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The Comedic Multiform: A Poetics Framework for Capturing and Analysing  
Performance in the Anglophonic Stand-up Comedy Tradition

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

York St John University

School of Humanities

September 2023

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## **Abstract**

This thesis outlines a holistic analysis framework for stand-up comedy performance in the Anglophonic comedy tradition. Academic stand-up comedy analysis and comparison is a comparatively recent addition to performative analysis and previous attempts are often unsuitable for direct comparison and contrast due to a lack of a unified framework and dedicated structuralist approach to the craft, with extant works approaching the analysis from a variety of intersectional but distinct schools adjacent to the appreciation of stand-up comedy as a unique performative medium.

Incorporating extant theoretical work on stand-up comedy analysis into a three-tiered poetics framework and applying this to analysing a corpus of thirty-five transcribed performance artefacts, this study is a structuralist approach to analysing anglophonic stand-up comedy performances. It argues that stand-up comedy is enough of a separate discipline to warrant its unique approach within the intellectual tradition of theatre and performance studies and that with the right framework for theoretical approaches, comparable analysis can be conducted on a wide variety of performances while maintaining the unique character of each.

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## **Introduction**

\*\*

“Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind” – E. B. White<sup>1</sup>

\*\*

The study of stand-up comedy represents a relatively new theoretical sub-school within the broader field of comedy studies. Despite some extensive work having been carried out in this area<sup>2</sup>, there is no unified theoretical framework possibly due to never having had a holistic structuralist approach to the medium. Consequently, no comprehensive framework is available for dissecting and discussing stand-up comedy that is flexible, extensible, and layered - comedy has never really had its own structuralist tradition and there has been a tendency to 'close read' stand-up at a sociological and performance level. My proposed framework seeks to address this by recognising the multi-sensory performance mode to achieve a close reading of text.

The primary aim of this thesis is to establish such a framework, grounded in a holistic examination of individual performances by a single performer in the anglophonic stand-up comedy tradition. By utilising unchanging "recorded artefacts", such as live notes, video, and transcription, a shared interpretive base will be provided as the foundation of a corpus for analysis. Three levels of analysis will be applied to these artefacts: firstly, a frame level, which encompasses the artefact as viewed by an educated spectator; secondly, a narrative level that analyses structure, pacing, and audience reaction from a constructivist viewpoint; and thirdly, a material

---

<sup>1</sup> Elwyn Brooks White, 'Some Remarks on Humor', in *A Subtreasury of American Humor* ed. by Elwyn Brooks White and Katharine Sergeant White (New York: Howard McCann Inc. 1941), p. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> See Ian Brodie (2008, 2009, 2014, 2020), Oliver Double (1997, 2012, 2014, 2017,2020), Antti Lindfors (2016, 2017, 2019, 2023), Sharon Lockyer (2005, 2008, 2010, 2015, 2020), Louise Peacock (2009, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020) and Sophie Quirk (2011, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2022) for the most prolific of the contemporary stand-up comedy scholars

level that delves into the arrangement, scansion, and comedic techniques responsible for eliciting reactions from the audience.

Each of these levels already has a reasonable body of work dedicated to them and I intend to build on this in a way that can be leveraged and combined to create a toolbox to utilise as part of a structuralist approach to stand-up comedy studies, exploring the genre from different theoretical angles to discover the ones that work together. Due to the relative academic youth of the medium compared to literature, theatre, film and television, I argue that stand-up comedy has never had a concerted structuralist approach before moving into post-structuralism like the rest of performance studies. This study is the first step towards addressing this. The proposed theoretical tools will not only be outlined and described as part of the study, but they will also be applied to a selection of three recorded anglophonic performances with varying levels of performance venue, audience expectation, and mediation, as well as selected material examples from other transcribed performances within the collected corpus of stand-up artefacts. This will demonstrate the applicability of the selected theoretical tools to different performers and genres within stand-up comedy.

The study was conducted against thirty-five recorded and transcribed solo stand-up performances. From these, I have selected three to analyse in detail using the developed framework - my own performance in character as Frank Astaire in 2016 (to demonstrate the use of the framework for reflexive analysis) and the performances of Nish Kumar and Mae Martin at Live from the BBC in 2016 (to demonstrate the use for the framework for both individual and comparative analysis). Each of these performances was selected as containing the lowest level of mediation and to be representative of the first three categories as defined by Neil Rosenberg<sup>3</sup>:

---

<sup>3</sup> Neil V. Rosenberg, 'Big Fish, Small Pond: Country Musicians and Their Markets', *Media Sense: The Folklore-Popular Culture*, ed. By Peter Narvaez and Martin Laba (Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1986), pp. 149-166

<u>Renown Level</u>	<u>Skill Level</u>
Local	Apprentice
Regional	Journeyman
National	Craftsman
International	Celebrity

*Table 1 - Renown and Skill Level Matrix*

In this context, I am classified as a Local Apprentice in the UK, while Mae Martin was a National Apprentice at the time of performance and Nish Kumar was a National Journeyman. Each performer's relative skill level is reflected within the trappings of the performance venue and the size of the attendant audience, demonstrating the diversity of the study and the applicability of the proposed theoretical tools.

The research was conducted over a period of five years and involved the transcription of thirty-five pieces of recorded material. This included multiple pieces of my own work, recorded over a year between 2015 and 2016, as well as commercially available material in both video and audio formats, and content broadcast via streaming services.<sup>4</sup> All the material within the corpus is within the Anglophonic tradition of stand-up comedy, with performers from predominantly English-speaking countries (Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Ireland) performing within the shared comedic tradition and language that will be defined in detail later in the thesis. Within the corpus itself, the ratio is roughly 77.5% male to 22.5% female acts<sup>5</sup> – this is largely representative of the wider circuit in the UK which, according to the profiles on the website Chortle had in 2020 a ratio of 27.4% female comedians<sup>6</sup>. While my study has fewer than the average, the chosen corpus performances for all gender identities were selected for the exemplification of their style – the aim of this corpus is as a starting point, a few

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<sup>4</sup> These parameters were chosen due to availability to view and review as well as copyright considerations. The work I recorded is copyrighted to myself, allowing me to examine and transform it into a transcript at my leisure. Commercially available and streaming material, on the other hand, is easily accessible and can be used for transformative works.

<sup>5</sup> This is counted as the gender the acts identified with at the time of the comedy performance recording

<sup>6</sup> Claire Cook, Jamie L Callahan, Thomas V Pollet and Carole Elliott, 'Gender(ed) performances: Women's impression management in stand-up comedy', *human relations*, 77, 4 (2024) pp. 533-559 (p.535)

exemplary performances for the wider academic field to expand upon, and this below-average ratio of female acts is not in any way representative of a dearth of talent or a lack of respect for the hard work and comedic skill that being a woman in a male-dominated profession demands.

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Oral Traditional Theory, for the study, I will be outlining a flexible, extensible multimodal poetics framework for recording the pertinent data points for a structured and layered analysis and comparison of stand-up comedy performance texts, with the aim of encompassing extant intersectional theories under the field of stand-up comedy analysis for the utility of professionals and academics in the field.

A detailed methodology will be established to outline this approach. This involves identifying key aspects of stand-up comedy, such as performance, audience interaction, and the cultural and social contexts within which it takes place. By systematically examining these aspects, and the relationships between them, a holistic framework can be created that recognises the interconnectivity of various factors influencing the art form. This comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach will enable researchers to better understand the nuances of stand-up comedy, and in doing so, more effectively contribute to the ongoing academic discourse in this field.

In terms of critical field, this work sits within performance studies in general and cultural performance in specific context – the textual artefacts themselves are the product of performance transcription akin to conversational analysis (through a more stand-up specific transcription method), and the levels of performance analysis being akin to those approaches underpinning folkloristics, speech act theory and performativity – detailed posthoc analysis of genuine social interaction and feedback between one performer and an audience in an artificial, staged setting. Stand-up comedy has more in common with cultural than artistic performance due to this instantaneous feedback, and any analysis beyond the visceral is difficult to perform at the locus of the performance as well as relying heavily on recollection beyond it. My approach is analogous to a practice such as sports science – a concentration on recording viable data for analysis (the performance artefact) and then assessing the

fundamental components of that artefact against not only a corpus of similar artefacts but also extant theories from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The research currently stands at the juncture of folkloristics, discourse analysis, and comedy studies, with core texts within each discipline providing the groundwork for the three analysis levels present within the proposed framework - folklore for the initial or frame level<sup>7</sup>, discourse analysis for the secondary or narrative level<sup>8 9 10</sup> and comedy studies for the tertiary or material level<sup>11 12</sup>.

The initial transcripts for the corpus were created using an AI program called Descript<sup>13</sup>, which was used in this context to process the recording before the transcript was exported to an Excel document to check for accuracy and further division. Descript was used as the transcription software for several reasons - Descript is API-agnostic, meaning it can work with whichever ASR provider offers the best combination of speed, accuracy, and affordability for its customers. Additionally, Descript is regularly tested against samples of scripted and unscripted broadcasts, VOIP calls, and meetings, including samples with diverse speakers and topics, to ensure accuracy in different scenarios. The average Word Error Rate (WER) for Descript is 16% using Google (Video).

WER is calculated using the following equation, where:

S is the number of substitutions,

D is the number of deletions,

I is the number of insertions,

---

<sup>7</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University Press 2014)

<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Eggins and J. R. Martin, 'Genres and Registers of Discourse', *Discourse as Structure and Process*, ed. T. A. van Dijk (London: SAGE Publications, 1998)

<sup>9</sup> Ralph H. Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behavior*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957)

<sup>10</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

<sup>11</sup> Bim Mason, *Provocation in Popular Culture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*, (New York: Routledge, 1993)

<sup>13</sup> Descript software available from *Descript for Transcription* (2023) <<https://www.descript.com/transcription>> [accessed 26 September 2023]

C is the number of correct words,

N is the number of words in the reference (N=S+D+C)

$$WER = \frac{S + D + I}{N} = \frac{S + D + I}{S + D + C}$$

As stated in the methodology for Descript's testing<sup>14</sup>, accuracy is much lower when speech overlap is involved. Therefore, the next step of the process is to export the AI-transcribed text into a template created using Microsoft Excel. This allows each section of material to be separated and numbered sequentially. The transcribed text is then checked for accuracy by watching or listening to the recording while reading, which also provides the opportunity to add in performer movements and audience reactions. Audience reactions are timed and inserted based on my interpretation of the heard reaction.

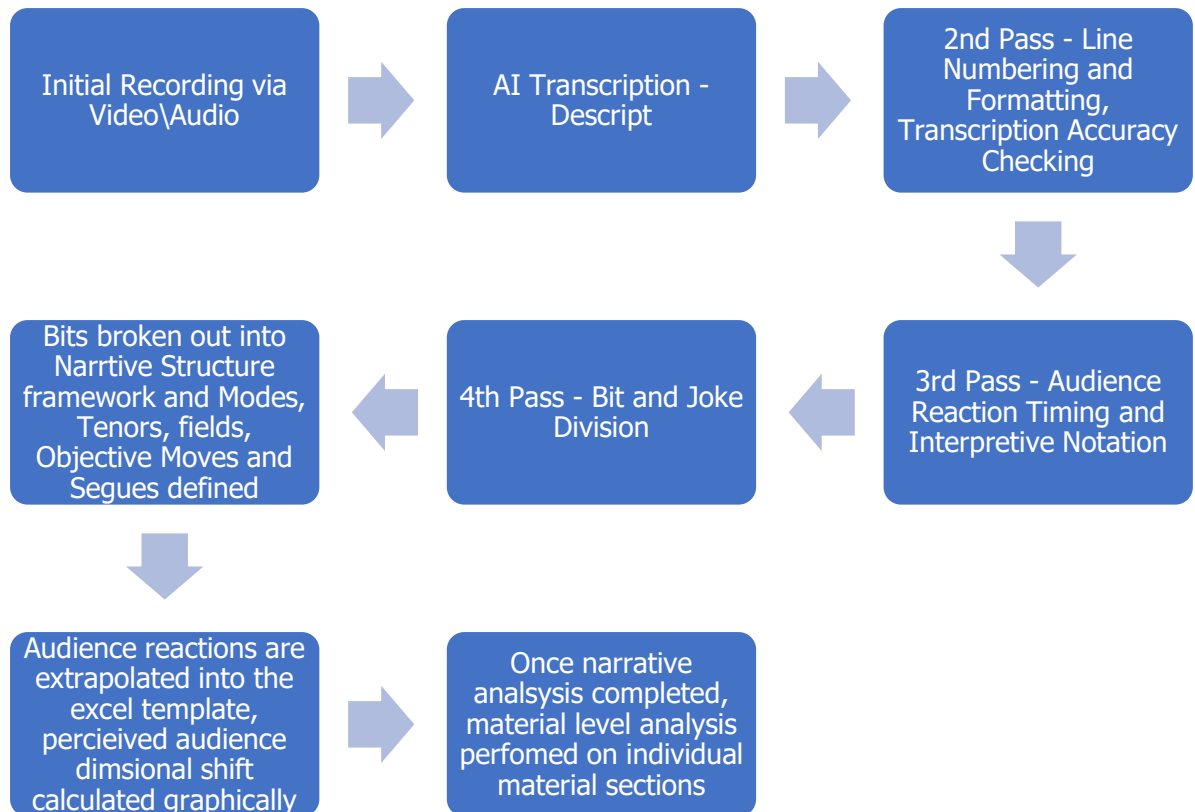
Once the secondary transcription is complete, a third pass is made to divide the transcription into bits and jokes. Bits are frames consisting of several sequentially correlated narratives by topic, and jokes are sections of material constructed to elicit a response. The fundamental distinction between jokes and material is that material encompasses all communicative comedy techniques into a unified performative whole, whereas jokes are just one of those performative techniques used by a performer to elicit a response. Focusing solely on jokes would ignore ad-libs, facial reactions, audience interaction, and the hundreds of other elements that contribute to the dialogue between performer and audience. Jokes may follow the conventional form of setup and punchline or take other forms - an anatomy of comedy forms will be provided as a guide for the comedy academic. The interpretation of the performance through the various passes of transcription falls under fair use for non-commercial research, criticism, and review, as well as recording for use later; the original work remains unchanged by the transcription, as the notes amount to little more than annotations for the purpose of later theoretical analysis.

---

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Mason, *Which Automatic Transcription Service is the Most Accurate? — 2018* (2018) <https://www.descript.com/blog/article/which-automatic-transcription-service-is-the-most-accurate-2018> [accessed 14 July 2023]



The full analysis process proceeds as follows:



*Figure 1 - Illustration of Analysis Process*

The narrative structure framework allows the transcribed material to be analysed in a concise and repeatable manner, drawing on elements from both communication theory and education theory to examine each narrative section within its own modes, tenors, fields, objective moves, and segues. Each bit connects to the next while also acting as its own narrative form.

By assigning rankings to audience reactions, a system can be created, albeit rudimentary, that enables a comparative analysis of the overall success of the performance as well as the success of individual bits of material. This creates a macro-to-micro scale of interpretive measurement that can be easily graphed to display the shape of the performance. These graphs offer a more accessible depiction of the ebbs and flows of audience concentration and engagement, providing a different approach for the comedy analyst than relying entirely on corresponding descriptions would.

This thesis comprises the following six chapters:

1. The establishment of the stand-up artefact as a holistic entity, including a modern definition of the area of study (anglophonic stand-up comedy) and the potential benefits of studying stand-up performance in the way I am proposing.
2. A survey of the current comedy studies field, including extant theories of comedy and why these are inadequate for examining stand-up artefacts in the holistic manner I propose.
3. A sketch of the proposed holistic framework that incorporates the current theoretical approaches favoured by the field and the rationale behind this approach, including a more detailed description of the methodology outlining this approach.
4. An exploration of the theories leveraged in the first level of the proposed framework – the framing level – and their application to the holistic analysis of three extant stand-up comedy artefacts.
5. An exploration of the theories leveraged in the second level of the proposed framework – the narrative level – and their application to the structural analysis of three extant stand-up comedy artefacts.
6. An exploration of the theories leveraged in the third level of the proposed framework – the material level – and their application to the close analysis of extracts from three extant stand-up comedy artefacts.

## **Chapter One**

\*\*

“If the audience doesn’t laugh, you’ve quite simply failed. The content of your act is irrelevant. You may have been inventive, imaginative, intelligent, but if they didn’t laugh, you’re a failure.” – Oliver Double<sup>1</sup>

\*\*

### **Defining Stand-up Comedy**

The establishment of the stand-up artefact as a holistic entity involves providing a modern definition of the area of study (anglophonic stand-up comedy) and discussing the potential benefits of studying stand-up performance in the way I am proposing. Stand-up comedy is a three-way collaborative performance, which requires the proactive investment of the performer, audience, and venue in the ongoing performance. In order to meaningfully analyse stand-up comedy as a performance artefact, the holistic collaboration that occurs between these three parties must be acknowledged, recorded, and analysed.

Much contemporary comedy criticism, while adequately equipped for the deep analysis of joke structures<sup>2</sup>, comedic techniques<sup>3</sup>, and philosophical approaches to humour<sup>4</sup>, is currently underequipped when it comes to the analysis and critique of stand-up comedy as a complete performative artefact. Any study of stand-up comedy as an observable tradition is multidisciplinary due to the unique nature of stand-up comedy performance. This form of comedy sits firmly at the intersection between creative writing, performance studies, communication studies, and humour theory while maintaining methodological distinctions from each of these disciplines.

---

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Double, *Stand-Up! On Being a Comedian* (London: Methuen, 1997) p. 5

<sup>2</sup> See Victor Raskin (1984, 1987), Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin (1991), Jonathan Raskin and Salvatore Attardo (1994), Salvatore Attardo (2002)

<sup>3</sup> See Arthur Asa Berger (1987, 1995, 1997, 2016, 2020), Stephen Gimbel (2017), Dan O’Shannon (2012)

<sup>4</sup> See Alan Roberts (2019) and John Morreall (2020) for a comprehensive primer on philosophical approaches to humour

## **Elements of Stand-up**

### Performer

The first element vital to any stand-up comedy performance is the performer. The nature of stand-up comedy may vary in terms of style, pacing, delivery, skill, and affect, but everyone attending the gig understands that the performer is the fundamental reason for their presence – thus, the performer's role is crucial in shaping the overall experience and atmosphere of the performance.

Conventionally, there is perhaps an expectation that the performers are "being themselves" on stage, even though the performance takes place in an artificial conversational environment. This means that the audience expects the performer to display a certain level of authenticity<sup>5</sup>, allowing them to connect with the audience on a personal level, despite the constructed nature of the stand-up comedy setting.<sup>6</sup>

Within the current literature, many researchers concentrate on the performers themselves as the focus of stand-up comedy<sup>7</sup>, examining them as an entity from an objective (through analysis) or subjective (through interview) standpoint. These studies often explore the personalities, motivations, and backgrounds of the performers, aiming to understand the factors that contribute to their comedic style and success.

However, focusing solely on the performer does not fully capture the essence of stand-up comedy as a performative artefact. By concentrating on the individuals who perform comedy, these studies largely encapsulate not the performative stand-up text but the type of people who engage in this medium. This approach may overlook the nuances and complexities of stand-up comedy as a unique and dynamic form of live entertainment that involves the interaction between the performer, audience, and venue.

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers, 'It's About Expecting the Unexpected': Live Stand-up Comedy from the Audiences' Perspective, *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8, 2 (2011) pp. 165-188 (p. 174)

<sup>6</sup> Phillip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Oxon: Routledge, 2008) p. 34-35

<sup>7</sup> See Kofsky (1974), Horowitz (2012), Limon (2000), Allen (2002), Murray (2010), Hunt (2010, 2013), Blunden (2011) and Peacock (2011) for just a few examples.

## Performance

The second element vital to any stand-up comedy performance is the performance itself, which consists of two interwoven features: material and improvisation. The overall percentage of each varies from performer to performer; however, the aim is to create an effective mix of the two that gives the illusion of spontaneous speech.

Material is the element that travels from performance to performance, whether this is rehearsed beforehand or workshopped as part of the performance itself. Material serves as the backbone of the performance, providing reliability for pacing and expected reception. On the other hand, improvisation is largely situational, involving reactions to current events such as unexpected laughs, heckling, or something accidental like a dropped glass. Improvisation may be turned into material if it is carried over from performance to performance, and established material may be passed off as improvisation if executed skillfully enough. According to Tobyn Demarco, there are at least three ways in which improvisation is a component of stand-up comedians' practices – heterotelic or instrumental improvisation, which is improvisation in non-performance contexts "used to generate new material, and hone, edit, and revise already scripted or composed material". Autotelic, the second kind of improvisation, "is improvisation during (or in) performances" and can often be combined with the first when "comedians perform sets at (usually lower stakes) venues in which they are trying out composed bits and honing bits."<sup>8</sup> Finally, Demarco reinforces the idea of the vernacular within stand-up, stating:

Since casual, ordinary, unplanned conversation is mostly improvised... an important aesthetic goal of stand-up is to present jokes and bits as if one were just talking. In other words, comedians seek to deliver jokes and

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<sup>8</sup> Tobyn Demarco, 'Improvisation and Stand-Up Comedy', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 78, 4, (2020) pp. 419-436 (p. 425)

bits with nonchalance and the kind of effortlessness ordinarily displayed in quotidian conversation, that is, with *sprezzatura*<sup>9,10</sup>

To foreground the content of the performance - jokes, routines, and so on - as the encapsulation of stand-up comedy is an approach that is extensively covered by the current extant academic literature. This approach is largely abstract, encompassing conversational analysis<sup>11</sup>, linguistic analysis<sup>12</sup>, and isolating the "comedic event."<sup>13</sup> However, these examples show only the constructive elements of stand-up comedy, not the complete structure of the performative stand-up text. By focusing on these individual components, it is possible to overlook the broader context and impact of stand-up comedy as a dynamic, engaging, and interactive art form.

### Audience

The typical audience for a comedy gig consists of a disparate mixture of couples, groups, and individuals brought together by the single unifying factor of the comedy performance itself. Within the context of comedy performance, audiences need to be carefully managed by the performer to maintain the desired state of an enthusiastic group receptive to humour, while not letting this reaction spiral out of control and become unmanageable.

Academically, a much rarer approach adopted from theatre studies is an audience-focused approach to stand-up performance<sup>14</sup>. Carried out through questionnaires at live events or through workshops, the collective view of the audience is gauged regarding various aspects of the stand-up experience. The idea of the audience as a collective entity is often overlooked within stand-up dissection but forms an important part of the overall experience. However, as useful as this

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<sup>9</sup> Defined later by Demarco as "effortlessness, or naturalness, or the deliberate concealment of artfulness or craft"

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 426

<sup>11</sup> See Rutter (1997, 2001), Brodie (2008) and Dore (2018)

<sup>12</sup> See Ross (2003)

<sup>13</sup> See Kozitski (1984), Thallon (2011) and O'Shannon (2012)

<sup>14</sup> See Lockyer and Myers (2011) but also Pavis (2003), White (2013) and Machon (2013) for more general performance application

information is, when considered alone it does not reveal the performative stand-up text but rather provides insight into how the performance is seen in retrospect.

By considering the audience's role in stand-up comedy, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the performance's impact and reception, contributing to a more holistic analysis of the performance. Recognising the symbiotic relationship between performer and audience is essential to fully appreciate the complexities of stand-up comedy as a dynamic, engaging, and interactive experience.

### Venue

Many different aspects of a venue can have a significant impact on the performer, the performance, and the audience - often the venue itself helps shape expectations of what a comedy performance is going to be<sup>15</sup>. Most effective comedy venues feature a stage area, microphone, and amplification as a bare minimum.

The stage serves to delineate the separation between the audience and the performer, while the microphone projects a sense of authority onto the performer due to the deliberateness and conspicuous nature of its being given to the performer as a tool within their arsenal - amplification allows the performer to literally overpower the voice of an individual member of the audience. These three elements, in unity, provide an image not of superiority or even unbridled authority but of conscious and deliberate empowerment, something that is gifted to the performer as part of their role as an entertainer while still being approachable enough to 'share a laugh with'.

When approaching stand-up comedy from a performativity theory perspective, the physical parameters of stand-up comedy appear to be clearly defined when considered as a distinct performative event. Most stand-up gigs consist of a microphone on a bare (or at most minimally decorated) stage with a single

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<sup>15</sup> See Sophie Quirk (2011), Jason Rutter (1997, 2000), Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers (2011), Sharon Lockyer (2015) and James M. Thomas (2015) for several examples specific to stand-up comedy

performer, empowered by the performative context that the stand-up setting provides. However, this does not provide a complete insight into the performance, only its contextualisation. By examining the relationship between the performer, the audience, and the venue, researchers can better understand the complexities of stand-up comedy as a dynamic, engaging, and interactive experience.

### The Gig

The comedy gig itself – the reason for the performer to be performing for the audience at the venue – represents a crucial element of stand-up comedy. At its most basic level, the comedy gig is the date, time, and place (temporospatial context) of the performance, but it also encompasses the expression of purpose and deliberate action of the previous four elements (intentionality). The performer comes to the comedy gig with the intention of performing for personal recompense (monetary, reputational, or otherwise), and performs with the general intention of making the audience laugh. The audience attends the gig with the general intention of seeing a performance and being entertained by it. The venue, on the other hand, facilitates the performance with the intention of profit, reputational increase, and future accommodation of similar performances.

This final element may seem the most trivial, but it helps establish one very important premise – stand-up comedy as defined here is never spontaneous, only ever performed with deliberate intentionality by participants on either side of the stage, who bring their own set of expectations matching their own personal perspective to the performance.<sup>16</sup> Humour and its philosophy do not analyse the performative stand-up text, only its intention and effect. To fully understand the nuances of stand-up comedy, it is essential to examine the interactions between the

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<sup>16</sup> While no examination of comedy is complete without a consideration of the philosophical concepts of superiority theory, incongruity theory, relief theory, and play theory, as well as the newer approaches such as General Theory of Verbal Humour (Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, 'Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model', *Humor*, 4.3-4 (1991) pp. 293-348), Cleverness Theory (Steven Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor* (Oxon: Routledge 2018)), and the O'Shannon Model of Humour (Dan O'Shannon, *What Are You Laughing At? A Comprehensive Guide to the Comedic Event* (London: Bloomsbury 2012)), these approaches are again largely abstract.



performer, audience, and venue, as well as the intentionality behind the performance itself.

These five aspects represent the full circumstances of the performance and are unable to be separated without losing the complete picture of the event. The performer is inseparable from the performance, the performance is shaped by the audience, the audience is influenced by the venue, the venue facilitates the comedy gig, and the comedy gig motivates the performer. Each aspect is interconnected and vital to the overall experience of a stand-up comedy performance.

Throughout the narrative of the performance, each aspect is in a state of various foregrounding and backgrounding, something that any skilled performer learns to recognise through experience. By understanding the intricate balance between the performer, performance, audience, venue, and comedy gig, a more nuanced and holistic approach to the study and analysis of stand-up comedy can be achieved. In this way, the true essence and impact of the art form can be more accurately and comprehensively captured, providing a richer understanding of the complex dynamics at play in the world of stand-up comedy.

### **A Modern Definition of English-speaking Stand-up**

Though the most basic form of stand-up comedy, in its narrowest and most limiting definition, is described by Mintz as "a single, standing performer behaving comically and/or saying funny things directly to an audience"<sup>17</sup>, the content and context of this comical behaviour and funny utterances have taken different forms over the years. As Double notes, "(t)he line connecting Max Miller to modern comedians such as Michael McIntyre is by no means unbroken, but the fact is that the very form of stand-up evolved from music hall song, and started life as the front cloth comedy of variety"<sup>18</sup>. Double then goes on to chart the evolution from variety

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Mintz, 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation', *American Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1985) pp. 71-80 (p.71)

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Double, *Britain Had Talent: A History of Variety Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 208

to club comedy, and from there to the alternative comedy movement in the 1980s, which still provides the context, if not the content, of modern stand-up comedy. Both the modern club circuit and DIY scene can draw a direct lineage to the early days of the Comedy Store in terms of approach, setup, and execution.

Although the alternative comedy scene was a radical departure from the club circuit of the 1960s and 70s, it must now be acknowledged that today's "alternative comedy" has become the mainstream and has evolved into a form markedly different from the politically charged, politically correct, left-wing, and/or anarchist sentiments espoused by those such as Ben Elton, Tony Allen, and Alexei Sayle.<sup>19</sup> Leon Hunt, in his examination of cult British TV comedy post-1989, defines this period as "post-alternative comedy", encompassing the "'new lad' culture of the 1990s or the 'ironic incorrectness'"<sup>20</sup> that would appear in later acts such as Jimmy Carr and Frankie Boyle<sup>21</sup>. This shift is, at least in stand-up terms, pinpointed by Hunt as epitomised by Frank Skinner winning the Perrier Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1991. As he writes:

Skinner's award, on the other hand, was interpreted by some as not so much a turn towards the apolitical as a political backlash, even though he is one of the most technically skilled and quick-witted comics of his generation. Skinner is as scrupulously non-racist as an alternative comedian, but his more unreconstructed take on sexual politics would make him a figurehead for the 'new lad' culture that flourished in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

In this context of "post-alternative comedy" then, what definition of stand-up can be gleaned that fits with modern expectations of the form? Oliver Double defines stand-up as a "single performer standing in front of an audience, talking to them with the

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<sup>19</sup> For an in-depth look at this period of comedy, see *Didn't You Kill My Mother in Law* by Roger Wilmut and Peter Rosengard (1989) or *Alternative Comedy: 1979 and the Reinvention of British Stand-up* by Oliver Double (2020)

<sup>20</sup> Leon Hunt, *Cult British TV Comedy: From Reeves and Mortimer to Psychoville* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2013), p. 1

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* pp. 201-203

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 6

specific intention of making them laugh"<sup>23</sup>. Although Double later challenges the idea of stand-up being solely the preserve of the single performer<sup>24</sup>, the notion of specific intention of laughter is the crucial element here. Laughter serves as the heart monitor beep that informs the comedian that their pacing, inflexion, rhythm, and intonation are working for the material, grounding the performance and steering it between beats.

This, however, does not mean that other reactions cannot be incorporated into the routine. The nature and reputation of stand-up as a taboo-breaking medium require skilful emotional manipulation from its most successful proponents. Double goes on to define the three things that further differentiate stand-up comedy from other disciplines<sup>25</sup>, namely: personality, where the performer displays a comic persona on stage, either an extension of themselves or a created character; direct communication, meaning the performance is a conversational exchange of jokes, laughter, and other reactions between the performer and audience; and present tense, which acknowledges the performance situation and must incorporate changes in that situation or risk losing faith.

These three distinctions, coupled with the earlier assertion of specific intention, make a workable definition of stand-up comedy and one that is an essential component to moving on to look at audience and performer motivation - to gain a more comprehensive understanding of stand-up comedy, further refinement and examination must be sought.

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<sup>23</sup> Oliver Double, *Stand-Up: On Being a Comedian* (London: Methuen 1997), p. 4

<sup>24</sup> See Double (2014) pp. 18-19 – although there is ample evidence that double acts provide a performance that is functionally identical, the fact that the performer-audience dynamic is no longer dialogic but “trialogic” i.e., the dialogue is now both performer-performer and performers-audience – this adds a layer of complication to the analysis that is beyond the scope of this study and therefore will be outside our strict definition.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* pp. 19-20

## **Narrative Elements of British Post-Alternative Stand-up Performance**

Ian Brodie, who examines stand-up comedy in his book *A Vulgar Art* through the lens of folklore, has collected a range of definitions<sup>26</sup> in an attempt to create an all-encompassing definition of stand-up comedy. His definition of stand-up is as follows<sup>27</sup>:

1. A spoken, verbal performance by a sole individual.
2. In front of, to, and in collaboration with an audience.
3. With a clear demarcation between performer and audience.
4. Without conspicuous staging, costuming, or props.
5. In prose and without musical accompaniment.
6. With minimal characterisation.
7. Seemingly extemporaneous.
8. Largely autobiographical or observational.
9. Presented as emerging from a particular worldview (place, perspective, values, experience, etc.).
10. Claiming shared, complementary, or overlapping worldviews between the performer and audience.
11. Esoteric.
12. Ostensibly counter-hegemonic.
13. Deliberately aimed at evoking laughter from the audience to whom it is being performed.
14. Taking place within an exchange economy and thus with attendant expectations of value for money; and

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<sup>26</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University Press 2014), pp. 13-14

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* pp. 14-15

15. Often recorded, broadcast, and disseminated as a tangible product for sale and/or for purposes of reputation cultivation.

Brodie is largely in agreement with Double in terms of the intention of laughter (point 13), direct communication with the audience (point 2) and the present tense incorporation by extension of reaction (point 7). However, it would also seem that point 6 about minimal characterisation runs counter to Double's observation about the display of a comic persona. As Brodie himself admits, "(f)or each feature, one could easily find a comedian who would prove the exception"<sup>28</sup>. Certain points in this definition bring interesting perspectives to the table that deserve further exploration, namely that stand-up comedy is autobiographical, emerges from a particular worldview, that that worldview is shared by the performer and audience, and finally, that comedy is both esoteric and counter-hegemonic.

### Autobiography

In his examination of the theoretical underpinnings of stand-up comedy, Richie analyses the Aristotelian quote "Comedy represents the worse types of men" and arrives at the following conclusion:

[I]t could include everyone from the post-war Tommy Cooper's comedian as clumsy oaf... Max Miller's comedian as cheeky joker with risqué gags; Eric Morecambe's relentlessly comic character, edged with pathos; and the more contemporary Mark Lamarr, sharp but hostile, and Alexei Sayle, manic, dangerous... In stand-up comedy, we do see Aristotle's 'worse type of men'<sup>29</sup> but also those whom we can admire for skill, wit and intelligence.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 15

<sup>29</sup> Although this quote is gendered, it is in no way reflective of a dearth of female acts in the alternative comedy scene, with performers such as Victoria Wood, Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, Jo Brand, Jenny Lecoat, Adele Anderson, Dillie Keane, Denise Wharmby, Claire Dowie, Jenny Éclair, Kit Hollerbach, Hattie Hayridge and Josie Lawrence as well as many others.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Richie, *Stand-up Comedy and Everyday Life: Post-war British Comedy and the Subversive Strain* (PhD Thesis: Goldsmiths College 1998), p. 44

This admiration can be seen as an argument towards stand-up being autobiographical, if not always explicitly then in the skill displayed in garnering the audience's admiration despite the shortcomings of the presented persona.

Richie then goes on to discuss the idea of shared experiences as revealed by the stand-up performer and the concept of the relation of universal truths:

In stand-up comedy, we can retain an emotional distance from that related... the personal narrative frames that represented and the stand-up comedian represents two different selves – the self speaking and the self of whom s/he speaks.<sup>31</sup>

This again leans towards stand-up being autobiographical – this "convenient grotesque" that is created to draw the mockery of both the audience and the comedian and create a virtual representation of the other that is nevertheless indicated as being formed from the comedian's own experiences.

#### Personal Worldview

Speaking of the role of stand-up comedy in the process of cultural affirmation, Lawrence Mintz states:

Traditionally, the comedian is defective in some way, but his natural weaknesses generate pity, and more important, exemption from the expectation of normal behaviour... In his role as negative exemplar, we laugh at him.<sup>32</sup>

Though this would seem to run counterpoint to the idea of the comedian having a worldview, it is precisely this role as negative exemplar that allows the comedian to have a worldview in the first place.

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* pp. 52-53

<sup>32</sup> Mintz, *Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation*, 1985, p. 74

A sense of otherness from society and a "plural reflexivity"<sup>33</sup> allows the worldview to be disseminated in a way that can be publicly affirmed without implicit negative consequences for society. As Mintz states:

In this sense, as a part of the public ritual of stand-up comedy, he serves as a shaman, leading us in a celebration of a community of shared culture, of homogenous understanding and expectation.<sup>34</sup>

This highlights the unique position of the comedian within the performance, as they act as both a participant and an observer of society, providing insights and critiques through their comedic lens. Andrea Greenbaum argues that stand-up comedy is carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense, stating that "(t)he verbal art of performing stand-up comedy provides the same cultural function as carnival; its laughter is not restricted" and that the dialogic nature of stand-up:

is more pluralistic, and "speaks" to a working-class audience. This style is a linguistic form of authoritative resistance. Likewise, the stand-up's rhetorical style is dialogical, designed to bridge the gap, the distance between orator and audience.<sup>35</sup>

Daniel R. Smith, in his book *Comedy and Critique*, argues that "(o)bservational comedy's virtue is to disrupt, and confront, our experience of 'everyday life' as a given or un-reflected upon reality" bringing:

(a) heightened self-awareness as to the contents of everyday life (social forms) while remaining outside of them; an invitation to move outside of the taken-for granted while at the same time furnishing the everyday with a new vitality<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 73

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 74

<sup>35</sup> Andrea Greenbaum, 'Stand-up Comedy as Rhetorical Argument: An Investigation of Comic Culture', *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research*, 12, 1 (1999) pp. 33-46 (p. 34)

<sup>36</sup> Daniel R. Smith, *Comedy and Critique: Stand-up Comedy and the Professional Ethos of Laughter* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), p. 148

This again supports Mintz's view while also adding in the idea of disruption and confrontation – a potentially more political outcome than just laughter alone and one that supports the idea of comedian as exemplar of their own worldview.

### Shared Worldview

Jason Rutter likens stand-up comedy to "a conversation between a comedian and the audience," leading to a "collaborative production" between both parties<sup>37</sup>. The implication here is that the rupture of the fourth wall is not only necessary but inherent in the performance of stand-up. If the performance can exist without audience engagement, it is not stand-up comedy.

This idea of "collaborative production" between the comedian and the audience is a pertinent one and an essential point to develop. The audience acts as an instantaneous feedback mechanism for the performer, simultaneously shaping and observing the text as an unfolding narrative in collaboration with the performer. The performer knows where the narrative is going but not how the audience will react, and the audience knows on an unconscious level how it will react but not where the narrative is going.

This relationship is under constant negotiation from joke to joke, forcing the performer to both anticipate and react to changes in the collective mood of the room. By navigating these shifts in audience response, the comedian can adapt their performance, ensuring that the humour remains engaging and relevant to the audience's experience.

### Judgement

Rachel Emslie-Henry writes in her thesis *Stand Up Comedy and the Multidimensional Character of Performance* that "stand-up comedy is a practice

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<sup>37</sup> Jason Rutter, *Stand-up as Interaction: Performance and Interaction in Comedy Venues* (PhD Thesis: University of Salford 1997), p. 95



which instigates immediate judgement from an audience."<sup>38</sup> This immediacy of response is a key characteristic of stand-up comedy, setting it apart from more theatrical forms of comedy such as farce or pantomime, where reactions are directed towards the events unfolding on stage rather than being elicited by direct interaction with the audience.

This sense of immediacy also serves to differentiate live stand-up comedy from recorded performances. When watching a recording, the viewer is removed from the live context that initially influenced the audience's reactions. Consequently, the experience for the viewer becomes markedly different from that of the original audience, as they are now observing the performance from a second-hand perspective.

In this context, the recorded audience becomes a part of the performance, helping to shape the experience for subsequent viewers. It is important to note that the comedian while performing for the live audience, has no awareness of how their performance will be perceived by those watching the recording later. Thus, the dynamic between the performer, the live audience, and the recorded viewer adds another layer of complexity to the multidimensional nature of stand-up comedy as a form of performance.

### Esoteric and Counter Hegemonic

Stephanie Koziski posits that the role of a stand-up comedian is to expose the implicitly hypocritical behaviour that society takes for granted. She states:

The comedian may investigate with an audience tacit areas of behaviour not easily discussed... Taken-for-granted behaviour patterns may have

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<sup>38</sup> Rachel Emslie-Henry, *Stand Up Comedy and the Multi-Dimensional Character of Performance* (PhD Thesis: Loughborough University 2000) p. 115

been present in a group for some time, attracting little attention, until the introduction of a new catalyst.<sup>39</sup>

This behaviour is unquestionably counter-hegemonic, critiquing the status quo within a society. However, could it be described as esoteric? One could argue that in order to successfully challenge the status quo in society, a comedian must possess a broad understanding of it and be able to communicate this understanding to a wide audience – comedian Simon Evans argues that:

(o)ur licence is granted on the understanding we lampoon pomposity in all its guises – the delusions of competence cherished by the managerial classes, as much as the vainglorious bombast of the autocrat.<sup>40</sup>

The question of esoterica lies in the way these observations about society are communicated. As Koziski states, "while the anthropologist reports literally and with scientific objectivity the closer structural observations of a society, the comedian's observations of his culture are broadly refracted and highly distilled, although recognisable, images from his own culture."<sup>41</sup> In simpler terms, the stand-up comedian embraces the esoteric in the name of entertainment, casting aside any pretensions of objectivity to create a highly specialised worldview with the aim of humorously communicating with an audience.

### A Definition of Stand-up Comedy

Taking all these elements into account, it is possible now to create my own definition of anglophonic stand-up comedy to be used for the purposes of this study – as previously stated, this is a strict definition that leaves out some elements that have been traditionally considered stand-up but fall outside of the purview of this analysis, but for the purposes of this work stand-up comedy is defined as:

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<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Koziski, 'The Standup Comedian as Anthropologist: Intentional Culture Critic', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 18, 2 (1984) pp. 57-74, (p. 60)

<sup>40</sup> Simon Evans, 'Funny and Right? That'll Be Me Then', *The Guardian*, 13 September 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/sep/13/funny-and-right-thatll-be-me-then>> [accessed 14 August 2023]

<sup>41</sup> Koziski, *The Standup Comedian as Anthropologist* (1984) p. 63

**A humorous routine by a plurally reflexive performer in collaboration with the audience at a comedy gig, with the specific intention of eliciting a judgemental reaction.**

The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions for Stand-up Comedy

**1. A humorous routine is necessary for stand-up comedy but is not sufficient.**

As previous analysis has shown, there are varying perspectives on the notion of what causes humour, but that does not mean that the idea of humorousness is a nebulous concept - humorous in this context means "with the intention of humour". Coupled with the idea of a routine, a sequence of actions regularly followed, gives shape to the humour and encompasses the fact that the humour is planned ahead of time – it is not totally spontaneous. This condition is necessary for stand-up comedy due to both the expectation of humour within the context of a comedy gig and the performative demands for a series of dependable laughs within the confines of the stand-up set, however, it is not sufficient on its own – without a comedy gig, plurally reflexive performance or collaborative audience there is no reason to expect a humorous routine from someone and without this context, it is very unlikely to be considered stand-up comedy.

**2. A plurally reflexive performance is necessary for stand-up comedy but is not sufficient.**

Stand-up comedy is by its nature plurally reflexive i.e., reflexive in both that the performer is continually assessing both their own performance and the reaction of the audience and adapting depending on the live feedback. Without this plural reflexivity, the performer is essentially performing a monologue *to* the audience rather than a stand-up set *with* the audience. The notion of a performance is essential too – one does not perform stand-up comedy by accident but with deliberate intent, it is not a craft of spontaneity despite appearances. This means a plurally reflexive performance is a necessity from both the perspective of facilitating audience collaboration and the expectations of inclusion in a comedy gig but is not

sufficient for stand-up without the contextual accoutrements of a comedy gig, the support and feedback of a collaborative audience or the backing of a humorous routine.

### **3. A collaborative audience is necessary for stand-up comedy but is not sufficient.**

Collaboration, the act of working with someone to produce something, is at the heart of stand-up comedy – without collaboration through engagement and feedback stand-up is not possible. However, this collaboration is not between performers but between the performer and audience – a collective of individuals present for the performance. A collaborative audience is a necessity from the perspective of the comedy gig, which will not occur without their presence, and a plurally reflexive performance, which is not possible without an audience, but is not sufficient as it relies in turn upon comedy gig, performance and humorous routine to give context to their collaboration.

### **4. A comedy gig is necessary for stand-up comedy but is not sufficient.**

A comedy gig encompasses all the necessary preparations, equipment and space required to host stand-up comedy – advertising, performance space, amplification, seating etc. The comedy gig as an entity gives context to most of the other conditions – a collaborative audience understands through the medium of the comedy gig what they are there to see and how they are expected to behave<sup>42</sup>, the gig gives structure in the form of a series of plurally reflexive performances introduced by a compere and the performer\audience negotiation through humorous is facilitated by the expectations a comedy gig fosters. However, a comedy gig by itself is not a sufficient condition for stand-up comedy – without an audience or performers, no stand-up comedy can happen.

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<sup>42</sup> This expectation of behaviour often includes an expectation of interactional respect i.e. somewhat of a taboo on unconstrained heckling – this is not always the case however, with examples ranging from Jimmy Carr often encouraging people to shout out so he can shut them down (<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/aug/02/is-it-ever-ok-to-heckle-a-comedian>) to Australian comedian Josh Ladgrove dressed as Jesus in the somewhat self-explanatorily titled *Come Heckle Christ* (<https://www.squirrelcomedy.com/?p=6727>)

**5. The specific intention of eliciting a judgemental reaction is necessary for stand-up comedy but is not sufficient.**

The final condition is not so tightly entwined as all the others because of its specificity – the intention to elicit a judgemental reaction. Judgemental reaction is deliberately used here instead of “laughter” as I would argue that laughter is not always the intended reaction, but all intended reactions are judgemental i.e., of or concerning the use of judgment. Stand-up comedy can also elicit cheers, boos, gasps, hisses and applause, all of which are based on a judgement of the performance and routine by the audience, so restricting a definition of stand-up comedy to provoking laughter would be doing it a disservice. This condition is necessary because most of the other conditions rely on it indirectly for purpose – the construction of a humorous routine is such that eliciting a judgemental reaction is intentional, the performative technique of plural reflexivity is employed with the same intention and the audience expects this intention to be the case. However, this condition is not sufficient on its own because a lack of context renders its application moot – intent on its own is insufficient without routine, performance, audience and gig to give it purpose.

## **Chapter Two**

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“Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life.” – Aristotle, *Poetics*<sup>1</sup>

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### **Separating amusement, ‘funniness’ and humour**

A comprehensive survey of the current comedy studies field, including extant theories of comedy, reveals certain limitations when it comes to examining stand-up artefacts in the holistic manner I propose. As such, it is crucial to differentiate between the terms amusement, humour, and ‘funniness’, as these distinctions hold significant implications for the study of comedy and its various aspects.

The distinction between amusement, humour, and funniness is explored in detail in Alan Roberts' *A Philosophy of Humour*<sup>2</sup>, which employs logical statements to construct a subject/object theory of amusement causally based on affective cognitive dissonance<sup>3</sup>. In his work, Roberts emphasises the importance of understanding these terms separately, rather than treating them as interchangeable or synonymous. By doing so, it becomes possible to delve more deeply into the complexities of comedy and to identify the factors that contribute to an audience's reaction to a particular stand-up performance.

Amusement, as defined by Roberts, refers to the emotional response elicited by a comedic stimulus. This emotional response can vary from a simple smile to outright laughter, and it is inherently subjective, as what amuses one person may not have the same effect on another. Humour, on the other hand, is a more general term that encompasses various forms of comedic expression, ranging from verbal

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (2008) in *Project Gutenberg*, <<https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1812/The%252520Poetics%252520of%252520Aristotle%252520by%252520Aristotle.pdf>> [accessed 21 October 2021], p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Alan Roberts, *A Philosophy of Humour* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 113-139

wit to physical slapstick. Funniness, the final term in this trio, pertains to the quality of a comedic stimulus that triggers the emotional response of amusement.

By clearly delineating these three terms and understanding their nuanced differences, it becomes possible to more effectively analyse stand-up comedy and its impact on audiences. This approach allows for a more holistic examination of stand-up artefacts, considering not only the content and delivery of the performance but also the audience's reaction and the broader cultural context in which the comedy takes place.

### Defining Amusement

Roberts' work on amusement, humour, and funniness builds upon the foundation laid by John Morreall<sup>4</sup> in defining amusement as an essential but separate component from laughter and humour. Morreall asserts, "In the narrow sense of humorous amusement – with which we are concerned – we are amused when our attention is agreeably occupied in a particular way."<sup>5</sup>

Roberts identifies two central observations about amusement. Firstly, amusement requires a subject (S) and an object (O)<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, amusement has both a cognitive component and an affective component.<sup>7</sup> Regarding the first of these predicates, it can be argued that this notion is an extension of a common feature of most languages, as they are primarily subject/object-based in formulation. However, Roberts suggests that the relationship between the subject and object is non-reciprocal, with the subject being amused by the object, even if that object is imaginary.

Although the relationship between subject and object may not necessarily be linguistic at the core of the amusement, any subsequent description or attempt to communicate it would be intrinsically tied to language (and therefore, so is the

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<sup>4</sup> John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1987)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, *A Philosophy of Humour* pp. 8-9

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* pp. 9-11

concept of amusement). As for the second observation from Roberts, he posits that the cognitive component constitutes the recognition of something as an object of amusement, whereas the affective component constitutes the appreciation of something as an object of amusement.

The crux of this point hinges on whether an audience is amused or not-amused. While this may be more of a spectrum than a binary, this definition allows for a plurality of audience reactions that fall along the amused(A)\not-amused(nA) line. It is the performer's prerogative and responsibility to interpret this reaction and guide it as the performance unfolds.

### Defining Funniness

Amusement can be understood as a response function when compared to funniness. Funniness is not a descriptive concept, but rather a normative one.<sup>8</sup> To claim that something is funny is not to report a response of amusement towards it but to endorse a response of amusement towards it.<sup>9</sup>

Roberts, therefore, posits the following definition of funniness: Object O is funny if and only if O merits amusement.<sup>10</sup> This definition also serves as a reflexive defence mechanism in the case of "accidental" cognitive or affective amusement, such as displays of amusement that go against the moral or intellectual outlook of the person making the display, who then must retroactively justify it to themselves or others.

Conversely, if something is justified as not funny, this is a tacit rejection of amusement towards an object from a subject and can even be indicative of an unspoken taboo for the topic in question. This distinction between amusement and funniness helps clarify the complexity of audience responses and their evaluations of what is considered funny or not funny in a stand-up comedy performance.

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p. 12

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p. 13

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 14



## Defining Humour

Humour, as defined by Roberts, is not determined by response but rather by objective intentionality. This definition dismisses the common conception that "humour is anything which amuses normal subjects in normal conditions"<sup>11</sup> through two arguments. Firstly, unsuccessful humour may not elicit amusement, but it is still considered humour nonetheless.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, objects of amusement are considered humour only when they are intended to amuse.<sup>13</sup>

With these two arguments in place, Roberts makes his final logical statement to distinguish humour as an intentional mechanism for amusement, in contrast to the normative function of funniness. According to this statement, object O is considered humour if and only if O is intended to elicit amusement.<sup>14</sup>

This re-conception of humour helps to clarify instances where the intention does not meet reality, such as jokes that fall flat. In these cases, the joke-teller may resort to using the defence "I was only joking!" to compensate for the fact that the humour might have been missed by the listener, causing offence or confusion. In a stand-up comedy situation, this is similar to the small shrug given by Jimmy Carr when he knows he has caused offence. By separating amusement, funniness, and humour, we can better understand the nuanced interactions and responses that occur during a stand-up comedy performance.

### **Philosophical Perspectives on Humour – Superiority, Incongruity, Relief,**

#### **Play and Others**

##### Superiority Theory

Turning first to the oldest of the perspectives, superiority; it is posited that laughter in these circumstances is caused by a mocking of those we find ridiculous thus allowing ourselves to feel a sense of superiority over the afflicted. As Jowett

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p. 16

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

states in his introduction to and analysis of book X of *The Republic*, Plato's view was "you may often laugh at buffoonery which you would be ashamed to utter, and the love of coarse merriment on the stage will at last turn you into a buffoon at home"<sup>15</sup> – this idea was further explored in the seventeenth century by Thomas Hobbes, who rejected humour as unworthy of society due to its perceived mocking of the afflicted to inflate self-worth, stating "For of great minds one of the proper works is to help free others from scorn, and compare ourselves only with the most able"<sup>16</sup>. This view of humour as aggressive ridicule is shared but reversed by Descartes in *Passions of the Soul*, noting the mockery from people who are "lame, one-eyed, or hunched-backed, or who have received some public affront" is especially fierce as they desire to see "everyone else in as much disgrace as they are in", something that he describes as a societal affliction arising from "our perceiving some small misfortune in a person we think to be deserving of it"<sup>17</sup>.

This idea of social mockery is picked up again through the philosophical work of Henri Bergson in his essay *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*<sup>18</sup>. As Bergson himself writes "the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart", allowing us to feel superior through a spontaneous failure of empathy and thus provoking laughter in response. The idea of societal consensus is also explored, stating "(h)owever spontaneous it seems, laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary", leading to the conclusion that to ridicule is a social norm. This idea of laughter as a form of social control, to make us "appear what we ought to be", is one which is toyed with by Bergson before being put aside for deeper analysis – the idea of rigidity of being creating an anthesis of humanity that one is compelled to laugh at in order to correct the behaviour, or to put it succinctly "(t)his rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective."

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<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Jowett, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1888) in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/55201/55201-h/55201-h.htm>> [accessed 21 October 2021]

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (1651) in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3207/pg3207-images.html>> [accessed 21 October 2021], pp. 41-45.

<sup>17</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, trans. by Stephen H. Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company 1989), p. 117

<sup>18</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of Comic* in *Authorama* <<http://www.authorama.com/book/laughter.html>> [accessed 21 October 2021]

John Morreall<sup>19</sup> cites counterexamples starting with Frances Hutcheson who writes that if Hobbes is correct, “there can be no Laughter on any occasion where we make no comparison of ourselves to others, of our present state to a worse state”<sup>20</sup>. This argument is then dismantled as a false analogy, citing such subjects as nonsense poetry (“to what do we compare ourselves, or imagine ourselves superior, when we laugh at this fantastical imitation of the poetical imagery”<sup>21</sup>) and agreeable social interaction (“such a thought seldom arises in the hurry of a cheerful(*sic.*) conversation among friends, where there is often high mutual esteem”<sup>22</sup>). Overall, Hutcheson takes a more positive view of humour and laughter than Hobbes and Descartes, and less of a mechanistic view than the later Bergson, though all share the view that humour is a social phenomenon. Morreall provides several counterexamples of his own, citing the comedic work of the silent film era as a foil – the characters often escape from an inescapable situation, much to the amusement of the audience, and “(l)laughing at such scenes does not seem to require that we compare ourselves with the hero; and if we do make such a comparison, we do not find ourselves superior”<sup>23</sup>.

As has been demonstrated by the previous examples, one of the main objections to superiority as a theoretical perspective is the absolutism of its stance – humour in its abstract is viewed as an aggressive act designed to denigrate those at the “butt” end of the joke, but while this is true in some cases (one could cite the racially charged humour of the 1960s and 1970s as demonstrated, and in some cases defended, by Charlie Williams in his 1973 autobiography<sup>24</sup>), there are countless examples that it falls short on. However, both promotions and objections of the superiority theory rely on one thing – context manipulated to demonstrate the superiority of the observer to the observed or vice-versa in the perceived power dynamic.

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<sup>19</sup> John Morreall, *Philosophy of Humor* (2020) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/humor/>> [accessed 21 October 2021]

<sup>20</sup> Frances Hutcheson, *Reflections Upon Laughter and Remarks Upon the Fable of the Bees* (Michigan: University Microfilms, 1971 [1750]) p. 7

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 9

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 14

<sup>23</sup> Morreall, *Philosophy of Humor* (2020)

<sup>24</sup> Charlie Williams, *Ee – I’ve Had Some Laughs* (London: Wolfe Publishing, 1973)

## Incongruity Theory

The second of the theoretical perspectives, the so-called incongruity theory, was first put forward by James Beattie in his essay *On Laughter, and Ludicrous Composition*. Starting with an analysis of the arguments advanced by Aristotle, Hobbes and Hutcheson<sup>25</sup>, Beattie reaches a conclusion at the beginning of his second chapter that while the theories may have flaws, the thing they all share is a *comparison* of objects is necessary to provoke laughter, writing "Laughter arises from the view of two or more objects or ideas, disposing the mind to form a comparison"<sup>26</sup> – thus the basis was laid for incongruity theory, which argues that laughter is caused by the perceived disparity between two entities, be they physical or metaphysical.

Kant briefly touches upon this in his *Critique of Judgement*, arguing in his examination of laughter that:

"(i)n everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laughter there must be something absurd...not, indeed, through the representation being objectively an object of gratification (for how could a delusive expectation gratify?), but simply through it as a mere play of representations"<sup>27</sup>.

As Morreall states when discussing Kant "A joke amuses us by evoking, shifting, and dissipating our thoughts, but we do not learn anything through these mental gymnastics. In humour generally, according to Kant, our reason finds nothing of worth."<sup>28</sup> Again, this is an important idea to take forward – incongruity in humour, though effective and demonstratable, relies on the incongruity being perceived by the observer.

Schopenhauer backs this point up in his brief discussion of laughter, stating:

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<sup>25</sup> James Beattie, *Essays: On Poetry and Music, as they Affect the Mind; On Laughter and Ludicrous Composition; On the Usefulness of Classical Learning* in *Library of Congress* <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/muspre1800.100867/?sp=3>> [accessed 21 October 2021] pp. 297-318

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 319

<sup>27</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* trans. by J H Bernard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914[1790]) in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://archive.org/details/kantscritiqueofj48433gut>> [accessed 21 October 2021]

<sup>28</sup> Morreall, *Philosophy of Humor* (2020)

laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. It often occurs in this way: two or more real objects are thought through *one* concept, and the identity of the concept is transferred to the objects; it then becomes strikingly apparent from the entire difference of the objects in other respects, that the concept was only applicable to them from a one-sided point of view<sup>29</sup>

This in itself is subjectivity in action – the view that only becomes visible from a certain conceptual standpoint reached, as Kierkegaard argues for the promotion among university lecturers of the *vis comica* – the comic force – that enables those who take subjective standpoints to do so with authority (“So it is with legitimate comedy in respect of matured immediacy”<sup>30</sup>) and to appreciate the subtleties and ironies inherent in the subject they purport to be experts on.

This then puts the supporters of incongruity theory in a similar but semantically different position to those of superiority – humour arises from subjective comparison, whether that comparison is hierarchical or metaphysical the subjectivity is perceived on the part of the *individual* and that is what makes the humour work.

### Relief Theory

Relief, the third theoretical perspective, is in the words of Morreall<sup>31</sup> a “hydraulic explanation in which laughter does in the nervous system what a pressure-relief valve does in a steam boiler”. Examining Morreall's first cited source, a 1709 letter from Lord Shaftesbury to a friend, we again can begin to see the notion of subjectivity but this time from an exterior perspective. Discussing (in, as

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<sup>29</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea* trans. by R B Haldane & J Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 2011[1909]) in *Project Gutenberg* <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38427/38427-pdf.pdf>> [accessed 21 October 2021] p. 95, emphasis in original

<sup>30</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Scientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* trans. by A Hannay (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009[1846]) available from <[https://www.academia.edu/30372238/S. Kierkegaard\\_Concluding\\_Unscientific\\_Postscript.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/30372238/S._Kierkegaard_Concluding_Unscientific_Postscript.pdf)> [accessed 21 October 2021] p. 236

<sup>31</sup> Morreall, *Philosophy of Humor* (2020)

pointed out by Billig<sup>32</sup>, a strangely parallel manner to the later Mikhail Bakhtin) the idea of the European carnival tradition he uses the example of a 'foreigner' arriving during this time and being at a "loss for some time until he discovered the cheat; because at first it wouldn't enter his head that a whole people could be so wild as to agree at an appointed time to transform themselves by changing their clothing and wearing masks and making a serious solemn practice of deceiving one another by this universal confusion of characters and persons"<sup>33</sup>. This idea of societally recognised taboo-breaking is the essence of relief theory, and in this case, when viewed from an outside perspective is an interesting one and turns the idea of context in humour on its head – it's only funny if you *don't* get it, to those taking part it is a social norm.

Another exponent of the relief theory of humour, Herbert Spencer, argued that laughter had no purpose other than the release of emotional energy that would otherwise overwhelm an individual, stating "amongst a number of persons who are witness to the same ludicrous occurrence, there are some who do not laugh, it is because there has arisen in them an emotion not participated in by the rest, which is sufficiently massive to absorb all the nascent excitement"<sup>34</sup>. This approach was expanded upon by the work of Freud with *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, who stated that "laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge"<sup>35</sup>. Both these theories have come under heavy criticism in the intervening years regarding the biomechanical processes that they describe, especially with Freud and Spencer both being medically trained<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Billig, *The Hidden Roots of Critical Psychology: Understanding the Impact of Locke, Shaftesbury and Reid* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008) p. 132

<sup>33</sup> Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour in Early Modern Texts* <[https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/shaftesbury1709a\\_1.pdf](https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/shaftesbury1709a_1.pdf)> [accessed 22 October 2021], p. 8, ellipsis in text

<sup>34</sup> Herbert Spencer, *The Physiology of Laughter* (Macmillan, 1860) in *Open Library* <[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL26294987M/The\\_physiology\\_of\\_laughter](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL26294987M/The_physiology_of_laughter)> [accessed 24 June 2020] p. 400

<sup>35</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. by J Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1960[1905]), p. 147

<sup>36</sup> See Morreall (2009, 2020) - "few contemporary scholars defend the claims of Spencer and Freud that the energy expended in laughter is the energy of feeling emotions, the energy of repressing emotions, or the energy of thinking, which have built up and require venting" - or Carroll (2014) for a more robust summation.

However, what both Spencer and Freud manage to touch on (though in the case of Spencer, it could be debated how deliberate this is) is the idea that laughter and humour are socially recognised and sometimes sanctioned as a subjective reaction to an occurrence, as Spencer writes:

the burst of laughter which ensues when the short silence between the andante and allegro in one of Beethoven's symphonies, is broken by a loud sneeze. In this, and hosts of like cases, the mental tension is not coerced but spontaneous —not disagreeable but agreeable; and the coming impressions to which the attention is directed, promise a gratification that few, if any, desire to escape<sup>37</sup>

However spontaneous this reaction is, it arises from a subjectivity to the social situation and the gravitas inherent therein – one is not supposed to laugh during a symphony for this is not the social purpose of symphonies, but the taboo-breaking sneeze allows for this to happen. Social sanction of unconscious taboo through humour, on the other hand, is espoused by Freud in relation to the audience:

Every exposure of which we are made the spectator (or audience in the case of smut) by a third person is equivalent to the exposed person being made comic. We have seen that it is the task of jokes to take the place of smut and so once more to open access to a lost source of comic pleasure.<sup>38</sup>

This approach speaks to the context-changing role of jokes themselves – taking on the role of the second person, the one who is doing the taboo-breaking, for the comic (first person) and audience (third person) to share in the thrill of that taboo-breaking while themselves not being implicitly tarnished by it. The joke itself in this case becomes the one who is breaking the rules in a way that society could not sanction for a real person, thus creating a “safe space” for the sanction to exist.

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<sup>37</sup> Spencer, *The Physiology of Laughter*, 1860, p. 399

<sup>38</sup> Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, 1960[1905], p. 222

## Play Theory

This idea of humour as a safe space brings us neatly to the next perspective of humour, play theory. As the nomenclature suggests, this theory posits that humour is an extension of juvenile play and is thus subject to all the same rules – copying (parody), exaggeration (caricature), narrative invention (joking), mocking of authority (satire) and frank discussion of taboo-breaking. This theory is a reasonably recent one, being developed in its nascent form by Max Eastman in his 1936 book *Enjoyment of Laughter*<sup>39</sup> (a follow up to his 1921 book *The Sense of Humor*<sup>40</sup>). Eastman argued that animals, like humans, exhibit the (non-linguistic dependant) juvenile play behaviours above as an adaptive mechanism – to enable them to learn behaviours that would otherwise not be considered and give them a survival advantage. Eastman posits that this adaptive behaviour extends to adults in the sense of humour, the ability to make light of otherwise painful or tragic situations for the good of the individual and the social group. While this was at the time treated as a less valid and intellectually rigorous approach compared with the Freudian relief theory in vogue (“Within the limitations of the materials he uses Mr. Eastman is a discriminating man of letters in this book, rather than a philosopher. Whenever he does give any serious analysis, he practically apologizes for doing so.”<sup>41</sup>), the core of this idea has been expanded on by modern proponents of the theory.

One of the first to indirectly resurrect the play theory was a psychologist, Ted Cohen<sup>42</sup>, who initially had presupposed over a decade and a half earlier<sup>43</sup> that jokes could be divided into two categories – pure and conditional. Upon revisiting this, however, he concludes “(i)t now seems clear to me that there is no such thing as a pure joke. It is a kind of ideal, but it doesn’t exist. At the very least, the audience

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<sup>39</sup> Max Eastman, *Enjoyment of Laughter* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936) in *Open Library* <[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6345564M/Enjoyment\\_of\\_laughter](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6345564M/Enjoyment_of_laughter)> [accessed 22 October 2021]

<sup>40</sup> Max Eastman, *The Sense of Humor* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921) in *Open Library* <[https://openlibrary.org/works/OL3564932W/The\\_sense\\_of\\_humor?edition=senseofhumor00eastuoft](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL3564932W/The_sense_of_humor?edition=senseofhumor00eastuoft)> [accessed 22 October 2021]

<sup>41</sup> I. E., ‘Other New Books and Journals’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 34, 6 (1937) pp. 165-166 (p. 166)

<sup>42</sup> Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

<sup>43</sup> Ted Cohen, ‘Jokes’ in *Pleasure, Preference and Value: Studies in Philosophical Aesthetics*, ed. by E Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)



will have to understand the language of the joke, and probably much more.”<sup>44</sup> While the reception of Cohen’s approach overall regarding academic depth can kindly be described as mixed<sup>45</sup> this conclusion of conditional joking is an important one – a recognition of the inherent subjectivity of humour in defining the play situation.

In examining one of the most prolific exponents of the play theory, John Morreall<sup>46</sup>, it is possible to see the subjectivity of humour at work in social interactions and through the signals used to decode them. As Morreall writes:

When in conversation we switch from serious discussion to making funny comments, for example, we keep the same vocabulary and grammar, and our sentences transcribed to paper might look like bona-fide assertions, questions, etc. This similarity between non-serious and serious language and actions calls for ways that participants can distinguish between the two. Ethologists call these ways “play signals”.<sup>47</sup>

This contextual subjectivity, play theorists argue, is inherent in humour – in fact it is what makes humour what it is, as much that can be taken with levity could equally be taken with gravity. Though as with the other perspectives above this approach has its detractors<sup>48</sup>, I would argue that seen as a logical extension of incongruity theory rather than the biologically encompassing philosophy it attempts to be. Play theory as an answer to the irrationality objection to incongruity theory<sup>49</sup> has a lot of merit - however, pure incongruity cannot be the subject of enjoyment in and of itself in the context of a rational being, and by including that incongruity as a subjective part of a larger social structure this gives purpose to the delusion in a useful context.

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<sup>44</sup> Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters* (1999) p. 12

<sup>45</sup> See Oring (2000, p. 71) for a particularly scathing review and Limon (2000b, pp. 518-520) for a kinder but no less critical one.

<sup>46</sup> John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humour* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

<sup>47</sup> Morreall, *Philosophy of Humor*, 2016

<sup>48</sup> Such as the theoretical lack of etymological delineation between “humour” and “play” from an evodevelopmentary standpoint leading to conceptual fallacy, see Tapley (2013, pp. 147-162))

<sup>49</sup> That which Kant calls “delusive expectation” (1790 [1914])

## Fringe Theories

Lastly, but by no means least, there are the fringe theories – specifically the General Theory of Verbal Humour, Cleverness Theory and the O’Shannon Model of Humour. Either too complex, new or under-adopted respectively to be considered dominant theories, nevertheless they are useful to include for the insight they provide into current academic approaches to humour.

### General Theory of Verbal Humour

Firstly, we have the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) as proposed by Attardo and Raskin<sup>50</sup>, a follow up to Raskin’s Semantic-Script Theory of Humour (SSTH)<sup>51</sup> answering the objection that the SSTH does not “differentiate between verbal and referential humour (simplifying, between puns and non-puns, respectively)”<sup>52</sup>. The theory itself is intended as “a general theory of verbal humor as represented by verbal jokes”<sup>53</sup>, though Attardo would later qualify that this represented a “staking out (of) a research space” with the intention of “research from various disciplines” to explore and expand on the initial framework rather than as a complete theory within itself<sup>54</sup>.

As outlined in the original article, the theory is somewhat complex in its proposition, simultaneously attempting to create a hierarchical structure for the knowledge resources (KR) informing individual jokes (script oppositions, logical mechanisms, situations, targets, narrative strategies and language) on the basis of asymmetrical binary relations while creating a comparative framework for jokes based on degrees of similarity. This means that for each joke considerations of each

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<sup>50</sup> Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, ‘Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model’, *Humor*, 4, 3-4 (1991) pp. 293-348

<sup>51</sup> Victor Raskin, *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (Dordrecht: D Reidel Publishing Company ,1985)

<sup>52</sup> Salvatore Attardo, ‘The General Theory of Verbal Humor’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor*, ed. S. Attardo (New York: Routledge 2017), p. 127

<sup>53</sup> Attardo and Raskin, *Script Theory Revis(it)ed*, 1991, p. 293

<sup>54</sup> Attardo, *The General Theory of Verbal Humor*, 2017, p. 126

of these knowledge resources and their relative similarities must be quantified in order to meaningfully compare and contrast them.

Though this theory is widely cited and has been applied or extended to various texts (See Attardo, Raskin & Ruch<sup>55</sup>, Archakis & Tsakona<sup>56</sup>, Ancheta & Erap<sup>57</sup>, Elwood<sup>58</sup>, Hempelmann, Raskin & Trizenberg<sup>59</sup>, Ma & Jiang<sup>60</sup>, Alharthi<sup>61</sup> and Korostenskiene and Lieponyte<sup>62</sup>), the apparent complexity of the GTVH seems to present a barrier to widespread adoption outside of linguistic approaches. I argue that the difficulty stems from the complexity of the comparative model – the KR approach offers some possibilities for deep individual joke analysis but due to the nebulous nature of some of the categories (narrative strategies and language being the worst culprits) combined with the relatively detailed level of analysis (jokes being numerous in the average stand-up set) means that the number of comparisons for each category increases as a triangle number ( $n(n+1)/2$ ) as the number of jokes compared increases – 10 jokes would need 55 comparisons per category or 330 across all the categories ( $6(n(n+1)/2)$ ), making analysing an entire stand-up comedy set this way very problematic without computational aid.

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<sup>55</sup> Salvatore Attardo, Victor Raskin and Willibald Ruch, 'Toward an Empirical Verification of the General Theory of Verbal Humor', *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research*, 6, 2 (1993) pp. 123-136

<sup>56</sup> Argiris Archakis and Villy Tsakona, 'Analyzing conversational data in GTVH terms: A new approach to the issue of identity construction via humor', *Humor – International Journal of Humor Research*, 18, 1 (2005) pp. 41-68

<sup>57</sup> Maria Rhodora G. Ancheta and Ni Erap, 'Reading Gloria-Garci jokes: The Semantic Script Theory of Humor/General Theory of Verbal Humor and Filipino political humor', *9<sup>th</sup> Philippine Linguistics Congress* (2005)

<sup>58</sup> Kate Elwood, 'An Application of the General Theory of Verbal Humor to Two American Sitcoms', *The Cultural Review*, 29 (2006) pp. 21-41

<sup>59</sup> Christian Hempelmann, Victor Raskin and Katrina Trizenberg, 'Computer, Tell Me a Joke... but Please Make it Funny: Computational Humor with Ontological Semantics', *FLAIRS Conference*, 13 (2006) pp. 746-751

<sup>60</sup> Zejun Ma and Man Jiang, 'Interpretation of Verbal Humor in the Sitcom The Big Bang Theory from the Perspective of Adaptation-relevance Theory', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 3, 12 (2013) pp. 2220-2226

<sup>61</sup> Adel Awadh A. Alharthi, *Challenges and Strategies of Subtitling Humour: A Case Study of the American Sitcom Seinfeld, with Particular Reference to English and Arabic* (PhD Thesis: University of Salford, 2016)

<sup>62</sup> Julija Korostenskiene and Aurelija Lieponyte, 'Funny as it may be: Humour in the American sitcoms I Love Lucy and Modern Family', *Studies About Languages*, 33 (2018) pp. 57-73

## Cleverness Theory

The next theory to consider is Cleverness Theory, expounded in Gimbel's recent book *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy*<sup>63</sup>. To summarise, the central tenet of Cleverness Theory is "(a)n act is humorous if and only if it is an intentional, conspicuous act of playful cleverness"<sup>64</sup> – the four operative elements being: intent, conspicuousness, playfulness, and cleverness<sup>65</sup>. Gimbel then goes on to claim that his Cleverness Theory can subsume all the preceding theories – that a situation that provides a feeling of superiority without playful cleverness is not humorous but uncomfortable or tragic<sup>66</sup>, that not all cases of humour contain an element that could be labelled incongruity but the specific cases outlined each contain playful cleverness<sup>67</sup>, that the central solution\dissolution involved within relief theory shows that there is a problem to be solved with cleverness and finally play theory is appropriated with the addition of cleverness<sup>68</sup>.

Due to the relatively recent addition of this humour theory to the academic discourse, there are only a handful of critics who have reviewed the theory at this present time (See Hick<sup>69</sup>, Tiller<sup>70</sup>, Dalebout<sup>71</sup>, Cundall<sup>72</sup> and Nannicelli<sup>73</sup>). Points raised for future defence include lack of in-text evidence for the claim that "his theory of humor applies to non-funny, non-verbal comedic gags"<sup>74</sup>, the concept of 'pure' jokes within the play frame being incapable of actual harm – "Gimbel seems to believe that "pure" joking occurs in something like Lewis Carroll's Wonderland: a

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<sup>63</sup> Steven Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018)

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p. 37

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* pp. 37-47

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* pp. 50-51

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* pp. 51-52

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p. 52

<sup>69</sup> Darren Hudson Hick, *Steven Gimbel: Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy* (2018) <<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/isnt-that-clever-a-philosophical-account-of-humor-and-comedy/>> [accessed 23 October 2021]

<sup>70</sup> Glenn Tiller, 'Steven Gimbel: Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy', *Philosophy in Review*, 38, 2 (2018) pp. 58-59

<sup>71</sup> Michael Dalebout, 'Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy by Steven Gimbel (review)', *Studies in American Humor*, 5, 1 (2019) pp. 247-250

<sup>72</sup> Michael Cundall, 'Objectively Funny Jokes: Comedy's El Dorado or a Simple MacGuffin?' in *Praxis, Poems and Punchline: Essays in Honor of Richard C. Richards*, ed. by Steven Gimbel (2020) pp. 101-106

<sup>73</sup> Ted Nannicelli, *Artistic Creation and Ethical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

<sup>74</sup> Tiller, *Steven Gimbel: Isn't That Clever* (2018) p. 59

domain of innocent wordplay, but "joke worlds" (whether the world of the HBO/Netflix special, the comedy club, the Friars Club, or the White House Correspondents' Dinner) are very much in the real world"<sup>75</sup> and the lack of discussion whether "playfulness and conspicuousness relies on how people perceive and conceive their world as a default... is an act of humor really made on one side or another?"<sup>76</sup>

Gimbel's theory has some application as a specialist interpretation of play theory, though I disagree with his estimation that it subsumes both superiority and incongruity theory.<sup>77</sup> Superiority theory, while not an all-encompassing theory by any stretch, is objectively (and unfortunately) demonstratable without cleverness but with intent – one such example being extracts taken from Bernard Manning's 1995 performance to Greater Manchester police officers<sup>78</sup>. Though I will not be reproducing the exact text verbatim, Manning's routine targeted Asian and black British people with the inference that they were not British due to their skin colour and maintenance of cultural heritage, with the intent of being humorous through the re-enforcement of offensive stereotypes and rancour – none of which could be described as the "cognitive virtue" that Gimbel centralises<sup>79</sup>.

As for incongruity, while I agree with Gimbel's assertion that "(c)reating a well-formed incongruity is an act that requires cleverness"<sup>80</sup> it assumes that all possible incongruity is a) perceived by the performer and b) is intentionally put there by the performer. I would argue Gimbel's insistence on largely rejecting a response-side perspective for humour is the main cause of this (as discussed later when examining Gimbel's case for objective humour) – the perception of incongruity, though guided by the performer in the narrative they weave, relies not on the receiver perceiving incongruity but what incongruity is perceived. Humour can be incongruous on multiple levels and the context of the receiver plays a large part in the reaction to that incongruity – one would argue that the work of Sacha Baron Cohen through the

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<sup>75</sup> Hick, *Steven Gimbel: Isn't That Clever* (2018)

<sup>76</sup> Dalebout, *Isn't That Clever* (2019) p. 249

<sup>77</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't that Clever* (2018) pp. 50-52

<sup>78</sup> John Gabriel, *Whitewash: Racialized Politics and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 137

<sup>79</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't that Clever* (2018) p. 43

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p. 51

medium of his characters relies on the incongruity of the situation for its humour, but though the same incongruity that amuses the mediated audience may be perceived by the interview subject you could not argue that their reactions fall into intentional humour category.

### O'Shannon Model of Humour

The final theory I want to examine is the O'Shannon Model of Humour (OMOH), introduced in by Dan O'Shannon in his book *What Are You Laughing At?*<sup>81</sup> A seasoned television writer and producer rather than an academic, the work contains few citations – as O'Shannon writes the “contents are based on my observations, first as a stand-up comic and then as a sitcom writer and producer”<sup>82</sup> – but nevertheless offers a holistic overview of the principal theories of comedy with the conjecture that each only tells a part of the story<sup>83</sup>. O'Shannon's model is entirely response-side based, with the receiver (affected by “reception factors” i.e., physical health, social situation etc.) being given “comedic information” and responding based on “aspects of awareness” (critical response, group response etc.) and “enhancers\inhibitors” (feelings of identification, superiority etc.)<sup>84</sup>. This process is called the “comedic event”, and rather than subsuming the previous theories folds them into either the comedic information (incongruity), aspects of awareness (play) or enhancers\inhibitor's (superiority and relief).

Despite being released in 2012, there are relatively few citations and even fewer direct critical appraisals or summations of the theory (See Wayne<sup>85</sup>, Martin<sup>86</sup>, Ritchie<sup>87</sup> and Malyuga et al.<sup>88</sup>). Ritchie, coming as he does from a computer science

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<sup>81</sup> Dan O'Shannon, *What Are You Laughing At?* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012)

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p. xii

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* pp. 1-6

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* pp. 7-16

<sup>85</sup> Gene Wayne, *What Are You Laughing At? A Comprehensive Guide to the Comedic Event* (2013) <<http://www.screeningthepast.com/2013/05/what-are-you-laughing-at-a-comprehensive-guide-to-the-comedic-event/>> [accessed 23 October 2021]

<sup>86</sup> Rod Martin, 'What Are You Laughing at? A Comprehensive Guide to the Comedic Event', *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 10, 3 (2014) pp. 582-585

<sup>87</sup> Graeme Ritchie, *The Comprehension of Jokes: A Cognitive Scientific Framework* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018)

background<sup>89</sup>, concentrates mainly on the resolution approach to incongruity when it comes to information processing, but notes "O'Shannon also suggests the need for the integration of information, but sees incongruity as the outcome rather than the starting point".<sup>90</sup> He also discusses O'Shannon's suggestion that "that Hobbes's idea about superiority (see Chapter 11) is an example of an enhancer being miscategorised as a key factor"<sup>91</sup> and expanding on this idea through the delineation of positive and negative reception factors. Martin, writing from the perspective of a psychologist, draws "several important practical insights" from O'Shannon's work, namely "humor involves the playful perception and generation of incongruity", "a humorous perspective involves imagination, the ability to elaborate on a basic humorous theme and create new incongruities by engaging in "what-if" thinking" and "to fully enjoy humor one must have an awareness of the personal enhancers and inhibitors that influence one's own level of enjoyment (e.g., mood states, the types of companions one associates with, the sorts of topics that evoke positive and negative emotional reactions, etc.)", all of which "could stimulate a good deal of further scholarly research, both basic and applied"<sup>92</sup>.

