios for comedic effect. The more inventive the mind, the funnier the scenarios. The genius of a great comedian is the ability to stride onstage

and make it look like all of those amazing ideas are flowing naturally, in the moment and off-the-cuff. But don't be fooled. A lot of after-hours thought, poured into notebook after notebook, goes into that stuff. Late nights alone with a hyperactive imagination, however, is also when you can get into a lot of trouble.

(Gould, *The Rolling Stone*, 27 August 2014)

Gould adds that: 'Laughing and screaming are physiological cousins; both used by the body to release anxiety and tension. In terms of comedians, when the chicken-and-egg question of, "which came first, the sad or the funny" is raised, I can, with authority, say that the egg of acute anxiety begat the rubber chicken of inspired hilarity. In other words, I literally laughed to keep from crying. As do so many' (Gould, *The Rolling Stone*, 27 August 2014).

Similarly, speaking about the suicide of Robin Williams, the director Terry Gilliam insists that comedic talent is a miracle and a gift which 'does not come from nothing': 'When the gods gift you with the kind of talent Robin had, there's a price to pay. It comes from deep problems inside. A concern, all sorts of fears. Yet he could always channel those things and turn them into gold. I think that comes with the territory' (Youngs, *BBC News*, 12 August 2014).

Working stand-up comedians often describe their creative process as something that happens against their will – by itself. For instance, Louis Anderson says in an interview:

I think comedy just comes out of you. And I think whatever kind of person you are, that's the kind of comedy that comes out. I think that half of how a joke is formed, or how comedy is formed, is the right mixture of a lot of different things in that individual. It's like ingredients go into you, like maybe a rough childhood, an oversensitive heart, an intelligent mind, and then maybe a defiance and rebellion. And I think all those things go in the right combination, and then they come out as a joke or as a monologue.

(Ajaye, 2002: 54)

Speaking about the source of creative inspiration, the famous British comedian John Cleese says in an interview to an online magazine Inc: ‘Creativity is not a talent; it’s a way of operating’ (<http://www.inc.com/samuel-bacharach/leadership-tips-from-5-stand-up-comics.html>). Meanwhile, the British actor and comedian Ricky argues that it is important to find your own outlet of creativity – which supports Hillman’s idea of the independent psychic force underlying all specific talents: ‘You should bring something into the world that wasn’t in the world before. It does not matter what it is. It does not matter if it’s a table or a film or gardening – everyone should create. You should do something, then sit back and say, “I did that”’ (<http://www.inc.com/samuel-bacharach/leadership-tips-from-5-stand-up-comics.html>). The psycho-analyst Donald Winnicott’s statement in *Playing and Reality*, writes regarding the nature of human creativity: it is a universal force that can manifest itself in a variety of forms depending on the individual as well as the environment. ‘it is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living (1971:65). The important moment, however, is to find out what one’s specific talent is. Then one can start utilising the powerful creative force that dwells in the psyche.

Some comedians like to explore scandalous subjects. For instance, Jimmy Carr has delivered a range of examples of aggressive and insensitive comedy. One of them was a joke about soldiers wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq: ‘Say what you like about those servicemen amputees from Iraq and Afghanistan, but we are going to have a fucking Paralympic team in 2012’ (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/nov/05/jimmy-carr-paralympics-joke>). The joke did not go well with the public, and Carr ended up issuing a public apology.

The American comedian Sam Kinison also boasts an array of rude and insensitive material. This includes a joke about hungry children in developing countries: ‘I’m like anyone else on

this planet — I'm very moved by world hunger. I see the same commercials, with those little kids, starving, and very depressed. I watch those kids and I go, 'Fuck, I know the Film crew could give this kid a sandwich!' There's a director five feet away going, 'don't feed him yet! Get that sandwich outta here! It doesn't work unless he looks hungry!!!'

(<http://www.comedyontap.com/jokes/kinison/skjokes.html>).

Probably the best (or the worst!) examples of insensitive comedy remains Jerry Sadowitz's infamous joke about Nelson Mandela. The joke was a result of a bet with his friend and fellow comedian, Nick Revell. Sadowitz came on stage and said: 'Nelson_Mandela, what a cunt. Terry Waite, fucking bastard. I dunno, you lend some people a fiver, you never see them again.' (<http://www.gqmagazine.co.uk/comment/articles/2010-02/02/james-mullinger-jerry-sadowitz>).

Aggression and destruction, however, do not have to be always aimed at other people – in live comedy there is a good deal of self-aggression and aggression aimed at the nearest and dearest. A good example of this is Michael McIntyre's joke about his two-year-old toddler: 'I've got a little baby, I made him...He doesn't speak, he's two...He's a slow learner, he's only got two words...car and map... I'm slightly worried he's trying to escape. If his next word is 'passport', we are in serious trouble!'
(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/comedy/9494410/Michael-McIntyre-jokes-and-one-liners.html>).

Jung writes extensively in 'Psychology and Literature', 'On the relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry' and "'Ulysses": a Monologue,' about the social uses of creativity. Quite in line with Jung's vision of creativity and its social significance (via the collective

unconscious), Lawrence E. Mintz argues in his article ‘Stand-up Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation’ that comedy is an inherently social phenomenon, and its roots are ‘entwined with rites, rituals and dramatic experiences’. It is also ‘the purest public communication, performing essentially the same social and cultural roles in practically every known society, past and present’ (Mintz, 1985: 71).

The stand-up creative process may be inspired by childhood problems, but the urge to be on stage has many more layers and goes beyond psychoanalytic views on creativity. Comedy can be about revealing oneself – but it is also about transforming oneself as well as acting out of altruistic impulses. Far from being a confessional act in which the audience plays the role of the obedient, passive and loving mother, stand-up incorporates elements of intellectual, emotional and social transformation.

Winnicott’s theory of creativity was adjacent to his theories of personality development. A work of art is seen as a symbol of the artist’s existence as an individual personality. Transitional objects – blankets, teddies and dolls – constitute the first expression of imagination at work; they are the first ‘created’, ‘imagined’ objects. Winnicott continues in *Playing and Reality* (1971):

When symbolism is employed the infant is already clearly distinguishing between fantasy and fact, between inner objects and external objects, between primary creativity and perception. But the term transitional object, according to my suggestion, gives room for the process of becoming able to accept difference and similarity. I think there is use for a term for the root of symbolism in time, a term that describes the infant’s journey from the purely subjective to objectivity; and it seems to me that the transitional object (piece of blanket, etc.) is what we see of this journey of progress towards experiencing.

(Winnicott, 1992: 3-7)

Winnicott argues that living creatively is an important part of healthy living. A healthy individual is an individual who has the ability to express himself, it is not in uniquely talented people. For Winnicott, creativity encompasses a range of everyday activities including a garden, a costume or a meal cooked at home (1999: 65). The creative impulse is present in anyone – baby, child, adolescent, adult, old man or woman (1999: 69). In Winnicott's view, in his analysis of the great artists and authors, Freud and his disciples divert the attention from the main ingredient of the creative process: the creative impulse. Meanwhile:

...it is inevitable that such studies of great men tend to irritate artists and creative people in general. It could be that these studies that we are tempted to make are irritating because they look as if they are getting somewhere, as if they will soon be able to explain why this man was great and that woman achieved much, but the direction of inquiry is wrong. The main theme is being circumvented, that of the creative impulse itself. The creation stands between the observer and the artist's creativity.

(1999: 69)

Donald Winnicott wrote about the necessity to be shielded from the painful experience of reality (Winnicott, 1975[1951]). Fantasy not only provides a meaningful narrative, as Jean Knox puts it (Knox, 2003: 120), but also serves as a motivating and driving force. Speaking about stand-up comedians, fantasy of recognition, expression and becoming a headliner or a solo arena stand-up comedian can be said to provide the necessary ambition for the comedians to go on stage and seek attention from the audience.

Winnicott almost accepts Melanie Klein's views on the subject of creativity as being a by-product of aggression and the subsequent impulse to restore and repair both the subject and the relationship. Gould writes about the connection between the child's fear of losing the mother and the birth of comedy, the emergence of comedic imagination. It is certainly born

out of anguish, of the desire to recreate the parent and to laugh at one's silly panic about losing her. This, however, is not about happiness – this is about the ability to repair things:

Being funny is not the same as being happy. This is an area to which I can speak with some expertise. False modesty aside, I have always been pretty funny. My elementary school report cards cite my “hyperactive imagination,” and my “proclivity towards being talkative.” I was also insecure, terrified and so crammed full of anxiety that I could barely function. Why? Because of my “hyperactive imagination.” One day I came home from school and could not find my mother. She had gone next door to visit our neighbour and lost track of time. How did she know I was home? Because she heard me screaming.

Having my mother not answer when I called her name, at eight years old, did not mean I had license to watch cartoons and stuff my face until she showed up. It meant something had happened. She had been taken away and I was now alone and defenceless in a hostile world. How would I eat? Who would take care of me? Was she dead? Who killed my mother?! Was I next?! Of course I screamed. I screamed and screamed and scr – “Oh, hi, mom. There you are. I was just wondering where you'd stepped away to. No, I didn't piss myself, I accidentally spilled a glass of urine on my underwear before slipping my pants on and it must have soaked through. Say, what did you make of the President's speech last night?”

(Gould, *The Rolling Stone*, 27 August 2014)

In fact, this goes back to Otto Rank's argument that ‘the act which we have described as the artist's self-appointment as such is in itself a spontaneous expression of the creative impulse, of which the first manifestation is simply the forming of the personality itself’ (Rank, 1989: 37). In creating the work of art, the artist, in fact, creates or re-creates his own self; he re-makes his personality.

Thus, the stand-up is able to return to his early stage, very much like the baby who is looking for ways to deal with the loss of omnipotence and perfect mirroring as he has the ‘mother’ to support his exploration and journey whilst he creates a new object that can match the original lost object (the mother) – or even be better than the mother. Since the artist is in control, overseen by his mother and the feeling of being ‘omnipotent’ within the borders of his little

universe, he can produce ‘an object that more fully contains and realises the artist’s self’ (Wright, 2009: 52):

With the help of this medium, and through the forms he creates, the artist retrieves elements of his subjectivity that were in danger of being lost. Within this new object – the art object in process of formation – he places these retrieved subjective elements within the forms of his own making. Thus an art work in progress is both maternal extension of the self, and a self in formation, within which the artist attempts integration with all the skill he can muster. The structure that results from this intuitive project (the art object) is in continuity with the fabric of the artist’s self and resonates with it. It is a genuine mix-up of artist and object, though now with a separate existence in the real world.

(2009: 52-53)

As members of the audience, we seek to consume someone else’s created symbols and transitional objects (‘works of art’) because we wish to experience ‘contact with our own dormant sentience, and through it carefully contrived and resonant forms responding to it’ (2009: 53).

This cluster of ideas certainly has validity for the stand-up circuit. Many comedians have spoken about the reparative function of their art. George Carlin states that the comedian is the boss and his material represents him. Moreover, it is good for the material to be organised into a coherent personal narrative: ‘There’s gotta be a kind of thread to your material because it represents you. It’s nice to have a series of unrelated jokes, but it’s better when they have a kind of segue’ (Ajaye, 2002: 85).

Throughout this thesis I argue that creativity is compassionate, compassionate healing. The Freudian theory of humour as form of sublimating aggression is limited to an underlying pessimism. The Jungian approach demonstrates the importance of transformation and repair

whilst utilising the regressive function and the aggressive impulse, as a destructive element, in order to deconstruct and re-integrate.

Meanwhile, Winnicott's idea of the transitional object as being the bedrock of human creativity does not contradict Jung's views on creativity as being an important part of the individuation process. One might argue that the transitional object restores the artist's sense (or creates an illusion) of wholeness. Although the Jungian school traditionally analyses 'wholeness' as a sense of unity with a higher force while Winnicott and Wright discuss it in terms of 'replacement' and 'illusion', the two versions of 'wholeness' do not contradict each other and can be used together to describe the comedian's emotional growth. Illusion can help the baby revive the needed experience of being held by the mother and it holds and holds onto the missing experience. The 'mother' lends herself to the process and the illusion can take place as she is formed and reformed to the baby's image. Thus the comedian can securely continue to create his art within an emotional container.

Anthony Storr argues: 'the ecstatic sense of wholeness is bound to be transient because it has no part in the total pattern of 'adaptation through maladaptation' which is characteristic of our species. Boeotian bliss is not conducive to invention: the hunger of imagination, the desire and pursuit of the whole, take origin from the realisation that something is missing, from awareness of incompleteness' (Storr, 1989: 197).

One can combine the concepts of individuation and work of art as transitional objects. In Jungian psychology, the Self is the image of wholeness. Combining his personality with the transitional object, the artist recreates the Self; he or she goes back to the 'baby' stage when the world seems to be manageable and controllable. However, this is not a regressive action –

it is part of the individuation process. The artist does not re-create his ideal world; instead, he or she can be said to shape the future while looking back. Creativity is a paradox – just like the union of the opposites is a paradox. Storr writes:

The path of individuation and the changes of attitude, which take place can be closely matched with accounts of the creative process given by men and women of genius. First, the mental state during which new ideas arise or inspiration occurs is exactly that which Jung recommended to his patients and which he called ‘active imagination’. Although, occasionally, the germ of a new composition or hypothesis occurs in a dream, by far the greater number of new ideas occurs during a state of reverie, intermediate between waking and sleeping.

(1989: 199)

Storr also argues that ‘creativity usually consists of forming new links between formerly disparate entities, the union between opposites described by Jung’ (1989: 199). In other words, when people use art as a transitional object; they individuate and self-create: ‘The end process of individuation shares with ecstatic states the experience of a new unity within, described by Jung as being a new reciprocity between conscious and unconscious. The sense of peace, of reconciliation with life, of being part of a greater whole, is closely similar’ (1989: 196).

However, the sense of peace described by Storr is temporary, as the transitional object is a poor replacement of the original state of unity with the object. The unity of opposites, being a paradoxical idea, is never stable and never fully achievable. It has to be recreated anew all the time. The sense of wholeness that comes with stage/public success is also temporary. The comedian is compelled to go back to the audience in order to transform certain psychic agencies within himself; to redeem certain lost elements of his psyche. This process is never

complete because 'ideal' individuation, as Jung postulated, can never be achieved. Comedians on stage seek wholeness and individuation in unity, with society and in relation to the audience. This union with the audience is almost alchemical, as the performer steps back in order to go forward.

CHAPTER 7

GOING ON STAGE: INTER-AND-INTRAPSYCHIC MATRIX OF STAND-UP COMEDY

This chapter discusses the mechanics of the creative process of the stand-up performer. Using a combination of Jungian, Freudian, Adlerian and attachment theories we will trace the trajectory of the comedian's creative act including three phases: preparation, on-stage and post-performance. I will explore the inter and intra-psychic processes and agencies activated at each of the comedian's three creative stages, Before, During and After the performance.

7.1.

Before

Most of the psychic processes involved in the preparation stage are intrapsychic; internal and profoundly personal. However, some of the processes also involve interaction with other people. Often the preparatory stage of performance is born out of interaction with others rather than being the result of intensive thought and lonely creative activity. The stand-ups inspiration may come from by his family situation or by the world around him. It is the creative urge that stands on its own and have its own merit. It has to be more than sublimation. Sublimation would imply that all comedians' artistic ability is regressive by nature and reforms unpleasant instinct into socially an acceptable form. It is arguable that their work is also reparative and progressive; while they refer to their drives and unpleasant

contributory instincts they also re-evaluate and reform themselves. The alchemical significance cannot be ignored in the stand-up practice, in which a situation or experience as ‘substance’ is elevated, uplifted, stimulating a spiritual transformative quality.

Negative experiences and the subsequent need for sublimation as a defense mechanism, self-expression, self-formation and reformation often trigger the creative process. Canadian comedian Jim Carrey says: ‘I don’t think human beings learn anything without desperation. Desperation is a necessary ingredient to learning anything or creating anything. Period. If you ain’t desperate at some point, you ain’t interesting’. He adds: ‘If you ain’t in the moment, you are either looking forward to uncertainty, or back to pain and regret’.

All aspects and complexities of life can serve as the inspiration for the jokes: politics, personal life – or the opportunity to have freedom in a regulated, structured environment. Like any creative activity, joke writing is a meaning-making process.

The on-stage persona is an exaggerated form of one or the other aspect of one’s personality. Usually comedians choose the subject with which they are most comfortable. The choice of the ‘favourite’ subject is often determined by the comedian’s psychological type. Jung created a psychological typological map,, which became a tool for locating an individual’s propensity in relation to the conscious functioning of the psyche. This psychological system containing dimensions of decision-making equipment – the functions – is embedded in the area of the psyche which Jung termed a ‘critical apparatus’. The individual contains all four functions which are expressed through an attitude. It is based upon these functions that individuals are categorised into types. Jung defined Psychological Types as an understanding of the primary conscious and lesser conscious leading to unconscious decision making processes.

Kempinska's 'Pilot Study of Psychological Types in Stand-up Comedy' (2004) there was a correlation between the stand-up and his choice of style. The categorisation chosen were wordsmith, Surreal, Obscene and Physical. Within their type and category a certain attitude was dominant in their material. She continues, 'the psychological typology certainly brings into account the conscious differences and approaches of individuals.'

The task of the comedian is to find something unique, something topical as well as something that has personal significance for him. It is the journey of the conceptual distortion. It is also a world-organising and meaning-making process bringing together random thoughts and ideas, and organising them into a conceptually and creatively coherent whole.

Much of intra psychic inspiration comes from the performers' childhood experiences and from their personal drive to make a mark on the world. For instance, the British comedian David Baddiel says:

Comedy is about retaining the child within you. Most comedians have it in them more than other people. It's not just about finding it – you can't help it, it's just there, and for some reason it's stronger than it is in other people. You haven't grown up.....

The reason I do this job is because I've got a deep confessional drive – my comedy seems to be all about confession. It's probably something to do with the fact that when my younger brother was born he was very much the mum's favourite – and although I wasn't neglected, I feel that there was a time when I wasn't being noticed as me. I remember as I was growing up, I was desperate to tell people about myself and for them to notice me and know who I was – totally. And that seems to be what I'm still doing as a stand-up.

(1994: 71).

Many comedians emphasise the influence of parent-child relations on their choice of profession, as well as the importance of various incidents that happened to them in childhood. Another British comedian, Dominic Holland, says:

I had a very funny upbringing – very Catholic, very disciplinarian father. He was a lecturer in French at London University. Now he's retired. He was very strict and quite draconian. He didn't like me living with my girlfriend. We're a very traditional family. My two brothers are both lawyers, my sister has a Masters in Philosophy. Now she's a town planner. I've got an MBA, so we're all very education-orientated. I'm the only person who's taken a novel career path. I was really worried about telling them – I always thought they wanted me to be successful in business.

(Cook, 1994: 1977)

Often comedians talk about how poverty and social issues influence them as individuals and as performers. For instance, Arnold Brown reveals the lack of ambition in his working-class family and how he felt out of place in his social background:

My mother and father weren't at war with each other, but they used to bicker over everything. My father ran a fruit shop. We were upper working class.I was slightly ashamed of my background and I felt alienated by being Jewish in Scotland. It was very rare that a non-Jewish person would come into the house. It sounds like apartheid, but that was the way it was. It was almost a ghetto mentality.

(Cook, 1994: 81)

Not all of the formative experiences are negative. Some comedians feel inspired by the complexities and intricacies of interpersonal experiences. Comedy also has a very powerful intra psychic aspect. Comedians can be inspired by encounters with other people, and jokes are born out of the tension of these encounters. It is always permitted for a comedian to self-deprecate their own religion and their own race. The comedian's identity is embedded in their community, family and culture. Issues such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality are pertinent. Jokes and performances, therefore, are born out of inter psychic encounters with cultural representations as well as with particular people. His inside world mirrors and echoes the 'inside' dilemma. Translating the emotions into jokes constitutes an important phase of the pre-performance process.

The comedian's task is to build a psychological bridge between his inner world and the outer world; between his own and the audience's problems and interests. In transforming his inner world into the comedic word, he also exposes and sublimates the issues relevant for society. The Jewish comedian Ian Stone often jokes about his Jewish appearance as well as about more serious political issues such as the Holocaust or blaming the Jews for crucifying Jesus. He is dealing with his inherited Judaism more than with the current political events. He is trying to reconcile his present social status with the status inherited from his biological family.

External influences creative, political, social or cultural are therefore, an important part of the creative process in general and its preparatory, pre-performance phase in particular. They have to invest into their material and think of what kind of jokes and linguistic modalities ensure them a better attachment to the audience. The American comedian Richard Jeni says on the issue of being influenced by the outside world: 'If a young comedian is really trying never to be influenced, I think they're doing themselves a disservice. Would you be a novelist and say, "I'm deliberately not going to read any of the great books"? Would you be a scientist and say, "I don't want to know what anybody else is working on"? In one sense there is no truly original idea. All you have is a set of pre-existing ideas combined and filtered through you' (Ajaye, 2002: 108).

External influences are undoubtedly crucial for the comedian's success. Performers peel off layers of their personality in front of the audience – yet, at the same time, they have to link the personal to the social as well as to the audience's interests and culture. The game of being

a stand-up is to pinpoint the different cultures in the room and to be verbally adept to identify with the audience.

7.2

During

The intra psychic and inter psychic processes during this stage are often intermingled. The intrapsychic components of the performance trigger inter psychic events. The two processes are very much related and often merge completely. The comedian is absorbing the audience's reactions and simultaneously thinking about his response to them as well as to the success of his performance. Since he is very concerned with his success at this stage, he keeps thinking about the public's reaction to his jokes. He needs to monitor it and, if necessary, modify his behaviour and performance. His acceptance by the audience depends on the successful connection with it – and this is a very important aspect of the intra psychic process. The performance starts within, flows into the audience, is then re-absorbed by the comedian who – armed with his knowledge of the audience – prepares the next wave of jokes. After re-absorption, the material transforms internally. The 'during' stage of the live creative process is then doubly intensive because it involves several types of processes merging, intermingling and working together.

7.2.1

The Stand-up Comedian's Potential to Individuation on Stage

One of the key arguments of this thesis is that the stand-up comedian has the potential individuate on stage together with their audience. In order to go through this kind of comedic

individuation, the comedian should be able to possess the ability to self-reflect and to laugh at himself or herself. As Mario Jacoby writes in *Individuation and Narcissism*:

Time and again we may observe that people suffering from typical 'narcissistic vulnerability' just 'do not understand jokes'. They tend to suspect that other people's utterances are meant as an insult to their own person. One would need to treat them with the greatest care, as if walking on egg-shells. [...]

It is quite possible for particularly 'talented' narcissists to develop a whole arsenal of witty and sarcastic remarks in order to scare off potential aggressors – otherwise they fear they will themselves become the target of mockery. But witticism and sarcasm are not synonymous with true humour; they can be used, rather, as defensive weapons in that they prevent feelings of hurt and embarrassment from 'coming too close'. They also keep people 'at a certain distance'.

(Jacoby, 1999: 127).

The stand-up's creativity relies on his relationship with the audience and aids the comedian in reflecting and re-integrating the lost, repressed and vulnerable parts of his psyche. The transference in the relationship with the audience integrates psychic components whilst developing the stand-up's ego. In the words of another comedian, Steve Punt: 'I find it ... upsetting when the audience ignores you. That's so depressing, because the whole illusion goes. Without that joke and response, there's nothing there at all' (Cook, 1999: 213).

American comedian Chris Rock agrees: 'It's weird. It's different every night because I change every day. Some nights I'm depressed, but as soon as they introduce me, it's all gone. I hear the music, and the people getting into it, and I know that as soon as I step out there, there will be a roar, so whatever down feelings I had are all gone' (Ajaye, 2002: 180). Chris Rock's words emphasise the importance of the collective aspect of the individuation process.

The disparate audience, the 'mother' can create anxiety in the comedian and disorientate him and if a consistent experience it can be crippling. He can through his self-evaluation of 'I and thou' realise that not all of him and his material was bad and to rectify those elements which

brought displeasure either by rejecting the audience's response or by changing his material. The disparate 'mother' can symbolically mirror the disunited Self, but if the comedian has a 'secure base' and as Neumann (1973) illustrates in his book 'The Child', that the 'ego' is within his 'Self' and not with the 'mother'. The comedian can accept the ambivalence without negative affect.

The ritual of the comedy club can create a heightened state similar to a religious revelation, which can prelude a numinous experience and the comedian as a transcendent power for the audience. The non-verbal dialectic between the stand-up and the 'mother' creates a frisson which is activated by the inter and intra-psychic unity of boundaries that can make the comedian feel ecstatic, godlike and omnipotent. Humbert explains that: 'numinosity is an Intensitatisfaktor (intensity factor). It corresponds to the intensity with which a representation takes over consciousness and become meaningful to it. It is thus an energetic phenomenon' (1988:42).

The British comedian Bruce Morton describes his encounter with the numinous feeling of omnipotence that often occurs during a particularly powerful and successful performance:

Some kind of chemistry happens in the first five seconds – something happens in the room. This'll look f**** pompous in print but it's almost like a spiritual thing. I've felt like I'm actually half an inch off the stage. I'm not walking, I'm floating, and later I can't remember how I got from one end of the stage to the other. That's as good as it gets. You come off feeling not so much, "God, I was such a star there!" but just, "What f**** fun I had there! No wonder I do this for a living!"

(Cook, 1994: 183)

The stand-up has a vital and critical voice, which allows the truth 'to slip out.' (Freud, 1960: 126). This voice is 'free of pretence,' as he observes and exposes society and social change,

resonating with members of the audience and drawing disparate members together through his humorous commentary.

Jung recognises the impact and value of the individual in relation to the audience:

‘Although the dangers of the individual identifying with the collectivity are very great indeed, the relationship between the individual and society or a group is essential, since no individual stands by himself but depends upon symbiosis with a group. The self, the very centre of an individual, is of a conglomerate nature. It is, as it were, a group. It is a collectivity in itself and therefore, always, when it works most positively, creates a group’.

(Adler, Jaffe,1973:508)

Chris Rock confirms the need for the connection with the audience: ‘I am constantly looking for the ad-lib.... I am constantly feeling the audience’ (Ajay,2002: 179). It is this ‘connection’ with the audience that the alchemical fusion takes place and transformation occurs which is similar to the process of transference and counter-transference within the therapeutic setting. Jung asserted that the analytical relationship was a ‘dialectical process,’ both therapist and client aim for an understanding, a relationship where the intention to exchange, transfer and receive the ‘knowledge’ is unified. The stand-up understands his relationship through feelings of empathy, negativity, closeness or separation. However, there is rhythm of unconscious delivery whereby the ‘mother’ can respond favourably even if the material is only adequate. The stand-up has a heightened sense of awareness of the non-verbal response and with experience he learns to adapt to those responses immediately i.e. ‘the ad-lib’ in order to create the treasured outcome of the reverie of the stand-up/‘mother’ connection.

The British-Jewish comedian David Baddiel had a many years of rejecting the therapeutic value of the process saying: ‘it’s so cathartic being onstage, when you’re doing well, that you

feel you should have come to some other point at the end of it, but your problems are still there at the end of the day.’ However, A number of years later, when his father was diagnosed with dementia he wrote and performed a stand-up piece about his father’s illness which had a positive therapeutic experience.“(Writing the show) was therapeutic, definitely, and it is therapeutic performing it,” said David. <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/showbiz/549033/David-Baddiel-admits-crying-stage-during-new-stand-up-about-father-dementia>

The show ‘My Twisted Love Letter to my Parents,’ also reveals that his mother was unfaithful in her marriage. He uses his show as retaliatory experience, through which he paradoxically diminishes his father’s power. We can humorously observe Freud’s controversial death Instinct,’ in Baddiel’s piece (1920). Freud’s libidinal theory had to be revised as having a dual role both creative and destructive “the death instincts are (initially) directed toward and tend towards self-destruction, but they are subsequently turned towards the outside world in the form of the aggressive and destructive instinct.’ Although there is a similarity between Jim Breuer’s experience, and the Amfortas Wound, David Baddiel repaired and enlightened by diminishing his father’s domination through mild aggression rather than compassion. Through his humour Baddiel gains command over his abusive father and finds healing through retaliation and restitution.

Anderson defines comedic creativity as some kind of alchemical process: ‘I think that half of how the joke is formed, or how comedy is formed, is the right mixture of a lot of different things in that individual. It’s like ingredients go into you, like maybe a rough childhood, and oversensitive heart, an intelligent mind, and then maybe a defiance and rebellion. And I think all those things go in the right combination, and they come out as a joke or as a monologue’ (2002: 54).

Individuation is both an internal and external process. The comedian's internal debate occurs as the audience response oscillates between the comedian and the audience. This means that the performance is always fluid and constantly changing; yet, at the same time, the comedian aims to remain in control of the whole process. Within this comedic process the comedian aims to appease if not heal the quenching pain of the distortions in life. The comedian reveals his guilt, shame, taboos, desires both actual and delusional, which resonate with the core of personal and social psychic drives and anxieties. Individually, they expose the collective complexes and give them a persona or a Scapegoat. The scapegoat, as Perera (1932), informs us historically means finding the one or one's who can be identified with evil and wrongdoing and blamed for it. In the past it was a spiritual religious literal ritual where negative elements were placed on the goat's head. This was to sacredly purge of defined negative qualities. Furthermore, 'the human scapegoat, could be actors who undertook the ritual drama for pay (1932:9). The comedian, such as Bill Hicks and Jerry Sadowitz can be such scapegoats whose outspoken taboo breaking humour can carry the guilt and shame of evil and shameful behaviour, which can disrupt relationships. This gives the member of the audience the opportunity to evaluate such behaviours whereas, from the maternal point of view the scapegoat can be identified with their own shame and guilt and thus be rejected and punished. The scapegoat as a stand-up in regular comedic circles finds it difficult to be accepted, as his material content is too disruptive, outspoken and unnerving for a tenuously secure society. Whereas controversial narcissistic stand-ups like Frankie Boyle, Russell Brand and Louis CK may not resonate with the audience and social issues they experience. When the stand-up is conscious of this cathartic process individuation can occur.

7.2.2

Attachment and Seduction

The key to the performer's success with the audience is 'seduction'. The stand-up has to attract the symbolic 'mother' whose attention he has to capture and hold. On stage, comedians have to be humble and, at the same time, look powerful and in control.

The comedian's relationship with the audience may be theorised as pre-oedipal; based on the pure, intense, pleasurable and (ideally) unrestrained interaction between the person on stage and the people who are listening to him. One could say that the performer undergoes a number of narcissistic processes and that his desire for the energy that he gets from the audience is also narcissistic. Freud postulates that mature adults never forget the affectionate fixations and the constant hunger for pleasure they had as children. He writes in the essay entitled 'On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love' (1912):

These affectionate fixations of the child persist throughout childhood, and continually carry along with them eroticism, which is consequently diverted from its sexual aims. Then at the age of puberty they are joined by the powerful 'sensual' current, which no longer mistakes its aims. It never fails, apparently, to follow the earlier path and the cathect objects of the primary infantile choice with quotas of libido that are now far stronger. [...] These new object will be chosen by the model (imago) of the infantile ones, but in the course of time they will attract to themselves the affection that was tied to the earlier ones. [...]

(Freud, SE XI: 180-181)

In his close contact with the audience, the comedian may be said to be coming back to the early experiences of unity with the mother. His affectionate fixation on the mother is replayed on stage. There is an automatic anticipation that the stand-up should be liked by the audience. On his part, the comedian has to prove to the audience that he deserves to be liked. The performer has to go through the process of seducing the audience and proving to it that he is good enough to be loved and praised.

Ego problems and the problems of integration are a major aspect of the individuation process. They often congregate within the shadow and vie for attention within the world. For instance, this is an excerpt from British comedian Eddie Izzard's show, which discusses his struggle to keep the balance between having a realistic view of his abilities and his ego:

It's ok to have an ego. [...]
I went to see Jesus Chris Superstar in Wembley Arena
I got a taxi to Piccadilly
The driver said – 'Are you going back to Wembley?'
'Well I'm glad you asked'
My God my ego kicked in at this time. I'm getting through to the Asian Community!
'Yes I think I will be going back to Wembley'
I struggled so hard to get there..
Taxi Driver: 'Here is my card I'm working tonight. I can take you back'.
The demons they come in my mind.

The British comedian Steve Coogan talks about using creativity to get attention from parents in a large family as well as from random adults:

I remember one weird thing I used to do, which was quite morbid. My sister brought me this wax skin and blood back from America, and I remember doing really detailed wounds on myself. I once went to get the family allowance from the post office with two really neat vampire bites in my neck, with blood down from them – just to see the reaction on the postmistress's face. She said: 'Excuse me. You've done something to your neck'. I said, 'Oh, that's OK'. [...]
It's definitely a case of having to get people's attention. I did do that in my family, because my sister tells me. She says I'd constantly be saying, 'Watch me! Look, watch me! Watch what I can do! Look, I can do this! Watch me do this!' When you're in a big family, you need to fight for attention.

(Cook, 1994: 80)

It is interesting that Coogan speaks of 'fighting for attention' as a survival strategy in an environment in which attention is a resource, and it is sparse. Curiously, Woody Allen also talks about comedy as a way of getting attention and devising strategies to get it. He says in

an interview to a fellow comedian Larry Wilde: ‘...it’s some kind of privation or suffering not necessarily economic that turns someone into a comedian... that makes you squeeze humour from the world or twist the world out of shape’ (Wilde, 2000: 27).

Steve Coogan’s necessity to gain attention, triggered in the child a bout of creativity, which he structured and shaped in such a way as to entertain his audience in the most effective manner, and keep their attention for as long as possible. Using his creativity, he also found a way of expressing himself as well as allowing the audience to express themselves.

A powerful combination of physical comedy and language is always bound to attract attention, either positive or negative, from an audience. Interestingly enough, John Bowlby links the acquisition of linguistic skills to attention-gaining strategies. He writes in *Attachment and Loss, Vol 1* (1969):

Starting, we may suppose, towards the end of his first year, and probably especially active during his second and third when he acquires the powerful and extraordinary gift of language, a child is busy constructing working models of how the physical world might be expected to behave, how his mother and other significant persons might be expected to behave, how he himself might be expected to behave, and how each interacts with the other. Within the framework of these working models he evaluates his situation and makes his plans. And within the framework of these working models of his mother and himself he evaluates special aspects of his situation and makes his attachment plans.

(1969: 354)

Bowlby is right in discerning the issue of interaction here. As a child growing up in a large family, Steve Coogan had to plan his interaction in such a way as to provoke a particular response from his parents and siblings. He was already exploring different audiences and learning different reactions at a young age. He was learning how to establish a connection

with a particular audience as well as gaining a better understanding of what makes people connect.

Similarly, when the comedian goes on stage, he has to ensure very early on during the performance that the audience likes him. Occasionally comedians choose alternative ways of establishing contact with the audience, including being controversial and openly aggressive. However, before the comedian can start engaging with the audience fully, he or she must ensure that the initial contact has actually been made. This is linked to another of Bowlby's ideas – the secure base. Bowlby devised this term in order to describe a whole range of behaviours going on between the child and the parental figure. He also links the secure base to human creativity and self-expression: 'Evidence is accumulating that human beings of all ages are happiest and able to deploy their talents when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise. The person trusted, also known as an attachment figure ... can be considered as providing his (or her) companion with a secure base from which to operate' (Bowlby, 2005: 125). Bowlby also mentions that the need for the secure base is not limited to babies and children but continues into adult life, albeit in a modified form:

The requirement of an attachment figure, a secure personal base, is by no means confined to children though, because of its urgency during those years, it is during those years that it is most evident and has been most studied. There are good reasons for believing, however, that the requirement applies also to adolescents and to mature adults as well. In the latter, admittedly, the requirement is commonly less evident, and it probably differs both between the sexes and at different phases of life.

In the picture of personality functioning that emerges there are two main sets of influences. The first concerns the presence or absence, partial or total, of a trustworthy figure willing and able to provide the kind of secure base required at each phase of the life-cycle. These constitute the external, or environmental, influences. The second set concerns the relative ability or inability of an individual, first, to recognise when another person is both trustworthy and willing to provide a base and, second, when recognised, to collaborate with that other person in such a way that a mutually

rewarding relationship is initiated and maintained. These constitute the internal, or organismic, influences.

(2005: 125)

Bowlby also mentions that his attachment concept discusses the same issues and phenomena that have been explored by other psychology schools in terms of ‘dependency need’ or of ‘object relations’ or of ‘symbiosis and individuation’ (Bowlby, 1980: 39).