As a functional theory, I would argue that O'Shannon's approach to other humour theories aligns closely with my own – a largely holistic model that encompasses all the preceding theories as factors within the production of humour itself. The OMOH, despite protestations from the author to the contrary, is academically rigorous from the approach of autoethnography and has clear, concise, and well-reasoned systems of operation borne from lived experience rather than from pure research. However, despite its holistic approach to the other theories as *post facto* enhancers\inhibitors, the foregrounding of incongruity as the single mechanism by which comedic information operates makes this theory a specialisation of incongruity theory rather than a generalised theory of comedy.

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<sup>88</sup> Elena N. Malyuga, Alex Krouglov and Maria V. Ivanova, 'Functional and Linguistic Features of Humour Economic Discourse' in *Functional Approach to Professional Discourse Exploration in Linguistics*, ed. by Elena N. Maluga (Singapore: Springer 2020) pp. 95-130

<sup>89</sup> Richie, *The Comprehension of Jokes*, 2018, p. i

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* p. 93

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* pp. 25-26

<sup>92</sup> Martin, *What Are You Laughing At?*, 2014, p. 585

However, while the model has application for deep response-side consideration and analysis it suffers from the issue of scalability – the detail of the model is its undoing when it comes to practical application.

For example, the final summation, pulling together all the variables of comedic events<sup>93</sup>, contains six sections of the modelled chart, three of which are charts for information on the receiver covering the elements of a comedic event and their influence on the receiver over six categories (receiver profile, additional receiver roles, level of social interaction, mode of communication and device), a section on the medium of communication used for the comedic event over four categories (outer vehicles, immediate vehicle, direction of communication and vicarious communication with other receivers) and a section on the relationship between the receiver and the source of the comedic event and what influence this has on the receiver over three categories (level of control, source and contributing sources). Although O’Shannon states “(i)f you grasp the concepts of this book, you don’t need to walk around with a chart, trying to scribble down every variable of every comedic event”<sup>94</sup>, in turn this raises issues of comparability – if not everyone is recording the same data due to the number of variables at play, how are meaningful comparisons to be made?

The major theoretical approaches to humour are both philosophically dense and simultaneously imperfect – though some are clearly semantically limited from the outset in their definition of humour (superiority, relief), for others (incongruity, play) there can be found examples that contradict their central tenets. If there is one central theme to the philosophical approach that is shared by these theories, it is that of context – that humour is contextual to each and every individual that encounters it, whether that context is said to come from socio-hierarchical comparison, metaphysical juxtaposition, clash of societal expectation or sociobiological indicative behaviours, and it is the job of the stand-up comedian to guide the audience into making the contextual leap they desire.

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<sup>93</sup> O’Shannon, *What Are You Laughing At?*, 2012, pp. 283-288

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* p. 283



## **A Joke-Act Theory for Stand-up Comedy**

As a relatively new area within the broader field of humour theory, the academic examination of stand-up comedy encounters a significant ontological question that requires attention in any approach. This issue stems from its parent field but is somewhat more specialised due to the unique nature of stand-up comedy. I would argue that the prevailing ontology of stand-up comedy research is a refined version of the objectivist versus subjectivist debate in humour theory – specifically the following question:

### **Are jokes subjective?**

This question is at the heart of any approach made into the field, though this may not be the central research question of this study the side of the line one falls ostensibly shapes the approach taken to any serious stand-up comedy analysis. Ontologically, there are scholars that fall on both sides of the line – the argument for the subjectivity of jokes (supported by Brodie<sup>95</sup>, Brown<sup>96</sup>, Carr and Greeves<sup>97</sup>, Cohen<sup>98</sup>, Double<sup>99</sup>, Limon<sup>100</sup>, O’Shannon<sup>101</sup>, Ross<sup>102</sup>, Richie<sup>103</sup>, Rutter<sup>104</sup>) is much older and can be summarised as follows – if a joke cannot work without foreknowledge (what Cohen calls *hermetic* jokes<sup>105</sup>) it is therefore conditional, though this conditionality can vary in strength from very weak (having to understand the language of the teller) to the very strong (requiring specific and detailed professional knowledge to understand the terms used). In addition to this base level

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<sup>95</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, 2014)

<sup>96</sup> Lesley Brown, *The Secrets to Writing Great Comedy* (London: Hodder Education, 2010)

<sup>97</sup> Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves, *The Naked Jape: Uncovering the Hidden World of Jokes* (London: Penguin Group, 2007)

<sup>98</sup> Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

<sup>99</sup> Oliver Double, *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)

<sup>100</sup> John Limon, *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, Or, Abjection in America*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000)

<sup>101</sup> Dan O’Shannon, *What Are You Laughing At: A Comprehensive Guide to the Comedic Event*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012)

<sup>102</sup> Alison Ross, *The Language of Humour*, (London: Routledge, 2003)

<sup>103</sup> Chris Richie, *Performing Live Comedy*, (London: Methuen Drama, 2012)

<sup>104</sup> Jason Rutter, ‘Rhetoric in Stand-up Comedy: Exploring Performer-Audience Interaction’, *Stylistyka*, 10 (2001) pp. 307–325.

<sup>105</sup> Cohen, *Jokes* (1999) pp. 12-21

of conditional foreknowledge, each recipient of the joke brings their own personal views, opinions, mood and biases that may come to bear on their reception of it (defined by Cohen as *affective* jokes<sup>106</sup> and by O'Shannon as *enhancers/inhibitors* to the joke itself<sup>107</sup>. As Cohen states:

Typically, these jokes are understood by many people, but the success of the jokes—their capacity to amuse—depends upon the affective disposition of the audience. It isn't always simply a matter of succeeding, or not, but a question of degree of success.<sup>108</sup>

Carr and Greeves, discussing not the direct mechanisms behind jokes but the social dimension of joking itself<sup>109</sup> observe that a "sense" of humour seems to be innate, citing a programme where they witnessed non-verbal children able to not only separate out jokes from non-jokes from a selection generated by a specialist piece of software but to subjectively decide how funny they are. They also mention the research done by Robert Provine on laughter in conversation, specifically the observation that:

most laughter did not follow anything resembling a joke, storytelling, or other formal attempt at humor. Only about 10 percent to 20 percent of prelaugh comments were estimated by my assistants to be even remotely humorous.<sup>110</sup>

This subjective judgement of funniness is where a joke lives or dies and in stand-up comedy, this judgement is made by the audience, as Limon states audiences "turn jokes into jokes, as if the comedian had not quite thought or expressed a joke until the audience thinks or expresses it"<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* p. 21

<sup>107</sup> O'Shannon, *What Are You Laughing At* (2012) pp. 239-241

<sup>108</sup> Cohen, *Jokes* (1999) p. 21

<sup>109</sup> Carr and Greeves, *The Naked Jape* (2007) pp. 30-33

<sup>110</sup> Robert Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, (London: Penguin Books, 2001)

<sup>111</sup> Limon, *Stand-up Comedy in Theory* (2000) p. 13

Conversely, the argument for the objectivity of jokes is much newer (outlined in detail by Gimbel<sup>112</sup> but supported by the work of Berger<sup>113</sup> and Quirk<sup>114</sup>) and is summarised as the following:

It is trivially true that not every person finds all of the same things funny. However, the claim that this entails the subjectivity of humor presupposes (a) humor is defined by the way it affects the listener, (b) the sole goal of humor is to be funny to the listener, and (c) determination of funniness is purely a matter of taste, which in turn is completely a matter of personal preference.<sup>115</sup>

If we consider "humour" as synonymous with "jokes" and take (c) as the first examined supposition as it correlates directly to the subjectivist ontology outlined previously (as Gimbel does) then we can look at it from a structuralist approach that the ability to recognise a joke, even if one does not consider it funny, was objectively an attempt at humour. Berger, in his *Anatomy of Humor*, broadly supports this view by concentrating on the mechanisms underlying jokes, writing:

If subject or theme wasn't all important, then, I concluded, technique was and so I elicited as many techniques of humor as I could find, not asking *why* something was funny (we may never know) but *what* was it that generated the humor<sup>116</sup>

Gimbel posits that, while we may disagree with jokes on some subjects due to matters of taste, there is near universal agreement on what *is* funny as a social collective – "(e)veryone who laughs, laughs together"<sup>117</sup>. This is supported by Quirk who argues that one of the aims of the stand-up comedian is to facilitate this agreement within the collective, stating "the comedian asserts that the disparate

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<sup>112</sup> Steven Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018)

<sup>113</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*, (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998)

<sup>114</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

<sup>115</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever* (2018) p. 34

<sup>116</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1998) p. 16 – emphasis in original

<sup>117</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever* (2018) p. 35

collection of individuals in attendance is in fact a unified group with a shared consensus"<sup>118</sup> – this consensus, while created and manipulated by the comedian, creates an objective baseline for their material to be judged against within the context of the performance. Gimbel maintains the reasons for funniness are objectively and consciously accessible as part of the collective judgement call which removes the presupposition of taste and brings the argument full circle, stating "The fact that a person did or did not find something someone said or did funny, in no way means that it was or was not an act of humor. Presuppositions (a) and (b) are false"<sup>119</sup>. This is supported by the notion of *intention*, as Gimbel writes:

If humor is truly subjective, then the listener would have no reason to care what the intention of the speaker was. If humor is subjective, then if the listener wants it to be a joke, then it would be a joke by fiat; everyone would get to determine what is a joke and what isn't. There would be no need to ask someone else about the humor status of an utterance—it wouldn't matter what s/he said.<sup>120</sup>

However, there exists room for pragmatism – despite initial appearances and language both ontologies are not mutually incompatible - as Marteinson states:

two different but compatible bodies of theory may be usefully combined in a way that allows one to complement the other, perhaps by shoring up some lacunae or shortcomings in each<sup>121</sup>

Within both ontological approaches, there is a synthesis taking as its inspiration, rather aptly, the Hegelian dialectic, specifically the aesthetic concept of **Objektiver Humor** – the idea that "(b)y means of "a deep feeling, a felicitous witticism, an ingenious reflection and an intelligent movement of imagination" objective humour attempts to "vivify and expand" the smallest details of its subject rather than destroy

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<sup>118</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters* (2015) p. 108

<sup>119</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever* (2018) pp. 35-36

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.* p. 36

<sup>121</sup> Peter Marteinson, 'Thoughts on the Current State of Humour Theory', *Comedy Studies*, 1. 2 (2010) pp. 173-180

it”<sup>122</sup>. This idea of treating objective humour as not in opposition to subjectivity but in negotiation with it is echoed by Moland, who writes:

(o)bjective humor correctly articulates that we cannot determine meaning subjectively and arbitrarily, but we can nevertheless give things coherence and then meaning when we communicate with our fellow humans in new and thoughtful ways<sup>123</sup>.

This approach does not subsume subjectivity but rather treats it as part of the rational response, as Hegel himself states:

what we may regard as necessary here is rather a sensitive abandonment of the heart in the object, which is indeed unfolded but remains a *subjective* spirited movement of imagination and the heart... such an intimacy can only be partial and can perhaps be expressed only within the compass of a song or only as part of a greater whole.<sup>124</sup>

If we take this ‘greater whole’ to mean the set of the stand-up comedian, it can be posited that within our specific context jokes can be both subjective and objective within the dialectic of performance and it is through this negotiation they move from one to the other through the **joke-act**. A joke-act is not only the joke itself but the heuristic engagement that comes from all the surrounding sensorial experiences.

Taking this idea of the performance dialectic as our baseline, it is possible to integrate the compatible elements of both theories into a pragmatic theory of joke-acts – one that I will lay out here in brief and expand subsequently:

- (i) A joke-act is subjectively identifiable *ex-ante*
- (ii) A joke-act is objectively identifiable *ex-post*

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<sup>122</sup> Stephen Law, ‘Hegel and the Spirit of Comedy’, in *Hegel and Aesthetics* ed. by W Maker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) p. 125

<sup>123</sup> Lydia Moland, *Hegel’s Aesthetics: The Art of Idealism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019) p. 143

<sup>124</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Translated by Thomas Malcolm Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

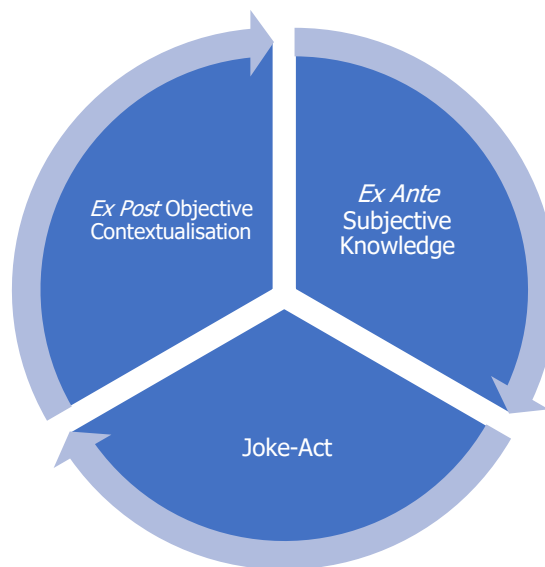
- (iii) The purpose of the joke-act is to reconcile the subjective expectation with the objective action through the manipulation of context

I would like to make clear at this point that this is purely an illustration of the joke-act itself, not a humour theory – it makes no suppositions whether the humour is generated by incongruity, superiority, relief, play or any of the other dominant theories of humour discussed previously. For the purpose of defining the joke-act, the form, content, style and delivery do not matter - the purpose of this abstraction is to divorce ourselves, temporarily at least, from the shared language of the two previous ontologies while the theory is built up.

To begin with (i) - the identification of an impending joke act requires foreknowledge, though this is neither innate nor infallible – the performer has foreknowledge of the script but may forget or improvise, an audience member may have seen the performer before and have memorised previous performances or conversely may never have been to comedy gig before and have only the vaguest idea what goes on. However, until the occurrence of the joke-act, this foreknowledge is entirely subjective and serves only to shape expectations of when (or even if) the joke act will happen. Failure to identify a potential joke-act *ex-ante* is not inherently fatal for the functioning of the joke-act theory – the venue and performance space should at minimum give the initial context required for the expectation\act reconciliation to happen, if not then the joke-act will fail.

Moving on to (ii) – once a joke-act has been recognised it is objectively visible – the fact that the action has been performed creates an artefact *ex-post* that can be objectively contextualised even if that artefact exists only in the memories of both the recipients and the performer. This artefact is not purely the joke itself, but rather a transient representation of the joke-act intertwined with personal bias that becomes part of the *ex-ante* knowledge of the next joke-act. Failure to recognise the immediately preceding joke-act will lead to the failure of this artefact being created, though this failure is not the same as not finding amusement in the joke-act itself, rather the failure to comprehend a joke-act has even taken place.

Finally, the joke-act itself (iii) – as stated before for our current purposes content is meaningless, as is structure – the key to the joke act is the manipulation of context, reconciling the subjective expectation with the objective action. Although there is only one performer per joke-act, both the performer and the audience are recipients – the performer uses their *ex-ante* foreknowledge to contextualise the joke-act for the receivers in the expectation that the joke-act will be reflexively judged *ex-tempore* and objectively contextualised *ex-post*, the audience reflexively judges the joke act *ex-tempore* based on the provided *ex-ante* context, then further contextualises it as an artefact *ex-post*. The process for both is cyclical – context accrues throughout the course of the stand-up set, each joke act informing the reception of the next as envisioned in the following diagram:



*Figure 2 - Joke-Act Model*

With this cyclical model in place, I can now bring back the previously discussed ontological positions and see how this pragmatic approach can be used to answer the perceived incompatibilities to each other in three categories – mechanism of (a), reaction to (b) and perceived success (c):

<b>Jokes are Subjective</b>		<b>Jokes are Objective</b>	
(a)	Jokes function by a degree of conditional personal foreknowledge	(a)	Jokes function by recognition of intention
(b)	Funniness is determined by the complex interplay of personal experience	(b)	Funniness is determined by shared cultural majority and can be objectively identified
(c)	A joke being a joke depends on the reaction of the receiver	(c)	A joke is a joke independent of the reaction of the receiver

Table 2 - Subjectivity vs Objectivity of Jokes

Taking the mechanism arguments from the subjective (henceforth denoted as (aS)) and objective (henceforth denoted as (aO)) and comparing them with the joke-act model, (aS) with its conditional foreknowledge fits firmly into the *ex-ante* section of the cycle and (aO) into the *ex-post* section with its recognition of intent, however, I would argue the joke-act serves as a bridge between the two through the medium of context. An audience may not have the foreknowledge for a joke to function as in (aS), but a competent performer can provide this foreknowledge through contextualisation, imparting just the right amount of needed information for the joke to work. Conversely, the skilled performer ensures that their intent is recognised through rhythm, whether that takes the form of setup-punchline, short-form puns or longer anecdotes – this rhythm is contextualised for the audience within the joke-act, ensuring that the recognition of intent, whatever that intent may be, functions as in (aO). Therefore, it can be held that both are true – the mechanism of a joke requires both conditional foreknowledge and recognition of intention, but both are provided within the bridge of the joke-act.

The second arguments ((bS) and (bO)) concern the reaction to the joke, specifically the idea of funniness – as previously defined often categorised by a laugh reaction but not exclusively. Both chiefly sit within the joke-act itself and may appear mutually exclusive at first, but this antagonism is at the core of the dialectic



– (bS) cites personal experience as a determinant of funniness, (bO) as the cultural majority, but I would argue it is the manipulation of their interplay by the stand-up comedian through contextualisation and recontextualisation. Personal experience exists *ex-ante* – each audience member brings their own biases based on experience; however, the function of the joke-act is to contextualise those individual experiences into a shared experience, facilitating a perception of shared objectivity within the temporo-spatial complex of the comedy gig. This objective *ex-post* experience then cyclically informs the *ex-ante* experience of the next joke act, facilitating a sense of collective hysteria based on a shifting perception of both personal and societal acceptability. This process within the cycle is not infallible and takes negotiation to maintain – if a significant proportion of the audience experiences dissonance between the *ex-ante* personal view and the *ex-post* cultural view a fracture can occur, known as “losing your audience”. This aside, however, the successful manipulation of this dialectic between the *ex-ante* and *ex-post* expectations of the individuals and the collective is the heart of the joke-act.

The final sections of the ontologies ((cS) and (cO)) concern perceived success, and these are where the most contention lies – (cS) holds that success depends on a positive reaction by the receiver, (cO) that a joke is a success providing it is recognised as a joke, regardless of whether the receiver has a positive reaction. The pragmatic common ground between both is the idea of reaction – the acknowledgement of a performed action – and the effect that has on the perception of success. Within the context of joke-acts, the positivity or negativity of a reaction is only important *ex-post* (and by extension, *ex ante* for the following joke act) – the vital thing is the reaction itself as that indicates that the foreknowledge\intention gap has been successfully bridged by the context. Some jokes are intended to elicit laughs, some groans, some a sharp intake of breath and sometimes the reaction will be unexpected to the stand-up comedian, but all are successful jokes – only if a joke-act garners no reaction at all can it be considered a failure due to the breakdown of contextualisation. Whatever the reaction, the success of the next joke-act relies on contextually incorporating it along with both preceding considerations.

## **Thesis Research Question**

With all this in mind, a picture of the challenge ahead emerges – stand-up comedy is multifaceted, complex and infinitely varied – a true big tent, holding everyone from the greenest first-timer to 40-year veterans: if you can get up and tell jokes at a gig, you are a stand-up comedian. The approaches to analysing humour are old and varied, yet despite centuries of debate on the nature of comedy there has been very little consensus as to which of these theories is the most applicable – in truth, I would argue that they are all equally applicable depending on the context that the humour is being used, and that is the important word – **context**.

When reviewing the current literature around stand-up comedy, humour theories and comedy studies the distinct lack of structuralist approaches to the medium became more and more obvious. The academic literature that does exist applying structuralist approaches to stand-up comedy is similarly narrow in focus, concentrating as it does specifically on callbacks<sup>125</sup> (although this does include a corpus, just not a transcribed one) and the performances of Bill Hicks<sup>126</sup>. This dearth of structuralist analysis is reflected in the ‘culturalist’ approaches adopted by most of the literature in the genre, the approach which Stuart Hall defined as:

both the meanings and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they ‘handle’ and respond to the conditions of existence; and as the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied.<sup>127</sup>

This in my mind raises the question as to whether stand-up comedy has ever had a structuralist tradition to call its own – certainly analysis of stand-up comedy has its

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<sup>125</sup> Caroline Chauvin, ‘Callbacks in Stand-Up Comedy: Constructing Cohesion at the Macro Level Within a Specific Genre’, in *Contrastive Analysis of Discourse-pragmatic Aspects of Linguistic Genres*, ed. by Karin Aijmer and Diana Lewis (Springer: Cham, 2017) pp. 165-185

<sup>126</sup> Henrik Sandén, *Voicing Opposition: Challenging Outlooks in the Stand-Up Comedy of Bill Hicks* (2007) Available from <<https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/1324080/file/1324081.doc>> [accessed 08 September 2023]

<sup>127</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms’, in *Media, Culture & Society: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Richard Collins et al. (London: Sage Publications, 1986) p. 38

roots in theatre and performance studies as well as much older and more disjointed forays from sociology and anthropology. However, by the time of focused anglophonic analysis of specifically stand-up comedy, both theatre and performance studies had already moved beyond structuralism and were firmly rooted in the post-structural of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Butler as argued by Richard Schechner<sup>128</sup>. The fact that stand-up as an academic study was in its infancy a mere thirty years ago means that, unlike theatre, clowning, mime, poetry, music and even film, there is no established structuralist critique to draw upon for a unification of post-structuralist and culturalist ideas.

I am aware that structuralism is a somewhat nebulous term – many schools of thinking have their own structuralist tradition, and the equally nebulous term post-structuralist can be applied to those who would even reject the term<sup>129</sup>. However, in this sense, I am referring to and inspired by an essay by Umberto Eco titled *The Narrative Structure in Ian Fleming*<sup>130</sup> in which Eco aims to “devise a descriptive table of the narrative structure in Ian Fleming while seeking to evaluate for each structural element the probable incidence upon the reader’s sensitivity”<sup>131</sup>. The subsequent analysis encompasses five layers of narrative structure on a corpus of ten extant novels in a way that each layer builds into and informs the next. This includes analysis of the opposition of characters and values, in which the major compositional relationships between characters and values common across the corpus<sup>132</sup>, the concept of the story as a ‘game’, which takes the rules of combination in the oppositional couples and maps out a series of moves in a prearranged scheme<sup>133</sup>, a discussion of the ideology of Fleming as an author using these moves and oppositions as evidence<sup>134</sup>, an examination of the literary techniques used in the

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<sup>128</sup> Richard Schechner, ‘Post Post-Structuralism?’, *TDR*, 44, 3 (2000) pp. 4–7

<sup>129</sup> James D. Marshall, ‘Introduction’, in *Poststructuralism, Philosophy, Pedagogy*, ed. by James D. Marshall (Netherlands: Springer Netherlands, 2004) p. xv

<sup>130</sup> Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979) pp. 144-172

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.* p. 146

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* pp. 147-155

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* pp. 155-161

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.* pp. 161-163

novels<sup>135</sup> and finally a discussion on Flemings use of literature as collage – the use of literary references within the work to simulate literature for the masses.<sup>136</sup>

Though the content of this article is interesting, the structuralist approach to Fleming’s corpus is the most relevant to the work to be done here. Eco uses existing, established theories in the field of literature to create a structure that is effective as a tool for analysis by virtue of its holistic approach – each level informs and is informed by the other, allowing him to build a picture of the underlying mechanics of Flemings writing from several complementary perspectives. That is my aim for the work undertaken here – to build a holistic framework for the analysis of stand-up comedy by creating a structuralist perspective on the medium, one that has been lacking due to the relative newness of the field.

My aim in doing this is not to discount or ignore the large body of work that has been painstakingly written and researched on the topic over the years, but rather to contextualise it within a structuralist tradition that is unique to stand-up comedy as a studied discipline. To borrow a phrase from software engineering, the aim is to *backport* the extant literature into a holistic poetics framework, letting the categories for analysis emerge from the literature itself. This is only an initial step in creating a structuralist perspective for stand-up comedy, and one that I sincerely intend to continue in later research. I hope others will be inspired to do the same. With that in mind, the central research question of this study is:

**What is the most effective way to capture and analyse stand-up comedy from a structuralist perspective?**

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid.* pp. 163-168

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.* pp. 168-172

### **Chapter Three**

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“One learns the game by watching how others play. But we say that it is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game—like a natural law governing the play.”<sup>1</sup> – Ludwig Wittgenstein

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In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of stand-up comedy, a holistic framework must be proposed, one which can accommodate the current theoretical approaches favoured by the field. This approach should provide a solid foundation upon which existing theories can be integrated, allowing for a more unified analysis of the subject. The rationale behind adopting such an approach is to facilitate the convergence of various perspectives, providing a clearer, more cohesive picture of the intricate dynamics at play in stand-up comedy.

To outline this approach, a detailed methodology must be established. This would involve identifying key aspects of stand-up comedy, such as performance, audience interaction, and the cultural and social contexts within which it takes place. By systematically examining these aspects, and the relationships between them, a holistic framework can be created that recognises the interconnectivity of various factors influencing the art form. This comprehensive approach will enable researchers to better understand the nuances of stand-up comedy, and in doing so, more effectively contribute to the ongoing academic discourse in this field.

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co, 1968 (1958)) p. 27

## **Approach - A Holistic, Multimodal Analysis Framework**

Based on the theoretical underpinnings of Oral Traditional Theory, for the study, I will be outlining a flexible, extensible multimodal poetics framework for recording the pertinent data points for a structured and layered analysis and comparison of stand-up comedy performance texts, with the aim of encompassing extant intersectional theories under the field of stand-up comedy analysis for the utility of professionals and academics interested in the field.

The framework approach to organising these traditions was inspired in part by the work of John T. Kearns on developing the speech-act theory of linguistics into a more generalised theory of intentional acts. As Kearns writes, his strategy in developing this was to begin with an outline, and then:

to flesh out the theory by applying it to a variety of specific topics and problems. The general theory of intentional acts becomes more fully articulated through its applications.<sup>2</sup>

Kearns makes a distinction between two types of theory, *framework* and *nonframework*<sup>3</sup>, with framework theory establishing a conceptual scheme and providing language to describe a class of phenomena while a non-framework theory deals with a subclass of the phenomena supplemental to the framework theory.

The initial work then is to build this framework of stand-up comedy theory from the ground up – map out its basic vocabulary and metatextual constraints, outline a research methodology for the framework development, and finally establish its central ontological considerations ready for the introduction of non-framework theories.

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<sup>2</sup> John T. Kearns, *Using Language: The Structures of Speech Acts* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 3

## **Vocabulary and Constraints**

To ensure that the reader and I remain comparatively synchronous throughout the following, it is necessary here to establish a technical grounding in the basic terms used in stand-up comedy theory going forward – as Kearns states, the “characteristic expressions of a framework theory cannot be completely defined in terms of expressions available prior to the theory’s formulation”<sup>4</sup>.

## **Performance Artefacts**

Jason Rutter describes stand-up comedy performance as:

a system made up of accepted norms based in specific cultural values rather than a system of canned jokes and audience responses, and it is one which governs the routine of audience attendance, behaviour at the venue, as well as the way in which comedians perform their act.<sup>5</sup>

Each stand-up comedy performance is a distinct event, resulting from the combination of five key factors: persona (the performer), routine (the performance), audience (the audience at the gig), context (the venue), and intention (the gig itself).

In the lead-up to a performance, these factors possess varying levels of adaptability. Some aspects, such as the routine or venue, are established well in advance and are resistant to change. Others, like the gig or the performer, may be subject to alterations due to unforeseen circumstances. Finally, the audience is typically a loosely gathered group of individuals who may attend either through careful planning or spontaneous decisions.

While the performance is underway, these factors become more solidified but remain subject to change. Audience members may arrive or leave during the show, technical issues may arise, or mistakes and misjudgements by the performer could

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Jason Rutter, *Stand-up as Interaction: Performance and Interaction in Comedy Venues* (PhD Thesis: University of Salford, 1997) p.82

impact the overall experience. However, these variations contribute to the unique narrative of the event rather than defining it outright.

Once the performance has concluded, the combination of factors becomes a cultural artefact, fixed and unchangeable. These elements, now intertwined, can be examined holistically, treating each performance as a self-contained event. To reconstruct a narrative from captured data, one can employ the classical rhetorical framework of the *Septem Circumstantiae*<sup>6</sup>, using five key questions to establish the circumstances of the performance: who (persona), what (routine), where (audience), when (context), and why (intention). In this way, each stand-up comedy performance can be comprehensively analysed and understood as a unique, multifaceted event.

### **Performance Artefact Vocabulary**

**Venue** – The temporospatial location of a stand-up comedy *gig*.

**Gig** – The overall structured framework of the performance happening in a *venue*, may play host to one or several *sets* – “Stand-up gigs come in all shapes and sizes, from small, struggling clubs above pubs to the O2 Arena, a London venue which can accommodate audiences of up to 16,000 for its stand-up shows... As venues get larger, the dynamic of interaction changes.”<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this study, the venue size for the majority does not go beyond large theatres due to this change in interaction, with the notable exception being the transcription of Micheal McIntyre (Wembley Arena – capacity 12,500).

**Audience** – The collective of spectators within a *venue* during a *set*, composed of “individuals who bring their own cultural reference points, political beliefs, sexual

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Sloan, ‘Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics as the Original Locus for the *Septem Circumstantiae*’, *Classical Philology*, 105, 4 (2010) pp. 236-251

<sup>7</sup> Sophie Quirk, ‘Containing the Audience: The Room in Stand-Up Comedy’, *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8.2 (2011) pp. 219-238 (p. 220)



preferences, personal histories and immediate preoccupations”<sup>8</sup> when interpreting the performance of the *stand-up comedian*.

**Stage** – The symbolic division between the *audience* and *stand-up comedian* at a *venue*, enforced either by physical separation or communal tradition. “In contrast to cinemas, theatres, concert venues, sports arenas etc. the amount of space that is marked out as the performer’s in stand-up venues is minimal. In most venues where there is a physical stage it is always less than a [*sic*] two feet high and usually only raised by a few inches.”<sup>9</sup>

**Room** – From a performer’s perspective, what one is faced with – the aggregation of the *venue*, *gig*, *audience* and *stage* in a way that is “all interlinked and interdependent; a collection of factors which merge together to form the context in which material develops into an interactive performance.”<sup>10</sup>

**Stand-up Comedian** – The singular individual who performs a stand-up comedy *set* to the *room* on the *stage* during a *gig* at a *venue*.

**Set** – The full performance of a *stand-up comedian*, consisting of a sequence of *bits* “usually structured to give impetus and drive to what the comedian is talking about.”<sup>11</sup> Each set, possibly alongside several others forming the lineup of a *gig*, comprises a full individual text for the purposes of analysis within the proposed framework.

**Bit** – Distinct subsections of a *set*, consisting of a collection of *material* divisible by topic, context, approach etc.

**Material** – The basic unit stand-up comedy, defined as a singular comedic event – this event can be linguistic or semiotic in nature, deliberate or accidental, but is drawn from the text of the performance and not the intentions of the performer, and each performance may create different material. This idea is echoed

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (London: Macmillan, 2009) p. 6

<sup>9</sup> Rutter, *Stand-up as Interaction* (1997) p. 73

<sup>10</sup> Quirk, *Containing the Audience* (2011) p. 220

<sup>11</sup> Chris Richie, *Performing Live Comedy* (London, Methuen Drama, 2012) p. 12

by Oring, who states "Understanding how a joke works depends upon scrutiny of the joke. It involves going serially through the joke, noting where incongruities arise and how they are made appropriate. There are no preconceptions about the kinds of incongruities that will necessarily arise, where they will arise, or how appropriateness is established"<sup>12</sup>.

**Funniness** – The "funny moment" crowning a piece of *material* is, as Sills describes it, "the unraveling, shattering, comforting, accepting, polysemous, phenomenological break between an aesthetic buildup and the happy affective payoff of laughter"<sup>13</sup>, but funniness does not necessarily denote universal enjoyment – something may be funny to a single person, a subset of an *audience* or to the majority, but nevertheless, the intention of funniness within a *set* exists.

**Sontext** - A "persona context" or "sontext" in the field of stand-up comedy refers to the specific background, circumstances, or environment that a comedian creates or implies around their onstage persona. As a compound word, "sontext" combines "sona" (from "persona") and "context." The term "persona" in comedy usually refers to the character or facade the comedian presents on stage, while "context" often pertains to the backdrop or circumstances in which the persona operates. So "sontext" suggests the interplay between the comedian's persona and the context within which they perform their comedy. It encapsulates the comedian's crafted identity and the setting or circumstances they use to enhance their performance and humour. This context serves to enhance the humour, relatability, or impact of their jokes, stories, and performance as a whole. It provides a frame of reference for the audience to better understand and connect with the comedian's persona and material. For example, Frankie Boyle is a comedian known for his dark, controversial humour and acerbic wit. His "sontext," or persona context, can be characterised by his cynical and often confrontational persona, which is used to tackle taboo or sensitive subjects and social issues in a brutally honest manner. His

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<sup>12</sup> Eliot Oring, *Joking Asides: The Theory, Analysis and Aesthetics of Humor* (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2016) p. 32

<sup>13</sup> Liz Sills, 'The Phenomenology of the Funny: A Diagrammatic Proposal', *Comedy Studies*, 8, 1 (2017) pp. 2-12 (p. 3)

Scottish background and experiences also form part of his "sontext," providing a frame of reference for his humour. The "sontext" sets up expectations for his edgy style of comedy and signals to the audience that few topics are off-limits.

### **Performance Artefact Constraints**

For the purposes of this study, I am only considering stand-up comedy gigs that have been advertised as such – such an advertisement, it can be argued, creates a preconceived expectation within the audience it attracts and facilitates their acceptance of the conventions of a stand-up comedy performance. This is not to say that stand-up comedy does not happen outside of specifically targeted events – the performance of stand-up at open mic nights, variety shows, and music festivals continues and is no less valid for analysis – however, as most stand-up gigs are advertised as such restricting my focus to these will help in identify a generalised ruleset that can then be clarified later in special cases.<sup>14</sup>

Other than this initial restriction, gigs for consideration are not restricted by venue, time, audience capacity or number of individual sets. As far as the stage goes, I apply two basic requirements for the resultant text to be considered – firstly, there must be a delineation between performer and audience, even if this delineation is largely symbolic (in practice this is rarely a problem, even the most rank of amateur gigs realise there should be a space for the performer to stand). Secondly, the performer must be amplified, whether this be via the traditional wired dynamic microphone in a weighted mic stand or through a wireless lavalier or headset-mounted condenser. While I realise this may be one of the more contentious requirements, I would argue that amplification reinforces the delineation between performer and audience through basic inference of authority – the

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<sup>14</sup> As stated earlier in my definition of stand-up comedy, for every statement about stand-up comedy you can find edge cases – one could argue Ted Chippington performed stand-up comedy to deliberately antagonise the crowd at music gigs (see Smith 2018 pp. 54-56) and that Norm MacDonalds final Netflix comedy show *Nothing Special*, performed with no stage and no audience, is still very much stand -up comedy, but I would counter that these exceptions actually prove the rule – MacDonalds performance is prefaced by text explaining the lack of audience and venue to assuage the expectation that they would be there and Chippington is always discussed in terms of the confounding of expectations that audiences had.

performer is separate because they have the ability to vocally overpower other individuals within the audience, though they are still vulnerable to the collective acting in cohesion.

For stand-up comedians, no restriction will be made based on political views, personal characteristics, subject matter or controversies – someone is a stand-up comedy performer providing their performance meets all the criteria outlined previously. However, there is one delineation I wish to make for the purposes of this thesis – stand-up comedy is the preserve of a single performer. While not a monologue due to the active participation of the audience, as soon as the performance involves more than one scripted participant it is no longer dialogic purely between the performer and audience but rather 'trialogic' – a dialogue between performer and performer as well as performers and audience. This by necessity excludes double-acts from my analysis, and while I would not go as far as to say that double-acts do not perform stand-up comedy, the type of stand-up comedy they perform is not the focus of my research due to both its complexity and the marked difference in the performer-audience dynamic.

As set and audience are inextricably linked, I will deal with one in reference to the other when it comes to data validity. Sets can be of any length to audiences of any size, providing the performance meets the aforementioned criteria. In my own personal experience, it is highly difficult but not impossible to perform an hour-long set to an audience of one, though considerations of both performance time and audience size actively shape the set. A set as an analytic text consists of all the active stage time a comedian spends in front of an audience – in the special case of the compere, this is an amalgam of their warm-ups, introductions and farewells. Sets can be analysed live or recorded, though each has its own specifics when it comes to data fidelity and ethical considerations.

The analysis of live sets, by the very nature of human memory, has a tendency to be somewhat impressionistic – in an excellent study by Lockyer and Myers on the audience perspective at live comedy gigs they deal with the idea of 'expecting the unexpected' and the disdain that some of the respondents have with comedians

later in their careers recycling their material<sup>15</sup>, However on an intuitive level this runs counter to my own experience having worked with comedians at all levels and being acutely aware that every one of them use the same material from gig to gig. This is entirely understandable given the amount of developmental capital that goes into each and every single piece of material in a set, but it does create a factual disconnect that can only be explained by an individual taking away an impression of what was said rather than something more accurate. Analytically, this means that the text must be reconstructed from notes and memory, giving an emotional lens to the experience, and often misrepresenting central details about the performer. One must only look at the tendency of comedy reviews, whatever their level of professionalism, to focus on the visceral reaction of the reviewer over the overall enjoyment of the collective audience.

Acknowledgement must be made of the fact that any analysis made of a live comedy performance will be impressionistic and care must be taken to not misrepresent the views or attitudes of the comedian with your own interpretive bias. This consideration will need to be folded into the methodology through a more accurate notation system concentrating on the selected analysis level and the pertinent details of that level of analysis.

The analysis of recorded material, on the other hand, is more complicated. As part of my initial process, I recorded my own performances with a fixed camera pointed at the stage, onboard sound and left them raw and unedited – thus, the only mediation of these performances was the positioning of the camera and when to start and stop the recording. With most other available stand-up comedy performance recordings, the mediation is much heavier. As professional sound recordist Audrey Martinovich<sup>16</sup> states with respect to recording live comedy “Laughter and audience reactions are a crucial part of stand-up comedy performances and on the final product, the comedian needs to sound like they

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<sup>15</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers, ‘It’s About Expecting the Unexpected: Live Stand-up Comedy from the Audiences’ Perspective’, *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 8. 2 (2011) pp. 165-188 (p. 175-177)

<sup>16</sup> Audrey Martinovitch, *Tips On How to Record Comedy Live* (2017) <<https://www.pro-tools-expert.com/home-page/2017/8/29/tips-for-recording-comedy>> [accessed 21 August 2023]

absolutely killed it". Martinovich discusses the placement of the microphones to avoid unnecessary noise such as drinks glasses or air conditioners, splitting the main feed from the on-stage mic to ensure crystal clear audio and even using the opening act as a sound check if possible to ensure the best level mix. Most importantly, multiple shows should be recorded and edited together "in case something goes wrong during one of the shows or a heckler decides it's their time to shine".<sup>17</sup> Even the audience themselves are mediated, as this statement reveals:

(t)hat can mean anything from letting a certain audience member know their laugh is too distracting to kicking hecklers out of the club. In one of my recent recordings involved an audience member who repeated the last few words of every punch line before laughing. I let the staff know and moments later the distraction was gone.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the heavy mediation previously alluded to, recordings offer several advantages over live performance when it comes to analysis, chief amongst these being relative objective permanence – a recording can be interrogated at several levels successively where, as I will argue later, each live performance can only be meaningfully analysed at one textual level due to inherent restrictions on notation and memory. The mediation of a recorded stand-up set serves to shape analysis of both the material and the audience – the former being heightened by the editing; the latter being homogenised by the same. The final product however is packaged with the same intention as the live show – to impress an audience, albeit part of which is temporally distant at the creation of the recording. As long as these considerations of mediation are acknowledged by the researcher then live and recorded stand-up comedy are both suitable for analysis.

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<sup>17</sup> As an aside, the multi-camera live stand-up segments in *Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle* are clearly signposted as such, introduced with clinking glasses to evoke in the viewer the experience of the live recording at the Mildmay Club in Stoke Newington

<sup>18</sup> Audrey Martinovitch, *Tips On How to Record Comedy Live* (2017) <<https://www.pro-tools-expert.com/home-page/2017/8/29/tips-for-recording-comedy>> [accessed 21 August 2023]

## **Data Collection – Effectively Encoding and Transcoding Performance**

### **Artefacts**

As discussed in the initial section, each stand-up comedy performance is a demonstrably unique event due to the coming together of five different factors that form the building blocks of each and every performance narrative – persona (the performer), routine (the performance), audience (the audience at the gig), context (the venue) and intention (the gig itself). In the build-up to the performance each of these factors has a varying level of capacity for change, ranging from those honed through various repetitions over months or years (routine) or decided well in advance and not subject to change without a large amount of notice (venue), through those decided in advance of announcement (gig), those subject to replacement due to unforeseen circumstances (performer) or those formed from a loose collection of people who have managed to make the performance, either through spontaneous decision or successful planning (audience).

While the performance is in progress, these factors are solidified but still mutable – audience members may arrive or depart mid-performance, technical issues or sound bleed may affect the enjoyment of the experience and mistakes in the routine or social misjudgements of the performer may mar or even ruin the evening – however these variations form an integral part of the experience and serve to shape the narrative rather than defining it as they do on the build-up to the event.

Once the performance has finished, those variables are fixed in place by the nature of retrospective experience – the particular combination of performer, routine, audience, venue and gig form a cultural *artefact*, something fixed and unchanging that can be examined as a collection of fixed elements. As each element is both identifiable and intertwined with the others, any approach used to capture the data needs to treat each performance by a performer as a self-contained event made up of these basic building blocks (holistic analysis). Approaching each performance as a self-contained event means you can reconstruct a narrative from captured data using a set of five questions common to establish the most basic of

circumstances – who, what, where, when and why (the *Septem Circumstantiae* from classical rhetoric, with the final question “how” being the subject of the narrative itself) - each circumstantial component can be tied to an aspect of the stand-up comedy performance:

Who = The Performer (Persona)

What = The Performance (Routine)

Where = In front of The Audience (Audience)

When = The Venue (Context)

Why = The Comedy Gig (Intention)

By examining a performance using this narrative approach, it is possible to begin the process of *encoding* – taking the information present within one medium (in this case, the stand-up comedy performance) and converting it into another (for example, digital video, audio or written word) for the purposes of capturing the data for later analysis. Due to the volume of complex data a performance contains even when broken down into these five basic categories, in-depth analysis would be extremely difficult if not impossible to perform live due to the large amount of data that would be lost from divided attention. This being said, all of the previous examples for encoding the performance data would suffer from *data loss* to a greater or lesser extent and this will be discussed in the following section under the pros and cons of each encoding method.

Live performance can be (and has been) encoded effectively for later analysis in two ways – notation or recording. The encoding of performance through notation has been explored by leading theoreticians and practitioners in various disciplines, including theatre and film<sup>19</sup>, music<sup>20</sup>, dance<sup>21</sup> and sports science<sup>22</sup> - though the

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<sup>19</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (United Kingdom: University of Michigan Press, 2003)

<sup>20</sup> Barthold Kuijken, *The Notation Is Not the Music: Reflections on Early Music Practice and Performance* (United States: Indiana University Press, 2013)



important details may vary between the performances and the purpose of recording the information may be for analysis, reproduction or both, the core aim of each of these systems is to capture these details with the greatest level of pertinent accuracy – as Ian Brodie states:

because a recording can be stopped and started and replayed, the recorded performance need not be experienced in a homeostatic way... In this manner, the performance becomes something like a printed text: parsable, revisitable, reviewable.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear from each set of examples however that each discipline has its own unique parameters and shorthand vocabulary that will have to be considered by anyone hoping to capture data with any accuracy at all.

The recording of performance (audio and video) for both posterity and analysis has been the subject of academic study for years, reaching back to the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in recording Yugoslavian Guslar singers between 1933 and 1935 on a phonograph in the study of Oral Tradition<sup>24</sup>, through to fieldwork in Ethnomusicology<sup>25</sup>, Poetics<sup>26</sup>, Folkloristics<sup>27</sup> and Comedy Studies<sup>28</sup>. In terms of pertinent accuracy, video with audio has the highest level if the recording is correctly set up (high enough quality to see facial expressions and minor movements of the performer, wide enough shot to encompass the whole range of the performer's movement as well as possibly encompassing some members of the audience to

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<sup>21</sup> Rachel S. Duerden and Neil Fisher, eds., *Dancing off the page: integrating performance, choreography, analysis and notation/documentation* (United Kingdom: Dance Books, 2007)

<sup>22</sup> Ian M. Franks and Mike Hughes, eds., *Notational Analysis of Sport: Systems for Better Coaching and Performance in Sport* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2004.)

<sup>23</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2014) p. 187

<sup>24</sup> See Harvard Library, *Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature* (2022)

<<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/milman-parry-collection-of-oral-literature>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

<sup>25</sup> Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts* (United Kingdom: University of Illinois Press, 1983)

<sup>26</sup> Meta DuEwa Jones, *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word*. Vol. 142. (University of Illinois Press, 2011)

<sup>27</sup> Kenneth S. Goldstein, 'Folklore Recordings as Bibliographical Entries', *Midwest Folklore*, 9, 2 (1959) pp. 110-113

<sup>28</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014) pp. 186-216

record their reaction), followed by audio alone (due to the ability to capture both the dialogue of the performance and the ambience of the audience reaction to this) and finally video (while this does provide an accurate recording of the visual side, the pertinent detail of the material and audience reaction is largely absent and therefore not useful as an encoded artefact).

However, any methodology needs to take into consideration the inherent levels of abstraction that encoding represents – although as previously discussed the aim of both methods is fidelity, the recording or notation is not the performance itself, and each time data is encoded or transferred from one type of encoding to another (*transcoded*) the data loss is further compounded by the level of abstraction i.e. a set of data selected due to technical or practical limitation is then further exposed to a different set of selection criteria, losing more data in the process. A diagram of the different levels of abstraction each of the encoding and transcoding steps represents within the data used for the study can be found below:

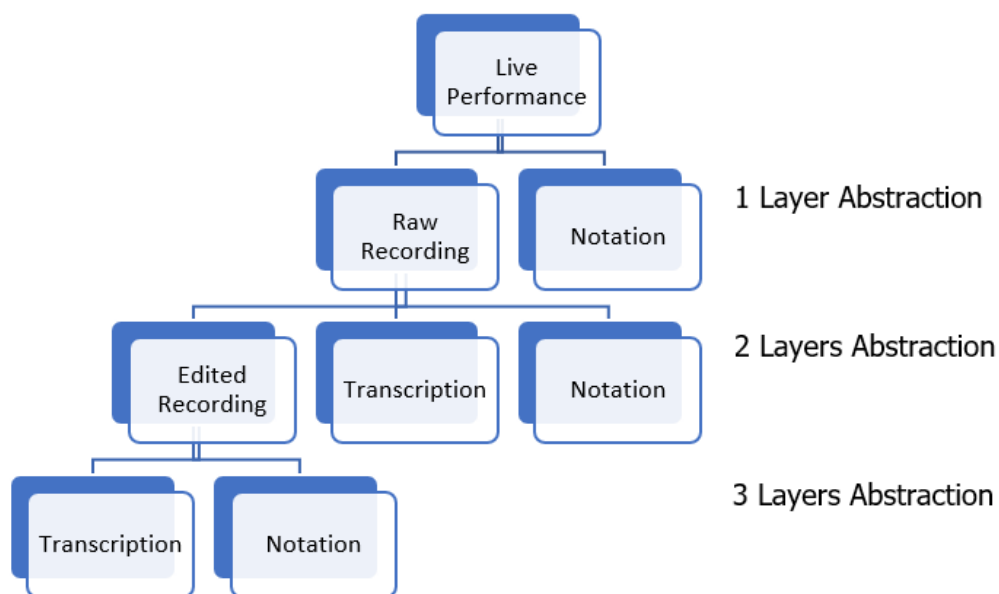


Figure 3 - Layers of Performance Artefact Abstraction

Starting at the lowest level of abstraction (encoding live performance), notation at this level creates the most immediately accessible analysis of a live performance experience i.e. analysis is performed “live” by the active selection and exclusion of

the notes taken as an aid to memory, but this method can have a high informational loss rate due to the same selective analysis previously discussed – there is only so much information that can be captured and encoded in a live environment due to a number of factors ranging from split attention and distraction to the parallel decoding that a listener is engaging in when processing the performative material in order to “get the joke” – this can lead to possible information bias through the preferences of the encoder, for example the notation of a punchline in full that particularly amused or impressed the researcher.

As an alternative, recording creates an encoded performative artefact with a much lower informational loss rate than notation alone (with, as previously discussed, video with synchronised audio having the lowest loss rate due to the visual and auditory information remaining intact, though both can be combined with notation during analysis to counteract the loss of perspective and atmosphere inherent in the recording) and one that can be compared and contrasted with other researchers away from the temporospatial confines of the live performance itself – the drawback is however that if further analysis is required, the recorded artefact must be further transcoded as one would with a live performance in order to perform further analysis upon it.

Recorded performance can be transcoded effectively for analysis via transcription or notation, either performed on the raw recording or the edited recording - though each transcoding step adds a layer of abstraction to the final artefact that must be taken into consideration in future analysis, the method of analysis that can be applied to each type of artefact remains consistent and it is only the pertinent details that can be explored in greater depth through the use of pausing, rewinding and multiple viewings.

Notation at this level suffers all the drawbacks previously outlined (selective analysis leading to information loss), while this is amplified by the level of abstraction – notation of a raw recording loses the aforementioned perspective and atmosphere information *before* this selective analysis process starts, and notation of an edited recording (such as a stand-up performance DVD or audio recording) also

has informational loss in the form of shot selection, insert shots and amplified audience response. This abstraction at both levels makes notation a direct analysis of the encoded or transcoded artefact rather than of the performance itself.

Transcription, as a performative artefact, is simultaneously a more accurate representation of a recorded artefact (comparatively less information loss to notation, as it is a verbatim account of not only the spoken words but also the audience reaction and performers movements) with the proviso that the visual information is lost if the recording is video, though as before the transcription can be combined with the recording if desired. As the transcription is a more accurate representation of the recorded performance, much deeper analysis can be performed on this than the other notation as more information is recorded.

### **Data Analysis – A Multimodal Framework Approach: Folkloristics, Discourse Analysis and Comedy Studies**

My approach to the analysis of the encoded and transcoded artefacts has been to use grounded theory to build a series of successive analysis frameworks focused on the five previously discussed core elements that make up stand-up comedy performance, then fold in theoretical approaches from related disciplines with the aim of creating a specialised and useful methodology for myself and other academics to leverage in the qualitative study of stand-up comedy.

These core elements in repeated sequence neatly loop us back to the recognisable traditions of stand-up comedy – the semiotic, practical, and performative practices that simultaneously define and facilitate stand-up comedy performance. This circular feedback loop is one of the strengths of this approach when considering stand-up comedy as it closely parallels in macro-form the micro feedback loops that performers induce with their audience through their material.

This multimodal approach, creating a layered framework structure of interlocking traditions, allows many levels of analysis on the same basic data while still allowing the flexibility of personal interpretation when recording the details of each data point.

Through iterative work demonstrating basic coding (personal material review, iterations of gig review sheets), intermediate coding (recorded comedy transcription, initial framework definitions) and advanced coding (current framework definition, working transcriptions) as well as 'memoing' as part of the process and actively engaging with the theoretical perspectives present in the adjoining disciplines, the research currently stands at the juncture of folkloristics, discourse analysis and comedy studies, with core texts within each discipline providing the groundwork for the three analysis levels present within the proposed framework - folklore for the initial or frame level<sup>29</sup>, discourse analysis for the secondary or narrative level<sup>30 31 32</sup> and comedy studies for the tertiary or material level<sup>33 34</sup>. Each level represents both the depth of analysis applied vs the level of abstraction needed to perform this analysis (with the secondary and tertiary levels being more abstracted from the performance as an initial artefact) and a delineation of interrelated concepts that can be holistically analysed.

	Persona	Routine	Audience	Context	Intention
Frame					
Narrative					
Material					

*Table 3 – Basic Holistic Analysis Matrix Outline*

<sup>29</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014)

<sup>30</sup> Suzanne Eggins and J. R. Martin Genres and Registers of Discourse. In van Dijk, T. A. ed. *Discourse as Structure and Process* (London: SAGE Publications, 1998)

<sup>31</sup> Ralph H. Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behavior*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957)

<sup>32</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

<sup>33</sup> Bim Mason, *Provocation in Popular Culture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016)

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*, (New York: Routledge, 1993)

At the frame level, the folklore aspect adds a much-needed humanising aspect to the study and Brodie's work anchors the stand-up performance firmly within the world of performative expectations and professional obligations which cannot and should not be ignored – a comedian is first and foremost an entertainer and the audience expects and demands a specific type of performance from them, though this expectation in and of itself can be played with in interesting ways. By using this as the basis for considering the framing level of a performance the fundamental questions regarding form, function and purpose of the stand-up comedy performance can be considered and answered for all performers, enabling comparison and contrasting. Brodie highlights the identity that the performer strives to be recognised as – that of a stand-up comedian – one that stands simultaneously within and distant from the temporospatial group that constitutes the audience and how this persona endeavours to close the distance imposed by the staging using vernacular small talk.

Discourse analysis forms a bridge into the more technical nuances of the narrative level, exploring through the lens of genre and register the forms, tenors, fields, modes and objective moves that make up the multiform of a stand-up performance, as well as the effect the audience as a collective and the venue setup can have on said performance. The dialogic form of stand-up comedy means that each performative viewing of an artefact is contextually different for the viewer despite the material being the same, and this material can only be parsed through an understanding of the discourse inherent in a stand-up performance. This level seeks to examine not the purpose but the expectations of a stand-up comedy performance and how these expectations are realised or confounded through the interaction of the various elements, from the narrative flow to comedic techniques such as callbacks, toppers, and rug-pulls. These discourse units form part of the play sphere of the stand-up comedy performance and serve to structure and organise the narrative in a way that facilitates communication between the performer and the audience.

Finally, comedy studies provides the backbone to the material level of stand-up comedy performance (and comedians perform material, not jokes – jokes are a form

of material, but not all material consists of jokes). This is the real nuts and bolts stuff of humorous performance and relies on five theoretical categories:

- Stance, as examined through the lens of a stand-up focused specialisation of positioning theory as put forward by Rom Harré<sup>35</sup>
- Comic Forms, as delineated by Arthur Asa Berger in his seminal work *An Anatomy of Humour*<sup>36</sup>
- Reaction, as examined through the work of Sophie Quirk<sup>37</sup>, Michael Mulkey<sup>38</sup>, Robert Provine<sup>39</sup> and Sharon Lockyer<sup>40</sup> among others
- Technique, as exemplified through observational, political, offensive, interactive and improvisational humour, as well as callbacks, pacing, rhythm, physicality and timing. This leads to the importance of cultural context, microphone technique, physical paralanguage, tone and inflexion and finally material structure.
- Provocateur, viewing the comedian as a liminal observer in a play space based on the work of Bim Mason<sup>41</sup> and the Emergent Norm Theory proposed by Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian<sup>42</sup>, explores how comedians push against boundaries both self-created and created by the wider society in order to provoke a reaction

For the analysis, I will be relying on three selected performative texts of differing levels of professional recognition and mediated performance supported by the rest of the corpus of transcribed material – a recording of my own stand-up (local apprentice, fixed camera, no close-ups or audience reaction), Mae Martin on Live at the BBC (international journeyman, tracking camera, close-ups but no audience reaction shots) and Nish Kumar on Live at the BBC (national craftsman, tracking camera, close-ups but no audience reaction shots). These three core texts

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<sup>35</sup> Rom Harré, 'Positioning Theory: Moral Dimensions of Social-Cultural Psychology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. Jaan Valsiner (Oxford Library of Psychology, 2012), pp. 191-206

<sup>36</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*, (New York: Routledge, 1993)

<sup>37</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015)

<sup>38</sup> Michael Mulkey, *On Humour: Its Nature and its Place in Modern Society*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988)

<sup>39</sup> Robert Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, (Penguin Publishing Group, 2001)

<sup>40</sup> Sharon Lockyer, 'Performance, Expectation, Interaction and Intimacy: On the Opportunities and Limitations of Arena Stand-up Comedy for Comedians and Audiences', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 48, 3 (2015) pp. 586-603

<sup>41</sup> Bim Mason, *Provocation in Popular Culture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016)

<sup>42</sup> Ralph H. Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behavior*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957)

provide a wide variety of approaches and techniques to the same goal – entertaining an audience through vernacular discourse – and will be examined both as a notated artefact and as a transcribed artefact. I will also be examining examples from other transcribed performances to highlight and re-enforce points but these core texts will form the basis of the comparison at each analytical level within the framework.

Finally, to recap, the aim of this study is to explore through the collection of written data and video with audio how to capture live stand-up comedy performances effectively and consistently in a way that can then be used for further analysis. This data will be transcoded through both notation and transcription of video artefacts, both raw and edited, and these transcoded artefacts will then be analysed using a specialised framework developed through the iterative application of grounded theory, holistically examining the five core elements using theoretical approaches from related disciplines to create an academic toolbox based on a traditions framework for the discipline of stand-up comedy research.

### **Existing Analysis Framework Approaches**

#### PhD Thesis – Jason Rutter

The first (and oldest) of these is by Jason Rutter and is his 1997 PhD thesis at the University of Salford. Ethnographic in its approach and arguing for an *in situ* approach to stand-up observation, Rutter’s methodology is established as conversational analysis of other performers rather than himself, undertaking fieldwork at two established Manchester comedy clubs to supplement commercially available recordings.<sup>43</sup> He also provides pertinent information regarding the pros and cons of using this method, which is very strong methodologically. The final chapters of Rutter’s study<sup>44</sup> consist of a mix of theoretical observations, in-depth conversational analysis and diagrams and it is these I want to examine for their practical content.

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<sup>43</sup> Jason Rutter, *Stand-up as Interaction: Performance and Interaction in Comedy Venues* (PhD Thesis: University of Salford, 1997) pp. 87-107

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* pp. 110-295



The arguments within the latter part of the thesis can be summarised thus:

- a. Stand-up comedy, and the stand-up environment, are governed by a set of interactional rules that both parties learn through practical experience
- b. Performances that happen within the context of those interactional rules in turn contribute to the development and shaping of that context
- c. Both comedian and audience contribute to the performance within the stand-up environment, and rhetorical techniques can be used on the part of the performer to persuade but not control the audience
- d. The opening and closing of a stand-up routine is highly formalised, with a defined move structure allowing the production and reception of performance between performer and audience

As can be seen from the above, each successive argument becomes more pointed and focused as the thesis goes on, and each is supported by a wealth of analysis demonstrating the presented arguments. Chapter Five<sup>45</sup> firmly establishes point (a) with two fundamental principles that both performer and audience need to understand – “laughter in a joking context is part of a similar responsive vocabulary to that of verbal conversation”<sup>46</sup> and is a part of the ongoing discourse, and this transitional turn-taking needs to be managed so the “performer maximises the amount of laughter he receives and allows the audience laughter to run the full course without suggesting any need for it to be terminated”<sup>47</sup>.

Chapter Six<sup>48</sup> begins to build on these ideas by looking at the structure of openings – the beginning of a comedian’s act. Here Rutter attempts to establish a set of commonalities through the examination of routinised sequences and the definition of seven “moves” to open a stand-up performance – comperes introduction, audience applause, greeting of audience, comment on the setting, request for action, response to request by audience and first canned joke. Chapter

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* pp. 110-143

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 114

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 130

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* pp. 144-195

Seven<sup>49</sup> takes an analytical approach to the diversity of content present in any stand-up routine by looking at the rhetorical skills used by a performer, listing the following common devices – contrast, list, puzzle-solution, headline-punchline, position taking and pursuit, and the following stand-up specific devices – re-incorporations, alliteration and assonance, intonation and adoption of voices. Finally, Chapter Eight<sup>50</sup> defines an eight-turn structure for the closing of a stand-up set – pre-closing, audience laughter, comment on audience, re-introduction, appreciation, exclamatory closing, audience applause and compere’s outro.

This structural approach to analysing stand-up comedy through the medium of conversational analysis (incidentally the earliest I have found that even attempts to create a framework for doing so) is a very strong offering and one that is invaluable for my later work in terms of defining stand-up traditions, but it is limited as an analytical framework on several levels. The first (and most glaring) issue is the focus exclusively on spoken performative text as the only medium of performer-audience interaction – no doubt a by-product of the focus upon conversational analysis, this reliance on the purely textual does not consider gesture, staging etc. as contributing to the performance context. A brief mention of this concept is made in the discussion and dismissal of frame theory<sup>51</sup> but no more is made of it in later exploration. This, I would argue, introduces a fundamental flaw in the usefulness of the framework as an analysis tool – without the flexibility to encompass (or ignore) gestural cues as part of your analysis, much of the aforementioned responsive vocabulary is lost and this is something that will need to be addressed within my own proposed framework.

Secondly, the importance of persona upon performance, while mentioned, is downplayed in favour of the textual content – persona is viewed as a costume\prop to augment the text rather than as a base to produce the text in the first place<sup>52</sup>. The side-lining of such a central tenet of performative tradition (which in itself, actually encompasses costuming, props, delivery, intonation, stage presence etc.)

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* pp. 196-244

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* pp. 245-288

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p. 36

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* pp. 236-240

weakens this approach as a way to break down stand-up comedy that allows an understanding of the *performer's* perspective. Again, this may be due to the unconscious bias in the methodology – while Rutter is clearly an avid comedy fan, the fact that he only ever saw the performer-audience interaction from the side of the audience unconsciously introduced this one-sided view to the creation of the framework. These two objections being stated however, overall, the study is thorough, well conducted and contains a wealth of useful material, even from the perspective of twenty-three years in the future.

### Joan Rivers: Reading the Meaning – Louise Peacock

The second framework to examine comes from an article by Louise Peacock examining a recorded performance by Joan Rivers<sup>53</sup>. This article takes a different approach to the previous one by Rutter by viewing stand-up through the lens of semiotics rather than conversational analysis, thus foregrounding the performative elements that Rutter's approach pushed into the background. Peacock starts by establishing the semiotic vocabulary to be used, making some use of the icon, index and symbol system defined by Peirce, stating "The fluidity of performance means that these three categories overlap and blur. One way of applying these to performance is to consider the iconicity of the performer's body."<sup>54</sup> This is combined with an indexical approach to interpretation, examining ostentation, denotation and connotation and the levels of meaning they impart to the performance text in the theatrical context of a stand-up performance:

The emphasis on introducing the performer highlights the centrality of the performer's body and identity as a locus of signs. Everything about the stand-up comedian can be read. If the performer is well known, as Rivers is, then the audience also bring foreknowledge to the performance. They come expecting a particular kind of performance and delivery. The

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<sup>53</sup> Louise Peacock, 'Joan Rivers - Reading the Meaning', *Comedy Studies*, 2, 2 (2011), pp. 125-137.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* pp. 126-127

identity of the stand-up comedian, and the way they play to expectation, is central to the act.<sup>55</sup>

The next section of the article<sup>56</sup> focuses on the performer's identity and how this can be approached as the locus of the semiotic system, specifically how Rivers constructs her identity through performance while simultaneously constructing her performance with her identity – “(w)e read what Rivers says and does through a lens of who Rivers is.”<sup>57</sup> The structure for the analysis of this performative polysemy is very much foregrounded here by the proposal that the set be segmented into “smaller sense units” to deal with the challenge of “synchronically interpreting costume, make-up, movement, gesture, facial expression and vocal qualities”<sup>58</sup>. Drawing on the work of Patrice Pavis and Tadeusz Kowzan, Peacock performs a semiotic analysis of a Joan Rivers performance from Live at the Apollo using a combination of the two models, concluding:

an analysis can be offered that holds good for the whole performance and that forms an interpretive foundation for the more fluid elements of the actor's performance (Pavis and containing Kowzan's word, tone, mime, gesture and movement) and the rhythm of the performance.<sup>59</sup>

Unfortunately, the issues with this approach are the mirror of the issues with Rutter's approach – while a semiotic approach allows for a more in-depth look at performance variables such as movement, gesture, tone and appearance and a more thorough analysis of these as a result, what suffers in this analysis is the narrative structure and linguistic analysis, as Peacock herself notes due to the sheer amount of information contained within a semiotic approach an analyst:

cannot use such a system to analyse the whole of a stand-up performance but must select brief sections to use as examples, and much

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* pp. 126-127

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* pp. 127-130

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 127

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p. 128

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p. 136

may be lost in this selection. The models provided omit key areas that must be considered in the analysis of stand-up such as joke content, humour and laughter theory and, importantly, performance skills, which are particularly relevant to comedy such as timing, irony and audience anticipation and participation.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, while this framework has great potential the sheer amount of data loss that comes from concentrating on only the semiotic aspects of a performance artefact means that this approach is not suitable for my purposes beyond inspiration.

### A Vulgar Art – Ian Brodie

The third and final framework to examine is Ian Brodie's *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy*<sup>61</sup>. Though there have been other attempts in the intervening years between Rutter's initial offering and this one to create a framework for or approach to understanding stand-up (See Richie<sup>62</sup>, Emslie-Henry<sup>63</sup>, Limon<sup>64</sup> and Thallon<sup>65</sup>) each suffered from the issues that hamstrung both Richie and Peacock's approach – microscopic or macroscopic studies that while valid, lack flexibility and extensibility to move beyond their remit. This study by Brodie attempts to rectify that by using the tools of a discipline known for its ability to encompass and explain a variety of sources – folkloristics. His approach and arguments can be broken down thus:

- a. Stand-up comedy is in its essentiality a vernacular communicative act taking place in a specialised space, creating through its performance a definable (if temporary) group

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p. 136

<sup>61</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University Press, 2014)

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Richie, *Stand-up Comedy and Everyday Life: Post-war British Comedy and the Subversive Strain* (PhD Thesis: Goldsmiths College, 1998)

<sup>63</sup> Rachel Emslie-Henry, *Stand Up Comedy and the Multi-Dimensional Character of Performance* (PhD Thesis: Loughborough University, 2000)

<sup>64</sup> John Limon, *Stand-up Comedy in Theory, Or, Abjection in America* (Durham: Duke University Press 2000)

<sup>65</sup> Norma Thallon, *The Relationship Between the Visual and the Verbal within a Comedic Moment: After the Laughter* (London: Royal College of Art, 2011)

- b. The job of a stand-up comedian is to deconstruct individual self-identity within the context of the group and introduce criteria that create an intimate shared identity
- c. As a direct consequence of this shared identity, the comedian can switch freely between belief stances without breaking immersion – switching between narrative modes similar to myth, tale, legend and testimonial while acting as a mediator
- d. Finally, stand-up comedians do not tell “jokes” in the conventional sense – discrete units that can be separated from the overall routine – instead each is inseparably linked with the communicative act of the routine itself

Brodie then goes on to expand on these points, beginning in part two<sup>66</sup> examining the central function of staging in an “unmediated”, communicative dialogic form and the technical advantages and limitations it bestows<sup>67</sup>, discussing the social identity of the stand-up comedian through the lens of vernacular theory<sup>68</sup> before approaching the centrality of the persona as a personal temporal narrative of social identities that overlap in complementary or contradictory ways with those of the audience<sup>69</sup>. From this base of establishing comedian as group insider, Brodie then begins to dissect the approaches that a comedian can take to convey their worldview, focusing on the routine, its formulaic flexibility and its utility as ethnography<sup>70</sup>. Part three, though an interesting discussion on mediated forms such as recordings and broadcasts of stand-up comedy, is not relevant as a theoretical framework for the purposes of this study beyond the previously discussed stand-up artefacts and can be laid aside.

Brodie’s framework answers all the methodological issues I have had with previous approaches – it is holistic, encompassing as it does the whole performance arena as well as the text of the performance itself, it is flexible, exploring as it does the base commonalities of social identity that can be applied to any performer, and it

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<sup>66</sup> Brodie, *A Vulgar Art* (2014) pp. 43-158

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* pp. 45-63

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* pp. 43-89

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* pp. 90-128

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* pp. 129-158

is extensible, by taking the routine itself as a discrete unit one can apply and analyse said routine regardless of variations in content. His equation of routine to oral-formulaic composition<sup>71</sup> is an interesting one with much relevance to my following framework proposal but is sadly lacking in much more substance than a throwaway comment followed by a short paragraph of discussion.

Unfortunately, though this framework answers my objection to the rigidity of the preceding studies, my issue is now one of scalability. This holistic approach, while providing some excellent insights through analysis, lacks a small enough unit of “measurement” as it were and leaves questions begging that previous studies managed to answer in their rigidity. Discussions are made regarding the use of the microphone, its utility, its totemic nature and its gestural drawbacks<sup>72</sup> these are all made in general terms, without much mention of applicability other than “some do this, some do that”. These generalities are present in the rest of the study with no suggestion of how a deeper analysis could be made, severely limiting its utility beyond ethnographic observation.

### **Towards a Holistic Analysis Framework**

With preparatory work drawn to a close and objections to perceived gaps in previous studies highlighted, I am now able to map out the requirements of the framework (and by extension, the nonframework theories that will populate it) – the framework requirements are:

1. Flexibility – the framework must be able to cope with any style of stand-up comedy within the context of a live or pre-recorded performance
2. Scalability – the framework needs to include various levels of analysis that can be applied to performances of varying length
3. Extensibility – the framework is not intended to be the final word on stand-up comedy analysis, but rather a toolbox defining comparable approaches. This means that the framework must be open to the inclusion of new levels of

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* pp. 138-139

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* pp. 51-60

analysis and the possibility that existing nonframework theories might need to be revised or replaced

4. Comparability – every nonframework theory must be directly comparable with others on the same level as it and integrated into the nonframework theory above it

In order to facilitate this and hit all these criteria, I have constructed the matrix of the framework as a series of integrative levels.

### Integrative Levels

The theory of integrative levels was first expanded in a widely cited article by Feibleman<sup>73</sup>, and while he was considering scientific fields within his proposal the basic principles can be usefully applied to the framework, as summarised below with hypothetical examples of the set consisting of the material level (Level One), narrative level (Level Two) and frame level (Level Three):

1. Each level organises the level below it plus one emergent quality

Just as sentences consist of words and words consist of letters, each level of the framework is an amalgamation of the levels below forming a discrete unit with its own qualities – material consists of readily dividable morphemes of language and semiotics, narratives consist of strategically collected material and framing collates and organises narratives in context to each other.

2. The complexity of the levels increases upwards

Material morphemes are relatively simple entities – they are sections of performed material which can a) provide context, b) transform context or c) both. Narrative structures, on the other hand, define different configurations of material morphemes, which are further classified and grouped as frame structures with a dynamic interplay all their own.

3. In any organisation the higher level depends upon the lower

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<sup>73</sup> James Kern Feibleman, 'Theory of Integrative Levels.', *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 5, 17, (1954) pp. 59-66.



4. In any organisation, the lower level is directed by the higher
5. For an organisation at any given level, its mechanism lies at the level below and its purpose at the level above.

These three principles as a group are self-explanatory – without material, there are no narrative structures, and without narrative structures no frame structures, however, Feibleman rightly points out the reverse is not true – the material morpheme that both provides and transforms context is a narrative structure known as a one-liner but would still work as a discrete unit without this classification. “Just as the mechanism of an organisation is furnished by its lower levels, so its purpose is the product of its higher levels”<sup>74</sup> – thus the purpose of material morphemes is to provide building blocks for narrative structures and the purpose of narrative structures is to create syncopation within a frame structure.

6. A disturbance introduced into an organisation at any one level reverberates at all the levels it covers

If we were to hypothesise other analysis structures for a given level under the five conditions, aligning Level Two narrative structure of Worldview (Persona), Structure (Routine), Collective Behaviour (Audience), Convention (Context) and Sociocultural Criticism (Intention), an example of a hypothetical disturbance to performance space utilisation – dropping the microphone – could be extrapolated on the effect this would have on the other structures on that level. For routine, intention and context, this mistake would lead to a full breakdown if the performer were unable to be heard. For persona and audience, this mistake would stress both – depending on the persona being maintained, the surprise or embarrassment entailed could lead to an erosion of belief and depending on the level of audience identification the performer cultivates this mistake may shift audience perception favourably or unfavourably.

7. The time required for a change in organisation shortens as we ascend the levels

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 61

It is much easier to change a narrative structure than it is a material structure – by substituting one bit of material for another on a similar topic but shorter, the narrative flow can be altered without having to change the jokes themselves. Change at the material structure level is more difficult – changing one material morpheme for another can alter the rhythm, timing and flow of material, which has a knock-on effect at the level of narrative structure and context of the material against all the other material.

8. The higher the level, the smaller its population of instances

As basically any utterance nor movement within the right context can constitute a material morpheme, there are orders of magnitude more material morphemes than narrative structures and many more narrative structures than frame structures, which rely heavily on physical contextualisation.

9. It is impossible to reduce the higher level to the lower

Each level has its own characteristic structure and emergent quality – frame structures are not just collections of narratives; the contextual organisation and rhythm of each narrative structure does not exist without the material arranged in that particular order. By the same token, the grouping of material morphemes that make up a specific narrative structure is only different within the context of the structure itself – reduced to those material morphemes in a random order there is no structure to make a narrative.

10. An organisation at any level is a distortion of the level below

Also known as abstraction, following on from the previous rule this holds that focusing on higher levels makes one less aware of the lower, as this focus melds lower layers into discrete units at that level of abstraction – for example, when analysing a set at the frame structure level one does not have to consider the structure of individual narrative structures beyond their utility in the narrative or contribution to the rhythm: narratives on the same topic are ordered by length, narrative thrust or punch rather than directly by the specific material morphemes they contain, though viewed from a lower level it is those specific material morphemes that create the desired characteristics.

#### 11. Events at any given level affect organisations at other levels

This is the same phenomenon as 6 but from a vertical perspective rather than a horizontal one – events at the material morpheme level affect the frame structure level and vice-versa: mispronouncing a word in a piece of material can alter the context of the narrative structure it is in, which in turn can alter the frame structure. Conversely, forgetting a piece of material at the frame structure level not only alters the framing but functionally obliterates that specific narrative structure and material morphemes from the text.

#### 12. Whatever is affected as an organisation has some effect as an organisation.

As previously seen, disruptive events at any level can have a stressing effect both horizontally and vertically on the framework itself – in order to avoid breakdown at the highest level there must exist “countermeasures” that can be deployed – these may not exist at every level for every section, but they offer an opportunity to reduce stress in that area. An obvious example is the notion of heckler putdowns – material (often pre-prepared) that can be used to re-establish control through the use of humiliation (be it a direct insult or superior witticism) when stress occurs at the audience identification level due to unwanted shouting out. Failure to deal with this stressor can cause cascade disruption among other levels and sections – interruptions sap audience good will, disrupt rhythm and timing and make concentrating on the set harder for all parties involved.

### Integrative Levels of Stand-up Comedy Analysis

With these final principles in place, the framework is ready to be laid out in the following diagram – the three levels highlight the proposed non-framework theories to be examined and applied in the following chapter, the lower the category is the more detailed the theory becomes. As I will demonstrate, level three represents the audience reading of stand-up comedy and is suitable for the fast pace of live performance, with the ability to be reconstructed from only a few notes. Level two represents the professional level of analysis, relying more on a structural understanding of the various conditions. Finally, level one represents the academic

level of analysis, the deepest meaningful dissection that can be performed while maintaining a sense of comparability and perspective to the top level. I would argue that this final level of analysis would be extremely difficult to perform at a live show and is thus only suitable for recorded performances.

	Persona	Routine	Audience	Context	Intention
Frame	Identity	Small Talk	Dialogic Form	Staging	Comedic License
Narrative	Worldview	Structure	Collective Behaviour	Convention	Sociocultural Criticism
Material	Stance	Comic Forms	Reaction	Technique	Provocateur

*Table 4 – Holistic Analysis Matrix Framework*

Note on Transcription

Although the intention is to include links to recordings where possible, I have transcribed various performances to demonstrate theoretical application. To facilitate transcription with a holistic focus I will be using the system previously created and utilised by Brodie, chosen for its ability to “indicate a variety of audience responses and to demonstrate performance rhythm”<sup>75</sup>, with only minimal changes – please see Appendix A. (for convenience, this is summarised below):

Audience Sound Notation

[A/a]                      Applause/Minor Applause

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<sup>75</sup> Brodie, *A Vulgar Art* (2014) p. xi

[Aw]	Aww (e.g., disappointment, sadness)
[B/b]	Booing/Minor Booing
[C/c]	Cheering/Minor Cheering
[H/h]	Hissing/Minor Hissing
[L/l]	Laughter/Minor Laughter
[sl]	Scattered Laughter
[O]	Ooh (recognition of taboo topic)
[S]	Silence (pronounced)
[W/w]	Whooping/Minor Whooping

#### Audience Sound Notation - Qualifiers

:	Simultaneously occurring e.g. [L:C] – Laughter and Cheering
→	Transition e.g. [L→A] – Laughter to Applause
<xxx>	Discernible words e.g., heckling, answering
!xxx!	Single shouted word e.g. [!yeah!]
(Number)	Extended reaction length in estimated seconds e.g. [L(3)]

#### Performative Notation

Line Break	Cadence\Interruption
Italicised	Specific emphasis
Underlined	Spoken over sustained preceding audience reaction
,	Short Pause
.	Pause
..	Longer Pause
...	False Start

{xxx}	Nonverbal Cues\Stage Directions
xxx	Characterisation (other than principal persona)
(xxx)	Tone\Accent qualifying following phrase in double quotes e.g. (timidly) "who are you?"
(!)	Sarcasm
♪	Singing
[...]	Non-transcribed section

Structural notation

Italic	Bit Structure start e.g., <i>B1</i>
Numbering	Material Structure e.g., 1x.
Lettering	Material Morpheme e.g., xa.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Impressionistic Notation of "Live" Performance**

Of the extant academic material that concentrates largely on the performance of stand-up, it is the aforementioned article by Louise Peacock<sup>1</sup>, proposing as it does a semiotic model of analysis from the role of spectator-analyst by drawing on the work of Patrice Pavis and Tadeusz Kowzan, which is an ideal jumping-off point for the construction of my own notation form.

The work of Pavis<sup>2</sup> provides an initial approach to this hybridisation through the concept of *reportage*, stating "such an analysis would comment on the developments of a performance as it unfolds... Ideally reportage-analysis of this kind should be carried out during the performance"<sup>3</sup>. Certainly, reportage offers significant advantages over reconstructual analysis as an approach to creating an impressionistic review, though it requires the establishment of further restrictions in order to make the analysis of in-person and recorded performances equal:

1. Recorded performances must be viewed as if "live" i.e., with no pauses, rewinding or skipping of the performance
2. The only exception to this is allowing a pause as the act initially comes on to the stage in order to assess anything that would have been visible to the audience if the gig was in person i.e., the staging, lighting and venue capacity

To ensure that comparable data is collected for each performance text while acknowledging the difference in information available between a live and recorded performance I have designed two forms (see Appendix B) to record this. The aim here is to collect as much data as possible for later analysis, with shared data points (date of viewing, time of viewing, stage and lighting setup) being used as universal

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Peacock, 'Joan Rivers - Reading the Meaning', *Comedy Studies*, 2, 2 (2011), pp. 125-137.

<sup>2</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (United Kingdom: University of Michigan Press, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p. 9-10

comparisons while the differing specificities of available data can be used as a comparison within the two difference performance viewing types.