The concept of secure base is useful for the analysis of live comedy. Comedians are dependent on the constant emotional feed generated by the audience. The comedian needs the audience to love him for his creativity to unfold. He needs to ensure that he will be accepted and loved consistently and dependably throughout the whole performance – otherwise he would not be able to function. Maternal mirroring – audience’s mirroring of the comedian – is very important for the psychological wellbeing of the comedian during the performance. The famous British comedian Jimmy Carr brilliantly explains the comedian’s need for the ‘secure base’ when he is on stage:

In this precarious and unforgiving profession, the character trait that unites all successful performers is a kind of masochistic compulsion to make people laugh. It’s pure, naked need: a need for love, for popularity, to be noticed, to show off. The great attraction of stand-up as a balm for the fragile ego – as opposed to, say, writing a book or appearing on a radio play – is the instantaneous nature of the audience feedback. Do they love me? Yes, they must do – they’re laughing. Obviously, it’s a double-edged sword: the medium’s greatest attraction is also its cruellest disappointment, because when they don’t laugh, it must follow that they don’t love me. Actually, maybe they hate me. No, I know what it is – they don’t get my jokes. I’m just *too funny* for them to deal with...

(Carr and Greeves, 2006: 114)

On-stage individuation can only happen when the secure base, a firm connection between the comedian and the audience, is present. Absence of a secure base may provoke a strong emotional reaction in the comedian. Many comedians speak of nervousness in anticipation of

being rejected or heckled. This is particularly true of female comedians whose ‘masculine’ profession often attracts envy and anger from the male portion of the audience. The American stand-up, television host and actress Ellen DeGeneres writes about her experience of not having a secure base during performances:

Somehow you just learn to deal with it. You learn to handle your nervousness. You just kind of look at it, you know, you’re not doing brain surgery. This is just a wonderful job you have.....

If [hecklers] are really being mean, which I don’t get anymore because my shows cost more money, so it’s not like they won it or they already had passes or whatever, so people are not going to spend a lot of money to come to be mean. In the beginning when I had people like that (which I did) – being a woman on stage, you have these macho idiots who are drunk who want to get to you and upset you – they used to upset me all the time. I’d just walk off crying sometimes. I mean, they wouldn’t see it, but I would be backstage crying.

(Ajaye, 2002: 95-6)

Building a secure base during a live creative process is always two-way; both the comedian and the audience are involved. Only when this magical connection is present can the transformation of both the audience and the comedian occur. Bion’s concept of reverie links with our analysis of the comedic creative process as an alchemical transformation, the success of which is founded on secure base. The term refers to a state of calm receptiveness that the infant requires of the mother. Her task is to take in the baby’s feelings and to make them meaningful. The baby, through projective identification, would insert into the mother its feelings of anxiety and fear, and, through introjection of a receptive, calm mother image, the infant can develop his own ability to reflect on his states of mind, and deal with them successfully (Hinshelwood, 1991: 420). The mother-audience has to be receptive – in a state of reverie – in order to ensure that the comedian engages his capacity for self-reflection, which has to be congruent with the audience.

In his essay ‘Psychopathic Characters on the Stage’ (1906), Freud writes that the audience is often seduced by the promise of heroic efforts from the performers on stage, as well as by the opportunity to live through powerful experiences, without having to actually suffer: ‘For the spectator knows quite well that actual heroic conduct such as this would be impossible for him without pains and sufferings and acute fears, which would almost cancel out the enjoyment’ (SE, Vol.7: 305-6). The necessity to introject heroic qualities comes from the feelings of inferiority and cowardice:

The spectator is a person who experiences too little, who feels that he is a “poor wretch to whom nothing of importance can happen”, who has long been obliged to damp down, or rather displace, his ambition to stand in his own person at the hub of world affairs; he longs to feel and to act and to arrange things according to his desires – in short, to be a hero. And the playwright and actor enable him to do this by allowing him to identify himself with a hero.

(Freud, SE, Vol.7: 305)

Any creative process is an act of self-reflection, however mediated. Comedians are prepared to go through this ordeal, and they are prepared to endure the risk of failure if something goes wrong. Audience members, as a rule, are not prepared to take such risks but still wish to feel the adrenaline surge and the excitement that goes with identifying with the performer on stage.

7.3

After

After the performance two processes take place: reflection and repair. The comedians assess the creative process and the quality of their connection with the audience. This is when self-reflection and self-understanding and facilitate individuation. Jung regarded the individuation

process as a psychological phenomenon that can only happen when the individual interacts with his society. The connection with the audience is the magical, alchemical moment that assists the comedian's individuation process.

Many comedians do not reflect on their work per se, and do dwell on their self-improvement. However, all live comedy performers think and analyse the audience's reaction to their jokes. By assessing the success of the joke through laughter and emotional response, the comedian measures – in a mediated or even escapist way – himself as a human being. By improving their material, they assess and improve themselves.

Like all creative people, including stand-up comedians, are often seen as narcissistic, self-obsessed, self-indulgent and unconcerned about society. Live creativity is a fair exchange of intellectual and emotional energies between the performer and the viewer. In *Individuation and Narcissism* (1999) Mario Jacoby draws the line between extreme individualistic behaviour and true individuation. Being on stage is not just about being visible, special and admired – it is also about giving something back to the people; being useful for your society. The comedian has to be in tune with the audience in order to please them. Being simply 'special' would not work. Jacoby writes: 'A sense of being special may mean: "I am especially beautiful, intelligent, good, clever, powerful, etc." It may also mean: "My sense of my own worth depends on whether this fact is seen and acknowledged by others; if that is not the case, then I am totally worthless, nothing. My very existence depends on whether my specialness is admiringly acknowledged or not"'. Meanwhile, Jung defines individuation as:

... the process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as being distinct from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality...

Since individuality is a prior and physiological datum, it also expresses itself in psychological ways.

(CW6: paras. 757-758)

At the same time, human beings cannot survive physically or psychologically without the influence of the social. As Aniela Jaffe notes, consciousness always depends on external social conditions that should be taken into consideration when making individual decisions. The individual is never free from his family, his community, or his society. Whoever thinks that he is free from the social is seriously deceiving himself: ‘... one of the tasks of individuation for modern man is to recognise that his autonomous consciousness, which fancies itself so superior and yet so suggestible, is dependent on external social conditions as well as being determined by inner psychic factors and, in spite of this insight, to retain his sense of responsibility and freedom’ (Jaffe, 1986: 93-4).

Thus, the comedian individuates by sharing his personal material, with his community, even if it is a group of strangers. He then gets feedback on this material, which feeds and furthers the processes of reflection and repair.

7.3.1

Reflection

In order to succeed the comedian reflects upon the audience’s reaction to his often very personal material. Since some comedians make their material dangerously personal, it makes the self-reflective process therapeutic and cathartic. Catharsis and sharing of emotions with an audience mostly consisting of strangers, is an important part of the comedian’s individuation process. For instance, the very famous American comedian Joan Rivers was brave enough to

joke about her husband's suicide, which happened a decade ago. The joke turned into a big scandal. Kate Lombardi writes about this incident in The New York Times:

It was all done with Ms. River's brand of can-we-talk intimacy and wildly irreverent humour. And, yes, not surprising from a woman who played the role of herself in a television movie about her husband taking his own life, there were suicide jokes.

'After Edgar killed himself, I went out to dinner with Melissa," Ms. Rivers said. "I looked at the menu and said, 'If Daddy were here to see these prices, he'd kill himself all over again'.

Or this: 'The first year after Edgar killed himself, I was so angry that if he had come home, I probably would have killed him'.

Ms. Rivers is unapologetic about her attitude. Laughter, she says, is healing, and anger is natural. People have the right to grieve how they want and on their own schedule.

(Lombardi, The New York Times, 29 January 1995)

The punishment for Rivers' joke, regarded as distasteful by many, was rather severe and resulted in loss of work and press vilification.

7.3.2

Repair

Repair is a chthonic process primarily because of the chthonic nature of the joke as a phenomenon, but also because comedic creativity is particularly dark and bitter— often comes out of the depths of the traumatised psyche. It is the trauma that we can hear in the joke; and it is the trauma that speaks off stage during the performance. Trauma, which has for many years struggled to find an outlet, finally finds a voice in a joke.

Jung and the post-Jungians, who tend to express psychological phenomena in the form of myth and metaphor, traditionally describe revisiting of traumatic experiences as *catabasis* –

the hero's visit to the underworld. The desire for repair essentially takes the individual back to the pre-sexual, pre-Oedipal stages of his existence. For instance, (the pre-Jungian but already emerging as an independent scholar with original ideas) Jung writes in his seminal work, *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* (1912):

The regressive libido apparently desexualises itself by retreating back step by step to the pre-sexual stage of earliest infancy. Even there it does not make a halt, but in a manner of speaking continues right back to the intrauterine, pre-natal condition and, leaving the sphere of personal psychology altogether, irrupts the collective psyche where Jonah saw the 'mysteries' ('representations collectives') in the whale's belly. The libido thus reaches a kind of inchoate condition in which, like Theseus and Peirithous on their journey to the underworld, it may easily stick fast. But it can also tear itself loose from the maternal embrace and return to the surface with new possibilities in life.

(CW4: para. 171)

To application of the catabasis mytheme to the joke-production process, is appropriate as once can recognise in Baddiel's experience, in pursuit of the truth, the stand-up can descend into the depths of his psyche and illuminate the dark brooding wound that still haunts him. These recovered personal and individual contents, confirmed by many stand-ups, become the foundation of the joke. For instance, the British comedian John Dowie openly says that therapy allows him to 'unearth' the contents of his psyche which could then be utilised for generating new material: 'A lot of the stuff in that [and act he used to perform in 1985] was improvised on stage – and also in therapy sessions, which were very useful for creating new material... it might start off having two laughs in five minutes; then the next night you might do three minutes and get four laughs; then if you're lucky you'll do six minutes and it'll all be funny' (Wilmot and Rosengard, 1989: 199).

The idea is reiterated by the famous actor, author, presenter and comedian Stephen Fry: ‘I’m kind of actually kind of sobbing and kind of tearing at the walls inside my own brain while my mouth is, you know, wittering away in some amusing fashion’ (Owen, *The Independent*, 16 September 2006). In the same interview, given to he says: ‘I always heard voices in my head saying what a useless bastard I am, but the voice is my own’ (Owen, *The Independent*, 16 September 2006).

Fry has struggled with mental illness throughout his life, and at one point nearly gassed himself in a car: ‘I had this image of my parents staring right in at me while I sat there for at least, I think, two hours in the car with my hands over the ignition key. [...] And so I decided not to do it. When you feel you can't go on - it's, it's not just a phrase, it is a ... it's, it's a reality. I could not go on, and I would have killed myself if I didn't have the option of disappearing because it was that absolute’ (Owen, *The Independent*, 16 September 2006).

Repair is a chthonic process primarily because of the chthonic nature of the joke as a phenomenon, but also because comedic creativity is particularly dark and bitter— often comes out of the depths of the traumatised psyche. Trauma, which has for many years struggled to find an outlet, finally finds a voice in a joke.

Repair thus happens upon the hero’s return from the underworld of his psyche and re-joining his community. The comedian, like the mythological hero, gains the treasure and takes it to the ‘mother’. Jung writes about the role of the hero in myth:

‘The hero who sets himself the task of renewing the world and conquering death personifies the world-creating power which, brooding on itself in introversion, coiled round its own egg like a snake, threatens life with its poisonous bite, so that the living may die and be born again from the darkness.’

(CW5: para. 592).

The process of relating to the 'mother' is also a meaning-making process, for only in relation to other human beings can we make sense of both our internal universe and the external world. To quote Jung again:

We must interpret, we must find meanings in things, otherwise we would be quite unable to think about them. We have to break down life and events, which are self-contained processes, into meanings, images, concepts, well knowing that in doing so we are getting further away from the living mystery. As long as we ourselves are caught in the process of creation, we neither see nor understand; indeed we ought not to understand, for nothing is more injurious to immediate experience than cognition. But for the purpose of cognitive understanding we must detach ourselves from the creative process and look at it from the outside; only then does it become an image that expresses what we are bound to call 'meaning'.

(CW15: para. 121)

The stand-up's discoveries and repair is not only personal but also social. The audience benefits from the jokes intellectually as well as psychologically. Not only do the audience laugh at the joke, but they also absorb the issues and problems raised by the comedian during the performance. The repair can happen through post show reflection of the performance experience. The revelation of vulnerabilities and your shame; announcing problems, and having been accepted by the 'mother,' who becomes the 'good enough mother'. The stand-up puts himself into a situation of constant revelation and repercussion when the 'mother' loves you healing can take place.

Meanwhile, the audience finds the person they can identify with, and connect with the comedian via mirroring. Jokes become reparative for the audience when a range of complex problems, otherwise hidden from view, is exposed, discussed and laughed at. The audience and the comedian get the control back from the issues that have been influencing them. Jokes,

like creativity, mute the pain. Even though the pain is not gone entirely, the individual has regained the psychological control over it. It is within this fantasy situation, that replay and repair happens.

Jokes help the stand-up and the audience, 'mother' to reiterate, analyse and re-absorb the painful or problematic situation. The stand-up is the hero who is brave enough to challenge the problems residing in the depths of his psyche, and members of the audience (who are not as brave, but empathise and reflect upon the emotional effect of the stand-up's journey as a myth) benefit from the hero's trip by gaining the picture of their own problems. Even if they do not recognise your problem, they like you enough to listen to you. The comedian Garry Shandling says: 'I think that acceptance is a springboard to go deeper, because once the audience accepts that you're funny, you no longer have to prove that. You're now free to explore' (Ajaye, 2002: 215). Whereas, stand-up, George Wallace, says that like most stand-up the power to be liked is in his hands; he has to seduce the audience into liking him: 'I am so basic that people stop and think, Yeah, that does make sense. It's like when people say to me, "He's just as nice as he wants to be"' (2002: 215).

Jokes are constructed with the ability to self-reflect as they defy the psychic disturbance of narcissistic greed, which is without any self-reflection. Whereas a narcissist would simply act out the anger and pain, the comedian deals with the situation creatively and laughs at it, instead of bottling it up. Repressed aggression and anger are thus dissipated and the whole situation 'repaired' and resolved instead of being pushed to the limit until it becomes unsolvable and potentially dangerous. Stand-up is thus a form of psychological self-sacrifice because, as a comedian, one has to expose one's personal life as he invites other people to

laugh at his personal problems. The audience learns from comedy by observing the catabasis and absorbing it via the processes of mirroring and self-reflection.

Thus, repair happens thanks to three factors: mirroring, empathy and the universality of problems. The mirroring and empathy is mutual as the comedian and the audience enter a period of intense emotional transaction. This emotional link guarantees that the jokes and their author will be understood and accepted by the listener. For instance, the American television host and comedian Johnny Carson argues that the ability to establish an emotional bridge with the audience is the first skill the comedian should learn:

... first of all, the most important thing to me, in comedy – the greatest thing a performer can have if he is going to be successful, is an empathy with the audience. They *have* to like him. And if they like the performer, then you've got eighty per cent of it made. And if you don't have that, it's damned difficult to get the audience on your side. If they resent you or if they don't feel any empathy with you or they can't relate to you, as a human being, it gets awfully difficult to get laughs.

(Wilde, 2000: 156)

Comedy also allows men to look at their feelings without becoming 'effeminate,' because humour allows them to remain masculine while discussing their emotions and vulnerabilities. It is a form of exposed and intense self-reflection, which is more 'masculine' than 'feminine'. It also invites a critical (but not judgemental) response from the audience in the form of laughter.

In fact, the similarity of all psychological problems is a very Jungian idea. The comedian often strives to embody 'the ordinary individual'. According to Jung, archetypes reside in the collective, and the collective unconscious is shared by everyone:

‘... it is sheer objectivity, as wide as the world and open to all the world. There I am the object of every subject, in complete reversal of my ordinary consciousness, where I am always the subject that has an object. There I am utterly one with the world, so much a part of it that I forget all too easily who I really am.’

(CW9/I: para. 46)

The principle of enantiodromia operates when there is a denial of an opposite. It is arguable that there is a psychological affect from the audience transference onto the comedian. By nature, the stand-up comedian is non-conformist and often subversive in his temperament. This could, if it were not expressed within sympathetic and accepting surroundings, manifest itself in personal neurosis. It is within the framework of the club setting that the comedian can engage in the process of confession, which is also a component of the psychotherapeutic process. One cannot ignore the parallel of the comedian’s approach to the play process of telling jokes with the work of Melanie Klein in child analysis, when she states, ‘play analysis had shown that symbolism enabled the child to transfer not only interests, but also phantasies, anxieties, and guilt to objects other than people’. It is arguable that it is only in this process that he can tell the truth, which often underlies the content of the joke, which, if expressed within the framework of pleasure, can prevent further neurosis. It is during the comedian’s performance that the audience becomes a recipient of the cathexes and makes their own interpretation. In turn, the process of transference from the audience is introjected by the comedian as a good enough object. Thus, transformation of the conflict within the comedian can occur.

Enantiodromia is an agency pertinent in the ‘repair’ process, which is activated by the stand up revealing his feelings on stage and consequently being reviewed in the post performance period. The tension of opposites of the performance response effect to the material versus the Self creates a dilemma and internal struggle. His individuality as being the ‘creatura’ versus

the collective is also debated. His daemon is activated in this process and when the enantiomorphic mechanism has been engaged the psychic switch is made and individuation is activated.

It is not only the making conscious of an attitude, but also the acceptance of that awareness in which the process becomes healing. Humour diminishes psychological defences and as such assimilation takes place through the internal unconscious attribute of the transcendent function in uniting the opposites. It is this aspect of the transcendent function that facilitates transition from an unconscious attitude to one becoming conscious. Humorous narrative from the comedian can pose emotional ambiguity for the audience, and by laughing at something that is personally or socially unacceptable (taboo), an internal dialogue is created through which the audience member can find a conscious factor of recognition. It is this recognition of a personal attitude that has the potential to activate the transcendent function. The activation of the transcendent function can lead to the union of opposing forces within. The principle of operates to moderate the polarisation, the effect of which is the movement to the opposite state. Jung states that it is 'a conversion into its opposite'. The unacceptable material at which the audiences laughs can in some cases make the audience member realise the affect of the thought process within the humour and create an enantiomorphic reaction. The dynamic is an internal regulator intrinsic to the individual's interaction internally and externally, consciously and unconsciously, when ethical decisions are made.

7.4

Stand Up Comedy as a Maturation Process

Unlike Jung who displayed in the Amfortas Wound that the male drive was towards a higher elevated spiritual and feeling instinct, Freud believed that during the puberty stage both the male and female focus is sexual:

‘This apparatus is to be set in motion by stimuli, and observation shows us that stimuli can impinge on it from three directions: from the external world by means of the excitation of the erotogenic zones ..., from the organic interior , and from mental life [...] The mental indications consist in a peculiar feeling of tension of an extremely compelling character; and among the numerous somatic one are first and foremost a number of changes in the genitals, which have the obvious sense of being preparations for the sexual act [...].’

(Freud, SE, Vol.7: 208)

It is this sexual excitement of the seduction process along with the attraction response activating the Freudian term ‘libido’ that is palpable on stage and many members of the audience who encourage comedians to have sex after the show. Freud also defined libido as ‘invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or women, and irrespectively of whether its object is a man or a woman’ (SE, Vol.7: 219). Libido is intrinsically linked with objects in the outside world. The ego-libido becomes visible when it cathezes sexual objects – that is when it becomes object-libido. The audience members are the objects, which the libido aims to attract.

Stand-up performance is an opportunity for the comedian to go through the Oedipal stages of differentiation and restructure through the mother child realm of primary communication within the performance. The performer gradually matures on stage and learns to be less obsessed with himself and more understanding towards the world. During the last stage of the Oedipus complex, when the child’s ego turns away from its obsession with the parent of the opposite sex...

...the object-cathexes are given up and replaced by identifications. The authority of the father or the parents is introjected into the ego, and there it forms the nucleus of the super-ego, which takes over the severity of the father and perpetuates his prohibition against incest, and so secures the ego from the return of the libidinal object-cathexis. The libidinal trends belonging to the Oedipus complex are in part desexualised and sublimated (a thing which probably happens with every transformation into an identification) and in part inhibited in their aim and changed into impulses of affection
(Freud, SE, Vol.7: 319)

As the stand-up progresses and psychologically matures, his material often moves from the personal to the collective, and from personal issues to social problems. It is in this movement towards maturation and individuation that the stand-up as Winnicott points out, in the course of time.....introjects the ego – supportive mother and in this way become able to be alone without frequent reference to the mother.’ He is learning to separate from ‘the mother’ and stand alone in his wisdom and artistic merit with the acknowledgment and acceptance of ‘I am alone and in the world’. (1965:32) For instance, the British comedian Rudi Lickwood changed his material significantly in the past twenty years. In the early days of his career, his material used to be based on personal experiences and events. Later it became socially informed. As he mentioned to me in a recent private conversation on Facebook: ‘My comedy is a reflection of the hidden racist barriers that create the glass ceiling for minorities that have given so much to the development of Britain today’ (Facebook, 15 April 2015).

CHAPTER 8

THE COMEDIAN AND DEPRESSION

The comedian's creative process is related to depression and a feeling of being empty as a stage of separation in its wider psychological context. Performing is emotionally and intellectually intensive and although it takes many forms of interaction with the audience it is also a sense of exhaustive depletion, the state of giving. In the height of his performance the stand up can attach the response to his Self rather than to the material, its structure or delivery. All comedians experience a sense of loss after the performance, and also between shows, which can amplify their internal conflicting agencies. The loss can be aligned to the acute anxiety as a replay of the Kleinian 'depressive position' which is constantly replayed and confronted in the stand-up psychological matrix.

It could be argued that the lack a sense of self is being sought to being replaced with a temporary emotional energy such as the audience reaction is a narcissistic issue and has to be analysed as such. It is also directly linked to the question of identity. A variety of approaches to this issue will be used in this chapter, including a number of Freudian and post-Freudian ideas (Freud, Klein), the theories of Heinz Kohut who highlights the narcissistic disturbance to depression and post-Jungian perspectives.

8.1

The Insecure Comedian

Comedy as a profession is often linked to mental health problems including depression and even suicide. There is an observable link between mental health issues and stand-up comedy. In the article ‘The Great Comedians: Personality and Other Factors’, the psychotherapist Samuel S. Janus argues that the fathers of the fifty five comedians with whom he happened to work were ‘described for the most part as either absent, uninterested, or overtly disapproving’ (Janus, 1975: 171). Later in the article he remarks that as many as eighty per cent of comedians hope that therapy relieve them of ‘a power struggle with an overwhelming father’ (1975: 172).

On the surface, it sounds impossible: how can someone whose profession implies making the audience laugh and making people happy (even if temporarily) can be sad or think about ending his life? Besides, does he not get his dose of attention from the grateful audience every time he performs? Surely, his dose of attention should be enough to keep him going for a while?

Apparently, not many performers are capable of retaining the ‘memory’ of ‘being happy’ while on stage. The adulation of the audience is not enough to alleviate the comedian’s depression. There are many examples of comedy stars fighting with depression and other mental health issues. For instance, in his autobiography *Camp David* (2012) the famous British TV comedian David Walliams reveals the truth about his three suicide attempts; the latest being in 2003 (Walliams, 2012:14). In an interview given to The Independent in 2012 he also discusses his life-long battle with depression. Its roots lie in childhood bullying (Dex, The Independent, 4 October 2012). During his appearance in the Radio Four programme

Desert Island Discs, he said that he would take a gun as his luxury item to a desert island so that he could shoot himself if he got lonely. He also says:

I can't stand being on my own. I hate it. I have a pathological fear of being on my own. When I am with my own thoughts I start to unravel myself and I start to think really dark thoughts, self-destructive thoughts.

I am trying to deal with it. I have learnt I have to make plans. I have to see people and do things because I don't want to get myself in that state and I can keep it at bay by being creative.

(Hastings, The Mail on Sunday, February 22, 2009)

In extreme case comedians, including Richard Jeni, Charles Rocket and Ray Combs, lost the fight with depression and committed suicide.

Many more stage and television comedians have been depressed at some stage of their life, or are chronically depressed but manage the condition relatively well – for instance, Steven Fry, Spike Milligan, John Cleese, Michael Barrymore, Tony Hancock, Woody Allen, John Belushi, Peter Cook and Jimmy Carr. For instance, Tony Slattery has admitted having a series of severe breakdowns complicated by alcohol and cocaine. (Sawyer, The Guardian, 6 July 2003).

Jimmy Carr battled with depression beginning in his twenties when, having graduated from Cambridge with a degree in Political Sciences, and then getting a good marketing job, he nevertheless felt dejected: 'my job, my life, how I was, who I was, how I was living... I didn't like it'. He turned to therapy and began training as a psychotherapist (Jones, The Independent, 18 November 2008). However, it was the decision to become a comedian changed his life:

Somewhere along the line came comedy. "It almost sounds retarded, but I was very unhappy and I thought, 'What would make me happy? Comedy would be a joyful thing to do.' I was sad for a good few years, then I got into doing this and got happy." His father, Jim formed JC Productions Ltd and made Jimmy a director to get his career going. His mother, who encouraged him to take the plunge, died from pancreatitis when he was 28. She had amicably separated from his father, Jim, an entrepreneur, seven years earlier. Her death convulsed the family. Carr has an older brother, Colin, a City banker, and a younger brother, Patrick (currently doing a Masters in film in California).

(Jones, *The Independent*, 18 November 2008)

After Robin Williams's suicide in August 2014, the producer and performer John Lloyd explained that it was very common for comedians to struggle with mental health issues:

Robin Williams was a complete genius and did an enormous body of work. You can't do that if you're just depressed. You're more likely to do that if you're bipolar and you have terrific bursts of creative activity. "And there's a price for everything. Often, and I know this as a television producer, if you've finished a series and you've been on a high with pumping adrenalin every day, when you come down from it you're really low. It's punishing.

(Youngs, *The BBC Website*, 12 August 2014)

The comedian Ruby Wax is also very open about her clinical depression – as well as about her treatment at the Priory, the acute mental health rehabilitation centre, where she 'sat catatonically in a chair, staring catatonically into space' (Grace, *The Guardian*, 12 December 2011). Wax is also open about the roots of her unhappiness she was raised by an overly strict father and a mother who was depressive and prone to fits of rage. Her main complaint is the internalized authority, which she inherited from her inadequate parents. She calls it 'the voices in her head' which have been with her ever since and resulted in a 'roller coaster of depression' for most of her adult life. She says in an interview with *The Mirror*:

I'm sure [my mother] was loving but she was also nuts. She had OCD and couldn't stop cleaning. And screaming. She was very critical. And usually when you have the critical voices in your head you pass them on to the next person.

I didn't know it but I was even depressed in my teens. I used to go to sleep for a few days at a time. But nobody knew what it was back then.

(Gask, *The Mirror*, June 2013)

Unlike with other comedians, Wax's depression is life-long and powerful. At times she felt completely out of control, and she had to take extra care to hide her condition from her two children. She says candidly: 'I never contemplated suicide, but when you're in that much agony, mental pain is so much more agonising than physical and all you want it to do is stop. So I didn't plan on jumping from a building but I thought something's got to give' (Gask, *The Mirror*, June 2013).

Gender does not seem to affect the propensity for comedians to become depressed. Ruby Wax has also become an advocate of announcing her mental health issues:

There is still a huge stigma attached to mental illness in this country. Being depressed has become the modern-day witch trials. People can't see it and they don't understand it: some are worried it might be catching. For those who do come clean about their illness, the consequences can be catastrophic. While some industries are now more relaxed about it, there are still many in which your career is effectively over. You can't run a company once you've declared you've been diagnosed as clinically depressed. So the pressure to keep it to yourself, to try and tough it out, can be overwhelming. And, almost invariably, the longer you wait to get help, the worse the problem gets.

(It's Grace, *The Guardian*, 12 December 2011)

She has even become 'the poster girl for depression', encouraging people to share their experiences of being unhappy (*The Guardian*, 12 December 2011). This, of course, is a curious and paradoxical position for a comedian to assume – talking publicly about sadness and depression instead of promoting jokes and laughter.

8.2

The Audience as a Psychological Filler: the Hunger for Love

A media psychologist and consultant Andrew Evans remarks that comedians get most of their love and affection from the audience and therefore any the smallest rejection can lead to depressive thoughts: ‘Because of their keen sense of injustice, they will feel criticism much stronger than us. Some of my patients ignore ten good reviews and are then cut in half by one mediocre one’ (Sheffield, The Guardian, January 27, 1998).

Chris Rock admits in an interview with Franklyn Ajaye that his depression immediately goes away once he gets the undivided attention of the audience:

‘Some nights I’m depressed, but as soon as they introduce me, it’s all gone. I hear the music, and the people getting into it, and I know that as soon as I step out there, there’s going to be a roar, so whatever down feelings I had are all gone.’

(Ajaye,2002: 180)

Chris Rock’s description of his stepping out on stage becomes his psychic nourishment– the physical, palpable manifestation of being loved and accepted. It brings about a state of inflation – a semi-delusional, temporary state of being unconditionally loved by a large group of people. To an extent, this state is also dangerous because it gives one the impression that one will be loved and accepted by the ‘surrogate mother’ forever whereas, in fact, this is only a temporary happening which, when it ends, might trigger a bout of depression and hunger for more attention. Often a depressive episode happens immediately or shortly after the performance. When the intensity of attention plunges, the performer’s psychological state takes a dip too.

The state of inflation is thus very addictive, and can be analysed either from the Freudian or the Jungian perspective. For instance, from the Freudian (or the post-Freudian) angle,

audience addiction can be explained by the narcissistic hunger and the need for mirroring. The intensity of the performance can be compared to the omnipotent paranoid-schizophrenic position of the early pre-Oedipal stage. It is so all-absorbing that one cannot separate oneself from the audience. There is an addiction to the challenge of being on stage – as well as addiction to the feeling of being the centre of attention.

Being on stage is part of a powerful experience, similar to the Jungian participation mystique, when the performer merges with the audience. Participation mystique replaces his separation anxiety and compensates with feelings of connectedness. It is during the performance that the richness of soul connection, which according to Samuels is ‘the non-material aspect of humans-their core, heart, centre,’ is experienced. A critical component of Jung’s definition is within the feeling function, which is activated and heightened and at times overwhelming. The stand-up can be disorientated and experience a feeling of disassociation, which can amplify an earlier under developed psychological state. If there is no internal psychological opposite, as understood within the enantiomeric mechanism, to regulate the feelings then depression can occur where depression can emerge through the separation of comedian/audience, comedian/soul connection or and comedian/other.

This state is so emotionally intensive that it can become addictive. The feeling is totally absorbing, it takes one over; and if there is a small sign of success, it gives one a feeling of completeness. Many comedians go back to this state over and over again to get their supply of the drug that is attention. The state is so emotionally intensive that it can become addictive; it is the ‘Zwang’ as the compulsion to repeat the trauma. During the live creative process and the resultant emotional exchange with the audience, the comedian’s self-esteem inflates, and then it may deflate sharply or gradually after the performance.

Mario Jacoby mentions that Freud linked self-regard directly to narcissistic libido. Freud wrote in *Narcissism: an Introduction* (1914): In the first place self-regard appears to be an expression of the size of the ego; what the various elements are which go to determine that size is irrelevant. Everything a person possesses or achieves, every remnant of the primitive feeling of omnipotence which his experience has confirmed, helps to increase this self-regard' (Freud, 1914: 98).

According to Kohut, the broken self has difficulty joining its different parts together as the walls of the psychological container are too thin. Kohut writes that such a self is

... the self of the child that, in consequence of the severely disturbed empathic responses of the parents, has not been securely established, and it is the enfeebled and fragmentation-prone self that (in an attempt to reassure itself that it is still alive, even that it exists at all) turns defensively toward pleasure aims through the stimulation of erogenic zones, and then, secondarily, brings about the oral (and anal) drive orientation and the ego's enslavement to the drive aims correlated to the stimulated body zones.

(Kohut, 1977: 97)

Melanie Klein links greed for attention to the depressive position to the ego's realisation that it is separate from the external world – in other words, to the same narcissistic issues discussed by Kohut and Jacoby. According to Klein, when the baby realises that it is not part of the world – or rather, that the world is not part of him – it becomes depressed and greedy. The baby is greedy for the mother's attention – which in adults turns into the greed for attention of the external world. Klein argues that the baby cannot deal with the fact that objects are both external and 'whole persons'. The baby goes a number of physical and psychological changes which are evidence of the gradual development of the ego. She writes in the essay 'Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant'

(1952): 'Integration, consciousness, intellectual capacities, the relation to the external world and other functions of the ego are steadily developing' (Klein, 1988: 72).

Besides, the baby starts to realise that, even when the objects are 'internalised', they still exist in an 'external' form and are therefore outside of the baby's influence. The baby has ambivalent feelings about the whole situation – it is a love-hate relationship. Klein writes:

The various aspects – loved and hated, good and bad – of the objects become closer together, and these objects are now whole persons. The processes of synthesis operate over the whole field of internal and external object-relations. They comprise the contrasting aspects of the internalised objects (the early super-ego) on the one hand and of the external objects on the other; but the ego is also driven to diminish the discrepancy between the external and internal world, or rather, the discrepancy between the external and internal figures. Together with these synthetic processes go further steps in integration of the ego, which result in a greater coherence between the split-off parts of the ego. All these processes of integration and synthesis cause the conflict between love and hatred to come out in full force. The ensuing depressive anxiety and feeling of guilt alter not only in quantity but also in quality.

(Klein, 1988: 72)

Meanwhile, the baby feels guilty about its 'bad' feelings towards the objects, now perceived as whole people, and its own desire to destroy or devour them: 'Greed and the defences against it play a significant part at this stage, for the anxiety of losing irretrievably the loved and indispensable object tends to increase greed. Greed, however, is felt to be uncontrollable and destructive and to endanger the loved external and internal objects' (1988: 72-3).

However, the attention received by the comedian on stage does not always fill the – or sometimes fills the void, but only temporarily. Whereas the 'logical' thing would be to use the state of elation experienced during the performance to make the self feel more 'whole' and 'complete' in the long term, comedians often fail to use the attention generated by the audience for therapeutic purposes. They 'spend' the attention and 'love' granted by the

audience in unproductive ways. After the performance, the inflated sense of self diminishes and the stand-up may need someone caring to restore his boundaries, to find his, after the show self. Many stand-ups have a 'figure,' often a partner or agent, who contains him once he exits the performance area.

Often the audience challenges the comedian (which is a forced way of attempting to establish a dialogue in a format in which any verbal exchanges are strictly controlled), and it may even be that comedians subconsciously want to be challenged. There is an attraction in this kind of conflict, although it can be a potentially traumatising experience. Trauma, as Donald Kalsched reminds us, can be addictive because the traumatized psyche is self-traumatizing:

Trauma doesn't end with the cessation of outer violation, but continues unabated in the inner world of the trauma victim, whose dreams are often haunted by persecutory inner figures. The second finding is the seemingly perverse fact that the victim of psychological trauma continually finds himself or herself in life situations where he or she is retraumatized. As much as he or she wants to change, as hard as he or she tries to improve life or relationships, something more powerful than the ego continually undermines progress or destroys hope. It is as though the persecutory inner world somehow finds its outer mirror in repeated self-defeating 're-enactments' – almost as if the individual were possessed by some diabolical power or pursued by a malignant fate.
(Kalsched, 2010: 5)

Once the trauma is internalized, it lives through 'internal persecutors' these dwell in the 'daemonic' agent within the Self:

Most contemporary analytic writers are inclined to see this attacking figure as an internalized version of the actual perpetrator of the trauma, who has 'possessed' the inner world of the trauma victim. But this popularized view is only half correct. The diabolical inner figure is often far more sadistic and brutal than any other perpetrator, indicating that we are dealing here with a psychological factor set loose in the inner world by trauma – an archetypal traumatogenic agency within the psyche itself.
(2010: 4)

It might be theorised that stand-ups deliberately look for trauma and find it in their relationship with the audience during the performance. They look for compliance and love, or, conversely, for a proof that ‘the perfect connection’ with the loving audience-mother is impossible. Since no equal interaction is possible within the tightly regulated format of stand-up performance, the comedian ends up having a controlling relationship with the audience which either results in ‘love and acceptance’ or ‘conflict and rejection’. In this case, neither outcome seems to be favourable as far as depression is concerned, and any confidence gained by the comedian during the performance is spent very quickly and the comedian is left depleted, empty and wanting more attention and control.

8.3

Audience as an Abusive or Neglectful Parent

Instead of the kind and accepting mother, the audience might start playing the role of the bad mother, a neglectful parent. In this case the comedian spends his emotional resources on pleasing the audience and ‘forgets’ about his needs. His personality remains ‘unfed’ and unsupported. This inability to nurture one’s personality creatively might be one of the reasons comedians become depressed and dissatisfied with their lives and career.