This fulfils the first requirement of the notation, however, the next issue to consider is how to record the performance itself – something that must be considered in concert with the methodological tools that are to be used. As previously stated, the intention of the proposed framework is to allow for stand-up comedy performances to be meaningfully compared and contrasted using non-framework theories, though by necessity live notation would only bear analysis at level three – in order to facilitate this, the data will need to be useable for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Returning once again to Pavis, the idea of a questionnaire for the spectator-critic is presented both as an analytical tool and aide-memoire<sup>4</sup> and although the provided questionnaire is simultaneously too specific and too unfocused for application to a stand-up comedy performance the basic idea is sound – a structured document that allows for interpretive work while collecting the same basic data points that can be used for analysis.

This performance artefact needs to accurately notate everything narratologically relevant about the performance text – the mise-en-scene – in a structured way, specifically:

- The overall philosophy of the performer\performance
- The stylistic stance of the performer\performance
- The ideological stance of the performer\performance
- The structure of the performance
- A socio-political narrative overview of each structural section
- The pacing and tone of each section and the performance as a whole
- The comedic techniques utilised by the performer
- The sociocultural signifiers of the performer

In order to facilitate the notation, I have designed a further form to be used by the spectator-analyst when reviewing a performance (see appendix C) in order to

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* 37-40



record observations pertinent to the above points – this was developed in four iterations, with each being tested in a live review situation and added to as needed. Starting from the top down, the form can be broken down into the following sections:

1. Name of performer – recorded for reference purposes
2. Position in the line-up – Based on my own experiences an acts position in the line-up can influence many things about their performance
3. Dominant Philosophy – This is how the comedian paints a vision of the world as seen through their performance, the three dominant comedy philosophies seem to be surrealism, realism and hyperrealism
4. Dominant Style – The way the comedian's worldview is expressed in the performance, the major ones being observational, interactional, conversational and traditional (joke-based)
5. Negative Exemplars – An expansion of an idea by Mintz<sup>5</sup> that all comedians, at their very basest level, fulfil the role of negative exemplar i.e., the enactment of socially unacceptable traits allows the audience to mock them in a safe space – if this is the case then these traits can be observed, compared and contrasted regardless of other considerations. In order to facilitate both a qualitative and quantitative approach to this, the dataset needs to be both constrained and easily accessible – Appendix G contains the complete list of negative traits as described in “The Negative Trait Thesaurus” by Ackerman and Puglisi<sup>6</sup>, chosen for standardisation and thorough description of each character trait in case of any ambiguity.
6. Topic – The building blocks of a stand-up performance narrative, noting each topic change provides a summary of the whole performance
7. Time – The time since the last topic change, useful for indicating the pace and timing of the material as well as the overall narrative flow of the performance

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<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Mintz, ‘Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation’, *American Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1985) p. 74-76.

<sup>6</sup> Angela Ackerman and Bella Puglisi, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus: A Writers Guide to Character Flaws* (JADD Publishing, 2013)

8. Comedic Technique – A space for noting down any comedic techniques or audience reactions beyond the expected (heckling, applause or the absence of laughter rather than laughter itself). In order to facilitate the rapid notation of these techniques I have created a symbol-based glossary (Appendix D)
9. Tonal Stance – The tone(s) in which this particular topic is being delivered, separate from the dominant philosophy and style as much more fluid, dependent on the demands of the material and the approach taken
10. Sociopolitical Narrative – What is actually being said about this topic, not a word-for-word notation but an impressionistic overview of the fabula of each particular topic and any important ideas and themes
11. Sociocultural Signifiers – A notation of the signified physical and constructed traits conveyed consciously or unconsciously by the comedian and how those traits emphasise or deconstruct what is being conveyed through the sociopolitical narrative

Taken as a whole, this notation will allow both quantitative comparison and qualitative review of a performance event, allowing for a structured approach to comedy criticism that allows freedom of interpretation while providing a fixed set of data points for future comparison - in order to record these details, I will be adapting the questionnaire system proposed by Pavis<sup>7</sup> with a focus on the specific requirements of stand-up comedy.

### **The Frame Level: Theories and Their Application**

With this framework in place, one can begin to analyse stand-up comedy through a variety of non-framework theories while having a structured and comparable notation to refer to.

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<sup>7</sup> Pavis, *Analysing Performance* (2003) pp. 37-40

	Persona	Routine	Audience	Context	Intention
Frame	Identity	Small Talk	Dialogic Form	Staging	Comedic License
Narrative	Worldview	Structure	Collective Behaviour	Convention	Sociocultural Criticism
Material	Stance	Comic Forms	Reaction	Technique	Provocateur

Table 5 – Level 3 - Holistic Analysis Matrix Framework

### Identity

At first glance, it may seem that comedy is not a medium that can support subtle characterisation, as it often relies on using stereotypes, taboo subjects, and mocking rhetoric to create humour. However, this does not mean that it is impossible to portray well-defined characters in comedy. In a medium where authenticity is highly valued and visible artifice is usually avoided<sup>8</sup>, creating nuanced characters can be a challenge. Nonetheless, with careful planning and management, it is possible to achieve this.

In stand-up comedy, the costume plays a significant role in shaping the non-character persona, much like in real life, where one's attire can be an extension of one's personality. Deborah Frances-White highlights that the clothes a performer chooses can influence the way the audience perceives them without having to verbally draw attention to it<sup>9</sup>. This perception can be positively manipulated, as Nat

<sup>8</sup> And where it is used, it is overplayed to show artifice is present, which in itself is a form of authenticity - John Kearns' wig and teeth for example

<sup>9</sup> Deborah Frances-White & Marsha Shandur, *Off the Mic* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015) p. 82

Luurtsema discovered when she realised the power of dressing up and looking good, only to bring herself down comedically, without appearing weak or losing control<sup>10</sup>.

Costumes can instantly communicate a performer's status to the audience, often more quickly than words can. Gary Delaney shares his experience of being judged and heckled before even starting his material while wearing a t-shirt and jeans. It wasn't until an older comedian, Keith Dover, advised him to adopt a semblance of the expected uniformity that he began to gain the initial respect needed to deliver his jokes without interruption<sup>11</sup>. This suggestion, which involved wearing a smart shirt and black jeans that resemble trousers, indicates the importance of being aware of conventions, even if a performer intends to deviate from them.

For a character performer, the challenge of inconsistent staging necessitates bringing everything required for the portrayal, which includes the costume. The term 'costume' here refers not only to the clothing worn by the character but also encompasses all the elements needed to represent them, whether complex, such as a wig, glasses, moustache, full three-piece suit and props, or as simple as donning a hat and coat.

The costume plays a crucial role in creating a world around the performer, offering a faster semiotic context for the character to the audience than any verbal explanation could provide. It should convey all essential information about the character before the performer even reaches the microphone and should continuously evolve as the character's backstory develops.

Furthermore, the costume signifies the character as a distinct entity, bridging the gap between the performer and the persona they embody. As such, when the ideal costume is found, it becomes a deeply personal object for the performer, reflecting the bond between them and the character they bring to life – there is a form of Brechtian performance going on with the character comedian. We need to

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 82

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p.83

understand them but for them to be comic rather than tragic we need to understand it is a comedian underneath. For example, much of character comedy can be seen as parody due to the visibility of this artifice – Krista Giappone, when discussing the comic-critical approaches in alternative comedy when compared to the club comedy that came before it, states “(a)lthough parody of such comedy included Alexei Sayle’s aspiring comedian character Bobby Chariot, frilly-shirted and tuxedoed, somewhat lovingly naïve and ill-at-ease in the changing scene.”<sup>12</sup>

The second aspect of identity within a stand-up environment is attitude, which shapes how a person perceives the world. Attitude is a core building block of the persona that the character channels and influences everything a character does and says on stage. It affects physical characteristics, such as gait, poise, and stance, as well as communicative characteristics such as inflexion, temperament, and volume.

While costume embodies the essence of a character, attitude represents their substance. One of the most effective ways to develop and convey attitude is by understanding the character's past and how they reached the point in their lives just before stepping on stage. In the professional realm, refining and developing your attitude is referred to as 'finding your voice', a process that can take years to become conscious of. Tom Wigglesworth describes this as gaining the confidence to realise, "This is how I'm funny when I'm at home. If I can turn it up a bit when I'm on stage, that'll be fine"<sup>13</sup>. While he is referring to amplifying his own personality, this does not imply there is no mediation in what is said. Frances-White states that "discovering what material fits your persona is just as important as discovering what material you can actually generate"<sup>14</sup>.

Jo Caulfield shares an anecdote<sup>15</sup> about her attempt to convey her opinion on the regressive hyper-sexualisation of women in the early 2000s, represented by celebrities such as Jordan and Jodie Marsh. The audience did not respond well, as

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<sup>12</sup> Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone, 'Laughing Otherwise: Comic-Critical Approaches in Alternative Comedy', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 21, 3 (2017) pp. 394-413 (p. 395)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 86

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. 81

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 81

she recalls, "No one wants you to preach at them... I thought, 'oh, that's interesting that they wouldn't go with me and also I don't have the skill to have that opinion and also make it funny and interesting'". This highlights the importance of both attitude and the ability to communicate that attitude effectively within a stand-up performance.

This mediation of material does not make the content less genuine or honest; instead, it reflects an understanding of the temporary personification of a stand-up performance. Your attitude, or voice, imposes expectational barriers, which may unconsciously constrain the acceptable worldview even while they can shift or distort it.

Stand-up comedy is very much a medium of the moment - performers are expected to change and adapt to surrounding events, and failure to do so can result in the loss of faith and trust as the artifice becomes visible. Gary Delaney started his career performing in deadpan but soon realised it was "too inflexible. You will die in a low energy room. It doesn't suit opening, it's too constrictive on longer sets and other people did it better than me"<sup>16</sup>. The artifice in this case was compounded by his material consisting mainly of one-liners, short-form jokes designed to be delivered as micro-routines or non-sequiturs, which are easily identifiable as such. Delaney eventually refocused as a performer, striving "to be a guy who's ambled up there... just really try and strip it down and not be slick and just be myself wandering out there with a bunch of jokes". Contrasting this approach with the high-status focus of Jimmy Carr highlights the need for the focus to ultimately serve in explaining away the artifice of performance in a way that maintains cohesion with the audience.

As a character performer, how can one work through the artifice of the character to reach the persona and prevent a breakdown of trust while still maintaining character cohesion in split-second decisions? The answer is to determine the focus of the character beforehand. In portraying an immersive stand-up

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 89

character, focus dictates the angle a character will take when faced with an obstacle. If attitude covers everything that has happened up to the point the character steps on stage, focus is what decides how a character reacts from moment to moment. It can be viewed as the thoughts and instincts of the character, sitting in the middle of the persona between the backward pull of attitude and the forward pull of objective, shaped by both.

It is important to clarify that the persona a performer channels through the medium of character is not a consciousness in and of itself. Without the existence of the performer and the character, the persona holds no relevance. Rather, focus serves as a set of moral guidelines for a character, concentrating on promoting the character's agenda while facilitating the achievement of the overall objective. This often requires a pragmatic approach when deciding how to react to various situations, allowing the character to navigate the complexities of the performance while maintaining authenticity and alignment with their core values.

Focus, being reactive in nature, is distinct from objective, which is more proactive. While focus is concerned with pragmatism, objective embodies optimism. Marcus Brigstocke, in a conversation with Deborah Frances-White, outlines the basic principle of the objective with his conjecture that:

The only reason I say that anybody who is any good is high-low (status) is that, in order to perform comedy, you have to be high status. You are standing on a stage. You have to own the room. And then, you can only do it by expressing or exposing some kind of vulnerability.<sup>17</sup>

The concept of vulnerability brings the other facets of the persona into sharp focus and serves as the key to unifying them. Vulnerability involves the revelation of predominantly negative emotions such as pity, disgust, guilt, shame, and regret. By exposing these emotions to an audience and reacting to them, either positively or negatively, a comedian can create a common ground between themselves and the

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 106

audience. This connection serves to enhance the overall performance, ensuring that the character remains engaging and relatable to those watching.

### Small Talk

In *A Vulgar Art*<sup>18</sup>, Ian Brodie explores the role of small talk in stand-up comedy, characterising it as a form of conversation primarily focused on establishing or re-establishing interpersonal relationships, rather than pursuing a specific, concrete goal<sup>19</sup>. He asserts that small talk is a crucial component of stand-up comedy, as it enables comedians to build rapport with their audience, thereby fostering a sense of familiarity and trust that aids in the successful delivery of their jokes. Brodie explains that the non-consequential nature of small talk permits a certain ambiguity regarding the connection between what is being said and what is believed, stating:

small talk is thus a frame of talking in which the talkers are allowed a license for a certain ambiguity in regard to the connection between what they are saying – whether in narrative or in belief statement – and what they 'actually' hold to be true.<sup>20</sup>

This element is essential in the context of stand-up comedy, where comedians often rely on ambiguity for comedic effect and can switch between perspectives in order to “find the funny”.

Small talk often serves various purposes - It can offer inspiration and material for comedians as they observe their audience's behaviour and interactions and can be employed strategically, allowing comedians to maintain control over the audience and deter heckling. Furthermore, small talk can help establish a comedian's context, crafting a sense of identity and authenticity that resonates with the audience. Nonetheless, mastering small talk in stand-up comedy can be challenging - it must be delivered in a manner that aligns with the comedian's persona and caters to the audience's needs and interests. If not executed with skill and finesse, small talk can

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<sup>18</sup> Brodie, *A Vulgar Art* (2014)

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 31

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p. 31



come across as insincere or irrelevant. Brodie highlights the notion that small talk serves as a foundation for joke delivery, stating:

The parameters of what is allowable in small talk – including whether small talk is even permissible to any extent – are contextually set, defined by a negotiated understanding between talkers, and continually renegotiated through the act of small talk itself.<sup>21</sup>

For all but the most distant and aloof performers, establishing a conversational rapport with the audience through small talk is essential; without it, a comedian might find it difficult to connect with the audience and effectively deliver their material. Comedians who are adept at small talk often benefit from a loyal fan base, as their ability to engage with the audience on a personal level cultivates a sense of intimacy and connection. This connection can foster an environment where the audience is more willing to participate in the comedic experience, ultimately enhancing the overall performance.

Research by Mintz<sup>22</sup> and Koziski<sup>23</sup> lends support to Brodie's assertions about the significance of small talk in stand-up comedy. Mintz posits that the interaction between the comedian and the audience is a vital aspect of the comedic experience, stating "(t)he comedian must establish *for the audience* that the group is homogenous, a community, if the laughter is to come easily"<sup>24</sup>, while Koziski proposes that comedians must be capable of adapting their material and delivery based on what they observe from the audience themselves as well as the social situation, suggesting "(m)any standup comedians are quick to detect the manifest theme(s) of their culture and behavior enacted in their society... (t)he more sensitive

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 31

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence Mintz, Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation, *American Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1985) pp. 71-80.

<sup>23</sup> Stephanie Koziski, The Standup Comedian as Anthropologist: Intentional Culture Critic, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 18, 2 (1984) pp. 57-74.

<sup>24</sup> Mintz, Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation (1985) p. 78, emphasis in original

and critical artist will discover, analyze and account for the discrepancies found in their observations of how things *should* operate in culture but *don't*." <sup>25</sup>

Comedians often use small talk to gauge their audience's mood, preferences, and sensitivities, using this information to tailor their performance to their audience's expectations, potentially enhancing the overall comedic experience. Oliver Double argues that audience interaction is central to stand-up comedy, as it allows comedians to test their material in real-time and adjust their delivery based on audience feedback and the exchange of energy within the dialogue and is something vital for the performer to learn to read.<sup>26</sup> This iterative process is essential for refining jokes and comedic timing, ultimately contributing to a more polished and engaging performance.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, small talk can be viewed as a form of social commentary, providing a distinctive lens through which comedians can examine and critique societal norms, values, and behaviours. Meyer asserts that comedy frequently serves as a form of 'vernacular rhetoric', wherein comedians employ humour to shed light on and challenge social issues<sup>28</sup>. By engaging in small talk, comedians can subtly address and subvert societal expectations, carving out a space for critical reflection and discussion.

Nonetheless, the use of small talk in stand-up comedy is not without potential drawbacks – chatting with the audience might be perceived as pandering or patronising if not carefully balanced with the overall comedic material. Furthermore, overreliance on small talk may detract from the comedian's ability to deliver more structured, scripted material, possibly leading to a less cohesive and less effective performance. It could be argued that small talk is less pertinent in alternative

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<sup>25</sup> Koziski, *The Standup Comedian as Anthropologist: Intentional Culture Critic* (1984) p. 65, emphasis in original

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Double, *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 187-191

<sup>27</sup> As a side note, this requirement for direct audience feedback on a dialogic level limits the maximum effectiveness of stand-up comedy beyond a certain venue size – arena gigs, for example, divorce the comedian almost completely from the audience due to both distance and lighting. For a more comprehensive discussion of this see Double (2014) p. 194-198

<sup>28</sup> John C. Meyer, 'Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication', *Communication Theory*, 10, 3 (2000) pp. 310–331 (p. 317-318)

comedy scenes, where comedians often concentrate on pushing boundaries and delving into unconventional themes. In such settings, small talk might be regarded as a diversion from the primary comedic content, potentially diminishing the impact of the performance.

Considering the diverse styles and approaches to stand-up comedy, it is crucial to acknowledge that small talk may have varying degrees of relevance and effectiveness depending on the specific context. For instance, comedians who focus on observational humour may find small talk particularly useful in setting the stage for their material, as it allows them to draw attention to shared experiences and everyday occurrences. On the other hand, comedians who specialise in political satire (such as Andy Parsons<sup>29</sup>) or absurdist humour (such as Paul Foot<sup>30</sup>) may find that small talk detracts from their primary message, necessitating a more judicious use of interpersonal engagement.

Moreover, the use of small talk in stand-up comedy may be influenced by cultural factors, as audience expectations and norms can vary significantly across different regions and communities. For example, comedians performing in an international context may need to adapt their use of small talk to accommodate differing cultural sensitivities and communication styles. As Mintz notes, humour is deeply rooted in culture, and comedians must be sensitive to these differences when crafting their material and engaging with their audience.<sup>31</sup> In light of these considerations, small talk plays a complex and multifaceted role in stand-up comedy. While it can be a powerful tool for establishing rapport, generating material, and maintaining control over the audience, it also presents potential challenges and limitations that must be navigated by the comedian.

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<sup>29</sup> Brian Logan, 'Andy Parsons review – punchline king makes the world more bearable', *The Guardian*, 27 March 2017, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/mar/27/andy-parsons-review-nuffield-southampton-comedy-political>> [Accessed 9 August 2023]

<sup>30</sup> Matt Wood, 'Paul Foot Review', *British Comedy Guide*, 12 August 2011 <[https://www.comedy.co.uk/fringe/2011/reviews/paul\\_foot/](https://www.comedy.co.uk/fringe/2011/reviews/paul_foot/)> [Accessed 10 August 2023]

<sup>31</sup> Mintz, *Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation* (1985) p. 72-74

## Dialogic Form

Ian Brodie in *A Vulgar Art* delves into the dialogic nature of stand-up comedy, stating: "all writers on stand-up comedy, without exception, specifically emphasise that a stand-up comedian is on stage talking with an audience"<sup>32</sup>. This underlines the fundamental role the audience plays in stand-up comedy as a dialogic form - rather than being passive recipients of the comedian's material, the audience actively participates in the performance. The success of the performance hinges on the audience's reaction, primarily through laughter, and the comedian must consistently adapt their delivery based on the audience's response.

The fact that all writers on stand-up comedy stress the relationship between the performer and audience further underscores the importance of the dialogic form. Stand-up comedy's success is not solely determined by the material or delivery; it also relies on the interaction and shared experience between the performer and the audience. Furthermore, this implies that the conversational aspect of stand-up comedy is crucial for establishing a connection with the audience - by engaging in dialogue with the audience, rather than merely speaking to them, comedians can cultivate a sense of familiarity and trust, which can facilitate the delivery of their material.

Brodie contends that stand-up comedy is fundamentally a conversation between the performer and the audience, with the success of the performance relying on the audience's reaction:

insofar as the success of the stand-up comedy performance, the impetus for it to continue, and its ostensible goal are all the audience's reaction in the form of laughter, the audience cannot help but be part of the performance<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Brodie, *A Vulgar Art* (2014) p. 32

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 32

This underlines once again that stand-up comedy is often akin to everyday conversation - although the conversation may appear one-sided, with the performer dominating the talking, there is an essential reciprocity between the performer and the audience. This reciprocity is vital for the success of the performance, as the audience's reactions and participation are key to the delivery of the material.<sup>34</sup> Without an engaged and responsive audience, a comedian might struggle to deliver their material effectively.

Stand-up comedy depends on the exchange between the performer and audience, as well as the conversational rapport that develops between them. This conversational aspect of stand-up comedy is vital for establishing a sense of authenticity and connection with the audience, and for creating a shared experience that resonates with the audience. The audience is not simply a passive recipient of the comedian's material; instead, they play a vital part in the overall comedic experience. Their laughter and reactions provide valuable feedback for the comedian, who must continuously adapt their delivery in response. This idea is consistent with Berger's observation that humour is a social phenomenon, with laughter serving as a form of social communication between the comedian and the audience.<sup>35</sup> By engaging in dialogue, rather than merely addressing them, comedians can create a sense of familiarity and trust, which aids in the effective delivery of their material. This notion is supported by Fine and De Soucey, who maintain that humour acts as a social glue, uniting individuals by encouraging a sense of shared experience and common understanding.<sup>36</sup>

However, while Brodie stresses the significance of the dialogic form in stand-up comedy, it is essential to acknowledge the potential challenges and limitations that may arise. For example, audience dynamics can vary greatly between performances, requiring comedians to be adaptable in accommodating diverse preferences and expectations. Furthermore, an excessive focus on audience interaction might detract

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<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 34

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, 'Anatomy of the Joke', *Journal of Communication*, 26, 3 (1976) pp. 113–115

<sup>36</sup> Gary Alan Fine and Michaela de Soucey, 'Joking cultures: Humor themes as social regulation in group life', *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 18, 1 (2005) pp. 1-22

from the comedian's central message, potentially resulting in a less coherent performance. Additionally, the audience participation in the dialogue of stand-up comedy can be influenced by cultural factors, as audience norms and expectations can differ across different regions and communities. Comedians performing in various cultural contexts must remain sensitive to these differences when developing their material and interacting with their audience. This view is supported by Kuipers, who contends that humour is culturally specific, necessitating that comedians navigate cultural boundaries in order to connect with diverse audiences<sup>37</sup>.

Antti Lindfors' work on stand-up comedy stresses the dialogic form of the genre and the collaborative nature of the performance. Contrary to accusations of individualism, Lindfors argues that "stand-up is a 'duet' with the audience – or rather audiences, given that a comedian can 'play' several audience segments at once, especially in bigger halls, as a conductor of affective bursts".<sup>38</sup> This emphasises the significance of the audience's reactions and responses to the comedian's material in the performance. The comedian is not merely delivering a monologue; they are engaging in a dialogue with the audience, adjusting their delivery based on the audience's reactions. Furthermore, Lindfors suggests that the performance is a collective effort, with the audience's involvement being crucial to the definition of the genre.

Lindfors' reference to the comedian as a "conductor of affective bursts" highlights that the comedian's role is not limited to presenting material but includes eliciting emotional responses from the audience and using those responses to shape the performance. It is essential to examine the various ways in which comedians can strengthen their connection with the audience. In this respect, comprehending audience demographics, interests, and preferences becomes crucial for customising comedic material and delivery to resonate with the spectators. Mintz's research underscores the significance of social context and the role of shared knowledge in

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<sup>37</sup> Giseline Kuipers, *Good Humor, Bad Taste : A Sociology of the Joke* (De Gruyter, Inc.: ProQuest eBook Central, 2015) <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/yorksj/detail.action?docID=2035728>> pp. 29-30

<sup>38</sup> Antti Lindfors, 'Awkward Connections: Stand-Up Comedy as Affective Arrangement' in *Punching Up in Stand-Up Comedy: Speaking Truth to Power*, ed. by Rashi Bhargava & Richa Chilana (2023) p. 182

creating and appreciating humour, implying that comedians should endeavour to develop a deep understanding of their audience's social context and common experiences.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, comedians may find it advantageous to incorporate elements of self-deprecation or vulnerability into their performances. These qualities can foster relatability and establish a stronger connection with the audience. Meyer posits that self-deprecating humour can function as a potent tool for diminishing social distance, as it enables the audience to identify with the comedian's flaws and weaknesses.<sup>40</sup> By exposing their own vulnerabilities, comedians can cultivate a sense of camaraderie and rapport with the audience, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their material.

Besides the audience's role in the dialogic form of stand-up comedy, the comedian's adaptability and responsiveness to audience reactions are crucial components of a successful performance. Comedians must excel at reading the room, assessing audience reactions, and modifying their material and delivery in real time. This dynamic interplay between the comedian and the audience sets stand-up comedy apart from other entertainment forms, as it necessitates a high level of improvisational skill and adaptability from the performer. Lockyer and Myers contend that the ability to improvise and respond to the audience's cues is a defining characteristic of the stand-up comedy craft.<sup>41</sup> This highlights the crucial reciprocal relationship between the performer and the audience. Understanding this relationship involves acknowledging the power dynamics at play. Comedians often possess authority and control on stage, and it is vital that they exercise this power responsibly in order to maintain an inclusive and positive atmosphere. They should be mindful of their influence and avoid perpetuating damaging stereotypes or marginalising specific audience members through their material. Mills supports this

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<sup>39</sup> Meyer, *Humor as a Double-Edged Sword* (2000) pp. 310–331

<sup>40</sup> Mintz, *Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation* (1985) pp. 71-80.

<sup>41</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers, 'It's about expecting the unexpected': Live stand-up comedy from the audiences' perspective', *Participations: journal of audience and reception studies*, 8, 2 (2011) pp. 165-188. (p, 176-177)

perspective, asserting that humour can act as a double-edged sword, with the potential to both challenge and reinforce social hierarchies and norms.<sup>42</sup>

Considering the critical role of the audience in shaping stand-up comedy performances, various strategies can be employed by comedians to foster audience engagement and cultivate a positive atmosphere. One such strategy is the use of call-and-response techniques, in which the comedian actively invites the audience to participate in the performance by asking questions or prompting them to respond to specific cues. This approach can encourage audience involvement, thereby creating a more interactive and immersive comedic experience. Another effective strategy for engaging the audience is the use of topical humour, which reflects current events or issues relevant to the audience's context. By addressing timely and relatable topics, comedians can demonstrate their awareness of the audience's concerns and interests, fostering a sense of connection and shared understanding. Furthermore, comedians can enhance audience engagement by incorporating elements of physical comedy into their performances, including gestures, facial expressions, and body language. Physical comedy serves as a powerful tool for conveying humour and emphasising punchlines, transcending linguistic barriers and appealing to a broader range of audience members.

Given the dialogic nature of stand-up comedy, it is essential to explore how comedians can manage and navigate the challenges that arise when dealing with diverse and unpredictable audiences. One critical skill for comedians is the ability to read the audience, which involves assessing their reactions and adapting the performance accordingly. This skill enables comedians to identify what type of humour resonates with a particular audience and adjust their material and delivery to maximise laughter and engagement. Conversely, Double emphasises the importance of adjusting the audience response, arguing that a successful comedian must be attuned to the audience's reactions and be prepared to modify their

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<sup>42</sup> Brett Mills, 'A pleasure working with you': Humour theory and Joan Rivers, *Comedy Studies*, 2, 2 (2011) pp. 151-160 (p. 157-158)



performance in real time to dissuade inappropriately placed reactions that would otherwise compromise a performance.<sup>43</sup>

Another challenge comedians face is managing audience hecklers, who can interrupt the flow of the performance and potentially undermine the comedian's authority. Developing effective strategies for dealing with hecklers is crucial for maintaining control of the performance and ensuring a positive experience for most of the audience. Comedians can employ various techniques to address hecklers, such as incorporating them into the performance through humorous retorts or using self-deprecating humour to diffuse tension. Kadar suggests that a comedian's ability to successfully handle hecklers can enhance their credibility and contribute to their overall effectiveness as a performer.<sup>44</sup> Comedians must also be mindful of the potential for their material to be perceived as offensive or insensitive by some audience members. Striking a balance between pushing boundaries and avoiding unnecessary offence is a delicate art that requires a deep understanding of the audience's cultural context and sensibilities. Creating a successful and engaging performance also necessitates that comedians be adept at storytelling and narrative construction. Capturing the audience's attention and guiding them through the performance is essential when weaving a compelling and coherent narrative.

### Staging

As Chris Ritchie highlights in his book *Performing Live Comedy*, "Nothing symbolises stand-up comedy more than the microphone beneath a single spotlight"<sup>45</sup>. However, this iconic image does not represent the entire picture, as there are numerous other elements of staging that contribute to a successful gig, which may not be consciously appreciated by the performers or the audience. As

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<sup>43</sup> Double, *Getting the Joke* (2014) p. 198-199

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Kadar, 'Heckling – A Mimetic Interpersonal Perspective', *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, 2, 1 (2014) pp. 1-35 (p. 6-7)

<sup>45</sup> Chris Ritchie, *Performing Live Comedy* (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), p. 88

Double asserts, "(w)hat goes on onstage is only part of the story. The whole way the gig has been set up is also vital in creating the right atmosphere"<sup>46</sup>.

Double identifies several factors that can influence a gig, which a performer may need to actively overcome. These factors include audience investment, stage position, start time, seating arrangements, performance space, atmosphere, sound quality, and audience numbers<sup>47</sup>. Drawing on Double's work and numerous examples, these factors can be separated into two major groups: audience categories and performance space categories. It is important to recognise that the relationship between these categories is reciprocal:

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Performance Space</b>
Seating Arrangements	Staging
Audience Numbers	Amplification
Start Time	Atmosphere

*Table 6 - Audience and Performance Space Categories*

In terms of audience categories, audience investment plays a significant role in shaping the success of a comedy gig. Comedians must actively engage their audience and create a sense of investment in the performance. This can be achieved through various techniques, such as establishing rapport, addressing audience concerns and interests, and employing effective crowd work. Additionally, the number of audience members can impact the atmosphere of a gig, with larger crowds potentially generating more energy and laughter, while smaller audiences may require a more intimate and personalised approach.

Regarding performance space categories, the stage position, seating arrangements, and performance space can all contribute to the overall atmosphere of a gig. A well-positioned stage with appropriate seating arrangements can encourage audience engagement and enhance the comedic experience. Moreover, the performance space itself should be conducive to comedy, providing adequate

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<sup>46</sup> Oliver Double, *Stand-Up: On Being a Comedian*, (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 154

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* pp. 154-163

lighting, sound quality, and ambience to support the performer's material and delivery.

Other factors, such as the gig's start time and the overall atmosphere, can also play a crucial role in shaping the success of a stand-up comedy performance. A well-timed start can ensure that the audience is in the right mindset to enjoy the show, while a carefully cultivated atmosphere can create a supportive environment for both the performer and the audience.

Seating arrangements, closely connected to staging, involve the organisation of the audience within the venue. Various seating styles can be employed, including theatre, classroom, herringbone, u-shape, horseshoe, hollow square, banquet, cabaret, and cocktail styles<sup>48</sup>. The choice of seating arrangement can significantly impact audience engagement and the overall atmosphere of a comedy gig.

Staging refers to the position, size, height, and framing of the stage, which can vary depending on the type, such as proscenium, thrust, in-the-round, studio, or platform stages. The staging can affect the performers' ability to connect with the audience and the audience's ability to focus on the performance.

Audience numbers play a crucial role in shaping the success of a comedy gig. A rough estimate of audience numbers compared to the venue's capacity is important for gauging the atmosphere and energy of the event. For pre-recorded gigs, the number of people in the secondary audience, those watching the recording, should also be considered.

Amplification is a key technical aspect of a comedy gig, involving the type of amplification system and any associated technical issues. Examples of amplification systems include wired microphones, wireless microphones, and head microphones, each with their unique characteristics and potential challenges.

The start time of a gig can significantly impact the audience's expectations and reception. For live gigs, both the advertised start time and the actual start time are

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<sup>48</sup> Encore, *Choosing the Best Seating Style for your Audience*, (2021) <<https://www.encore-anzpac.com/choosing-the-best-seating-style-for-your-audience>> [accessed 22 April 2023].

important, as the difference between the two can affect the audience's mood and engagement. For pre-recorded gigs, the time at which the secondary audience begins watching should be noted.

The atmosphere of a comedy gig encompasses various elements, such as stage lighting, audience lighting, stage dressing, room utility, and initial audience investment. For live gigs, additional details can influence the atmosphere, such as ticket price, pre-show music, and the availability of alcohol. By considering these factors, comedians and event organisers can create an engaging and enjoyable environment for both the performers and the audience.

In his book *A Vulgar Art*, Ian Brodie discusses the role of the microphone in stand-up comedy staging. Brodie emphasises that "through projecting the human voice at its natural register, an illusion of intimacy can be created despite space/time distances"<sup>49</sup>. Brodie suggests that the microphone can foster a sense of intimacy between the comedian and the audience, even in large venues or when the performer and audience are separated by space or time. By projecting the human voice at its natural register, the microphone can amplify the nuances of the comedian's delivery, creating the illusion that the comedian is speaking directly to each audience member.

This illusion of intimacy is crucial in stand-up comedy, as it helps to generate a sense of connection and shared experience between the performer and the audience. Even in expansive venues, the microphone enables the audience to feel as though they are part of an intimate conversation with the comedian. Establishing a rapport with the audience and effectively delivering material relies on this sense of connection and shared experience. Moreover, Brodie's quote underscores the significant role that technology plays in stand-up comedy staging. The microphone is a vital tool for amplifying the comedian's voice and cultivating a sense of intimacy between the performer and the audience. Without the microphone, comedians would struggle to establish the same connection with their audience and effectively deliver their material.

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<sup>49</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy*, (Mississippi: University Press, 2014), p. 58

In her work *Why Stand Up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, Sophie Quirk delves into the importance of the physical space, atmosphere, and audience dynamics in shaping the success of a stand-up comedy performance. Quirk's analysis underscores the significance of the 'room' as a critical factor in determining the overall effectiveness of a comedian's performance. The 'room' in stand-up comedy is a multifaceted concept, encompassing not only the physical space where the performance takes place but also the overall atmosphere, the audience's disposition, and the various factors that influence the interaction between the performer and the audience. As Quirk states, "(t)he room is an active participant in a stand-up comedy performance, exerting a powerful influence over the course of the gig"<sup>50</sup>.

One key aspect of the 'room' that Quirk focuses on is the staging, which involves the arrangement and design of the performance space. Staging plays a crucial role in determining the level of audience engagement, as it can influence the audience's ability to see and hear the comedian, as well as their overall comfort and enjoyment of the performance. Quirk notes that "(t)he stage is the focal point of the room, providing a clear and unobstructed view of the performer is essential"<sup>51</sup>. Quirk also highlights the importance of the stage's positioning and height in creating an effective performance space. She points out that "(t)he stage should be raised enough to provide a clear sightline for audience members but not so high as to make the performer appear distant and inaccessible"<sup>52</sup>. This balance is crucial for fostering a sense of intimacy and connection between the performer and the audience, which is a key element of successful stand-up comedy.

The overall layout of the 'room' is another critical factor in shaping the success of a stand-up comedy performance. Quirk discusses various seating arrangements and their impact on the audience's engagement and enjoyment, stating "(s)eating arrangements can play a significant role in creating the right atmosphere for a gig,

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<sup>50</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 32

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p. 34

<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p. 35

with cabaret-style seating often preferred for its relaxed and informal feel"<sup>53</sup>. The choice of seating arrangement can also influence the audience's sense of involvement and investment in the performance, with more interactive seating layouts encouraging audience participation and fostering a sense of shared experience.

In addition to the physical layout and staging, Quirk emphasises the importance of sound and lighting in creating the right atmosphere for a stand-up comedy performance. As she explains, "(s)ound quality and appropriate lighting are essential for audience enjoyment, as they contribute to the overall clarity and impact of the performance"<sup>54</sup>. Good sound quality ensures that the comedian's voice and delivery are clearly audible, while effective lighting can enhance the mood and focus of the performance.

Quirk also explores the role of audience dynamics in shaping the success of a stand-up comedy performance, suggesting that the audience's disposition and level of investment in the performance can significantly impact the overall atmosphere and enjoyment of the gig. Quirk notes a "receptive and engaged audience can create a positive feedback loop, with laughter and applause encouraging the performer and contributing to the overall momentum of the gig"<sup>55</sup>. In contrast, a disengaged or hostile audience can hinder the comedian's performance and negatively affect the atmosphere of the 'room'. Quirk argues that the "comedian must navigate the complex dynamics of the audience, adapting their material and delivery to suit the mood of the room and maintain a positive atmosphere"<sup>56</sup>. This adaptability is essential for ensuring the success of the performance and maintaining a positive and engaging environment for both the comedian and the audience.

Another crucial aspect of the 'room' that Quirk discusses is the role of audience participation in stand-up comedy performances, asserting that "(a)udience participation, when managed effectively, can enhance the sense of shared

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p. 36

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p. 38

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 40

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 41

experience and connection between the performer and the audience"<sup>57</sup>. However, audience participation can also present challenges, such as managing hecklers or dealing with potentially disruptive interactions. Comedians must strike a delicate balance between encouraging audience involvement and maintaining control over the performance.

Quirk also addresses the impact of the performance's context on the audience's experience and enjoyment. Factors such as the venue, the time of the performance, and the expectations of the audience can all shape the atmosphere of the 'room' and influence the success of the gig. As she notes, "Performances in unconventional venues or at unusual times can present unique challenges and opportunities for the comedian, requiring them to adapt their material and delivery to suit the specific context"<sup>58</sup>.

### Comedic License

Sophie Quirk, in her insightful and thoroughly researched book *Why Stand-Up Matters*<sup>59</sup>, posits that "for joking to be effective, all participants in the stand-up event must acknowledge that what is said occurs under the auspices of comic licence"<sup>60</sup>. Quirk refers to Mintz's essay "Stand-up Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation"<sup>61</sup> as the foundation for this assertion, identifying two essential processes that comedians undertake to "establish an atmosphere in which social practices may be questioned, and the boundaries of consensus tested"<sup>62</sup>. These processes are:

1. Establishment of audience homogeneity
2. Establishment of the comic persona

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 43

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p. 45

<sup>59</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p. 107

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Mintz, 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation', *American Quarterly*, 37, 1, (1985) pp. 71-80.

<sup>62</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 107

These two processes form what Quirk and others refer to as 'warming up' the audience—creating a unified group bolstered by shared consensus and value judgements, with the comedian established as the dysfunctional focus<sup>63</sup>.

The first process, the establishment and maintenance of homogeneity, has already been explored under the topic of collective behaviour. Therefore, the emphasis here is on the establishment of the dysfunctional persona. Mintz asserts that "The key to understanding the role of standup comedy in the process of cultural affirmation and subversion is a recognition of the comedians traditional *license* for deviate behaviour and expression"<sup>64</sup>.

Mintz claims that the comedian is traditionally "defective" in some way, and this marginal presentation results in an exemption from the expectation of normal behaviour, allowing for "fascinating ambiguity and ambivalence. In his role as a *negative exemplar*, we laugh *at* him"<sup>65</sup>. This exception to expected behaviour, supported by the temporary homogeneous collective of the audience, fosters a sense of comic licence—the notion that a comedian can say anything and get away with it. However, this licence is not absolute and must be carefully maintained through the ongoing effort of managing and redefining both the comic persona and the collective consensus. This effort "extends throughout the set, allowing the comedian to delve into more controversial, complex, or challenging material as the audience becomes increasingly attuned to the ethos of the gig and the persona of the comedian"<sup>66</sup>.

Mintz's definition, which highlights various socially unacceptable traits enacted by comedians to be ridiculed, laughed at, repudiated, and ultimately, symbolically 'punished'<sup>67</sup>. These traits include the grotesque, the buffoon, the fool, the simpleton, the scoundrel, the drunkard, the liar, the coward, the effete, the tightwad, the boor,

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* pp. 107-108

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence Mintz, 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation', *American Quarterly*, 37, 1, (1985) p. 74, emphasis in original

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p. 74, emphasis in original

<sup>66</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 108

<sup>67</sup> Lawrence Mintz, 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation', *American Quarterly*, 37, 1, (1985) p. 75



the egotist, the cuckold, the shrew, the weakling, the neurotic, among others. Mintz's list serves as an excellent initial foundation for understanding negative exemplars. However, to ensure that the data is comparable, the list of negative exemplars needed to be referentially fixed. For this purpose, "The Negative Trait Thesaurus" by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi<sup>68</sup> was chosen. This thesaurus contains 107 negative traits, accompanied by a literary description of each to clarify any ambiguity.

By assigning these negative exemplars to a comedian's persona as they become apparent through their words and actions, one can then use this information for further analysis. This analysis can help determine the extent of the comedic licence in operation at any given moment and the cumulative effect of that exemplification on the ongoing material. As a result, a clearer understanding of the comedian's use of negative exemplars and their impact on the performance can be achieved.

Table of Negative Traits

Abrasive	Grumpy	Obsessive	
Addictive	Gullible	Oversensitive	
Antisocial	Haughty	Paranoid	
Apathetic	Hostile	Perfectionist	
Callous	Humourless	Pessimistic	
Catty	Hypocritical	Possessive	
Childish	Ignorant	Prejudiced	
Cocky	Impatient	Pretentious	
Compulsive	Impulsive	Promiscuous	
Confrontational	Inattentive	Pushy	
Controlling	Indecisive	Rebellious	
Cowardly	Inflexible	Reckless	
Cruel	Inhibited	Resentful	
Cynical	Insecure	Rowdy	
Defensive	Irrational	Scatterbrained	
Devious	Irresponsible	Self-destructive	
Dishonest	Jealous	Self-indulgent	
Disloyal	Judgemental	Selfish	

<sup>68</sup> Angela Ackerman & Bella Puglisi, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus: A Writers Guide to Character Flaws*, (JADD Publishing, 2013)

Disorganised	Know-it-all	Sleazy	Unintelligent
Disrespectful	Lazy	Spoiled	Ungrateful
Evasive	Macho	Stingy	Unethical
Evil	Manipulative	Stubborn	Vain
Extravagant	Martyr	Subservient	Verbose
Fanatical	Materialistic	Superstitious	Vindictive
Flaky	Melodramatic	Suspicious	Violent
Foolish	Mischievous	Tactless	Volatile
Forgetful	Morbid	Temperamental	Weak-willed
Frivolous	Nagging	Timid	Whiny
Fussy	Needy	Uncommunicative	Withdrawn
Gossipy	Nervous	Uncooperative	Workaholic
Greedy	Nosy	Uncouth	Worrywart

*Table 7 - Negative Traits*

Daniel R. Smith and Simon Critchley delve into the comedic form in stand-up comedy, examining its relationship with social order and ritual practices. Smith writes, "jokes approach the limits of the social order but do not offer another way of organising society, institutions or relations; they provide 'comic relief' to the burdens of dominant patterns of thought, practice and ways of living"<sup>69</sup>. By approaching the limits of social order, jokes enable us to find humour in the mundane and the oppressive, shedding light on contradictions and absurdities. However, Smith also posits that jokes do not present a means of reorganising society, institutions, or relations. Instead, they afford a temporary escape from the burdens of social order, allowing us to laugh and breathe a sigh of relief before returning to the demands of everyday life.

This examination of comedic form in stand-up comedy emphasises the tension between humour and social order. While jokes have the potential to subvert or challenge social norms, they do not necessarily propose an alternative vision for society. Instead, they offer a fleeting escape from the constraints of social order, helping us find joy and meaning in an otherwise oppressive world. Critchley's perspective complements Smith's analysis by suggesting "jokes are anti-rites. They mock, parody or deride the ritual practices of a given society"<sup>70</sup>. In other words, jokes can be a form of rebellion against the restrictions and demands of social order.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel R. Smith, *Comedy and Critique: Stand-up Comedy and the Professional Ethos of Laughter*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2018), p. 144

<sup>70</sup> Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 5

They expose the contradictions and absurdities of ritual practices and challenge the authority of those who enforce them.

### **Performance Analysis – Frame Level**

What follows is the frame-level analysis of the three exemplar texts from the corpus – my own performance in character as Frank Astaire and the performances of Mae Martin and Nish Kumar from *Live at the BBC* in 2016. My own performance analysis was reconstructed from a performance diary written at the time for the purpose of further analysis and as such is not as comprehensive as the notation taken for the other two performances. The reasoning behind this is the other two performances were notated as if viewed live i.e., without pausing or interrupting the viewing at all while taking notes as it would be in a live performance context, but to do this to my own performance would be disingenuous as I am intimately familiar with the material, pacing and timing and this would cloud any objectivity that a live perspective would hopefully offer.

The reasons I have included myself in character are twofold. Firstly, this study and the associated corpus are intended as a starting point for further research by interested parties, including comedians themselves. By analysing my own performance in the wider context of this study, I am to highlight the benefits of reflective post-hoc analysis on not only my own work but the work of others and how those insights can be used to improve my own performance or suggest things I could have done differently. While this approach could be seen as endangering objectivity due to both my familiarity with the material and my fondness for the character, I argue the use of transcribed performance artefacts gives enough of a separation from the original performance that a level of objectivity can be maintained. Secondly, the inclusion of my own performance demonstrates my familiarity with the subject matter in a practical as well as theoretical context – the selected performance was one from the later part of a year of recordings of my own material in various venues up and down the country and serves to demonstrate the holistic value of my framework approach. Each performance, while using largely the same material over the course of that year, was completely different due to the

change of context that performing at a different venue necessitates and therefore each performance needed to be approached as a separate entity despite the continuity of performer and material.

Nevertheless, I would argue that this is the only section that treats my own performance as a different type of artefact from the others and this is a very illustrative example of how a framework that supports a deeper analysis than just frame level could be beneficial to not only academics but performers themselves – at the framing level I find myself unable to view my own work “objectively” (whatever this means in the context of personal performance) but at the narrative and material level what I am viewing is a transcribed artefact like any other. For this reason, I have left in the analysis despite this lack of objectivity in the hope that it will serve as an illustrative example of the performer-performance relationship if nothing else.

For the other two performances, scans of the complete notation taken for these can be found in Appendix E and may be useful to see the notation system in action and compare it to the analytical results.

### **Number 28 Café – Belper – 04\02\2017**

#### Sontext Sketch – Frank Astaire

As Frank is character of my own creation, this is an ideal opportunity to not only provide a contextual character outline and describe the key aspects of his persona but to use this to explore the concept of sontext through an artificially created one and discuss the building blocks of “persona context” in detail.

As discussed earlier, the first and most impressionistic part of a sontext is how a person looks – their clothing and appearance. For the character performer, costume needs to focus on the basics of a character, those bits that are unspoken but understood. To break down Frank’s costume as an example, here is a list of each piece and what it represents:

- Brown hand carved leather shoes – these represent Frank’s former fame, a relic much better cared for and much more expensive than the rest of the outfit he wears, the care he takes of them also shows his nostalgia for better days

- Camel corduroy trousers, both too short and too small – These represent Frank's frugality and unwillingness to move on, they are clearly broken and unsuitable, yet he refuses to replace them
- An un-ironed white shirt, open at the front – this represents the rift in his marriage, his sexist attitude towards women and his self-delusion that he is sexually attractive
- A camel corduroy waistcoat, too small – this represents Frank's stubbornness and his refusal to admit time has moved on, that he is not as young or thin as he used to be
- A camel corduroy jacket – the jacket represents Frank's professionalism and experience, harking back to a time when every performer was smartly turned out
- Thick grey moustache, with surrounding stubble – the moustache represents his views and opinions on masculinity, while the stubble shows his now jaded view of performing
- Grey wig, medium length hair – the length and style of the hair show Frank is still holding on to his youth despite his age
- Large, thick-rimmed spectacles – these represent Frank's unwillingness to move with the times, to follow current fashion trends
- Silver signet ring, right ring finger – A symbol of his former wealth and status
- Gold wedding ring with masonic symbol, left ring finger – This represents the guilt and regret he holds at the breakdown of his marriage and subsequent divorce, the masonic symbol represents Frank's entrenchment within the system
- Electronic cigarette – represents Frank's addictive personality and symbolises his morals being set in a bygone era

While these touches of costume may not be individually semiotically overt to every member of an audience, overall, they build up a picture of the character and

how they want to be portrayed. In Frank's case, the picture is of a lonely and jaded man, pining for past glories while bitterly fighting against modern sensibilities.

The second part of a context is the character's attitude, which defines how they see the world based on their personal history and experiences. To illustrate this with Frank, here is a list of the most influential events and happenings in his life and how they have helped shape him. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but without these pivotal moments Frank would not be the man he is today:

- Frank, following in his father's footsteps, steps on stage at the Embassy club eleven months into his comedy career. This is not the first time he has performed, but it is the first time he feels he understands the attraction of performing on stage.
- Frank meets his future wife while working as a Redcoat at Skegness Butlins. She is the first woman he has ever fallen in love with.
- Frank plays headline at the pier end in Blackpool for an entire summer season supported by Cannon and Ball. He sees it as his greatest achievement and the high point of his career – everything subsequently has been a downhill slide
- Frank's career begins to deflate coinciding with the alternative comedy boom of the early eighties – rather than recognising his own arrogance and unwillingness to change, he instead blames the up-and-coming new acts for stealing his work, and becomes more bitter and stubborn as his downhill trajectory continues
- After thirty years of marriage and two children, Frank and his wife separate. He views this as the ultimate betrayal, and relations between the two become increasingly acrimonious
- Jaded with performing yet financially dependent on it, even though he should be retired, Frank attempts to relaunch his career within the modern circuit

These six touchstones encapsulate Frank completely, and everything he does, says or thinks on stage is related in some way to them. They influence the material Frank tells, the way that he stands, the way he enters and leaves.

The third aspect of a character's scontext is focus - when it comes to portraying an immersive stand-up character, focus determines the angle a character will take when faced with an obstacle. If attitude covers everything that has happened up to the point the character steps on stage, focus is what decides how a character reacts from moment to moment. It can be viewed as the thoughts and instincts of the character, sitting in the middle of the persona between the backwards pull of attitude and the forward pull of objective, shaped by both.

This is not to say that the persona that a performer channels through the medium of character is a consciousness in and of itself – without the existence of performer and character, the persona has no relevance. Instead, focus is more a set of moral guidelines for a character, concerned with promoting the character's agenda while facilitating the achievement of the overall objective - something that often must take a pragmatic approach to how to react to things.

As an example once again, here are the central tenets of Frank's focus whilst on stage:

- Frank is highly disdainful of the audience and is not afraid of them, he considers himself intellectually superior because he is the performer and they are just there to see him
- Frank is emotionally vulnerable, yet considers unsolicited outpourings of emotion to be strictly taboo and the height of bad manners
- Frank does not consider himself bigoted against anyone, seeing his views as practical common sense – he would be very confused if anyone was to suggest otherwise
- Frank considers himself a consummate professional in the world of entertainment – anyone who disagrees is an idiot or an enemy

Finally, the last part of the scontext is objective - where focus is reactive, objective is proactive. If focus encapsulates pragmatism, objective exemplifies optimism – it delineates what the character wants to achieve within the confines of the performance.

Back to Frank again, and his objective is a simple one – he wants to be loved. Not just by a partner or audience, but by everyone, he wants them to recognise his greatness and love him for it. Now this is not something that Frank would admit to himself, nor is he largely conscious of the fact this is what he wants, but nevertheless it is there. However, his abrasive personality, outdated fashion sense and bitter experiences conspire against this goal, and it is this struggle that is at the heart of his portrayal on stage.

### Venue Layout

The venue is a long, low room with a raised area to the rear used for the stage. The audience is arranged in a cabaret style, with groups of five or six sitting around tables facing the stage for a total of about forty-five audience members. The stage itself is lit from above and behind by conventional spotlights, with a plain white wall for a backdrop with two portrait pictures hanging on either side of the performer. The front of the staging area is bordered by a glass barrier with a handrail above, behind which is a conventional microphone stand and a wired microphone.





The venue itself was converted from an old Salvation Army hall prior to 2014 and is advertised as a “multi-purpose community venue providing a 60-capacity space for hire for a variety of different activities. Comfortable, attractive space with stage and ever-changing art exhibition on the walls.”<sup>71</sup> The Ship of Fools comedy night is hosted monthly at the venue and had been running there for at least two years before the performance, with a regular audience associated with this longevity. Alcohol is not served at the venue, and all drinks consumed by the audience are from a bring your own policy.

### Frank Astaire (Sebastian Bloomfield) – Midspot<sup>72</sup>

#### Exemplified Traits

“Abrasive – rubbing others the wrong way through lack of thought or care”<sup>73</sup>

“Resentful – marked by bitterness”<sup>74</sup>

“Disrespectful – contemptuous or rude in action or speech”<sup>75</sup>

#### Framing

Frank Astaire, instead of approaching the stage at any kind of pace, walks slowly to the stage, allowing the applause to wane before exhorting the audience for more without having done anything to deserve it. Dressed in a three-piece tan corduroy suit, with brown shoes, a moustache and an obvious hairpiece, he radiates contempt for the audience as he stands silently staring at the audience, a contempt that he maintains for the rest of the performance in his aggressive and sulky demeanour and forces him into a self-inflicted antagonistic outgroup. The style of the suit is deliberately evocative of the nineteen seventies and serves to try and communicate Frank’s background to the audience from first glance.

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<sup>71</sup> Love Belper, *Visit Belper* (2021) <<https://lovebelper.co.uk/specialist-services/number-28/>> [accessed 23 April 2023].

<sup>72</sup> Performance video is accessible via <https://youtu.be/j1eY0y0jexk>

<sup>73</sup> Angela Ackerman & Bella Puglisi, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus: A Writers Guide to Character Flaws*, (JADD Publishing, 2013) p. 40-41

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 188-189

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 78-79

Fumbling in his pockets for an electronic cigarette, he begins to pound a beat on the microphone, getting the audience to join in before doing a rug pull joke, pretending that the beat he started is the wrong one before launching into a terrible rendition of "When You're Smiling". His earnest dancing and powerful if misjudged singing serve to throw the audience's expectations off, and once the song is done and the audience appreciation has died away Frank deliberately picks on someone, stating the song was "for them" and firing back when they interact. Frank then deliberately tries to invoke the answer to his catchphrase, "I don't like the look of any of you..." but is quite put out when no one knows it (to deliberate effect – how could anyone?), re-enforcing his outgroup status and antagonism with the audience.

After explaining the expected reply ("...but that's never stopped you before!") Frank deliberately draws attention to the performative aspect of the night, leaving the stage cursing the audience for their imagined ineptitude. After reintroducing himself and engaging in the performative ritual of the catchphrase, Frank begins in earnest. The lack of polish that Frank displays combined with his clear contempt for the people he is performing for put him at odds with the usual philosophy of comedy performance of making it appear natural, charming and spontaneous.

The next section of the performance switches gear into a more rapid-fire stance, with a number of self-deprecating jokes at the expense of the character (though not deliberately so from the point of view of the character) – this change of pace serves to begin to engage the audience and build a sense of homogeneity, even if that stems from "laughing at" rather than "laughing with" the performer and establishes the thread of pathos that runs throughout the set. Frank, upon stating "recently divorced", does another rug pull and turns this round into more audience interaction (though really the interaction is scripted and heavily skewed towards Frank speaking). The borderline hostility and contempt that Frank treats the audience with is again self-evident here, again highlighting his exemplification of the traits "abrasive" and "disrespectful", paying backhanded compliments to the audience member he has picked on before abruptly singing a rough chorus of "Come Fly with Me" to end the interaction when it becomes awkward.

Returning to his prewritten material, Frank attempts to ingratiate himself by stating he is in one of his favourite places in the world, yet this is immediately revealed as disingenuous when he forgets the name of the town and then states he loves the place but "...don't like the people very much", rousing a few half jesting boos from the audience. Again, this re-enforces Frank as an outgroup character in the attempt to create a sense of audience togetherness, however, this is a fine line to walk as each time hostility is invoked alongside a sense of impotence it makes the audience lose some respect for Frank as is demonstrated in the next section.

He once again puts his foot in his mouth by attempting to ingratiate himself but implying a woman in the audience is a "train wreck" (along with a bit of unscripted audience interaction that arises naturally from both women he has talked to one after the other having the same name), Frank offers to sing a song for Helen to make it up to her and asks for her favourite song. In the context of the material, whatever the audience member says is immaterial as the result will be for Frank to sing a version of "Mandy" with the participants name swapped out, however when attempting to build tension the audience begins chatting amongst themselves, something that should be a clear sign to any performer that the audience is losing homogeneity. Although the next bit of material lands squarely and the song elicits widespread (if not entirely genuine) applause, a change of pace is required.

Frank launches into more material regarding love and its failures, highlighting his resentful nature while he singles out a couple from the audience and begins to question them on their relationship, again dishing out prewritten backhanded compliments alongside some improvisation before launching into the most material-heavy section of the set. After joking about his own health and telling an ostensibly misogynist joke (with an improvised reaction based on the joke dividing the room), Frank again pulls back the curtain on the performative nature of stand-up with the (ironic) admission he "hasn't told a single joke yet" and heavily telegraphing the fact what follows are jokes in the traditional sense i.e., containing a self-contextual setup and punchline.

After asking if there are any golf fans in the room and declaring that they will hate the joke due to the firm audience reaction to the contrary, Frank tells the joke

and then proceeds to recontextualise it by telling a “personal” anecdote regarding the prevalence of drink driving in the nineteen seventies. This serves to create somewhat of a perverse ingroup for the first time in the set, reflecting those conservative values (real or imagined) that things were “better in the old days” even though this is immediately undermined by the punchline and topper. The same template is then used for the next joke (“...any music fans in?”), with the traditional joke about his wife being undermined by immediate pathos speculating about why she left. Finishing with a third repetition, Frank promises the audience a “bit of blue”, before reversing the order and deflating the mood with an allusion to the Yewtree investigation which is followed by the self-contained joke about sex.

From here, Frank makes what looks to be an attempt at a bit of ribald banter with the audience before it once again sinks into bathos, transforming from banter into another anecdote about his failed marriage – this is the climax of the set, where Frank abandons all pretence at maintaining a veneer of professionalism (however thin) and begins to wallow in his own bitterness and misfortune. The material in this section takes the form of narrative toppers (the story of Frank’s married life which ends in a series of toppers and call-backs), various rug-pull or misdirection jokes, where an assumption is built by the phrasing only to be pulled away or proven to be false (“The main argument we’re having at the moment is who gets the kids on weekends... Because I don’t want them”) and image juxtaposition based on nostalgia (Frank’s description of his much-missed Austin Allegro, despite the fact it is widely regarded as one of the worst cars ever made).

The final story before the closing song brings all the exemplars of Frank’s character together, as Frank attempts pathos by painting a picture of comics forced out of their jobs by political correctness, culminating in Frank having to tell his kids that “Christmas just isn’t happening this year... mainly because people don’t find racism funny anymore”. The patent ridiculousness and ignorance of this worldview mean that pathos turns to bathos, painting Frank as an impotent and wretched figure in his final act. Finally, in a parody of the traditional lounge singer, Frank ends on a song – a pre-scripted rendition of “My Way” to bring the audience back inside and prepare them for the next act.

## **Mae Martin and Nish Kumar - Live from the BBC – 24/02/2016**

### Venue Layout

The BBC Radio theatre is arranged in the studio style, with fixed seating facing a square low, square stage made of low, black-painted rostra. The stage is arranged in the typical stand-up style, with a single microphone stand and microphone at the front and in the centre, close to the audience. An angular arrangement of various-sized panels makes up the backdrop of the stage, with a railed balcony above. The lighting arrangement consists of a dozen splayed decorative lights, alternately suspended from the ceiling and arranged on floor stands. The backdrop is lit with a mix of red and blue highlights and a long row of a dozen decorative footlights along the bottom. The stage lighting consists of a white flood illuminating the whole stage.



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<sup>76</sup> Martin Kempton, *The BBC Radio Theatre*, 2022, photograph, Available at: <https://www.tvstudiohistory.co.uk/bbc-studios-in-london/broadcasting-house/> [accessed 23 April 2023].

Originally built in 1932 on the lower ground floor of Broadcasting House in central London<sup>77</sup> with a current seated capacity of 312, the BBC Radio theatre is currently fitted out for both broadcast and live performance with extensive PA and lighting facilities<sup>78</sup>. Though the staging and backdrops are, by necessity, flexible and reconfigurable, the use of a dedicated performance space with fixed-tiered theatre seating both minimises potential distractions and conveys a level of professionalism to the intended audience. The dedicated sound and lighting equipment as well as dedicated technicians mean that technical problems are less likely to have a disruptive influence on the performance. The stage has a thrust central flat to minimise the gap between the performer and audience, with a conventional wired microphone on a round-based stand in the centre picked out by a spotlight to create a semiotic link with the stereotypical comedy club image. The backdrop, while more unconventional than the typical blank wall, is designed to fade down and change colour with the house lights to provide a strong contrast behind the performer and delineate their presence.

### Mae Martin – Opener

#### Exemplified Traits

“Childish – marked by immaturity or a lack of experience”.<sup>79</sup>

“Indecisive – prone to wavering between courses of action”.<sup>80</sup>

#### Framing

When Mae Martin initially takes the stage, they remove the mic from the stand to support their high-energy style and remove the stand from the equation. Their choice of attire, consisting of a white Colorado t-shirt with rolled-up sleeves emblazoned with the American flag and fronted by an eagle, skinny blue jeans and large-laced trainers in the baseball style helps to paint a picture of youth combined with a sense of north-Americana that complements their onstage persona. Their

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<sup>77</sup> Roger Beckwith, *Broadcasting House in the 1930s*, (2013), <[http://www.orbem.co.uk/bh32/bh32\\_lg.htm](http://www.orbem.co.uk/bh32/bh32_lg.htm)> [accessed 23 April 2023].

<sup>78</sup> Roland, *BBC Radio Theatre*, (2020), <[https://proav.roland.com/global/solutions/user\\_stories/audio/2104/](https://proav.roland.com/global/solutions/user_stories/audio/2104/)> [accessed 23 April 2023]

<sup>79</sup> Ackerman & Puglisi, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus* (2013) p. 52-53

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p. 122-123

hair, short and styled, provides explicit coding that is referenced within their performance material as invoking their bisexual identity.<sup>81</sup> Throughout the performance, they stalk the stage while talking rapidly and their lean form is full of nervous energy as they turn this way and that to take in the audience. Throughout their seven-minute set, the pace of Martin's delivery is consistent, with each broader topic being considered for around a minute and a half before naturally segueing into the next.

Opening confidently in a friendly, approachable manner in a casual register, Martin engages with the audience straight away with a series of small talk enquiries ("...how's it going?", "...are you guys well?") and an initial non-sequitur regarding childhood to establish their adult status despite their youthful appearance as well as establishing one of the themes of their performance. Martin then confronts and confirms their outgroup status as a Canadian in the UK, asking if any other Canadians are in the audience. Their surprise that someone responds affirmatively is quickly transformed into further small talk engagement ("do we know each other?", "Where are you from?", "What's your name?"), though this time the speech acts are framed as more playful and are responded to by the general audience as such. Looking for an out to the interaction due to the constraints of the format, Martin feigns awkward disinterest before launching into their material proper, energising the audience into applauding for their parents and then quickly winning them over with a quick succession of jokes dealing with the archetype of parental concern and the motif of the parental phone call. Through subtle characterisation, Martin effectively paints a picture of an overprotective parent using the impressionistic catchphrase "oh my god".

This characterisation peaks in a display of illogical abduction with the assertion that the damp weather in England will give Martin "spores", facilitating ingroup engagement with their incredulity at this chain of reasoning. The medium of their mother is also used to re-enforce the identity of stand-up comedian, subtly

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<sup>81</sup> Though Martin now identifies as non-binary, at the time of performance they identified as female, however as the analysis is being done in the present, I have made the decision to use their preferred they\them pronouns

reassuring the audience of their competence while gaining sympathy by referring to their current performance as “a career-defining chance that you could easily mess up”. Switching gears to self-deprecation, they draw attention to their perceived juvenility through the use of the word “relaish”, though this is offset by a minor confrontational speech-act (“thanks for your sympathy”) to cajole the audience into reactional investment in the anecdote, counterbalanced with some sharply-observed clichés delivered as if to friends (“I’m *fine* guys”) and an engagement enhancing survey of the audience enquiring as to anyone who is single. This section of the performance is ended with the observation that loneliness is epitomised by putting a duvet cover on a duvet by yourself, creating a surprising contrast of ennui against the positive persona that Martin has projected thus far and re-enforcing a sense of commonality with the audience.

Building on this established rapport, Martin casually mentions they are attracted to men and women, framing the subject again through the medium of her mother and the inherent embarrassment in discussing relationships with your parents. This explicit confirmation of a bisexual identity allows further discussions on the topic in the context of an ingroup member, playfully challenging perceptions through their discussion of turning off all filters on Tinder and the apparent annoyance of their friends that they had “lied” to them due to their haircut and fashion sense. This section allows a dialogue with the audience regarding the audience's own possible preconceptions or assumptions without it being confrontational by framing these discussions as happening between the performer and the “other” – in this case parents and friends – while still allowing Martin’s thinking on these attitudes to be made clear.

Their final section, taking up just under a third of the runtime of their set, ties together the already established themes of childhood, their concerned parents and their sexuality. It begins with an anecdote about the juvenility and naivety surrounding the experience of their first boyfriend at school, the carefully signposted “Ian Peach”, and the abject cruelty in which he broke up with them with all his friends sniggering in the background. This is constructed to establish a further sense of commonality with the audience about the notorious embarrassment and



awkwardness surrounding teen relationships. It is here that we see Martin push back against the audience again, actively chiding them for the lack of reaction while subtly signposting to ensure that their attention is focused on them for the final section. The vicarious irony highlighted in the closing line of the bit (“I *rarely* discuss it publicly”) means the section ends with a sense of shared catharsis, closing the gap once again between audience and performer and ensuring that the dominant emotion remains shared empathy rather than projected sympathy.

Stitching back to the earlier discussion of sexuality, Martin sets up the closing joke of their set through the framing of a series of quickfire questions for a magazine interview, ending with the unquestionably personal enquiry “why are you gay?” From a dialogic standpoint, this retrospective framing allows them to once again engage with the critical nuance of the question in a way that highlights their ingroup membership and thinking on the subject while discussing both the unexpectedness of the question and their regret at their own indecision. Instead of the eloquent response hoped for, they offhandedly refer to the earlier signposted relationship with Ian Peach and the penultimate punchline – that their comment “maybe Ian Peach in grade nine” has been misquoted as “maybe eating a peach in grade nine” – serves to invoke vicarious embarrassment in the audience in response leading to the largest laugh of the performance. Martin finishes the set with a final topper, returning once again to the character of their mother and the established trope of illogical abduction with the line “your brother ate the same peaches” to compound the perceived generational misunderstanding regarding sexuality.

#### Nish Kumar – Headliner

##### Exemplified Traits

“Confrontational – eager to challenge, argue, or confront”.<sup>82</sup>

“Pessimistic – inclined to focus on the negative and expect the worst possible outcome”.<sup>83</sup>

“Haughty – contemptuously proud in a way that distains others”.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ackerman & Puglisi, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus* (2013) p. 59-59

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* 172-173

## Framing

Headliner Nish Kumar exuded a sense of confidence from the start, dressed smartly in a suit and raising his arms in greeting of the applause that welcomed him to the stage. Striking a balance between approachable and aloof, his formal greeting of “good evening” was immediately followed by the local boy approach of confessing he is from Croydon, with all the self-deprecation this usually entails. An early heckler, fuelled more by enthusiasm than malice, was swiftly dealt with a relatively gentle putdown before Kumar began the meat of his set. Taking the unconventional tactic of starting the first section with a hyperbolic apology, this tactic soon was revealed to be a way of espousing his personal philosophy of comedy – that it is a strange job because unlike most others it is an inherently subjective medium. This provides an opportunity for Kumar to indicate his education while effectively conveying the concept through a joke about builders never being told a wall isn’t a wall. An anecdote about his dad disliking rap music because it is “too easy” draws a surprised aside when the audience laughs in an unexpected place, met with wry amusement at the apparent laugh at the concept of misogyny and homophobia inherent in rap music, before finishing with the *reductio ad absurdum* punch where he drops the microphone in a demonstration of bad juggling to prove that because you do something badly doesn’t make it easy.

Pointing to his confrontational trait by describing himself as “argumentative”, Kumar changes gears here in his rapid-fire way, cementing his observational realist philosophy by discussing his very public reaction to the film *12 Years A Slave*, painting an evocative picture through the phrase “crying out of my mouth”. Arguments with two friends are then articulated, with Kumar expressing scorn for the arguments that the film was not very good, mocking this with the idea of Eddie Murphy playing four different slaves as an alternative, and that there was no need to watch the film as his friend already knew slavery was bad, met with incredulity and the phrase “it wasn’t a twist ending!” He ends the section with a

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* 106-107

demonstration of self-awareness coupled with the first foray into the theme he will tackle more in-depth later, being a British Asian, by examining his urge to comfort a black girl affected by the screening of the film and deciding that would be patronising, drawing parallels to his own experience of being greeted with shouts of "Dude! Slumdog!"

Kumar takes on somewhat of a haughty tone for the next section of the performance, describing an encounter with his uncle describing his generation as "weak" due to things like lactose intolerance. Despite his forays into surrealism in this section, Kumar firmly reinforces his commitment to rationalism here by explaining the reasoning behind the mockery. This tone again is shifted as he begins to talk about being a British Asian in earnest, starting with the declaration that there is nothing he can't do that a white person can before providing the exception as the generalisation that he can't do "international airport pranks". Taking the stereotypes contained within this subject to their logical conclusion, Kumar mines the humour here in a rapid succession of one-liners, finishing with the assertion he has an "ethnically ambiguous face" and that his accent betrays his middle-class origins. Continuing with the theme of accents, Kumar diverts to pondering why in an age of political correctness when it comes to people being rightfully uncomfortable about impressions of the accents of other cultures it is still deemed acceptable for people to occasionally imitate a stereotypical southern American black woman in casual conversation. The phrase he uses to typify this, "Mama don't like that", becomes a stitchback reference to the title of the imagined Eddie Murphy 12 Years A Slave film.

Reaching the end of his "first act" at about eight minutes into the set, Kumar changes both tone and pace, starting with a faux confessional introduction about how he is now in a relationship but is relatively inexperienced, driving home the point that he didn't kiss girls because he was too busy getting "good A level results". Though this helps delineate his persona, Kumar immediately flips this to be mock serious by saying there may be people in tonight who did both and that they should "go fuck yourself". A tangential anecdote regarding his poor cricketing prowess at school being rewarded with a trophy for enthusiasm re-establishes both his penchant for naivety and resentment before stitching back into a bare and

honest summation of his difficulty with women as an adult due to partially self-imposed social isolation. Having decided that women would like him more if he was “more mysterious”, Kumar proceeds to critique his own approach to dating as creepy and completely lacking in self-awareness through the lens of comparing himself to Don Draper from *Mad Men* and examining the shortcomings inherent in comparing yourself to a fictional character. Counterpointing this, he discusses his current relationship and self-deprecatingly says the one thing he would change is his entire personality, pointing to a recent example while on holiday in Sydney where he perceived a beautiful view as something that he would look back on fondly when they had broken up.

Kumar takes the suggestion that he may be an introverted pessimist as a personal revelation, exploring the ramifications of not realising this himself despite thinking he was “the best version of himself”. This demonstration of self-awareness is further cemented by his assertion that due to his lack of personal relationships, his personality had never been under real intimate scrutiny – he formed an echo chamber of his own thoughts and opinions that was counterproductive to personal growth. This realisation is illustrated by the final two anecdotes in this act, the first illustrating Kumar as a “jet-powered bellend” at the age of eighteen, counterpointed by a confession of egocentricity while recently having coffee with a friend and losing his thread thinking about how interesting he himself was being.

Reaching the final act of his set, Kumar pulls the audience's focus back ready for the final set piece with some establishing detail, explaining his expectations of difficulty while performing at the Melbourne Comedy Festival that were proved to be incorrect. This however sets up the magazine interview that he was asked to do as part of the press contact at the festival, a questionnaire containing generic, “wacky” questions that the tone of his voice conveys is an irritating but necessary part of self-promotion while at an international comedy festival. To his confusion and ire, however, Kumar mentions a question that had been “personalised” for him in between the standard fare- the question “how come Christians are allowed to draw pictures of their prophets and Muslims aren't?” This is met with incredulity, mostly because it is revealed that Kumar's parents are Hindu exposing the ill-thought-out

assumptions made by the journalists while doing the same with any prejudices held by the audience, but also at the logical leap that people may assume there are meetings for “non-white people” where these kinds of issues are discussed. Dealing with these prejudices head-on, he relates the story of a gig where, in a deliberately unnamed part of the UK and surrounded by an audience of perceived suspicious white people, the one black audience member tapped his nose conspiratorially just to be deliberately mischievous.

Snapping back to the topic at hand, Kumar expresses his anger at the fact that the question after this serious philosophical one was whimsical, that he will have no chance to express these feelings with the writer of the questionnaire, building to a crescendo of rage to perfectly position the final reveal – the last part of the questionnaire was to complete the feed line “A book walks into a bar and says to a bookcase...” Triumphantly, he finishes the joke by getting the book to ask the same offensively inappropriate question to the bookcase, finishing with the assertion “I don’t know, I’m a bookcase. Granted, I am a brown bookcase, which is probably why you asked me.”

### **Evaluation of Frame Level Analysis**

With the frame level analysis complete, it is worth taking the time to review the strengths and weaknesses of this level of analysis when it comes to encoding (notating) and decoding (analysing) performance artefacts. This is not intended to be comprehensive, nor to pre-empt the conclusion which will focus on the framework as a holistic whole, but an opportunity to review this stratum of the framework for any insights it can bring.

Starting with the positives, the one that is uppermost is the fact that this level of notation and analysis allows the transcription of an artefact in real time making it the only level suitable for encoding live performance without an accompanying recording. Supporting this, the recorded artefacts are reasonably concise as framing considers the overall shape of the performance rather than each individual beat and thus the transcripts are not too unwieldy.

The level of detail encoded into the artefact would best be described as impressionistic – due to the demands of transcribing in real time, selective editing and analysis must be performed on even what material is transcribed and thus the more visceral critical reactions and the most memorable words and phrases are the ones most likely to make the page. However, this assists with the reconstructive nature of the notes and the fact that this allows for a greater level of detail to be recreated in the subsequent analysis due to the utility of the artefact as an aide-memoire, allowing those details that would be lost to memory to remain fresh.

However, this level of encoding and decoding also has its negative points, chief of which is the low-resolution nature of the final transcript compared to a recording – as the notation is done only once, detail is by necessity selective and can be sparse or unclear in places. This also contributes to the second negative point, bias. As this notation is designed to be performed on a unique performance event there is potentially no recording of the frame level artefact beyond the transcript itself, it becomes automatically authoritative with no recourse to dispute particulars. This makes inaccurate information more likely to be copied and passed on, as the transcription becomes an effective facsimile of the performance for those who were unable to witness it.

Finally, the resultant artefact is also biased towards the performer themselves and this means that they are the focus of any subsequent analysis - due to the demands of the transcription, the focus is naturally much more biased towards the performer than the audience or venue as that is who the transcriber is focussing on, leading to a lack of full holistic analysis.

## **Chapter Five**

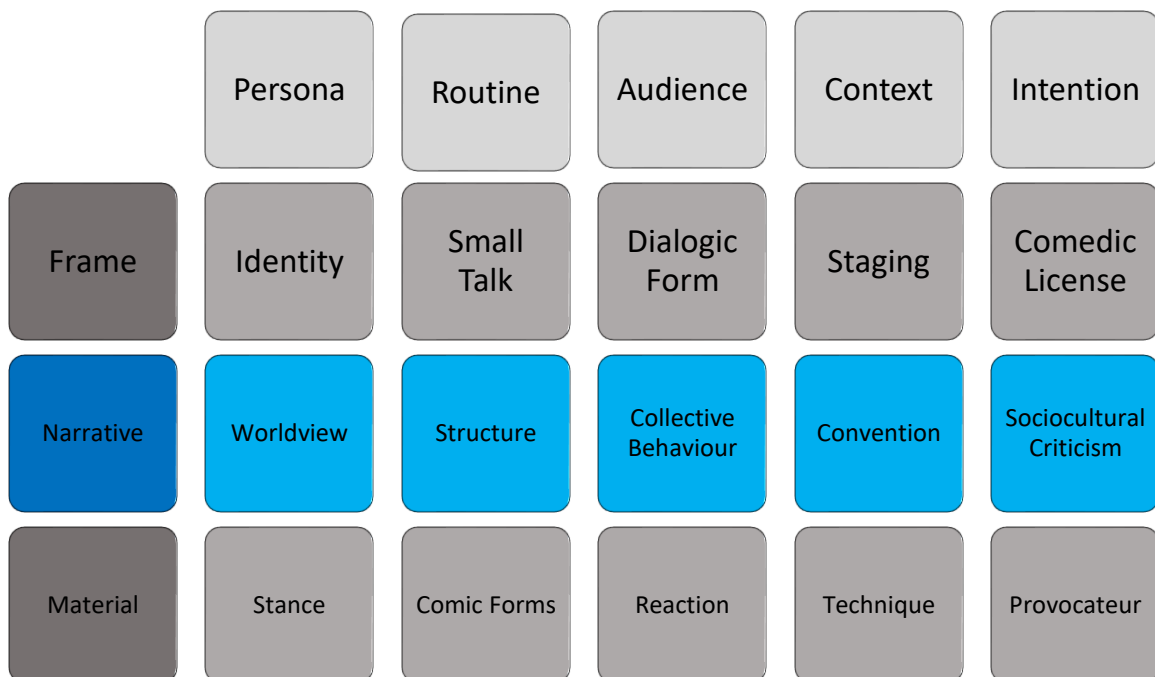
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“Re-telling a text in one’s own words is to a certain extent a double-voiced narration of another’s words, for indeed “one’s own words” must not completely dilute the quality that makes another’s words unique” – Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>1</sup>

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### **The Narrative Level: Theories and their Application**

The narrative level of the proposed framework concentrates on the structure and content of stand-up comedy performances with the aim of understanding the principles that govern the organisation and delivery of comedians' material at this level.



*Table 8 - Level 2 - Holistic Analysis Matrix Framework*

Several theories have been leveraged to facilitate this analysis offering valuable insights into the narrative structure of stand-up comedy artefacts, these will be

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 341

applied to the three previously selected performance artefacts individually as well as through comparison and contrast. This section also contains illustrative examples from the wider artefact corpus for the purposes of demonstrating worldview – these will be presented in the context they appear in the transcription and a link provided to the full transcript.

### Worldview

The concept of worldview, comprising an individual's beliefs, values, and attitudes, plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including the domain of stand-up comedy. A worldview shapes one's understanding of the world and one's place within it, guiding one's actions and reactions to different situations. Within the context of stand-up comedy, a comedian's worldview significantly influences their performance, impacting their perspective on social issues, their approach to humour, and their ability to connect with diverse audiences.

In order to comprehensively understand the role of worldview in shaping stand-up comedy at the narrative level, it is vital to first define the concept of worldview and its components. Fundamentally, a worldview is an all-encompassing framework of ideas and beliefs about the world that includes an individual's values, attitudes, and understanding of reality<sup>2</sup> - a concept called by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* as 'Weltanschauung'<sup>3</sup> or intuition of the world. This framework not only influences how a person interprets and makes sense of their experiences but also shapes their actions, reactions, and overall approach to life.

To further explore the concept of worldview, it is crucial to acknowledge the dynamic nature of worldviews and their potential to change over time. As individuals encounter new experiences, their worldviews may evolve, leading to shifts in their beliefs, values, and attitudes<sup>4</sup>. This fluidity of worldview can significantly impact a comedian's material and style as they adapt to changing social, cultural, and

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<sup>2</sup> James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 19

<sup>3</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement: Including the First Introduction*, trans. by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) p. 111-112

<sup>4</sup> Sire, *Naming the Elephant* (2004) p. 25-27



personal contexts. However, it could be argued that the concept of worldview may be overly simplistic or reductionist in attempting to capture the complexity of human beliefs and experiences<sup>5</sup>. For instance, the idea that individuals possess a single, unified worldview has been challenged, with some proposing that people may hold multiple, occasionally contradictory, worldviews concurrently<sup>6</sup>. This critique raises questions about the extent to which the concept of worldview can genuinely capture the nuances of stand-up comedy and the diverse perspectives comedians bring to their performances. Moreover, the emphasis on worldview as a determining factor in shaping stand-up comedy could be criticised for overlooking the importance of other influences, such as the social context, audience expectations, and the comedian's individual skills and talents.

As James Sire elucidates, a worldview consists of a "number of basic presuppositions"<sup>7</sup> which serve as the foundation for an individual's understanding of the world and their place within it. These presuppositions encompass beliefs about the nature of reality, human nature, morality, and the ultimate purpose of life. Furthermore, worldviews are often shaped by factors such as culture, upbringing, education, and personal experiences. One counterargument to this perspective on worldview formation is the idea that individuals may not necessarily be aware of their presuppositions, making it difficult to accurately assess their worldview. Philosopher Gilbert Ryle<sup>8</sup> argues that people's beliefs and attitudes may be implicit, existing as a set of underlying dispositions rather than explicit thoughts. Consequently, the process of uncovering one's worldview may be more complex than simply identifying a set of conscious beliefs.

In addition, some scholars argue that worldviews are not solely the product of individual factors but are also shaped by collective experiences and shared cultural

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<sup>5</sup> Ron Miller, 'Beyond Reductionism: The Emerging Holistic Paradigm in Education', *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 18, 3 (1990) pp. 314-323 (p. 315-316)

<sup>6</sup> Levi Geir Eidhamar, 'Dimensions of the Relationship between the Individual and Her Unique Worldview Construction', *Religions*, 12 (2021) p. 215

<sup>7</sup> James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 20

<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind: 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009 (1949))

values. British sociologist Anthony Giddens posits that worldviews emerge from a dialectical process between individual agency and societal structures.<sup>9</sup> This perspective emphasises the role of social context in influencing the development and expression of worldviews, suggesting that personal experiences alone may not fully account for the complexity of an individual's worldview.

Understanding the role of worldview in stand-up comedy necessitates the exploration of key theories and perspectives on the subject. According to Paul Hiebert, worldviews can be characterised by three primary components: cognitive, affirmative, and evaluative. The cognitive component pertains to an individual's beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge, while the affirmative component involves emotions, attitudes, and values. The evaluative component, on the other hand, relates to the judgments individuals make based on their cognitive and affective components.<sup>10</sup>

To further elaborate on Hiebert's framework, the cognitive component may encompass a comedian's beliefs about various social, political, and philosophical issues, which can shape the topics they choose to address in their stand-up routines. For example, Stewart Lee often critiques religious dogma and political hypocrisy in his performances, reflecting his cognitive beliefs about these subjects<sup>11</sup>:

38a	People are very keen on that now [sl]	424
38b	<u>In</u> comedy there was a big piece in er	425
38c	the Daily Mail in December by Jan Moir	426
38d	saying there's not enough anti-Islamic stand-up [sl]	427
38e	in Britain at the moment	428

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) p. 144-181

<sup>10</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 45-48

<sup>11</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Stewart Lee – Carpet Remnant World (2023)* <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/stewart-lee-carpet-remnant-world.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

38f	Of course they're very <i>keen</i>	429
38g	on <i>balance</i> at the Daily Mail it's been a... [L(2)]	430
38h	<u>A</u> watch-word of the paper [sl(2)]	431
38i	<u>going way back</u> to the 1930s [l(2)]	432
38j	{Looks at someone in the audience} I know {shrugs} it's a good joke No one... gets it [L]	433

In contrast, the affective component focuses on the emotions and values that inform a comedian's perspective, such as empathy or compassion, which can influence their approach to humour. For an example, here is some material from Rose Matafeo that demonstrates an affective approach to the recent “Me Too” revelations<sup>12</sup>:

60a	<u>So</u> I've got a lot of straight, male friends yeah	523
60b	because I am an {chuckles} ally [L(3)]	524
60c	And they say they're like Rose it's a t... it's a <i>tough time</i> to be a <i>decent</i>	525
60d	A decent man	526
60e	Yeah do you know yeah you know what's a little bit harder	527
60f	Is... is trying to be a <i>straight woman</i>	528
60g	at a time like this [sl]	529
60h	given what we know about you now [L] <u>okay</u>	530
60i	<u>And</u> what... the only accurate way I've come to describing what that truly feels like to be a straight woman at <i>times like these</i>	531
60j	is it almost feels like trying to recommend a restaurant that has given you food poisoning eight times [L(2)] <u>okay</u>	532

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<sup>12</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Rose Matafeo - Horndog* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/rose-matafeo-horndog.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

Nevertheless, some scholars caution that dividing worldviews into separate components might lead to an oversimplification of the complexity inherent in an individual's perspective. According to Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*, a person's worldview is not a static concept, but rather a continuously changing and developing process, influenced by a variety of internal and external factors.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is vital to consider the interplay among cognitive, affirmative, and evaluative dimensions when investigating a comedian's worldview.

Sometimes a comedian's worldview may subtly shape their comedy in ways that are not immediately apparent to the audience or even to the comedian themselves. One recurrent example of this, and one that is highlighted in my later analysis, is the presentation of "real" people (parents, friends, romantic partners) through the lens of the comedian's worldview so they are to all intents and purposes characters created within the narrative of the performance – the only insight the audience has to the verisimilitude of the real people presented is from the comedian themselves, and their impression of anyone no matter how long they have known them or how close they are socially is shaped by the same worldview that they present the rest of the performance through.

A noteworthy perspective on worldviews is presented by Ninian Smart, who proposes that they can be assessed through seven dimensions: ritual, narrative, ethical, doctrinal, experiential, material and social<sup>14</sup>. These dimensions supply an extensive framework for comprehending the intricacy of worldviews and the way they materialise in various facets of an individual's life – though Smart was mainly a theologian, the framework he presents is useful as a reference point for the ritual practice of stand-up comedy.

Using Smart's model within the context of stand-up comedy offers valuable insights into a comedian's perspective and allows for the illustration of exemplars for

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, (United Kingdom: Open Road Media, 2011) p. 123-127

<sup>14</sup> Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 13-21

each of the stated dimensions. For instance, the narrative dimension encompasses the stories a comedian narrates on stage, influenced by their worldview and personal experiences. Romesh Ranganathan<sup>15</sup> regularly shares anecdotes about his British-Sri Lankan upbringing, mirroring his distinctive cultural background and worldview:

70a	She is a wonderful woman	767
70b	Erm my mother but she um [C:A(4)] <u>{scoffs and looks away, adjusting jacket}</u>	768
70c	Okay um [L(2)]	769
70d	<u>she doesn't</u> actually consider me to be a proper Asian [L]	770
70e	<u>This is a sad state of affairs in my life</u> my mum calls me a coconut I don't know if you've heard [L] <u>this term</u> [L:a]	771
70f	Don't applaud it [I]	772
70g	<u>Brown on the outside</u> white on the inside [I] <u>That's what my mum calls me</u>	773
70h	{Sri Lankan accent}  "You coconut"  And [L(3)] <u>the reason...</u>	774
70i	the reason my mum calls me a coconut is because I'm originally Sri Lankan	775
70j	My mother tongue is Tamil	776
70k	and I cannot speak it [w]	777
70l	<u>And the</u> reason I cannot speak it is because my mum and dad	778
70m	never spoke it to me [L]	779
70n	when I was growing up	780
70o	and now my mum blames me [L]	781
70p	for not being able to speak it [I]	782

<sup>15</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Romesh Ranganathan – Irrational* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/romesh-ranganathan-irrational.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

The doctrinal dimension concerns the belief systems and theories shaping a comedian's worldview, such as political ideologies or religious beliefs. This dimension highlights the intellectual underpinnings of a comedian's worldview and how they inform their routines. For an illustrative example, Dylan Moran often explores the big ideas of life through the medium of absurdity and whimsy, expounding philosophy through his stand-up material <sup>16</sup>:

17a	The er...	172
17b	thing is you know the crises come and go	173
17c	and you blame <i>this person</i> or <i>that group of people</i>	174
17d	but the ultimate crisis	175
17e	is... never changes	176
17f	it's always	177
17g	the same	178
17h	You know and that's	179
17i	that we're all going to die [L]	180
17j	<u>We're all going to die</u>	181
17k	<i>all of us</i>	182
17l	Yeah I'm sorry that's a spoiler but <i>we are</i> [L]	183
17m	<u>we're all going to die</u>	184
17n	and people hate it when you <i>say it out loud</i>	185
17o	Most of the time they <i>hate it</i>	186
17p	especially if you're having sex [L(2)]	187
17q	If you're afflicted with that condition that makes you go "We are all going to die!" every time you cum [L(2)] <u>it's very</u>	188

<sup>16</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Dylan Moran – Off the Hook* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/dylan-moran-off-hook.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

17r	hard to get the mood back [L(2)]	189
17s	But we <i>are</i> and we're <i>all</i> ..	190
17t	you know there's no point blaming everybody else 'cause we're all ultimately alone	191
17u	as well	192
17v	Here we are	193
17w	hot fleas	194
17x	in the <i>gulping dark</i> [L(2)]	195
17y	We are alone	196

The ritual dimension allows comedians to examine the rituals that make up society and the stock that we put into these rituals, for example, family rituals such as marriages, funerals or shared holidays or mating rituals such as dating, monogamy or displays of affection. The angle that the comedian takes to these familiar things helps to communicate their worldview to the audience, whether mocking the minutiae or revelling in the shared fondness that people have for these experiences. Sean Lock is well known for examining the ridiculousness of certain rituals as part of his routines, as exemplified in the following material<sup>17</sup>:

52a	I'll give you an example like you know Christmas crackers	526
52b	I've known for years the actual crackers were made in China	527
52c	but I always thought the jokes were written in this country	528
52d	but I think they're doing that in China now	529
52e	cos I pulled a cracker this Christmas and	530
52f	I'll just say at this point I'm not a fan of crackers I've been campaigning to get rid of them for years [sl]	531

<sup>17</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Sean Lock – Purple Van Man* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/sean-lock-purple-van-man.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

52g	I think they're a dull joyless pointless experience from start to finish	532
52h	If there was <i>any pleasure</i> to be had from a cracker you'd have them at other times of the year wouldn't you? [L(2)] <u>yeah</u>	533
52i	<u>Any</u> just the slightest pleasure you know you'd go  "Oh, happy birthday!	534
52j	(high pitched voice) {reaching forward} "Do you want to pull a cracker?"   [L(2)]	535
52k	{to one side}"Dave and Sue are coming round later"	536
52l	{to other side} "OK	537
52m	I'll go to the off-licence... {touches face as if in thought}	538
52n	Shall I get some crackers?"   [L(2)]	539
52o	(enthused) "Yeah let's get some <i>crackers</i> and have a <i>bloody laugh</i> "   [L(2)]	540
52p	But you don't cos they're <i>shit</i> aren't they? [L(2)]	541
52q	The cracker I pulled this Christmas	542
52r	the <i>bang</i> wouldn't have made a kitten look up [L(3)]	543
52s	The paper hat didn't make me look like a king I didn't look like a king no [L(2)]	544
52t	I looked like a grill chef in a service station [L(4)] <u>like this...</u> {waddles round the stage glaring at the audience}	545
52u	On his third warning [L(3)] <u>like that...</u> {continues waking hunched and glaring}	546
52v	(depressed voice) "Do you want egg?	547
52w	Do you want egg?"	548



The ethical dimension, conversely, comprises the comedian's moral beliefs, which might be conveyed through their comedy. Nish Kumar<sup>18</sup>, for example, frequently addresses issues like racism and social inequality, demonstrating his ethical stance on these subjects:

<i>B6</i> 14a	So er... I'm a British Asian gentleman	104
14b	And it's a good time to be a British Asian gentleman right now [I]	105
14c	It's a pretty sweet time you know? It's pretty good	106
14d	Like I really believe there's nothing I can't do right now that a white person can, I really believe that	107
14e	There's nothing I can't do that a white person can do	108
14f	Oh there's one thing I can't do that white people can do and that's, play pranks at an international airport, because... [L(3)]	109
14g	<u>You know I don't care what you say</u> that fun is not open to you [L]	110
14h	<u>If you have the voice of 'Downton Abbey'</u> but the face of 'Homeland' [L(4)]	111
14i	<u>That is not.. an option</u>	112

The social dimension concerns the direct connection a comedian has with the audience, through the acknowledgement of not only the setting of the comedy show itself but the acknowledgement that the audience is there for a social experience – comedians confront this dimension when they talk about the here and now, the gig

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<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023)  
<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

itself. Dara O'Briain, well known for his audience work during gigs, demonstrates this in the following<sup>19</sup>:

6a	And yes we will be talking to you as the show goes along people in the front row	45
6b	Don't feel... don't feel scared by that, right [sl]	46
6c	<u>I'll will say...</u> It's not some <i>corny</i> comedy thing where I'd <i>slag you off</i>	47
6d	I'll make <i>gods</i> of you [L(3)]	48
6e	<u>You know that?</u> {Clenches fists and leans forward}	49
6f	<u>I'll render you</u> <i>extraordinary</i> you'll be carried out of this building shoulder high	50
6g	You'll be <i>legends</i> by the end of it [I] I...	51
6h	Because that's what you do it's the only real... it's one of the joys about live comedy is that you get to mess around with people and find stuff about out about people's lives it's kind of fun	52
6i	and it changes every night and...	53
6j	In Oxford for example	54
6k	Here's a little tip for comedians always ask another question	55
6l	Because I asked them the "What do you do for a living?" He goes "I'm a <i>food scientist</i> "	56
6m	And the entire room went [(disappointed mumbling) "Uh..." [L(3)]	57
6n	<u>"That's so boring we don't like that"</u>	58
6o	And I went "Well have you done anything interesting as a food scientist?"	59

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<sup>19</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Dara O'Briain – Talks Funny* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/dara-obriain-talks-funny.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

The experiential dimension emphasises the personal experiences and emotions that mould a comedian's perspective. Sarah Millican's candid reflections on her experiences with body image and relationships exemplify this dimension <sup>20</sup>:

78a	Second thing I started to buy clothes	934
78b	Online	935
78c	No longer do I go into a shop pick some clothes to try on take them into a <i>tiny cubicle</i> with an <i>ill-fitting curtain</i>	936
78d	office lighting	937
78e	and a <i>fuckin' circus mirror</i> [L(4)]	938
78f	<u>and</u> ultimately hand them back to a <i>tiny specimen of a woman</i> [L(2)]	939
78g	<u>like a mouse in hot pants</u> [L(2)]	940
78h	<u>who never</u> says anything but with her eyes is saying  (nastily)"Oh you're too fat for all the clothes [L(3)] <u>now</u> "	941
78i	What I do now is I order them online	942
78j	They arrive at the house	943
78k	I try them on	944
78l	and if they don't fit I have a fuckin' <i>biscuit</i> 'cause it doesn't fuckin' <i>matter</i> [L:C:A(10)]	945

The impact of a comedian's worldview on their comedy is evident in the work of comedians such as Eddie Izzard, who weaves her political beliefs and experiences as a transvestite and then as a transgender person into her comedy. Izzard's worldview allows her to explore intricate issues related to gender and identity, crafting a comedic perspective that is both informative and entertaining. While some

<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Sarah Millican – Outsider* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/sarah-millican-outsider.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

audiences may not share Izzard's experiences or beliefs, her comedy presents an opportunity for dialogue and understanding<sup>21</sup>:

B3	Yes so um...	53
9a	I was going to be in the <i>army</i> when I was a kid	54
9b	<i>Yes</i>	55
9c	And I say that and people go  (mumbling) "Oh, yeah, yeah"	56
9d	No I was I was going to be in the <i>army</i>	57
9e	when I was a kid 'cause...	58
9f	cause if you're a transvestite you're actually a <i>male tomboy</i>	59
9g	That's where the sexuality [L(2)] <u>is</u>	60
9h	<u>Yeah it's not...</u> it's not drag queen	61
9i	No gay men have got that covered and er [L]	62
9j	this is male tomboy and	63
9k	people do get that mixed up and they put transvestite there no no no	64
9l	little bit of a crowbar separation [L(2)] <u>thank you</u>	65
9m	<u>and</u> gay men I think would agree	66
9n	And er it's it's...	67
9o	it's male lesbian that's really where it is okay? [L(3)]	68

In contrast, comedians like Michael McIntyre, known for his observational humour, frequently focus on everyday experiences and universal themes. McIntyre's comedy, which is less dependent on a specific worldview, can appeal to a broader range of audiences by emphasising shared experiences and cultural touchstones. This approach suggests that while a comedian's worldview undoubtedly shapes their

<sup>21</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Eddie Izzard – Dress to Kill* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/eddie-izzard-dress-to-kill.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

comedic perspective, a more inclusive focus on shared experiences can also foster connection with diverse audiences<sup>22</sup>:

70a	'Cause there's two very distinctive styles of hoovering you can either walk with your Hoover like this... {walks round imitating vacuum cleaner whirring and pushing it in front of him} [L(2)]	686
70b	<u>Then you get to the end</u> and you hoover around {turns round flamboyantly and does the same in reverse} [l(2)]	687
70c	<u>and you follow in behind</u> [L(2)] {continues to walk and make vacuum noise}	688
70d	Or you stand your ground	689
70e	and hoover out [L(6)] { <u>makes large movements as if throwing vacuum outwards in a circle while making vacuum noise</u> }	690
70f	<u>Then</u> you just pick another spot at random	691
70g	Hoover out again [L(3)] { <u>repeats previous movement in half circle</u> }	692

It is important to note that the ability to challenge societal norms and values through comedy is not solely determined by a comedian's worldview, but also by their skill in navigating the nuances of their chosen subject matter. A comedian must be able to strike a balance between pushing boundaries and maintaining a connection with their audience, avoiding alienation or outright offence. Thus, while the worldviews of comedians such as Jimmy Carr allow them to explore controversial topics and challenge societal norms, it is ultimately their ability to navigate these complex issues with wit, timing, and empathy that determines their success in this endeavour<sup>23</sup>.

A comedian's worldview, while foundational to their humour and performance, can also serve as a limiting factor, potentially constraining their understanding and

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<sup>22</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Michael McIntyre – Hello Wembley* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/michael-mcintyre-hello-wembley.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>23</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015) p. 82-83

portrayal of certain issues or perspectives. This limitation often arises when a comedian's worldview is narrow or inflexible, impeding their ability to empathise with diverse experiences and potentially causing them to alienate segments of their audience. One of the risks associated with a limited worldview is the potential for perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing harmful prejudices. This can lead to the exclusion of certain individuals or groups, as the comedian's material may not resonate with those who hold different beliefs, values, or experiences<sup>24</sup>.

The potential consequences of a comedian's worldview leading to controversial or offensive material are perhaps best exemplified by British comedians Bernard Manning and Roy Chubby Brown. Manning, known for his racially-charged humour, faced criticism throughout his career for perpetuating racist stereotypes and promoting intolerance. His performances often alienated audience members and contributed to a divisive atmosphere within the comedy scene<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, Roy Chubby Brown has faced criticism for his crude and offensive humour, which frequently targets marginalised communities<sup>26</sup>. His style of comedy has been described as appealing to the lowest common denominator, with critics arguing that it reinforces negative social attitudes and perpetuates discriminatory beliefs<sup>27</sup>.

However, opponents of these worldviews assert that comedians have a social responsibility to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and contributing to societal divisions<sup>28</sup>. They argue that comedy should be used as a tool for fostering understanding and empathy, rather than reinforcing negative social constructs. This debate underscores the complex relationship between a comedian's worldview and the impact of their material on society, with both sides presenting valid concerns.

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<sup>24</sup> Giseline Kuipers, 'The Sociology of Humor', *The Primer of Humor Research*, ed. By Victor Raskin, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 361-398 (p. 379)

<sup>25</sup> Steve Bennett, *Bernard Manning – Original Review* (2002) Available from [https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/b/3136/bernard\\_manning/review](https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/b/3136/bernard_manning/review) [accessed 27 August 2023]

<sup>26</sup> Simon Cross, 'Review: Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (eds), *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*', *European Journal of Communication*, 22, 4 (2005) p. 506

<sup>27</sup> Steve Bennett, *Review - Roy Chubby Brown* (2018) [https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/r/477/roy\\_chubby\\_brown/review](https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/r/477/roy_chubby_brown/review) [accessed 14 September 2023]

<sup>28</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering, eds., *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 14-15

## Structure

As defined in Chapter One, a bit is a distinct subdivision of a set or routine. In common parlance, comedians will refer to a “bit” by its theme or function i.e. the “bookcase” bit or the “closing” bit – in an analysis of Steve Martin’s performance and persona as a self-referential “meta-comedian”<sup>29</sup>, Wuster refers explicitly to bits as a classification category of narrative, stating “(T)he bits build on each other, cycle around, and themes develop as the comedian creates an experience for the audience that is more than the sum of its jokes.”<sup>30</sup>

With a bit being composed of a collection of jokes grouped together by topic, context or form, at this level we will not be examining the jokes themselves as individual units but rather the narrative structures that tie them together – bits function as narrative subdivisions within the larger narrative of the routine, even in the case of a one-liner act such as Tim Vine, who clusters together jokes on a similar topic<sup>31</sup>. From personal experience, this subdivision serves a practical purpose for writing purposes, allowing the creation of narrative structure through the organic accretion of material i.e., one joke has a topper added, which leads to a second joke, followed by a third and so on. Given that this is a common practice among comedians, using this as a structure to “reverse-engineer” a more detailed reading of a performance text has obvious practical applications for the purposes of feedback and reflection – the initial issue then becomes how to categorise the form of a bit in a way that is uniform but extensible.

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<sup>29</sup> Tracy Wuster, ‘Comedy Jokes: Steve Martin and the Limits of Stand-Up Comedy’, *Studies in American Humor*, 3, 14, (2006) pp. 23-45 (p. 26-27)

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p. 25

<sup>31</sup> Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves, *The Naked Jape: Uncovering the Hidden World of Jokes*, (London: The Penguin Group, 2007), p. 27

From a structuralist perspective, there are two distinct ways in which bits can lead into each other – sequentially and non-sequentially. The diagram to the right shows the arrangement of a sequential bit structure, with each bit leading into the next with a linking or segue line, either at the end of the previous bit or at the start of the next. This link may be purely formal in the case of one-liner comedians, indicating a change of topic for a new joke cluster, all the way up to more elaborate misdirection or non-sequiturs of the more absurdist or chaotic performers.

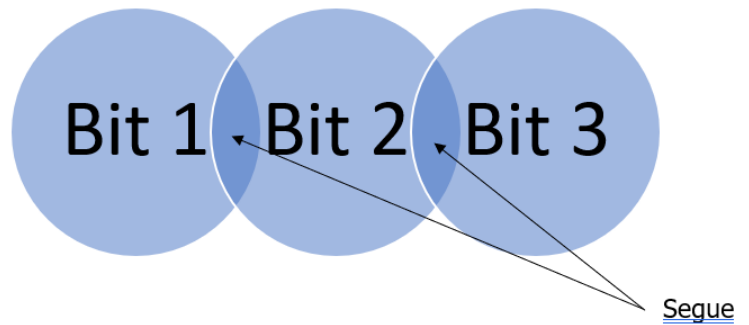


Figure 4 - Sequential Bit Structure

For non-sequential bit structure, the bit in question is often contained within the demesne of another bit i.e., the performer starts a topic, switches to a related topic halfway through the bit and then returns to the previous topic at hand. As shown on the diagram to the right, the narrative progression is still sequential, however structurally this “topic within a topic” needs to be acknowledged and accounted for.

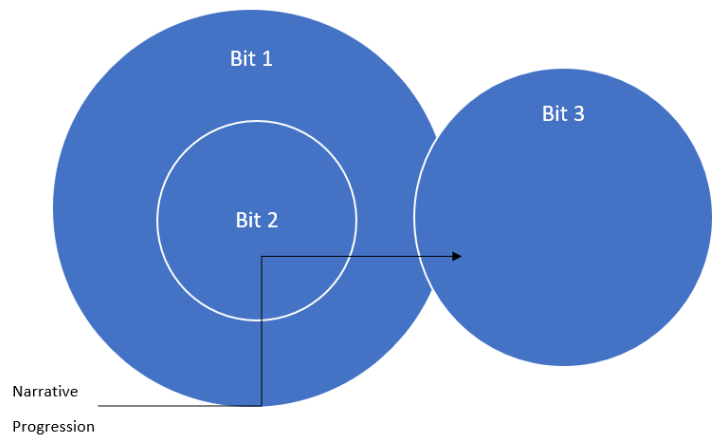


Figure 5 - Non-sequential Bit Structure

This structure is less common than the sequential bit structure, possibly due to the extra cognitive effort required on behalf of both the comedian and audience in keeping the previous bit topic in mind and is mostly seen in more verbose and narrative focused comedians, such as Billy Connolly or Ross Noble, who both have a habit of tangential thinking.

So, with the structure of the bits themselves defined, the next step is to categorise what they are doing. Gimbel, building on the previous work of Arthur



Berger in creating an anatomy of humour<sup>32</sup>, created his anatomy of comedy<sup>33</sup> with the goal “section is to do for comedic styles what Berger did for joke mechanisms”<sup>34</sup>. The result defines sixteen major comedy techniques, with thirteen sub-techniques under *Observational*, two sub-techniques under *Parody* and four under *Physical Comedy* for a total of thirty-five distinct techniques. Though not all of these can be applied to stand-up comedy (Improv, Sketch, Sitcom and Film Parody being the outliers) this still leaves most categories that can be usefully applied, with definitions as summarised here with a few illustrative performer examples – these are not supposed to be exclusive, but rather to highlight those performers that are often exemplars of the style:

**Joke-based** — rapid-fire joke-based stand-up e.g., Jimmy Carr<sup>35</sup>, Tim Vine<sup>36</sup>

**Direct Narrative** — stories where the comedian takes the audience along a plot line to a conclusion e.g., Rhod Gilbert<sup>37</sup>, Greg Davies<sup>38</sup>, Tig Notaro<sup>39</sup>

**Inverse narrative** – when the narrative is set up so that the audience has knowledge about the narrative that the comedian seems not to.

**Skit** — when a comedian acts out a fictional situation rather than narrating it e.g., Eddie Murphy<sup>40</sup>, Richard Pryor<sup>41</sup>

**Absurdist** — challenges what we believe to be normal reality or the form of stand-up itself e.g., Ross Noble<sup>42</sup>, Milton Jones<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*. (New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1998)

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever: A Philosophical Account of Humor and Comedy*, (Oxon, Routledge, 2018), pp. 80-90

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 81

<sup>35</sup> *Jimmy Carr – His Dark Material*, dir. by Brian Klien and Amanda Baker (Netflix, 2021)

<<https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81478151>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>36</sup> *Tim Vine – Sunset Milk Idiot - Live*, dir. by Tim Vine (Spirit Entertainment Limited, 2019) [On DVD]

<sup>37</sup> *Rhod Gilbert – The Book of John*, dir. by Rhod Gilbert (Warner Bros, 2022) [On DVD]

<sup>38</sup> *Greg Davies – You Magnificent Beast*, dir. by Peter Orton (Netflix, 2018)

<<https://www.netflix.com/title/80158875>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>39</sup> *Tig Notaro – Happy to Be Here*, dir. by Tig Notaro (Netflix, 2018)

<<https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/80151384>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>40</sup> *Eddie Murphy – Delirious*, dir. by Bruce Gowers (Anchor Bay, 2007) [On DVD]

<sup>41</sup> *Richard Pryor – Live on the Sunset Strip*, dir. by Joe Layton (Fabulous Films, 2019) [On DVD]

<sup>42</sup> *Ross Noble – Fizzy Logic*, dir. by Peter Callow and Ross Nobe (Stunt Baby Productions, 2007) [On DVD]

<sup>43</sup> *Milton Jones – Lion Whisperer*, dir. by Geoff Posner (Spirit Entertainment Limited, 2011) [On DVD]

**Prop** — Those who bring objects on stage to use as the basis for their bits  
e.g., Tape Face<sup>44</sup>, Tim Vine<sup>45</sup>

**Insult—insult** comics make put-downs of individuals or groups the foundation of their routines e.g., Frankie Boyle<sup>46</sup>, Jimmy Carr, Jerry Sadowitz<sup>47</sup>

**Shock** — Shock humour relies more on raw emotions than cleverness per se  
e.g., Jerry Sadowitz

**Cringe** — the cringe comic acts in a way that makes the audience uncomfortable for the comedian e.g., Neil Hamburger<sup>48</sup>

**Impression** — While there is a separate category of comedic form for those who do impersonations as their act, the stand-up technique of impression is a limited version. Here, the cleverness is in the construction of the joke, not necessarily in the perfection of the mimicry e.g., Robin Williams<sup>49</sup>

**Topical** — Topical humour uses the news of the day, often politics, as its focus  
e.g., Andy Parsons<sup>50</sup>

**Crowd Work** — establishing a personal relation with members of the audience  
e.g., Dara O’Brian<sup>51</sup>

**Observational** — wherein the comic takes something familiar to the audience and cleverly has them see it in a new way or a way that makes it seem other than it is.

**Disclosure** — Disclosure humour plays on the intersubjectivity of the experience or act.

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<sup>44</sup> Steve Bennett, *Tape Face – Review* (2018) <[https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/t/33678/tape\\_face/review](https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/t/33678/tape_face/review)> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>45</sup> *Tim Vine: So I Said to this Bloke – Live*, dir. by Steve Kemsley (Platform Entertainment, 2008) [On DVD]

<sup>46</sup> *Frankie Boyle Live – The Last Days of Sodom*, dir. by Brian Klien (Channel 4 DVD, 2012) [On DVD]

<sup>47</sup> *Jerry Sadowitz – Live in Concert – The Total Abuse Show*, dir. by Jerry Sadowitz (Vision Video, 1988) [On VHS]

<sup>48</sup> *Neil Hamburger: The Worlds Funnyman*, dir. by Neil Hamburger (Drag City, 2006) [On DVD]

<sup>49</sup> *Robin Williams: Live on Broadway*, dir. by Marty Callner (Sony Music CMG, 2003) [On DVD]

<sup>50</sup> *Andy Parsons - Live and Unleashed - But Naturally Cautious*, dir. by Peter Callow (Laughing Stock, 2015) [On DVD]

<sup>51</sup> *Dara O’Brian – Crowd Tickler*, dir. by Paul Wheeler (Universal Pictures UK, 2015) [On DVD]

**Phenomenological Commonality** — accurate reporting of something the audience knows they all share.

**Phenomenological Difference** — accurate reporting of a uniquely shared experience among a sub-population.

**Exhibition** — the comedian feigns making a disclosure joke, but knows that it is not a shared experience, thereby creating an incongruity between the form and the uncomfortable detail of his/her inner life just exposed.

**Kvetch** — This is the version of observational humour where what is exposed is a shared complaint about the world e.g., Jack Dee<sup>52</sup>, Jo Brand<sup>53</sup>

**Incongruity** — The observation of a contradiction or inconsistency in daily life which generally passes unnoticed because it is so normal or ubiquitous.

**Revision** — pointing something out in such a fashion as to cause a Gestalt switch in the listener, so that the normal occurrence is now given a new interpretation e.g., Rhod Gilbert

**Duchamping** — taking something mundane and by removing it from its usual context and placing it in a play frame, either exposes its intrinsic strangeness or conjures up strangeness by seeing it without its usual surroundings.

**Extension** — where the incongruity in the observed element is created by taking the thing and exaggerating it or taking it to its logical (or local logical) conclusion e.g., Joe Lycett<sup>54</sup>

**Extension Kvetching** — creating a false incongruity by extension and then goes on to complain about how much we should or do hate it in its false, exaggerated form.

**Usurpation** — taking a thing and putting it in a new context thereby creating incongruity that does not normally exist.

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<sup>52</sup> *Jack Dee: So What? Live*, dir. by Paul Wheeler (Universal Pictures UK, 2013) [On DVD]

<sup>53</sup> *Jo Brand - Barely Live*, dir. by Jo Brand (Universal Pictures UK, 2003) [On DVD]

<sup>54</sup> *Joe Lycett: I'm About to Lose Control and I Think Joe Lycett Live*, dir. by Brian Klein (Spirit Entertainment Limited, 2018) [On DVD]

**Inversion** — a situation in which the wrong interpretation is given by the comic while the audience all the time knows the proper interpretation.

**Counterfactual** — observational humour based on a lack of observation, altering some element of the thing and exposing its peculiarity that way.

**Impersonation** — Impersonation is the comedic art form where mimicry is the focal point of the act.

**Song Parody** —taking the melody of a known song and substituting new lyrics e.g., David O'Doherty<sup>55</sup>

**Humorous Poem \Limerick \Novelty Song** — working within the constraints of the metered nature of another art form and being clever while creating a legitimate artistic work of that form.

**Ventriloquism** — Ventriloquism is a peculiar brand of comedy in that the central skill being presented—being able to speak with minimal movement of the mouth so that it appears visually that the speaker is not speaking while the speech sounds normal—is impressive, but not necessarily humorous e.g., Nina Conti<sup>56</sup>, Jeff Dunham<sup>57</sup>

**Clowning** — The clown creates the performance space around him/her by designating him/herself as a clown often through exaggerated dress. Recognised as a clown, the clown uses props, stunts, and tricks in addition to verbal gags to get laughs e.g., Tape Face

**Mime** — silently uses the body and facial expressions to pretend to be in a situation or carrying out an activity e.g., Tape Face

**Slapstick** — physical comedy wherein there is a victim who befalls an exaggerated physical mishap e.g., Lee Evans<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> David O'Doherty, *Let's David O'Doherty*, online audio recording, Bandcamp, 1 January 2010, <<https://davidodoherty.bandcamp.com/album/lets-david-odoherty>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>56</sup> *Nina Conti: Talk to the Hand*, dir. by Jim Hare (IMC Vision, 2011) [On DVD]

<sup>57</sup> *Jeff Dunham: Beside Himself*, dir. by Troy Miller (Netflix, 2019) <<https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81074113>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>58</sup> *Lee Evans: Roadrunner Live at the O2*, dir. by Tom Poole (Universal Pictures UK, 2011) [On DVD]

**Gurning** — Gurning is the comedic form which uses the face as a medium  
e.g., Lee Evans

This categorisation is perfect for bit level analysis, especially when modelling the ebb and flow of form – bits can be single or multi-category as required to define their content, but this categorisation allows for a useful comparison of narrative structure without pigeonholing a comedian into an overall genre beyond that of stand-up comedy, one that may be unreflective of the changing circumstances of performance expectations. However, the list is not prescriptive is flexible enough to be expanded and adapted when needed, as Gimbel states:

The claim is not that this catalogue is complete. It is intended to be an opening bid in a long-term project for the philosophy of comedy community and as a dynamic art form, new forms are always being innovated. It is also not the case that these categories are exclusive. Bits can pull from multiple categories.<sup>59</sup>

With the categorisation of form considered, the next consideration needs to be context – discussion of form is meaningless without some indication of how something is being said, who is saying it and why it is being said. Register and genre theory is an ideal tool for this purpose<sup>60</sup>, taking stand-up comedy as the *genre* (to be expanded upon later in the section on objective moves) and considering each bit as a text within that genre to be compared and contrasted. From here, we can develop a performative *register* to examine the “contextual dimensions (that) can be seen to impact on language by making certain meanings, and their linguistic expressions, more likely than others”<sup>61</sup>. By defining by deduction the bit-level *field* – “the nature of the social action taking place” – *tenor* – “the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles” and *modal channel* – “what part the language is playing”<sup>62</sup> – it becomes possible to examine the semantic multidimensionality of the language used

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<sup>59</sup> Gimbel, *Isn't That Clever* (2018) p. 81

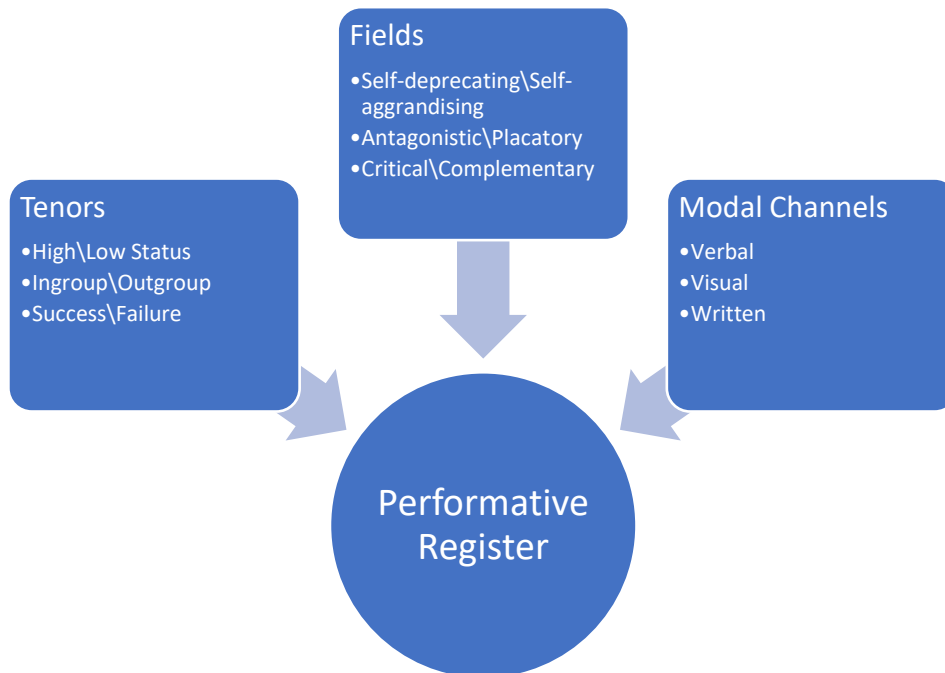
<sup>60</sup> Suzanne Eggins, and J. R. Martin, ‘Genres and Registers of Discourse’, *Discourse as Structure and Process*, ed. T. A. van Dijk (London: SAGE Publications, 1998)

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p. 234

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p. 238

within the text without exclusive reliance on content, making the resulting analysis comparable both internally and externally to the larger text of the set.

Based on my research, I have mapped out a preliminary performative register for the genre of stand-up based on three primary modal channels - verbal, visual and written, as shown in the following diagram:



*Figure 6 - Performative Register*

These channels are not exclusive and can be combined, but most stand-up performances use the verbal mode either solo or in conjunction with the others (e.g., Greg Davies projected quotes, Dave Gorman’s slideshows, Tim Vine’s “Pen Behind the Ear”). Notable stand-up comedians that use the visual mode solo include Tape Face and Rob Spence, and stand-up comedian Lee Ridley, also known as Lost Voice Guy, encapsulates the exclusive written mode as he uses a speech aid synthesiser preprogrammed with his own material and keys in ad-libs live<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Gary Evans, ‘Lee Ridley: Making Comedy Out of Silence’, *The Guardian*, 6 June 2022. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/jun/06/silent-comedian-lee-ridley-ipad>> [accessed 9 July 2020]

For both the tenors and fields, I have defined three pairs of graded antonyms with an assumption of neutrality in each dimension if not specified - for tenors, representing the relation between performer and audience, these relate to the *projected status* of the comedian in the eyes of the audience (High\Low Status), the *socio-political status* of the comedian in relation to the assumed collective norms of the audience (Ingroup\Outgroup) and the *idealised status* representing the aspirations of the performer vs the reality (Success\Failure) - for fields the three gradated categories are based on language use that affects the social status of the *self* (Self-Deprecating\Self-Aggrandising), the *audience* (Antagonistic\Placatory) and the *other* (Critical\Complementary). These antonymic categories are based on the work of Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*<sup>64</sup>, specifically the chapters on performances<sup>65</sup> and teams<sup>66</sup>.

### Collective Behaviour

In Lockyer and Myers's influential empirical paper on live stand-up comedy from the perspective of the audience<sup>67</sup>, produced because a "dearth of research exists that examines live stand-up comedy from the audiences' perspective"<sup>68</sup>, eleven semi-structured interviews were carried out<sup>69</sup> with a variety of individuals to complement the much larger online survey responses<sup>70</sup>. Through these interviews, the authors examined the following themes:

- Respect for the Stand-up comedian – "the appreciation of the comic skills involved in live stand-up comedy is one of the main features attracting audiences to live stand-up comedy"<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London: Penguin, 1959 [1990])

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*, pp. 28-82

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, pp. 83-108

<sup>67</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers, 'It's about expecting the unexpected': Live stand-up comedy from the audiences' perspective, *Participations: journal of audience and reception studies*, 8, 2, (2011) pp. 165-188.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*. p. 165

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*. pp. 174-183

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*. pp. 169-173

<sup>71</sup> *ibid*. p. 174

- Expectation of the Unexpected – “related to both the stand-up comedian’s actions, the content of their performance and the ways in which the stand-up comedian responds to the dynamics of the specific audience”<sup>72</sup>
- Proximity and Intimacy – “Respondents expressed that they enjoy the limited distance between the audience and the stand-up comedian”<sup>73</sup>
- Opportunities for Interaction – “Interaction between the interviewee and those who s/he is attending the live stand-up comedy with is important before and during the stand-up comedy performance”<sup>74</sup>
- Sharing the Comic Experience – “attending live stand-up comedy resulted in a shared or collective experience of being in the same environment, sharing the comedic experience or being in ‘the moment’.”<sup>75</sup>

From this, we can approximate the intentionality ascribed to the audience in the same way a performer would – any successful performer needs to both understand and maintain this intentionality in order to perform in a stand-up context. Respect for the comedian’s comic ability is only maintained through an active demonstration of that comic ability – failure results in a loss of confidence from the audience. The same can be said of the dynamism the performer must show in response to the unexpected and the sense of shared comic purpose that must be engendered between the performer and the audience – these need to be actively maintained throughout the performance in order to facilitate the sense of immersion necessary for enjoyment. The proximity between the performer and audience and within the audience themselves is largely down to the venue setup, however, this still needs to be facilitated by the performer, who needs to ensure that the audience feels included through their performance.

While this approach of survey and interview is a wonderful addition to the corpus of comedy scholarship, both the opportunity of being able to interview an audience in this way and the logistics of doing so are often beyond the temporal scope of this framework. However, these insights into the comedy audience, while

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p. 175

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 177

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p. 179

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p. 181



by no means universal, can be usefully applied to the audience as a collective entity as motivators. For the spectator-analyst, the audience in both mediated and live comedy is only accessible as a collective entity and the audience needs to be considered as such.

Turner and Killian, in their seminal work *Collective Behavior*<sup>76</sup> define six elements that are common to all crowds, namely:

1. uncertainty
2. a sense of urgency
3. communication of mood and imagery
4. constraint
5. selective individual suggestibility
6. permissiveness<sup>77</sup>

It will be argued that some of these elements in a comedy crowd are facilitated either by the routine (1), performance (3), gig (4) or intention (6), but in turn, it is the audience as a collective entity that affects the functioning of those elements. However, the remaining two elements – urgency and suggestibility – are dictated by the crowd themselves – while they can be influenced by the performers, they cannot be manufactured in the way the other elements can. Further to this then, how does one approach the comedy crowd as a collective, both as a potential member of that collective or as a performer in discourse with it? To help define crowd forms, Turner and Killian propose three dimensions for crowd behaviour<sup>78</sup>:

**Individualistic-Solidaristic** – Does the crowd act cooperatively with a group objective (Solidaristic) or act similarly with a series of parallel objectives (Individualistic)?

**Focused-Volatile** – Is the action of the crowd concentrated on a specific object (Focused) or does the activity shift from one object to another (Volatile)?

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<sup>76</sup> Ralph Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behavior*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957)

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*, p. 84

<sup>78</sup> *ibid*. pp. 84-86

**Active-Expressive** – Is the crowd acting upon the object(s) (Active) or expressing behaviour about the object(s) (Expressive)?

From a stand-up performance perspective, the idealised crowd is Solidaristic-Focused-Expressive – an audience who all laugh together in the right places. Conversely, the antithetical crowd would be Individualistic-Volatile-Active – an audience who were actively fractured into individual factions actively engaging with the comedian and each other i.e., heckling, booing etc. However, these are the extremes – I propose to view each dimension as essentially a sliding scale that fluctuates based on the dialogic actions of the stand-up comedian and audience. Note as well the use of “idealised” to describe the strived-for crowd – this does not mean that every stand-up comedian would find this crowd ideal, however in my experience this crowd type is the most receptive to stand-up comedy performance.

In order to read this from an audience with only largely audio cues to go on (as a performer, audience member or watching a mediated recording) I propose a system wherein audience reactions impose movement towards or away from the “idealised” in each or every dimension:

Antithetical (-)	Idealised (+)	Notation
Individualistic	Solidaristic	IS-\+
Volatile	Focused	VF-\+
Active	Expressive	AE-\+

*Table 9 - Antithetical/Idealised Matrix*

Referring to the transcription notation system (See Appendix A) there are nine major general reactions, nine minor general reactions and two direct dialogic reactions – the larger the reaction, the larger the perceived shift in the dimension or dimensions:

Audience Reaction	Dimensional Shift
[A] Applause \ [a] Minor Applause	IS+ VF+ AE- \ IS-
[Aw] Aww \ [aw] Minor Aww	IS+ AE+ \ IS- AE+
[B] Boo \ [b] Minor Boo	VF- AE- \ IS- VF-
[C] Cheers \ [c] Minor Cheers	IS+ AE+ \ IS- AE+
[H] Hisses \ [h] Minor Hisses	VF- AE- \ IS- VF-
[L] Laughter \ [l] Minor Laughter	IS+ VF+ AE+ \ IS- VF+ AE+
[O] Ooh (taboo) \ [o] Minor Ooh	IS- VF+ AE+ \ IS- VF+
[S] Silence \ [s] Minor Silence	VF- AE- \ VF- AE-

[W] Whooping \ [w] Minor Whooping	IS- VF+ AE+ \ IS- VF- AE+
[<xxx>] Discernible Words \ [<!xxx!>] Shouted Word	Dependant on circumstances, but conceivably VF- AE- in the majority

Table 10 - Audience Dimensional Shift

The values assigned to each dimension are unimportant and do not require real numbers – the purpose of this notation is to represent a cumulative shift in crowd dimensionality between bits. This shift is calculated additively within each bit and reaction (minus and plus cancelling each other), with the most volatility being upon the IS scale and the least on the VF and AE scales i.e. audiences will tend to react more expressively (laughter, cheering, whooping) and focus more over the course of a set if they are enjoying the performance, however smaller reactions tend more towards the individualistic side of the IS dimension and therefore impact on audience unity. Finally, the length of the reaction should be considered – a longer full-room laugh is more unifying, a longer silence more disunifying – so for the purposes of this analysis if we treat the +/- as 1 then each second of that reaction after the first modifies the reaction by 0.2.

For example, if there were a reaction of [L(3)] - full room laughter for around 3 seconds – this would be recorded as IS: 1.4, VF: 1.4 and AE: 1.4, moving each of the scales more towards Solidaristic, Focused and Expressive respectively. In contrast, a reaction of [w(2)] – scattered whooping for around two seconds – would be recorded as IS: -1.2, VF: -1.2 and AE: 1.2, moving the aggregated audience reaction towards Individualistic, Volatile and Expressive. This system, while inherently abstract, allows us to not only consider overall audience reaction but also model a graphical representation of the fluctuation of audience dimensionality.

#### Convention

Amy Devitt, in her article discussing the concept of genre knowledge and transfer assessment, posits the idea of a *genre performance* - a shared genre lexicon that is nevertheless uniquely assembled by each person that uses it, as Devitt herself states:

Each performance of a genre demonstrates its degree of prototypicality, disciplinary membership, historical moment, authorial identity, and many other qualities shared with other members of its category. Yet all of those sources of variation gathered together cannot account for the unique text that an author performs in a unique moment in a unique rhetorical situation, its unique action carrying out a unique communicative purpose through a unique process.<sup>79</sup>

Though both Devitt and the book she is examining, John Swales's *Genre Analysis*<sup>80</sup>, focus on pedagogy and academia the central idea of genre theory is that it can be applied to any discourse community, as Swales himself writes:

Genres themselves are classes of communicative events which typically possess features of stability, name recognition and so on. Genre-type communicative events (and perhaps others) consist of texts themselves (spoken, written, or a combination) plus encoding and decoding procedures as moderated by genre-related aspects of text-role and text-environment. These processing procedures can be viewed as *tasks*.<sup>81</sup>

These tasks then, the encoding and decoding procedures moderated by genre, are the things that form the *objective moves* of a bit – communicative dialogue subdividing structures operating at a higher level than the jokes but nevertheless influencing their reception. These objective moves are analogous to the moves in the Create a Research Space (CARS) model proposed by Swales<sup>82</sup>, which describes the moves and steps required to begin an academic paper in the genre of academic research.

Each of these moves helps shape the meta-narrative of the set by imparting extra-textual information and framing about the comedian to the audience, forming the bridge between the micro-narratives of the jokes and the macro-narrative of

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<sup>79</sup> Amy J. Devitt, 'Genre Performances: John Swales' Genre Analysis and Rhetorical-Linguistic Genre Studies', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 19, (2015) pp. 44-51 (p. 44)

<sup>80</sup> John Swales, *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* p. 9, emphasis in original

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* pp. 140-141

stand-up performance – they are the building blocks of the genre of stand-up comedy that allows intimacy to be communicated between comedian and audience. As Brodie states “the comedian must interweave the comic bits in her routines with declarative statements or testimonial personal experience narratives which squarely locate her as sharing a core of fundamental precepts with her audience”<sup>83</sup>, and it is the interweaving of these narratives that contextualises the comedian as a comedian.

In order to define the moves of this model I turn to Jason Rutter’s work on rule-based introduction sequences for comperes as a starting point, expanding on the idea “comperes act to frame a series of performances into a single event”<sup>84</sup> by defining a set of “moves” that compere perform in the introduction sequence of an act. The moves as defined by Rutter are:

- Contextualisation – in which small details of background are offered about the comedian
- Framing of Response – directs an audience towards greeting the comedians with a certain attitude
- Evaluation of Comedian – the compere passes comment on the performance skills of the comedian
- Request for Action – from the audience by the compere – usually for applause
- Introduction – of the comedian by the compere
- Audience Applause<sup>85</sup>

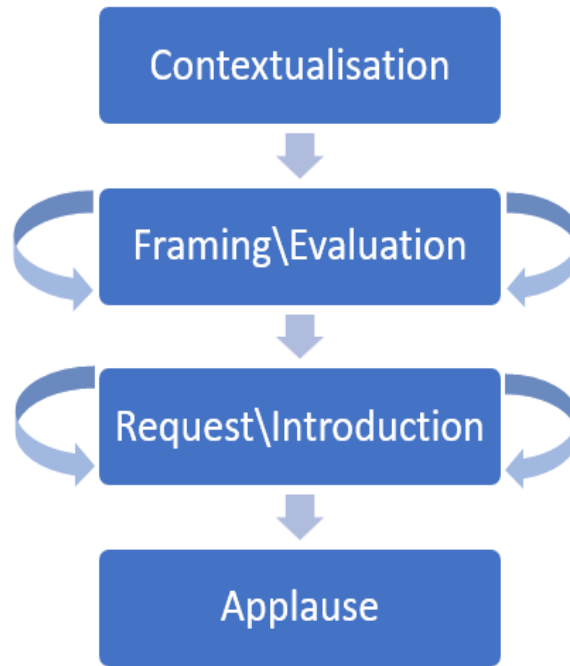
Taking this as a starting point and creating a flowchart to model the six moves that are used to introduce acts, we end up with the following flowchart:

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<sup>83</sup> Ian Brodie, ‘Stand-up Comedy as a Genre of Intimacy’, *Ethnologies*, 30, 2 (2008) pp. 153-180 (p. 170)

<sup>84</sup> Jason Rutter, ‘The Stand-up Introduction Sequence: Comparing Comedy Compères’, *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32, 4 (2000) pp. 463-483 (p. 464)

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 466



*Figure 7 - Standard Comperes Introduction Flowchart*

While the order of these is somewhat mutable, allowing for framing then evaluation or vice-versa, each of these moves bears a striking resemblance to a speech act. Aarons and Mierowsky<sup>86</sup> discuss speech acts in the “speech event” of stand-up in a similar way:

the overall purpose of standup is to entertain the audience. That is the implied contract. The audience agrees to give the performer licence and the performer takes that licence... the audience may remove that licence at any time: if the performer isn’t good enough, the audience may boo them off the stage; if the performer offends the sensibilities of the audience, the audience may revolt in some way<sup>87</sup>

In this way the initial set of moves defined by Rutter, while currently specific to comperes, can be usefully expanded and redefined slightly in order to focus on the genre of stand-up comedy. Just as comperes create a sense of continuity between a series of performances through a series of moves, so too do the comedians

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<sup>86</sup> Debra Aarons and Marc Mierowsky, ‘How to do Things with Jokes: Speech Acts in Standup Comedy’, *European Journal of Humour Research*, 5, 4 (2017) pp. 158-168.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* pp. 159-160

themselves create a sense of continuity between a series of jokes through a series of objective moves.

This is explored further in *The Interactional Context of Humor in Stand-Up Comedy* by Scarpetta and Spagnolli<sup>88</sup>, which looks at how joke sequences are shaped to facilitate joke acceptability for different audiences, specifically how performer-audience interaction creates an informal environment throughout the performance. Referring to Rutter's work as a starting point they define the following additional moves:

- Fillers – Meaningless phrases and words that are used to punctuate, separate, delineate or delay setups or punchlines within a sequence of jokes.
- Surveys – Questions and statements that serve the purpose of preparing the audience for the punchline.
- “Pags” – Also called “toppers” in UK English, these are successive punchlines that rely on the success of the initial and subsequent punchlines to work as they have no other contextual reference.
- Audience Reference – Referring directly to the audience as a collective as part of the joke in a referential, ingroup way.

Combining these approaches, I propose the following list of objective moves that can be used to create an initial, higher-level performative speech act model of stand-up comedy performances:

- **Acknowledgement** – Directly acknowledging the audience, can be formal or informal e.g., responding to heckling, acknowledging audience reaction.
- **Introduction** – The comedian introduces or reintroduces themselves to the audience.
- **Enquiry** – Generalised question for the audience, can be used to gauge opinion etc.

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<sup>88</sup> Fabiola Scarpetta and Anna Spagnolli, ‘The Interactional Context of Humor in Stand-Up Comedy’, *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 42, 3 (2009) pp. 210-230.

- **Contextualisation** – The introduction of purported “background information” to the audience e.g., personal information, upbringing, experiences
- **Framing** – shift of audience focus to guide consensus belief about an object or subject e.g., “have you ever noticed...”, “don’t you think that...”
- **Evaluation** – Evaluation of current, upcoming or past circumstances e.g., “it’s nice to be here...”
- **Request** – Request for action inviting and precipitating a certain contribution from the audience e.g., applause, cheering, sympathy
- **Enaction** – Performing a theatrical exchange to provide context e.g., acting out a conversation

Each of these moves, modelled after the idea of speech-acts within the realm of performative language, can be combined in any order within the bit

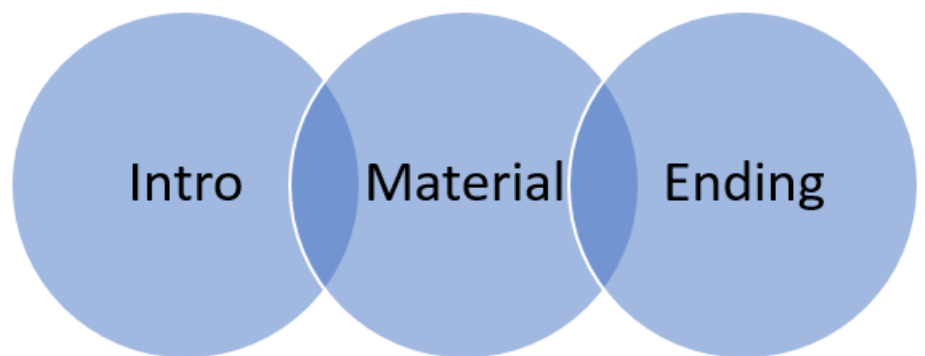


Figure 8 – Nuclear Phases of the Genre

division of a set and will provide a measure of performative comparison.

Moving beyond the individual moves, through analysis of the corpus I have also observed a meta-structure within stand-up comedy as a genre that is reflected in most if not all performances. The first of these observations is the most obvious, with what I am calling the “nuclear phases” of the genre (see Figure 8) – this is based on the aforementioned work by Rutter but applied to

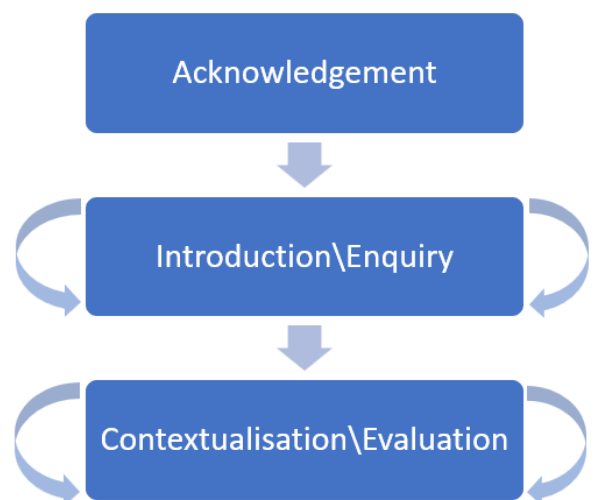


Figure 9 – Standard Introduction Sequence



comedians themselves, the standard approaches that comedians have when taking and leaving the stage. The “standard” introduction sequence is three to five objective moves (see Figure 9), and usually begins with an acknowledgement of the audiences greeting, followed by either the comedian introducing themselves by name or with a joke, or alternatively enquiring about the health of the audience, then possibly vice-versa. Finally, the comedian either contextualises their own presence or evaluates their own opinion of the venue and audience – for a material example of this, please see the below extract of a performance artefact from Alan Davies<sup>89</sup>:

B1	<p><u>[A:C(20)] {Enters the stage and spreads arms wide as he walks to the microphone, leans to stage right with arms out to the crowd, then to stage left and does the same, speaks into the microphone still in the stand}</u></p>	1
	<p><u>Hello!</u></p>	2
	<p>{removes mic from stand}</p>	3
1a	<p><i>Welcome</i> [I]</p>	4
1b	<p>to your own city [L] <u>{moves mic stand to downstage left and chuckles}</u></p>	5
	<p>How are you well? [&lt;yes&gt;]</p>	6
	<p><u>Excellent</u> news very nice to see you all</p>	7

In the above example, Davies acknowledges the applause and adulation from the crowd with physical movements and an enthusiastic “Hello!” (Line 1-2 - Acknowledgement), then bids the audience welcome with a joke (Line 4-5 -

<sup>89</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Alan Davies – Little Victories* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/alan-davies-little-victories.html>> [accessed 10 September 2023]

Introduction) and enquires after their general wellbeing (Line 6 – Enquiry). Finally, Davies finishes the standard introduction sequence with an evaluation move, marking the affirmative reaction from the audience as excellent news and noting how nice it is to see them all (Line 7 – Evaluation).

The bookend counterpart to this is the standard ending sequence, which most comedians in the corpus use to leave the stage (and those who don't are often deliberately inverting expectations). The sequence consists of two to three objective moves, with the performer evaluating the audience or message given by the performance, or alternatively reiterating who they are, then possibly vice versa. Finally, the comedian acknowledges the applause from the audience and leaves the stage. For a corpus example of this, please see the below ending bit from Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette*<sup>90</sup>:

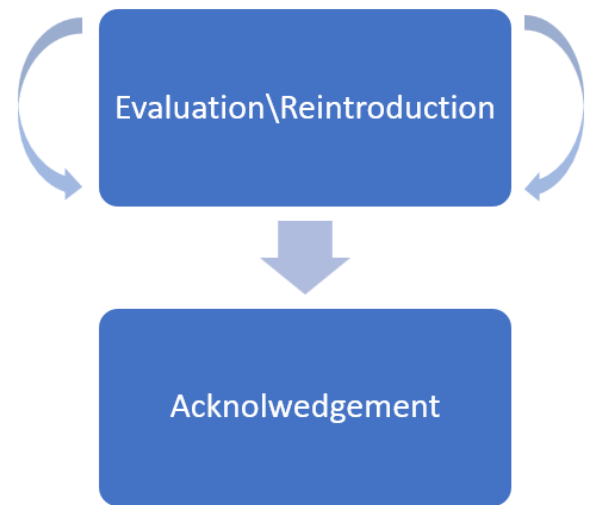


Figure 10 - Standard Ending Sequence

B32	Do you know why we have the sunflowers? [S(2)]	1150
	It's not because Vincent van Gogh <i>suffered</i>	1151
	it's because Vincent van Gogh had a brother who loved him	1152
	through all the pain	1153
	He had a tether	1154
	a connection to the world	1155
	and that is the focus	1156
	of the story we need	1157
	connection [S]	1158

<sup>90</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Hannah Gadsby – Nanette* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/hannah-gadsby-nanette.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

Thank you [A:C(10)]

In this example, Gadsby uses their final few lines to summarise the overall message of the performance and why it is important (Line 1150-1158 – Evaluation) before acknowledging the audience and leaving the stage (Line 1159 – Acknowledgement). This sequence is not always lengthy but is a shared feature of most performances and thus is worth considering in any analysis of stand-up comedy.

Finally, the last part of the observed traditional structure within the corpus is the contextualisation bit – the part of the performance where the comedian lays out their “thesis statement” for the performance ahead of continuing, establishing the themes for the audience and often using this to introduce context. The contextualisation bit is noteworthy as it is often where a comedian will introduce their first exemplar (see chapter four – comedic license for note on negative exemplars) in order to provide this context, as these are often shorthand for a whole bundle of personality types that the audience can understand.

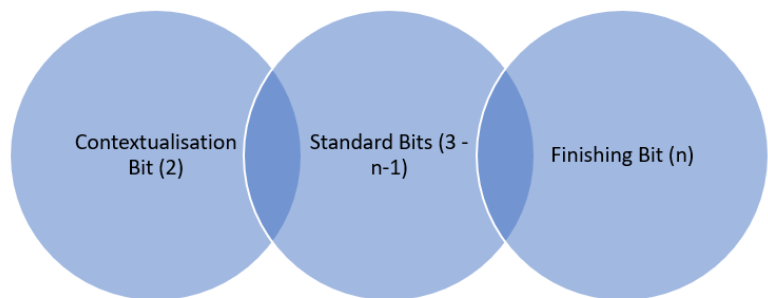


Figure 11 - Contextualisation Bit Sequence

### Sociocultural Criticism

Stand-up comedy has been widely acknowledged as a possible form of social critique and commentary, with some comedians serving as sociocultural critics who shed light on important issues, challenge dominant discourses, and offer alternative perspectives. This is not true of all comedians, but it could be argued that any comedian who has “found their voice” will bring with them an inherent social point of view and criticism of the worldview they are speaking from. This is not without a sense of risk in both a performance and practical sense, as Oliver Double writes in his seminal book *Stand Up! On Being a Comedian*:

By definition, experimentation involves the risk of failure, and few are prepared to take that risk. Political gags involve the risk of alienating people, so they tend to take second place... Radical aspirations have to compete with worrying about getting enough gigs to cover the cost of the mortgage.<sup>91</sup>

So, while not all comedians may trade in grand sweeping political statements, I would argue that any perspective on the world can be considered sociocultural criticism, no matter how small or personal. At the heart of sociocultural criticism in stand-up comedy is the role of the comedian as a cultural commentator and social critic, by offering a critical view of their own experiences and social backgrounds to an audience that may not have encountered that perspective before. By offering alternative perspectives and challenging dominant discourses, comedians can serve as sociocultural critics who shed light on important issues and provoke critical reflection and engagement from their audience.<sup>92</sup>

One way in which sociocultural criticism can be applied to stand-up comedy is by using lenses that help to frame and interpret the performance; however, this is something that the comedian needs to guide the audience through rather than expecting them to bring their own inherent interpretation. By applying different lenses to stand-up comedy through the medium of humour and insightful material to subjects such as gender, race, or class, audiences can gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of the performance, and the ways in which it reflects and challenges their own opinions of the world. As Robert Stebbins notes in his work on the sociology of stand-up comedy, "the sociocultural context in which stand-up comedy is produced plays a critical role in shaping the content and structure of the performance, and the ways in which it is received and interpreted by audiences"<sup>93</sup>. By understanding the sociocultural context in which stand-up comedy

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<sup>91</sup> Oliver Double, *Stand Up! On Being a Comedian* (London: Methuen, 1997) p.225

<sup>92</sup> Daniel R. Smith, 'Stand-up Comedy and the Comedic Cult of the Individual: or, the Humor of James Acaster', *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 9 (2021) pp. 70-91 (p. 72-73)

<sup>93</sup> Robert A. Stebbins, *The Laugh-Makers: Stand-up Comedy as Art, Business, and Life-Style* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) p. 45

is produced, audiences can gain a deeper appreciation for the broader social and cultural issues that it addresses.

The forms that sociocultural criticism can take are impossible to enumerate here due to their inherent variability and the close ties they have to a particular comedian's point of view of the world – this point of view may be exaggerated or distorted with the aim of making the audience laugh, as Carr and Greeves state “personal experience doesn’t tend to come with a neat punchline... Lots of jokes *start* with a true story.”<sup>94</sup> It is this kernel of truth however that enables the criticism to ring true and change opinions, as long as it is presented in an authentic and personal manner.

As previously discussed, there are clear limits to sociocultural criticism in stand-up comedy, particularly when it comes to the use of humour and satire to critique social and cultural issues. The comedian is there to entertain first and foremost and may be being paid for doing so, so the onus is often on the performer to be as inclusive as possible with their material and avoid contentious topics such as politics and religion, which many people have deeply held beliefs about, or sensitive topics that may be potentially triggering such as sexual assault, terminal illness or suicide. This is not to say that these topics should not be or are not covered with warmth, wit and humour by stand-up comedians, but by maintaining a sense of perspective and respect, comedians can avoid alienating their audience and failing to connect with them on a meaningful level.

Overall, an understanding of sociocultural criticism is critical to the success of stand-up comedy and highlights the complex interplay between the comedian, the audience, and the sociocultural context in creating effective and engaging performances. By recognising the role of comedians as sociocultural critics and applying different lenses to frame and interpret their performances audiences can gain a deeper appreciation for the ways in which stand-up comedy reflects and challenges dominant discourses and beliefs, and the broader social and cultural

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<sup>94</sup> Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves, *The Naked Jape: Uncovering the Hidden World of Jokes* (London: Penguin, 2007) p. 131, emphasis in original.

issues that it addresses. While there are limits to sociocultural criticism in stand-up comedy, particularly when it comes to the use of humour and satire to critique serious social and cultural issues, a nuanced and respectful approach can help to create more engaging and effective performances that connect with audiences on a more meaningful level and provoke critical reflection and engagement on important social and cultural issues.

### **Narrative Level Analysis**

The previous chapter analyses represent a critic's eye view of the performances, reconstructed from memory and notes shortly after viewing. To facilitate notation and comparison between the sets using the appropriate nonframework theories I will be referring to the artefact transcriptions of the three previously analysed sets produced using the transcription methods discussed in chapter three.

Each of the sets is broken up into distinct subsections or "bits" based on (in order) Topic, Form or Framing – some bits, notably the introduction and the ending, have no topic per se and are characterised by form; some bits, while retaining the same base topic, are reframed in such a way that they create a distinct "bit within a bit" that is navigated non-sequentially<sup>95</sup>. Bit division is read rather than objectively indicated by the performer and is subject to interpretation – the exact division between bits is largely unimportant compared to what bit structure can help read in terms of pacing, construction and conventionality. Each of the following bit matrices notes topic, forms, modal channels, tenors and fields (Bit Structure), objective moves in sequence and the segue to the next bit (Objective Moves) and Exemplars Introduced (Comedic License) for ease of later comparison and analysis. The aim here is to begin to provide a metatextual analysis to complement the impressionistic review, using background research and nonframework theories within this framework level to create a synthesis between the academic and performative points of view.

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<sup>95</sup> See Nish Kumar Bits 11 and 12 for an example - <https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>

## Narrative Level Analysis – Frank Astaire<sup>96</sup>

Structurally, the set follows the standard genre phase structure with Frank’s 10 bits in 17:23 giving a 01:44.3 per bit average (pba), Frank speaks 2290 words for a wpm average of 131.6 – this puts the performance into the moderately slow speed bracket for conversational speech of 130-160 wpm<sup>97</sup>.

Narratively, the performance follows a sequential bit structure with standard segues between each bit and uses the verbal channel throughout.

<b>Bit One<sup>98</sup></b>		
Topic: Opening	Forms: Cringe	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Failure	Objective Moves: Request, Contextualisation, Enaction, Request, Evaluation, Request, Contextualisation, Acknowledgement, Contextualisation	
Fields: Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

In the opening bit of the performance (B1), Frank follows a non-standard structure of objective moves:

- i. Request (3)
- ii. Contextualisation (4)
- iii. Enaction (5)
- iv. Request (6)
- v. Evaluation (7-8)
- vi. Request (10)

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<sup>96</sup> Transcription available via Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023]

<sup>97</sup> Steve Tauroza and Desmond Allison, ‘Speech Rates in British English’, *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 1 (1990) pp. 90-105.

<sup>98</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 1-25

- vii. Contextualisation (11-22)
- viii. Acknowledgement (23)
- ix. Contextualisation (25)

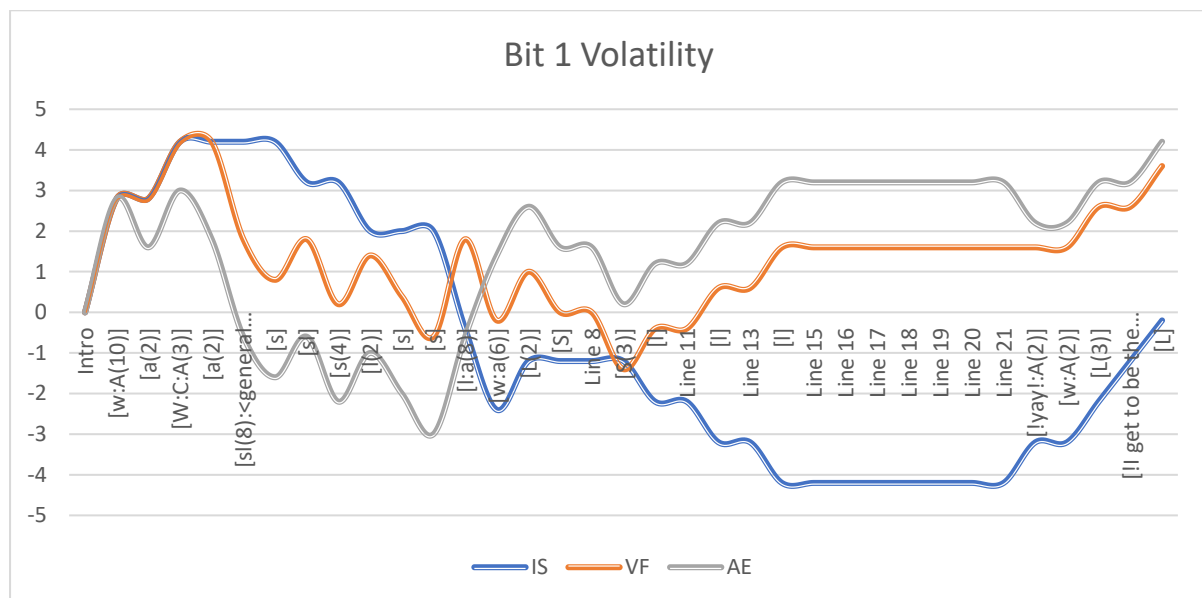
This differentiation from the standard objective moves i.e., not immediately approaching the stage, introducing himself and acknowledging the audience serves two purposes – to set the high status and antagonistic tenor and field of the character and to introduce the audience to the cringe form by making the slowness of the delivery almost painful. This cringe form relates to the performers' worldview, with Frank portraying an awkward, failed character who struggles to connect with the audience. The structure of this bit, with its combination of objective moves, demonstrates an unconventional approach to stand-up comedy, breaking from the traditional introduction sequence.

The first move (B1i) is a silent request to increase the applause, an immediately arrogant and high-status move from the performer who is directly responsible for the delay in getting to the stage. This is followed by a contextualisation move (B1ii) as Frank fumbles in his pockets and turns away from the audience, again showing contempt and causing some scattered, nervous laughs as well as a general murmuring as the audience is unsure quite what to make of the action. Having found his electronic cigarette, Frank turns back with it in his mouth in a very deliberate enaction move (B1iii) with his hands in his pockets, removing the microphone from the stand and setting it aside. He then performs another silent request move (B1iv), pounding on the microphone and bouncing up and down, eliciting audience participation with clapping and whooping. However, he quickly shifts to an evaluation move (B1v) by declaring the beat to be wrong in a sudden change from high status to failure within the tenor of the bit before pressing on regardless ("Ah bugger it"). He then makes another request (B1vi), audible this time, for the audience to clap while he sings a confident but poor rendition of "When You're Smiling" in a contextualisation move (B1vii), delineating his character as a former club comedian reminiscent of (and directly inspired by) Andy Kaufman's character Tony Clifton.



Song complete to overly generous appreciation from the audience, Astaire acknowledges (B1viii) the audience with a direct comment to an audience member (“That was for you mate [L(3)]”) – as this was my performance I am aware there is actually a punchline to this setup (“tell your face”) but the comment from the audience member (“[!I get to be the target tonight then?!:L]”) forced me to change tack and add in another contextualisation move (B1ix) to retain control of the room.

In terms of sociocultural criticism, Astaire's performance can be seen as a commentary on the nature of entertainment and the expectations placed upon performers. His awkward, failed persona challenges the notion of the successful, polished entertainer, and invites the audience to consider the broader context of performance and its relationship to societal norms and values.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B1, there is a weak positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a volatile negative trend towards Individualistic (IS), though this begins to reverse at the end. The good will of the introduction is instantly undercut by the arrogance of Astaire’s approach to the stage and general disdain for the audience, though some awkward, nervous laughs from the audience coupled with a general air of expectation stemming from the unconventional approach to introducing the performer helped to offset any trend towards the antithetical in the audience as a whole – equilibrium of the audience reception is largely maintained

but no real push towards idealisation has been achieved due to the nature of the approach.

<b>Bit Two<sup>99</sup></b>		
Topic: Introduction	Forms: Introduction	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup, Failure	Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Framing, Request, Evaluation, Introduction, Acknowledgement, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced: Disrespectful	Segue: Sequential

B1 then segues directly into the next B2 through proper acknowledgement of the audience, moving on from the previous contextualisation move (B1ix) to a wider acknowledgement move (B2i). A contextualisation bit (B2) within the material phase structure, it consists of eleven objective moves:

- i. Acknowledgement (26)
- ii. Evaluation (27-28)
- iii. Contextualisation (29)
- iv. Enquiry (30)
- v. Framing (31-33)
- vi. Request (34)
- vii. Evaluation (36)
- viii. Introduction (38)
- ix. Acknowledgement (40)
- x. Evaluation (41)
- xi. Contextualisation (42)

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<sup>99</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 26-42

The first acknowledgement move (B2i) starts with the performer acknowledging the audience for the first time with a simple greeting ("Good evening, ladies and gentlemen [<good evening>"]) prompting a similar response in return. Astaire then moves to an evaluation (B2ii), confronting the audience with a provocative statement ("I have to say, I don't like the look of any of you [L(2)→I]") and introducing the critical field of the bit - this statement generates laughter from the audience, indicating their engagement but also their confusion at the insult.

After an expectant pause, Frank continues with a repetition of the provocative statement, which this time elicits murmuring, boos and more laughter, indicating the confusion of the audience that has been deliberately created by the performer. To contextualise (B2iii), Frank introduces a catchphrase element, suggesting that the audience might not be old enough to remember it, which generates more laughter.

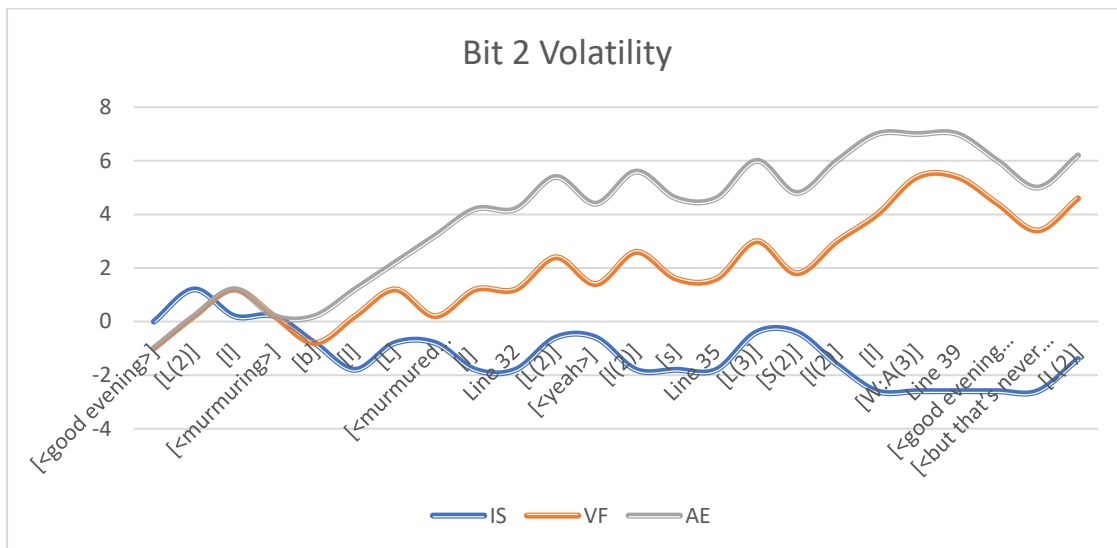
Frustrated by the lack of response, Frank enquires about the audience's memories of the 1970s (B2iv) and follows up with a framing move (B2v), starting with a teasing comment ("You were there but you don't remember it do you. That's fine. [I] No that's fine"), generating laughter, and then moves to an explanation for audience participation in a call-and-response format. With a request move (B2vi) from Frank ("You all up for that yeah? [<yeah>] Right here we go. [I(2)→s]") the audience agrees to participate, and the performer briefly leaves the stage.

This is again a break in convention for a stand-up performer, even though Frank prewarns the audience that this is about to happen – the punctuation of a disrespectful shout in evaluation (B2vii) ("{Frank replaces the microphone into the stand and walks off into a door at the back}"/^(shouting) Bunch of fucking amateurs [L(3)→S(2)→I(2)])" provides the first negative exemplar for the character (Disrespectful) and breaks the tension felt by the audience in response to the violation of performance norms.

After a shouted parody of a standard introduction (B2viii) which Frank uses to reintroduce himself, in comparison to the start practically bounding to the microphone, and repeats verbatim the acknowledgement (B2ix) from the beginning of the bit ("Good evening ladies and gentlemen [<good evening GOOD

EVENING>]”) and evaluation (B2x) to which the audience replies with the agreed upon phrase (“I have to say, I don’t like the look of any of you [<but that’s never stopped you before>]”). Frank concludes this bit with another contextualisation, suggesting that the audience's response might impact the performance tonight (B2xi) which generates further laughter.