In this case, the comedian’s role as ‘the leader’ on stage is questioned. The audience is seen as attacking, and the performer may become aggressive and defensive in order to precipitate any attacks. In fact, there are two ways for the comedian to deal with this kind of audience – to try to please them or, by contrast, to go into the defensive mode and attack them (before or after their attack). It takes some comedians a lot of time to learn the correct emotional and

behavioural ways of dealing with an aggressive audience – the metaphorical non-accepting mother.

Eddie Izzard, outlines his own ways of deflating the hecklers – creatively. He would confer a whole new identity on the heckler, thus wresting all control from him or her, and re-establishing mastery of the audience and the situation. His technique means that disruptive individuals are incorporated into his performance as rather than attacking them. By attacking the individual, which would fragment the audience, highlight the disruptor, and dissipate his connection he learned to skilfully inoculate them:

I first dealt with hecklers on the street. I'd developed what I called the Imposing Scenario technique. Someone would say, 'Fuck off!' and I'd say, 'This is Steve. He is going to be saying "Fuck off" at regular intervals. He's a beginner heckler from Kent – he's driven up here for the day'. You'd impose a whole identity on to him and although the audience knew it was all bullshit, he became your assistant. Every time 'Steve' said, 'Fuck off – you're crap', I'd say, 'Good! Keeps me on my toes. Thank you, Steve!' And that deflected all the heckles.

(Cook, 1994: 225).

Most importantly, Izzard points out that the performer should under no circumstances show their anger or annoyance at the heckler, this would mean that the comedian lost control over the audience.

Heckling is permitted in a limited number of contexts, and in stand-up comedy scenario it is a recognised element of the entertainment. The comedian uses skilful mechanisms to create a safe environment, with the audience, which would allow him to fully express himself as well as to build his self-confidence and self-esteem. Heckling creates a transition from the performer speaking to the audience setting to a disorientating, unexpected, unsettling and potentially dangerous atmosphere, which relies on the stand-up to control the heckler/s in the

room. Should he lose control At Jongleurs I created and incorporated a system of managers and security who will monitor the heckler. If a heckler was too disruptive to the show and the spotlight was more on the indulgent audience member than the creative comedian, he would be spoken to and if continued, removed since the heckler has become an aggressor rather than a participant in the comedy setting. There are not many spaces where this kind of liminality can be experienced. It is arguable that it is similar to political heckling which is also a 'weapon of words', both aiming to unsettle the speaker or stand-up. It is a recognised practice within the comedy club setting for the comedian to 'cut the heckler down.' The accepted task of the comedian is to turn the heckle into a humorous interplay. The political heckler often has an agenda or differing political and social view and can be verbally or physically abusive or demeaning to the speaker. Their aim is to make an impact on the views of the politician or at least to be heard by the surrounding politicians and spectators. In the political chamber political remarks are expected, but must be relevant to the agenda. However, the heckler in a comedy club often does so as a parapraxis. They can be drunk and comment to impress their partner or friends, or are angry with the comedian and want to interject. They can and have climbed on stage to hit the comedian in extreme cases or finally they add immense value to the evening. The comedian can retort with a variety of 'put downs' from humorous to extreme verbally aggressive remarks including, physical comments about the individual, or sexually explicit comments about their relatives normally the mother.

Heckling can be analogous to what Neumann calls 'anal rejection' as excrement being matter out of place or it will challenge the status quo. It is the stand-up comedy space that permits a liminal primal public experience. This liminal space facilitates the experience of disorientation to integration, separation and incorporation, birth and death all components of the individuation process, which otherwise would happen in enclosed spaces.

A performance is still a framework, and any aggression – or any other liminal phenomena – still has to be captured and framed in a certain way. This residual liminality is a left-over from traditional slapstick comedy, the pre-modern comedy which was ‘in touch’ with the masses, and which gave individual members of the audience the right to partially meddle with the performance. The audience was allowed to participate in ‘the ritual’.

With contemporary stand-up comedy it is more complicated. On the other hand, such ‘medieval’ liminal happenings as heckling are still part of it – and they can be psychologically or even physically dangerous. On the other hand, the comedian is already an individual performer, attempting to express his own self and establish himself as an individual on stage. Victor Turner would call this kind of performance ‘liminoid’ as opposed to the pre-individual expressions of creativity typical of small communities and pre-industrial societies.

While liminality is matched with pre-modern consciousness and expresses itself in the rebellious, healthy, spontaneous creativity of the carnival, liminoidness renders the meaninglessness of contemporary mass entertainment. In social context, liminality describes transitional periods in pre-industrial societies. By contrast, liminoid phenomena, although they may also be collective (rock concerts, big sports events, mass spectacles), are rarely spontaneous and are carefully pre-planned, organised and produced. Unlike pre-modern liminal events, which denote change of personal, social or calendrical status within a given community and do not have a commercial purpose (or, at least, if it exists, it is not decisive), liminoid phenomena are primarily commercial. In other words, a liminoid event or artefact is usually a one-off product of individual creativity or small constellation of creativities.

Liminoid products are not cyclical but continuously generated; tend to be more idiosyncratic, quirky, radical and subversive than liminal phenomena (which are ‘generalised and normative’); develop ‘outside the central economic and political processes’ and are ‘plural, fragmentary, and experimental’ (1992: 56-57). Liminoid phenomena, ‘flourish in societies of more complex structure.’ They are not cyclical but intermittent, generated often in times and places assigned to the leisure sphere’ (1977b: 50-51, quoted in St. John, 2008: 133).

8.4

Early Childhood Experiences and Suicide

Many comedians link their depressive episodes to their childhood experiences. Stephen Fry, who, by his admission, has had two suicide attempts (one of them recent), in a recent interview to The Telegraph, talks about depression and suicidal tendencies being part of his family history. Fry spoke publicly about being gay and in a humorous unconscious attack spoke out against his mother, ‘it all began when I came out of the womb. I looked back up at my mother and thought to myself, that’s the last time I’m going up one of those’. He continues to say about his physicist father ‘He was pretty aware early on that I wasn’t interested, and I did think he felt there was something lacking in me’. His father commented, ‘Stephen spends a lot of time of things that aren’t worthy of him’ (The Telegraph March 5th 2017). Fry has a public relationship with his depression and family constellation.

In 1987, when I was 31, I suffered a suicidal episode, which I fortunately lacked the courage to bring to its conclusion. I stood swaying on high buildings; I teetered on the edge of Tube platforms. I was only relieved of the symptoms by taking medication – a course that I had resisted for four years, because taking antidepressants was to admit that I was mentally ill.

Shortly afterwards, my mother committed suicide, a story that I recounted in my “coming out of the depressive closet” memoir, *The Scent of Dried Roses*. These are facts, even now, that I find hard to recount, because part of me is blighted by shame.

(Lott, *The Telegraph*, 7 June 2013)

Fry reportedly struggled with manic depression and his suicide attempts include trying to kill himself with exhaust fumes. It is notable that he links suicide to the feeling of being ashamed – in other way, of being out of control. This goes back to the issue of relating to parental objects at the early stages of life. Fry describes the feeling of shame as being unstoppable, and the suicidal thoughts as being unmanageable. These thoughts as Kalsched states are ‘an archetypal traumatogenic agency within the psyche itself’ and can have the same affect of the super ego. In Fry’s case it is possible that the super-ego is punishing his Self for not being the ‘successful son’ being a disappointment to his father. This knowledge can heavily weighed down i.e. de-press his natural elation experienced of being ‘loved’ in his work. He can consistently fall into the dark crevice of denigration and melancholia. The practice of stand up can activate the tyrannical, ‘super-ego’. It is the power of critical super-ego, which can diminish any success and deflate the praise that is experienced on stage. One can argue that the damning voice, which can recur internally, triggers the torment of shame and the need to depress any positive feeling within the self. As Freud states it is a matter of replaying the condition in order to dissipate its affect which the stand-up can engage in this process and by activating the consistent feelings and being self-reflective can illuminate a repair a sense of self through the mother/child dyad.

Comedians are often depressed, which sounds paradoxical with their profession. The short-term ‘on-stage’ relationship represents of contemporary Western socio-cultural societies where there are fewer methods of establishing lasting emotional bonds. Technology and the

breakdown of cultural structures encourage transience. Families are fragmenting, globalised social movement of migration and immigration is accelerating, technology and social networks encourage limited engagement. These psychosocial factors impact profoundly on the stand-up, which in turn can exacerbate personal issues and his long-term 'secure' relationship with the public. However, if the stand-up is conscious of the intermittent nature of the intensely emotional engagement and finds his internal or outer means of security he is able to frame and value the intermittent on stage relationship.

CHAPTER 9

GENDER, CULTURE AND COMEDY

This chapter discusses the difference between male and female stand-up comedians, and the role of female comedians in the industry. It discusses a range of issues associated with women in live comedy: the female voice, sexist and patronising treatment by the male representatives of the industry, male envy, the compatibility of comedy and femininity, of the material of female jokes, gender identity on stage and dealing with aggressive audiences. The best theoretical base for discussing these issues is a combination of Jungian psychology (particularly the concept of the animus), Freud's ideas (the link between jokes and aggression) and gender studies.

Western society largely ignores the proactive, creative, decision-making female, particularly in such male-dominated areas as politics, entertainment and corporate culture. Society's main socio-political structures are still predominantly male-dominated. They are masculine. There is no place in them for the woman who does not fill the traditional feminine role as the receptive vessel who listens, soothes and does not show much of her own personality. The woman, prototypically the mother, is the object who is always there to accept and to deliver love. The mother who 'does her own thing' is a bad mother, a selfish mother who neglects the children instead of spending all her energy on her family. This outmoded role is automatically transferred onto mature familial relationships as well as penetrating the entire social structure. A woman is the one who is expected to assume a passive role: the listener who does not have – or does not express her own views. Her creativity is linked to her 'biological destiny'. It would therefore be dangerous to grant a woman the full rights for self-expression; to allow her to have her own voice and to let it be heard.

Certain types of female creativity are 'suitable' for the patriarchal society because, by keeping the woman in the position of the object, they do not challenge the social masculine structure.

A female comedian does not have to look beautiful, or be slim, or wear perfect make-up and nice clothes because her creativity centres on her jokes and not her looks. She cannot afford to be passive: she has to be assertive in order to make her voice heard in an environment that has the potential to be hostile to her both as a woman and as a comedian. She can engage in any type of creativity, which involves 'speaking her mind', for instance, writing or politics, which leads the woman to be seen as a person and not an object. An object is something without history, biography, desire, ideas or opinions; whereas a person is someone who is not scared to be her self regardless of the social consequences.

Stand-up comedy is a male-dominated industry. It is therefore difficult for a female comedian to break through because she is immediately seen as someone who is trying to be too visible for her sex. There are three main barriers to her success. The first is the audience, which is used to, and consequently expects, a certain type of comedy – a male style comedy, predominantly illuminating male issues. The second is the booker who looks mostly for male comedians because they mirror their own views, are not competition for the female booker and are overall a safer option. Male comedians who often keep the woman at a distance simply create the third barrier because she is not 'one of the guys': she is different. Besides, there is a silent implication underlying all these barriers: that female comedy is different, that it touches upon the subjects that are either not too 'interesting' or are too sensitive for the general public.

It is much harder for a woman to individuate as a comedian on the circuit. There are many obstacles to her individuation: on average, women have fewer opportunities to perform, and, when they are given a chance, it does not mean that they would be heard (as opposed to be heckled or insulted). Female comedians also have to be more defensive than their male counterparts to get through to the audience, which means that they often appear to be more aggressive or even offensive. This also colours their psychological processes before, during and after the performance.

In this arena female individuation is a battle for acceptance, for transformation, and for the acceptance of this transformation. Female comedians have to go through a very public and extreme type of individuation. The audience will not necessarily try to ‘mother’ the female comedian the way they ‘mother’ the male performer, and respond with a higher degree of resistance both to her personality and material. She has to break through resistance and envy coming from the audience, and still be funny. She has to trust the process, and she has to allow the shadow to come to the fore before the communication process between her and the audience becomes stabilised.

9.1

Baubo – the Greek Goddess – the First Female Comedian

Baubo (also Iambe) is an old woman who makes indecent jokes and exposes her genitalia for laughs. Her sexually liberated behaviour and her ability to laugh in the face of difficulties and loss enable her to transgress the barriers of depression and social norms. Various accounts depict Baubo as lifting her skirts and exposing her genitals in order to make the grieving Demeter, who lost her daughter Persephone, laugh. Even though Baubo is a minor character and mythological accounts about her are often incomplete or contradictory, she has great

power over Demeter. ‘That such a minor character should have such power over the great Demeter has led some to propose Baubo as a form of Hecate, who plays significant roles in Demeter’s legend. Baubo’s part in the Demetrian mysteries was re-enacted at a bridge between Athens and Eleusis, where participants engaged in ribald speech before more serene ceremonies’ (Monaghan, 2014: 231). In the book *Goddesses and Monsters: Women, Myth, Power and Popular Culture* (2004) Jane Caputi writes that Baubo is associated with ‘lewd jokes and the exposure of the vulva: Baubo’s name is said to derive from a word meaning a body cavity, belly, womb, vulva. Images show her sometimes as a full-bodied old woman lifting her skirt, sometimes only as a vulva, and sometimes as the lower half of a female body with a face in place of the vulva’ (Caputi, 2004: 382).

Baubo is associated with what we today see as ‘stereotypical male’ behaviour: indecent joking and lack of concern for one’s appearance. Marguerite Rigoglioso also notes that figurines of Baubo often contain phallic references, which brings Baubo even closer to the image of the hermaphrodite:

The image of the ‘hermaphroditic/phallic’ Baubo renders sensible something that has puzzled scholars for quite some time: the significance of her strange name in the larger schema of the Eleusinian complex. As Lincoln (1981, 80) notes, Baubo’s name “literally means ‘vagina’, or a ‘mock vagina’, counterpart to a dildo (*baubon*)’. Baubo was frequently represented iconographically as a naked headless torso with her face appearing in the abdomen as her vulva serving as her chin. Lincoln (81) also remarks on the ‘markedly phallic shape’ of the figurines, which renders them ‘reminiscent of Baubo’s implied male counterpart, Baubon (dildo)’. What we see in this constellation of meanings and allusions is this: Baubo was the dildo, the dildo that was at once phallic and vulvar. A penis-within-a-vagina, a vagina-within-a-penis, she was, indeed, the ultimate symbol of parthenogenetic reproduction in a mother-centered universe.

(Rigoglioso, 2010: 180)

Baubo’s exposure is very obviously non-sexual: the vulva is shown solely for entertainment purposes, and only when all other resources are depleted (Demeter insists on grieving and

refuses to laugh until Baubo lifts the skirts). Baubo acts as a proto-comedian, by using references to pre-shame and pre-civilised phenomena (genitalia, scatology). In so doing, she rejects the constraining, male-centered framework of civilisation, which sees the woman as a well-behaved and passively sexual creature, always at the mercy of male aggression and male desire.

Also important is Baubo's part in the myth of Demeter and Persephone. In a way, with her humour, Baubo rectifies the crime committed by a man. Demeter is mourning her daughter having been abducted and raped by Hades. Baubo hauled Demeter out of her depression, caused by a man and brought nature back to life. In the myth Baubo is acting as both a healer and a comedian, reminding another woman of the power of the feminine; not the mysterious, fragile, passive and sexual feminine who can be desired, objectified, raped and abducted, but a powerful, ancient woman who is in charge of life and death, whose vagina is a symbol of the ability to create life; to 'make' human beings. Such a power places her above men, and is a reminder of the lost matriarchy. This power is true creativity, and its, albeit rude, symbol is the vulva.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes notes that Baubo, the Greek female proto-comedian, the goddess of obscenity, 'speaks from between her legs' (Estes, 1994: 336). Estes writes that Baubo;

'gives us the interesting idea that a little obscenity can help to break a depression. And it's true that certain kinds of laughter, which come from all those stories women tell each other, those women stories that are off-colour to the point of being completely tasteless ... those stories stir libido. They rekindle the fire of a woman's interest in life again. The belly Goddess and the belly laugh are what we are after.'

(1994: 339)

Contemporary comedians can be said to be following in the footsteps of Baubo by discussing typically female – rather than male problems on stage. They may be even said to be metaphorically ‘exposing’ themselves on stage by discussing the issues that are simultaneously personal and social. The healing aspect of female humour is the catalyst and barometer for change because, on the one hand, it is rough and rowdy, and on the other, she is also caring. By making Demeter laugh, Baubo shows her motherly, soft, feminine side, which peacefully co-exists with the rude behaviour, which is sexual exposure.

The idea of ‘sexual exposure’ has always been associated with male indecent behaviour, and has not been applied to women. In ancient Greek comedy, actors were equipped with large leather phalluses, which were seen as a necessary part of the comedic routine. There are no records of ‘leather vaginas’ or female breasts being made part of comedic plays. The phallus is thus ‘funny’ whereas the vagina is not. Parts of female physiology (or female identity) were not thus in the spotlight because putting them in the spotlight would mean foregrounding the woman with her problems and thoughts, and this is what patriarchal cultures – including Classical Greece – have always been trying to avoid. In Classical Greece, women were completely excluded from the public sphere, and Baubo – the reminder of older fertility rituals – was thus regarded as a dubious and suspicious figure. She defied the power of the phallus – the symbol of order, civilisation and patriarchy.

Unlike the examples of Demeter or Penelope both of whom prefer the passive, masochistic, suffering stance, Baubo signifies a proactive and creative female:

... complex and elusive persona who is sometimes a nurse, servant or priestess, sometimes a participant with goddesses in the hieros gamos (sacred marriage) ritual of certain ancient rites. She was also referred to as Bona Dea, goddess of women, while others saw her role simply as bawd, night demon, or the Evil Eye. [...]

Baubo was probably an extremely ancient aspect of certain agricultural rituals of fecundity, when specially appointed women squatted over the newly ploughed fields and gave their 'mood blood', their menstrual fluid, back to the earth; or of a time when priestesses may have officiated over archaic puberty rites.