Throughout this bit, Frank establishes his outgroup membership and a critical worldview by expressing his disapproval of the audience's appearance and creating an unconventional introduction by not conforming to the typical polite or positive interactions expected. He also encourages collective behaviour by encouraging the audience to participate in a call-and-response, fostering a sense of solidaristic and expressive interaction albeit in an unusual way.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B2, there is an overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a variable negative trend towards Individualistic (IS). The third objective move (B2iii) evaluating the audience serves to push for a negative start in the trend towards Individualistic, and as deliberate as this confusion is it adds volatility towards the end of the bit as full-room laughs are countered with smaller ones.

<b>Bit Three<sup>100</sup></b>		
Topic: Career	Forms: Joke-based, Phenomenological Difference	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualization, Evaluation, Framing, Contextualisation	
Fields: Self-deprecating	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B2 segues into B3 through with a proper introduction of the performer and the initial framing move of the bit (B3i) which introduces the character properly over eight objective moves:

- i. Framing (43)
- ii. Contextualisation (44-46)
- iii. Evaluation (47-48)
- iv. Contextualisation (49-52)
- v. Evaluation (53)
- vi. Framing (54-55)
- vii. Contextualisation (56-61)

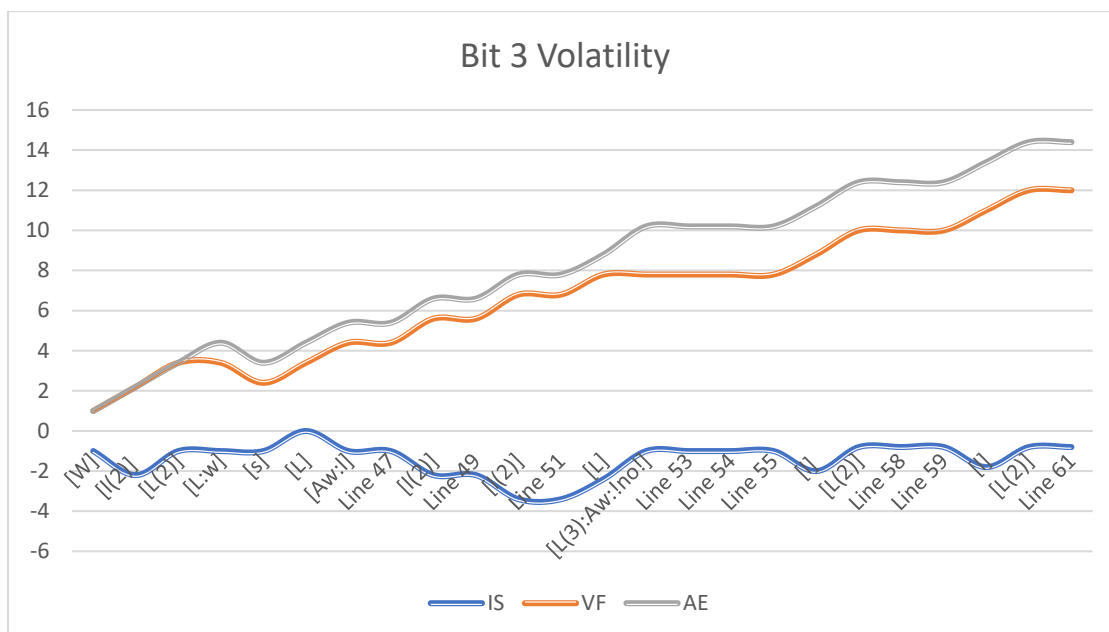
In the first move (B3i), Frank acknowledges the audience with a formal greeting for the first time in the set and introduces himself as a compere extraordinaire and after-dinner speaker to the stars. This sets a high-status tenor for the bit and emphasises his outgroup identity, deliberately setting himself apart from the audience and establishing the pique necessary for the subsequent pathos of the following joke-based material. In the contextualisation move (B3ii), he establishes a self-aggrandising field through statements about his career, such as attending Keith Chegwin's wedding as best man, though this is immediately undercut by the revelation that he was replaced at the second one. After a standard evaluation (B3iii)

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<sup>100</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 43-61

where he states a common platitude (“It is very very nice to be here tonight ladies and gentlemen”) before undercutting this with a repetition and injecting some humorous pathos (“Very very nice to be here. Nice to be nice to be anywhere. Nice to be out the house [l(2)]”). Frank then moves into a contextualisation phase (B3iv), with a quick irreverent topper (“I mean, I can’t get work these days for love nor money”/“and believe me, I’ll tried offering both [l(2)]”) followed by a longer joke discussing his experiences in the entertainment industry and expressing his struggles with finding work and being offered gigs. This builds a picture of his worldview, where he sees himself as an experienced but somewhat struggling performer, as well as leveraging bathos as after this revelation it is undercut by his blunt and insulting insinuation that he would rather be anywhere else than the gig he is doing.

Frank follows this up with some immediate damage control in the form of an evaluation (B3v) restating his pleasure in being there, making it clear that the previous statement was in jest, followed by a framing move (B3vi) praising the acts coming up (“It’s nice to see, so many young acts on the circuit nowadays ladies and gentlemen as well”/“You’ve got some really good acts on tonight”) before finishing the bit in a contextualisation move (B3vii) using self-deprecating humour to create a sense of solidarity with the audience while maintaining his high-status tenor - by admitting to forgetting jokes and having an unchanged set since the 1970s, he portrays himself as both a veteran and somewhat outdated comedian. This adds a layer of sociocultural criticism to the performance, as it comments on the changing nature of the entertainment industry and its impact on older performers.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B3, there is a strong overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a mild negative trend towards Individualistic (IS), though this becomes more volatile towards the end from the enquiry move onwards (B3iii). The shift away from idealised in terms of audience solidarity compared to a shift towards the other factors can possibly be explained by the unconventional approach of the joke subject contrasted with the conventionality of the jokes themselves – by directly insulting the audience themselves this serves to split the room in terms of their receptiveness to the performer.

<b>Bit Four<sup>101</sup></b>		
Topic: Divorce	Forms: Crowd Work	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup, Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Enquiry, Evaluation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation	
Fields: Critical, Placatory	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

<sup>101</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 62-84

B3 segues to B4 via a framing move (B4i), invoking the cliché of “confronting the elephant in the room” regarding his divorce leading into the first major bit of crowd work of the set. This bit consists of eight objective moves:

- i. Framing (62-63)
- ii. Enquiry (65-66)
- iii. Evaluation (67-68)
- iv. Enquiry (69-73)
- v. Evaluation (74)
- vi. Contextualisation (75-76)
- vii. Enaction (77-82)
- viii. Evaluation (83-84)

In the initial framing move for bit four (B4i), Franks stumbles somewhat in his introduction of the cliché, establishing an outgroup the tenor as it implies he is discussing a sensitive topic – this is followed by a somewhat awkward introduction of the topic of divorce in the style of a cheesy chat-up line (“Uh, in case you’re wondering ladies, recently divorced [L(2)]”), again working in an element of pathos that borders on the pathetic.

Frank acknowledges the audience's reaction with an enquiry (B4ii), directing attention towards a woman in the front row and deliberately performing a rug pull by insinuating she is divorced (“{Looks pointedly to a woman in front row}”/“ Aren’t you love? [L(3)]”). This move highlights the failure tenor, as they are making a seemingly incorrect assumption – though within the metacontext of the performance, this is a deliberate flip for comedic effect, pulling back with a second evaluation (“Sorry, sorry did I get the wrong end of the stick there? [I]”)

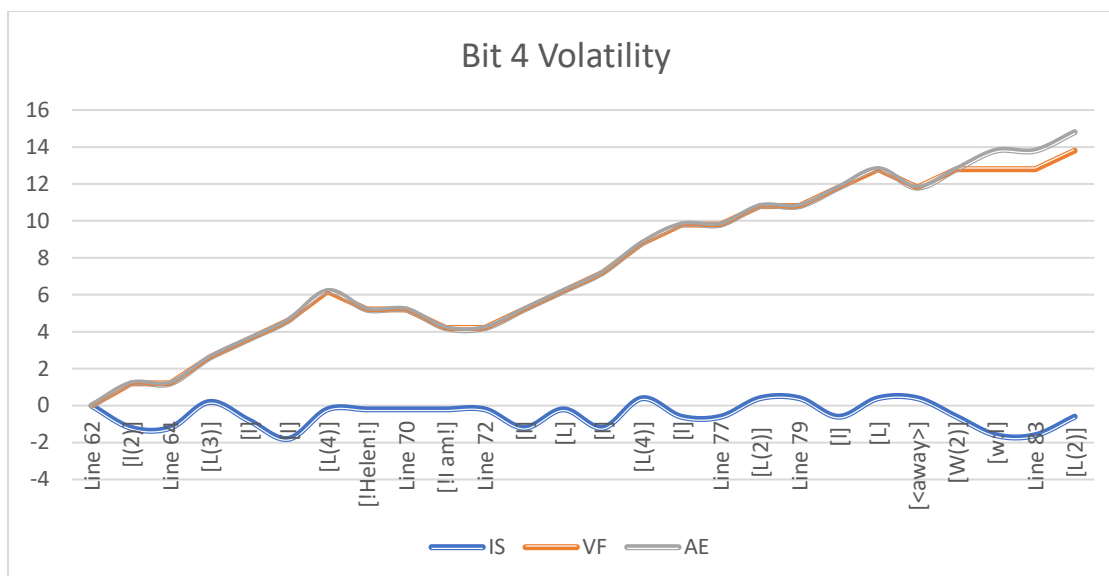
Continuing the bit, Frank evaluates the situation (B4iii), commenting on the woman's outfit and suggesting it is something she would wear to show that she was unbothered by the breakup (“It’s the kind of outfit, you wear to show that bastard what for isn’t it [L(4)]”). The remark provokes more laughter from the audience, maintaining the critical and placatory fields. Frank then engages in an enquiry move (B4iv), asking the woman's name and questioning her relationship status. Through



this move, he creates a direct connection with the audience, shifting focus towards the woman's personal life with questions such as "Is this your other half?" and "...is it a happy relationship Helen?"

With the answer in the affirmative from the audience member, Frank effusively evaluates (B4v) the answer ("Yeah? Alright that's good to hear you know no no you should be happy, whatever floats your boat [I]") before contextualising (B4vi) this as a setup to an "accidentally" off-colour joke that serves to further delineate his character ("Or a... as we used to say in the seventies, whatever tickles your babysitter [L(4)]"). Frank immediately pulls back from this under the guise of the audience taking what he said the wrong way, satirising the excuses often used for unacceptable views from the past ("Hey no no no, it were a different time it were a different time back then [I]").

In a complete non-sequitur and with no introduction, Frank starts singing "Come Fly with Me" unaccompanied as part of an enaction move (B4vii), nakedly attempting to distract the audience and extolling them to join in as asides during the song ("...join in if you know it..."/"...come on join in...") – this serves to call back to the initial song in B1 as well as further delineate the character of Frank as an old-school entertainer (albeit a poor one with no social graces) – this rendition of the song comes to an end with a final evaluation move (B4viii), delivering the final joke of the bit ("Yeah my wife and I, we had... we had that as the first at our wedding"/"but I still like it [L(2)]"), serving as a further delineation of character and bringing the bit topic full circle.



The perceived bit volatility for B4 shows a gradual positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) after the initial audience interaction is over and the more joke-based material starts and a more volatile downward trend towards Individualistic (IS) throughout the bit. The audience interaction move (B4iv) causes a downward trend due to the tendency for the audience to lose interest when a performer talks specifically to one member rather than the wider room.

Bit Five <sup>102</sup>		
Topic: Area and Audience	Forms: Insult, Crowd Work	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Enquiry, Enaction, Acknowledgement	
Fields: Critical, Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced: Abrasive	Segue: Sequential

<sup>102</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 85-126

B4 segues into B5 using an evaluation move, specifically reiterating the earlier platitude of "nice to be here tonight ladies and gentlemen". The structure of this bit is one of the longer ones, with sixteen objective moves in total:

- i. Evaluation (85-86)
- ii. Enquiry (87)
- iii. Contextualisation (88-90)
- iv. Evaluation (91-93)
- v. Contextualisation (94-95)
- vi. Evaluation (96)
- vii. Contextualisation (97-99)
- viii. Enquiry (100)
- ix. Contextualisation (101-102)
- x. Enquiry (103)
- xi. Contextualisation (104-106)
- xii. Enquiry (107)
- xiii. Evaluation (108-109)
- xiv. Enquiry (110-117)
- xv. Enaction (118-125)
- xvi. Acknowledgement (126)

B5 starts with a repeated evaluation (B5i) of the audience and the location ("It is very very nice to be here tonight ladies and gentlemen erm"), something that now has become somewhat of a motif at the beginning of a bit for Frank, followed by a subsequently disingenuous assertion about where he is ("Nice to be in one of my favourite places in the world [S→I]") which is revealed as such by the following an enquiry (B5ii), as he seemingly forgets where he is ("Shit where am I? [L(2):!Belper!]"). This initial engagement sets a low-status tenor and invites the audience to participate, resulting in an outgroup dialogue as they remind him that he's in Belper.

Frank then uses this answer to start a contextualisation move (B5iii), discussing his agent informing him about the gig in Belper. This sets the stage for a critical and antagonistic field as he plays with the audience's expectations, pretending to have a

negative opinion about Belper, though in a dismissive rather than explicit (“When my agent told me that I was going to be playing Belper tonight ah I said what any sane and rational human being would say”/” Oh [L(3)]”).

Following up on this dismissive approach, Frank uses an evaluation move (B5iv) to create a sense of tension with the audience by expressing his dislike for the people of Belper (“Now don't get me wrong you know it's a lovely place, it... It is a lovely place”/” Just don't like the people very much [l(2):b]”). This unconventional move utilises a direct narrative style and generates laughter as well as a few boos by highlighting the unexpectedness of a performer criticising the audience.

Frank finishes the evaluation move with another reiteration of the recurrent motif of how nice it is to be there, which then turns into a contextualisation move (B5v) as he comments on the appearance of the audience (“You are a lovely looking the audience tonight as well, you are a lovely looking audience”) and follows this up with a blunt rugpull, surprising the audience into laughter (“You'll forgive my tone of surprise but I've seen some fucking train wrecks in my time [L(3)]”) – while the audience is reacting to this, Frank follows this up with an evaluation move (B5vi) directly referring to an audience member (“{to lady in front row} Especially you madam [L(4)]”) in a way that implies he is calling her a train wreck.

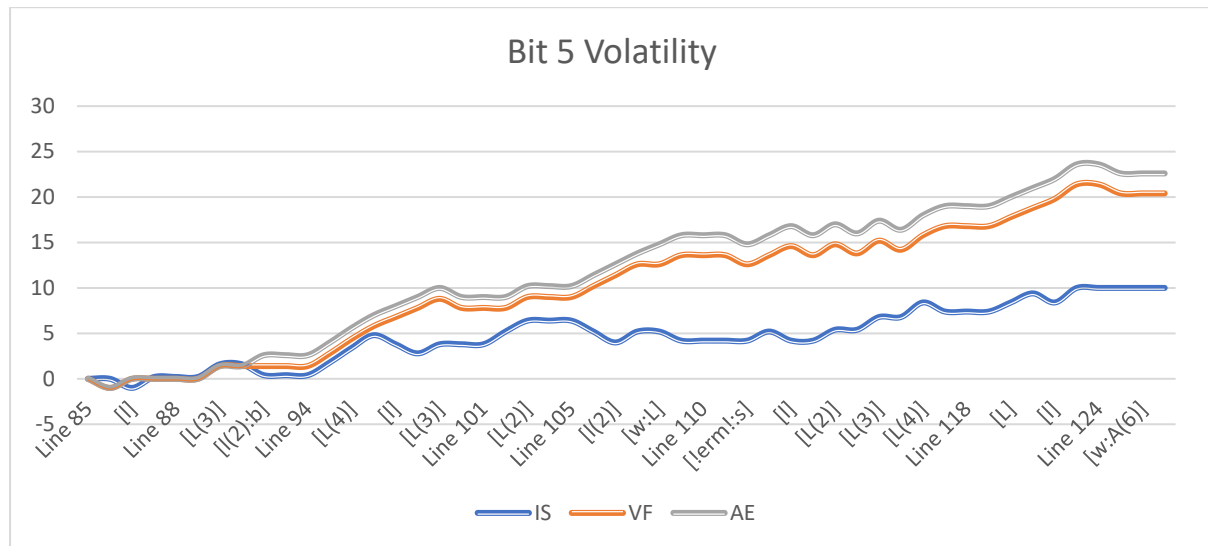
With the following contextualisation move (B5vii) Frank quickly walks back on this, appearing to be genuinely abashed that he had come across as offensive (“Oh sorry sorry no I meant that you were lovely there sorry [L(3)→l] not that you were a train wreck”) before reiterating this again (“You are lovely [l]”) and following up with a line that simultaneously delineates his the outdated views of his character and reveals his ignorance of acceptable social behaviour (“All... all I'm saying is you wouldn't be able to walk past a desk in my day without getting a little bit of friendly sexual harassment [L(3)]”). This line is the crux of the second of his exemplars, Abrasive, and shows that Frank is the kind of person who even when trying to mollify a person manages to simultaneously insult and patronise them and everyone else in the room.

Keeping the momentum going, Frank asks the woman for her name (B5viii) and is genuinely surprised by the coincidence of finding another Helen in the room, leading to an improvised contextualisation move (B5ix) as he reacts to this (“{Frank looks back to previous audience member in confusion} Hold on [L(3):<book ends>]”) – this is necessary as to fail to react to this would read as disingenuous, though only an economy of words and reactions are needed, a mere acknowledgement enough to raise a laugh.

Frank follows this up with a topper in the form of an enquiry (B5x), improvising another line in search of further laughs (“Anybody else called Helen in tonight? [L(2)]”) before heading back into his prepared material with a contextualisation move (B5xi), setting up that his wife was also called Helen (or whatever name is given) followed by a further reinforcement of the same setup (“And uh, you do look a little bit like it actually [L(2)]”) before using an enquiry move (B5xii) for the punchline (“You’re not her are you? [L(2)]”) and an evaluation move (B5xiii) to add a topper that serves to enhance the laugh and also further delineate Frank’s character as an estranged husband (“No no, no Helen no no why would you break the habit of a lifetime and actually come and see one of my gigs [L(2)→w:L]”) before pulling it back with an apology and an admission of overreaction, however small (“Sorry Helen I’m projecting a little bit there I think [I]”).

Moving on to the next part, an extended enquiry move (B5xiv, Frank asks for a favourite song from Helen to make it up to her, before immediately becoming impatient (“It’s a little bit of a leading question there Helen [I], anything at all anything you like”) and when Helen does answer Frank stays silent for several seconds while staring, causing a large loss of focus for the audience – however, this serves to reinforce the punchline (“Mandy you say [L(4)]” – the punchline no matter what is said by the audience members) leading to one of the bigger laughs of the night. Frank finishes the move with a reiteration of his non-apology from earlier (“Well Helen, as I’ve been picking on you a little bit tonight [I]”) / “Here’s my version of Mandy just for you”) before leading into an enactment move (B5xv) where he sings a modified version of “Mandy” by Rod Stewart inserting Helen’s name in at the appropriate times (“Oh Helen [L]”) / “Well you came and you gave without tekin’

[L]”), changing the narrative to give some backstory (“And you left and shacked up with my brother [L(4)]”) before uttering the last note in a gravelly vibrato (“Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh Helenn [s→w:A6]”) and ending with a final acknowledgement move (B5xvi) to finish the interaction with Helen (“That was for you Helen you can keep that love”).



The perceived bit volatility for B5 is much greater than the previous bit, which is reflective of the increased pace of jokes, showing positive trends across the board in IS, VF and AE - with the only moment of levelling coming at through the direct audience interaction (B5xiv), though this is boosted by the solid punchline at the penultimate part of the move. punchline cascade turning into laughter and rolling from there.

Bit Six <sup>103</sup>		
Topic: Relationships	Forms: Crowd Work, Usurpation	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Failure, Ingroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Framing, Enquiry, Request, Enquiry, Evaluation, Enquiry, Request, Evaluation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Framing, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Evaluation	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

<sup>103</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 127-162

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B5 segues into B6 through the use of an evaluation move, specifically reiterating the earlier platitude of “nice to be here tonight ladies and gentlemen” before moving on to some more crowd work regarding relationships. This bit is another longer one, consisting of the following sixteen moves:

Objective Moves:

- i. Evaluation (127-128)
- ii. Framing (129-130)
- iii. Enquiry (131)
- iv. Request (132)
- v. Enquiry (133-134)
- vi. Evaluation (135-136)
- vii. Enquiry (137-139)
- viii. Request (140)
- ix. Evaluation (141-142)
- x. Enquiry (143-148)
- xi. Evaluation (149-150)
- xii. Framing (151-152)
- xiii. Contextualisation (153-154)
- xiv. Enquiry (155)
- xv. Contextualisation (156-161)
- xvi. Evaluation (162)

Frank again starts the bit with the same evaluation move as before (B6i), a motif that has come to denote a change of topic with a slight change of wording (“it’s very, very nice to be here tonight ladies and gents”). This then goes into a framing move introducing the topic of love and relationships, with a rhetorical question (B6ii) that sets the stage for audience engagement (“It’s a wonderful thing love isn’t it?”) before delineating character further with the punchline (“You know, while it lasts [l(2)]”). Frank adopts a critical field with this approach, and the tenors he employs revolve around failure and ingroup dynamics.

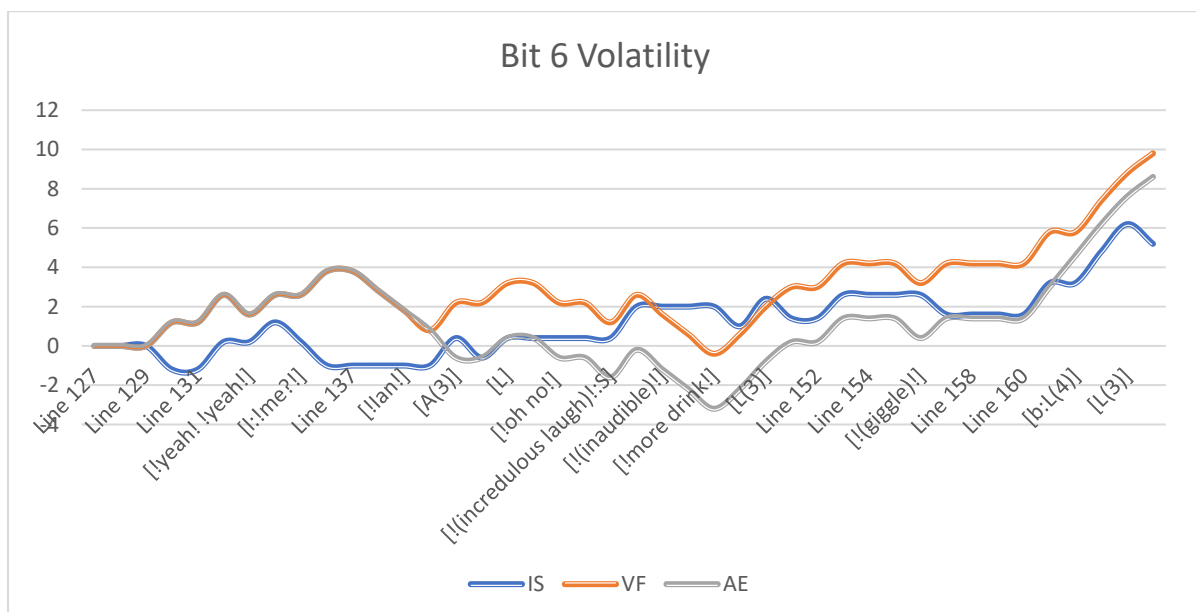
The following enquiry move (B6iii) seeks to establish the presence of couples in the audience (“have we got any couples in tonight ladies and gentlemen?”) before a request move (B6iv) where he clarifies what he is asking (“I know we’ve done the married bit but have we got any couples in just general couples in you don’t have to be married hands up, what are we thinking [L(3)]”) before requesting they raise their hands. Having got couples willing to participate to self-identify, Frank begins the audience interaction with an enquiry move (B6v) to establish his target (“You guys are a couple right? [!yeah! yeah!]”) and starts the banter by being doubtful of their viability as a pair (“Are you sure? [L]”). This doubt is doubled down on in the following evaluation move (B6vi) for comedic effect, where he implies that the mismatch is patently obvious (“It’s just, you know you’re punching well above your weight there son don’t you [!me?!] yeah”) before further pushing this using an unwieldy amalgamation of sports and romantic cliché (“I mean, you’re so out of your league I don’t even think you’re playing the sport you think you’re playing let’s be entirely honest [!(2)]”).

A functional enquiry move (B6vii) is then used to establish Claire and Ian’s names and that they have been together for a year, which leads to a request move (B6viii) for a round of applause for the couple which the audience obliges. Frank then uses an evaluation move (B6ix) to take light-hearted jabs at Ian’s appearance (“(inaudible)... A year... a year is a long time to put up with someone [!it is!]”/“especially someone who looks like Ian [L]”), setting an ingroup tenor and inciting laughter. Changing tack, Frank then uses an extended enquiry move (B6x) to try and “relate” to Ian specifically, setting up the premise (“Ian I’ve got a question for you tonight son”), expanding the context (“Right [!oh no!] You know you’ve been in a relationship a little while”) and then asking the question (“Would you say”/“that you understand women? [!(incredulous laugh)!:S→L(3)]”). By manipulating the ingroup dynamic in this way, Frank manages to get several interesting reactions from the audience, including an “oh no” from Ian and an incredulous laugh from Claire.

However, the effect is lessened somewhat by Ian’s lack of a clear vocal reaction, leaving Frank to have to fill in the blanks with the end of the enquiry move (“Is that a yes or a no? [!no!]”) and with the following evaluation move (B6xi), doubling down



on the nonsensical reaction that Ian gives (“[!more drink!] More drink [I], erm”/” No idea what that means but I’ll take it as a no [L(3)]”) in an attempt to maintain the audience focus and solidarity and not let this drift. Frank then goes into his prepared material, moving away from crowd work and starting with a framing move (B6xii) that further pushes the idea of ingroup solidarity with his shared confusion over women (“Cos I’m just like Ian you see, cos I don’t understand women [I]”/”I don’t think I’ll ever understand women if I live to be a hundred”), followed immediately by a contextualisation move (B6xiii) that adds the punchline (“Which if my doctors right, isn’t very likely [L(2)]”) and further contextualises his confusion by referencing the (then only mildly) dated erotic novel “Fifty Shades of Grey”, following it up with an enquiry move (B6xiv) to ensure the whole audience is on the same page (“Has everybody heard about this? 50 shades of gray?”) before using a contextualisation move (B6xv) to spoon feed the audience the context (“Now for those of you who haven’t heard of it it’s a book [!(giggle)!]”/”It’s a little bit saucy, a little bit kinky [I]”), the setup (“And I just didn’t know women were in to that kind of thing”) and finally the punchline (“Then I thought to myself, well Frank”/”it’s the 21<sup>st</sup> century”/” and if women want to read more power to them that’s what I say [L(4)→b:L(4)→L(4)]”), This combination of “ironic sexism” and usurpation receives a reaction of both hearty laughter and boos from the audience, causing Frank to add an improvised evaluation move (B6xvi) commenting on this to finish the bit (“That got a somewhat mixed reaction didn’t it [L(3)→I]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B6, the whole bit is volatile across the board, with a weak positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS) for only the second time in the performance and a drop towards Volatile (VF) and Active (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience in the first three-quarters of the bit before some sold laughs rally it in the last quarter. I would interpret this trend as a combination of two factors within the bit – the overuse of audience interaction, especially with the preceding bit being so crowd work focused, leading to a saturation of the technique and thus audience fatigue, coupled with the reticence Ian to give a coherent answer (B6x-B6xi) marking a low point of the trend which is reversed by Frank switching to the much stronger material that punctuated the last quarter of the set and brought the focus and expression back to the audience while building on that solidaristic feeling engendered by the ingroup approach.

<b>Bit Seven<sup>104</sup></b>		
Topic: Jokes	Forms: Joke-based, Exhibition	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Failure	Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Framing, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Framing, Evaluation, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Framing, Evaluation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Evaluation	
Fields: Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B6 segues into B7 through the use of an acknowledgement move (B7i) explicitly positions Frank as being there to tell jokes (70% of the way into his set) and uses this as the context for the bit, which consists of twenty-one objective moves making it the longest of the set:

- i. Acknowledgement (163-164)

<sup>104</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 163-218

- ii. Framing (165-166)
- iii. Contextualisation (167-169)
- iv. Enquiry (170-172)
- v. Evaluation (173)
- vi. Framing (174-178)
- vii. Evaluation (179-181)
- viii. Contextualisation (182-186)
- ix. Evaluation (187-190)
- x. Contextualisation (191)
- xi. Enquiry (192-193)
- xii. Evaluation (194)
- xiii. Framing (195-196)
- xiv. Evaluation (197-198)
- xv. Enquiry (199-201)
- xvi. Contextualisation (202-203)
- xvii. Framing (204-206)
- xviii. Evaluation (207-209)
- xix. Contextualisation (210-216)
- xx. Enquiry (217)
- xxi. Evaluation (218)

Frank begins the bit with an acknowledgement move (B7i) that foregrounds the joke-based form of the bit and serves to re-enforce Frank's "sontext" (as defined earlier, the context of a performers persona, for which facts have to ring true relative to the persona being portrayed on stage rather than being objectively true) as a seventies entertainer though his bizarre admission that he hasn't been doing his job ("Now I know what you're thinking ladies and gents you're thinking Frank"/"You haven't told a single joke yet"), setting the failure tenor of the bit. This is followed by a framing move (B7ii), reinforcing this odd admission for humorous effect ("and you'd be right, so [L(2)]") and prepping the audience for the change of pace in the jokes to come, spoken over the amusement of the bluntness of the previous line ("Here we go ladies and gentlemen").

Frank then follows up with a contextualisation move (B7iii) where he attempts to forge a witty metaphor but ends up creating a crude analogy, starting with a contextual setup (And to borrow a phrase from the adult entertainment industry") followed by a misdirect or faux-punchline ("Prepare yourself [L(2)]") that invokes an image of gritted teeth and then the true one ("Because they're all coming at once [L(3):<(audible disgust)>]") that provokes not only laughter but audible disgust from the audience at the crudeness of the image, cementing the antagonistic field of the bit.

The next enquiry move (B7iv) starts the high-status tenor with the cliché of the performer asking if a specific subset of audience fandom is in attendance ("...have we got any golf fans in tonight ladies and gents any golf fans in?") before being told the negative ("Nope no golf fans?") before completely subverting expectation in the following evaluation move (B7v) by replying in a strikingly blunt fashion ("Well you'll fucking hate this one then [L(3)→!clap!:L(2)]"). This then foregrounds the framing move used for the joke itself (B7vi), starting with another character delineating cliché of the seventies working-men's clubs style of comic ("There's this fella right there's this fella") and then telling a well-worn joke about a man who is pulled over by the police on the way home from his golf club while drunk, ending in the lines ("*too drunk to drive* says the man"/" I can barely putt [L(3)]"). However, the following evaluation move (B7vii) subverts the apparent simplicity of the joke, first of all unconventionally pointing out that fact ("Now that was a joke, some of you might have missed that [!yes!]") to a mild heckle from an audience member, but Frank goes on to expound on this and also show his disdain for (as he calls it) modern comedy – ("But"/" like so much of modern comedy nowadays it actually had *a point* to it as well right"), though this is with deliberate irony on behalf of the performer as the anti-comedy adjacent antagonism thus far displayed is anything but traditional.

Frank continues into a contextualisation move (B7viii), again driving home some more characterisation ("Back in my day"/"the seventies") before making a strange and unbelievable claim ("people would drink 10 pints and drive home"/" Safe as you like [L(3)]") and following this up with an evaluation move (B7ix) to tee up the punchline ("You know what the only difference between then and now is don't

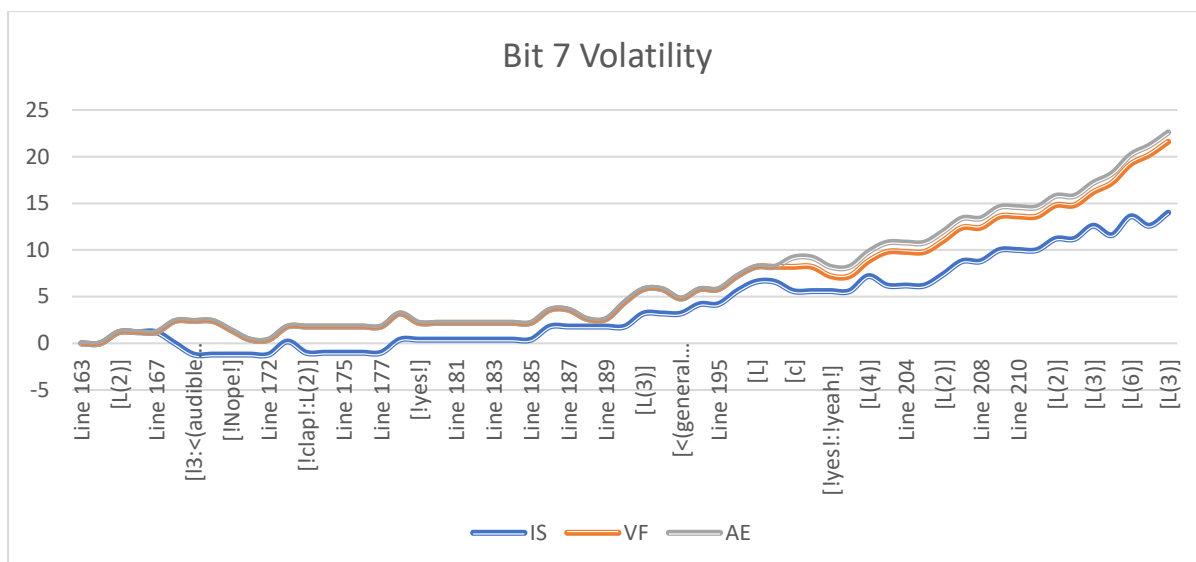
you?”). At the moment however, Frank is interrupted by an audience interjection (“[!you get caught!:!]”) causing him to have to defer the punchline in order to react (“No son, no”), pulling focus back to himself in order for the punchline to land with proper effect (“Practice [a:L5]”), finishing the joke with a contextualisation move (B7x) adding a topper (“You do anything enough you’re gonna get good at it, that’s [L(3)] all I’m saying”).

Again switching back to the cliché motif that Frank has set for the bit, Frank pulls another enquiry move (B7xi) in the same vein (“Have we got any music fans in tonight ladies and gents any music fans in?”) before another evaluation move (B7xii) in a mirror of the earlier, though not so blunt the invocation of this callback still raises a laugh (“A few more of you, you’ll like this one then [L]”). Frank then tells a short classic joke through the use of a framing move (B7xiii), consisting of a single-line setup and punchline (“I traded my wife’s piano, for a clarinet”/“because you can’t *sing* while playing the clarinet [L(3)]”) and quickly switches to an evaluation move (B7xiv) that serves to further delineate his backstory, getting a laugh for the first but not the second topper to the joke (“Probably shouldn’t have done that [L]”/“Probably why she left”). The cliché of the seventies performer is once again evoked by his next evaluation move (B7xv) starting with the concept of “blue” or adult material (“Bit of blue tonight ladies and gentlemen we all up for a bit of blue? [c]”), though despite the small cheer this is immediately followed up with another question (“We’re all consenting adults here aren’t we?”) and then followed up more insistently in a way that gets some members of the audience to react (“I said we’re all consenting adults here [!yes!:!yeah!] aren’t we?”).

The reason for this insistence is revealed in the next contextualisation move (B7xvi) where Frank makes an apology and a vague allusion to the investigations surrounding entertainers from the seventies, such as Operation Yewtree (“Yeah, sorry I’ve...”/“I’ve got to check that out nowadays because certain individuals that I grew up with have ruined it for the rest of us [L(4)→I]”). Immediately after this, he snaps back into joking mode with a framing move (B7xvii), using repetition to distance the setup from the previous joke so all the audience members are focused and listening (“In my opinion”/“In my opinion, sex, is like air”), continuing this

belabouring of the point with short pauses (represented in the transcription by commas) into the punchline for effect ("It's not important, until you're not getting any [L(2)]"). Once the laughter dies down from this, Frank switches back to picking on the audience with an evaluation move (B7xviii) singling out an audience member to imply that they don't have an active love life ("You look like know what I'm talking about son [L(3)]"), inverting this by insinuating that he may be just what ladies are after ("You know ladies... ladies like a little bit of beef don't they?") and then inverting it again in a double rugpull where he implies that he may be mistaken because he can't see the man properly ("Might be my glasses [L(2)]").

Turning wistful, in the follow-up contextualisation move (B7xix) Frank repeats the phrase in a thoughtful manner ("Like a little bit of beef"/"I used to like a little bit of beef") before contextualising it to the amusement of the audience ("You know on a Sunday like [L(2)]"). This is followed by a successful callback to a well-received joke from the beginning of the bit ("I'd come home from the pub"/"Driving [L(3)]") and then the final setup and punchline which receives one of the longest laughs of the performance, using as it does a play on the words "cold shoulder" ("And there'd be a hot lamb shank on the table [1]"/" and a cold shoulder in the kitchen [L(6)]"). With this climactic bit of character delineation reinforcing the failure tenor of the bit, Frank doubles down on the bathos with an enquiry move (B7xx) showing how sad his life has become ("I mean pot noodles just not the same is it? [1]") and a final evaluation move (B7xxi) that brings home this point to the degree of absurdity ("Even if you leave it out for a few days so you can carve it [L(3)]").



The perceived bit volatility for B7 is much greater than the previous bit, which is reflective of the increased pace of material, showing positive trends across the board in IS, VF and AE for the third time in the performance - with the only moment of disgust at the beginning of the bit showing any negative movement which soon recovers. Each punchline in itself is quite effective at building the momentum of the set, and the extraneous observations that Frank makes regarding the state of modern comedy and the state of his life serve as strong sontext delineators.

<b>Bit Eight<sup>105</sup></b>		
Topic: Personal Failure	Forms: Disclosure, Extension Kvetching	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation	
Fields: Self-deprecating	Exemplars Introduced: Resentful	Segue: Sequential

B7 segues into B8 through the use of a framing move that introduces the topic of personal failure in the form of disclosure through the discussion of both his

<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 219-248

divorce from his wife and the fall of his career. This bit uses the extension kvetching form to create a scenario to complain about and takes place over seven objective moves:

- i. Framing (219-220)
- ii. Evaluation (221-222)
- iii. Contextualisation (223-224)
- iv. Enquiry (225)
- v. Framing (226)
- vi. Contextualisation (227-232)
- vii. Evaluation (233-236)

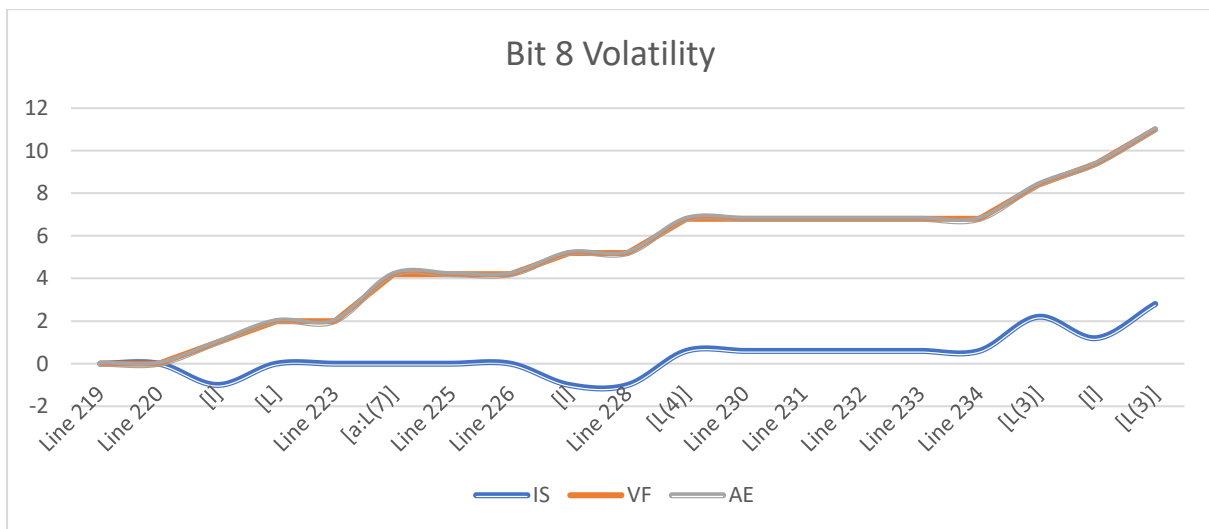
The initial framing move of the bit (B8i) marks a change in the demeanour of Frank, dispensing with the self-aggrandising bluster that marked the beginning of the piece and foregrounding the idea, at least from a scontext perspective, of honesty (“Do you know what I’m going to be honest with you tonight ladies and gents”/“Because you seem like a nice bunch”). This appearance of earnestness carries over into the following evaluation move (B8ii), at least for the first line (“My divorce is not going well [I]”) before the resentful side of Frank’s nature comes back to the fore in the form of a joke (“And that’s about as much sympathy as I am getting from her as well [L]”) and foregrounding this as the final exemplar of the performance. Frank leans heavily on the self-deprecating field of the bit going forward, with a quick and effective joke contained within a contextualisation move (B8iii) leading to the other big laugh of the performance, starting with the cliché of a divorced couple arguing over custody of the children (“I mean the main argument we’re having at the moment is er who gets the kids on weekends”) before subverting expectations with the punchline (“because I don’t want them [a:L(7)]”).

The next move, an enquiry (B8iv), is used to invoke the beginning of the kvetch form but provide the extension in order to do so, delineating character and providing the motivation for the imaginary complaints to follow (“I mean what happened to me ladies and gentlemen?”) followed by a framing move (B8v) that provides scontext (“Back in the late seventies I had everything, everything a man could want you know”) in order to make the contextualisation move (B8vi) work,



listing as it does various stereotyped items that one could imagine a person of Franks taste and upbringing prizing highly (“Cigars as long as your arm [I]”/“Camel Coat”) before building to his prize possession, something that in modern retrospect was unfashionable and widely derided (“A chocolate brown Austin Allegro [L(4)]”/“With walnut panelling”/“And a cream leather interior”), though not when seen through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia that Frank seems to be wearing (“beautiful that car was”).

This trip down memory lane is interrupted by Frank himself however, with a final evaluation move (B8vi) that bridges from the nostalgic (“I had to give it up though, if only I knew”) into the blunt reality of the situation (“If only I knew what a fucking nosedive my career was going to take back in the 1980s”) before switching back to self-deprecation with a line that turns the pathos into bathos in one fell swoop (“I would have gambled a lot less [L(3)→I]”) before finishing with an effective topper to highlight Franks simultaneous ignorance and acceptance of his own limitations (“or a lot more I was never very good at the odds [L(3)]”).



The perceived bit volatility for B8 shows very strong positive trends towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) while showing a more volatile up-and-down positive trend between Individualistic and Solidaristic (IS) as the jokes land to varying degrees throughout the narrative. The jokes that landed were strong and effective, but looking at this from personal experience I know that the intention was for there to be more recognised punchlines within the framing (B8iv) and

contextualisation (B8v) moves that comprised the nostalgia section, leading to weaker laughs overall due to the momentum not being built as effectively as it could have been.

<b>Bit Nine<sup>106</sup></b>		
Topic: Career Failure	Forms: Extension Kvetching, Inversion	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Acknowledgement, Contextualisation, Evaluation	
Fields: Antagonistic, Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B8 segues into B9 through the use of a framing move that introduces the topic of career failure through the forms of extension kvetching and inversion. The bit itself deals with a sensitive topic (racism) in what I feel with the benefit of six years of hindsight is a less than truly sympathetic way and contains a topper that I feel misses the mark of the inversion that I was going for in with the aim of making Frank look outdated rather than trivialising a genuine problem that is still experienced today. However, the aim of this thesis is to examine a performance artefact in its holistic entirety and to remove this from the transcript and the analysis would be disingenuous to the work being done here. This bit is self-contained and is intended to be the penultimate bit of the performance over five objective moves:

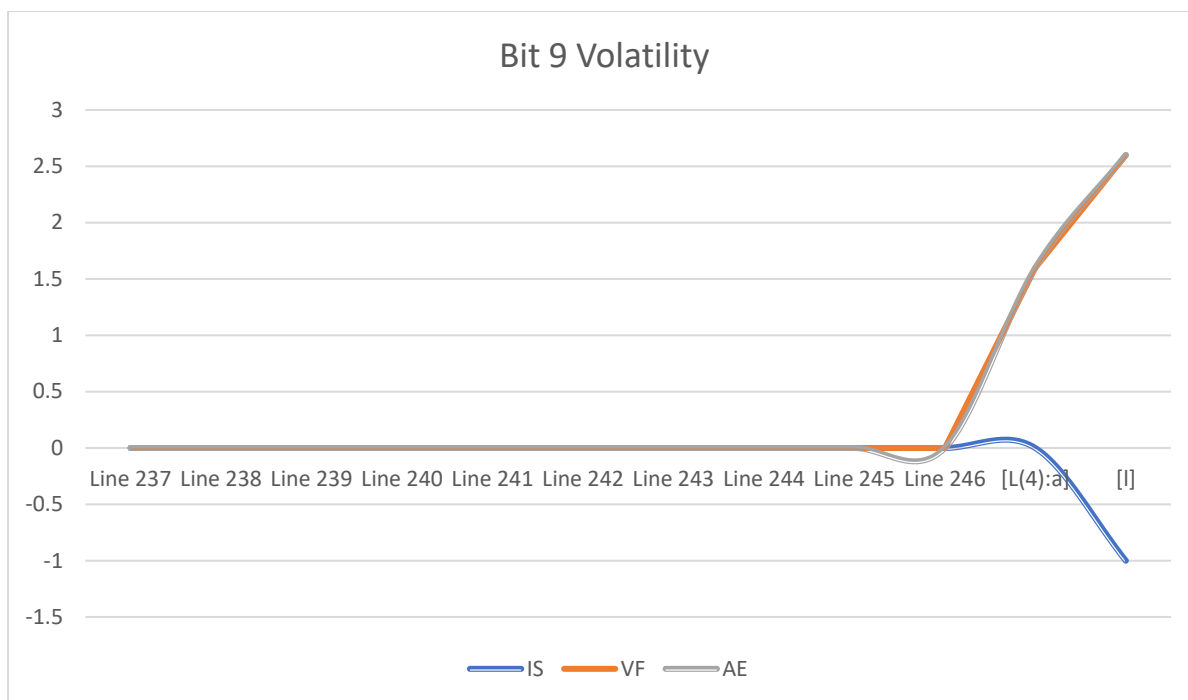
- i. Framing (237-238)
- ii. Evaluation (239)
- iii. Acknowledgement (240)
- iv. Contextualisation (241-246)

<sup>106</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 249-248

v. Evaluation (247-248)

Frank begins the bit with a framing move (B9i) stating his intention to leave shortly in a somewhat clumsy manner ("Now I'm going to finish in a minute ladies and gentlemen but"/"I've... I've got a couple of things to do before I go now"), unfortunately almost pre-empting his departure in the eyes of the audience and possibly making them less receptive to the next act as a result. He tries to pull this back with an evaluation move (B9ii) praising the acts to come ("you're all going to go home tonight you know you've got some wonderful acts coming up after me you'll have a lovely time") before moving into his pre-scripted material in an acknowledgement move (B9iii) that refocuses his point ("You're going to go home to your families") before again trying in a contextualisation move (B9iv) to invoke pathos and sympathy for his context and those like him ("but just spare a thought, for us club comics"/"Because"/" back in the 1980s we lost everything, you know") to establish once again the extension kvetching form previously invoked.

Frank, with sorrow in his voice, starts a narrative that is designed to tug at the heartstrings of the listeners and make them feel sorry for him while listening to it ("I bet none of you lot have ever had to go home to your kids"/"and say, sorry kids"/"but Christmas just isn't happening this year"). This sympathy is immediately shattered however by the final evaluation move (B9v) that uses the inversion form to highlight that Frank deserves everything that has happened to him and that he has not really learned anything from his experiences, pointing his anger at the wrong side of changing social mores ("Mainly because people don't find racism funny anymore [L(4):a]"). This inversion is immediately undercut however by the improvised topper that follows which has the unfortunate effect of trivialising the impact of this inversion and being blatantly insensitive rather than making Frank look the fool for his ignorance ("And that's a sentence I never thought I'd have to say in my entire life [I]").



With only two audience reactions in the entire bit, the perceived bit volatility of B9 is positive towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) and negative toward Individualistic (IS), with both the minor applause and laughter failing to show unanimous approval of the punchlines and thus not pushing towards Solidaristic.

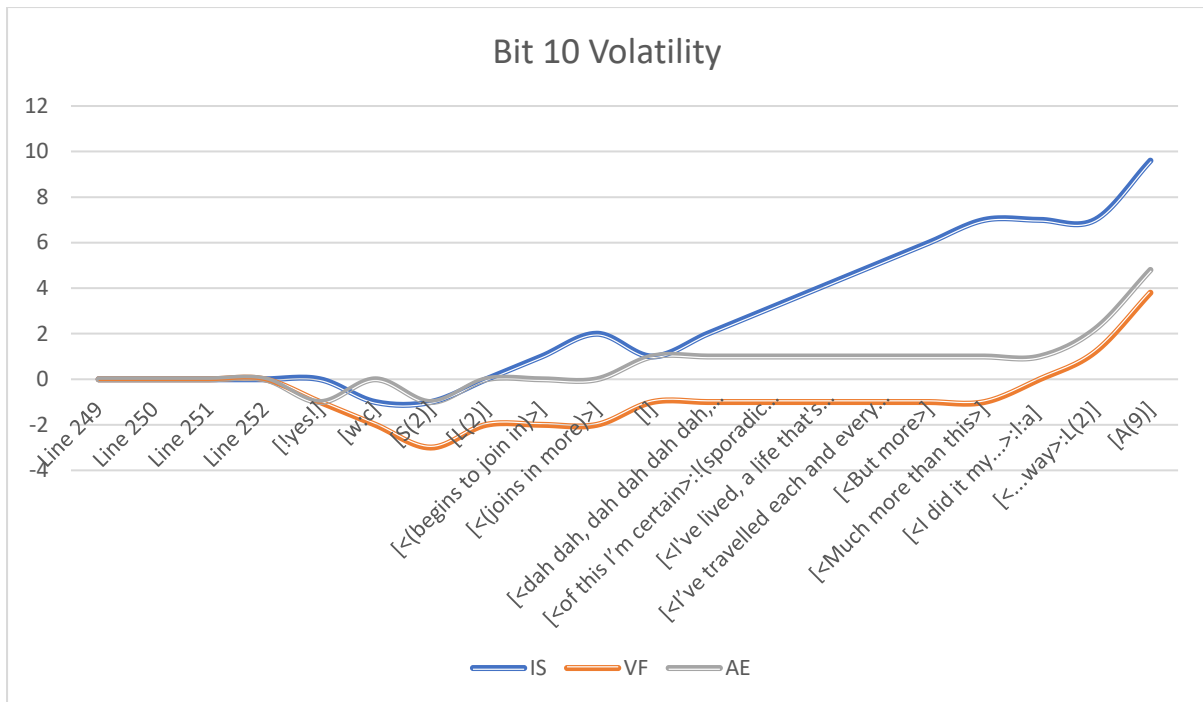
Bit Ten <sup>107</sup>		
Topic: Ending	Forms: Ending	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Request, Enquiry, Request, Enaction, Reintroduction	
Fields: Placatory	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Finish

B9 segues into B10 as Frank looks to reiterate his leaving and close the set with a song, creating a non-standard ending bit that nevertheless acts as a book-end to the song at the start, remains true to the context of his character and consists of six objective moves:

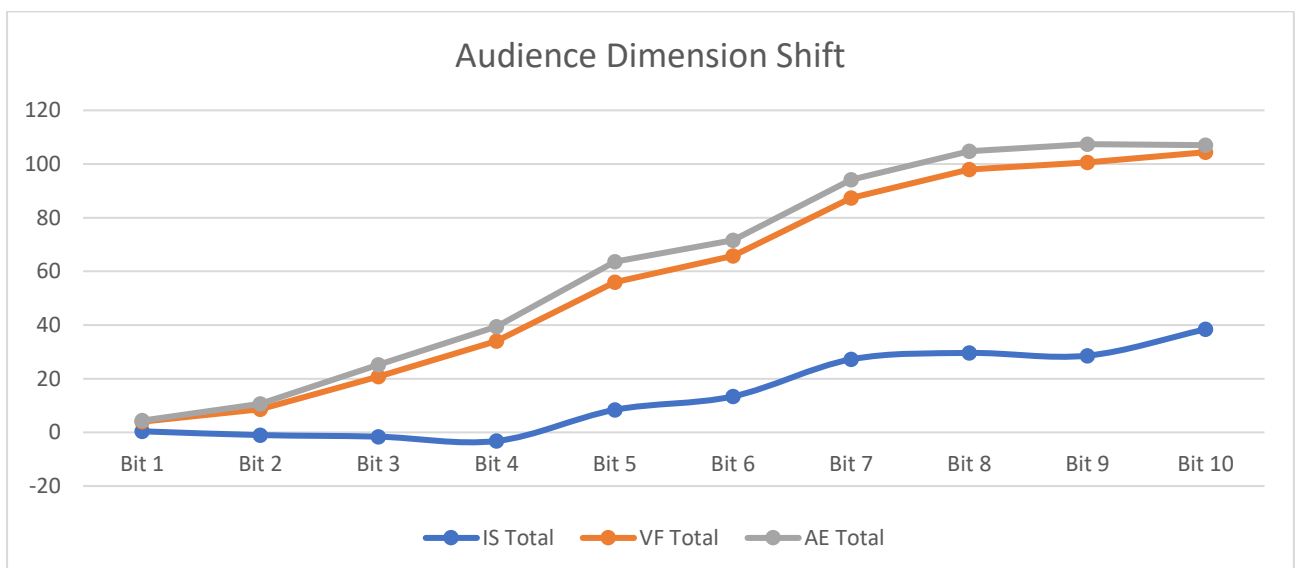
<sup>107</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frank Astaire* (2023) <[https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below\\_1.html](https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/disclaimer-and-acknowledgement-below_1.html)> [accessed 07 September 2023] - Line 249-267

- i. Evaluation (250)
- ii. Request (251-252)
- iii. Enquiry (253)
- iv. Request (254)
- v. Enaction (255-266)
- vi. Reintroduction (267)

Frank begins the closing bit of his performance with an evaluation move (B10i), noting that he was aiming for sympathy in the previous section (“I’m not going to leave you on a sad note ladies and gentlemen”) followed by a request move (B10ii), explaining what is about to happen and asking the audience to participate (“I’m going to go out on a song and I want you all to join in/” because it’s one that’s very very close to my heart so here we go”). An enquiry move (B10iii) and a request move (B10iv) serve to focus the audience on what is about to happen (“You all ready [!yes!]”), though the requested cheer drops away quicker than anticipated leaving a couple of seconds silence before the next move (“Give us a cheer [w:c→S2]”). The enaction move (B10v) where the song “My Way” by Frank Sinatra is performed goes as expected, with the audience joining in with increasing solidarity– only two notable moments from a performance perspective stand out, the failed setup and punchline where the audience fail to laugh (“(sings) dah dah, dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah dah [<dah dah, dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah dah>]”/“(sings) of this I’m certain [<of this I’m certain>:!(sporadic clapping)!]”) and the final two lines, where Frank holds his off-key note until he runs out of breath (“(sings) I did it my [<I did it my...>:!a] (holds note until out of breath(12))”/“(Gasps) way [<...way>:L(2)→A9]”). Finally, he ends with a reintroduction move (B10vi) and leaves the stage during the final applause (“Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen I’ve been Frank Astaire you’ve been wonderful”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B10, we see a largely neutral trend for AE and an initially negative trend for VF due to the passive experience of singing on these dimensions, with the experience neither strengthening nor weakening them from the ideal. In contrast, a strongly positive trend towards Solidaristic as a result of the same experience, with more and more of the audience joining in the singing as it went along leading to a perceived unification of purpose towards the end. The misjudged moment of silence as part of the second request move (B10iv) shows as a dip in all three dimensions as silence in the context of a traditional stand-up comedy performance is generally unhelpful.



Overall, the plotted audience dimensional shift shows strong positive trends towards the idealised Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) and a weakly positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS), with VF and AE following each other closely in peaking early (B1-B5), then becoming a more gradual curve towards the end of the set (B6-B10). With the IS trend, this falls initially due to Frank's attitude toward the audience and the unconventional nature of his introduction and opening bits (B1-B4), before picking up across the joke-heavy bits (B5-B6) and then trending towards the neutral for the end of the performance (B7-B10).

### Narrative Level Analysis – Mae Martin<sup>108</sup>

Structurally, the set follows the standard genre phase structure with Martins 8 bits in 7:13 giving a 00:54.13 per bit average (pba), Martin speaks 1398 words for a wpm average of 193.7 – this puts them into the average speed bracket for conversational speech of 190 to 230 wpm. Narratively, Martin follows a sequential bit structure with standard segues between each bit and uses the verbal channel throughout.

<b>Bit One<sup>109</sup></b>		
Topic: Intro	Forms: Introduction	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Low Status, Outgroup	Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Enquiry, Introduction, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enquiry	
Fields: Placatory	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

For their introduction sequence (B1), Martin follows the standard five objective moves:

- i. Acknowledgement (1-3)
- ii. Enquiry (4-6)

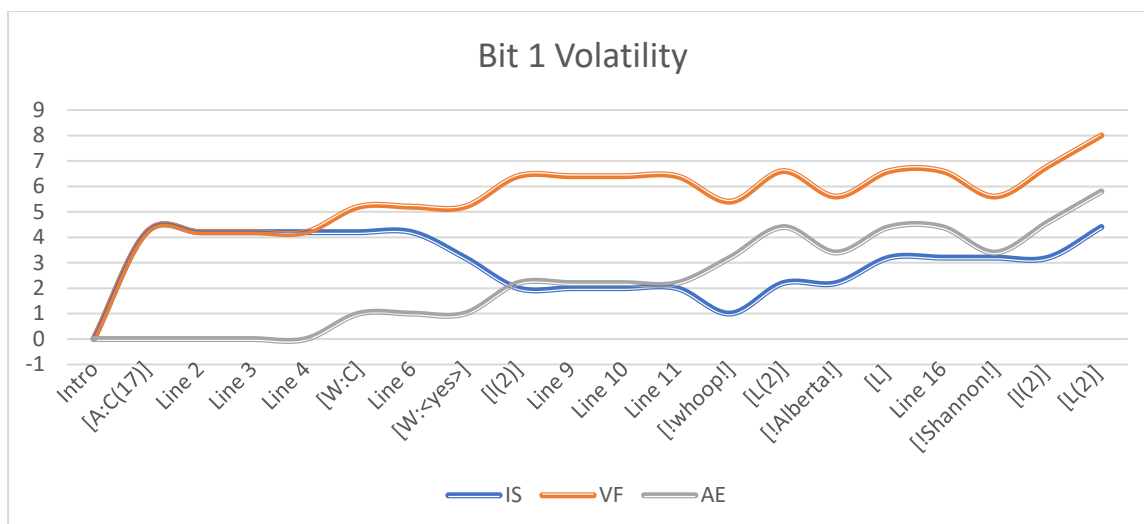
<sup>108</sup> Transcript available via Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

<sup>109</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 1-19

- iii. Introduction (7-9)
- iv. Evaluation (10)
- v. Contextualisation (11-19)

The first move (B1i) acknowledges the audience's applause with waving, smiling and an excited greeting ("Hi!"), followed immediately by (B1ii) a pair of casual rhetorical questions aimed at establishing familiarity ("Hi guys, how's it going?" / "This is very exciting isn't it? Um"). Martin then introduces himself (B1iii) coupled with two further questions as to the audience's health and by doing so leans towards the placatory side of the field in their intro and by consequence establishes a low-status tenor for the rest of the bit, re-enforced by the awkward opening non-sequitur that receives only a minor response (1a-1b). Plunging ahead, they counter with an evaluation move (B1iv) which simultaneously explicitly thanks the audience for having them in the country and introduces their outgroup membership as a Canadian - the first of their ingroup\outgroup identities which helps the audience make a relative tenor contextualisation. This is then built upon with a longer contextualisation move (B1v) which serves to establish Martin's worldview as well as their nationality through dialogue with the audience – once it has been established that there is a fellow Canadian in the audience, the politeness of their approach to the interaction ("Oh really? {She looks to the source of the response} Do we know each other? [L(2)]" / "Nice to meet you what's your name? [!Shannon!]" / "Hey Shannon, Cool {shrugs} [l(2)]") shows they have respect for others, but this is coupled with an immature irreverence and awkwardness ("Don't know I'm not going to {laughs nervously} talk to you anymore um [L(2)] {laughs nervously}") that highlights their relative youth and inexperience.





Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B1, there is a strong overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a more volatile trend between Individualistic and Solidaristic (IS). The good will of the introduction coupled with the earnest politeness of Martin’s initial approach helped this trend towards idealisation within the audience, and despite some awkward interaction with an audience member (which can reduce both the solidarity and expressiveness of an audience) the regular and active laughs received during the contextualisation move (B1v) helped to offset any trend towards the antithetical in the audience as a whole.

Bit Two <sup>110</sup>		
Topic: Parents	Forms: Phenomenological Commonality	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Request, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced: Childish	Segue: Sequential

This bit (B1) segues directly into the next (B2) using repetition, re-referencing the previous evaluation move (B1iv) as a framing move (B2i) by the restatement of

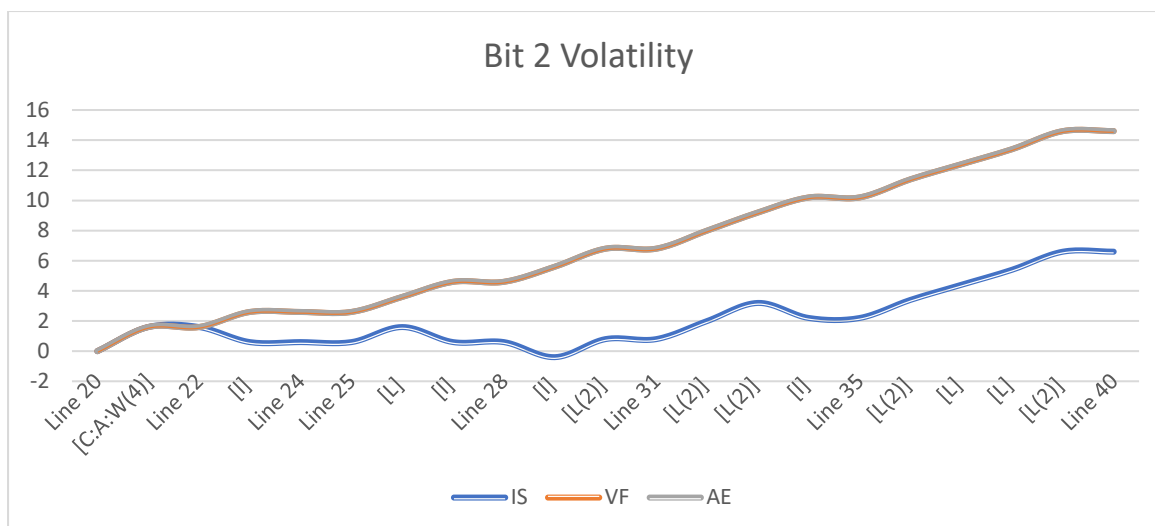
<sup>110</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 20-40

the excitement they have for being in England. A standard contextualisation bit (B2) within the material phase structure, it consists of four objective moves:

- i. Framing (20)
- ii. Request (21)
- iii. Evaluation (22)
- iv. Contextualisation (23-40)

The initial framing move (B2i) is a direct reaction to the previous dialogic interaction with Shannon, which refocuses the audience and provides context for the material to come. The following request move (B2ii) serves a dual purpose - to create the tenor framing of a phenomenologically common ingroup experience (the concern of a close family member and the loving exasperation that comes with it) and to reunite the audience as a collective by exhorting them to cheer of this commonality, re-enforced by Martin's affirmation through an evaluation move (B2iii) ("*Please.. They're the best they're so worried about me living overseas*") that contextualises the following material as being a humorously affectionate pastiche rather than blunt criticism.

With concentration and background established, the jokes of the bit are clustered in the larger contextualisation move (B2iv) where Martin carefully builds one of the central themes for the narrative, that of their overprotective mother, through deliberate but initially subtle characterisation that establishes the critical field of the bit. The material here remains conversational and dialogic, with each setup serving to provide context for this character and reinforce the ingroup experience. This also serves to highlight and confront Martin's perceived youth based on their appearance – in a necessary step to avoid assumptions of inexperience and naivety, they instead opt to exemplify childishness by highlighting the unconsciously infantilising influence that parents can have on their children while pushing back against this to establish their credentials as a legitimate opening act.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B2, there is a strong overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a weaker but still positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS). The second objective move (B2ii) requesting action from the audience serves to push for a positive start in the trend and acts as a focussing counterpoint to the relative volatility of the end of the last bit. The fourth objective move (B2iv) provides most of the upward trend with a series of solid laughs bringing the audience together and showing the effectiveness of the phenomenologically common ingroup form and tenor that Martin adopts for this material.

Bit Three <sup>111</sup>		
Topic: Relationships	Forms: Disclosure, Phenomenological Commonality	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Request, Evaluation, Enquiry, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Self-deprecation	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

<sup>111</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 41-59

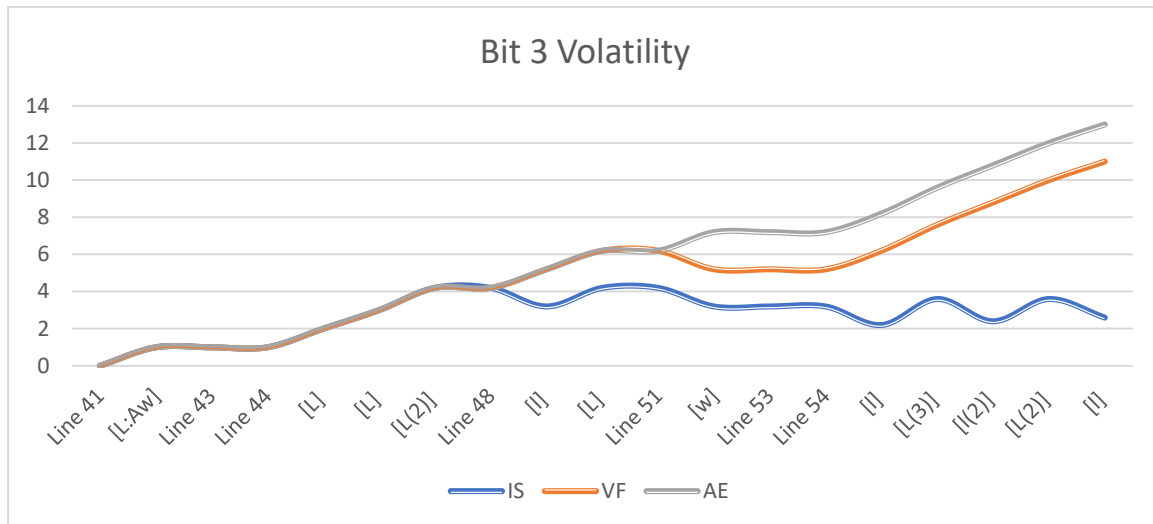
B2 segues into B3 through a re-enforcement of the phone call motif in the initial framing move of the bit (B3i) which introduces the next topic of relationships over six objective moves:

- i. Framing (41)
- ii. Request (42)
- iii. Evaluation (43-51)
- iv. Enquiry (52)
- v. Evaluation (53-56)
- vi. Contextualisation (57-59)

The initial framing move having introduced the topic, Martin then makes a request move (B3ii) by sarcastically chastising the audience for their lack of sympathy, both for humorous effect and to refocus the audience on the change of topic away from the previous characterisation. The next nine lines form an evaluation move (B3iii) and shift the comic form to the more personal and reflective disclosure and the field to self-deprecation – this evaluation of Martin’s own immaturity (“I Um... Thanks it was a real... it was a *three year* reliaish” / “One of the early signs you’re not mature enough to be in a long term relaish is you are abbreviating the *word* relationship [L]”) serves as both an expression of worldview and a form of sociocultural criticism establishing the tenor of failure for the bit. The use of clichés maintains the conversational register and helps get some solid laughs from the perceived personal disclosures confessed as if to friends, lending trust and credence to the following impromptu survey enquiry (B3iv).

This move, actively asking which members of the audience are single, helps to facilitate the switch in comic form from disclosure to phenomenological commonality despite the trend towards Individualistic and Volatile that such surveys tend to produce (effectively dividing the audience by excluding, however briefly, the non-single people for that move). The next objective move (B3v) switches back to evaluation but continues the field and tenor of self-deprecation and failure under a sense of commonality within banality (“The only time that I really feel *alone*” / “Is when I’m trying to put a *duvet cover* on a *duvet* [L(3)]”) leading into a final contextualisation move (B3vi) that juxtaposes this banality against the unexpected

ennui of the final three lines (“Isn’t that the... It’s the *loneliest task* [l(2)] I don’t...something about it is so bleak”/“ I get halfway through doing that I’m like (disturbed) “I’m going to go write my will” [L(2)]/“ I don’t...“I’m going to sleep in the bathtub tonight” [l]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B3, there is a strong overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience and a small positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS), though this becomes more volatile towards the end from the enquiry move onwards (B3vi-B3vi). The most stable trend towards idealised comes within the second and third objective moves (B3ii-B3iii), with a series of strong, solid laughs during the disclosure section of the bit uniting the focus of the audience behind Martin.

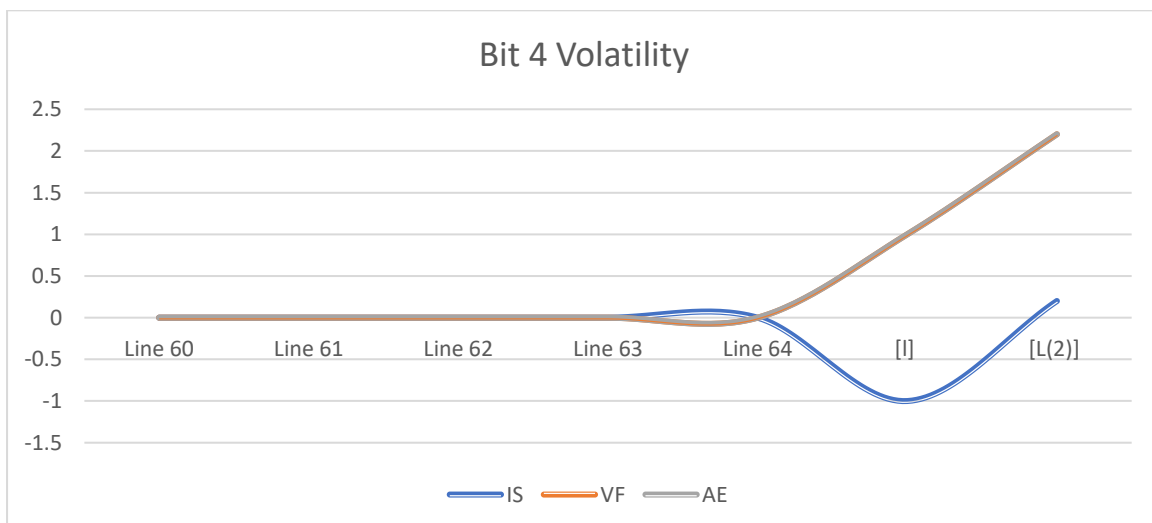
Bit Four <sup>112</sup>		
Topic: Parental Judgement	Forms: Phenomenological Commonality	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Contextualisation, Framing	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

<sup>112</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 60-66

B3 segues to B4 via a contextualisation move (B4i), reintroducing the character of their mother to recreate the tenor framing of a phenomenologically common ingroup experience through the cliché of going home after a breakup. This bit is the shortest of the performance, consisting of two objective moves:

- i. Contextualisation (60-62)
- ii. Framing (63-66)

Martin stumbles slightly getting their words in order for the contextualisation move (B4i) but puts particular deliberate emphasis on the idea of parental criticism to counter-highlight the critical tenor of the bit (“but my mum I went home erm to...to...”) / “visit Canada after my breakup and my mum used the opportunity of my breakup to, like *broach* some topics with me erm”), before using a framing move (B4ii) to explicitly reference their bisexuality (“because I was in a relationship with a woman and my mum was like, she was like”) and call-back to the character of their mother through her voice and mannerisms. The pacing of this section is much slower compared to the previous three bits, which much more build-up to the final punchline, and demonstrates how Martin has built up enough trust with the audience regarding the competence of their primary identity (shared with all other performers, that of “stand-up comedian”) and is able to start expanding on other aspects of identity that they wish to bring to the fore.



The perceived bit volatility for B4 is much lower than the other bits due to the longer build-up, with an eventual neutral trend on IS and positive trends on VF and

AE. Although there are fewer data points in this section, the fact that the audience can maintain focus, engagement, and solidarity for this comparatively longer section is indicative of Martin's craft in cultivating an effective performative dialogue with the audience.

<b>Bit Five<sup>113</sup></b>		
Topic: Sexuality	Forms: Phenomenological Difference	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical, Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B4 segues into B5 using a framing move, specifically juxtaposing the embarrassment of discussing one's dating life with a parent against the self-deprecating comment of "An... an... an eclectic group of very.. *lucky* men {giggles} [L]". The structure of this bit is compact, with three objective moves:

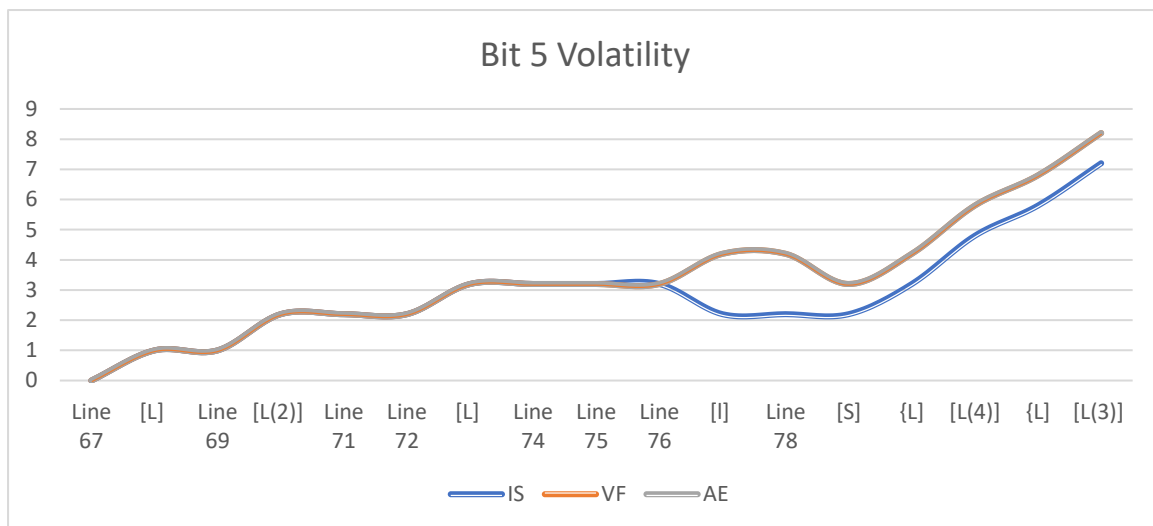
- i. Framing (67-68)
- ii. Contextualisation (69-77)
- iii. Enaction (78-82)

The start of the bit also serves to juxtapose generational attitudes towards sexuality without explicit mention of this – the framing of their mother's binary approach is contrasted against the more open approach that Martin advocates (albeit in a tongue-in-cheek way) with the material on Tinder in the contextualisation move (B5ii). This forms a thematic bridge between the framing (B5i) and enaction (B5iii) moves of the bit, reversing the narrative focus from adult judgement to peer judgement.

The contextualisation move of the bit (B5ii) serves as a way for Martin to delineate context for themselves – starting with a self-deprecating joke about getting

<sup>113</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 67-82

Tinder before the relationship had ended (“All right sorry, slightly *before* I was single [L(2)]”) which once again highlights Martins immaturity before moving on to the revelation that they are interested in dating men and women. This is then recontextualised in the light of peer judgement with the self-deprecating setup of how their friends were annoyed over this leading into the enaction move (B5iii), resolving this through an enacted conversation where Martin (through the amalgamated character of her friends) accuses themselves of lying with their hair (“I was like “How did I lie?! I didn’t mean to!” but they were like |(voice wavering)“you lied with your hair”| [L(3)]”), marking them at this moment as part of the outgroup due to assumptions of sexuality based on appearance.



The perceived bit volatility for B5 is much greater than the previous bit, which is reflective of the increased pace of jokes, showing positive trends across the board in IS, VF and AE - with the only moment of awkward silence at the beginning of the punchline cascade turning into laughter and rolling from there. The extended enaction move (B5iii) is the most effective of the bit, with a laugh for every spoken line building momentum toward the climax of the performance.



<b>Bit Six<sup>114</sup></b>		
Topic: Heartbreak	Forms: Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High-status	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Critical, Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B5 segues into B6 through the use of a framing move that introduces the topic of heartbreak in the form of disclosure through the introduction of Martin’s first boyfriend, Ian Peach, and the teenage angst and awkwardness associated with early relationships. This bit is self-contained on the face of it, though in the longer narrative structure this is the first part of the setup for the climax over three objective moves:

- i. Framing (83-86)
- ii. Evaluation (87-92)
- iii. Contextualisation (93-98)

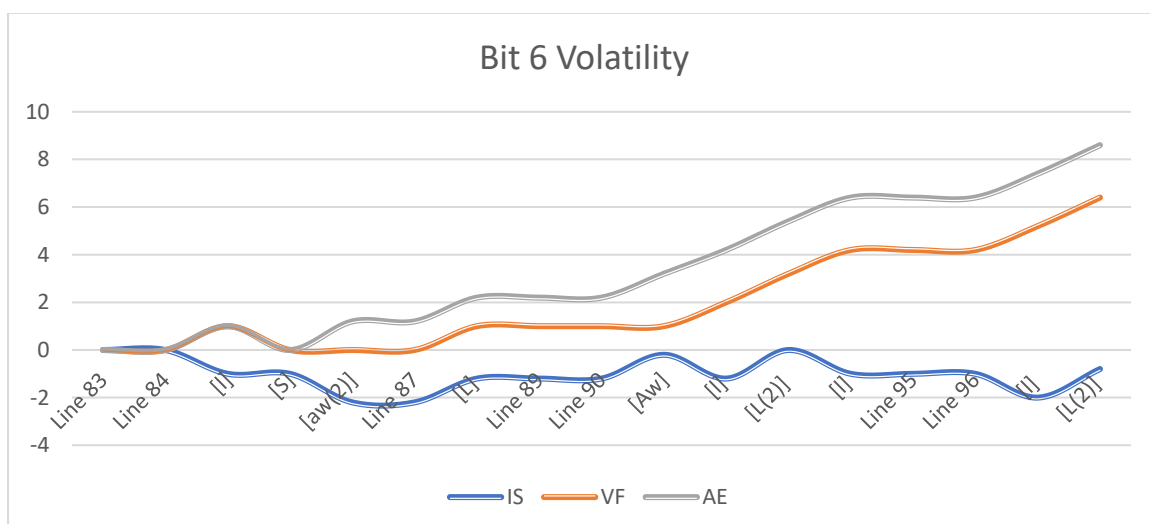
The introduction of Ian Peach (B6i) serves to frame not only the topic but the disclosure form itself, containing as it does the full context of the story in condensed form – a beginning (“Yeah but I did...I... my first boyfriend when I was 13 his name was Ian Peach”), middle (“I think we only hung out like *twice* [I] but we were in... we were in love”) and end (“And erm... Ian Peach broke up with me on *speakerphone* while all of his *friends were laughing*, they were room laughing [S→aw(2)]”). This complete framing within three lines is important and serves as a narrative level setup (as compared to a material level setup) that later moves can refer to without having to reiterate the detail, thus allowing for the desired punchline cascade.

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<sup>114</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023)  
<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 83-98

This narrative efficiency is effectively leveraged in the next move, evaluation (B6ii) as Martin turns the largely nonplussed reaction of the audience into high-status criticism and passionate support for their own point of view (“Yeah thanks ten of you(!) what eighty percent of you are like”/“(nonplussed)”yeah, fine, that seems...” [L]”/“That seems normal.. that’s...”|”/“No it was the absolute worst it was so harsh”). This berating of the audience again serves a purpose beyond laughter, acting as an (albeit mildly risky) strategy to sway audience opinion quickly by making them reactive to their own passivity by portraying it as negative, siding with Martin more readily than they would otherwise in the time available. The emphasis on the “harshness” of the action is juxtaposed in turn with romantic cliches (“And he had brought a CD player in and he was playing our *song*, over the phone... which was... [Aw]”) that aids in making the opinions behind the evaluation clear – the interposing of reality over expectations underscoring the palpable feelings of betrayal and disappointment.

The final contextualisation move (B6iii) is where most of the punchlines of the bit lie as a direct consequence of the previous objective moves – the establishment and re-enforcement of the negative experience surrounding the circumstances of the breakup giving emotional weight and sincerity to the remembrance of the breakup itself despite the occasional flashes of self-deprecating irreverence that serve as the punchlines (That was our song. Because we slow danced to it at a party and he got a semi, so that was our song [L(2)]”/“I’m... {makes pained noise} I’m over it, *now* [I]”/“ Like I *rarely* discuss it publicly [L(2)]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B6, there is a strong overall positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) within the collective behaviour of the audience but for the first time in the performance, there is a very weak negative trend towards Individualistic (IS). I would interpret this trend as a combination of two factors within the bit – the use of a framing move (B6i) followed immediately by an evaluation (rather than contextualisation) move (B6ii) means that the evaluation has to be done with a lack of finer context in an attempt to guilt the audience over to side, and this leads to smaller (and thus less cohesive) laughs which are indicative of less Solidaristic audience. This is not to say that laughs are absent from the final contextualisation move of the bit (B6iii), but their sporadic peaks and troughs point to an audience digesting material rather than reacting to it.

<b>Bit Seven<sup>115</sup></b>		
Topic: Public Embarrassment	Forms: Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup, Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

B6 segues into B7 through the use of a change of framing (almost a non-sequitur apart from the linked ideas of speaking publicly) that switches from the past to the more recent present through the context of a magazine interview and continues the disclosure form established in the previous bit. At twenty-one lines total, this bit is the longest of the performance and is a marked change of pace after the compactness of the previous three bits, containing as it does the climax of the piece over four objective moves:

- i. Framing (99-100)
- ii. Contextualisation (101 -104)
- iii. Evaluation (105-110)

<sup>115</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 99-120

iv. Contextualisation (111-120)

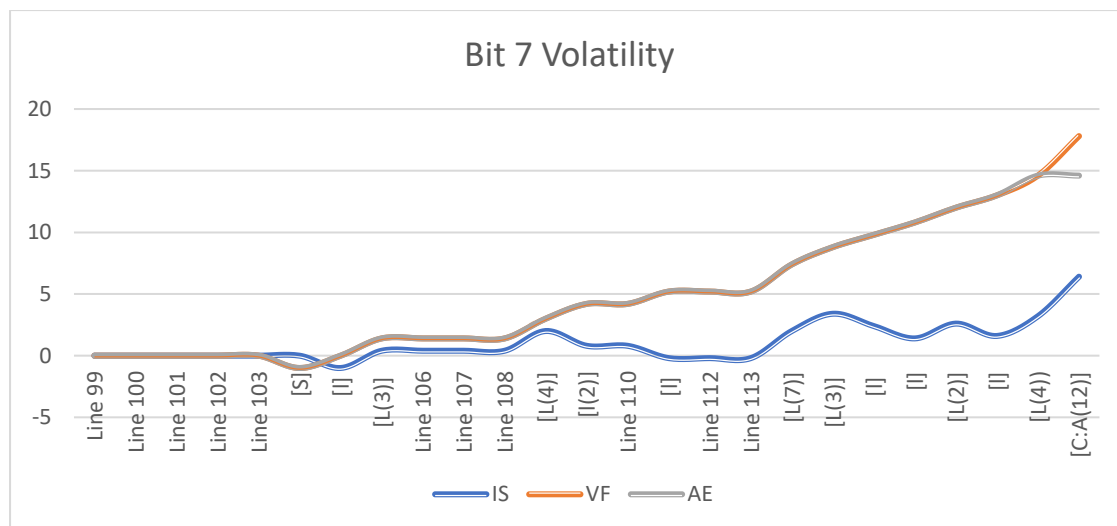
The initial framing move (B7i) is very short, consisting of two lines of purely informational content that inform the audience of the most pertinent facts i.e., time and place (“But um... I was doing an interview recently for a... like a magazine”) and structure (“And the structure of the interview was ten rapid fire questions”). This, coupled with the ending of the previous story outlining public embarrassment, sets the stage for the final section to tie everything together at the climax.

The following contextual move (B7ii) establishes the juxtaposition between expectation (“So they were like “This will be really fun, it’s word association”) and the reality (“We get to the *final question* and they’re like |(upbeat) “last question, rapid fire, why are you *gay?*”|{shakes head in disbelief}[S→I]”) of the questioning, with the banality of the intervening questions serving to heighten the punch of being asked such an intensely personal question from an outgroup perspective. The casualness with which this question is presented as being asked serves to highlight the hypocrisy (however well-meaning the interviewer may have been) between how heterosexual and homosexual people are viewed – that heterosexuality is seen as the default state of being therefore there must have been a conscious, intellectual process behind one’s sexual orientation other than this rather than it just being. This again shows Martin approaching from an outgroup tenor in terms of relative experience, highlighting something that many in the audience may not have even encountered or considered within their day-to-day lives.

With this framing and contextualisation in place, Martin moves on to evaluation (B7iii) and becomes more self-deprecating, showing their own shock and panic at the implications of the question through both verbal (“What do... As a rapid fire. [L(3)] question, and I was like” / “Panicking! I think if I’d had *any* time to like, think it over”) and physical (“{shakes head up and down and gurgles}”) means. This moment of paralysing indecision is juxtaposed against the hindsight Martin now possesses and serves to again underline their true feelings on the matter – the sense they could have come up with something if given enough time and notice (“I would have come up with something, *vaguely* progressive like “I think labels can be divisive and, I don’t feel the need to identify as anything other than a *human*

*being*”). Instead, the self-deprecation comes to a climax with the clumsy non-sequitur (at least in the context of the interview) mentioning the previously mentioned Ian Peach in grade nine.

The final move of the bit (B7iv) recontextualises this answer for the penultimate punchline of the set, as Martin explains that in a final twist, the magazine has misquoted them and they are now on record as giving a strange and nonsensical answer (“And I’m now on record as saying in answer to the question “Why are you gay?”/” They’ve put “maybe *eating a peach* in grade nine” [L(7)] {covers mouth with hand}”). This punchline invokes the largest and longest laugh of the performance (roughly seven seconds) enhanced by a tag re-enforcing the mistake (“It’s.. the *worst* misquote [L(3)]”) extending the laugh for a further three seconds. This context being established, Martin begins to tie up their routine by making a call back to the character of their mother, invoking her sense of overly-involved concern, her trademark catchphrase of “Oh my god” and her incredulous approach to the world before finishing with another example of generational misunderstanding and physical characterisation (“I don’t understand we gave your *brother* the same *peaches*” [L(4)] {closes eyes in pained expression}|”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B7, there is once again a strong positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) as would be expected for the climax of a performance, and a weakly positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS) with some impressive laughs rounding out the penultimate bit of the set. In my

experience, IS is the most volatile of the audience dimensional variables within normal performance parameters so to keep the trend largely positive throughout the performance demonstrates Martin’s skill as a performer, leveraging the good will of the audience even in the slower sections.

<b>Bit Eight<sup>116</sup></b>		
Topic: Ending	Forms: Ending	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Reintroduction, Acknowledgement	
Fields: Placatory	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Finish

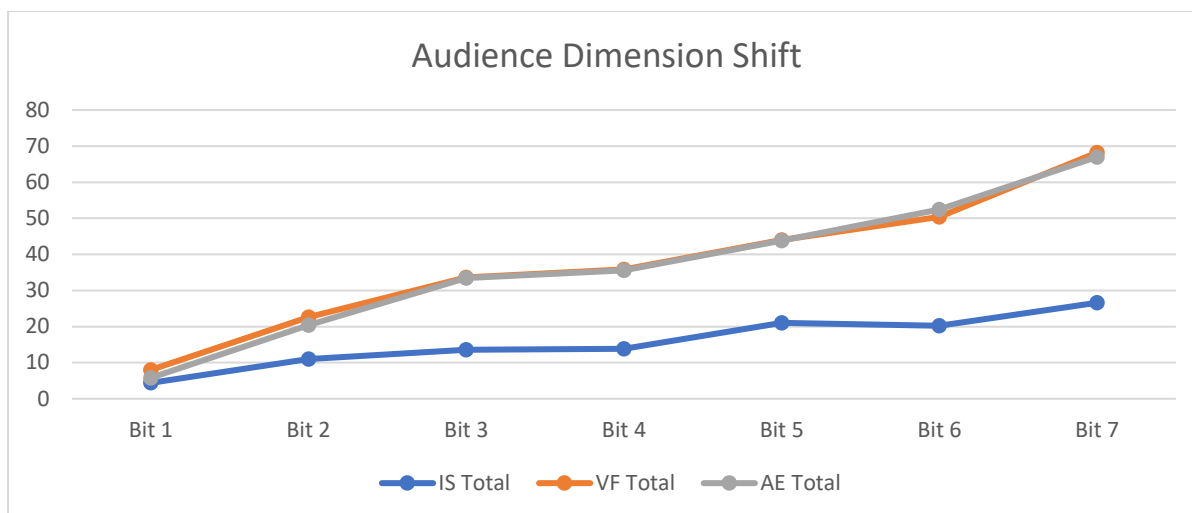
B7 segues into B8 as a natural conclusion of the set and follows the standard ending sequence (see Figure 10):

- i. Evaluation (121)
- ii. Reintroduction (121)
- iii. Acknowledgement (121-122)

To finish the performance, Martin uses their evaluation move (B8i) to praise the audience (“Guys you’ve been so nice...”), followed by a reintroduction move (B8ii) to signal the end of the performance (“...I’ve been Mae Martin...”) and a final acknowledgement move (B8iii) to thank the audience and make their exit (“...thank you very much {waves with left hand over head}”). Unusually for a mediated performance, the edit shows Martin's full exit from the stage, including the replacement of the microphone and stand for the next act as would be commonplace within a club, and with a final wave of their hand, they exit the stage to applause.

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<sup>116</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Mae Martin* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/mae-martin.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 121-122



Overall, the plotted audience dimensional shift shows strong positive trends towards the idealised Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) and a weakly positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS), with VF and AE following each other closely in peaking early (B1-B3), then becoming a more gradual curve towards the end of the set (B4-B7). With the IS trend, the rise is more gradual (B1-B4), with a peak of full room laughs at B5 then trending towards the neutral for the end of the performance (B6-B7).

### Narrative Level Analysis – Nish Kumar<sup>117</sup>

Structurally, the set follows the standard genre phase structure with Kumar's 13 bits in 19:55 giving a 01:31.92 per bit average (pba), Kumar speaks 3890 words for a wpm average of 195.3 – this puts him into the average speed bracket for conversational speech of 190 to 230 wpm. Narratively, Kumar uses the verbal channel throughout and follows a mostly sequential bit structure with standard segues between each bit, with the exception being the transition between bit eleven and bit thirteen, with bit twelve nested in between.

### **Bit One<sup>118</sup>**

<sup>117</sup> Transcript available Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

<sup>118</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 1-13

Topic: Intro	Forms: Introduction	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Ingroup	Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Introduction, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Evaluation	
Fields: Critical, Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

For his introduction sequence (B1), Kumar employs the following five objective moves, following the standard introduction sequence (see Figure 9):

- i. Acknowledgement (3)
- ii. Introduction (5)
- iii. Enquiry (6-8)
- iv. Contextualisation (9-10)
- v. Evaluation (11-13)

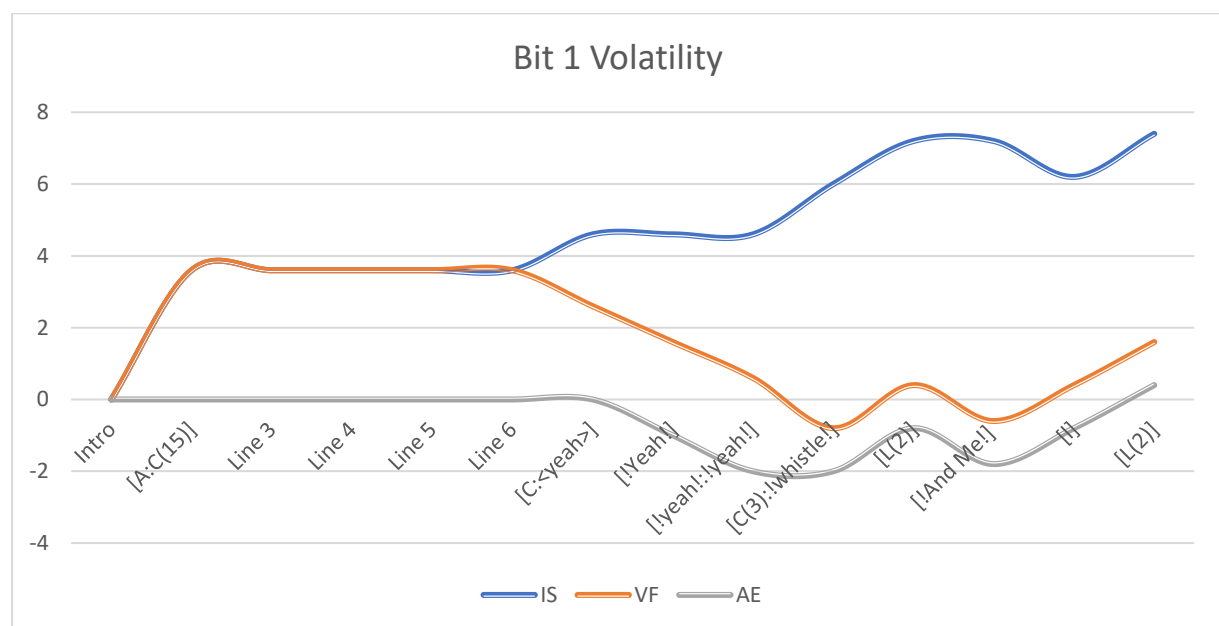
In the first move (B1i), Kumar acknowledges the audience's applause by entering the stage with both arms in the air, smiling, and exclaiming ("Yes!") before moving the microphone stand, setting the stage for his performance. Kumar proceeds with an introduction move (B1ii), greeting the audience before telling them who he is ("Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Nish Kumar") before moving on to an enquiry move (B1iii) where he enquires as to the health of the audience ("How are you are you alright? [C:<yeah>]"), reacts as if to a heckler in order to check what was said ("What was that somebody shouted at the top? [!Yeah!]") and finally attempts to create a connection with the audience via a location enquiry ("Yeah hi, who's from Croydon? [!yeah!:!yeah!]").

Kumar follows up with a contextualisation move (B1iv) to further this connection after the positive response ("I'm from Croydon! [C(3):!whistle!]") before launching into his first self-contained joke building on this setup ("I am yeah, I'm a prominent Croydoner, it's er... the only other two things to come out of Croydon are Kate Moss and the concept of crime, so... [L(2)]"). He then attempts an evaluation move (B1v) trying to further ingratiate himself with the audience but is interrupted by a "positive" heckle – one that is not intended to be malicious but can be equally



as disruptive if not handled correctly – which he immediately acknowledges (“Great to [!And Me!] see you all ladies and gentlemen, and you yeah [!]”) before doubling down on the reaction in order to regain control of the situation (“*Of course* it would be the people from Croydon who were shouting [L(2)]”) and having had a positive response to his improvisation he attempts a topper, though this does not get a reaction as the previous line had (“Not doing *anything* to, help our image”).

The introduction bit here serves to establish Kumar’s high-status tenor – once that he will maintain for the rest of the set and that is intrinsic to his scontext – as well as establishing an ingroup tenor for this bit only and pushing a critical and (mildly) antagonistic field, mainly through his reaction to the positive heckle from the audience member and the control that needed to be re-established as a result.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B1, the initial bit for Kumar is somewhat volatile, with a broadly positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS) and an initial negative trend towards Volatile (VF) and Active (AE) caused by the initial shouted interruptions, though this is reversed back towards neutral as he takes control of the bit towards the end. This volatility serves to visualise the power struggle that takes place when an audience member is especially vocal, no matter how well-meaning they may be, as to acquiesce to the audience member would be

to pull focus away, and Kumar shows his understanding of this expertly with the switch in focus of the final evaluation move of the bit (B1v).

<b>Bit Two<sup>119</sup></b>		
Topic: Nature of Comedy	Forms: Phenomenological Difference	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation	
Fields: Self-Deprecating, Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

This bit (B1) segues directly into the next (B2) using an evaluation move (B2i) that revisits and completes the evaluation move that was previously interrupted (B1v). A standard contextualisation bit (B2) within the material phase structure, it consists of four objective moves:

- i. Evaluation (14-18)
- ii. Framing (19-22)
- iii. Contextualisation (23-26)
- iv. Evaluation (27-29)

For his second bit, Kumar delves into the nature of comedy, beginning with an evaluation move (B2i) where he reintroduces himself (“It’s nice to be here ladies and gentlemen my names Nish, erm...”) to make up for the earlier interruption to his flow, then restates his purpose in performing (“I hope you enjoy the er jokes, I’ve got some jokes to tell you erm...”) by explaining what it I he is here to do – something that would not normally be necessary but helps to delineate his personal scontext through the form of Phenomenological Difference as he commits to the outgroup tenor of the bit. These points plus the self-deprecating field of the bit is re-

<sup>119</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 14-29

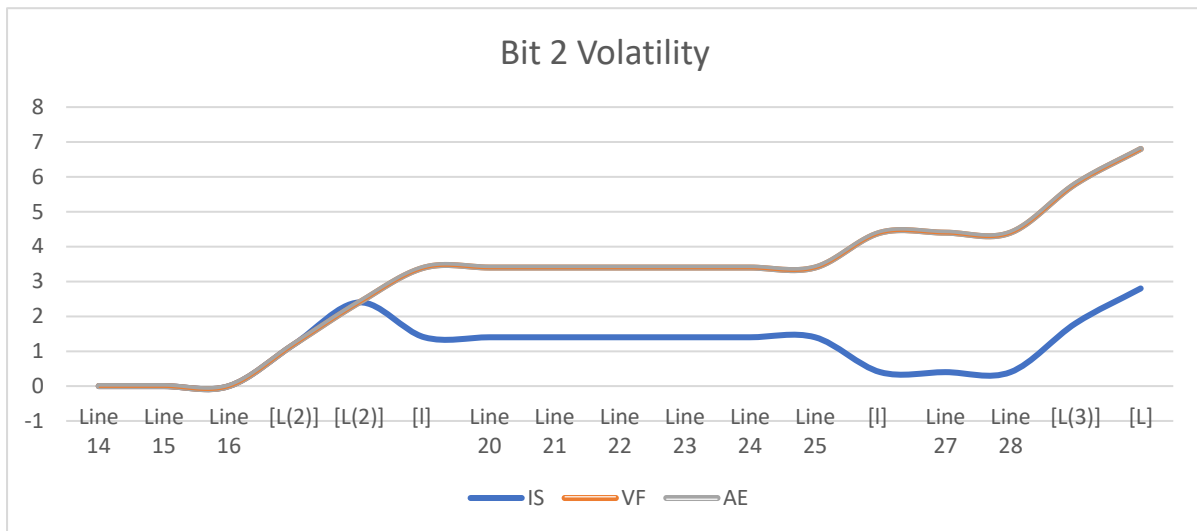
enforced by the next line (“I hope you enjoy them, if you don’t, wow! I am sorry! [L(2)]”) which pulls back focus to the possibility of failure and the line Kumar is dancing here, followed by two toppers, one with a cheeky use of “almost certainly” introducing the possibility that he could blame the audience for his failure (“That will almost certainly have been my fault [L(2)]”) before building on this logic with the final line of the move to finish (“You know... At least sixty forty that way round, [I] you know”).

Moving on to his second objective move with framing (B2ii), Kumar presents his central thesis statement for the bit, starting with a description of the problem (“Because the problem is that’s the problem with comedy like...”), following up with re-enforcing his own credentials as a performer (“I love being a comedian and it’s a job that I absolutely adore”) before pointing out the intrinsic strangeness of comedy as a profession (“But it’s a strange job because I might do it to the best of my abilities”/“ And you might not, enjoy it”). These four lines again serve to delineate the outgroup tenor, separating Kumar from the audience while still maintaining enough of an honest self-deprecation to keep the audience on side.

Having established his thesis with the previous framing move, Kumar moves on to a contextualisation move (B2iii) to go into further detail, pushing forward the idea of comedy subjectivity (“That’s the nature of comedy it’s an inherently subjective medium no two people can agree on what’s funny”), making the audience relax after the previous bit by absolving them of blame if they subjectively do not find his material funny (“So if you don’t think I’m funny that’s absolutely *fine*”) before reversing the perspective to focus on his own role and the fact that it is a job, again pulling back the curtain to show the performance happening behind the material (“The only problem that I have *as* a comedian is that if somebody thinks what I’m doing is not funny, it *stops being comedy* [I]”/“And there’s no other job like that”).

For his final evaluation move of the bit (B2iv) Kumar introduces a critical field for the final three lines, criticising the fact that for most jobs success or failure is self-evident in the finished product regardless less of subjectivity (“If you’re a builder

and you build a wall people go {hands up in shrugging motion} “That’s a good wall” or {hands up in shrugging motion} “that’s a shit wall”) before hammering home the existential nature of the subjective performative success that comedians face (“No-one says “*That is not a wall!*” [L(3)]”) and finishing with a *reductio ad absurdum* line highlighting the ridiculous nature of subjectivity (“You... “You built a bloody duck mate what were you thinking?” [L]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B2, this bit is much less volatile than the initial bit, with a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) throughout showing the momentum being built by Kumar as a performer and a negative trend after the first two laughs away from Solidaristic (IS), though this is again positive as the laughs build towards the end. Despite some more cerebral material being somewhat of a risk for the second bit of a set, especially after the initial power struggle of the opening bit, but the reactions here show that he manages to communicate his ideas effectively and keep the audience on his side.

Bit Three <sup>120</sup>		
Topic: Opinions	Forms: Kvetch, Extension	Modal Channels: Verbal

<sup>120</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 30-48

Tenors: High Status	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical, Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced: Confrontational	Segue: Sequential

This bit (B2) segues directly into the next (B3) using a framing move (B3i) that both reframes the subjectivity argument from comedy to opinions and introduces Kumar’s first exemplar of the performance (Confrontational). A standard bit within the material phase structure, B3 consists of seven objective moves:

- i. Framing (30-32)
- ii. Contextualisation (33-36)
- iii. Evaluation (37-39)
- iv. Contextualisation (40-41)
- v. Enaction (42-43)
- vi. Evaluation (44-45)
- vii. Enaction (46-48)

In Bit Three, Kumar focuses on the topic of opinions and the value of having diverse viewpoints. He adopts a high-status tenor, positioning himself as an authority on the subject while maintaining a critical and antagonistic field. Starting with a framing move (B3i), he moves to a separate but related topic of subjective opinions (“And I like the fact that people have different opinions I like arguing”), simultaneously introducing the first exemplar of the set, confrontational, with his confession that he likes arguing. Kumar justifies this as being part of the human experience (“I think that’s part of what makes being a human being interesting and exciting”) before sharing his own opinion on what annoys him about the way certain people do it (“I don’t like it when people can’t justify their opinions or do so on spurious grounds”) introducing the kvetch form that dominates in the first section of this bit. The narrative form of this initial move is important to take note for later in the set, where Kumar starts with a generalised statement, justifies this statement to

the audience and then makes his approach to it personal, something that he will return to as a technique in subsequent bits.

Moving on to the following contextualisation move (B3ii), he introduces and begins to delineate the character of his dad with a straightforward statement ("Like my dad doesn't like rap music") before establishing his own position and acknowledging that rap can be controversial ("Now listen, I like rap music but I know there's a lot of good reasons not to like rap music") and listing these shortcomings as he sees them ("Misogyny, homophobia, the needless celebration of wealth"). Kumar is about to continue with the setup of the anecdote in the final line of the move but is caught off guard by the audience's reaction to the previous line ("My dad [L] doesn't like rap...") and goes into a different objective move, an evaluation move (B3iii), to compensate. He starts by confronting his confusion with the reaction directly, much to the appreciation of the audience ("(confused) that does not normally get a laugh [L(3)]") before pushing further with a critical impression of the audience ("Very unusual people being like {flails hands in clapping motion} "ha-ha.. yeah" [L(2)]") and finishing with a further impression as a topper ("I love all three of those things" [L(3)]) which caps off his reaction to the audience.

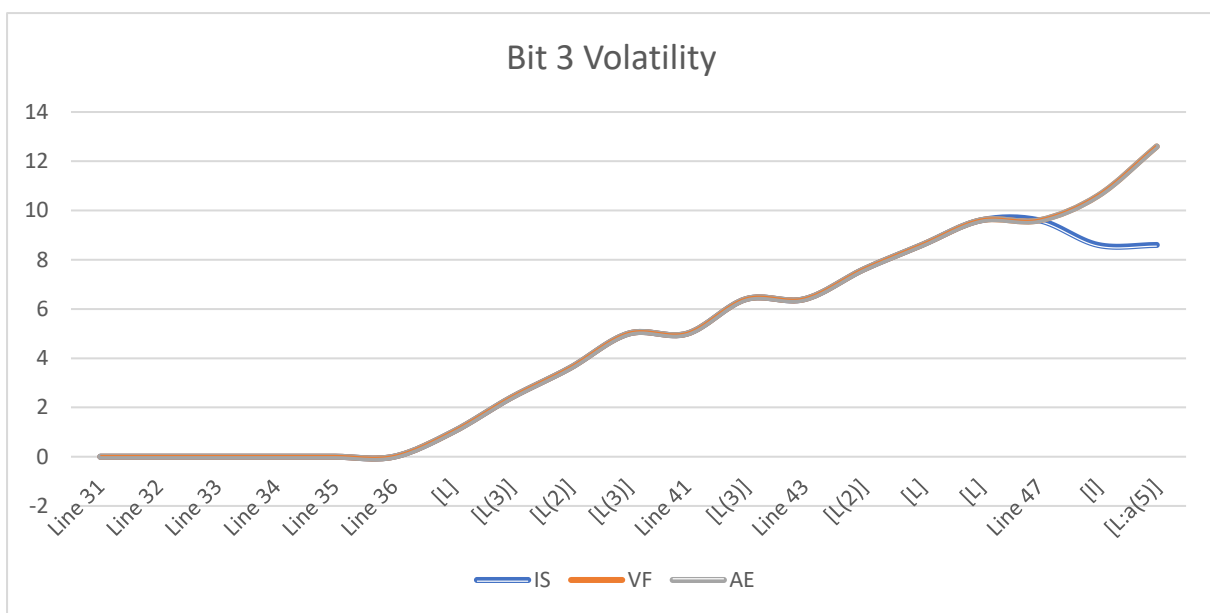
Having successfully reacted to the audience and bolstered their engagement by doing so, Kumar switches back to a contextualisation move (B3iv) to finish of what he was saying before ("My dad doesn't like rap music because he says it's *easy*") before further delineating the character of his dad by painting him as someone who is dismissive of talent due to the Dunning-Kruger effect, where "poor performers in many social and intellectual domains seem largely unaware of just how deficient their expertise is... not only does their incomplete and misguided knowledge lead them to make mistakes but those exact same deficits also prevent them from recognizing when they are making mistakes"<sup>121</sup>. Shifting on to an enaction move (B3iv), Kumar starts with a character impression of his dad, starting with an

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<sup>121</sup> David Dunning, 'The Dunning-Kruger Effect: On Being Ignorant of One's Own Ignorance', *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. by James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna, 44 (2011) pp. 247-296.

introduction of what he is about to do (“He’ll go | “Rap music is really easy Nish watch this””) and then enacting the rap in all its embarrassing glory (“(rapping badly) “my name is dad and I’m here to say I’m a really great guy...” [L(2)]”).

Building on the momentum that the enaction has provided for him, Kumar switches to an evaluation move (B3v) pushing firmly into the critical field, starting with blunt criticism (“That’s not proof of *anything* [L]”) before clarifying this further by expression his incredulity with the previous approach (“You can’t say something’s easy and your evidence is *you do it badly* [L]”) – the criticism on display here reinforces his confrontational nature and also serves to delineate the relationship he has with his dad and one that many people share with people they are close to but have known for a long time, loving but exasperated. To finish the bit, Kumar moves on to a final enaction move (B3vi) which takes the ideas presented to their local-logical conclusion using an extension form, starting with a direct parody of his dad’s initial statement (“That’s like me going “Jazz music’s really easy watch this””) before moving straight into calculated poor singing (“(high pitched singing) “bladi-bladi-blaaaaa” [I]”) before a final topper line finishes the bit to laughter and applause from the audience (““Oh check out this easy juggling” {drops microphone with a thud} [L:a(5)]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B3, the whole bit has a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) throughout showing the solid laughs that Kumar is getting in this bit, with a positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS) all the way until the slightly muted laughter and scattered applause at the end as the bit peaks possibly earlier than intended. Kumar builds the character of his father and the relationship he has with him in the minds of the audience, something that humanises him despite his high status and critical approach to humour. The introduction of his first exemplar within the first third of his set also helps to flesh out Kumar’s central philosophy for those that may not already know him as a performer and solidify his context in the eyes of the audience.

<b>Bit Four<sup>122</sup></b>		
Topic: Patronising Opinions	Forms: Disclosure, Kvetch	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High-status, Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation, Enaction, Evaluation, Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation	
Fields: Critical, Self-Deprecating	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

Moving along, the previous bit (B3) segues directly into the next (B4) using a framing move (B4i) that shifts the topic slightly once again from unsubstantiated opinions to patronising opinions using the film “Twelve Years a Slave” as both a social and cultural reference point. As with the previous two B4 is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of ten objective moves:

- i. Framing (49-50)

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<sup>122</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 49-84



- ii. Enquiry (51)
- iii. Contextualisation (52-54)
- iv. Enaction (55-56)
- v. Evaluation (57)
- vi. Enaction (58-61)
- vii. Evaluation (62-71)
- viii. Framing (72-78)
- ix. Evaluation (79-82)
- x. Contextualisation (83-84)

Kumar starts with a framing move (B4i) to move the topic on slightly, shifting it in context if not in subject to the idea of patronising opinions, confessing that his confrontational nature caused arguments over the viewing of the film “twelve years a slave”, which was released around three years prior to the performance and had become somewhat of a cultural touchstone by this time (“And I had two different arguments with two *separate* friends”/“ Because they didn’t go and see ‘12 Years A Slave’”). Regardless of the cultural relevance of the film, switching to an enquiry move (B4ii) Kumar takes a moment to ensure the audience is mentally aligned with the topic he is about to talk about and gauging their familiarity in this way (“Now, did anyone go and see ‘12 Years A Slave’? [w:<yes>]”).

Having had a positive reaction (though not a universally strong one), he uses a contextualisation move (B4iii) to communicate his own positive view on the film (“Yeah I like that movie, I thought it was really good”) while allowing him to maintain his high-status tenor through the presentation of his own opinions, before bringing in a self-deprecating field with the second line that paints an amusing but less than flattering picture of the visceral reaction he had to the subject matter through the form of disclosure (“I mean by the end I was crying out of my mouth, I didn’t even know that was possible [L(2)] right”) before painting his friend’s decision not to see the film as a banal juxtaposition against this deep emotional reaction (“But two of my friends *didn’t* go and see that film”). In the following enaction move (B4iv) Kumar brings critical life to the character of one of his friends, starting with an offhand dismissal of the film itself (“One of my friends said |“Oh, I’m not going to

see that film Nish"|"") before doubling down on this off-handedness by voicing an inexplicable opinion ("And I said "why not?" and he said |"cos it's not, even a good film"| [I]"). Kumar shows his perplexity while maintaining his high status with a single line evaluation move (B4v), dismissing his friend's opinion while not outright vocalising that he thinks he is foolish for it ("Which I think is logically.. interesting [I]").

Switching back to an enaction move (B4vi) for the second part of the conversation, he continues with a follow-up question to his friend ("I was like "Why? What do you mean it's not a good film?"), vocalising the confusion felt by himself and presumed to be felt by the audience, followed by three consecutive lines that build on the motif of ignorance to come to a conclusion in the character of his friend's line of thinking ("And he said |"well it's just cos it's about slavery isn't it"/"People just think it's a good film because it's about slavery"/"It's not even a good film people are just tricked cos it's about slavery"|") – the repetition of the phrase "it's about slavery" is interesting here, both from a rhythmic perspective (each line ends with a similar cadence of syllables) but also because it serves to highlight the idea of confidence in ignorance – the fact that his friend was so convinced that the slavery angle was a trick means he failed to consider that exploring the slavery angle was, in fact, the point of the film.

Kumar shifts to an evaluation move next (B4vii) to put over his own opinion, starting with an incredulous refusal of his friend's premise ("Now I'm pretty sure that's *not* the case [L]") before a statement of his own counter-argument ("Right I'm pretty sure '12 Years A Slave' did really well because some people think it's a good film") to reassure the audience he rejects this idea completely. Taking the idea to its next logical conclusion, he ventures one step further by contrasting the accolades the film has received ("In fact, I know that's the case cos I don't think '12 Years A Slave' would have won all the Oscars it had won") against the difference of reception if the film had been a multi-character comedy vehicle for someone in the same way that "The Nutty Professor" was ("If it had starred *Eddie Murphy* as *four different slaves* [L(2)])" before topping it off with a final non-sequitur that drives home the

absurdity of the notion by taking it a further step into the random and nonsensical (“And a Chinese man for no reason [L(3)]”).

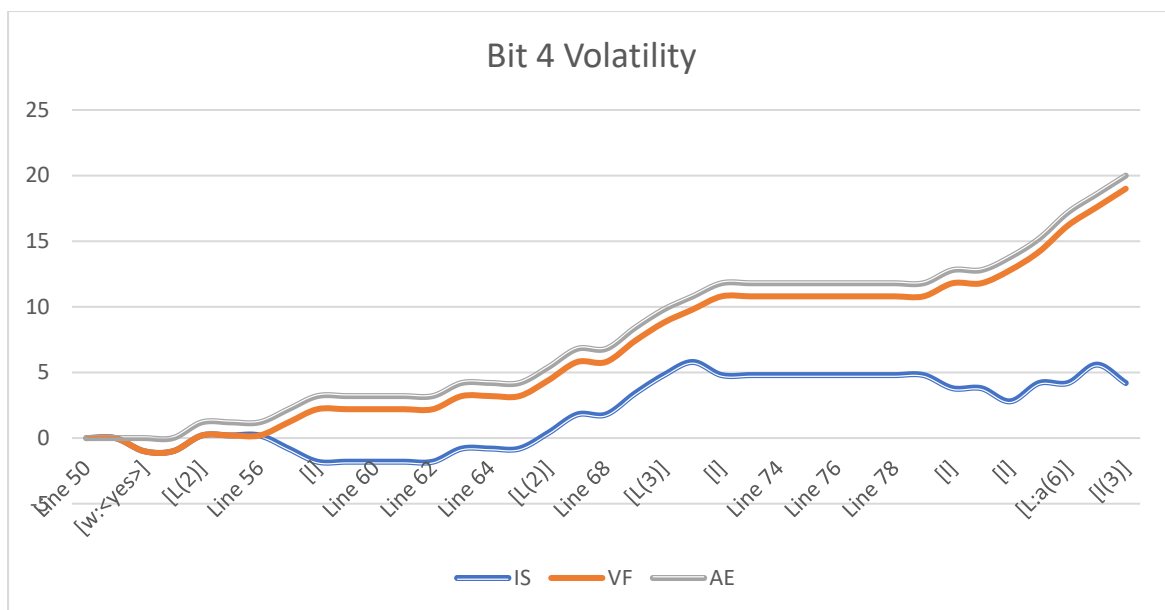
Kumar changes the topic slightly while still sticking with an evaluation move, highlighting another friend with a contrary opinion and dismissive approach to the film (“And then one of my other friends just went |{dismissive hand gesture} “I don’t need to see that film Nish”|”) before ramping up the incredulity he feels when presented with the nonsensical answer, drawing the audience in with his confused reaction after the punchline to prolong the laughter (“And I said “why not?” and he said |“Oh! Because I already know (higher pitched) slavery was bad”|[L(4)] {looks around in confusion}”). To finish this move, Kumar delivers a series of toppers to somewhat diminishing returns, starting with an immediate reaction as the laughter dies down (“It wasn’t a *twist ending!* [L(3)]”), quickly followed by one parodying the vapid approach that one could assume someone would have to have to dismiss the film as not worth seeing (“It’s not like the rest of us got to the end and went “Oh my god! Slavery was the *bad guuuuuuuuy!*” [L]”) before referencing another film with a famous twist ending to finish (“This is like ‘The Sixth Sense’!”[I]).

Having finished his kvetch, Kumar switches back into disclosure for his framing move (B4viii), again reiterating his enjoyment of the film in opposition to the opinions of his friends as previously presented (“And I went to see ‘12 Years A Slave’ and, you know I really enjoyed it”) before confessing to his own embarrassing moment of mental ignorance (“But at the end I made a slight.. faux pas in my mind right”). Having placed this tension in the minds of the audience, he begins to paint a picture of the scene with a series of short, clipped lines (“Because at the end of the movie erm”/“ the lights came er, back up”/“ and everybody was sort of recovering from it”) before, in the same way as he would have shifted focus in his own perception, he shifts perspective from the general atmosphere of the room to a specific person behind him (“and you know it was a very moving film and there was a girl behind me who was still crying”/“and this girl was *black*”). At this point, the tension in the audience has been built up through the previous framing move, and Kumar switches to an evaluation move (B4ix) to critique his own behaviour, starting with some context delineation (“and I was like “Oh my god, this is incredible” [I]),

building in its assumptions of grandiosity in a mirror of the way that his performative self approaches situations (“She must have had some kind of personal connection to this film”) before raising to a crescendo in such a way that raises a nervous laugh from the audience as they are not sure how much further he can go with this (“I’m so moved that I’m here to share what is clearly an important moment in her cultural and personal development” [1]) – however, the tension is soon dispelled as he punctures his own pomposity with one blunt, grounding line (“And then I realised that’s the most patronising thing I’ve ever [L(3)] thought in my life”).

For the final contextualisation move of the bit (B4x), Kumar relates why he had this personal epiphany of how patronising he was, dealing with the presumptions of other people of personal relevance due to one’s race (“And I know it is because I remember how I felt a couple of years ago when people just kept coming up to me and going |“Dude” {thumps chest twice and points} “Slumdog!”| [L:a(6)] {shakes head repeatedly with eyes closed}”) before topping it off with one final successful line that brings the bit to a strong close (“Slumdog millionaire, I have tasted your pain” [L(3)→I(3)]”).

Throughout the bit, Kumar employs a high-status tenor and a critical, self-deprecating field. By presenting his friends' arguments and offering counterarguments or sarcastic responses, Kumar critiques their patronising opinions and dismissive attitudes. The narrative framework of Bit Four involves the use of enaction and framing to portray his friends' arguments and his own reactions, as well as audience engagement through enquiry and expansion. The bit showcases Kumar's worldview and sociocultural criticism through his exploration of people's reactions to a film about a significant historical topic, highlighting the importance of engaging with challenging subjects rather than dismissing them.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B4, the whole bit has a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) with only a small drop at the start, with a more volatile Individualistic\Solidaristic (IS) trend, with smaller laughs at the beginning followed by a run of stronger laughs towards the middle before a more mixed group towards the end. Kumar builds on his previous negative exemplar again in this bit, pushing against the arguments of his friends in a confrontational manner that plays as high status before he deflates his own pomposity with the anecdote surrounding his own patronising thoughts.

Bit Five <sup>123</sup>		
Topic: Weak Arguments	Forms: Extension Kvetching	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High-Status, Ingroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

Moving along, the previous bit (B4) segues directly into the next (B5) using a framing move (B5i) that shifts the topic again, highlighting not only a disagreement between him and a friend of this dad where he considers the argument weak but

<sup>123</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy* – Nish Kumar (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 85-103

also a difference in generational perspective. As with the previous two B4 is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of five objective moves:

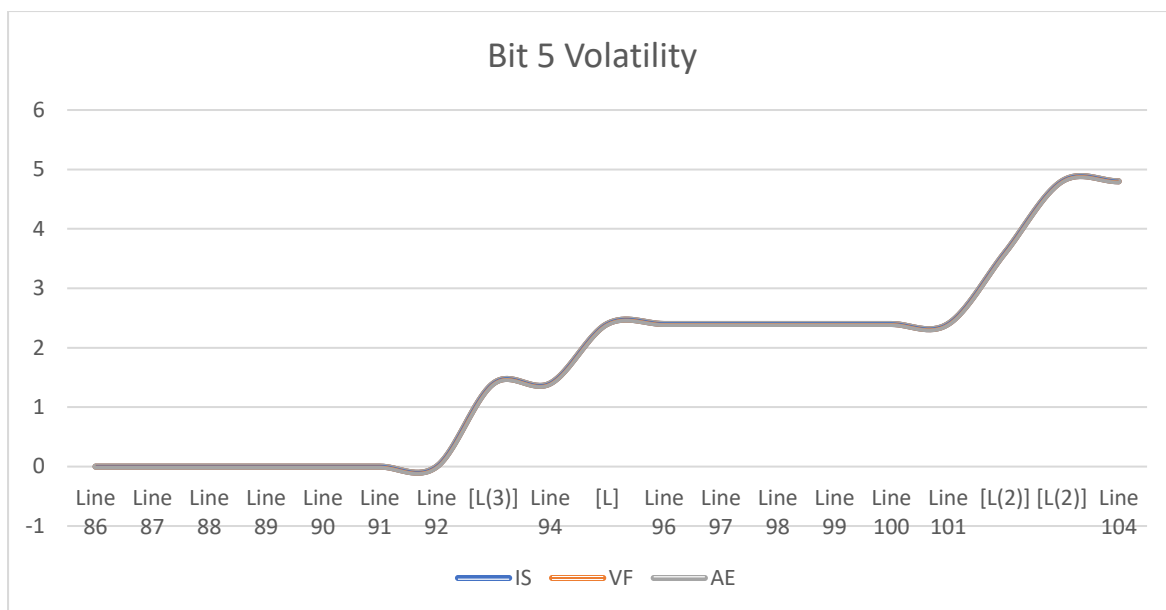
- i. Framing (85-88)
- ii. Contextualisation (89-91)
- iii. Enaction (92-94)
- iv. Evaluation (95-97)
- v. Enaction (98-103)

In Bit Five, Nish Kumar focuses on the topic of weak arguments, employing Extension Kvetching as the primary comedic form. In this bit, Kumar takes a high-status and ingroup tenor, addressing the audience with a critical field. The framing move at the start (B5i) begins with him refocusing the topic at hand (“So I like the fact that people can sort of agree and disagree about different things”) before presenting the thesis statement of the bit (“But like I say you just have to think about”/“ what the grounds are, that your justifying it on”) – this is a direct continuation of the argument he has been presenting since Bit Two, though each bit has moved the perspective slightly to keep the topic interesting. Kumar ends this first framing move by introducing his narrative throughline for the bit and the character of his dad’s friend (“like one of my dad’s friends was arguing me... with me recently”). With this character introduced, he moves on to a contextualisation move (B5ii), starting by presenting the argument made (“And he said |“Nish everyone your age is really weak, you’re a weak generation”|”) before presenting his own opinion (“Now there is definitely a good argument to be made on that case”) and then pulling back with a counter that twists the direction of the story (“But not the grounds he chose”) in a mirror of the now established narrative convention for Kumar’s material established in Bit Three and Four – presenting an argument in the character of a friend or relative, using this as a springboard to showcase his own moderate views and then seeing the arguing character doubling down on the stupidity in their option.

This doubling down is presented in full force for the next enaction move (B5iii), starting with a fantastic statement (“Because he chose to justify that, he said

|“You’re all weak Nish”| and his justification for it was *lactose intolerance* [L(3)]”) to ensure the audience are on side and know the angle he is taking, before resorting to *reductio ad absurdum* by enacting the character to it’s ridiculous logical conclusion (“He’s like |“Nish look how many people your age are lactose intolerant”/“Back in my day we fought milk, [L] that’s how tough we were”|”). This allows him to move into the setup crux of the bit with an evaluation move (B5iv), dismissing the ideas presented as ridiculous (“But of course we all know that’s not how disease and discovery works”) and using the inclusive “of course we all know” to re-enforce the ingroup tenor with the audience, before coming in with a sensible theory to buoy up this ingroup praise (“The same number of people have always been lactose intolerant”/“It’s just *now we know* it’s called that”), building the setup for the foray into the ridiculous by the final enaction move (B5v) of the bit.

Kumar starts with a classic character-based scenario, beginning by setting the scene and characters (“Fifty years ago somebody would go to the doctor and be like”/“|“Doctor, I don’t know what’s wrong with me””), pushing this further into the ridiculous in the Extension Kvetch style that has come to dominate this bit (“I drink milk all the time and I feel awful what’s wrong with me?”|”) before pushing back with a full dismissal of the idea using the two final punchlines (“And the doctor would just go |{shrugging} “Pfffffft....” [L(2)]/“^ ...ghosts?”| [L(2)]”) before tidying up the ideas with his final line (“Like that was the best guess that they could come up with”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B5, the whole bit has an exclusively positive trend towards Focused (VF), Expressive (AE) and Solidaristic (IS), with four solid laughs throughout, though these come later in the set after a longer build-up. Kumar reuses the previous narrative approaches of the previous two bits to great effect here, building his ideas and opinions hard at the beginning of the bit before paying these off with a flurry of quick punchlines at the end.

<b>Bit Six<sup>124</sup></b>		
Topic: Racial Identity	Forms: Phenomenological Difference, Incongruity	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Framing, Enaction, Evaluation	
Fields: Critical	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential

Looking at the narrative structure, the previous bit (B5) segues directly into the next (B6) using a framing move (B6i) that changes the topic completely, bringing to the fore his racial identity and the challenges that public perception of this brings. Bit Six is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of nine objective moves it is one of the longer bits of the set:

<sup>124</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar (2023)*  
<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 104-141



- i. Framing (104)
- ii. Evaluation (105-106)
- iii. Contextualisation (107-112)
- iv. Enaction (113-117)
- v. Evaluation (118-123)
- vi. Contextualisation (124-128)
- vii. Framing (129-131)
- viii. Enaction (132-137)
- ix. Evaluation (138-141)

In Bit Six, Kumar tackles the topic of racial identity with a blend of phenomenological difference and incongruity. He verbally shares his experiences as a British Asian gentleman and employs outgroup tenors to highlight differences between his own experiences and those of white individuals.

Starting with a framing move (B6i), Kumar switches the topic completely away from his argumentative context, highlighting his background and ethnicity (“So er... I’m a British Asian gentleman”) before moving on to what seems to be a sincere evaluation move (B6ii), starting with a statement from his own perspective (“And it’s a good time to be a British Asian gentleman right now [I]”) which the audience are unsure whether is genuine indicated by the nervous laugh, which he then doubles down on this positivity to reassure the audience (“It’s a pretty sweet time you know? It’s pretty good”). The following contextualisation move (B6iii) builds on this and provides it with a context, starting with an expanded statement (“Like I really believe there’s nothing I can’t do right now that a white person can, I really believe that”), followed by again a doubling down to build the setup and tension ready for a rug pull (“There’s nothing I can’t do that a white person can do”) and finally switching perspectives for the rug pull and revealing that the setup had been ironic all along (“Oh there’s one thing I can’t do that white people can do and that’s, play pranks at an international airport, because... [L(3)]”).

Kumar follows this reversal up with a couple of further toppers, starting with a solid follow-up to compliment the previous punchline (“You know I don’t care what you say that fun is not open to you [L]”/“If you have the voice of ‘Downton Abbey’ but the face of ‘Homeland’ [L(4)]”) before allowing the strong reaction to taper off before his next objective move (“That is not.. an option”). Moving on to an enaction move (B6iv), he introduces the character of his ‘white friends’, an amalgam character created for the express purpose of providing an ignorant counterpoint to his point of view (“My white friends are always like |“Nish lets have some banter with the customs officials”|”/“ I say “no thank you the only prank I’m playing is let’s not get *fingered*, OK?” [L(4):a]”). This is followed up with further examples of the Phenomenological Difference he experiences as part of the perceived outgroup, starting with an extreme but still plausible approach (“I walk into airports my bag in one hand my *shoes* in the other”), following this up getting more surreal (“I wear t-shirts that say “I heart the west” [L(2)] just...”) before finishing invoking the rule of three and presenting the final escalation into the realm of the ridiculous (“Run up to random white people “you know what sucks? *Jihad! Ha-ha!*” [L(4)]”).

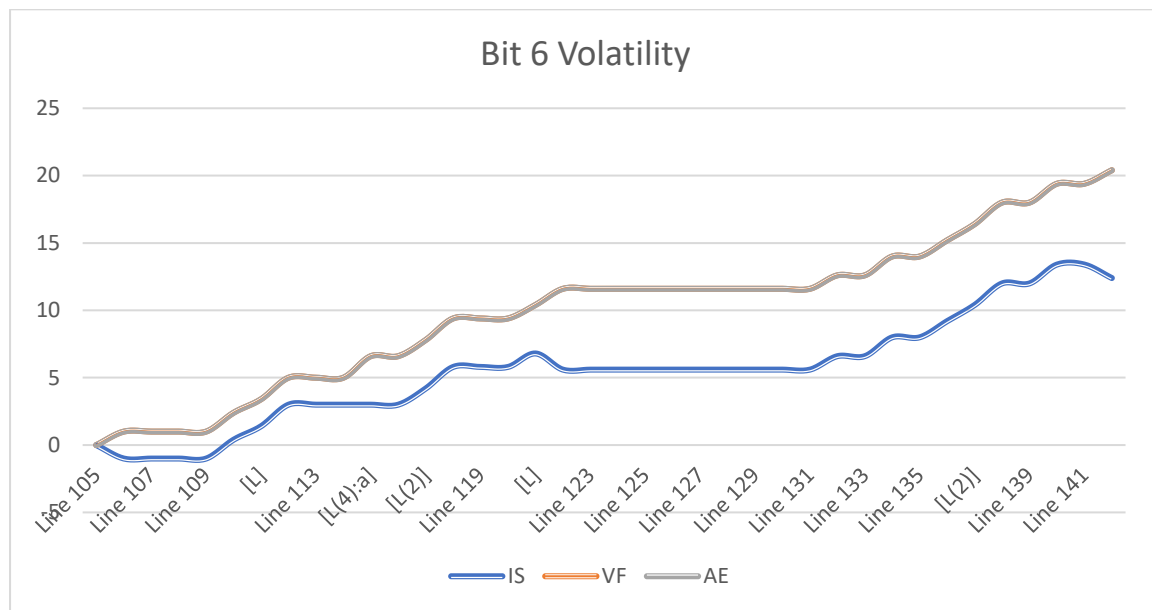
This escalation leads nicely into the following evaluation move (B6v), starting with a subjective statement presented as an objective evaluation (“I have er what’s er known scientifically as an ethnically ambiguous face erm...”) before genuinely evaluating the reality of the situation he faces because of this (“No-one really seems to know where er I come from”/“ Er which just means I get searched at customs *everywhere* like [L]”) and attempts to follow this up with a topper (“I don’t know, like people just really hedging their bets [l(2)] with me”) but as this does not land as strongly he moves on with the narrative with a final evaluation (“But generally you know things are getting, things are getting way easier”/“ Things are getting much better, like even conversationally we’ve moved so far”). This then turns into a contextualisation move (B6vi) as Kumar seeks to re-enforce this evaluation, starting by raising the topic of outdated stereotypes in comedy (“Conversationally it’s no longer acceptable to do an accent”/“If it’s clearly an impersonation of a non-white ethnicity”) and having made this point confronts the crux of why this is the case,

citing the fact that attitudes have changed (“If you do it people get really uncomfortable”).

Kumar stumbles on his next line but restarts as he had missed an important point regarding this, highlighting Benny Hill as an example before restating his position on the commonality of doing an accent in setup for the next move (“It’s seen... it’s like Benny Hill doing Chinese voices in the seventies”/“It’s seen as something we just don’t, sort of do anymore”). With the next framing move (B6vii), he begins to build the tension in the audience, countering his previous point that this is no longer done and allowing his point that “people get really uncomfortable” to come to the fore (“Apart from *one* ethnic group”/“ There is one ethnic group we have *no problem* impersonating for some reason”) – however, this tension is quickly dissipated but the follow-up line (“And that ethnic group is black women from the southern states of America [I]”). This is swiftly followed up with an enaction move (B6viii), setting up the impression with a subtle restatement of his liberal credentials (“Because for some weird reason no matter how liberal a person is”) before going in full tilt with the impression including head movement (“Occasionally they’ll just go |{shaking head up and down} (southern American accent) “And you know momma don’t like that!”| [L(3)]”). Kumar is completely dialogic in his approach at this point, reacting directly to the audience’s reaction (“You’re like {offended faces}”), showing that he shares their consternation (“How is that OK? [L(2)]”) before re-enforcing that this is his own opinion too (“That is definitely not OK! [L(2)]”).

Kumar shifts the perspective back to himself and highlights the ridiculousness and double standard of the approach (“If I do an Indian accent people go |“Nish you should not do that, it’s crass, it’s offensive, |{shaking head up and down} (southern American accent) “And you know momma don’t like that!”| [L(4)]”). Moving on to his final evaluation move of the bit (B6ix), Kumar begins with a direct comment to the audience (“And if you take nothing away from anything else I say to you tonight ladies and gentlemen”) before successfully calling back to his earlier material on Eddie Murphy and *12 Years a Slave* (“I think we can all agree that “Momma Don’t Like That” would definitely be the name of that Eddie Murphy remake of ‘12 Years a Slave’ [L(3)]”). After a strong series of laughs, Kumar slows down the audience’s

reaction with a couple of throwaway lines before changing the topic for the next bit (“That is...”/“Almost beyond doubt [I]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B6, the whole bit has an exclusively positive trend towards Focused (VF), and Expressive (AE) with a series of solid laughs at the beginning and some that come later in the bit after a longer build-up, with the middle being more of a discussion of ideas rather than a series of jokes. The trend towards Solidaristic (IS) is also broadly positive, with minor dips due to the audience not acting in full concert but otherwise a string showing towards unity. The switch of topic and technique away from the previously utilised narrative structure necessitated both an initial strong series of jokes to support the change and a lull in laughs while Kumar's position is fully explained ready for the final run of jokes.

Bit Seven <sup>125</sup>		
Topic: Personal Life	Forms: Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Evaluation	

<sup>125</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 42-163

Fields: Antagonistic, Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced: Resentful	Segue: Sequential
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The previous bit (B6) segues directly into the next (B7) using a framing move (B7i) that refocuses the topic on his personal life, bringing to the fore his shortcomings and a frank admission of the person he once was. Bit Seven is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of six objective moves:

- i. Framing (142-144)
- ii. Evaluation (145-149)
- iii. Contextualisation (150-153)
- iv. Evaluation (154-156)
- v. Contextualisation (157-161)
- vi. Evaluation (162-163)

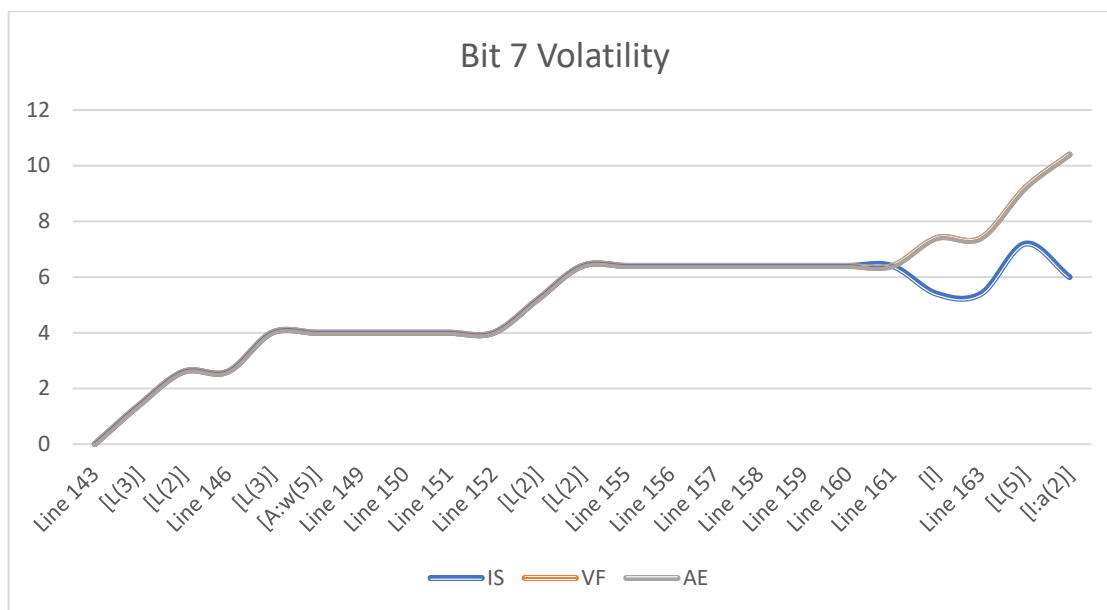
In Bit Seven, Nish Kumar delves into his personal life, adopting a high-status tenor and focusing on the theme of failure. He utilises Disclosure as the primary form, using verbal modal channels to express his experiences. The narrative fields revolve around antagonistic and self-deprecating humour.

Starting with a framing move (B7i), he switches the topic from his ethnicity to his personal life (“I’ve had a lot of changes in my er personal life”) before immediately undercutting this seriousness with the phrasing of the next line (“I was single for a long time but I’ve recently er... taken a woman [L(3)]”) and drawing attention to this for humorous effect (“{shakes head} I’m almost certain that is not how you are supposed to phrase that right [L(2)]”). The follow-up evaluation move (B7ii) starts with a frank admission of his own shortcomings in confidence (“I was single for a long time because I was always quite sexually reticent”) before regaining his high-status approach with an unconventional boast (“Like when I was at school I didn’t really kiss girls, largely because I was busy getting some *excellent* A-level results erm... [L(3)]”) and following this up with a topper (“*Did very well...* [A:w(5)]”) before directly acknowledging the audience reaction with a couple of throwaways

that serve to provide further context to his performance and finish the move (“Thank you yes correct”/“I was that kind of kid”).

Moving on to a contextualisation move (B7iii) Kumar continues along this vein by admitting that his experience may be personal rather than general (“And I’m aware there might be some people in here who kissed loads of people and did very well in their exams”) and sets up that he has an opinion on this (“And let me just take this opportunity to say this”) – this is followed by a sudden switch in both tone and attitude for comic effect, maintaining the high-status tenor while admitting failure (“(angry) go fuck yourself! [L(2)]”/“No one likes you! [L(2)]”). Switching to an evaluation move (B7iv), he continues the disclosure form of the set by confessing his lack of sporting prowess as a child (“I was not the most sporty kid to be honest er”) before clarifying this (“When I was at school er the only sport I really played to any distinction was cricket”). As is convention at this point, after an admission Kumar then presents his current evaluation of the subject (“I loved playing cricket, I still love playing cricket now but I loved playing cricket when I was at school”) before changing to a contextualisation move (B7v) to come to the crux of the story (“And er eventually I won an award for playing cricket”).

This then feeds into the narrative required to set up a joke, starting with the context of the story (“Now every year they would give out awards for playing cricket that were all pretty self-explanatory”), using a triumvirate of awards to build expectation through repetition (“There’s “Best Batsman” that’s for best batsman, “Best Bowler” that’s for best bowler, “Best Player” that’s the best all-round player”) before presenting the punchline to follow as a counterpoint to the sensible and straightforward awards quoted previously (“Then there was the award that I won”/“An award called “*Clubman of the Year*”[I]”). This punchline is presented as an evaluation move (B7vi), drawn out initially in the specificity of Kumar’s words (“An award that I have subsequently found out was presented on the criteria of the boy who’d shown the most enthusiasm”) before bluntly hammering the point home to end the bit (“In the face of, and I quote, “an *overwhelming* lack of abilities”, [L(5)→l:a(2)] so...”) and allow him to frame the topic for the next bit.



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B7, the whole bit has a mostly positive trend towards Focused (VF), Expressive (AE) and Solidaristic (IS) with a series of solid laughs in the first half and some that come at the end of the bit after a longer build-up, with the latter being a narrative setup for the larger laugh in the final joke. The two dips seen are the result of audience sympathy that is not shared universally – the first comes from scattered whoops due to Kumar's self-mockingly smug “*did very well*” in response to the reaction of his admission of getting “excellent” A-level results, the second due to scattered applause after the last joke lands very well but the reaction is interrupted by him saying “so..” and building up the expectation for the next joke.

Bit Eight <sup>126</sup>		
Topic: Relations with Women	Forms: Disclosure, Revision	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Failure	Objective Moves: Framing, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction, Contextualisation, Enaction, Evaluation	

<sup>126</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 164-197

Fields: Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Sequential
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The previous bit (B7) segues sequentially into the next (B8) using a framing move (B8i) that shifts the topic slightly to his lack of experience with dating, bringing to the fore his shortcomings and ignorance around the topic. Bit Eight is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of seven objective moves:

- i. Framing (164-165)
- ii. Evaluation (166-174)
- iii. Contextualisation (175-183)
- iv. Enaction (184-185)
- v. Contextualisation (186-190)
- vi. Enaction (191-195)
- vii. Evaluation (196-197)

In Bit Eight (B8), Nish Kumar explores the topic of his relations with women, primarily focusing on his shyness around them during his school years. He adopts a self-deprecating tone throughout this bit, discussing his past misconceptions about what women find attractive. Kumar's narrative utilises forms such as disclosure and revision, with the tenor revolving around his perceived failure in approaching women.

Starting with a framing move (B8i), he introduces the topic almost with a sense of reticence ("So I was quite, you know"/"I was shy around girls when I was at school") before quickly clarifying with an evaluation move (B8ii) to deflect any potential criticism from those who might also have been shy ("Which is *fine*, it's not a problem") and clarifies his point further ("The only problem is if you're shy around people you are sexually interested in when you're a younger person"/" You *don't make mistakes*") before once again putting over his own opinion after making a definitive statement ("And you should make mistakes so you can have some idea about how to talk to these people when you become an adult"). Kumar's approach becomes more confessional as he continues, leaning more heavily into the disclosure

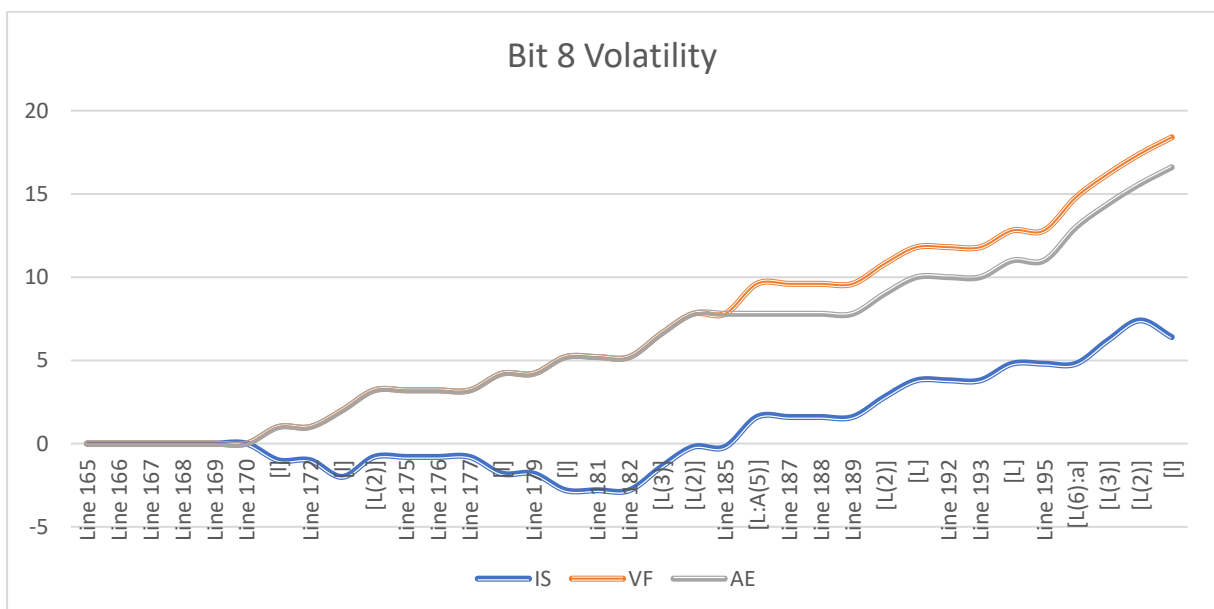


form as he admits his own failings (“So I *grew up*, because I wasn’t really *trying*, with some *bad ideas* [1]”), before starting a personal narrative (“About five years ago I became obsessed with the idea that I needed to be more mysterious”). He builds on this, a self-aware skewering of his own foolish attitude (“I was like “I need to be more mysterious [1]”/“That’s what girls like” now... [L(2)]”) and reacting dialogically to the audience’s amusement with a self-deprecating shamefacedness (“Yeah, fair enough OK?”).

Switching to a contextualisation move (B8iii), he quickly offers to explain himself (“Let me explain my reasoning”) before presenting a context for his actions at the time (“At the time I was watching *a lot* of episodes of the TV show ‘Mad Men’”) and the reasoning behind those actions (“Now. [1] the lead character in ‘Mad Men’ is Don Draper”/“ And he’s really mysterious and attractive so I was like”/“Well that’s what I’ll do. [1]”/“I’ll be mysterious and so I’ll become attractive”). Suspect but followable reasoning aside, this serves as the narrative setup of the joke and enables a punchline cascade from Kumar, starting with another humorous bit of reasoning (“Now, the key problem here is that *Don Draper* is played by *Jon Hamm*”/“*I am not played by Jon Hamm* [L(3)]”), followed by a showing of self-deprecating self-awareness (“And when I try and be mysterious it just comes off as *threatening* [L(2)]”). Switching to an enaction move (B8iv), he finishes off the cascade with a definitive piece of context development where he acts out his own failings to make the point crystal clear for the audience (“I once said to a woman with no discernible trace of irony”/“ {stares forward, lowers head over microphone}(reedy monotone voice) “You have no idea what I’m capable of” [L:A(5)]”).

Changing gears after the rapid-fire punchlines of the previous two moves, Kumar switches to another contextualisation move (B8v) and launches into a longer narrative building on this defined context, starting with efficiently setting the scene (“Like once I went into this pub and saw a girl I know, like I’m friends with her”), acting out the narrative as he goes along to build tension in the audience (“And I went up behind her, put my hands on her shoulders {crouches with hands forward} and went to kiss her on the cheek”) before revealing the awkward twist of the story

(“And at this point I realised, *this was not a girl I knew* [L(2)]”) and following this up with repetition to really impress on the audience the awkwardness of the situation (“{looks across audience, still crouched} This was a girl who *looked like a girl I knew* [L]”). Realising this seems to be spiralling out of control, Kumar starts to defuse the tension through an enaction move (B8vi), confronting the awkwardness head-on with a sensible suggestion (“Now. That is a retrievable situation”/“ All you have to do is say “I do apologise madam, I thought you were someone else, have a nice day”) before pulling the rug out suddenly with a manic change of tone and position and forcing a nervous laugh from the audience (“(shouting) {standing up} *what you must not do* [L]”) and bringing the tension to a head into another punchline cascade starting with the strongest (“Is have your hands on a woman’s shoulders {crouches back down and leans forward}”/“Be this close to her face and when she turns around just go |(deep creepy voice) “oh dear!”| because... [L(6):a]”). For the final two punchlines, Kumar switches to a final evaluation move (B8vii), adding another twist to the situation (“{stands back up} You have just *scared* a woman ladies and gentlemen [L(3)]”) and finishing with a topper that reflects on the situation in a blunt way (“Scared and kind of insulted to be honest [L(2)→|]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B8, the whole bit has a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) due to the two strong punchline cascades, and a more volatile trend between Individualistic and Solidaristic

(IS) due to the peppering of smaller audience reactions at the beginning and end of the bit. In terms of consistent laughs, this is one of the stronger bits of the set, though as before there is a longer narrative setup before each punchline run.

<b>Bit Nine<sup>127</sup></b>		
Topic: Relationship	Forms: Phenomenological Commonality, Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Outgroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Enaction, Evaluation, Enaction, Contextualisation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical, Self-Deprecation	Exemplars Introduced: Pessimistic	Segue: Sequential

The previous bit (B8) segues sequentially into the next (B9) using an evaluation move (B9i) that shifts the topic again to his current relationship, stitching back to the framing move at the beginning of B8 where he introduced this idea for the first time and exploring his negative worldview. Bit Nine is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of eight objective moves and is the longest bit of the set at 47 lines:

- i. Evaluation (198-201)
- ii. Contextualisation (202-209)
- iii. Evaluation (210-220)
- iv. Enaction (221-225)
- v. Evaluation (226-231)
- vi. Enaction (232-236)
- vii. Contextualisation (237-243)

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<sup>127</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 198-245

viii. Enaction (244-245)

In Bit Nine, Nish Kumar discusses his relationship and his tendency to think pessimistically. The bit employs the phenomenological commonality and disclosure forms as well as primarily verbal modal channels. Kumar adopts an outgroup tenor as he shares his thoughts on his relationship. The fields of the bit are critical and self-deprecating, and the segue is sequential.

Starting with an evaluation move (B9i), Kumar reintroduces the character of his girlfriend introduced at the beginning of B8 ("So I'm in a relationship, the relationship is going erm..."/"Is going well er. Because she is a nice lady, you know?") before stumbling slightly as he explores the language he is using to introduce her as a character ("{scoffs} that doe.. "Nice lady" never sounds strong enough does it? [I]") and takes this to its local-logical conclusion ("she's a nice lady.. she's a solid fellow" [L(2)]"). Changing tack, he starts a contextualisation move (B9ii) to explore the context of his relationship, starting with a strong statement ("If there was one thing I could change about my relationship er") before clarifying it with the following line ("And it really would just be one thing, it's a very small thing"). Kumar then starts a series of repetitions with changing inflexion for comic effect, starting with a shortened version of the previous line ("It's one thing, very small"), repeating this line almost verbatim ("It's one thing, it's very small [I]"), repeating again over the laughter and with a different inflexion ("It's one thing, it's *very small* [I]"), repeating the beginning as a motif and then just making noise for the second line ("It's one thing... {puts two fingers almost together and opens mouth} (gurgling noise) [I]") and finally repeating the motif at the beginning of the line with a sincere inflexion and muttering the words at the end ("It's one thing {puts two fingers almost together, mutters unintelligible words} [I]").

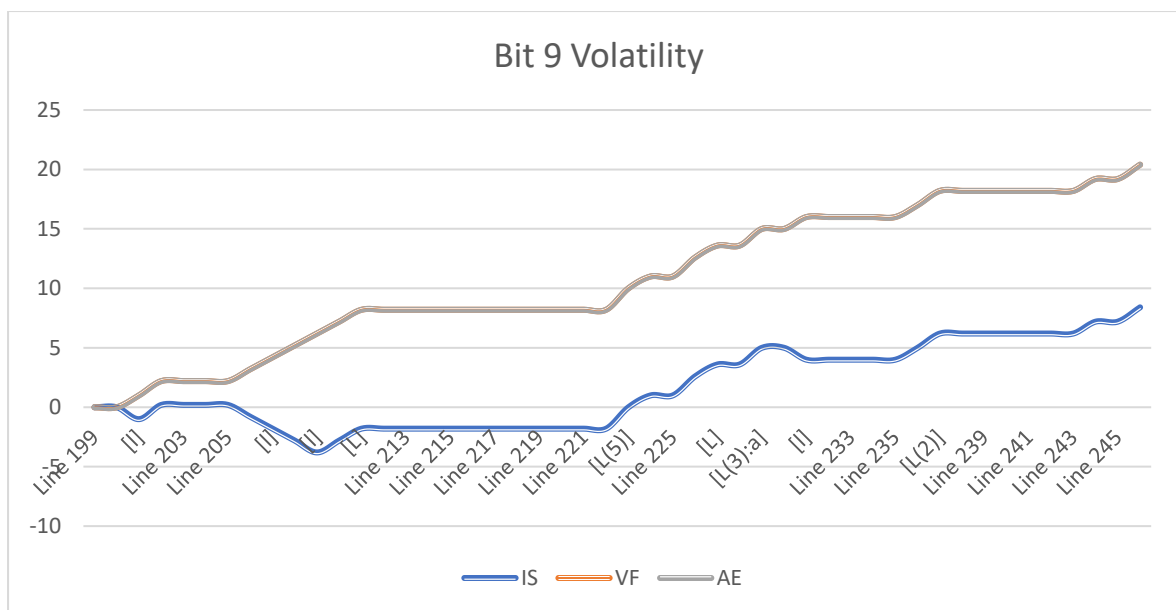
With these five repetitions violating the rule of three and pushing towards the overly-long gag, the audience expectations are built up enough that the following rugpull lines land well and gives the thesis statement of the bit ("And that thing would be my *entire personality* because [L]"/"I really believe that's the last obstacle to us being truly happy right? [L]"). Switching to an evaluation move (B9iii), Kumar

starts a longer narrative to support this statement, setting the scene (“My girlfriend and I were in Australia last year and”) before giving his own opinion on the scene (“We were in Sydney and Sydney’s an incredibly beautiful city”/“It really delivers on its postcard right”). Having set the scene in general terms, he moves into the specific, bringing the audience into the scene and zooming with the narrative (“There’s a point you can stand in Sydney where you’ve got the harbour bridge on one side and the”/“Opera house on the other side and you can watch the sort of...”/“You can just stand there and look at this incredible view”) before becoming zooming in further, sharing his thoughts and feelings at that moment (“It’s really really beautiful, and I’m there with my girlfriend”/“We’ve had this amazing holiday together”/“We’ve grown closer as a couple and we’re in this incredible place”) before ending the evaluative narrative build-up with a sincere rhetorical question (“Now that should be a moment of *real, fundamental* existential calm for me right?”).

With this lengthy setup completed, Kumar starts an enaction move (B9iv) to deconstruct it, starting with an immediate tension-building contradiction (“But for some reason, at that exact moment”) and using the next line not only to get a laugh from the audience but to introduce his second exemplar of the set – pessimistic (“The thought in my head was “This’ll be one of those things you’ll look back on fondly when you’ve broken up” [L(5)]”). This startling contrast between the previous romantic imagery and this pessimistic doomsaying does not go uncommented on, with Kumar directly acknowledging this to the audience (“{widens eyes as if in shock} *who the hell thinks like that?* [L]”), analysing his own past reaction through retrospective enaction (“Who can’t experience one moment of joy without immediately thinking”/“That’s one for the sorrow montage” [L(4)]”). Changing to an evaluation move (B9v), he bluntly assesses this reaction (“That is weapons-grade pessimism [L]”) before taking this reaction to its local-logical conclusion (“That’s like someone saying |“Do you think this glass is half full or half empty?”|”/“And me just replying “Does it matter? One day we’ll all be dead” [L(3):a]”). Pushing the disclosure form to the fore, he confesses his surprise (“And it *surprised* me”) and the fact that it was a facet of his character he was ignorant of (“I didn’t know I was

capable of that sort of, volcanic pessimism [1]"/"It... it sort of came out of nowhere").

Changing back to an enaction move (B9vi), Kumar confesses this personal revelation to his girlfriend ("And I said to my girlfriend afterwards"/"I think I might be quite, you know"/"Quite a pessimistic person") and this ignorance serves to help further define his context, as he shows the incredulous reaction of her character ("And she was like |{spins head to audience and laughs manically} "ha-ha-ha!" [L]) and the unexpected counter line where she opines that it was obvious all along ("Yes you are Nish, me and your friends talk about it all the time" [L(2)]). With this blow to how he saw himself serving the audience as a definitive piece of context building, he uses the phenomenological commonality form when switching to a contextualisation move (B9vii) and confessing as much ("And I felt so *foolish*"/"Because I felt like I had this whole sense of who I was as a person") before reiterating the point that his view of self was different to how others perceived him ("And the more I talked to my girlfriend"/"The more that that turned out to not be the case"). This delusion is contextualised further by Kumar professing the positive image he had of himself ("I sort of think of myself as a sort of free spirit"/"An optimistic dreamer who wears his heart on his sleeve"/"His sleeve on his shirt and his shirt on his, torso right? [L]) before a final enaction move (B9viii) brings these lofty ideas crashing back to earth with a blunt dismissal ("Now that I have a girlfriend she's like |"Nish you are none of those things"/"You're an introverted pessimist and frankly it's quite difficult to be around you a lot of the time" [L(2)]).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B9, the whole bit has a strong positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE), with the more narrative sections building to some stronger laughs, and a more volatile initial trend between Individualistic and Solidaristic (IS) which then becomes more positive towards the end. As one of the longest bits of the set the narrative buildup is correspondingly long, but the length of later laughs shows that these are well received.

<b>Bit Ten<sup>128</sup></b>		
Topic: Self Reflection	Forms: Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction	
Fields: Self-Deprecation, Critical	Exemplars Introduced: Haughty	Segue: Sequential

The previous bit (B9) segues sequentially into the next (B10) using a framing move (B10i) that shifts the topic again slightly to the ideas of singledom and the lack of self-reflection that engenders. Bit Ten is a standard bit within the material phase structure and consists of five objective moves:

<sup>128</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy* – Nish Kumar (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 246-275

- i. Framing (246-251)
- ii. Contextualisation (252-257)
- iii. Evaluation (258-268)
- iv. Contextualisation (269-272)
- v. Enaction (273-275)

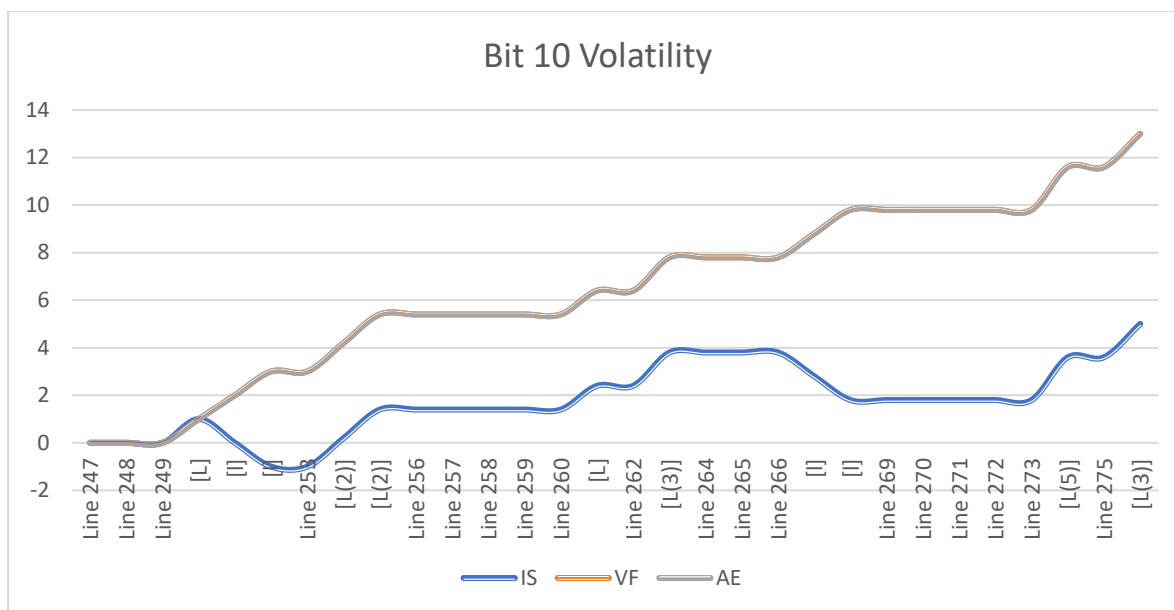
In Bit Ten (B10), Kumar delves into self-reflection, focusing on his personality and personal growth. The overall structure of this bit revolves around the Disclosure form, with the modal channel being verbal. Kumar maintains a high-status tenor throughout the bit, engaging the audience with a blend of self-deprecation and critical commentary.