(1994: 5)

Lubell adds that;

'in the fiercely misogynist climate of later patriarchal cultures, these old, female rituals that had been closely connected with the earth and its cycles faded away or were effectively obliterated. The concept of menstrual blood as part of the earth's sacred energy no longer fitted the ideology of the emerging aggressive civilisations that had seized power. Gradually, Baubo was transformed into an obscure creature of long-forgotten rituals. Her "moon blood", once understood as "wise blood" or "magic blood", became something to be feared and was rejected as an obscenity.'

(1994: 5)

Baubo is an expression of female creativity. She is both an artist and a creative person with the powers of making the crops grow. Classical Greece is, undoubtedly, the cultural and ideological base of the Western world. We have inherited the lamentable patriarchal attitude towards female creativity.

There is no consensus as to gender influencing comedian's material and performance manner? The American comedian Elaine Boosler explains that, for her, there are no 'male' subjects and 'female' subjects or 'male' and 'female' comedy styles:

Once you ghettoize yourself, you're dead. I'm a comic. It's very important to me, and I fight hard. I don't let them write 'comedienne' when referring to me. People don't say doctorette, or dentistista, do they? I always did it funny, but I wanted to get the point across. I'm a human being trapped in a woman's body. Most people still think that a woman comedian is Totie Fields and nothing else. That's one of the reasons that I don't do television because the parts they write for women are so bad. They'll bring me something like ugly best friend who can't get laid. I said: 'I get laid in life. I see no reason to stop on television'. I think that I'm in an entirely different category and I will eventually carve that out. And that's what I hold out for.

(Ajaye, 2002: 76).

The British comedian Sarah Millican also thinks that gender has no relevance as far as writing and performing jokes is concerned. It also does not affect the success of the joke: 'Gender doesn't come into it. And it's too easy to use it as an excuse. If I don't do well at a gig I could come off and go, well it's because they don't like women, but it's much more likely your jokes weren't good enough or you didn't have the confidence, or it's just a hard gig. There's a million reasons why an audience might not like you and it's almost never to do with gender.' (Viv Groskop, *The Daily Mail*, 6 July 2013).

Female comedy becomes the voice of the female condition and, as such, represents direct criticism of the patriarchal organisation of society. When women laugh at another woman's joke, they are experiencing a more direct (as opposed to a mediated) relationship with the content of the joke. They see the issue through another woman's eyes and criticise it using the female voice.

Typically, a female comedian going on stage feels isolated and pretty much outnumbered by her male colleagues. The American comedian Ellen Degeneres speaks about the difficulties females have to face because of their gender while on stage: female jealousy, male envy, sexism, hecklers and the macho attitude. For instance, proving to a group of men that you are capable of telling a joke may end up in a serious disaster because there is a level of prejudice that cannot be overcome. Degeneres states:

'I remember playing a boot camp for like four hundred Marines, and I thought, Gee, they're going to like seeing a woman. And that was a bad thing. They were screaming out the most obscene things. They didn't give me a chance to say anything. You're going to have times

like that. It's just that everything builds character, everything makes you stronger, and it's just like life.'

(Ajaye, 2002: 100-101)

In the world of stand-up comedy, inter and intra-psychic processes surrounding the performance entail dealing with a high degree of aggression – and often, female comedians deal with more emotional violence than their male colleagues. They are insulted both on their appearance and their abilities. For instance, Jo Brand recalls being called 'a fat cow,' who should 'fuck off' by one very persistent male audience member (Cook, 1994: 135). Her decision to remain calm did not help her in those circumstances: 'I wasn't scared – I was just fed up. I was angry because I was expected it to be better than that. I didn't get any laughs at all – he did. I slid off, humiliated, and packed it in for four months' (1994: 135).

Donna McPhail (who is gay) notes that men often insult female comedians because they suspect a powerful, talented woman who receives all the attention would reject them:

Men feel threatened by a woman assuming authority over them. Some men have an emotional problem with you getting that attention and praise. They say 'I wouldn't fuck you' when you hadn't even asked them. You hadn't even noticed them. They want to be noticed, and put you in your place. You learn to use an outrageous heckle like that to your advantage, if it's, 'You're crap!' then the audience can agree or disagree. Also, women don't like it. If they're out with their boyfriend, and their boyfriend's laughing at you, which translates to them that they fancy you, that's when they heckle. Everyone is very attractive onstage, even if off stage in normal life they are quite ugly. It's something about the light shining in the eyes of someone onstage that makes them look more appealing.

(1994: 206)

McPhail also recalls a man in the audience telling her to 'get her tits out' (1994: 207).

Interestingly enough, McPhail also mentions her own envy and jealousy – this time related to the matters of social class and privileges. She prefers working class audiences to middle class ones because she feels intimidated by the latter.

The body and appearance is a particularly difficult area for female comedians to handle. When a woman appears on stage in public, standing on an elevated surface and therefore pretty visible, the expectation is that she will look like a performer: entertaining, pretty, feminine, dressed up and made-up.

Jo Brand often talks about her appearance and her body. Many of her performances include jokes about being fat, unattractive, weird, and the now famous metaphor of the 'sea monster'. At first sight, this is deeply personal material. Yet, at the same time, she identifies an area of herself that is both intimate and vulnerable, and relevant and understandable for the audience. The audience can easily relate to the problem of excess weight or being unattractive in a society that places emphasis on model appearance, eternal youth and cosmetic surgery. She feeds on contemporary issues and is inspired. Moreover, these contemporary socio-cultural myths coincide with her internal psychological state. She aims to build the bridge between her identity and the ideal female image propagated by her social surroundings. In this respect, her attempts at reconciling the 'identities' – the personal, the real, and the ideal – is a good example of the interpsychic process that takes place during the preparatory, pre-performance phase.

David Quantick argues:

To be a female stand-up is a bit like volunteering to be water boarded while accompanying yourself on the banjo; it's hard enough just to keep going, never mind being entertaining as well. And there is – not with all women comedians, but a lot – a difference in comedic styles as well. Male comedians can be bullish testosterone-fuelled lads. A lot of male stand-up revolves around blokeiness, and is rooted in the "real" world of observation comedy. Female comics are often either whimsical and surreal (Issie

Suttee) or rooted in a gentler, dafter kind of comedy, which is notably female (Millican). There are exceptions – the American Sarah Silverman is terrifyingly obscene – but comics like Silverman rely on being outside the norm for part of their impact (a male comic such as Frankie Boyle has to be either really good or really vile to stand out in a more crowded field).

(The Daily Telegraph, 22 December 2011)

A Daily Telegraph article Sarah Millican comments on the success of her DVD, *Chatterbox* and discusses the problem of sexism in the industry: ‘I don’t think there’s an awful lot of sexism in this industry – I think if an audience is watching you and you’re a bloke - it’s the same as if you’re a woman, they’re expecting the same, to be entertained. But there were a handful of people who haven’t seen any women comics on DVDs before and were suggesting it wouldn’t happen’ (The Daily Telegraph, 21 December 2011).

Male and female comedians include sensitive issues in radically different ways. Sexual violence towards women in male comedy sets is one of them. Rape jokes usually reflect a serious gap in confidence, but it does not make them less controversial or less acceptable. In this sense, nobody is interested in the psychological motifs of the comedian joking about violating a woman, but only about the effect that his words have on the audience.

For instance, the American comedian Patton Oswalt made headlines when he was trying to defend a fellow stand-up, Daniel Tosh, who, after being heckled by a female spectator about earlier rape jokes in his set, announced to the audience: ‘Wouldn’t it be funny if that girl got raped by, like, five guys right now?’ To the moral outcry Patton responded with a long essay in which he explained his position as regards rape jokes, and assured his audience that he has no intention of raping anyone:

A lot of times, a setup is deliberately meant to shock, to reverse your normal valences, to kick you a few points off your axis. If you heard the beginning of Lenny Bruce's joke where he blurts out, "How many niggers do we have here tonight?" and then stood up and mother fucked him into silence and stormed out? You'd be correct—based solely on what you saw and heard—that Lenny was a virulent racist. But if you rode the shockwave, and listened until the *end* of the bit, you'd see he was attacking something—racism—that he found abhorrent and was, in fact, *so* horrified by it that he was willing to risk alienating an audience to make his point.

So that's how I saw the whole "rape joke" controversy. And, again, my view was based on my experience as a comedian. Twenty-five years' experience, you know? This was about censorship, and the limits of comedy, and the freedom to create and fuck up while you hone what you create.

(The Slate, June 16, 2013)

Patton explains his defending of Tosh by naming this topic a taboo. In his view, no subject should be off-limits as far as stand-up is concerned. Joking about rape is not the same as raping women, Patton claims. This is only about making sure that no social or political taboos are left unexplored, and therefore left in the dark where they would fester:

In fact, every viewpoint I've read on this, especially from feminists, is simply asking to kick upward, to think twice about who is the target of the punch line, and make sure it isn't the victim.

Why, after all of my years of striving to write original material (and, at times, becoming annoyingly self-righteous about it) and struggling to find new viewpoints or untried approaches to any subject, did I suddenly balk and protest when an articulate, intelligent and, at times, angry contingent of people were asking me to apply the same principles to the subject of rape? Any edgy or taboo subject can become just as hackneyed as an acceptable or non-controversial one if the *exact same approach* is made every time. But I wasn't willing to hear that.

And let's go back even *further*. I've never wanted to rape anyone. Never had the impulse. So why was I feeling like I was being lumped in with those who were, or who took a cavalier attitude about rape, or even made rape jokes to begin with? Why did I feel some massive, undeserved sense of injustice about my place in this whole controversy?

The answer to that is in the first incorrect assumption. The one that says there's not a "rape culture" in this country. How can there be? *I've* never wanted to rape anyone.

(The Slate, June 16, 2013)

Adrienne Truscott, the female comedian, treated the controversial subject differently by basing a whole show, 'Asking for It: A One-Lady Rape About Comedy', around the subject of rape. Shockingly she performs naked from the waist down. She emphasises that her nudity is not intended to be sexual or attractive. In fact, it is quite aggressive, 'a subversion of how women are conditioned to perceive and use their own bodies' (Brockes, 2014). The show is a response to Daniel Tosh's joke about rape and Patton's subsequent failure to condemn it. During the show, Truscott jokes about women's right to make decisions about their bodies. She focuses on various aspects of rape. Emma Brockes writes:

For anyone who has watched with dismay, as rape jokes became standard fare in comedy – or just anyone who wants their stand up to mean something – this is an exhilarating tour. Truscott's got something major to get off her chest – and I'm not talking about the strip-tease sight gag that punctuates a date-rape routine mid-show. That sounds like strong stuff? It is, and Truscott knows it: 'anybody need the [rape] whistle? She'll ask. "Everybody fine?"

(The Guardian, 1 January 2014)

Truscott's decision to partially undress, from the waist down, echoes Baubo's undressing and squatting for comedic purposes. Here Truscott denies two main assumptions about the female body that are prevalent in our patriarchal culture: that breasts symbolise the caring and nurturing aspect of the woman, and that the vagina should always be 'sexual'. The vagina without the breasts 'should not be seen'. Shown without the breasts, the vagina becomes the world of chaos, and the world of darkness. Another issue is that, unlike the phallus, the vagina has never been seen as funny; as something that can be 'displayed' in a non-sexual way. Whereas the phallus can be seen as a symbol of strength and a giver of life, and even laughed at as such, vagina as a symbol has an aura of danger to it.

Interestingly enough, Truscott's challenge to mainstream perception of female nudity is not funny probably because it is based on aggression. It is a forceful rejection, a form of pushing the boundary, a radical erosion of traditional roles and perceptions. The idea behind the image of the semi-naked woman (but naked 'on the wrong end') is to assert the power of the feminine, to go back to the ancient idea of the vagina as a source of creativity.

The room, a bookstore in Edinburgh, was nerve-rackingly personal: no lights, no stage, no distance between Truscott and the front row. No one could leave without the entire room noticing – given the material, it amused Truscott to note that this acted as a powerful disincentive. “You can't get up because it's like,” – sotto voce – ‘is that the rapist?!’ She laughs.

Although it is more challenging, Truscott's preference is to perform before a mainstream audience, rather than a self-selected group of woman-friendly activists or supporters. (She is canny enough to know that being described as a “feminist performance artist?” even though she is a feminist performer “would be the death of it”).

(Brookes, *The Guardian*, 1 January 2014).

According to Freud, jokes are a form of passive aggression; they represent instincts diffused in 'civilised' ways. Jokes have traditionally been used to disguise both sexual and non-sexual aggression (Freud, 1960: 118-129). Obscene jokes, for instance, mask 'undisguised obscenity' which, in its crude form, cannot be enjoyed by a civilised person because of 'repression'. In a comedic form, however, sexuality is more palatable and acceptable:

It is our belief that civilisation and higher education have a large influence in the development of repression, and we supposed that, under such conditions, the psychical organization undergoes an alteration ... as a result of which what was formerly felt as agreeable now seems unacceptable and is rejected with all possible psychical force. The repressive activity of civilization brings it about that primary possibilities of enjoyment, which have now, however, been repudiated by the censorship in us, are lost to us. But to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost. When we laugh at a refined obscene joke, we are laughing at the same thing that makes a peasant laugh at a coarse piece of smut.

(Freud, 1960: 120-121)

A woman who delivers jokes, expresses her primal aggression, and also exploits her aggression – which is an intrinsically male milieu. If a woman diffuses her aggression, this means that she has aggression to diffuse. In addition, language and particularly speech can be perceived as crude and powerful tools of communication because they can be used to offend and humiliate people; they can be used as means of establishing hierarchies and explicitly demonstrating power. A female comedian is automatically regarded as a proactive woman, who, from a traditional perspective, is seen as aggressive and even dangerous because she seeks to challenge the patriarchal order. Truscott's aggression is both deliberate and explicit, and its aim is to reverse the 'victim psychology' often conferred onto women who have suffered rape. She wants to empower the victims with her show, and to prove that naked women do not necessarily look alluring or vulnerable – they can also be hostile:

No one said, 'Dude, that was a bad joke'. The response to criticism was, 'Oh, you don't believe in free speech?' Oh, for fuck's sake, it's not that black and white'.

She also wanted to make a point about emphasis. 'To show the flip side of the attention that's always on victims – the worst version of which is 'You asked for it', and the best version, 'That shouldn't have happened to her'. No, no, no. He shouldn't have done it. That was my whole thing: to bring that into the room'.

(Brookes, The Guardian, 1 January 2014)

Some female comedians choose to perform in a deliberately 'non-feminine' way. For example, the British comedian Mandy Knight tends to be very rude on stage and tries to sound 'like a man'. Here are a few lines from her show in Oxford, which took place on the 6th of July 2001:

No, look at you, you little couple, what's your name? Stephen. And your name? Emma. Emma, hello, Emma... that's quite posh, isn't, Emma? Excuse me, it's a little princess if I may say. A little bit posh – you've sort of got that middle class body language, haven't you, Emma?

Hello? Yes, down the front, dress circle. 'I'm so posh I don't have periods, far too messy'. It's like, 'goodness me, I don't mess down there every month – I have a woman in from Bicester who does'.

And look at you! Raaah! You're about twelve, aren't you? You're all ehhhh. Oh and you, take your glasses off – you'll find I'm a stunner. Look at you! What's your name, sweetheart? Mick. Um, foreplay over with... oh bless him, he's going, look, 'I'm with my friends, don't make me fuck the scary red lady'. I'm only teasing, Nick – take your hands out of your lap, though, I'm doing the entertainment. I'm only teasing, bless, I don't do anything dodgy, Nick, never taken it up the tradesman's. Alright once. But no, girls, you know what it's like – I jumped on his lap too quickly, it went up the wrong hole. No harm done, once the stitches were out.

Oh, you're looking at me, going 'it's too much'. Relax, for fuck's sake. I'm in drag. Eh, luck, suckie suckie, five dollars.

(Jongleurs show, Oxford, 6 July 2001).

Knight is deliberately offensive to audience members of both genders, putting them down and inserting sexual allusions here and there. It is as if she is trying to break all possible boundaries, and to scandalise and disgust the audience with her comments. She is not scared of people's reactions, and is not shy of making her material and delivery sound aggressive and attacking. In this sense, her approach is no different from that of a male comedian, yet her allusions contain traditionally 'female' material and expose 'female' concerns – female biology, finding a partner, female sexual aggression, the issue of appropriate 'feminine' behaviour (invariably linked with the class issue), etc. She talks about periods, deciding 'how 'approachable' a woman should appear to men, dealing with shy men, etc.

Female comedian, Gina Yashere, adds the race issue to the list of taboo subjects, which are not normally discussed openly in public. She brings up the problem of the cultural ghettoization of black people in Britain. For instance, she says in one of the shows she performed in 2001 at the Jongleurs club in London:

None of you know me – that’s cool, that’s cool. In the black community, I’m a star! I had to say that ‘cos there’s only ten black people here. If black people recognise you on the street, they are like this... [gestures]

Black people are not into all that talking and stuff. We’re not into sleeping outside pop stars’ houses and stuff. Black people like what? You mean sleep on the floor. I don’t think so. Where am I going to plug my charger?

(Jongleurs, 2001)

Like Knight, Yashere discusses the uncomfortable sexual and scatological issues. She breaks the same boundaries, but is less aggressive towards the audience and probably less annoying. Although her approach seems to be more ‘feminine’ than Knight’s, Yashere still manages to produce some outrageous material. Interestingly enough, her take on sexual rejection echoes traditionally male complaints that it is difficult for both a man and woman to ‘get laid’.

It’s all the male comics that get all the groupies... they get all the women queuing up outside their dressing rooms. Sex, sex, sex! I don’t get shit.

The other day, there was a man standing outside my dressing room. And I was like, “yes! Could be sex, could be sex, could be sex for me”. And he was like – “No, I’m a minicab, mate”.

I shagged him anyway. £3.50 and a lift home ... think I was worth a fiver, though, you know what I mean. Obviously not.

(Jongleurs 2001)

Although Yashere’s delivery of her material is ‘softer’, the material nevertheless shows no signs of ‘femininity’. Moreover, she aims at the same degree of exposure of taboo subjects as Knight, Truscott and many other ‘rude’ female comedians. She still talks about the differences in attitudes between men and women; yet her language and subject matter are not at all ‘feminine’. It is deliberately coarse, and aimed at breaking the ‘civilized’ social attitudes

and challenging accepted behaviours. Being a comedian – going on stage and being physically ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ gives one a degree of power and authority.

9.2

The Issue of Male Envy

A woman making jokes on stage often evokes envy from both male comedians and the male audience. The comedian Lee Mack claims that women make worse comedians than men because they are not as ‘boastful’ and ‘competitive’:

When men sit around and talk, they are very competitive. One person will tell an anecdote and the next person will try to top that. When you get six women together, they share a lot more.