Starting with an initial framing move (B10i), Kumar presents his thesis statement for the bit, starting with the general context of the issue (“Now. The problem is that for a long time I was single”/“So my personality was under no real intimate scrutiny”), presents his own view of the context (“So I basically thought about a person that I would like to be”/“And then I just *pretended I was that person* [L]”) before presenting the consequences of the statement (“And because there was no-one checking [I]”/“There was no problem! [I]”). This thesis is then taken to its local-logical conclusion in the following contextualisation move (B10ii), where he self-deprecatingly admits his shallow thought process (“So I was just walking around being like “I’m a great guy”) before veering into the absurd by answering as the character of himself and introducing the final context-defining exemplar of the set - haughty (“And the only person there was me who was going “yes you are Nish” [L(2)]”/“You are.. an absolute legend, you’re lucky to have you” [L(2)]”). Kumar then presents the other side of this scenario as a narrative, switching tack to present the personality change from a serious angle (“And my problem is that if my personality has drifted that is a *serious issue*”) before presenting with sincerity his own worldview on the issue (“Because I currently believe myself to be the best version of myself that I’d ever been”/“I think that I’ve learnt a lot and I’m acting in a way in which I’m really proud”).



Switching to an evaluation move (B10iii), Kumar presents an anthesis to the initially proffered thesis (“Now the problem is clearly I’m not the best version of myself that I’ve ever been and this has happened before”) before clarifying this with a conjectural statement (“I thought I was the best version of myself that I’d ever been when I was eighteen years old”/“And when I was eighteen years old I was a *jet-powered bell-end* [L]”) before backing up that statement with an example (“I used to wear a bandana and call people daddy-o”) and finishing with a critical evaluation (“That’s [L(3)] not acceptable”). Again, after taking the presented thesis to its local-logical conclusion Kumar becomes self-reflexive, this time discussing his own sense of self (“And the other problem is that I have a *giant ego*”/“*Huge*”) before directly acknowledging the audience (“I know *you know*, of all people”/“Given what is happening right in front of you, right? [I]”) and the performance itself (“I obviously think I’m *something of a laugh*, clearly [I]”/“By my choice of profession”) for the second time in the set (see B2iii).

Changing to a contextualisation move (B10iv), he launches into a narrative regarding his egomania with a leading statement (“But you have no idea of the extent to which my ego has got, out of hand right?”) before setting the scene (“A couple of days ago I was having a coffee with my friend”), specifying the action (“And as I was speaking I lost my train of thought”) and beginning to explain the reason for that action (“And the reason I lost my train of thought is because as I was speaking”). With this setup in place, Kumar finishes the bit with an enaction move (B10v), humorously and self-deprecatingly disclosing his thought process (“In my head I started thinking {smug expression} “well I am being *very* interesting here” [L(5)]”), building on this (““I’m so interesting, I’m intellectually stimulating, I’m a great laugh, I’m jealous of people who get to meet *me*””) and finally bluntly confronting his own shortcomings to finish the enaction (“That’s the thing! [L(3)]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B10, the whole bit has a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE), with a more volatile trend between Individualistic and Solidaristic (IS). The bit contains two longer narrative buildups, with the bulk of laughs evenly distributed between the start, middle and end of the section, with the final evaluation move (B10v) being the most well-received of the objective moves. The IS volatility is caused by a scattering of smaller laughs after some larger punchlines, dropping the unification of the audience slightly before rallying both times.

Bit Eleven <sup>129</sup>		
Topic: Inappropriate Questions	Forms: Phenomenological Difference [...] Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Enaction, Framing, Evaluation [...] Evaluation, Enaction, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical, Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: B11→B12 [...]→B13

<sup>129</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy* – Nish Kumar (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 276-317

The previous bit (B10) segues sequentially into the next (B11) using a framing move (B11i) that shifts the topic back to his reason for being in Australia and begins his final narrative to end the set regarding facile questions. Bit Eleven is a standard bit within the material phase structure but has a non-sequential segue so it will be broken into two parts, the first part consisting of five objective moves:

- i. Framing (276-282)
- ii. Contextualisation (283-291)
- iii. Enaction (292-296)
- iv. Framing (297-305)
- v. Evaluation (306-317)

In Bit Eleven, Kumar discusses inappropriate questions through the form of Phenomenological Difference using the verbal modal channel – the tenors of the bit are high status and outgroup, and the fields critical and antagonistic. As the segue from this bit to the next is non-sequential, this section will deal with the first half before the segue into B12, with the second half being marked as B11a and dealt with afterwards.

Starting with a framing move (B11i), he stitches back to the earlier setup (B9iii) and reintroduces the reason that he was in Australia in the first place (“Um, so...”/“The reason that my girlfriend and I had been out in Australia is”/“I’d been out in Australia doing some gigs”/“I was doing some gigs at the Melbourne Comedy Festival”) before once again in the now established pattern giving his personal opinion on that context (“Now, the gigs were really fun”/“Which is good because I didn’t think they were going to be”) before raising audience tension and expectations with the final line of the bit (“Because before I went to do the gigs there was *an incident*”). Having built up this tension, Kumar switches to a contextualisation move (B11ii), using the phenomenological difference form to explain the background of comedy festival media promotion (“Now, a lot of the time when you go to a comedy festival”/“There’s too many comedians to interview er... sort of all individually”) before going into specifics of how these interviews are done (“So what they’ll do is they’ll send out Q & A’s”/“Now these are all the same

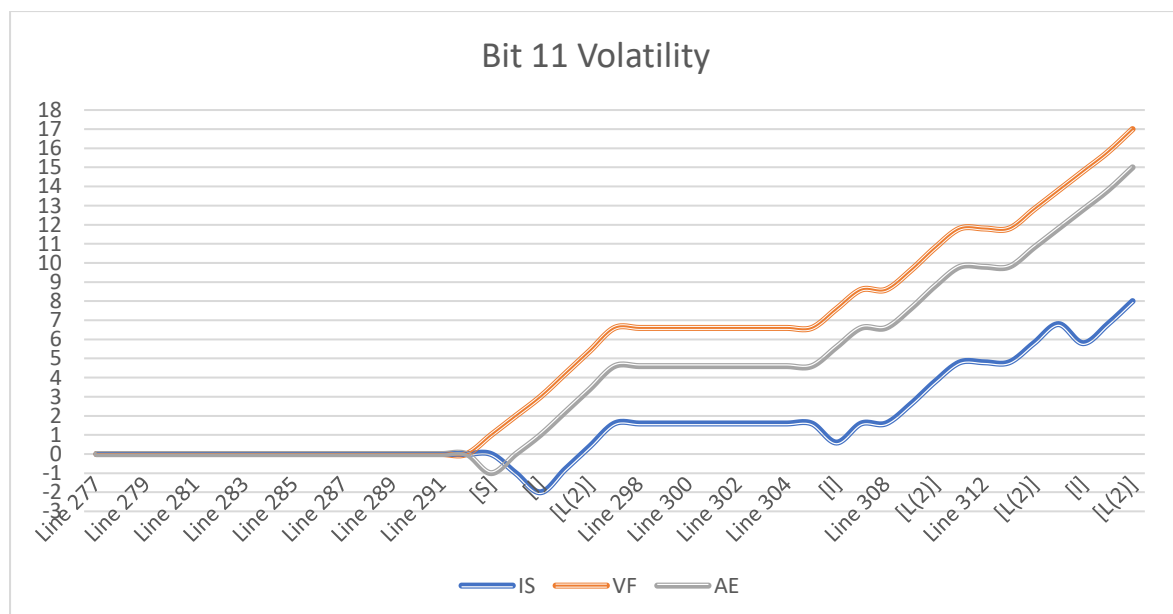
questions everyone gets and they're all.."/"It's like a standard form that you get sent out").

Getting more specific again, he begins the final setup for the following enaction move by establishing the banality of the questions asked ("And they're all sort of boring questions like "Where are you from? Who are your favourite comedians?" Blah blah blah"), reversing expectations ("Then occasionally journalists will get creative") and raising the audience tension with a local-logical scenario ("I have no idea why they feel the need to ask wacky questions"/"But they ask some wacky *wacky* questions"). Changing to an enaction move (B11iii), Kumar takes on the amalgam character of an annoying and obnoxious interviewer ("There'll be a question like |(higher pitched) "Oh!" {chuckles faux mirthfully} [S→I]"/"if your comedy show was a *dog*, what kind of *dog* would it be?!" [I]"), taking this character to its self-referential local-logical conclusion ("{chuckles faux mirthfully at length} [L(2)]"/"I'm so wacky!" {chuckles faux mirthfully} [L(2)]) and finally breaking the fourth wall of his own characterisation in reference to the audience being there ("Maybe *I* should be a comedian, what? shut up" [L(2)] Now...").

Kumar at this point switches back to an extended framing move (B11iv), preparing for the final climatic joke of the set with a line providing general context to the narrative ("I'm filling one of these things out"), followed up by presenting his opinion as before ("And I'm happy to do it because I get to, go to Australia") before going into the specifics of the situation ("And I'm going through one of these questions and there's also boring questions like"/"Where are you from who are your favourite comedians") and finally providing the narrative twist that piques the audience interest ("Then there is a question that has been personalised for me"). As this is a longer framing build-up, Kumar now zooms in further to a pinpoint moment in the narrative as told, communicating in real-time his thought process ("It's in a different font so I spot it a mile off"/"It's clearly been inserted into an existing document") before bringing the interest to a peak with a crystal clear reiteration of the context of what he was looking at ("And the question that these people had personalised for me is this") – the revelation is dropped as a blunt statement ("How come Christians are allowed to draw pictures of their prophets and Muslims aren't?"

[I]”) before he communicates his own opinion through action, expressing his disbelief without a word (“{looks around in disbelief} [L]”).

Swapping to an evaluation move (B11v), Kumar begins to interrogate the thought process of those who came up with this by starting with the patent idiocy of the assumption (“To which the obvious answer is...”/“*I don’t know!* [L]), developing his scontext with a piece of background information (“*My parents are Hindus!* [L(2)]”) before reiterating his exasperation with the situation (“*I’ve got no idea... why they think I would know!* [L]”). Having established the ridiculousness of the premise, he then proceeds to examine that that ridiculousness (“Now one of two things has happened here”), painting a scenario for the audience (“Either these people have seen that I’ve got a foreign name and just thought”/“must be a Muzzer, definite Muzzer” [L(2)]”) and taking it to its local logical conclusion (““*Nish Kumar* is a classic Muzzer name” [L]”) before pushing further into the surreal with an alternative scenario (“*Or they think we have non-white-people meetings* [I]”) and again taking this to its local-logical conclusion (“*Where we assemble.. set the non-white agenda for the year* [L]”/“*And then retire to a screening room where we watch a DVD of ‘Boyz N the Hood’ and...* [L(2)]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for the first half of B11 before the self-contained segue through B12, the whole bit has a strongly positive trend towards

Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) showing the final build-up of momentum towards the end of the set, with more volatile Individualistic\Solidaristic (IS) trend caused by a scattering of smaller laughs at the beginning and towards the end of the bit. The longer narrative parts are all focused on the final goal of the end of the bit, though this is broken up by the segue tangent that Kumar takes into B12.

<b>Bit Twelve<sup>130</sup></b>		
Topic: Microaggressions	Forms: Phenomenological Difference	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Evaluation, Enaction	
Fields: Complementary	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: B12→B11

B11 segues directly into B12 using a framing move (B12i) that builds on the previously discussed ideas at the end of the first half of Bit Eleven (B11v), taking the idea of “non-white people meetings” and relaying an experience he had regarding microaggressions. B12 is a contained bit within the material phase structure and consists of four objective moves:

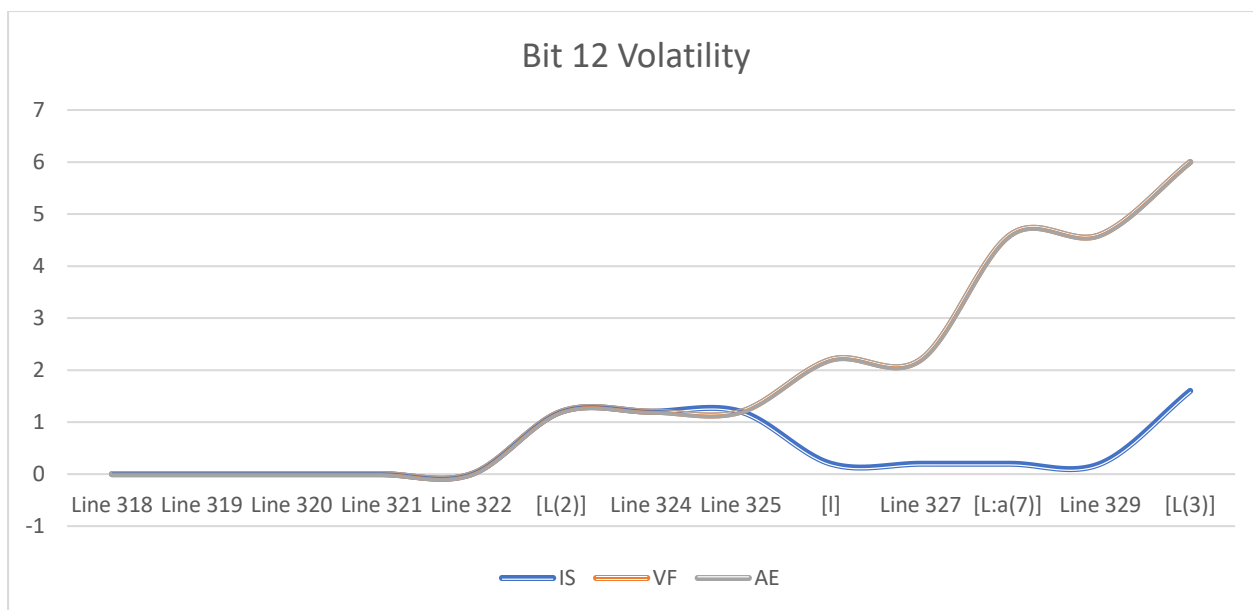
- i. Framing (318-319)
- ii. Contextualisation (320-323)
- iii. Evaluation (324-326)
- iv. Enaction (327-330)

Starting with a framing move (B12i), Kumar interrupts his own narrative for a directly related anecdote (“Let me tell you something ladies and gentlemen right”) before setting the scene and tactically (to prevent alienating audience members this close to the finale) avoid saying exactly where it was (“I was doing a gig in a part of the UK which I will not name”). Moving to a contextualisation move (B12ii), he focuses the scene further, pointing out the relevant details starting with the

<sup>130</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Nish Kumar* (2023)  
<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 318-330

audience (“And there was a group of nervous-looking middle-aged white people here {points to front row}”), the room layout (“And it was a three sided room so there were two banks of seats here {points to either side of the stage}”), and a final pertinent detail for the setup (“Which were empty apart from one black guy who was sat here {points to stage right}”) before pulling the rug out with a blunt observation of the awkwardness of the situation (“Presumably because they were keeping an eye on him and [L(2)]”).

Changing to an evaluation move (B12iii), Kumar sets up the final punchline of the narrative with some speculation on the man’s thought process (“This guy obviously decided, he was going to have some fun right?”) before recounting his actions in tension building detail (“Because when I men... when I used the phrase “*non-white-people meetings*”/”He turned to make sure that they were all looking at him [1]”). Switching to an enaction move (B12iv) for the penultimate punchline of the bit, Kumar breaks the tension through simple action to great effect (“And then in full view of all these people just looked at me and went...”/”{taps nose conspiratorially repeatedly and closes eyes} [L:a(7)]”). As the audience is reacting to this, he makes his own enjoyment clear (“{makes “Bellissima” gesture, kisses fingertips and tosses away}”) before combining the final topper punchline of the bit with an unconscious indication that he is bringing the set to its conclusion (“{turning away from audience and moving microphone stand to his right} You have not lived until you’ve seen a room full of middle-aged white people simultaneously *shit their pants* right? [L(3)]”).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B12, after a long narrative start the last half has a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE), with a more volatile trend towards Individualistic (IS). The bit starts with a longer narrative buildup, with the bulk of laughs spiking at the end of the section, with the final enaction move (B12iv) being the most well-received of the objective moves.

Bit Eleven A <sup>131</sup>		
Topic: Inappropriate Questions	Forms: Phenomenological Difference [...] Disclosure	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: High Status, Outgroup	Objective Moves: Framing, Contextualisation, Enaction, Framing, Evaluation [...] Evaluation, Enaction, Evaluation, Contextualisation, Enaction	
Fields: Critical, Antagonistic	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: B11→B12 [...]→B13

Bit Twelve segues back into the second half of the previous bit (indicated as B11a) using an evaluation move (B11ai) that shifts the narrative back to the topic started in B11. Bit Eleven A is a standard bit within the material phase structure but

<sup>131</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy* – Nish Kumar (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 331-363



has a non-sequential segue so it has been broken into two parts, the second part consisting of five objective moves:

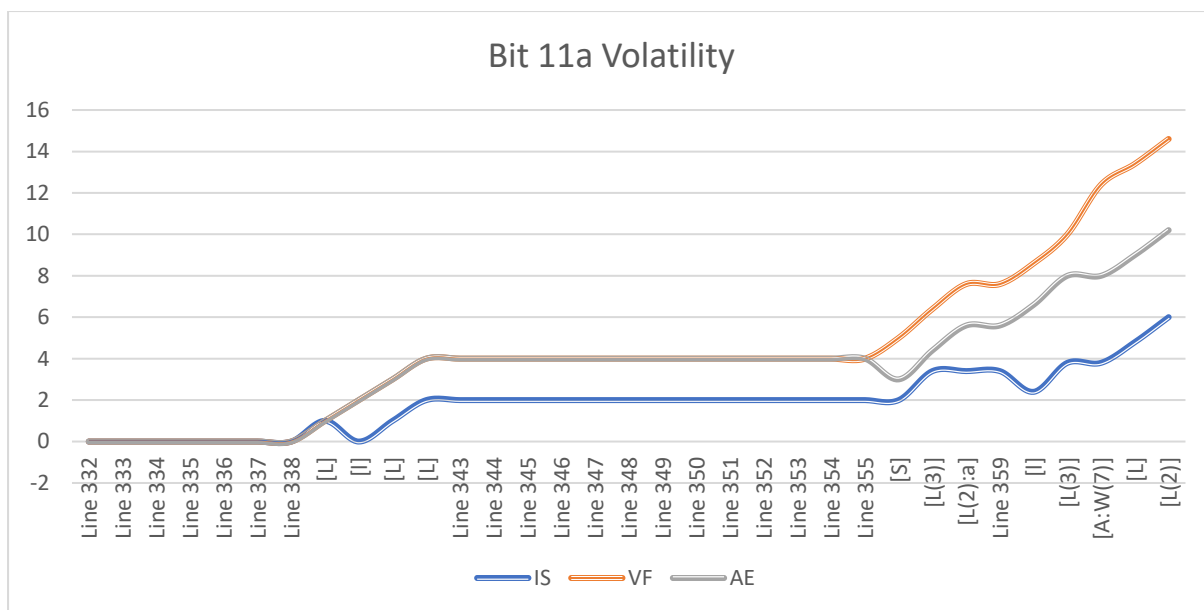
- i. Evaluation (331-336)
- ii. Enaction (337-339)
- iii. Evaluation (340-343)
- iv. Contextualisation (344-352)
- v. Enaction (353-363)

Starting with an evaluation move (B11ai), Kumar quickly recaps the situation (“So Obviously I didn’t know how to answer this question cos this is a contentious subject”) before giving his own opinion (“And, you know I don’t want to {stammers} upset anybody”/“But I was offended”) and making very clear the inappropriateness of the question (“Like I didn’t think they had the right to ask me those kind of questions”) and the effect it had on him and his sensibilities (“My Muslim friends wouldn’t know how to answer that question so”/“I felt very uncomfortable”). Switching to an enaction move (B11aii), he shares the whiplash he felt when he saw the next question (“But it was hard for me to articulate my discomfort because the next question was”) followed by the return of the amalgam character of the “wacky” interviewer (“|(higher pitched) “Oh!” {chuckles faux mirthfully} [L]”/“if your comedy show was grass would you feed it to a horse?!” | [I]”).

In reaction to his jarring change in tone, Kumar switches to an evaluation move (B11aiii), making his own opinion clear on the ridiculousness of this (“And I was like “you can’t just jump *back into whimsy* [L]”/“After you’ve just asked me a *serious theological question*” [L]”) before beginning to build the tension for the final piece of the set (“But then luckily there was a little scope for discussion”/“Because the *last question*. wasn’t really a question”). Changing to a contextualisation move (B11iv), he starts the build-up process by pacing the explanation lines, starting with the context (“It was a task”) before establishing the setup (“They had given us the first half of a joke”) and the punchline (“And we had to complete the second half”), reiterating this narrative form (“They’d

given us the feed line, we had to write the punchline"). After this has been established, Kumar gives his own opinion of the context and purpose of this ("You were supposed to complete this in a way that shows your distinctive style of humour"/"So people will come and watch you do the show") before setting the focused context for the final objective move ("And the feed line that they'd given us the first half of the joke was"/"A book walks into a bar, and *sees.. a bookcase'* {beat}") and finalising the audience expectations for what is to come ("And this is how I finished the joke {beat}").

Switching to a final enaction move (B11av), Kumar repeats the setup of the joke using the same timing as before to hammer home the repetition ("A book walks into a bar and sees.. a bookcase {beat}") before starting with a cliché of his own ("And the book says...") and leading into an amalgam character of "the book", based on the character of the interviewer from before (B11iii), which starts with another cliché ("|(enthusiastically) "Hey bookcase!" {mugs for a second at audience} [S]") and then repeats the offending question for comic effect ("How come Christians are allowed to [L(3)] draw pictures of their prophets"/"and Muslims aren't?" [L(2):a]). Building on the local-logic of the joke, Kumar continues ("And the bookcase said...") before doing a rugpull on his own logic into reality("I don't *know*' [I]"/"I am a *bookcase'* [L(3)→A:W(7)]"). This bumpy return to logic is exacerbated by the follow-up line, where he counters further the logic of his own joke when juxtaposed with reality ("and as such.. have no idea about Islamic theology" [L]). Finally, he finishes with a refutation of the unspoken assumption behind the offensive question in the local logic of the joke ("I assume you've asked me because I'm a *brown bookcase'* [L(4)]") and his own reaction to this assumption ("in which case you can *go to hell*" [L(2)]).



Looking at the perceived bit volatility for B11a, the bit is very narrative heavy, with a mostly neutral trend for the first two-thirds, with a strongly positive trend towards Focused (VF), Expressive (AE), and Solidaristic (IS) with the final punchline cascade that serves to bring the bit to its conclusion. There is some initial volatility with IS, but the first two-thirds consist entirely of setup for the final punchline cascade, bringing everything to a head and finishing the set on a high.

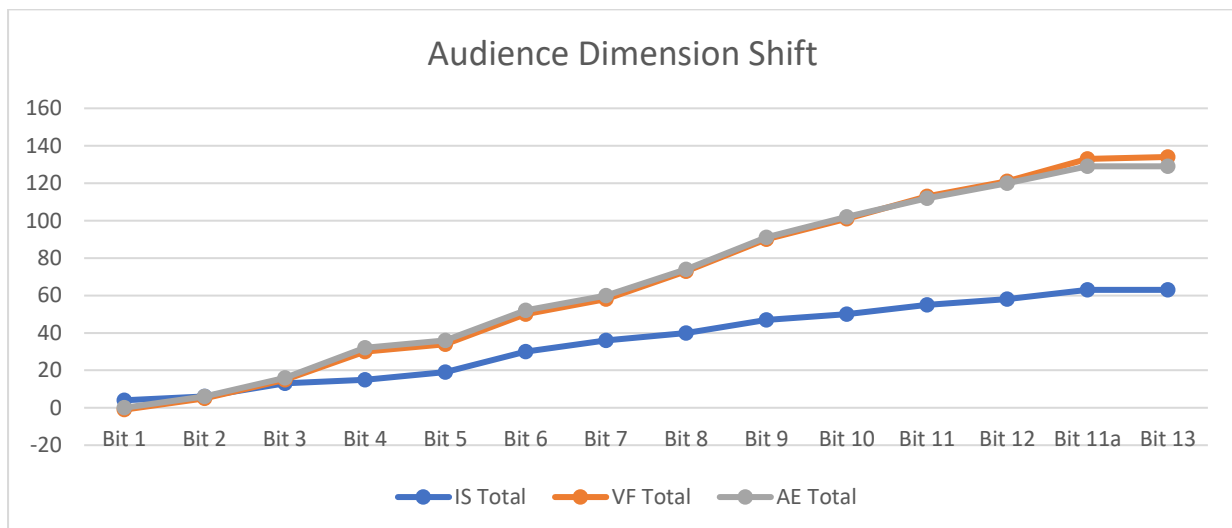
Bit Thirteen <sup>132</sup>		
Topic: Ending	Forms: Ending	Modal Channels: Verbal
Tenors: Ingroup	Objective Moves: Evaluation, Reintroduction, Acknowledgement	
Fields: Placatory	Exemplars Introduced:	Segue: Finish

The previous bit (B11a) segues sequentially into the next (B13) using an evaluation move (B13i) that begins the finishing sequence of the set. Bit Thirteen is a standard finishing bit (see Figure 10) within the material phase structure consisting of three objective moves:

<sup>132</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy* – Nish Kumar (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/nish-kumar.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023] – Line 364-366

- i. Evaluation (364)
- ii. Reintroduction (365)
- iii. Acknowledgement (396)

Starting with an evaluation move (B13i), Kumar evaluates the audience and their positive impact on the performance (“Ladies and gentlemen, you have been an absolute delight”) before switching to a reintroduction move (B13ii) to finish the set (“My name is Nish Kumar, thank you very much, goodnight! {holds right hand up in wave} [W:A:C(12)]”) and a final silent acknowledgement move (B13iii) where he gives final thanks to the audience before leaving the stage (“{replaces microphone in stand, bows, raises both hands, then exits upstage right}”).



Overall, the plotted audience dimensional shift shows strong positive trends towards the idealised Focused (VF) and Expressive (AE) and weakly positive trend towards Solidaristic (IS), with VF and AE following each other in dipping early (B1-B3), then becoming a steeper curve towards the middle section of the set (B4-B10) and levelling out towards the end as the narrative becomes longer and more involved (B11-B13). With the IS trend, the rise is much slower at the beginning (B1-B4), with a steady gradual rise from then onwards to the end of the set.

### **Comparative Analysis – Narrative Level – Nish Kumar and Mae Martin**

As noted previously, both shows were performed at the same venue – the BBC Radio Theatre in London – and from this, an assumption of collective norms relevant to the performances can be created from available socioeconomic data and used as our reference point for this period. This is a rough statistical simulation of what the performers would be doing when choosing their material, though rather than statistics they would use intuition based on lived experience – however using statistics for this exercise allows those choices to be fully envisioned in a past tense scenario where the analyst may not be a member of those groups. Tickets for BBC shows are provided free of charge upon application, often by random draw if demand is high enough<sup>133</sup> which means that economically the audience would be diverse in terms of social class with no barrier to entry in the form of the ticket price, though one can assume more likely to be local to London and surrounding areas because the tickets were free. Based on ONS data for over sixteens from the 2016 Annual Population Survey<sup>134</sup>, 2.7% of the population of London identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual at that time<sup>135</sup> which means that identifying as non-heterosexual would put you into a statistical outgroup. Similarly, 62.59% of the population of London identify as white as compared to non-white, though a much smaller disparity exists percentage-wise due to the multiculturalism of the location between the assumed white ingroup and non-white outgroup. Finally, the second (12.41%) and third (5.34%) most common religious denominations by respondents are Muslim and Hindu respectively, so their representation compared to those who identify as a Christian of any denomination (48.5%) is statistically significant but also plausibly, as Kumar implies, interchangeable by the ignorant.<sup>136</sup>

In terms of background and experience, something that is easily researched through the advertising surrounding a gig or through database websites such as IMDB or Chortle, Mae Martin at the time of the performance had been performing

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<sup>133</sup> *Join us in the audience for one of our shows* (2023) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/showsandtours/shows>> [accessed 05 September 2023]

<sup>134</sup> See Appendix E for derived calculations from ONS 2016 data

<sup>135</sup> *Sexual Identity, UK: 2016* (2017)

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016#males-are-more-likely-to-identify-as-gay-or-lesbian-females-are-more-likely-to-identify-as-bisexual>> [accessed 05 September 2023]

<sup>136</sup> See Appendix E for calculations based on ONS data for 2016

comedy for 16 years, in the UK for 5 years and had appeared on several TV programmes aimed at a youth demographic prior to 2016, as well as winning 'Best International Performer' at the Brighton Fringe and performing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival<sup>137</sup>, whereas Nish Kumar at this point had been performing comedy for 12 years and as a solo performer for 3 years, with a consecutive run of 6 Edinburgh Fringe shows under his belt including a Fosters Comedy Award nomination for the latest one in 2015<sup>138</sup>. Kumar had appeared on a number of panel shows aimed at both a youth and middle-class demographic, as well as being on the writing team for the first series of *The Kumars* in 2014<sup>139</sup>. This information, while some of it is mediated by the performers and promoters, allows us to envision a demographic for both performer and audience based on the image they want to project and who would respond favourably to that image.

To recap before moving on, based on the available data our assumed audience collective norms are an economically diverse, geographically local capacity audience, with statistically significant numbers of both white and heterosexual people. The relative experience of both performers coupled with their projected image should indicate a fan following in both a youth and middle-class demographic.

The next thing to consider is the venue itself and the effect the space can have on the gig. Though the staging and backdrops are, by necessity, flexible and reconfigurable, the use of a dedicated performance space with fixed-tiered theatre seating both minimises potential distractions and conveys a level of professionalism to the intended audience. The dedicated sound and lighting equipment as well as dedicated technicians mean that technical problems are less likely to have a disruptive influence on the performance. The stage has a thrust central flat to minimise the gap between the performer and audience, with a conventional wired microphone on a round-based stand in the centre picked out by a spotlight to create

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<sup>137</sup> Mae Martin: *Biography* (2022) <[https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1543343/bio?ref=nm\\_ov\\_bio\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1543343/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm)> [accessed 05 September 2022]

<sup>138</sup> Steve Bennett, *Nish Kumar: Actions Speak Louder than Words* (2016) <[https://www.chortle.co.uk/review/2016/08/21/30478/nish\\_kumar%3A\\_actions\\_speak\\_louder\\_than\\_words...](https://www.chortle.co.uk/review/2016/08/21/30478/nish_kumar%3A_actions_speak_louder_than_words...)> [accessed 05 September 2023]

<sup>139</sup> *The Kumars: Full Cast and Crew* (2014) <[https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3470362/fullcredits/?ref=tt\\_cl\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3470362/fullcredits/?ref=tt_cl_sm)> [accessed 06 September 2023]

a semiotic link with the stereotypical comedy club image. The backdrop, while more unconventional than the typical blank wall, is designed to fade down and change colour with the house lights to provide a strong contrast behind the performer and delineate their presence.

Structurally, the sets for both acts followed the standard genre phase structure with Martin's 8 bits in 7:13 giving a 00:54.13 per bit average (pba) compared to Kumar's 01:31.92 pba from 13 bits in 19:55. Kumar speaks 3890 words over the course of his set for an average of 195.3 words per minute, Martin 1398 words for a wpm average of 193.7 – this puts them both into the average speed bracket for conversational speech according to Tauroza and Allison of 190 to 230 wpm<sup>140</sup>. This fits largely with their delivery – both have a conversational approach to their performance, though the greater pba time enjoyed by Kumar allows for multiple narrative considerations of the topic at hand compared to Martin's more focused approach. Narratively, Martin follows a sequential bit structure with standard segues between each bit, while Kumar follows this structure for the first 10 bits of his set and then switches to non-sequential for the final three bits to incorporate an aside into his penultimate bit build-up, resulting in a narrative progression from Bit 11 to 12, 12 back to 11 and then 11 to 13.

In terms of standard introduction sequences, Martin follows the standard five move one (Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Enquiry, Introduction, Evaluation, Contextualisation) whereas Kumar follows a slightly longer one (Objective Moves: Acknowledgement, Introduction, Enquiry, Contextualisation, Enquiry, Evaluation) adding a second enquiry to further establish ingroup membership as a "local" from Croydon compared to Martin's outgroup membership as a Canadian, something they highlight immediately in their contextualisation move. This establishes the first of both their ingroup/outgroup identities and helps the audience make a relative tenor contextualisation. The other interesting tenors and fields established here are status-related – Kumar immediately establishes a high-status stance through direct acknowledgement of the audience's applause as directly for him, confronts a

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<sup>140</sup> Steve Tauroza and Desmond Allison, 'Speech Rates in British English', *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 1 (1990) pp. 90-105 (p. 102)

possible disruptive influence pre-emptively by asking for clarification from the audience and takes an antagonistic and critical field stance towards both the audience and the other to shut down the possibility of further heckles. Martin, in contrast, leans towards the placatory side of the field in their intro and by consequence establishes a low-status tenor – explicitly thanking the audience for having them in the country and reacting with surprise and seeming slightly unprepared when someone else said they were from Canada after a direct question to the audience.

Moving on to the material of the set, both sets follow the material phase diagram – Martin uses their contextualisation bit (Bit 2) to establish one of the central themes for their narrative, that of an overprotective mother, through deliberate but initially subtle characterisation to create a critical framing of phenomenologically common ingroup experience – loving exasperation at the concern of a close family member. This also serves to highlight and confront Martin’s perceived youth based on their appearance – in a necessary step to avoid assumptions of inexperience and naivety, they instead opt to exemplify childishness by highlighting the unconsciously infantilising influence that parents can have on their children while pushing back against this to establish their credentials as a legitimate opening act. Interestingly, Kumar uses his contextualisation bit to contextualise the idea of stand-up itself, discussing the subjective nature of comedy in a way that self-deprecatingly highlights the outgroup inherent in the performer-audience relationship through a critical lens of phenomenological difference. While this could (uncharitably) be viewed as an attempt to manage audience expectations, the confidence exuded by Kumar coupled with a genuine and honest reflective evaluation of stand-up as a medium makes this almost seem like an unguarded observation until this is undercut by the final scripted punchline.

### **Comparative Analysis – Narrative Level – Mae Martin, Nish Kumar and Frank Astaire**

When it comes to performers at the level of Astaire (Local Apprentice), usually much less background information can be gleaned without a direct interview – however, in this case, as I am the performer in question it is useful as a



demonstration to compare myself to Martin and Kumar to see what insights can be gleaned. For clarity, this comparison will be against the background of me as the performer unless relevant to the way the character is perceived on stage – when I refer to I or me I am talking about myself as a performer, when I refer to Frank I am talking about the character.

Portraying a character that is white and heterosexual, I am in the statistical ingroup compared to both Kumar and Martin respectively, with the ONS statistical data for 2016 showing 87.48% of respondents identified as White in the East Midlands<sup>141</sup> and the previously discussed ONS Sexual Identity survey<sup>142</sup> 93.4% of people nationwide identified as heterosexual. Though Frank as a character never states a religious leaning, again the assumption here would be that he is in a statistical majority for the area, either “Christian – All Denominations” at 53.81% or “No Religion” at 35.94% - for comparison, the percentage of people in the East Midlands who identified as Muslim or Hindu respectively are 4.11% and 2.78%, around a third of their London counterparts.

A demographic that was less relevant for Martin and Kumar but one that is more relevant for me in this situation is average age – unlike the BBC gig, an entrance fee was charged which reduces the distribution amongst those with a lower average disposable income. This is also coupled with the material done in character as the context of Frank is tied very much to the 1970s. Assuming a lack of disposable income in age brackets below 25-29, this excludes 9.46% of the possible audience from attending, with only those in the 45-49 age bracket and above old enough to remember the decade of the 1970s at the time of the performance – 63.19% of the total potential audience removing the lower age brackets, with the remaining 36.81% being too young to possibly get the more obscure references.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> See Appendix E - Ethnicity % by Region for Over 16's (9 UK Categories)

<sup>142</sup> *Sexual Identity, UK: 2016* (2017) <

<<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2016#small-changes-in-the-percentage-identifying-as-lesbian-gay-or-bisexual-in-2016>> [accessed 06 September 2023]

<sup>143</sup> See Appendix E - Age Band Over 16's % By Region

Moving on to background and experience, I started performing in 2009 while at university, moved into character comedy in 2011 with a character named Johnny F. Monotone, reached the final of the Chortle Student Comedian of the Year Competition with that character in 2012<sup>144</sup> and the semi-final of the same competition in 2013 as myself. I was involved in running several new act/new material gigs throughout York from 2009 to 2014 under the group name “Can’t Sing, Can’t Dance, Don’t Care”, as well as helping several new acts take their first steps into stand-up comedy. Frank Astaire as a character was conceived during this time and initially served as a compere for several of the different gigs before becoming a fully-fledged character in his own right. During this time, I had also been gigging by invitation but was still working a full-time job, the PhD research started in 2015 and Frank was the first character selected to perform for a year which is when this performance took place. At this time, I had been to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival twice as a performer and was being paid occasionally for Opener and Headliner spots but was mostly doing middle spots for free or petrol money. Both Kumar and Martin were vastly more experienced at this time, with Kumar having six years on me and Martin ten, as well as an established following.

In comparison to the purpose-built BBC radio theatre, the venue for my performance was designed as a multipurpose space. The trappings of stand-up comedy are there as provided by the organiser Alan Seaman, who is a seasoned promoter as well as a stand-up performer himself<sup>145</sup>, and who runs several successful gigs in the area. The lighting was undimmable and consisted of banks of lights controlled by a switch as per the standard in a venue like this as well as strung Christmas lights throughout the venue. The sound equipment consisted of an amplifier and long-cabled microphone with a stand, and the seats were arranged largely cabaret style, with a couple of sofas at the front to form a front row. Each of these differences not only reflects my relative level compared to Martin and Kumar but also could be an influencing factor in audience reception – the use of a prebuilt

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<sup>144</sup> Steve Bennett, *Sebastian Bloomfield – News* (2023)  
<[https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/s/33926/sebastian\\_bloomfield/news](https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/s/33926/sebastian_bloomfield/news)> [accessed 06 September 2023]

<sup>145</sup> Steve Bennett, *Alan Seaman – Review* (2023)  
<[https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/a/33216/alan\\_seaman/review](https://www.chortle.co.uk/comics/a/33216/alan_seaman/review)> [accessed 06 September 2023]

and more professional-looking space could predispose the audience towards the comedian as the expectation is that only those that have a deserving talent would be performing there.

Structurally, Frank's set follows the standard genre phase structure with 10 bits in 17:23 giving a 01:44.3 per bit average (pba), speaking 2290 words for a wpm average of 131.6 – this puts the performance into the moderately slow speed bracket for conversational speech of 130-160 wpm<sup>146</sup>. Being around 60 wpm slower than both Kumar and Martin while the performance time being comparable to Kumar's (and ten minutes longer than Martin's) means that the differences in delivery become clear – Frank's contempt for both the audience and himself leads to much more awkward pauses, pacing and approach to conversation than either of the others, and his lack of ingratiation and humility stand him apart from Kumar and Martin, making him appear less professional. In terms of my approach, the standoffishness is part of the character – a challenge, to make them laugh even when you are insulting them. Whether this shows personal contempt for the audience I don't know, however, my intent was never to truly insult but to mock in a way that allowed people to laugh at themselves. Narratively, the performance follows a sequential bit structure with standard segues between each bit, which despite its proliferation of non-sequiturs is a linear narrative and does not contain any integrated bits like Kumar's.

In comparison to the others who both used standard introduction sequences when it came to the first bit, Frank's introduction bit (Objective Moves: Request, Contextualisation, Enaction, Request, Evaluation, Request, Contextualisation, Acknowledgement, Contextualisation) is much longer and more unfocused, concentrating as it does on establishing context rather than ingratiating him with the audience. This distance and arrogance immediately put him in an outgroup compared to the audience as he does not even introduce himself further to the audience, just makes them wait while he finds his cigarette and starts into a song without any banter or context. Immediately putting him into an antagonistic field

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<sup>146</sup> Steve Tauroza and Desmond Allison, 'Speech Rates in British English', *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 1 (1990) pp. 90-105

with the audience while pushing for a high-status tenor, the opposite of Martin's low-status open and honest approach and worlds away from Kumar, who while high-status and antagonistic when first coming to the stage at least acknowledges the audience properly and creates himself an ingroup membership through establishing he is from Croydon.

Finally, when it comes to the material of the set all sets follow the material phase diagram – Frank uses his contextualisation bit (Bit 2) differently again from Kumar and Martin, starting by introducing himself and then trying to win over the audience not with platitudes but with nostalgia. When they fail to recognise his catchphrase, instead of showing any humility Frank immediately exemplifies his disrespectful nature – taking the audience through what he expects of them and then storming off stage to do it properly, blatantly insulting them on the way out. Despite these differences in approach, just like with Martin and Kumar the aim I have here is to establish the central theme of the performance – rather than an experiential one (such as Martins's overbearing parents) or a theoretical one (such as Kumar's contextualisation of stand-up comedy performance) the theme is a contextual one – this is how Frank is going to treat you throughout the performance, this is the kind of person he is.

### **Evaluation of Narrative Level Analysis**

With the narrative level analysis complete, it is worth once again taking the time to review the strengths and weaknesses of this level of analysis when it comes to encoding (notating) and decoding (analysing) performance artefacts. As before, this is not intended to be comprehensive, nor to pre-empt the conclusion which will focus on the framework as a holistic whole, but an opportunity to review this stratum of the framework for any insights it can bring.

Again, starting with the positives, the exclusive use at this level of recordings when creating the stand-up artefact allows for much greater detail to be encoded (and subsequently decoded). The several passes that it takes to complete each transcription allow for error corrections on each subsequent watch and thus improve the accuracy of the transcription far beyond what could be achieved at the frame

level. This level of detail also allows for the collected data to be used to calculate the statistics of the performance – words per minute, line count, length of audience reactions, number of objective moves – with these being easily comparable from bit to bit and performance to performance. Finally, the resulting data is graphable – by graphing the ebb and flow of the performance this can enable it to be easily visualised. This approach can be applied line by line and the whole performance mapped from beginning to end, showing the peaks and troughs of the dialogue between the performer and the audience.

Conversely, there are a couple of strong negatives to this level of transcription and analysis, the first of which is that it is very labour-intensive – transcription needs several passes to complete, first to check the accuracy of the computer transcription, then to separate the lines in the rhythm of speech, then to transcribe movements and gestures and finally to transcribe the audience reaction. This means that, unlike the frame level transcription and analysis which is done in real-time, the creation of a performance artefact at this level takes many times the length of the recording that is being encoded, and this is before even any analysis beyond structural has been carried out. Secondly, while these multiple passes are necessary to get the greatest level of accuracy possible, things like audience reactions are counted to the nearest second and the intensity is not recorded beyond a binary uppercase/lowercase separation – this is a limitation of the current system when transcribed by a human and future systems would need to assist with this.

## **Chapter Six**

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“Jokes rightly belong to an oral culture: they live out loud, not on the page. Anyone who tries to capture these elusive little stories treads a fine line.”<sup>1</sup> – Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves

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### **The Material Level: Theories and Their Application**

This chapter is an exploration of the theories leveraged in the third level of the proposed framework – the material level – and their application to the close analysis of extracts from three extant stand-up comedy artefacts. Due to the close reading required for application of theories at this level, unlike with the previous chapters I will not be carrying this reading out on the whole performance for each of the artefacts, but rather a selected piece of material from each. Though this will be precontextualised by the analysis in earlier chapters, the ideal approach would be to perform this close reading on every piece of material in the performance artefact to maintain the holistic connection to the performance itself – as previously stated, one of the issues with concentrating purely on the material is that the context of the performance itself is largely lost – the aim of the artefact is to prevent this as much as possible by sequentially numbering the material structures so it is possible to ascertain their location within the larger overall performance but this can only provide so much contextualisation.

Also, just like the previous chapter I will be including material examples from the corpus, but rather than using these as an illustrative example of a comedian's worldview they will instead be used as examples of stance-taking, certain comic forms and comedy techniques within a transcribed artefact – while these will be not be provided with the same level of background detail as the three artefacts that

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<sup>1</sup> Jimmy Carr and Lucy Greeves, *The Naked Jape: Uncovering the Hidden World of Jokes* (London: Penguin, 2007) p. 4

have been the focus of the study, I will be providing the link to the full transcribed artefact with each so they can be understood in a wider context.

	Persona	Routine	Audience	Context	Intention
Frame	Identity	Small Talk	Dialogic Form	Staging	Comedic License
Narrative	Worldview	Structure	Collective Behaviour	Convention	Sociocultural Criticism
Material	Stance	Comic Forms	Reaction	Technique	Provocateur

*Table 11 - Level 1 - Holistic Analysis Matrix Framework*

### Stance

Stance-taking serves as a tool for comedians to establish rapport with their audience, construct their comedic personas, and delve into an array of perspectives on a given subject with the flexibility that is offered to comedians to present unique viewpoints and narratives. The relativity of stance to the subject matter is a crucial part of stand-up comedy. As Karkkainen states when discussing the inherently dialogic nature of speech this very dialogism means "subjectivity is no longer regarded as a more or less static mental state of the speaker, but a dynamic concept constructed in the course of some action; i.e., subjectivity is an integral part of the interaction between conversational coparticipants"<sup>2</sup>. When applied to the realm of the dialogic in stand-up comedy, this implies that a comedian's stance is neither rigid

<sup>2</sup> Elise Karkkainen, 'Stance Taking in Conversation: From Subjectivity to Intersubjectivity', *Text & Talk*, 26, 6 (2006) pp. 699-731 (p. 706)

nor preordained, but rather shaped by the topic at hand. Consequently, this adaptability directly influences the comedic objectives of the performance.

Such relative stance is often exhibited in the structure of stand-up comedy material, which can involve a comedian exploring a topic from one angle before abruptly switching to an opposite perspective. Such abrupt transitions can enrich performances, granting comedians the latitude to explore an array of viewpoints on a subject, thereby engendering moments of revelation or irony. This relativity of position can be explored using Positioning theory, as Rom Harré writes when discussing relativity within the theory "(t)he position a person occupies at any moment in an evolving strip of life is determined in part by the storyline that is realised in the unfolding episode."<sup>3</sup> Harré argues that the relative positioning of participants can be described by a triangle, with the three corners being Rights and Duties, Actions and Acts, and Storylines – there is no guarantee of symmetry between the participants, but at the basic level the audience comes to understand the narrative that the comedian is describing as consisting of these interactions between participants. To illustrate this fluidity of relative stance, consider the following example from Alan Davies<sup>4</sup>:

3a	A babysitter tonight is it? [<yes>]	12
3b	A few of you, the rest of you just left them [L(2)]	13
3c	Teenage daughter of a friend, that's quite a good option	14
3d	If you... If you want a babysitter, if you have gone for the teenage daughter of a friend	15
3e	I don't want you to worry about smuggling her boyfriend in about half past eight, don't think about that [I]	16

<sup>3</sup> Rom Harré, 'Positioning Theory: Moral Dimensions of Social-Cultural Psychology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. Jaan Valsiner (Oxford Library of Psychology, 2012) pp. 191-206 (p. 197)

<sup>4</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Alan Davies – Little Victories* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/alan-davies-little-victories.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]



3f	As she unzips his fly on your sofa [L(3)] <u>about nine</u>	17
3g	Followed by full anal in your bed about ten. [L(2)]	18
3h	<u>Don't...</u> Don't think about... Don't think about that	19
3i	Just put that out of your mind. Why are you thinking about that?	20
3j	Think about the evening ahead	21
3k	Relax, it's your time	22

The storyline in this example starts as a dialogic conversation between Davies and the audience regarding their childcare arrangements, with the duties of both participants (Davies and the audience) understood as being that of parents i.e. a duty of care of their children and the action of the latter being passing of that duty to someone responsible in order to come and see the former, with Davies playfully mocking that idea in the second line of the joke. Moving the storyline onwards, Davies suggests that some of them may have entrusted this implicit duty to a “teenage daughter of a friend”, revealing the asymmetry of this duty based on the relative age of the participants (and thus their assumed maturity), removing himself from the triangle and replacing himself with this amalgam character that he absolves himself of responsibility for while still implicitly controlling their actions. In the next step of the storyline, Davies juxtaposes both the duty of care and the social act of trust assumed by the parents against the increasingly concerning actions of the babysitter in sneaking in her boyfriend, unzipping his fly and then full anal sex on the parents' collective beds at the end, each action exposing the asymmetry biased now away further and further from the parents and their act of trust and duty of care ringing more hollow with each. At this point, Davies reinserts himself into the dialogue, reversing his stance and playfully accusing the audience of acts of mental

self-sabotage that are interfering with their right to have a good time at the gig, reiterating the sense of enjoyment to bring the asymmetrical relationship between performer and audience closer to symmetry with the exhortation that this is “your time”.

The crux of stance-taking in stand-up comedy lies in the simultaneous positioning of the comedian and their audience with respect to the “stance objects”, or the topics of discussion. This positioning enables us, as speakers of a common language, to assign value to the objects of interest. Stance-taking, as noted by Matoesian<sup>5</sup>, can be marked verbally as well as through body posture, facial expression, and gestures. In the context of stand-up comedy, stance-taking serves as a mechanism for the comic performer to align or realign themselves and their audience regarding the stance objects, thereby invoking or mobilising presupposed systems of sociocultural value<sup>6</sup>. Frequent and widespread stance-taking acts in stand-up performances often evoke shared stance objects and advocate for various stances, often in an attempt to foster a sense of community among the audience. Indeed, Du Bois<sup>7</sup> emphasises that stance-taking acts typically elicit and respond to a “counterstance” attributed to another position. Thus, these acts are intrinsically suited for creating structural parallelisms, an effective strategy in comedy.

It's pertinent to note that the very stances perceived as harmful or discriminatory can themselves become objects for subsequent stance acts that may repudiate or oppose them. This complex interaction between stances and counterstances lends stand-up comedy its distinctive dynamism, creating a dialogue not just between the comedian and the audience but also between contrasting perspectives and viewpoints<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, stand-up comedy routines often embody a rich tapestry of sociolinguistic phenomena. Comedians may adopt and drop

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory Matoesian, *Struck by Speech Revisited: Embodied Stance in Jurisdictional Discourse*, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9, (2005), pp. 167-193 (p. 168-169)

<sup>6</sup> John Du Bois, ‘The Stance Triangle’ in *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction*, ed. Robert Englebretson (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007) pp. 139–182 (p. 139, 143, 169)

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p 141, 149-150

<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth analysis of stance and counterstance see Alexandra Jaffe, *Stance: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009)

personas at will, altering their voice and gestures to illustrate various social positions or playfully imitate characters. This interweaving of stances and personas suggests the Anglo-American narratological distinction between showing and telling, as highlighted by Booth<sup>9</sup>.

From this perspective, stand-up comedy could be seen as a blend of mimetic, dramatic comedy constituted by play-acted enactments, and narrative, oratorical comedy. Each comedian intricately balances these elements to craft their unique comedic style, with the stances they take contributing significantly to their individual comic persona. Lindfors notes that a comic persona is “produced and stylised to a high degree through various stances and viewpoints”, highlighting the combative, manifestly confrontational nature of the genre<sup>10</sup>. This persona, honed and sharpened through the craft of stance-taking, becomes a powerful tool for the stand-up comedian to navigate the treacherous waters of comedy.

### Comic Forms

Comic forms are the techniques and approaches used to make material humorous – they are not humorous in and of themselves *per se* but when leveraged to shape material they are powerful tools that can transform meaning and reshape expectations. In his extensive study of the intricacies of comedy techniques<sup>11</sup>, Arthur Berger provides a detailed exploration of the morphology of the joke-tale and similarities to rhetorical techniques. Each of the techniques is sorted into four categories, as enumerated by Berger:

1. Language – The humour is verbal
2. Logic – The humour is ideational
3. Identity – The humour is existential
4. Action – The humour is physical or non-verbal<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 1983 [1961])

<sup>10</sup> Antti Lindfors, Twin Constellations: Parallelism and Stance in Stand-up Comedy, *Oral Tradition*, 31, 2 (2017) pp. 561-582, (p. 561)

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor*, (New York: Routledge, 1993)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

For the purposes of applying these as a non-framework theory, it is useful to enumerate the most relevant of them to stand-up comedy here along with some illustrative examples from my own research to demonstrate their use.

Absurdity (logic)<sup>13</sup> is a key form of comic expression that manipulates the expectations of the audience, presenting scenarios or ideas that blatantly defy logic or common sense. The comic impact derives from the surprising incongruity, leading the listener to reassess their understanding of the situation. For a corpus example, see the below material from Milton Jones<sup>14</sup>:

2a	I was walking along the other <i>day</i>	7
2b	and someone threw some shampoo at me {beat}	8
2c	but it turns out it was real poo [17]	9

In this example, the absurdity comes from the unexpected twist of logic from shampoo to real poo, utilising the alternate meaning of the logical unit *sham* – deceitfulness or pretence. This change in perspective then recontextualises the whole narrative of the material from getting something unpleasant but hygienic thrown at you to something deeply unpleasant and unhygienic, as well as relying on the dual meaning of “sham” in a way that conjures an absurd image of someone hurling genuine faeces in the street.

Accidents (logic)<sup>15</sup> constitute another technique by incorporating unexpected events or mishaps to create laughter. The unpredictability and suddenness of an accident, when framed in a humorous context, can elicit great comedic effect. For an illustrative example, here is an example of an accidental fluff of a word by Dylan Moran and the subsequent improvised humour he pulls from this<sup>16</sup>:

79a	<u>they</u> go home	966
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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 19

<sup>14</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Milton Jones – Lion Whisperer* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/milton-jones-lion-whisperer.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

<sup>15</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 20

<sup>16</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Dylan Moran – Like Totally* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/dylan-moran-like-totally.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

79b	to the bed they've sheared for... sh sh... sheared	967
79c	When you shear a bed [L3] <u>it's a... it's a difficult process</u>	968
79d	<u>You know</u> when you go home, you're a bit...	969
79e	had a couple of drinks and the bed all <i>woolly</i> [L3]	970
79f	<u>and you have to...</u>	971
79g	you have to get the clippers out [L2]	972

In this example, the humour comes from the accident of logic presented by Moran in saying *sheared* instead of *shared* – this is a slip of the tongue in this case, but he immediately capitalises, creating an absurd scenario where a couple have to remove the wool from a bed before being able to sleep.

Allusions (language)<sup>17</sup>, another comedy technique, involves making a reference to a person, place, event, or literary work, subtly inserting it into the joke. The humour relies on the audience's recognition of the allusion. For an example from the corpus, Bill Hicks<sup>18</sup>:

28a	I'm down south recently	222
28b	I'm playing a town	223
28c	called Fyffe Alabama all right?	224
28d	And it's right outside Sputnamburg	225
28e	for those of y'all [I] <u>who need a</u>	226
28f	point of reference all right? [L2]	227
28g	<i>Anyway</i> I'm down there in Fyffe	228
28h	They want me to host their annual rickets telethon all right [I]	229

<sup>17</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 21

<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Bill Hicks – Relentless* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/bill-hicks-relentless.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

28i	Whatever [I2]	230
28j	It's great to be able to give something back [L2]	231

The humour here comes from Hicks alluding to the preconceptions of Alabama as being out of the way and backwards without saying so outright, using made-up place names such as "Sputnamberg" and referencing rickets as a disease that is much less common now in the developed west but something that it is common enough in this place to need a telethon for.

The Before and After (identity)<sup>19</sup> comic form relies on presenting a drastic, often humorous contrast between two states or situations. The punchline typically follows a "before... but now..." format, with the "now" state introducing a twist that subverts expectations. For a corpus example, here is a piece of material from Frankie Boyle that twists the before and after style to leave the second part implied<sup>20</sup>:

102a	Twitter's good though isn't it?	636
102b	Before Twitter came along if I wanted a stranger to call me a cunt I had to go out for a walk [L3]	637

In this example, Boyle likens Twitter to being insulted in public and in doing so implies that now Twitter has come along he can be insulted at any time and anywhere, thus creating the juxtaposition between the before and after situations.

The technique of Bombast and Rhetorical Exuberance (language)<sup>21</sup> leverages exaggerated, grandiose language to evoke laughter. Often employed to mock self-important or pretentious figures, bombast juxtaposes inflated language or claims

<sup>19</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993). p.23

<sup>20</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frankie Boyle – Hurt Like You've Never Been Loved* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/frankie-boyle-hurt-like-youve-never.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>21</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 24-25

with mundane or ridiculous realities. For a corpus example, here is Eddie Izzard talking about the experience of having a careers advisor at school in the 1970s<sup>22</sup>:

24e	And he took me aside, he said,	211
24f	(down-to earth voice) "What you want to do, kid? What you want to do? Tell me tell me your dreams"	212
24g	I said  (grandiose) "I want to be a <i>space astronaut</i> go to outer space discover things that have never been discovered"	213
24h	He said  (down-to earth voice) "Look you're British so scale it down a bit all right?"  [L4]	214
24i	(grandiose) "All right I want to work in a <i>shoe shop</i> then [L2]	215
24j	<u>"Discover shoes</u> that no one's ever discovered [I2] <u>right in the back of the shop</u> on the left"	216
24k	He said  (down-to earth voice) "Look you're British so scale it down a bit all right?"  [L(2)]	217
24l	(exasperated) "All right I want to work in a <i>sewer</i> then [L(2)]	218
24m	<u>Discover sewage</u> that no one's <i>ever discovered</i> [I]	219
24n	<u>and</u> pile it on my head	220
24o	and then come to the surface and sell myself to an art gallery"  [L(2)]	221
24p	<u>He said  (shocked) "What the fuck</u> have you been smoking, eh? [L(2)]	222

In this example, Izzard employs bombast in a way that highlights the grandiosity of dreams compared to the down-to-earth pessimism of Britain in general and careers workers in particular, especially in a decade that had industrial action on a large scale in the UK. The second repetition shows Izzard's dreams grow smaller, but the

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<sup>22</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Eddie Izzard – Dress to Kill* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/eddie-izzard-dress-to-kill.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

rhetorical exuberance juxtaposed against the mundanity of the work in a shoe shop is leveraged for maximum effectiveness.

Burlesque (identity)<sup>23</sup> works by employing exaggeration and distortion to parody or mock. It usually involves taking serious subjects and treating them in an absurd or trivial manner, or vice versa. The humour derives from the stark contrast between the style and the subject. For a corpus example, here is Katherine Ryan talking about her dad in her trademark irreverent style<sup>24</sup>:

18a	My dad is a pretty good guy	138
18b	He's done nothing wrong	139
18c	But he looks at my choices like  (confused) "What the fuck? Did I molest her and forget? [L(2)→L:a(2)→L(2)→l(2)]	140
18d	<i>Who's this bitch mad at?</i> [L(3)] {shrugs}	141
18e	If you figure it out, let me know."  [l(2)]	142

In this example, Ryan through the character of her dad takes the very serious topic of sexual molestation and treats it as just another thing that could have happened to influence her choices in life, like not getting enough love or a puppy. The breezy irreverence with which she treats the serious topic creates a humorous juxtaposition for the audience.

Caricature (identity)<sup>25</sup> involves exaggerating or distorting certain characteristics or traits for comedic effect. By amplifying these features to absurd levels, caricature exposes the absurdity or ridiculousness in individuals or types. For a corpus example, here is some material from Joe Lycett<sup>26</sup>:

146b	Anyone in from the Black Country? [c(2)]	1381
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<sup>23</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 25

<sup>24</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Katherine Ryan – In Trouble* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/katherine-ryan-in-trouble.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>25</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 26

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Joe Lycett – I'm About to Lose Control and I Think Joe Lycett* <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/joe-lycett-im-about-to-lose-control-and.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]



146c	Which part? Where are you... where are you from? [!Wolverhampton!]	1382
146d	(Black Country accent) Wolverhampton alright [L(2)]	1383
146e	<u>How are you bab?</u>	1384
146f	That's how they talk if you don't know the Black Country they talk like...	1385
146g	{crunches neck backwards and walks awkwardly} They talk like that  (Black Country accent) "I got no neck and no future"  [L(5)]	1386
146h	<u>I love it</u>	1387

In this example, the humour comes from the overstated posture, mannerisms and accent performed by Lycett rather than from the words alone – this playful mocking of the accent creates a posture and attitude that is antithetical to happiness and positivity demonstrates Lycett’s understanding of and appreciation for a local area of the UK in such a way he can exemplify it through action.

Catalogue (logic)<sup>27</sup>, another comic form Berger explores, relies on the listing of items or ideas, usually in rapid succession, with the final item providing a humorous twist. The surprise and incongruity of the final item in the catalogue elicits laughter. For a corpus example, here is Sean Lock discussing the perils of appearing interested in anything around his partner<sup>28</sup>:

13a	From about October to December	126
13b	I don't say anything positive about anything [L(2)]	127
13c	One time we got a ferry	128
13d	In... in... in October	129
13e	and you know ferries are normally an awful	130

<sup>27</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 27

<sup>28</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Sean Lock – Purple Van Man* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/sean-lock-purple-van-man.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

13f	crap dismal experience?	131
13g	This one was a really.... It was a ferry from Holland	132
13h	really nice ferry really clean new the food was really good	133
13i	and everything was... it was really nice	134
13j	I was about to say	135
13k	(enthusiastically) "Oh	136
13l	cor this is a nice ferry isn't it?"  [L(2)]	137
13m	And I thought Uh-oh	138
13n	no don't say that [L(2)]	139
13o	don't say that	140
13p	Because I had this image on Christmas morning of opening an envelope and pulling out	141
13q	(mock enthusiasm) a <i>golden ferry ticket</i> [L]	142
13r	(as an announcer) "A magical VIP day out on the ferry [I]	143
13s	"Help the captain {mimes steering wheel} steer the ferry out of port [L(3)] {grins}	144
13t	{chuckles}	145
13u	Wave the cars {mimes waving car to pull forward} onto the deck [L(3)] {continues to wave}	146
13v	"Sing a song with the group Liquid Motion"  [L(3)] {dances}	147

In this example, the humour comes from the pure banality of the catalogue items that Lock lists towards the end – the juxtaposed grimness of ferries as a mode of transport against the idea of a “magical VIP day”, which each subsequent item being acted out to show the contrast between the manic energy and the reality of the experience.

Comparison (logic)<sup>29</sup> involves juxtaposing two or more entities in a way that highlights their disparities in a humorous manner. It's the exaggeration or surprise of the difference that makes it funny. For a corpus example, here is Michael McIntyre<sup>30</sup>:

B6	I'm into all technology I'm particularly enjoying Sky Plus at the	224
25a	moment	
25b	You can pause	225
25c	live TV	226
25d	Pause it	227
25e	And it's a good pause as well the perfect...	228
25f	Everything you want from pause	229
25g	Not like the old sort of 1980s VHS pause that was a very different story {flaps head and hands up and down while keeping body still} [L(5)]	230
25h	People who weren't even moving would {gyrates back and forth} [L(3)] <u>start moving</u>	231
25i	(exasperated) " <u>I</u> wasn't even moving in this scene"  [(2)]	232
25j	People in paintings {thrusts hips back and forth} [L(4)]	233

In this example, McIntyre compares the pause effect of modern technology against the magnetic head tape of the much older VHS format, creating a juxtaposition between the perfectly still image of digital media and the jerky, frame-shifting effect that came from stopping a VHS at a certain point. To illustrate this, McIntyre uses action and movement to humorously highlight the disparity in an object that should be static moving involuntarily.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 29

<sup>30</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Michael McIntyre – Hello Wembley* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/michael-mcintyre-hello-wembley.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

Disappointment (logic)<sup>31</sup> as a form plays on the universal human experience of unfulfilled expectations, giving it a twist of humour. For a corpus example, here is a short piece of material from Jimmy Carr<sup>32</sup>:

10a	My girlfriend spends ages getting ready for a night out I'm not sure what she's getting ready <i>for</i>	50
10b	Disappointment is my best {chuckles} guess [L(2)]	51

In this example, Carr leverages the ambiguity of the phrase “getting ready for” when juxtaposed against the preceding “getting ready for a night out”, creating the impression that the statement is rhetorical before answering it himself with a twist on the phrase “getting ready for disappointment”, a concept rather than an event. This highlights Berger’s definition literally, showing the shared human experience through the understanding of the linguistic twist.

Eccentricity (identity)<sup>33</sup> capitalises on peculiar and outlandish behaviour, odd habits, or unconventional attitudes. The exaggerated strangeness in contrast with perceived 'normal' behaviour provides a rich vein for humour. For a corpus example, here is Simon Amstell<sup>34</sup>:

10a	And I was drawn on this particular night to	82
10b	this guy wearing very large	83
10c	Round	84
10d	<i>Funny</i>	85
10e	big glasses	86
10f	Really	87
10g	funny [sl] <u>crazy oversized</u> big	88

<sup>31</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 31

<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Jimmy Carr – Funny Business* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/jimmy-carr-funny-business.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>33</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 32

<sup>34</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Simon Amstell - Numb* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/simon-amstell-numb.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

10h	round glasses [sl]	89
10i	<u>and I said</u> to him	90
10j	"Hi	91
10k	they're big glasses."	92
10l	And he said,  (incredulous) {shrugging} "Not really"  [L(2)]	93
10m	{stares ahead in confusion as if doesn't know what to say} [I→L]	94
10n	Small face? [L(5)]	95
10o	He said  (dismissive) "I'm short-sighted"	96
10p	I said "Oh I know Look, we're all short-sighted [sl] <u>but if you can't see how big they are...</u> [L(3)]	97
10q	"Maybe you need bigger glasses" [L(2)]	98
10r	Then I was worried he thought I was being aggressive which I wasn't I said, "I came over cos I like the look I really like what you've got going on here but you seem to be wearing them without the humour they were designed with." [L(4)]	99

In this example, Amstell uses the perceived eccentricity of the character of the man to mock his choice of eyewear, at first trying to point out the eccentricity in how big the glasses were, then when rebuffed countering with a local-logical opposite of the man having a small face. When again this is quashed and the man pleads myopia as the cause, Amstell again treats this as an eccentricity and counters that he may need even bigger glasses if he is too short-sighted to see how big they are. Finally, when this is taken as aggression, he points out once again the absurdity and eccentricity of the glasses, saying the man is wearing them "without the humour they were designed with".

Embarrassment (identity)<sup>35</sup> is a form of comedy that draws on awkward situations, social faux pas, and personal humiliation. It's a type of humour that is both relatable and cringe-inducing. For a corpus example, here is Fern Brady<sup>36</sup>:

35a	I thought it'd be cracking	266
35b	to get to a point in comedy	267
35c	where people recognize you for your comedy	268
35d	and say they like your stuff	269
35e	Then it started happening and I was like	270
35f	Oh I forgot	271
35g	I don't have	272
35h	any social skills offstage [sl]	273
35i	A guy came up to me in the airport	274
35j	He was like  (soft voice) "Hey	275
35k	I've seen you on YouTube	276
35l	I really like your stuff"	277
35m	In my head when this happens	278
35n	I'm always like	279
35o	(whispering, thrilled) "Ah, thank you so much"	280
35p	The way I responded to this guy however	281
35q	was by silently	282
35r	holding out both my hands [l]	283
35s	and holding both his hands [l]	284

<sup>35</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 33

<sup>36</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Fern Brady – Power & Chaos* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/fern-brady-power-chaos.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

35t	and just {nods up and down quickly} smiling into [L] <u>his face dementedly</u>	285
35u	like Kate Middleton when she meets a heroin addict [L(2)]	286
35v	<u>at the opening of community centre</u> {stops nodding}	287

In this example, the embarrassment and humour come from Brady’s side as she explains her lack of perceived social skills and how this can be problematic once one becomes more recognisable to others due to fame. In minute detail, Brady describes meeting a man in an airport who complimented her work, and instead of just thanking him she silently took both his hands, smiling dementedly “like Kate Middleton when she meets a heroin addict”. The embarrassment felt by the audience here is vicarious, putting themselves in this situation but able to humorously empathise due to the temporal and physical distance from the event.

Exaggeration (language)<sup>37</sup> involves magnifying traits, situations or actions to ludicrous extents. The humour arises from the excessive and absurd hyperbole. For a corpus example here is Dylan Moran<sup>38</sup>:

12a	People end up in Australia	108
12b	Why would <i>anybody</i> want to go there? [L(3)]	109
12c	What is the point of that country? I was I usually never leave the house but we all went to Australia recently	110
12d	The whole family it was a ridiculous	111
12e	Place	112
12f	located three quarters of a mile from the surface of the sun [L(3)]	113
12g	<u>people audibly crackling</u> as they walk past you on the street [L(2)]	114

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 33

<sup>38</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Dylan Moran – Like Totally* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/dylan-moran-like-totally.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

12h	That's why they all barbecue you don't need to cook somewhere like that you just bring the shit out fling it on the grill and it bursts into flames [L(2)]	115
12g	It's not supposed to be inhabited and when they're not doing that frying themselves outside they all fling themselves into the sea	116
12h	which is inhabited almost exclusively by things designed to kill you [I]	117
12i	<u>Sharks</u> jellyfish swimming knives they're all in there [L(4)]	118

In this example, the humour comes from the extreme hyperbole expressed by Moran when describing the heat in Australia, illogically locating it so close to the sun that all life would be extinguished, describing people walking past as if they were roast pork joints being cooked and imagining spontaneous combustion when meat comes in contact with metal due to the extremes of temperature.

Exposure (identity)<sup>39</sup> is a comedic form that relies on revealing truths or secrets in unexpected or humorous ways. Comedy is derived from the shock and surprise of the revelation. For a corpus example, here is Sarah Silverman<sup>40</sup>:

30a	So Mary is my dog	268
30b	And I love her	269
30c	And she got me into squirrels	270
30d	And she's young and she's full of energy but...	271
30e	she's dying... [sl]	272
30f	in that	273
30g	it's out there	274

<sup>39</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 34

<sup>40</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Sarah Silverman – A Speck of Dust* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/sarah-silverman-speck-of-dust.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]



30h	It might be	275
30i	in	276
30j	two weeks It might be in 12 years [L(3)]	277
30k	<u>But it's out there</u>	278
30l	and it's <i>looming</i> over me.	279
30m	And my heart can't take it	280
30n	I made a mistake I shouldn't have gotten another dog it's too much [I(2)]	281
30o	I'm...	282
30p	Don't judge me I'm gonna put her to sleep now. [L(5)] <u>I just...</u>	283
30q	<u>I need it to be done</u> [L(5)→I]	284

In this example, the exposure happens as the narrative unfolds – Silverman starts positive, talking about the love she has for her dog and the vitality the dog possesses and has brought to her life before the narrative takes a darker turn and she announces the dog is dying. This is quickly clarified that this is a general rather than a specific condition i.e., caused by being alive, however, Silverman’s anxiety grows further and further until, in a local-logical leap, she decides to euthanise a young and healthy dog just to save herself from the anxiety of what may happen in future.

Facetiousness (language)<sup>41</sup> is a form of humour that employs inappropriate levity or flippant treatment of serious matters, often to the discomfort of others. The humour stems from the violation of social norms and expectations. For an example from the corpus, here is Doug Stanhope<sup>42</sup>:

29a	I have no fear of death except I hate waiting for it [L(3)]	325
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<sup>41</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 35

<sup>42</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Doug Stanhope – Beer Hall Putsch* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/doug-stanhope-beer-hall-putsch.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

29b	<u>(quietly, pleadingly) Just come on</u> [sl]	326
29c	I beat cancer [w:!yeah!]	327
29d	I never had it that's how I beat it like I've... [L(2)]	328
29e	<u>Oh You survived it?</u> [l:c(3)] <u>I beat the fuck out of it but by not getting it</u> [L(2)]	329
29f	<u>I've courted cancer every day of my life</u>	330
29g	I have done everything but [!yeah!] fucking	331
29h	paid cancer's taxi fare to my hotel [L(2)]	332
29i	<u>Won't show up that's beating it</u> [L(2)]	333
29j	<u>You survived it you're like tied</u> [I]	334
29k	<u>I get the number one seed in the bracket</u> [L]	335
29l	<u>over you</u> [I]	336
29m	<u>survivor</u> [I]	337
29n	<u>I'm a winner</u> [L]	338

In this example, Stanhope treats the human fear of death and disease with annoyed irreverence, starting by stating that he doesn't fear death but rather is impatient for it to happen to him. He then brings up the topic of cancer and treats the fact that he has never had it despite smoking, drinking and "actively courting" cancer to come into his life, making the offhand comment that he has done everything but paid cancers taxi fare to his hotel, anthropomorphising the disease into a character that can be sneered along with members of the audience at with the final few lines.

The Grotesque (identity)<sup>43</sup> involves distorting or exaggerating physical features or situations to absurd levels, evoking both laughter and discomfort. For a corpus example, here is Greg Davies<sup>44</sup>:

38a	You're two years younger than me	338
38b	And I'll tell you this	339
38c	things have happened to me in the last two years that you've got to look forward to	340
38d	And I just want to share them with the young people	341
38e	In the last two years	342
38f	my nails have become <i>four times thicker</i> than they used to be [L(2)]	343
38g	<u>Just</u> imagine that young people	344
38h	Imagine not being able to bite through your <i>own fucking nails</i> [L(3)]	345
38i	What's the evolutionary miracle about that David Attenborough?	346
38j	In case I fancy skittering up a wall like a fucking lizard? [L(5)]	347

In this example, the humour comes from the vivid and grotesque images that Davies conjures up, describing the thickness of his nails in his middle age, the fact that he is incapable of biting through them (while also creating the grotesque image of him trying and failing) and finally coming to the local-logical conclusion of the joke where he invokes specific images through the use of the word "skittering" to describe unnatural movement and using a lizard as shorthand for a herpetological monster leaping up the wall using only its claws.

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<sup>43</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 36

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Greg Davies – You Magnificent Beast* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/greg-davies-you-magnificent-beast.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

Ignorance (logic)<sup>45</sup> is a form of humour which plays on a character's lack of knowledge or understanding. The comedic effect comes from the discrepancy between what the character knows or understands and what the audience knows to be true. For a corpus example, here is Milton Jones<sup>46</sup>:

91a	years ago I was offered a job as a shipyard apprentice	254
91b	but I knew deep in my heart that I would never be a shipyard [L(4)]	255
92a	I lost my job with last minute.com for being consistently late [L(2)]	256
93a	I lost my job as a prison officer for organizing a lock-in [L(2)]	257
94a	I lost my job as a cricket commentator for saying the words "I don't want to bore you with the details" [L(3)→A(3)]	258

In this example, Jones displays his ignorance in a humorous way with a series of one-liners each highlighting the disparity between what the audience understands about each initial statement compared to what he contextually believes as a performer. The initial piece of material plays on the technical ambiguity between being an apprentice *in* a shipyard and being an apprentice *to* a shipyard, thus showing his ignorance when he picks the illogical one. The second and third one-liners play off the discrepancy between the job title and the action taken in that job, with the second being the lastminute.com name juxtaposed against standard workplace etiquette when it comes to being late and the third being a play on the idea of a pub lock-in. In the final piece of material, Jones starts as if the result will be due to his ignorance but then reverses it and makes the humour's intent a commentary on the perceived dullness of cricket.

Imitation (identity)<sup>47</sup> is a comedic form that involves copying another's actions, speech patterns or traits in a humorous way. Often, the laughter is evoked from the

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<sup>45</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) pp. 36-37

<sup>46</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Milton Jones – Lion Whisperer* (2023)  
<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/milton-jones-lion-whisperer.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

<sup>47</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 37-38

contrast between the imitator and the imitated, or from the exaggeration of certain characteristics. For a corpus example of this, here is another piece of material from Sean Lock<sup>48</sup>:

124a	Yeah it'd be great if all advertising was done door to door I'd love that	1297
124b	Especially when celebrities do adverts	1298
124c	cos that'd be great wouldn't it you'd be walking across your hallway	1299
124d	the letter box would flip open	1300
124e	and you'd hear a voice going {bends down as if speaking through letterbox}	1301
124f	(Scottish accent) "Hello	1302
124g	it's Sir Chris Hoy here [L(2)]	1303
124h	Before I go cycling I like a bowl of Bran Flakes."  [L(2)]	1304
124i	{waits a few beats, then stands up}  (Scottish accent, sighing) "Ah Christ"  [L(3)→sl(3)] {walks as if going to top of path, turns into the next house and walks down path, bends down to letterbox}	1305
124j	(Scottish accent) "Hello [L(2)]	1306
124k	It's Sir Chris Hoy here [sl]	1307
124l	before I go cycling I like a bowl of Bran Flakes [l(2)]	1308
124m	{stands up and looks to the sky with eyes closed}  (Scottish accent) "Oh, kill me now."  [L(2)]	1309
124n	And he'd bump into other celebrities on the street.	1310
124o	{starts to walk towards the top of the stage again}  (Scottish accent) "Oh, hello, Keira"	1311

<sup>48</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Sean Lock – Purple Van Man* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/sean-lock-purple-van-man.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

124p	(soft alluring accent) "Hello, Chris." [L(2)] { <u>does exaggerated sexy walk down stage</u> and bends down as if talking through letterbox}	1312
124q	(soft alluring accent) "Hello It's Keira Knightley here	1313
124r	from the films	1314
124s	Yes I didn't think I needed the money either [L(2)]	1315
124t	Anyway I'm wearing a really tight catsuit	1316
124u	and when I walk away	1317
124v	I'd like you to look at my arse and think about Coco Chanel [L:a(4)→a(2)]	1318
124w	<u>Yeah</u> {chuckles}	1319
124x	it's really subtle	1320
124y	it's <i>my arse</i>	1321
124z	and <i>perfume</i> "   [L(2)]	1322
124aa	{waits a second, then walks towards the top of the stage with exaggerated swagger}  (soft voice) "Oh, who's this?"	1323
124ab	{chuckles} Hello... Hello Ray"	1324
124ac	{turns round and walks downstage like wideboy}  (rough cockney accent)  "Ello, Keira"   [L(4)]	1325
124ad	{bends down to letterbox}   (rough cockney accent) "It's Ray Winstone here {smacks lips}	1326
124ae	(yelling) Put a bet on, <i>you sla-a-a-ag!</i> [L:A(5)→L:A:!whistle!→L:A]	1327
124af	<u>There's loads of markets</u> in play now!"   [I(2)] {stands up and sighs, then walks towards top of stage}	1328
124ag	(rough cockney accent) "Oh who's that coming along the {chuckles} street?"   [I(2)]	1329

124ah	(rough cockney accent) "Oh, it's David Beckham."   (high pitched voice) "Hello, Ray."  [L(4)] {walks down towards door}	1330
124ai	[<inaudible>] Man of a thousand voices [sl]	1331
124aj	{bends down to letterbox}  (high pitched voice) "Hello, David Beckham here, erm... [sl]	1332
124ak	Everything under the sun [L(3)]	1333
124al	All of it hats flannels spanners [L(2)] <u>trousers motorbikes</u>	1334
124am	Just buy shit all right?"  [L:A(2)→A(7)]	1335

In this example, Lock uses the scenario of celebrities being forced to sell products door to door (as opposed to on television or other form of advertisement) to imitative renditions of characters, starting with a simple accent for Sir Chris Hoy as he speaks through the letterbox which then turns into further characterisation as he mimes him standing up after his advertisement, walking up the garden path, round to the next house and bending down again to shout the same thing through the letterbox. Lock then expands this by introducing the character of Kiera Knightley, changing his voice and posture to show the change, and using the character to comment on the objectification of women in perfume adverts. This characterisation is then replaced again by the character of Ray Winstone, though unlike with the previous two characters, Lock does not introduce him by his full name until he shouts through the door, letting his voice and mannerisms convey the impression he is trying to create. Finally, Lock creates the character of David Beckham using all the stereotypes available – high pitched voice, slow thinking and the perception that he is happy to put his name to anything for profit.