They will be far more interested in what the other person has to say. The conversation is more interactive and less about individually showing off.

(Hastings, The Daily Mail, 28 September 2013)

The female comedian Josie Long wonders why out of the twenty highest-earning comedy performers there is only one woman:

In fact, the numbers in the industry are even worse. Of the 20 highest-earning stand-up comedians in Britain at the moment, just one – Sarah Millican – is a woman. In the 31-year history of the Edinburgh comedy award, there have been only two solo female winners, Jenny Eclair and Laura Solon. A 2010 poll conducted by Channel 4 found that 94 out of the 100 greatest stand-ups were men, with Eclair, Victoria Wood, Jo Brand, Shappi Khorsandi, Joan Rivers and Roseanne Barr being the exceptions. Last month's shortlist for the Chortle awards named just two solo women comics in a list of 54 nominations (Dana Alexander and Susan Calman; on Tuesday night, Calman won the compere award). Never mind equality – these lists don't even give women 10%. Is any other art form so skewed?

(The Guardian, 20 March 2012)

In the same article in *The Guardian*, Leo Benedictus tries to understand why the general socio-cultural view is that female comedians cannot be funny: ‘There is an opinion at large out there, which Long estimates she hears three hundred times a year: that women aren’t funny. Or, the deluxe version: that women are only funny rarely, and certainly less often than men. Some evolved genetic disadvantage (the details of which we’ll gloss over) is apparently holding women back. A bold theory, is perhaps the politest thing to call that’ (2012). Benedictus attempts to find the answer to the problem. He thinks that this is the issue of social conditioning:

‘So what is the problem? Lara A. King, recent winner of the Funny Women award, does not believe that men are funnier. ‘Just because there are more men doing it, that doesn’t necessarily mean they are better at it. I think they get given the breaks a bit more, and they get given a little bit more slack. I think women are less encouraged and less supported. People who book comedy nights do tend to think that one woman on the bill is really quite enough’

(*The Guardian*, 20 March 2012).

Women on the circuit are still seen as a ‘novelty’, as something unusual and exotic. ‘Bookers will spread you out ‘ explains Sarah Millican:

‘maybe because there's only about 10 or 12 [women] at [a particular] level. A bit like they might spread out the one-liner guys. You’re kind of a bracket on your own – which is fine. I understand that people want variety on a bill. It’s also positive discrimination in a way. They might like to have a woman on the bill.’

(Benedictus, 2012).

Another female comedian, Viv Groskop, shows that women in comedy often have to deal with male patronising behaviour:

There are times when you just have to be grateful for sexist condescension. Without it I would not have got any laughs at all when I did a stand-up comedy set for the first time. As the compère handed over the microphone to me, he announced – not inaccurately, but totally cringe worthily – that we were moving ‘from one lovely lady to another’. The comic on before me was a woman. There were four of us on a bill of 25. (Yes, 25 comics. Welcome to the open-mic circuit.) But the MC then sealed the deal in the worst way possible by patting me on the arm, looking at me pityingly and mouthing, “Well done, love.” I thought out loud into the microphone: “Hmm, that wasn’t very patronising or anything...” Big laugh. Sadly I then proceeded to die for most of the next five minutes. But that was not because I was a woman. It was because I was rubbish. And a beginner. But mostly rubbish. There’s a stereotype that stand-up comedy is more difficult for women. But it is rapidly being overturned.

(Groskop, The Daily Mail, 6 July 2013).

Interestingly enough, Groskop chooses financial success to show the measure of female comedians’ popularity. Criticising, author and journalist Christopher Hitchens’s statement that ‘women cannot be funny’, she gives examples of DVD sales of a fellow woman comedian:

The infamous Christopher Hitchens accusation (‘Women aren’t funny’) has been buried under the weight of Millican’s DVD sales (more than 175,000, a record for a female stand-up), Miranda’s best-selling book (over £1 million in sales in the run-up to Christmas) and the film *Bridesmaids*’ box office takings (\$228 million).

If anyone still thinks women aren’t funny, they would be well advised not to bet any money on it.

(The Daily Mail, 6 July 2013).

Overall, it seems that female comedians’ material contains both gender-specific and non gender-specific elements. At the same time, women in the live comedy business still feel insecure enough to talk about their success in terms of the number of DVDs sold and money earned. They are still unsure as to their place and role in this thriving and complex business.

9.3

Gay Women on the Circuit

Female comedians who are gay do not like the idea of the audience being too obsessed with the performer's sexuality. James Rampton writes in *The Independent* about Donna McPhail's 'coming out' on stage:

Like it or not, Donna McPhail is known as the comic who 'came out' on stage. With some justification, she feels the seven minutes of her hour-long show devoted to her sexuality at Edinburgh last summer have been blown out of all proportion. 'All that lesbian stuff annoyed me,' she asserts. 'I hid it in the middle of the show, but all the reviews still read, 'Donna McPhail . . . LESBIAN' . . . But I'm a stand-up who's a woman who's a lesbian – in that order. I want to be a funny person, not a funny lesbian - which is a contradiction in terms anyway.

(James Rampton, *The Independent*, 2 March 1994)

What McPhail implies here is that the content and quality of her work is not in any way influenced by her sexuality; and that she is a primarily a comedian who has to be judged on her professional qualities; and only then a gendered person. At the same time, McPhail observes, her sexuality affects the way the audience reacts to her – and particularly its male members. She admits that she has to develop an aggressive persona in order to protect herself from the men who feel offended by the fact that she is gay:

Part of her appeal lies in her aggressive stage persona, developed as a way of counteracting nerves. Crunching on a croque monsieur in a Regent St cafe, McPhail explains: 'The adrenalin you get before a show is equivalent to a car crash – that's why your bowels open so regularly. Your body is in shock. If you show that on stage, you're dead. So I give the feeling that you don't mess with me'.

Some beer swilling, rugby-club types have certainly learnt not to mess with her. 'They heckle on a very personal basis. They shout, 'You've got no tits, I wouldn't shag you. You haven't got a boyfriend'. If they're trying to humiliate you sexually, all you have to do is turn around and do the same to them: 'What do you use for contraception - your personality? Where's your girlfriend - outside grazing?' Although it's not my bag politically, you have to do that to shut them up.

(The Independent, 2 March 1994)

She also admits that lesbian audiences also present problems – albeit of a different kind. Gay audiences tend to be defensive, and their defensiveness results in an impaired ability to enjoy jokes. They need to make sure that the jokes are not too flighty, too feminine or not in any way diminishing the achievements of the LGBT movement:

Sometimes lesbians forget to have a laugh, because we have to be so defensive all the time. That attitude can be very frustrating when you're doing a comedy show. They all mentally flick through their Politically Correct Dictionary before they laugh. You get women coming up and saying, "It's not right to say you're a bird", and I have to reply, "It's a joke. Shall I give notes out before you come in?". I love having dykes in, but they take a long time to relax".

(James Rampton, The Independent, 2 March 1994)

Often the degree of power, aggression and masculinity that the female comic possesses is mistaken for being a matter of sexuality, rather than as an exercise in the female right to express aggression more openly.

Another British gay comedian, Zoe Lyons, called one of her shows 'Miss Machismo'. The title itself implies a masculine approach – but should not be seen as specifically gay. In an interview to Time Out London, Lyons talks about her argument with the philosopher and feminist Germaine Greer. Greer was scandalised by Lyons's jokes about female self-harm, and pointed out to her that subjects like this were not funny – particularly because the target of the joke was Amy Winehouse (who was still alive at the time).

Lyons calls 'lazy journalism' the attempts of some representatives of mass media to stick labels to gay comedians' jokes. For her, there is no such thing as 'lesbian comedy'. She says in the interview with Tim Arthur:

Was this the inspiration for your show, 'Miss Machismo'?

'Partly, yes. Also in the same year I got voted the eighty-first most influential gay in Britain. And that was another moment where I went: "You're joking!" I literally spat my coffee out. The two things came together so I thought I'd write a show about having a bit of a swagger. And then, like most shows, you start off with a kernel of an idea and you end up talking about gay penguins and the Pope.'

(Tim Arthur, Time Out London, 23 March 2010)

She also points out that the way the public still sees female comedians is shaped by traditional attitudes:

Why do you think that the out dated misconception still exists?
'I haven't focused on it that much, because it doesn't really bother me. But I think it probably goes back to the old tradition of blokes sitting in pubs telling each other jokes. Men told jokes and ladies gossiped. But that's all nonsense. Like I said, it's not something I really focus on. I'm not a flag waver of any kind. I just enjoy going out there and making people laugh. I think if you can't hack it don't do it (Tim Arthur, Time Out London, 23 March 2010).

The problem is that the genre itself originated as a male one, and has been dominated by male performers for a long time. The first comedians were male, and female comedians have had no choice but to copy their format and style. Besides, the format and style of stand-up performance presuppose a fair amount of aggression, both on the part of the comedian and the part of the audience. This format, which implies aggressive, untamed exchanges between the

performer and the audience, is only suitable for certain personality types. It is very different from contemporary theatre performances which are geared up for polite audiences and which would not test the actor's confidence. Comedy, on the other hand, is a remnant of rough street culture, which is not well suited for female performers.

Female comedians adopt of the male street entertainment tradition by including psychological, political and particularly social issues. The female comedians work in the best popular entertainment traditions, and incorporate into their performances and engineer crude jokes that often go beyond the 'norms' of the middle class. They do this on purpose, knowing that crudity is going to embarrass and test the limits of tolerance of any 'decent' people (particularly women), present in the audience.

There is a psychological aspect to the masculinisation of stand up comedy as well. The adoption of the 'male' style also may be the result of the generally accepted view that masculine means of dealing with the outside world are more advantageous and, in the long run, more productive. They bring financial and social security. It was Freud's assumption that both sexes assign a higher value and universality masculine behaviour, and 'that one's image of masculinity should provide the baseline in reference to which femaleness is considered' (Mitchell, 1995: 220).

Freud himself was puzzled by femininity and wondered about how it came into being. He paid attention to both its biological and social aspects. Ultimately, he admits that

disentangling the one from the other, and creating a single psychological picture of human sexuality is the kind of task of which psychoanalysis is incapable:

The distinction is not a psychological one; when you say “feminine”, you usually mean “passive” Now it is true that a relation of the kind exists. The male sex-cell is actively mobile and searches out the female one, and the latter, the ovum, is immobile and waits passively. This behaviour of the elementary sexual organisms is indeed a model for the conduct of sexual individuals during intercourse.....

One might consider characterizing femininity psychologically as giving preference to passive aims. This is not, of course, the same thing as passivity; to achieve a passive aim may call for a large amount of activity. It is perhaps the case that in a woman, on the basis of her share in the sexual function, a preference for passive behaviour and passive aims is carried over into her life to a greater or lesser extent, in proportion to the limits, restricted or far-reaching, within which her sexual life thus serves as a model. But we must beware in this of underestimating 'the influence of social customs, which similarly force women into passive situations. All this is still far from being cleared up. There is one particularly constant relation between femininity and instinctual life, which we do not want to overlook. Suppression of women's aggressiveness, which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favours the development of powerful masochistic impulses, which succeed, as we know, in binding erotically the destructive trends which have been divested inwards.

(Freud, XXII: 114-11)

Freud's analysis of 'misplaced aggression' is far from displaying self-destructive masochistic trends for women on stage who find healthy, creative and socially useful ways of channelling their aggressive impulses. Moreover, they are not afraid to admit that they have these impulses, and openly display them in rude jokes and arguments with hecklers. Their impulses are expressed both verbally and visually. Gay female comedians do not emphasise their sexuality deliberately, and do not make their performances look or sound explicitly gay. In this way, self-expression is equated with aggressive impulses. Writing and performing jokes is an act that is both linguistic and political. It threatens the patriarchal structure of society and questions male control over language and discourse.

The Comedic Animus

Female desire to write and perform comedy can also be explained using the Jungian concept of the animus. The animus is one of the archetypes and represents the male counterpart of the female psyche. Marie-Louise von Franz defines the animus as ‘the male personification of the unconscious in woman’ which ‘exhibits both good and bad aspects, as does the anima in man’ (Jung, 1964: 198). Von Franz describes the animus as a kind of voice that can be dangerous if not controlled:

... the animus does not so often appear in the form of an erotic fantasy or mood; it is more apt to take the form of a hidden ‘sacred’ conviction. When such a conviction is preached with a loud, insistent masculine voice or imposed on others by means of brutal emotional scenes, the underlying masculinity in a woman is easily recognized. However, even in a woman who is outwardly very feminine the animus can be an equally hard, inexorable power. One may suddenly find oneself up against something in a woman that is obstinate, cold, and completely inaccessible.

(1964: 198)

The animus, another female disciple of Jung, Jolande Jacobi, adds, seldom appears as a single figure. Moreover, Jacobi writes, it often takes the form of ‘uncritically accepted opinions, prejudices, principles, which make women argue and bicker. This happens most often to those whose main function is that of feeling and whose thinking function is undifferentiated. They seem to make up a fairly high percentage of their sex, though there may have been some change since the turn of the century, perhaps as a result of the emancipation of woman’ (Jacobi, 1973: 121).

Jung’s own view of the animus had negative connotations, and, at times, was openly hostile. Thus, the animus expresses itself in ‘opinionated views, interpretations, insinuations and misconstructions, which all have the purpose (sometimes attained) of severing the

relationship between two human beings' (Jung, CW 9/II: para. 32). This particular definition is also profoundly insulting to women:

No matter how friendly and obliging a woman's Eros may be, no logic on earth can shake her if she is ridden by the animus. Often the man has the feeling – and he is not altogether wrong – that only seduction or a beating or rape would have the necessary power of persuasion. He is unaware that this highly dramatic situation would instantly come to a banal and unexciting end if he were to quit the field and let a second woman carry on the battle (his wife, for instance, if she herself is not the fiery war horse). This sound idea seldom or never occurs to him, because no man can converse with an animus for five minutes without becoming the victim of his own anima.

(CW 9/II: para. 29)

This sexist outburst is, to an extent, compensated by his remark that the animus also has a useful side to it. A woman's animus originates from her father's conduct, and 'expresses not only conventional opinion but – equally – when we call "spirit", philosophical or religious ideas in particular, or, rather the attitude resulting from them. Thus the animus is a psychopomp, a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious, and a personification of the latter' (CW 9/II para. 33). Meanwhile, 'the animus gives to a woman's consciousness the capacity for reflection, deliberation, and self-knowledge' (CW 9/II: para. 33).

The female on the circuit is often seen as having an overwhelming presence and 'loud mouth'; she is a creature who expresses her views openly and has the pluck to discuss a range of 'sacred' things which had traditionally been taboo subjects for 'decent' women: being sexually promiscuous, refusing to please men emotionally, being physically violent, being morally strong, being emotionally or financially independent, consciously and proactively choosing the man for procreation, criticising their own children (showing no love towards their children), weight and appearance, and single motherhood.

Erich Neumann expresses a similar sexist view of the animus, which is experienced by her as an intrusion: ‘the animus world expresses itself in opinions and assertions that, on closer inspection, prove to be the property of the archetypally masculine, patriarchal spirit. They arise from the world of male consciousness and of the masculine spirit that is extrinsic and foreign to woman and the Feminine. They express the patriarchate’s inner rule over woman. This is why this level of animus actually belongs not to woman’s nature but to male culture’ (Neumann, 1994: 80).

Emma Jung in her book *Anima and Animus*, confirms “Roseanne’s assertion, “the woman’s animus in its superhuman, divine aspect is comparable to such a spirit-and-wind god.’ (1957:20) It is arguable to believe that Emma Jung’s writing on the animus and anima was means of asserting as independent of her husband and also to divest herself of her role of what Adam’s and Duncan (2003:9) termed, ‘femme inspiratrice.’ It was a statement asserting her independence within the process of individuation.

The idea that a female comedian should be brave in the way she express herself, is enforced by American comedian, Elaine Boosler who remarks that comedians should not shy away from difficult subjects: ‘The paper doesn’t change every day. The abortion fight’s going on, the economy’s been going on. This is all four to eight years old already. So it just festers. Someone once said to me, “I’ve figured you out. You either want to be outrageous or outraged.” I can live with that. I don’t enjoy the jokes that are just jokes for me as much as the jokes that have a little political punch on the end (Ajaye, 2002: 73).

‘The loud animus’ can be explained by the fact that self-expression is still an uncommon thing for women in Western societies. In order to be heard, one has to shout loud and be

proactive. As Viv Groskop explains, ‘this leads to many female comedians becoming ‘bullish’ on stage because they are still unsure about their position in society as well as about their position within the hierarchy of the circuit’. Therefore, women on the circuit are often treated as ‘fragile’ – particularly because they are ‘prone to failure’. Comedians like Millican and Groskop argue that women are no more prone to failure on stage than men; and when they fail, it happens for reasons other than their gender:

While no one would argue more funny women is a bad thing, many successful women in comedy are bullish, saying they don’t want special treatment and they wish everyone would just forget the whole thing. Miranda Hart has said that women love her show because it’s like “having a friend who does things you fear you might do or have done”. But she’s also known as “the female Eric Morecambe” and has pointed out that her comedy is far more about being a fool and a clown than being a woman.

(The Daily Mail, 6 July 2013)

As Tessa Adams writes, Jung saw the animus as a form of possession, and contrasted the ‘active’ nature of the male psyche with the innate female ‘passivity’ (Adams and Duncan, 2003: 97). Although Jung’s idea of the animus may be intuitively correct and has a degree of psychological truth to it, the forms and language in which it is expressed are clearly conservative and even sexist. This sexism is the result of his conservative background:

...it is hardly surprising that Jung psychologizes women’s passivity in a society that needed women to subdue intellectual enquiry in the service of domestic concerns. The simplification of a woman as a nurturer and a man as thinker needed to be perpetuated and Jung’s amalgam of gendered attribution and biological difference – masculine/male; feminine/female (albeit mitigated by the contra-sexual archetypes) does little to ensure change. Since Jung was renowned for encouraging many women to enter the analytic profession, this raises the question as to why Jung was not more radical.

(Adams and Duncan, 2003: 97)

Polly Young-Eisendrath also notes that Jungian psychology has a blatant misogynist and patronising bias, and that many women interested in Jung often feel confused and torn between Jung's vision of the female voice and their own perception of their voice as it should be – expressed openly and clearly (Young-Eisendrath, 2004: 90). Young-Eisendrath eventually realises that she had no other choice but to become a Jungian feminist (which, in itself, is an oxymoron):

My own definition of feminism shares its principal themes with many others' definitions. Feminism is a discipline of thought and action that aims to enhance mutuality and trust; to reveal the meanings of gender differences; especially as these might interfere with mutuality or trust; and to oppose all models of methods of dominance-submission for relationships among people. Feminism is not a "power-over" movement. It is not women wanting power over men. What feminism has revealed, in its many forms from theology to literary criticism to psychology and philosophy, is that silencing and trivializing of women and their ideas affect all of us all of the time in the way that we expect the world and ourselves to be.

(Young-Eisendrath, 2004: 90)

Is the decision to go on stage, make oneself visible, make oneself heard, understood and accepted, a sign that one has become a feminist ideologically and politically?

This profession is based on the ability to manipulate language in a certain way; it is all about the mastery over language. Thus, female comedians reclaim power by having access to live language – the bedrock of the social; the keeper of the rules. Female comedians can choose their own subjects, and manipulate these subjects in their own way. Feminist psychologists Rachel Hare-Mustin and Jeanne Marecek explain: 'Language highlights certain features of the objects it represents, certain meanings of the situations it describes. Once designations in language become accepted, one is constrained by them [...]. Throughout history, men have had greater influence over language than women' (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1988: 455). Young-Eisendrath also highlights the fact that women themselves are often guilty of using patriarchal language to describe and criticize 'the weaker sex' because creating and

popularizing a female-friendly (let alone feminist) language is a task that is difficult socially, culturally and linguistically:

Currently, we are still in the position of being dominated by gender stereotypes that function to limit our experiences, expressions, and expectations of the lives we live. We all necessarily participate in everyday conversations in which the given worldview includes assumptions of female inferiority, inadequacy and weakness. Inevitably, all female people arrive at adulthood with feelings and significant beliefs about their own inferiority. [...] Attributions about women's weaknesses and narcissism, about their lack of competence and objectivity, are sustained an on on-going conversations in which both verbal and non-verbal communications are structured by the hard-core belief that female persons lack something. Inevitably all female people develop individual theories about themselves, their families of origin, their bodies, their intelligence, their competence, their nurturance, or the like, that indicate to themselves and others: "Something is wrong with me personally".

(Young-Eisendrath, 2004: 91).

Young-Eisendrath emphasises the fact that women tend to be less 'adventurous' (intellectually as well as in any other way) than men because being proactive sends all sorts of signals to society (2004: 91-92). Female comedians are adventurous and in this context means to take emotional risks in order to activate her 'opinionated' animus giving it a partial or even a full freedom.

They also take narcissistic risks – including the ones associated with their appearance. For instance, they are not afraid of looking silly or even 'ugly'. The very idea of being funny (and comedy has a physical aspect alongside the intellectual aspect) contradicts society's expectation that women look good and look after their appearance. Robert Lynch, a cultural anthropologist from Rutgers University, attempts to explain this phenomenon: 'Maybe women have to go overboard with the self-deprecation because comedy can be an alpha thing, the alpha being the class clown, the attention-grabber, the presence dominating the room. Women alphas in general tend to be disliked. They can sometimes be distrusted, I think. And

they're not sought after. The female stand-ups I know, they don't get a lot of dates out of it' (Fetters, *The Atlantic*, 23 August 2012).

Lynch also points out that this can evolutionally be explained, and that both men and women look for a sense of humour in their partners, but tend to see it differently: "What men mean by 'a sense of humour'" is that they want someone who laughs at their jokes, Lynch explains, "and what women want is [someone who's] funny" (Fetters, *The Atlantic*, 23 August 2012).

It might as well be that men regard 'active' women who are allowed free self-expression on stage as some kind of archetypal ambivalent mothers, devouring, seductive and poisonous. They are mothers who demand all attention for themselves, and therefore deprive men of care and warmth. Like the Freudians, the Jungians traditionally objectify and poeticise the mother figure. However, there are significant differences in the way in which the maternal is objectified. Unlike the Freudian's, the Lacanian's, and the Kleinian's, Jungian thought does not make it look innocuous and a passive object of filial projections. The mother in the Jungian thought, albeit still not a 'real' woman, is nevertheless seen as the seat of power and action. She has the right to create and destroy; she is potentially dangerous. Far from being the castrated, downtrodden creature residing in the imaginary, her power is all too real. Jung writes that the 'negative' mother".

...may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. [...] Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to the medieval allegories, his cross. In India, the 'loving and terrible mother,' is the paradoxical Kali. Sankhya philosophy has elaborated the mother archetype into the concept of prakrti (matter) and assigned to it the three *gunas* or fundamental attributes: sattva, rajas, tamas: goodness, passion and darkness. These are the three essential aspects of the mother: her cherishing and nourishing goodness, her orgiastic emotionality, and her Stygian depths.

(CW 9/I: para. 158).

A female comedian is not an object because she is not beautiful, passive or voiceless, which means that male members of the audience cannot project onto her. Men in the audience may even feel psychologically 'starved' because all the attention goes to the female on stage who is automatically elevated to the status of the leader. The female performer is not 'feeding' the man; instead, she is taking something for herself. In fact, female comedy is a matriarchal situation. Erich Neumann writes that in the realm of 'the Great Mother' the role of the masculine is limited:

In the matriarchy – that is, under the hegemony of the Great Mother – the Masculine can be experienced only in diminished form. The matriarchy regards the masculine side of the uroboros, which of course is bisexual, as part of the Great Mother, as her tool, helper and satellite. The male is loved as child and as youth, and used as her tool of fertility, but he continues to be integrated in and subordinated to the Feminine, and his authentic masculine being and uniqueness is never acknowledged.

(Neumann, 1994: 15).

The 'masochistic' and passive tendencies are only brought about by 'the invasion of the patriarchal uroboros,' which seeks to oppress and control the dark and overwhelming power of the Feminine (1994:14). At the same time, Neumann distinguishes between masculine tendencies in women and truly feminine power. He writes:

Often a woman's neurotic animus-possession is the expression of her inability to differentiate her Self from the Masculine. The woman becomes the victim of her tendency to identification and alienates herself from her own nature by over-developing the masculine, animus side. This identification with the spiritual and the Masculine can find expression in truly tragic conflicts. By identifying with the transpersonal Masculine that takes the place of authentic surrender and devotion, the woman relinquishes her own earth nature and thus becomes a helpless victim of masculine powers.

(1994: 23)

Female creativity, particularly of the proactive, comedic kind, can be regarded by society as a claim to have ‘too much creative power’; as a claim to give birth in several ways instead of just one. This can even take a form of double ‘womb envy’ – male envy of the woman’s ability to produce both biological and metaphorical children. Every time a female comedian makes a joke, it is like a child. The female comedian is the matriarch who has the most power in the room, and who expects male members of the audience to give her attention and praise.

Neumann expects a woman to be both ‘powerful’ and ‘non-masculine’. He implies that there exists some specific female power, grounded in biological reproduction: ‘Nature has granted the mystery of the Feminine its fulfilment both in the primal relationship and in pregnancy, a fulfilment that ever and again comes to pass even without consciousness and even if it is not expressed in ritual; the male mystery is the deed and something to be earned’ (1994: 23-24).

Neumann apportions ambiguity within the female herself. He believes that her intrinsic power is diminished and distorted because she is over identifying with the masculine. Hence the female who enters into the masculine world of stand-up comedy has to entertain the rules of performance and consequently becomes overtly antagonistic. It so happens that the moment the woman starts expressing her ideas, making jokes or appropriating language in other ways, she is immediately seen as ‘aggressive’, rough and unfeminine. She is seen as someone who has lost ‘a vital, soft maternal aspect of herself. Moreover, the female performers themselves seem to be struggling with self-definition, self-image and the persona acceptable for success. Female comedy is still at the crossroads, whilst society is transforming its patriarchal and inherently masculine expectations, she has to accommodate her own and societies’ transition. Hence her route to individuation is fraught with many obstacles.

9.5

My Own Experience as a Comedian

In my own performance on the 26th of April 2013 at the Covent Garden branch of Jongleurs I encountered all the issues that professional female comedians have to deal with on a regular basis. First of all, I felt like my performance had to contain some taboo material; to be shocking in some way. Shocking in this context means ‘not feminine’, challenging, rude. I opened the performance with a joke about multiculturalism in London, and concluded it with jokes about sex and promiscuity.

The opening line was: ‘I am fascinated by languages. Did you know that, in London, Polish is officially the second language. First of course is Jamaican patois. English is fifth, after Rumanian and Arabic!’. The closing paragraph sounded like this: ‘Sexual politics has to change in this country. For years men have said to women: “Lie back and think of England”. I think in this day and age there should be something women can say to men in the bedroom, like “Thrust forward and think of football... and let’s see if you can last 90 minutes and score a goal, but I prefer a hat trick! But really its better with rugby players as they always have a few tries?’

I needed help so I asked a friend and master comedian Sean Meo to help me. As I have already stated this is a male-dominated industry and I chose a male for several reasons, firstly because I respected Sean’s style and his ability to create sharp new political, cultural and personal insights into on-stage material. He also delivers his material in a sharp, fast and efficient manner. Secondly, and most importantly, is that he avoided macho statements about

women and relationships, which meant that he was confident enough to be friendly about women. I wanted to impress and deliver in a short, fast style and hopefully successfully.

The initial meeting with Sean was to discuss what sort of help I needed. He comically translated the areas of my life that I was prepared to divulge, and showed me how to engage the audience and to make the audience laugh. I talked about my upbringing at a council estate, being the daughter of Polish political refugees, being mistaken for a famous singer, my divorce and new relationships. Importantly, I suggested that underlying all this should be a feminist statement: the recent changes to the gender/control axis in relationships. I wanted to show that in this day and age, women were moving closer to having more control in relationships. I also realised that I particularly liked Sean as a stand-up with his style of one-liners, of short pithy stories or attitude statements. I had one shot at this, and had to make it work for me.

I was nervous prior to the performance. My world of comedy was watching me and one of the fears beginning to emerge was that other comedians would be derogatory of me. I was scared of being a bad performer, of other people thinking of me as hopeless, as someone doing 'not her own job'. My biggest fear was being criticised by other comedians. Thankfully, they were also supportive and helpful. It is only in a performance that a comedian to see if the material is funny.

I saw Sean a couple more times, and in between he sent me new one-liners or some of his old one lines that he no longer used and that could fit with my template. My whole being became enveloped by an emotional and energetic charge of potential failure, criticism, annihilation, and subsequent shame.

However, the sense of isolation for me was unnerving. Imagine: it would be me and only me on the stage doing the job for which I usually pay other comedians a substantial amount of money. Of course I wasn't being paid, but I wanted to be good.

On the day of the performance my fear made me myopic and my memory vanished. I couldn't remember my lines. Finally, the set began, and I engaged with the audience: 'Is anyone here Polish?' There was silence. The next question was: 'Not even behind the bar?' Laughter. Phew, I had a response! I divulged certain areas of my partying days, and these were viewed with interest and minimal laughter. I talked about my mobile phone and about people who talk in cinemas. A stag party to my right was looking at me intently. There was laughter, the audience was responding. The second half of my set was received better than my first. Overall, the response was generous, and I could breathe a sigh of relief. At the same time, I felt that I didn't get control of the audience fully. Audience control is an art in itself, and it comes with experience. I felt as if I was on a high-speed train clinging on tightly, afraid to let go until the end of the set when the train stopped. The oceanic feeling of being in contact with so many people at once was enthralling and all consuming, so much so that I sat on my own for a while to understand my feelings. It was like moving to a different dimension. It was the amalgamation of my creativity with the audience reaction that consumed me. This alchemy made the experience totally enveloping. I hadn't failed, I was good enough.

The most exciting part of the performance was the feeling of having my own voice back; of discovering it anew. This was the 'loud', uncontrollable animus emerging from the depths of my psyche. For instance, half way through my set I changed my material from the perspective

of the victim to being in control and fierce. This got the biggest laugh. I joked about not being married anymore because ‘I don’t want to be told off – I have predictive text for that’. I also joked about the sensitive issue of communicating with ex-husbands: ‘The best way to contact them is at eighty mph in a three-litre Range Rover in the middle of the night on a quiet road with no witnesses or speed cameras’.

The louder my animus became, my jokes became cruder. I realised that the soft mellow nurturing female aspect of myself, which I use mostly in my work, would have to be put aside, and the dark shadow of the careless, self absorbed, proactive, offensive (as opposed to defensive) aspect of my nature would have to be accentuated. Now, for the first time, I was exposing my true inner dynamic. There was a frisson between myself and the world of stand-up comedy, and I wanted to engage with this world. Secretly I was hoping that I might unveil an aspect of a creative life that I had never had the chance to explore. Never in the thirty years of watching stand-up had I hoped that one day I would be one of the people on stage.

Conversely, I was afraid that that dark side would get out of control, that I might enjoy it. For the sake of getting laughs I may expose the darker aspect of myself, and it may take over, and subsequently I may regret it. Conversely, it may work well in my favour. I was reclaiming my voice, and trying to discern the different shades within it.

My voice was silenced throughout my entire childhood. Finally and ironically I re-discovered it in a format that was predominantly male! The analysis of what had actually happened here took a few days to understand, but the full realisation of what happened took a few months. It was as if my internal psychological mechanism changed. The performance encouraged me to do more, to be better, to be brilliant. It gave me confidence and realisation

that I could create, to produce something new, and affect people in a positive way. Importantly, I don't have to behave 'like a woman' to be accepted: I can be rude and rough and challenging. I could even be unpleasant. I could show off my bete noir. It was now my choice. I was not projecting my shadow. There was no sharing of glory or pain. I had to take responsibility for the good and the bad. Thankfully, both the performer and the audience were good enough!

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The stand-up comedian is a modern artistic phenomenon who has an impact on society culture, politics and the global psyche. The comedian can be viewed as the embodiment of the creative process along with the therapeutic aim of confession, education, elucidation and transformation as a process to achieve individuation on both personal and social level. The entire process is psychologically and socially unique as it can give the comedian regular employment while, at the same time, it is also transformative.

The comedian enters into the role of stand-up comedy much like Parzifal enters into the Klingsors' valley naively, yet with a serious mission: to make people laugh. He engages in the ritual of comedy, finding his persona, his comedic voice, his style of delivery, the composition of the joke, opening lines, timing, engaging with the audience and, ultimately, finding his comedic power. What becomes apparent is the intra psychic changes of the comedian.

Comedy is a unique genre in terms of the intensity of emotional interaction between an individual performer and the audience. The comedian receives an immediate response from the spectators in the form of laughter. The audience's reaction is instantly visible and therefore feeds the comedian's ego and contributes to his sense of self-satisfaction. On the other hand, the audience is also basking in a variety of positive emotions and is intellectually stimulated. The exchange between them is mutually satisfying and can be therapeutic. With their routine, which is based on personal experiences, comedians also offer self-reflective

experiences for the audience. This self-reflection is simultaneously personal and social, and can be seen as mini-steps on the path that is the Jungian individuation process.

In order for this personal and social individuation to occur, the comedy club transforms into an alchemical container, the *vas*, and the audience becomes the symbolic mother who reinforces Bowlby's 'secure base' which, once found, helps the comedian discover his voice and sends him on a journey of self-discovery. During the performance the comedian can uncover his shadow and disintegrate and re-integrate various components in a public manner.

It is the individual's search for individuation that promotes the self-reflection and actualization of society, which can be termed 'Supra Individuation'. Little by little, area-by-area, the comedian has an illuminating effect on society. His or her search for individuality and distinction, his *Creatura* gives rise to society's disintegration and re-integration. There is a healing component to comedic individuation and Supra Comedy. The Supra Comedian consistently creates the Supra Jokes, which become the spark to make the fire in which the alchemy of change from the stone to gold takes place.

The question arises of the lack of Supra Comedians amongst female performers. Whereas there are quite a few female comedians on the circuit (and several big stars such as Sarah Millican), there are still few female Supra Comedians such as Andi Osho and Ellen DeGeneres. This may be because it is difficult to tackle social issues and to be successful. Women are still yet to find their feet in the realms of stand-up comedy, and they have fewer chances to become Supra Comedians simply because there are many more obstacles on their way to success and acceptance.

In as much as a client cannot go into the ritual of therapy knowing how his individuation process will unfurl, all he knows is his need to be healed or for changes to be recognised and made. It could be suggested it is a similar process for a comedian, he knows he wants to make people laugh and for some individuation comes through the alchemy of the stand-up ritual. The comedian's individuation is constantly on view to the audience, and the changes to his psyche are being encouraged by the verbal transaction much like the therapist and his client. The comedians' psychic development is being watched by a great number of people, and although the individuals in the audience are not personally selected, they potentially affect his development, and they monitor his or her progress by loving them and thereby following them or, conversely, disowning them. Jung states that 'a system of healing that fails to take account of the epoch-making representations-collectives of a political, economic, philosophical, or religious nature, or assiduously refuses to recognise them as actual forces, hardly deserves the name of therapy.

The audience needs the comedian for guidance and illumination. It could be inferred that mankind is in need of the modern type of gods, not as celebrities who have an idealistic glow to them, but people who express their inadequacies, vulnerabilities and neuroses in a palatable and more immediate form than that of the stand-up comedian. The audience can watch and influence the comedian who performs for them but he also represents the ordinary man as he translates the struggles of his fellow human beings with humour. Humour, therefore, becomes a vehicle for change and personal transformation as it accommodates the paradox of conflict. It is arguable that the stand-up is representation of man's psycho-evolutionary drive.

Essentially, stand-up comedic performance represents the connection between the individual and society. As Jung wrote, 'in the last analysis, the essential thing is the life of the

individual. This alone makes history, here alone do the great transformations take place, and the whole future, the whole history of the world, ultimately springs as a gigantic summation from these hidden source in individuals. In our most private and most subjective lives we are not only the passive witnesses of our age, and its sufferers, but also its makers. We make their own epoch' (Jung, CW10: para. 315).

As an individual and social agent, the comedian initiates change in society by looking at the political issues through the prism of his or her psyche. This is a heroic act, and by doing so, individual performers do make 'their own epoch'.

10.1

Developing Stand up Comedy Therapy:

I intend to create a series of Stand-up Comedy Therapy workshops in combination with psychotherapists. This will act as both a medium for behavioural change and personal change with immediate feedback. It can also give an opportunity for a creative outlet and potentially a new occupation.

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