Insults (language)<sup>49</sup> form another comedic category in Berger's analysis, whereby offensive or derogatory remarks are used humorously. The shock value and

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<sup>49</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 40

wit involved in a well-crafted insult can create a strong comedic impact. For a corpus example, here is Frankie Boyle<sup>50</sup>:

5a	Where you from?	15
5b	Any idea? [L] [!(inaudible)!]	16
5c	Just looking up at me like your fucking <i>cat</i> started talking [L(4):a]	17
5d	You've got a blank face there pal if you held that expression for long enough in a hospital you'd get fucking switched off [L:A(8)]	18

In this example, Boyle asks an audience member a reasonably simple question and when this is not answered to his satisfaction begins to insult him, starting with a simple follow-up question implying the man may be stupid, then explaining to the audience what the man looks from his perspective (as this is not implicitly shared) before engaging again with faux friendliness before implying that the man's impassive face would have him mistaken for a non-responsive coma patient and disconnected from the machines.

Irony (language)<sup>51</sup> involves stating something that implies the opposite of the literal meaning, often revealing a disconnect between appearance and reality. For a corpus example of this, here is Hannah Gadsby<sup>52</sup>:

B7	(laughs) perhaps I... (laughs) perhaps I've been slacking off a bit	135
	When I first started er...	136
	the comedy over a decade ago	137
	Always	138

<sup>50</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frankie Boyle – The Last Days of Sodom* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/frankie-boyle-last-days-of-sodom.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

<sup>51</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 40

<sup>52</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Hannah Gadsby – Nanette* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/hannah-gadsby-nanette.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]



	nothing but	139
	nothing but lesbian content wall to wall	140
	my first ever show er was classic new gay comic 101	141
	My coming out story	142
18a	I told lots of cool jokes about homophobia	143
18b	Really solved... that problem [L(4)] <u>tick</u>	144

In this example, the irony and humour here come from how Gadsby perceived themselves in the past compared to the time of the performance and how much they had learned in the intervening years. In response to earlier accusations that they were not including enough lesbian content in their newer shows Gadsby reflects that the shows used to contain wall-to-wall lesbian references and were cliché as a result, as well as not making an appreciable difference to the massive and pervasive problem of homophobia through the telling of jokes.

Literalness (language)<sup>53</sup> is a comedic form that involves interpreting figurative language in a literal way. The humour comes from the unexpected misinterpretation. For a short one-liner from the corpus, here is Milton Jones<sup>54</sup>:

7a	I didn't speak to my dad	26
7b	when he was a bus driver you're not allowed to [L(3)→I]	27

In this example, the humour comes from the audience's interpretation of "I didn't speak to my dad" as that there had been possibly a family rift compared to the literal interpretation favoured by Jones – that he didn't not because of any emotional

<sup>53</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 41

<sup>54</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy - Milton Jones – Lion Whisperer* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/milton-jones-lion-whisperer.html>> [accessed 07 September 2023]

turmoil but because people are dissuaded from speaking to bus drivers while the vehicle is in motion.

Mistakes (logic)<sup>55</sup> represent a comedic form that involves errors, accidents or mishaps, often due to clumsiness or misunderstanding. The amusement stems from the surprise and awkwardness of these mistakes. For a corpus example, here is Bill Bailey<sup>56</sup>:

16a	<u>I actually have got an accountant</u>	163
16b	Well I did have and [I]	164
16c	they emailed her	165
16d	and asked her	166
16e	to transfer some money to an account in Turkey	167
16f	A place I've never been	168
16g	Showed no interest	169
16h	And she bloody <i>did</i> [L(2)]	170
16i	<u>She just</u>	171
16j	<i>handed it over</i> [L]	172
16k	Now what really <i>annoyed</i> me	173
16l	was the <i>language that they used</i>	174
16m	was so <i>clearly not me</i>	175
16n	(middle-eastern accent) "Hurry up Julie	176
16o	Where is money?	177
16p	Send money now Julie for Turkey house"  [L(6)]	178

<sup>55</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 43

<sup>56</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Bill Bailey – Limboland* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/bill-bailey-limboland.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

16q	Did she think  {typing and looking around} (confused voice) "Bill's a bit grumpy today [L(2)]	179
16r	He's lost his grip of grammatic structure"	180
16s	And then	181
16t	they used a load of baffling emojis	182
16u	Things I would <i>never use</i>  (middle-eastern accent) "Hurry up Julie	183
16v	<i>Where is money?"  Pony pony pony [L(5)] <u>cricket bat sad face</u> <u>cable car</u></i>	184

In this example, the humour comes from the mistake made by the accountant in handing over the money despite obvious red flags in the grammar and scansion of the requesting email. Bailey makes this mistake central to the narrative of the material, taking the fact that she sent the money despite obvious discrepancies in the way that they normally communicate to its local-logic conclusion in that his grumpiness is the cause of this change, making him lose grip of his grammatical structure.

Misunderstanding (logic)<sup>57</sup> is a similar comedic form to mistakes, involving characters misunderstanding words, intentions or situations. The humour arises from the discrepancy between the character's interpretation and the actual meaning or situation. For a corpus example of this, here is Jack Whitehall<sup>58</sup>:

10a	Cos I come from a family of heavy drinkers all right	93
10b	My dad he drinks a <i>lot</i>	94
10c	This is how big a drinker my dad is	95
10d	I took my dad to a <i>McDonald's</i> the other day for the first time ever	96

<sup>57</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 43

<sup>58</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Jack Whitehall – At Large* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/jack-whitehall-at-large.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

In this example, Whitehall plays on his own perceived sense of class due to his accent and upbringing and juxtaposes his dad, who one would assume based on this would usually dine out in a restaurant, against the backdrop of McDonald's which although restaurant in name is not so in terms of serving a range of alcoholic beverages.

Parody (identity)<sup>59</sup> involves mimicking the style of a specific work, genre or artist, exaggerating certain aspects for comedic effect. This form of comedy relies on the audience's familiarity with the original source being parodied. For a corpus example, here is Bill Bailey<sup>60</sup>:

9a	I'm just trying to get behind anything you know	87
9c	I mean... (scoffs)	88
9d	<i>Something</i>	89
9e	Like bizarre Olympic sports, I watch them three o'clock in the morning you know	90
9f	This sort of... {walks determinedly across stage} That one	91
9g	You know the race [L(2)] <u>walking</u>	92
9h	The cockney marathon I call it [L(8)] <u>{walks back across stage}</u> <u>Yeah yeah that's it leave it out</u>	93
9i	<u>Yeah</u> {grins and chuckles}	94
9j	{walks back across stage}(cockney accent) ♪ Do me a favour I'm doing the cockney marathon ♪ [L(4)]	95
9k	I just love it	96

<sup>59</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 44

<sup>60</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Bill Bailey – Limboland* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/bill-bailey-limboland.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

In this example, Bailey parodies stereotypes of Cockneys based on the way they walk being like the movements of race-walking by invoking the honky-tonk style associated with traditional east-end music-hall songs such as *Knees Up Mother Brown* and the like, fusing the two together in a phenomenon he calls the “cockney marathon”.

Puns (language)<sup>61</sup> involve a playful use of language that exploits multiple meanings or similar sounds of words to create humour. This form of comedy requires linguistic dexterity and wit. For a short corpus example, here is Peter Kay<sup>62</sup>:

14a	Got to start with a bit of sad news though	66
14b	Mate of mine's just been sacked off dodgems	67
14c	but he's doing 'em for funfair dismissal [L(5)] { <u>does shuffling dance and jazz hands</u> }	68

In this example, the humour comes from the similarity between the words *unfair* and *funfair*, with the latter being relevant in this case as dodgems are often found at a funfair.

Repetition (logic)<sup>63</sup>, according to Berger, is a comedic form that involves repeating certain words, phrases, actions or situations, where the repetition itself becomes the source of humour. For a corpus example of this, here is Eddie Izzard<sup>64</sup>:

35a	So yeah there was a lot of that and we built up empires	323
35b	We stole countries that's what you do that's how you build an empire	324
35c	We stole countries with the <i>cunning use of flags</i> [I(2)]	325
35d	<u>Yeah</u> [I:c]	326

<sup>61</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 45

<sup>62</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Peter Kay – The Tour That Didn't Tour* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/peter-kay-tour-that-didnt-tour.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

<sup>63</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 46

<sup>64</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Eddie Izzard – Dress to Kill* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/eddie-izzard-dress-to-kill.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

35e	<u>You just sail around</u> the world and stick a flag in them [l(2)]	327
35f	(posh voice) "I claim India for Britain."	328
35g	And they go  (northern accent) "You can't claim us, we live here [L(2)]	329
35h	500 million of us"  [l(2)]	330
35i	(posh voice) "Do you have a flag?"  [L:A:C(7)] {sticks tongue out}	331
35j	(northern accent) "We don't need a bloody flag We... It's our country [l(2)] <u>you bastard</u> "	332
35k	(posh accent) "No flag, no country, you can't have one [L(2)]	333
35l	That's the rules that	334
35m	I've just made up" [L(3)]	335

In this example, Izzard uses the totemic nature of a flag, both literally and figuratively, to ridicule the concept of colonialism by reducing it to having a flag and discounting the people who live there because they have not got this totem according to the rules that were "just made up". The repetition of the word "flag" to an absurd degree serves in turn to highlight the arbitrariness and absurdity of colonial policy and the damage it could cause to indigenous populations due to the dismissal of their concerns and displacement of their population.

Reversal (logic)<sup>65</sup> involves a sudden shift in situation or expectation, turning the tables in a surprising and humorous way. For a corpus example, here is Jim Jefferies<sup>66</sup>:

42j	I'm a dreamer [L(3)]	473
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<sup>65</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 47

<sup>66</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Jim Jefferies – Alcoholocaust* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/jim-jefferies-alcoholocaust.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

43a	But this is not our fault this is bred into us this is in our psyche you can't fix things that had been said to you as a child	474
43b	Like when we were in school	475
43c	we had school teachers stand in front of every single one of us	476
43d	and go "If you work hard	477
43e	and you put your mind to it	478
43f	you can achieve anything"	479
43g	You know what that was?	480
43h	That was a fucking <i>lie</i> [L(2)]	481
43i	You can't achieve anything nobody can don't put that pressure on yourself [sl]	482
43j	Everybody in the world has limitations	483

In this example, Jefferies paints himself as a dreamer and highlights that throughout childhood many kids are told that the world is a meritocracy and that anything can be achieved by perseverance and hard work. He then reverses his view hard on this for comic effect, calling the statement a lie and going against everything previously said, stating that no one can achieve anything, you shouldn't put pressure on yourself and everybody in the world has limitations.

Ridicule (language)<sup>67</sup> is a form of comedy that involves mocking, deriding or making fun of someone or something. The humour is derived from the exaggeration or absurdity of the subject of ridicule. For a corpus example of this, here is Ricky Gervais<sup>68</sup>:

22a	Look at Susan Boyle	209
22b	If you can	210

<sup>67</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 48

<sup>68</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Ricky Gervais – Science* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/ricky-gervais-science.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

22c	<i>Fucking</i> [L(3)] <i>hell</i> {looks to stage right and walks away}	211
22d	<i>Jesus Chri...</i> Oh! [l(2)]	212
22e	Shocking	213
22f	Be fair though	214
22g	'Cause usually in the music industry	215
22h	it's all about image, isn't it? You can't just have a great voice and a	216
22i	a great talent	217
22j	you've got to be <i>young</i> and <i>thin</i> and <i>trendy</i> and <i>pretty</i>	218
22k	and she's turned all that on its head	219
22l	Although	220
22m	I think it's the same powers of image	221
22n	just working in reverse with her	222
22o	'cause I don't think she <i>has</i> got a great voice actually	223
22p	I think she's fooled a lot of people	224
22q	It's sort of like mock opera for people who don't know any better	225
22r	But I don't think she'd be where she was today	226
22s	if it wasn't for the fact that she looked like such a fucking mong [L(2)]	227

In this example, Gervais refers to Susan Boyle and begins to mock her looks in a blatant display of misogyny, inviting the audience to look at her "if you can", then repeatedly exclaiming and calling her "shocking". He then pays her a backhanded compliment, stating that usually to succeed in the music industry you need to be young, thin, trendy and pretty and she has turned all that "on its head". He then



reverses direction again with another thesis, stating that he thinks the way she looks has worked in her favour and that because she is unsightly it has made people not notice that she has no talent before calling her an ableist slur. The humour here for the audience derives from the unrelenting attacks on her image and the callousness with which these attacks are perpetrated.

Rigidity (logic)<sup>69</sup> represents a comedic form where the humour is derived from the characters' inability to adapt or change their ways. These individuals are often set in their patterns, and their strict adherence can lead to humorous outcomes. For a corpus example, here is Jon Richardson<sup>70</sup>:

5a	Er I'm a cardigan-wearing gentleman er	33
5b	I wear them all year as well	34
5c	in case you're wondering.	35
5d	I'm not one of these Christmas <i>dicks</i> [L]	36
5e	<u>Put one</u> on for a Wetherspoons pub crawl and think you've got a personality all of a sudden [L(3)]	37
5f	I wear mine all year round	38

In this example, the humour comes from the inflexibility of purpose shown by Richardson here in wearing his cardigans all year round and the anti-trendy attitude that this engenders in him, calling those who wear cardigans for fun during the winter holidays “Christmas dicks” and implying that they have no real personalities so are compensating for this lack.

Sarcasm (language)<sup>71</sup> involves saying something but implying the opposite, usually in a mocking or contemptuous manner. The comedic value here arises from

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<sup>69</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 48

<sup>70</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Jon Richardson – Old Man* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/jon-richardson-old-man.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

<sup>71</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 49

the contrast between the literal and the intended meaning. For a corpus example of this, here is Hannah Gadsby<sup>72</sup>:

	I'm from Tasmania in er...	23
4a	Now, of course, Tasmania is that er... little island floating off the	24
4b	the arse end [l(3)]	25
4c	<u>of mainland Australia there, just er</u>	26
4d	(high pitched) <u>lovely place</u>	27
4e	lovely place famous for er a lot of things	28
4f	Uh, potatoes, very... [l] ( <u>laughs to self</u> )	29
4g	and our frighteningly small gene pool, that's... [L(4)]	30
4h	I wish I was joking [L(2)]	31
4i	but I am very partial to the potato [L(2)]	32
4j	Very versatile... (gasps) vegetable [l(2)]	33
4k	Um	34
4l	And not all the branches go directly away from the trunk in our family tree I will admit [L(3)]	35
4m	it's a... it's a bit... it's a bit topiary but... [a:L(3)]	36
	but I love Tasmania	37

In this example, Gadsby uses sarcasm to communicate their dislike of their home state of Tasmania through the counter-intuitive use of positive language, stating that

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<sup>72</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Hannah Gadsby – Nanette* (2023)  
<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/hannah-gadsby-nanette.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

Tasmania is floating of the “arse end” but pointedly calling it a lovely place repeatedly. Gadsby then argues that the place is famous for lots of things, before seeming lost for a second, and then names those things as potatoes and a “frighteningly small” gene pool. After pulling back for a second by stating they wish they were joking, Gadsby then sarcastically quips “but I am very partial to a potato” and states it is a “very versatile” vegetable, all the while not repairing the accusations of inbreeding previously offered. They then double down on what has previously been said, stating all the branches don’t go “straight out from the trunk on our family tree” but restating at the end that they love Tasmania.

Satire (language)<sup>73</sup> is a comedic form that uses irony, ridicule, or exaggeration to criticise or mock the follies and shortcomings of individuals, institutions, or society. The satirist hopes not only to entertain but also to provoke thought and possibly even change. For a corpus example, here is Dylan Moran<sup>74</sup>:

18a	'Cause people don't really have religion any more	197
18b	you know	198
18c	You don't really have religion in this country anyway I mean you know	199
18d	the Christian religion doesn't really exist	200
18e	in a big way here	201
18f	You never <i>really</i> had it to be honest	202
18g	We had it in Ireland	203
18h	that was religion	204
18i	What you had was a dressing up box with some cardigans with holes in the [L] <u>elbows</u>	205
18j	<u>everybody</u> would meet up and have some ginger nuts and sing a few tunes and go home	206

<sup>73</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 49

<sup>74</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Dylan Moran – Off the Hook* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/dylan-moran-off-hook.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

18k	we had religion	207
18l	The thing that makes you feel bad from the <i>moment you're awake</i> [L(2)]	208
18m	with God squatting on the end of your bed with his fist pressed between your eyes going " <i>Wake up shit bag</i> " [L(3)]	209
18n	<u>That's religion</u>	210

In this example, Moran juxtaposes the perceptions of Protestantism, with its biscuits and cardigans, against the fire and brimstone teachings of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Though this is invoked with absurdist imagery, the humour here comes from the shortcomings he highlights in both institutions – that he calls Protestantism not a true religion, comparing its practitioners to kids playing dress up and its parishioners to people turning up and singing a few songs, enables him to highlight the growing perceived atheism in England and infer that the institution was never central to social life and is thus irrelevant. In contrast, the satirical bent he takes on the Catholic church is one of crushing pessimism and control, invading people's lives to the extent that the guilt felt by those it touched was inimical to leading a normal life. Both approaches create juxtaposed humour but also serve to satirise the institutions being juxtaposed against each other by comparing their respective shortcomings.

Stereotypes (identity)<sup>75</sup> involve the use of over-generalised and simplified characters based on social, cultural, or racial attributes. While often criticised for reinforcing harmful biases, when used judiciously, they can be a source of insightful humour. For a corpus example of this, here is Rhod Gilbert<sup>76</sup>:

72a	I remember the first time I ever said "Llanbobl" on stage	923
72b	I was in the Comedy Store in London in the West End	924

<sup>75</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 52-53

<sup>76</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Rhod Gilbert – And the Awarding Winning Mince Pie* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/rhod-gilbert-and-award-winning-mince-pie.html>> [accessed 12 September 2023]

72c	You know sometimes as a Welsh person on stage in London you can come in for quite a <i>hard time</i>	925
72d	You know you get the odd sheep noise and...[L(3):!Baa!]	926
72e	(!)Yeah that's the one(!) [L(2)]	927
72f	On this particular occasion there'd been a guy baaing at me nonstop for about 18 19 minutes	928
72g	And I'd lost control of the gig I don't mind telling you I'd lost control completely	929
72h	but he was heckling me he was saying "Where are you from?" I didn't want to give him anything	930
72i	I thought if I <i>withhold information</i> if I just <i>make something up</i> then he'll have nothing to work with so it just came out	931
72j	He said "Where are you from?" I said "Llanbobl" [sl]	932
72k	And he laughed in my face like you did [L(2)]	933
72l	And I said "Why are you laughing? You haven't even been there."	934
72m	I was fairly confident he wouldn't have been there... [L(3)]	935
72n	what with it not existing you know [L(2)]	936
72o	But he said "Yes, I have, it's a dump" [sl]	937
72p	Which freaked me out a bit [L(3)]	938

In this example, Gilbert uses the harmful stereotypes associated with Welsh people as a way of highlighting phenomenological commonality and explaining how stereotypes can be weaponised against performers as well as within material. The humour here comes from the shared recognition of the adverse situation he was facing as well as the offhand way he states after 19 minutes of heckling he had "lost control of the gig".

Theme and Variation (logic)<sup>77</sup> is a form where a central theme or joke is presented, and then variations of that joke are offered. For a corpus example, here is Stewart Lee<sup>78</sup>:

B3   4a	Erm... I was surprised to be placed I've had a sort of	38
4b	an odd relationship with the press	39
4c	In fact, when this show was running in London in December I got a review	40
4d	describing me as looking like a squashed Albert Finney [L(5)]	41
4e	Nine years previous to that the same paper the London Evening Standard	42
4f	described me as looking like a crumpled Morrissey [L(5)] <u>And it's good...</u>	43
4g	[I(4)] <u>You can see</u>	44
4h	<u>a kind of trend developing there</u>	45
4i	<u>of comparing me unfavorably [I]</u>	46
4j	to various stocky, greying celebrities [I]	47
4k	in increasingly terrible states [L(3)] <u>of physical distress</u>	48
4l	And a squashed Albert Finney is arguably worse than a crumpled Morrissey [L(2)]	49
4m	As a crumpled Morrissey there's the possibility the Morrissey could be	50
4n	straightened out [L]	51
4o	put to work [L]	52
4p	<u>But a...</u> a squashed Albert Finney is of no value [I]	53

<sup>77</sup> Berger, *An Anatomy of Humor* (1993) p. 54

<sup>78</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Stewart Lee – 41<sup>st</sup> Best Stand-Up Ever* (2023)

<<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/stewart-lee-41st-best-stand-up-ever.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

4q	except perhaps as a coaster, made of meat [l(2)]	54
4r	erm...	55
4s	or a white pudding as I believe [L(2)] <u>you would call it</u>	56

In this example, Lee takes the theme of two similar reviews from papers comparing him “unfavourably to various stocky greying celebrities” and takes this to its local-logical conclusion. The humour here comes from the interpretation Lee brings to the quotes when applying them to different scenarios, arguing that a “crumpled Morrissey” could possibly be straightened out, whereas a “squashed Albert Finney” only possibly has unlikely value as a coaster made of meat.

### Reaction

During a stand-up comedy performance, an intricate dance transpires between the comedian and the audience and power dynamics heavily sway the performance's success or failure. It is paramount for the audience to be encouraged to actively engage with the comedian's material, participating through laughter or other forms of active feedback. As Sophie Quirk articulates, "(a)udiences look to the comedian to lead their responses, and will be disappointed if the comedian does not succeed."<sup>79</sup> This disappointment can manifest as silence or heckling in a way that can destabilise the performance, tarnishing the comedian's performance through their vocal (or non-vocal) displeasure.<sup>80</sup> An integral determinant in the success of a stand-up comedy performance is managing the audience's expectations - an audience viewing a performance with elevated expectations<sup>81</sup> may critically assess the comedian's material more harshly, while those with lesser expectations might be readily impressed<sup>82</sup>. Understanding these expectations and tweaking their material to match

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<sup>79</sup> Sophie Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters: How Comedians Manipulate and Influence* (London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015) p. 65

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* pp. 3-4

<sup>81</sup> Often caused by a previous act “killing it” i.e. exceeding previous audience performance expectations

<sup>82</sup> This is one of the reasons for the opener/midspot/headliner divide – expectations are much higher for a headline billed act to be the funniest on the night, and the opener has the delicate job of reinforcing the tone

can aid comedians in meeting or surpassing the audience's anticipations and delivering an impressive performance. Moreover, the cultural and social underpinnings of an audience can significantly mould their response to the comedian's material. Different cultural clusters may possess diverse sensitivities to certain topics or humour styles, necessitating comedians to remain aware of these facets while selecting their material – something that may kill at a weekend club may be far too offensive for a Tuesday night at an intimate, upmarket theatre venue. Demonstrating sensitivity to the audience's cultural and social backgrounds can assist comedians in steering clear of unintended offence and selecting material that resonates with their audience, enhancing the overall comedic experience.

The choice of material by a performer plays a crucial role in shaping audience reactions - material can either engage and entertain or alienate and offend, depending on individual audience members' preferences and sensitivities.<sup>83</sup> Selecting material that aligns with the audience's tastes and experiences increases the likelihood of positive reactions, however, the subjective nature of humour means comedians will inevitably encounter those who do not share their comedic sensibilities, making it impossible to please everyone. Delivery also is a crucial determinant of the audience's response to stand-up comedy. The effectiveness of a joke or routine heavily depends on timing, pacing, and vocal inflexion - a well-timed pause or a subtle change in tone can significantly amplify the impact of a joke.

The physical space in which the comedy act takes place also has considerable bearing on the success of the performance - Quirk states, and I agree, that "(m)any comedians can relate horror stories of badly run comedy nights in which they felt they were set up for a fall by management who failed to optimise the environment and expected the performer to struggle against unnecessarily difficult circumstances"<sup>84</sup>. The performance space significantly impacts the audience's response to the comedian's material - a well-laid out room, making the best use of

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set by the compere, whereas the Midspot has much fewer responsibilities and therefore audience expectations

<sup>83</sup> Giselinde Kuipers, 'Television and Taste Hierarchy: the Case of Dutch Television Comedy', *Media, Culture and Society*, 28, 3 (2006) pp. 359-378 (p. 374-375)

<sup>84</sup> Quirk, *Why Stand-up Matters* (2015) p. 70



the space and properly balancing comfort with proximity, can foster a positive audience response, while a poorly designed one where the audience is too distant, clustered or inaccessible can set unnecessary hurdles for the comedian. The physical layout of the room plays a substantial role in audience dynamics and their engagement with the comedian's material, and factors such as seating arrangements, lighting, and acoustics can either amplify or impede the audience's capacity to connect with the performance. Quirk notes that "A tightly packed space is unlikely to be as comfortable as a sparsely populated one..." and the reason for this is that "(a) comfortable audience is a less efficient conductor of energy"<sup>85</sup>. For example, while audiences may be more comfortable sitting in groups of their friends around tables where they can rest their drinks, for the performer this creates barriers in the physical (tabletop between audience and performer), social (proximity to one's social group encourages chatting and commentary) and audience cohesion sense (clusters of people taking laughter cues from their peers and not the audience as a whole). That is not to say that playing in a badly laid out room is impossible - comedians must be aware of these elements and modify their material and delivery accordingly by optimising audience engagement – but this extra hurdle is one that is unnecessary to throw in the performer's way for a promoter who knows what they are doing.

In addition to room layout, the size of the room can also govern the audience's energy and responsiveness to the comedian's material - larger spaces may require comedians to project their presence and material more robustly and favour acts who have a larger-than-life stage presence, while smaller ones might accommodate a more intimate and conversational style. Again, comedians should be prepared to tweak their material and delivery based on the room's size and the energy of the audience, but there is an onus on promoters to choose the right acts for their venue.

When looking at audience dynamics in terms of stand-up performance, Quirk argues "(t)o produce laughter, an audience needs not only energy but also confidence. To laugh is pleasant but can also be risky; to be caught laughing heartily

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<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p.68

when other audience members are silent could be embarrassing"<sup>86</sup> – a comedian needs to establish a sense of trust and confidence among the audience because when audience members feel secure and confident, they are more inclined to respond positively to the comedian's material. As with the sociocultural and physioproximal aspects of a gig discussed earlier, comedians can build this essential trust and confidence through their choice of material and style of delivery - displaying a strong command of their material and delivering it with conviction and confidence can forge an atmosphere of trust that encourages the audience to laugh and engage with the performance, whereas a nervous or unsteady delivery can provoke nervousness, pity or anger in turn from the audience as they become more and more uncomfortable with the comedian and situation. Unless deliberately subverted by the performer, the key to a successful performance is the comedian's ability to exude an aura of confidence that extends to the audience, thereby creating a reciprocal cycle of trust and engagement.

Interestingly, audience members may experience anxiety or social discomfort during a stand-up comedy performance due to the content of the material or the comedian's delivery style – for example, audiences are often reluctant to answer direct questions in case they are targeted by the comedian and made fun of and this can make it difficult for those performers who rely heavily on audience interaction. Comedians must be attuned to these feelings and make necessary adjustments in their material or delivery to alleviate audience anxiety and secure a positive audience response, such as adopting a more light-hearted tone, addressing the audience's concerns directly, or pivoting the subject matter to something less contentious. Comperes and openers play a pivotal role in establishing the appropriate level of audience comfort and engagement by setting the tone for the performance and engaging the audience with humour and conversation, creating an environment where the audience feels comfortable enough to laugh and engage with the material of other performers.

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 75

The previous comedy experiences of an audience can play a large part in reaction, Quirk highlights this distinction stating " A comedy-savvy audience is one which is highly literate with comic forms and devices. They know the comedy scene reasonably well and can distinguish and articulate differences in comedic style."<sup>87</sup> Understanding the distinction between a comedy-literate audience and one which may be new to comedy or even live performance is imperative for comedians when selecting their material, as it allows them to tailor their content and delivery to suit the audience's preferences and level of comedy literacy. When performing for a comedy-savvy audience, comedians may elect to integrate more complex material, intricate wordplay, or subtle irony into their act as these audiences are more likely to appreciate and engage with this type of material and enjoy the more nuanced aspects of the performance. For a less "sophisticated" audience, a performer may opt for more straightforward and accessible material that is easier for the audience to engage with and enjoy.

Throughout her analysis, Quirk emphasises the importance of unifying the audience - "The comedian's job is to get this disparate collection of individuals working together: the audience must be bound into a homogeneous group which will respond in unison"<sup>88</sup>. Comedians can adopt a multitude of techniques to unify the audience, for example using inclusive language, making shared cultural references, or establishing a common "butt" or focus of the joke are some tactics that can help cultivate a sense of solidarity among the audience members - these techniques encourage the audience to engage with the comedian's material as a cohesive group, amplifying their collective response. However, this can be a double-edged sword when it comes to performance, as a misjudgement of language, a clumsy reference or a perception of unnecessarily "punching down" at an individual or group deemed taboo by the audience may result in the unification of the audience against the performer.

While striving for positive audience unity is the primary performative goal of most stand-up, comedians must also be prepared to manage individual audience

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 72

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* p. 4

reactions that may disrupt the performance or challenge their authority or material. The potential disruptions could range from addressing hecklers, managing silence, and responding to unexpected laughter, each of which requires its own social handling within the sociocultural and physioproximal context of the performance space. By effectively handling these individual reactions, performers can maintain essential control over the performance and ensure that the audience remains engaged and supportive of their material. Individual audience reactions to a comedian's performance can often diverge significantly throughout the course of a set - some audience members may choose to support the comedian with laughter and cooperation, while others may disagree with the material and disrupt the comedic exchange through silence or heckling.<sup>89</sup> Heckling, a confrontational form of audience reaction, can pose significant challenges - heckling often ensues when an audience member disagrees with or feels the need to challenge the comedian's material or authority. Despite often being distressing for both the performer and audience due to the disruption it can cause, it can also provide an opportunity for comedians to exhibit their improvisational skills and wit by responding humorously or cleverly to the heckler.<sup>90</sup>

In contrast, silence can be a stark indication of a joke or topic not landing with the audience - while initially unsettling, silence can provide valuable feedback in suggesting an aspect of the performance that may need reconsideration, something that the performer can confront directly to diffuse the tension in the room. It can also be deliberately used by the comedian to create suspense or anticipation before delivering a punchline, leading to potentially more powerful laughter when the tension is broken.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, silence doesn't always indicate a performance misstep; in some instances, it could be a sign of an audience deeply engaged in processing complex or thought-provoking content and thus the performer needs to be aware of these potential reactions and act accordingly.

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* p. 2

<sup>90</sup> Sameer Rao, "'Joke's on You": Stand-up Comedy Performance and the Management of Hecklers', (Senior Thesis: Haverford College, 2011) p. 30-33

<sup>91</sup> John Meyer, 'Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication', *Communication Theory*, 10, 3 (2000) pp. 310-331 (p. 318-319)

On the other side of the reaction spectrum, applause is often a more overt expression of approval and enjoyment and can be particularly gratifying for comedians. It can denote that their material has struck a deeper chord with the audience and suggest that they've managed to stir thought or challenge preconceived notions, though equally applause can also be a superficial response, not necessarily reflecting genuine appreciation or understanding of the content, influenced by group dynamics, peer pressure, or a desire to appear sophisticated.<sup>92</sup> Laughter is arguably the most sought-after audience reaction in stand-up comedy and often serves as a barometer of success - according to Mulkay, laughter is a potent social signal indicating approval, enjoyment, and shared understanding, central to the comedian's craft<sup>93</sup> - and comedians can leverage laughter to assess the effectiveness of their jokes and to figure out which topics or approaches might resonate more with their audience. However, it's worth noting that laughter may not always accurately reflect the audience's genuine appreciation of the material, being a complex social phenomenon - people may laugh due to social conformity, nervousness, or even discomfort, although Robert Provine argues that one should not discount the idea of laughter simply triggering laughter, stating "The power of naked laughter to trigger laughter got lost in a blizzard of sometimes baroque theorising about such higher-order social processes".<sup>94</sup>

One of the aims of many stand-up performers is the production of a "laughter cascade", where each punchline or topper is pitched to land as the previous laugh starts to fall away, creating rolling surges of laughter that become self-sustaining with each line spoken and riding a line between focus and pure hysteria. For the purposes of shorthand, I will be referring to this as "laughcade" referring specifically to this phenomenon and its role in stand-up performance reaction.

The production of a laughcade in stand-up comedy can also be enhanced by a performer's physical expressions and engagement. Comedians like Lee Evans, known

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<sup>92</sup> Sam Friedman and Giseline Kuipers, 'The Divisive Power of Humour: Comedy, Taste and Symbolic Boundaries', *Cultural Sociology*, 7, 2 (2013) pp. 179-195 (p. 180-181)

<sup>93</sup> Michael Mulkay, *On Humour: Its Nature and its Place in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) p. 90-119

<sup>94</sup> Robert Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2001) p. 149

for his physically intensive performances, demonstrate how body language and exaggerated facial expressions can bolster the effect of a joke, producing a heightened sense of enjoyment and hysteria in the audience. However, overemphasising such techniques might lead to a style of comedy that depends more on physical spectacle than on content, overshadowing the core material of a comedic set.<sup>95</sup> The crafting of a laughcade also depends significantly on the performer's ability to respond and adapt to the audience's reaction, which plays a critical role in generating and maintaining laughter - understanding and capitalising on the audience's responses to the material provides the comedian with the opportunity to tailor their performance accordingly, either emphasising well-received themes or adjusting their approach when a joke fails to resonate. Comedians like Dara Ó Briain often showcase this adaptability, expertly gauging the audience's pulse and tailoring their act in real time.

Performers also utilise techniques such as call-and-response or direct audience participation to immerse the audience in the performance and elevate the atmosphere in the hopes of encouraging a laughcade. Engaging the audience directly can foster a sense of camaraderie and shared experience, showcasing the comedian's quick-thinking and improvisational skills - for example, Ross Noble is admired for his interactive style, frequently incorporating audience suggestions into his act. The pacing and structure of the comedy set also contribute significantly to the creation and sustenance of a laughcade - comedians need to deliver their jokes in a manner that keeps the momentum going while giving the audience sufficient time to process the punchlines. As Rousell and Diddams observe, effective pacing fosters the audience's interest and maintains the atmosphere of laughter, allowing the comedian to construct a rhythm that drives the performance<sup>96</sup> - comedians such as Eddie Izzard, celebrated for her fast-paced delivery and seamless topic transitions, can create a sense of exhilaration with this impeccable pacing that keeps audiences hooked.

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<sup>95</sup> Sharon Lockyer, 'Performance, Expectation, Interaction and Intimacy: On the Opportunities and Limitations of Arena Stand-up Comedy for Comedians and Audiences', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 48, 3 (2015) pp. 586-603

<sup>96</sup> David Rossell and Natalie Diddams, 'Fielding Hilarity: Sensing the Affective Intensities of Comedy Education and Performance', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 25, 3 (2020) pp. 422-440 (p. 426-427)

Creating and maintaining a laughcade in stand-up comedy is a holistic process that depends on a judicious selection and presentation of material, skilful use of performance techniques, an ability to read and respond to audience reactions, and strategic pacing. By crafting a positive atmosphere and a sense of audience unity, comedians can generate a shared experience of laughter and propel the performance with an infectious momentum. However, it is crucial to remember that not all comedians or audiences share the same appreciation for laughter cascades - certain performers and viewers may favour a more understated, conversational style of comedy. As argued by Rutter, while constant laughter can captivate and entertain the audience, it isn't the sole approach to successful stand-up comedy, and a more nuanced style may be preferred by some performers and audiences<sup>97</sup>, and a comedian like Stewart Lee, known for his cerebral, deadpan style, often avoids the high-energy performances typically associated with uncontrolled laughter, offering instead a more contemplative and thought-provoking approach.

### Technique

As Double has previously suggested, stand-up comedy heavily relies on the performer's capability to utilise different techniques to amplify the impact of their material and craft a shared experience with the audience.<sup>98</sup> Performance techniques in stand-up comedy serve as decisive factors in a comedian's success and the metaphorical tools in their toolbox - in addition to choosing the appropriate material, comedians must also perfect the art of "selling" their jokes and building momentum for subsequent ones. This involves using effective delivery techniques like timing, tone, facial expressions, and body language.<sup>99</sup>

Pacing and rhythm between pieces of material significantly contribute to punchline delivery and setting up for future ones - comedians must strike a balance between delivering their material at a pace that is engaging, while also allowing

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<sup>97</sup> Jason Rutter, Rhetoric in Stand-up Comedy: Exploring Performer-Audience Interaction, *Stylistyka*, 10, (2001) pp. 307-325 (p. 322)

<sup>98</sup> Oliver Double, *Getting the Joke: The Inner Workings of Stand-Up Comedy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) pp. 188-201

<sup>99</sup> John Byrne, *Writing Comedy*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) p. 126-132

enough time for the audience to process and react to each joke. The tone and pacing of a piece of material can make a significant difference to how it comes across – consider the difference between the laconic puns of Milton Jones and the high energy often falsetto delivery of Michael McIntyre, and then consider if the same material would work for either if the pace and tone were swapped. One also has to consider the physical performance - comedians often utilise gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to enhance their material and provide a visual element to their humour. These non-verbal cues, complementing the spoken content, heighten the overall impact of the material using paralanguage<sup>100</sup> - Michael McIntyre's performances, replete with animated gestures and body movements, exemplify this idea.

It's also crucial to understand that different comedians adopt gestures and body language in a myriad of ways, reflecting their individual performance styles and artistic visions. For instance, comedians like Sarah Millican might employ subtle gestures and facial expressions to transmit irony or sarcasm, while performers like Ross Noble might opt for more flamboyant movements to highlight the absurdity of their material. This wide array of approaches to gestures and body language can cater to diverse audience preferences and tastes, fostering a rich array of comedic experiences – building on the much older foundations of clowning, physicality is a key element of the comedian's repertoire, allowing them to convey intricate ideas, and emotions in a visually engaging manner<sup>101</sup>. In addition, physicality can offer a refreshing contrast to the spoken content, thereby producing a more varied and dynamic performance - for example, Lee Evans is known for his energetic performance style, using his entire body to accentuate the humour in his material along with gurning, mugging and his ever-present flop sweat.

Timing is also a critical element in stand-up comedy - often referred to as 'comic timing', it is the ability to deliver a joke or a funny line at the right moment for maximum comedic effect. This requires a deep understanding of rhythm, pacing,

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<sup>100</sup> Fernando Poyatos, New Perspectives for an Integrative Research of Nonverbal Systems, in *Non-Verbal Communication Today*, ed. By Mary Ritchie Key (Berlin, De Gruyter, 1982) pp. 121-136 (p. 130-136)

<sup>101</sup> Joe Dieffenbacher, *Clown: The Physical Comedian* (London, Bloomsbury, 2021) pp. 18-19



and audience dynamics - as highlighted by Macks, "For the professional comic, the timing within the structure of the joke is of crucial importance"<sup>102</sup>. A comedian's skill at timing can determine whether a joke lands successfully or falls flat - For example, Jimmy Carr is often lauded for his impeccable timing, which can enhance the impact of his sharp one-liners. However, learning to master comic timing can be a difficult and lengthy process, with inexperienced comedians often struggling to get the timing right resulting in less effective laughs.<sup>103</sup> It's important to consider, too, the potential for interaction and spontaneity in a stand-up performance – as stated previously in the initial definition, stand-up comedy encourages direct interaction between the performer and the audience. Comedians often adapt their material on the spot, responding to audience reactions or incorporating unexpected events into their performance, leading to unique and unrepeatable comedic moments and contributing to the thrill and unpredictability of live comedy. Ross Noble is particularly known for his improvisational style, often deviating from his planned material to engage in spontaneous banter with his audience. Yet improvisation is a delicate tightrope to walk - too much spontaneity can lead to a disjointed or chaotic performance and disrupt the narrative flow and build of a set.

The structure and organisation of a stand-up routine can have a significant impact on its success - a well-structured routine not only helps to maintain audience engagement but can also enhance the comedic impact of the material.<sup>104</sup> A common structure in stand-up comedy material is the 'setup-punchline-tag' format, where the comedian presents a situation (the setup), delivers the joke (the punchline), and then adds additional jokes (the tags) to prolong the laughter.<sup>105</sup> Comedians need to ensure their routine has a coherent narrative structure, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, to keep the audience engaged and build up to the comedic climax effectively. Audience interaction is another technique that can enhance a comedian's

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<sup>102</sup> Jon Macks, *How to be Funny* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) p. 25

<sup>103</sup> For in in depth look at the importance of timing from a prosodic perspective see Pickering et al. (2009) and Attardo, Pickering and Baker (2011)

<sup>104</sup> Andrea Greenbaum, 'Stand-up Comedy as Rhetorical Argument: An Investigation of Comic Culture', *Humor*, 12, 1 (1999) pp. 33-46 (p. 33-37)

<sup>105</sup> Marianna Keisalo, *Set-Up and Punchline as Figure and Ground: The Craft and Creativity of Stand-up Comedy* (OAC Press, 2017) p. 11-13

performance and help with that build - this can range from incorporating audience reactions into the act,<sup>106</sup> responding to hecklers,<sup>107</sup> or even bringing audience members on stage. This technique helps make the performance feel more dynamic and interactive, keeping the audience engaged throughout the act - comedians like Dara Ó Briain are well-known for their quick-witted audience interactions and judicious use of audience interaction that weaves throughout their performance narrative. However, performers must be careful not to alienate or embarrass their audience through such interactions - the comedian's skill lies in making the audience feel part of the performance without making them uncomfortable.

One vital technique in making a routine feel structured while involving the audience is the use of callbacks - this method involves referencing a previous punchline or audience interaction in the performance, creating a sense of continuity and cohesion. Through callbacks, the material can be reinforced by drawing on established themes, characters, or scenarios, thereby solidifying the comedian's overall narrative or persona - as noted by Chauvin, callbacks are a significant tool in a comedian's repertoire, allowing the performer to create a sense of cohesion and shared experience with the audience, whilst showcasing their talent in merging various elements of their performance.<sup>108</sup> For example, Jimmy Carr is often regarded for the skilful use of callbacks in his sets, often referring back to earlier improvisations and heckles as he builds towards the climax of his set. However, these must be used judiciously - an excessive use of callbacks can become predictable, and there exists the potential for alienating audience members who might not recall or appreciate the original reference.

When it comes to stand-up comedy performance, microphone technique emerges as a significant equalising mechanism enabling comedians hailing from a plethora of backgrounds, styles, and competencies to aptly communicate their

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<sup>106</sup> Lawrence Mintz, Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation, *American Quarterly*, 37, 1 (1985) pp. 71-80 (p. 78)

<sup>107</sup> Sameer Rao, "'Joke's on You": Stand-up Comedy Performance and the Management of Hecklers', (Senior Thesis: Haverford College, 2011) p. 30-31

<sup>108</sup> Catherine Chauvin, 'Callbacks in Stand-Up Comedy: Constructing Cohesion at the Macro Level Within a Specific Genre' in *Contrastive Analysis of Discourse-pragmatic Aspects of Linguistic Genres*, ed. by Karin Aijmer and Diana Lewis (Springer, 2017) pp. 165-186 (p. 171-173)

material to audiences - as Ian Brodie asserts, the medium of the microphone “not only alters the stand-up comedy performance but also allows for new expressive forms to take place on stage”<sup>109</sup>. To illustrate, the microphone proves invaluable to comedians possessing quieter voices, or those that lean into subtle vocal nuances during their acts - when a comedian masters the use of the microphone-as-voice, they can effectively enhance their vocal projection, create intimacy with the audience, and strategically alter the audience's focus. By perfecting microphone technique, these performers can ensure their material reaches the audience with desired clarity and effectiveness. Thus, it's reasonable to perceive the microphone as a tool, which aids comedians in overcoming potential hurdles and boosting their engagement with audiences - Brodie frames the microphone as an extension of the performer's body, aiding comedians to efficiently communicate their ideas and sentiments through physicality<sup>110</sup>. Vocal inflexions and accents are another critical aspect of performance technique in stand-up comedy - tonal variation can sustain audience interest and amplify the humour in a joke, and by skilfully manipulating their voice, comedians create unique characters, highlight punchlines, and develop a distinct comedic persona.<sup>111</sup> Michael McIntyre, for instance, by alternating accents and vocal tones McIntyre brings his narratives and characters to life within the sphere of the performance, acting as an extension of his persona while maintaining a continuity of performer on stage.

A comedian's persona plays a vital role in the overall success and reception of a comedy act – as previously highlighted, the persona is essentially the character or image that a comedian projects on stage and it significantly influences how the audience perceives the humour. Some comedians might adopt an exaggerated, over-the-top persona, others may choose to portray a more understated or deadpan character, and some might just be a heightened version of themselves - this decision greatly shapes the comedian's comedic style and the types of jokes they can

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<sup>109</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2014) p. 52

<sup>110</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2014) pp. 56-58

<sup>111</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2014) pp. 78-80

successfully deliver. For instance, the late Mitch Hedberg was known for his distinctive laid-back, laconic persona that perfectly complemented his unique brand of one-liner and non-sequitur humour. However, the reliance on a specific persona could limit a comedian's range and flexibility, potentially making their act predictable or repetitive over time. A comedian's costume and appearance can also reinforce their comedic persona and set the tone for their act.<sup>112</sup> As Double writes, costume helped Alexei Sayle "discover his own highly exaggerated persona. He found a grey suit in an Oxfam shop, which shrank in such a way as to emphasise his stomach."<sup>113</sup> However, comedians must also consider their audience's expectations and cultural sensitivities when selecting their attire - overly distracting or inappropriate costumes could detract from the content of the act and potentially offend audience members.<sup>114</sup>

An equally important aspect is the cultural context in which a comedian performs – to take my own culture into consideration, British comedy is often characterised by satire, irony, and self-deprecation, and could be argued to have a distinct style of its own<sup>115</sup>. However it can be observed the globalisation of comedy, spurred by the rise of digital platforms and international comedians, has caused a blending of comedic styles. With the continuing evolution of stand-up comedy, the role of technology and digital platforms in shaping performance techniques is an intriguing area of study - platforms like Netflix have expanded comedians' reach, enabling them to connect with global audiences<sup>116</sup>. This transition to digital mediums might dramatically transform how comedians refine their performance techniques in future and adapt to new ways of engaging with audiences – potentially leading to a rise in homogenisation of form, style and technique in "standard" stand-up comedy.

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<sup>112</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2014) pp. 80-82

<sup>113</sup> Oliver Double, *Alternative Comedy: 1979 and the Reinvention of British Stand-up* (London: Methuen Drama, 2020) p. 129

<sup>114</sup> Ian Brodie, *A Vulgar Art: A New Approach to Stand-up Comedy* (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2014) pp. 70-76

<sup>115</sup> Brett Mills, "A pleasure working with you': Humour theory and Joan Rivers", *Comedy Studies*, 2, 2 (2011) pp. 151-160 (p. 158)

<sup>116</sup> Johnny Ma, *Stand-up Comedy: Quantifying Humor and Identity*, (2020)

<<http://johnnyma.info/dist/files/Stand-up%20Comedy%20-%20Quantifying%20Humor%20and%20Identity%201-27-20.pdf>> [accessed 12 September 2023] p. 1-2

Some comedians harness the power of observational humour to form connections with the audience - by commenting on universally relatable experiences, they make their material accessible and appealing to a wide range of audience members. Observational comedy often revolves around the humour inherent in everyday situations, drawing attention to shared experiences or absurdities that might otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>117</sup> Political humour also plays a key role in some comedians' performances, allowing them to connect with the audience on shared concerns or viewpoints. By offering biting commentary on current events or public figures, comedians can provoke thought, challenge assumptions, and stimulate discussion amongst their audience members. Often, the comedian's perspective can expose the absurdity or incongruity of political situations, leading to a shared sense of incredulity or outrage.<sup>118</sup> Mark Thomas, for example, is renowned for his politically charged comedy, using his performances to spark debate and challenge societal norms. However, overly political material can potentially divide an audience by alienating those with differing viewpoints and may overshadow the humour with polemics.

Humour often involves playing with taboos, transgressing boundaries, and defying social norms, which can potentially lead to controversy or backlash. What one person finds hilarious, another might find distasteful or even offensive, given the subjective nature of humour - comedians thus walk a tightrope, attempting to push boundaries and provoke laughter without alienating their audience.<sup>119</sup> To this end, comedians often utilise satire or irony as a tool to explore controversial topics without stepping into the realm of offensiveness. This method enables them to indirectly address delicate issues and stimulate critical contemplation from their audience. Nonetheless, there is a counter-argument that satire and irony might unintentionally reinforce harmful stereotypes rather than contesting them and the message may be misinterpreted or lost on the audience - Leon Hunt argues that irony can provide a veil for comedians, enabling them to express contentious or

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<sup>117</sup> Justyna Wawrzyniuk, 'Identifying Humor in Stand-Up Comedy: A Preliminary Study', *Linguistics Beyond and Within*, 7 (2021) pp. 86-97 (p. 87-88)

<sup>118</sup> Paul Sturges, 'The Production of Comedy: The Joke in the Age of Social Media', *Sage Open*, 5, 4 (2015)

<sup>119</sup> Phillip Deen, 'What Could It Mean to Say That Today's Stand-Up Audiences Are Too Sensitive?', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 78, 4 (2020) pp. 501-512 (p. 502)

offensive views without owning up to their impact.<sup>120</sup> Jimmy Carr for instance has faced backlash for jokes anchored in racist or sexist stereotypes, which critics argue can perpetuate damaging attitudes and entrench existing power dynamics. While Carr often defends his material as being intentionally ironic<sup>121</sup>, it can be contended that his reliance on irony can blur the underlying issues and normalise sexist and offensive humour<sup>122</sup>.

An alternative method for steering the course between offensive and provocative humour is for comedians to adopt a self-aware, reflexive stance. By acknowledging potential offence and actively involving the audience in the process of deciphering and interpreting the humour, comedians can encourage shared responsibility. Stewart Lee, for example, often underscores the contrived nature of his performances, highlighting potential offensiveness while promoting audience self-reflection. This inclusive approach enables the exploration of challenging topics in an open, honest atmosphere. However, the effectiveness of this reflexive style is debatable, as some audience members may be unable or unwilling to partake in the level of critical reflection required to comprehend the intended message. It is possible to assert that the self-awareness shown by comedians like Lee might come across as self-centred or pompous, potentially alienating audience members who prefer a more direct or humble style of comedy<sup>123</sup>. Hence, while reflexivity can be an effective tool, it comes with its own set of challenges and limitations.

### Provocateur

The intent of a stand-up comedian is to provoke and challenge, navigating the nuanced line between irreverence and seriousness that allows laughter to resonate

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<sup>120</sup> Leon Hunt, 'Near the Knuckle? It Nearly Took My Arm Off! British Comedy and the 'New Offensiveness'', *Comedy Studies*, 1,2 (2010) pp. 181-190 (p. 182-183)

<sup>121</sup> Stephen Moss, 'Interview – Jimmy Carr: 'I Thought My Paralympics Joke was Totally Acceptable'', *The Guardian*, 05 November 2009, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/nov/05/jimmy-carr-paralympics-joke>> [accessed 14 September 2023]

<sup>122</sup> Hazel Davis, 'Not Amused by Jimmy Carr? Check Out These Comedians Instead', *The Guardian*, 29 October 2009, <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/oct/29/jimmy-car-safe-comedians>> [accessed 14 September 2023]

<sup>123</sup> For an insightful demonstration of this in action, Lee keeps a collection of his online critiques - <https://www.stewartlee.co.uk/online-critiques/>

with diverse audiences across various venues. The comedian as a provocateur plays a crucial role within the realm of stand-up comedy, used to unsettle societal norms, question authority, and elicit potent reactions from the audience. It's an approach echoed in the work of Bim Mason, a performer in the fields of performance art and clowning whose book *Provocation in Popular Culture*<sup>124</sup> delves into the idea of 'cultural provocation':

the art of using cultural artefacts or events to stimulate a process of transformation in individuals, organisations or social groupings... neither political performance in with aspects of popular entertainment, in the tradition of agit-prop, say, nor entertainment that simply aims to shock.<sup>125</sup>

Though one can easily accuse comedians of wanting to shock or agitate, the truth is that stand-up is closer in tone and intent to the cultural provocation proposed by Mason, walking the line between politics, entertainment and spectacle while in dialogic negotiation with the audience. Mason, as a classically trained clown at the Ecole Jaques Lecoq, approaches the idea of comedy from the perspective of the fool or bouffon, from a liminal perspective on society similar to the carnivalesque, the wise fool, the jester and the harlequin.<sup>126</sup> Each of these perspectives has one thing in common – all are seen as sanctioned tricksters speaking truth to power from a position of difference and/or ignorance. The other interesting perspective from Mason's background on cultural provocation is the idea of 'play' – as previously discussed this is already a prominent theory of comedy, but Mason argues that play can in itself be seen as provocative and have real-world consequences, stating "(a)n outwardly playful action may also present a direct and serious challenge and must be overcome by the authorities in order to avoid their public loss of status".<sup>127</sup>

Traditionally performance is signalled as 'play,' but provocative stand-up comedy complicates this definition. The form is a more complex variation of play, constructed not on the premise 'This is play,' but rather around the question, 'Is this

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<sup>124</sup> Bim Mason, *Provocation in Popular Culture* (Oxon, Routledge, 2016)

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.* p. 1

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.* p. 19-21

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.* p. 17

play?' This essence of provocative comedy disrupts the comfort of easy definitions, thereby amplifying its power to unsettle and challenge audiences.<sup>128</sup> It's also worth noting that audiences for stand-up comedy are often less homogenous than those for other performances. Often audiences don't undergo the same self-selection that occurs with ticket purchase, further complicating the task of the comedian.<sup>129</sup> The diverse demographic and attitudinal nuances demand careful tailoring of the comedic material to engage effectively and provoke a strong response.

The efficacy of provocative comedy originates from its ability to upset audience expectations, obliging them to face uncomfortable realities or contradictions within their own belief systems. Through exploring taboo subjects and addressing contentious issues, provocative comedians can create fresh paths for discourse, challenging the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable in comedy. However, the precarious equilibrium between provocation and sensitivity is integral to ensuring that the humour remains both engaging and thought-provoking, without isolating or offending audiences.

Building upon the Emergent Norm Theory proposed by Turner and Killian (see Chapter Five – Collective Behaviour), group dynamics can indeed push behaviour to become more extreme, permitting greater risks within unfamiliar territories.<sup>130</sup> This idea is particularly relevant to stand-up comedy, where comedians often push boundaries, provoking audiences to grapple with uncomfortable realities in the pursuit of laughter. However, it's vital to strike a balance, as an over-prescriptive performance could impose an unwanted relationship upon the spectators, thereby limiting the scope of the comedic play. This is particularly evident through the phenomenon of "dying" on stage i.e., when the audience turns indifferent or fully against the comedian and the dialogism of the performance grinds to a halt – using emergent norm theory as a baseline, it could be argued that this happens because

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<sup>128</sup> John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humour* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

<sup>129</sup> Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers, 'It's About Expecting the Unexpected: Live Stand-up Comedy from the Audiences' Perspective', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 8, 2 (2011) pp. 165-188 (p. 175-177)

<sup>130</sup> Ralph H. Turner and Lewis Killian, *Collective Behavior*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1957)



the comedian provokes the audience response into one of the antithetical dimensions i.e., Volatile (VF), Individualistic (IS) or Active (AE).

Pushing the audience into just one of these dimensions, whether deliberately or through inexperience, often results in indifference – a Volatile audience that is still Solidaristic and Expressive may begin to mutter amongst themselves, an Individualistic audience that is still Focused and Expressive may begin to start friendly heckles as they find themselves trying to support the comedian and an Active audience that are still Focused and Solidaristic may clam up and begin to fidget with embarrassment. The major risk to the comedian comes when an audience is pushed into the antithetical response in two of these dimensions – a Volatile, Individualistic and Expressive audience will begin to actively heckle, whereas a Focused, Individualistic and Active audience may vote with their feet and leave.

Taboo topics and controversial themes are among the primary tools a comedian uses to provoke audiences. As Kelsey Timler observes;

Humour facilitates the comedian's dealings with thematic elements in ways that are unavailable to anthropologists; taboo topics and sensitive socio-political themes can be explored within the safe spaces created by the comedic context<sup>131</sup>

This strategic use of contentious material instigates discomfort and cognitive dissonance in audiences, inviting them to interrogate their beliefs and assumptions.

Satire and irony are also vital tools in a comedian's repertoire, enabling them to critique socio-political institutions in a manner that's simultaneously humorous and insightful. These devices challenge audiences to critically evaluate their world and question the underpinnings of societal structures in a way that is seen as socially acceptable, as noted by Nicholas Holm "(h)umour is thus both critical *and* functions in the service of current relations of power, because those two functions are not

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<sup>131</sup> Kelsey Timler, 'Critical Laughter: The Standup Comedian's Critique of Culture at Home', *Platform: Journal of Graduate Students in Anthropology*, 13, (2012) pp. 49-63 (p. 50)

mutually exclusive"<sup>132</sup>. However, as Kennan Ferguson points out, humour may not be the most reliable way of invoking critique within audiences, stating:

critique depends on a profound positivism, or at least a presumption of discoverable verities. Discovery (the procedures of seeing how things operate) and actuality (the structural truth of oppression in any given situation) underpin critical thought. What is behind the curtain is real; the curtain itself must be abolished. Comedic tropes, in contrast, revel in the play between reality, intentionality, and meaning: irony, sarcasm, exaggeration, slapstick. Critique operates structurally and narratively, while humor (*sic*) surprises and undercuts.<sup>133</sup>

Comedians tread the line between irreverence and seriousness with great skill. By leveraging humour to critique and provoke while acknowledging the gravity of the issues they're addressing, comedians strike a delicate balance.

Tailoring material for various audiences is another essential aspect of a comedian's role as a provocateur. They often adapt their jokes and performance style to cater to different groups, considering the audience's beliefs, assumptions, and societal norms. This customisation enables them to forge a stronger connection with their audience and intensify reactions to their performance, as noted by Lockyer and Myers.<sup>134</sup> Hence, the role of the comedian as a provocateur in stand-up comedy extends beyond merely eliciting laughter. They employ their craft to prompt audiences to reflect upon societal norms, question authority, and reconsider their assumptions, enriching the comedic experience while fostering critical thinking. The provocation woven into the fabric of stand-up comedy is a delicate art, balancing the serious with the irreverent, engaging diverse audiences, and transforming laughter into a tool for social critique and self-reflection.

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<sup>132</sup> Nicholas Holm, "Against the Assault of Laughter": Differentiating Critical and Resistant Humour', in *Comedy and Critical Thought: Laughter as Resistance*, ed. by Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone, Fred Francis and Iain MacKenzie (London, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), pp. 31-44 (p. 36), emphasis in original

<sup>133</sup> Kennan Ferguson, 'Review - Comedy and Critical Thought: Laughter as Resistance', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 18, 4 (2019) pp. 247-250

<sup>134</sup> Lockyer, Sharon and Myers, Lynn, "It's About Expecting the Unexpected': Live Stand-up Comedy from the Audiences' Perspective', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8, 2 (2011) pp. 165-188 (p. 175-176)

Ken Willis suggests that provocative comedy serves to challenge the status quo and push the boundaries of societal norms, which is not always an intellectual response as “(o)ur amusement (or lack of it) is immediately present.”<sup>135</sup> This type of comedy not only entertains, but also spurs audiences to introspect, examining their own beliefs and presumptions. By nudging at the borders of the acceptable, these comedic provocateurs stimulate critical thinking and foster dialogue around societal norms and values. Nevertheless, the power of provocation in comedy is a contested issue. For some, such as Caty Borum Chattoo and Lauren Feldman, it serves as a necessary instrument for challenging ingrained conventions and catalysing social transformation.<sup>136</sup> Conversely, others argue, like Dennis Howitt and Kwame Owusu-Bempah, that it may reinforce damaging stereotypes, contributing to a hostile culture of offence<sup>137</sup>. Within this debate, we must consider the effects of provocative humour on audiences and wider society.

Within the Anglophonic context, provocative comedy boasts a long and illustrious history. Comedians such as Lenny Bruce, Peter Cook and Dudley Moore were trailblazers, pushing the boundaries of acceptability in their respective eras.<sup>138</sup> Presently, comedians persist in using provocation to engage audiences and ignite debate around a variety of social and political issues.

Challenging both the audience and society, comedy serves as an influential tool for questioning norms and values. In the first analysis of stand-up comedy in an academic framework, Oliver Double illustrates the capacity of comedy to challenge conventional ways of thinking about the world. It becomes a vehicle for re-evaluation of our beliefs and perspectives, offering alternative viewpoints, and

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<sup>135</sup> Ken Willis, ‘Merry Hell: Social Competence and Humour Incompetence’, in *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humour*, ed. by Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 126-145 (p. 128-132)

<sup>136</sup> Caty Borum Chattoo and Lauren Feldman, *The Role of Comedy in Social Justice* (2020) <<https://doi.org/10.48558/JQ1A-JT09>> [Accessed 29 July 2023]

<sup>137</sup> Dennis Howitt and Kwame Owusu-Bempah, ‘Race and Ethnicity in Popular Humour’, in *Beyond a Joke : The Limits of Humour*, ed. By Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 45-62 (p. 59-61)

<sup>138</sup> Roger Wilmut and Peter Rosengard, *Didn’t You Kill My Mother-in-law?: The Story of Alternative Comedy in Britain from the Comedy Store to Saturday Live* (London, Methuen Drama, 1989)

engendering critical thinking.<sup>139</sup> Noteworthy comedian and activist Mark Thomas has made persistent use of his platform to question political and social issues, ranging from the arms trade to corporate tax avoidance.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Josie Long applies her stand-up routines to address pressing matters such as social inequality and the necessity of activism.<sup>141</sup>

For another example, Frankie Boyle's comedy is distinguished by his biting wit and his unflinching address of contentious topics, using his sharp humour to challenge boundaries. Boyle's approach to sensitive issues, including race, religion, and disability, encourages audiences to grapple with their discomfort and question their assumptions, and while some praise Boyle's blunt style, critics argue that his humour can be excessively offensive and perpetuate damaging misogynistic stereotypes.<sup>142</sup> Despite these critiques, Boyle's comedy can underscore the delicate equilibrium between provocation and offence, and the capacity of humour to question societal norms<sup>143</sup>.

91a	So <u>you</u> can't really ban words right? Ricky Gervais is getting in trouble for saying "mong"	417
91b	I don't know why he did it 'cause he didn't seem to be able to make it very funny [L:A(4)]	418
91c	<u>You</u> can't <i>ban a word</i> [A:C(2)]	419
91d	<u>Even a</u> horrible word like that that's like saying let's just burn one book.	420
91e	Let's just burn Mein Kampf it's a horrible book nobody likes it	421
91f	At the point you burn Mein Kampf	422

<sup>139</sup> Oliver Double, 'An Approach to Traditions of Stand-up Comedy' (Doctoral Thesis: University of Sheffield, 1991) <<https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/1873/>> [accessed 30 July 2023] p. 35-36

<sup>140</sup> Sophie Quirk, 'Who's in charge? Negotiation, Manipulation and Comic Licence in the Work of Mark Thomas', *Comedy Studies*, 1, 1 (2010) pp. 113-124

<sup>141</sup> Eric Berlin, 'The Bottomless Present: A Conversation with Josie Long', *Comedy Studies*, 10, 2 (2019) pp. 237-251

<sup>142</sup> Leon Hunt, 'Near the Knuckle? It Nearly Took My Arm Off! British Comedy and the 'New Offensiveness'', *Comedy Studies*, 1, 2 (2010) pp. 181-190

<sup>143</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Frankie Boyle – The Last Days of Sodom* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/frankie-boyle-last-days-of-sodom.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

91g	you're a fucking fascist society	423
91h	And you're not even a proper fascist society	424
91i	'cause you burned the fucking guidebook [L(4)]	425
91j	<u>You're marching about in peach</u> military uniforms [sl]	426
91k	Invading... {chuckles} Poundland [L(2)]	427

As a further example, Jimmy Carr, known for his one-liners and dark humour, frequently confronts taboo subjects with a sardonic edge. Carr's comedy is defined by elements of incongruity and surprise, frequently leading audiences to question their values and beliefs. Nevertheless, Carr has faced criticism for his regular use of shock tactics, which some argue prioritise eliciting a reaction over offering substantial commentary.<sup>144</sup> Still, Carr's capacity to provoke laughter whilst tackling contentious topics illustrates the potential of humour to question the status quo and initiate conversations around societal issues<sup>145</sup>:

163a	I get away with murder in jokes	1200
163b	I think 'cause they're so clearly jokes	1201
163c	Feed line punch line	1202
163d	laugh possibly an "ooh".	1203
163e	But it's so clearly a joke	1204
163f	It's not an opinion	1205
163g	I'm not trying to change your mind about anything	1206
163h	I'm just trying to make you laugh	1207

<sup>144</sup> Leon Hunt, Near the Knuckle? It Nearly Took My Arm Off! British Comedy and the 'New Offensiveness', *Comedy Studies*, 1, 2 (2010) pp. 181-190

<sup>145</sup> Sebastian Bloomfield, *Ruddy Great Comedy – Jimmy Carr – Funny Business* (2023) <<https://www.ruddygreatcomedy.co.uk/p/jimmy-carr-funny-business.html>> [accessed 11 September 2023]

163i	But actually my dirty secret is sometimes when I'm at home writing jokes of a day	1208
163j	I look back at what I've done and I'll just go "Well, that isn't transgressive or taboo or edgy	1209
163k	That's just wrong	1210
163l	That's just 100%	1211
163m	wrong."	1212
163n	And then another bit of me quite a big bit goes	1213
163o	"Huh	1214
163p	funny though" [L(2)]	1215
163q	If we're gonna be fancy about it it's cognitive dissonance it's two	1216
163r	opposing thoughts in my head at the same time	1217
163s	I think	1218
163t	"It's wrong	1219
163u	It's funny"	1220
163v	Is it okay to say something that's 100% wrong if it's funny enough? [<yeah>]	1221
163w	Well you say that but it's not like 100% wrong where you'll go  (jolly voice)"Oh	1222
163x	What are you like?	1223
163y	Cheeky!"  [I]	1224
163z	You're much more likely to go	1225
163aa	{starts to laugh and then recoils} "ugh" [L(3)]	1226

Finally, Jo Brand's stand-up is characterised by her laconic delivery and confrontational approach to issues such as gender, body image, and sexuality. Brand

utilises dark humour and irony to break taboos and expose societal double standards, providing a feminist viewpoint that challenges traditional gender roles.<sup>146</sup> While Brand's humour can sometimes veer into vulgarity or reinforce negative stereotypes, her work often showcases the power of comedy in pushing boundaries and interrogating societal norms, prompting audiences to rethink their preconceived notions around gender roles, body image and standards of decorum and appearance

### **Material Excerpts for Analysis**

Presented below are three material excerpts from the selected corpus examples – one from my own performance as Frank Astaire, one from Mae Martin and one from Nish Kumar on *Live From the BBC*. As previously stated at the beginning of the chapter, the ideal would be to perform this level of analysis on all material in the selected artefacts however the resulting analysis would be many times the length limit required by this study – my hope is that these have been contextualised enough by the previous analysis that the lenses applied to them here will produce results that make meaningful sense to the reader.

#### Frank Astaire – Selected Material for Analysis

17a	It's very, very nice to be here tonight though ladies and gentlemen	93
17b	You are a lovely looking audience tonight as well, you are a lovely looking audience	94
17c	You'll forgive my tone of surprise but I've seen some fucking train wrecks in my time [L(3)]	95
17d	{to lady in front row} <u>Especiallly you madam [L(4)]</u>	96
17e	<u>Oh sorry sorry no I meant that you were lovely there sorry [L(3)→I] not that you were a train wreck</u>	97

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<sup>146</sup> Gaelle Sobott-Mogwe and Donna Cox, 'Laughter and the Medusa: An interview with Jo Brand', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 8, 2 (1999) pp. 133-140.

17f	You are lovely [!]	98
17g	All... all I'm saying is you wouldn't be able to walk past a desk in my day without getting a little bit of friendly sexual harassment [L(3)]	99

Starting with the linguistic makeup of the transcript, there are a total of 7 lines with an average of 12.57 words per line. The material is primarily composed of declarative sentences, with only one interrogative sentence in line 17d. This pattern suggests that Astaire primarily uses statements to convey his ideas and engage the audience. Astaire also employs repetition as a linguistic device to emphasise his point. For example, in lines 17b and 17f, he repeats the phrase "lovely looking audience" and "you are lovely" to stress the positive impression of the audience. Moreover, he uses self-correction in line 17e, which serves to clarify his previous statement and maintain a humorous tone.

In the initial line (17a), Astaire acknowledges the audience and sets a positive tone, thus creating an allusion to a welcoming atmosphere. Contextually at this point, Astaire has been less than gracious with the audience so this could be seen as a first step in establishing rapport. Continuing with the theme of flattery in the next line (17b), Astaire compliments the audience's appearance. By doing so, he not only builds the positive start created earlier but also invites the audience to see themselves as a collective group, fostering a sense of camaraderie and shared enjoyment.

In the next line (17c) Astaire takes a sudden turn, introducing a touch of dark humour and pulling back to the already established context. The blunt mention of "train wrecks" creates an incongruity, contrasting sharply with the previous compliments and provoking a three-second laugh from the audience in recognition of this. This is followed up by some crowd work (17d) where Astaire singles out a woman in the front row, seemingly reinforcing the train wreck comment. This technique of using a targeted aside to an audience member, while potentially risky, can enhance the audience's engagement with the performance if done well – in this



case, it provokes four seconds of laughter based on both the non-sequitur and the insinuation that the targeted lady could be considered a “train-wreck” and potentially insulted.

Realising the potential for offence, Astaire quickly backtracks with the next line (17e), clarifying that he meant the woman was lovely, not a train wreck. This moment of self-correction showcases the performer's awareness of the delicate balance between humour and offence, although the potential for offence was deliberately manipulated to create the humour. By apologising and reiterating the compliment, Astaire manages to maintain rapport with the audience while also demonstrating humility and vulnerability, and this retraction once again provokes a three-second laugh from the audience as the context is flipped once more to being accidental rather than deliberate.

The repetition of the compliment in the next line (17f) serves as a reinforcement, reminding the audience of the performer's professed positive stance towards them. It also acts as a buffer between the edgy humour in the previous lines and the controversial statement that follows, with the repetition raising a small laugh from the audience. In the next line (17g), Astaire introduces a provocative comment, referencing “friendly sexual harassment” in a casual manner. This statement can be interpreted as a form of ‘shock humour’, which relies on the violation of social norms and taboos to elicit laughter. By presenting the controversial topic in a nonchalant manner, Astaire challenges the audience's sensibilities and invites them to question their own reactions to the material. This punchline is tied directly to the character's context and worldview of the character and is enhanced by this context – one could infer that if this punchline was earlier in the set before the context had been properly established rather than 99 lines in it would not have received the three seconds of laughter from the audience as they interpreted in an ironic context.

Stance theories provide a useful lens through which to examine the ways in which Astaire negotiates his relationship with the audience and asserts his comedic identity within the context of this piece of material. As previously noted, stance can be understood as the subjective positioning of a speaker in relation to the audience

and the topic being discussed. In the context of stand-up comedy, a performer's stance is crucial in determining their comedic style, as well as the extent to which they can engage and entertain the audience. In this material excerpt, Astaire employs a mix of stance strategies, ranging from flattery and self-deprecation to provocative humour. These strategies can be understood in terms of Alignment, Stance Taking and Footing.

Alignment refers to the degree of congruence between the speaker's perspective and that of the audience. In this material, Astaire demonstrates a keen awareness of the audience's sensibilities, aligning himself with them through compliments and apologies while also challenging their expectations with edgy humour. The fact that Astaire recognises that his comments have the potential to cause offence (17e) shows he is sympathetic in some respects to the audience as a collective, though his poor attempts at a compliment (17g) show that his social perspective is not in alignment with modern audience sensibilities.

Stance-taking involves the process of adopting a particular position in relation to a topic or issue. Astaire's provocative comment at the end of the excerpt (17g) can be seen as a form of stance-taking, as he adopts a controversial position in relation to the topic of sexual harassment. By doing so, he invites the audience to engage with the material on a deeper level, questioning their own beliefs and reactions. From Astaire's perspective, there is nothing controversial about the statement but from a performance perspective, it is designed to be a provocative stance for precisely this reason. In contrast to the firm stance taken in the final line, the earlier lines are dynamic, with a continuous negotiation and adjustment of Astaire's stance throughout the interaction as he moves fluidly between complementary (17a-17b, 17f), insulting (17c-17d), apologetic (17e) and provocative stances (17g). This dynamic approach contributes to the overall impact of the material, as it keeps the audience engaged and attentive to the shifting nuances of the performance.

Footing refers to the social roles and relationships that are constructed and negotiated within an interaction. In this material, Astaire skilfully navigates various footings, positioning himself as a friendly host (front foot), a humble performer (back foot), and a provocative comedian (front foot). This ability to switch between

different footings is key to the success of the performance, as it allows Astaire to maintain rapport with the audience while also asserting his context and keeping the performance within the understanding of the play frame even when provocative material is present. However, in order to build a footing, there must be implicit trust between the performer and audience otherwise these relationships break down to the detriment of the performance.

Using positioning theory to examine the relative positioning of the participants on a line-by-line basis, we can infer the following:

Astaire reminds the audience of his duty as a performer (17a), thus reestablishing the parameters of their respective relationship – in this case, the relationship is asymmetrical, with Astaire being both literally and figuratively above the audience within the context of the gig at this point. This storyline is reinforced by Astaire's next line (17b), which is directly complementary to the audience, thus reinforcing not only their worth as a collective entity but distancing Astaire from them in terms of this asymmetry. The next line (17c) introduces a new collective participant to the storyline – the previous audiences that Astaire has encountered and describes as "fucking train wrecks". This new participant does not change the relative rights and duties of the performer or current audience but is positioned in the storyline as an inferior implied other, providing in their contrast a compliment (however obtuse) to the current audience and raising them closer to Astaire in relative worth.

Astaire's next action (17d), direct interaction with an audience member, creates a new dynamic within the storyline. The previous audience, having served their contextual purpose, is abandoned and the dynamic now becomes the performer, the audience member and the rest of the audience as a collective. In the context of this dynamic, the targeted woman loses the right of relative anonymity that the audience enjoys and the audience as a collective loses the duty of care for the woman – this dynamic change is not permanent nor reflective of individual feelings towards the woman from audience members, it is a temporary change precipitated by the actions of the performer who while the interaction continues has the power to raise or lower

the relative positioning of the audience member in comparison to the audience, something that this “accidental” insult is effectively calculated to lower.

However, Astaire’s next action (17e) turns the relative positioning of the participants on its head, as in apologising to the woman and complimenting her he raises her relative worth in the storyline above his (and by extension, the audience) as well as revealing both his duty of care to the audience as a performer and the implicit right that the audience have as paying punters to be entertained. This shift in relative positioning is perceived as a reactive one, though in reality it is planned and scripted this way deliberately to provide this relative shift for the purposes of humour. The next line (17f) again provides a direct compliment to the audience member, once again marking her out from the audience collective in the three-way dynamic but without any extra agency provided by this dialogue as Astaire has not yet let her speak or asked any direct questions. Finally, the final line (17g) restores the equilibrium of the original three-way dynamic established in 17d, with the implication of ‘friendly sexual harassment’ reducing the audience member from subject to object i.e., no longer the direct subject recipient of compliments but rather the object that the act described happens to. This objectification reduces her relative worth in the context of the storyline, demoting her to below Astaire and the audience and allowing Astaire to reestablish his dominance at the expense of her rights as an individual (but not currently a member of the audience due to the separation imposed by the storyline).

In terms of comic forms, the material excerpt demonstrates the following techniques and forms as outlined previously:

Parody – In Astaire's performance, parody can be seen throughout the context of the character as a washed-up 1970s entertainer. In the context of this material excerpt, direct parody can be found in his exaggerated depiction of past attitudes towards sexual harassment (17g). By presenting these attitudes as outdated and absurd, Astaire invites the audience to laugh at the ridiculousness of such behaviour, thereby commenting on the progress society has made in addressing such issues.

Satire – Satire is a form of comedy that employs irony, exaggeration, and ridicule to criticise or expose human vices, follies, or shortcomings, in the selected material Astaire employs satire to shed light on societal changes and the evolving attitudes towards sexual harassment. Through his comments on the acceptability of "friendly sexual harassment" in the past, Astaire indirectly critiques these attitudes and the environment that allowed them to flourish. By doing so, he encourages the audience to reflect on these issues while also providing comic relief through his exaggerated portrayal.

Irony - In the selected material, the irony is evident in his interaction with the lady in the front row (17d-17e). After initially singling her out as an example of a "train wreck," he quickly backtracks and claims that he meant to compliment her instead. This reversal of meaning creates an ironic situation that contributes to the humorous effect of the performance.

Exaggeration - In the selected material, Astaire makes use of hyperbole in describing the "train wrecks" he has seen in his time (17c) and in his reference to the oxymoronic "friendly sexual harassment" (17g). These exaggerations serve to heighten the comic effect of the material while also inviting the audience to consider the underlying themes and issues being addressed.

From a reaction perspective, out of seven extant lines in the excerpt, there are four full-room laughs and one minor laugh making five in total, a reaction percentage of 71.42% of the provided transcript. Only one of the reactions comes after a line I would not consider a punchline (17f), making the punchlines in the section 100% effective at their intended purpose.

For a joke to be effective, the audience must possess the necessary background knowledge to understand the context and make inferences about the humorous elements. In lines 17a and 17b, Astaire establishes a rapport with the audience by complimenting their appearance, acknowledging their presence, and setting a positive tone for the rest of the performance. The audience can infer from these lines that Astaire is attempting to create a friendly atmosphere, making them more receptive to his subsequent material. Astaire then uses this shared rapport to

create the incongruity in line 17c, where he contrasts the "lovely looking audience" with the "fucking train wrecks" he has encountered in the past. This sudden shift from a complementary tone to a more aggressive and blunt statement surprises the audience, creating humour through the unexpected incongruity. Effective comedy often depends on the comedian's ability to regulate the audience's emotions, guiding them from a state of tension to a release of laughter. Astaire demonstrates this skill in lines 17d and 17e, where he initially insults the lady in the front row by calling her a "train wreck," only to backtrack quickly and assure her that he meant she was "lovely." The audience experiences a moment of tension as they anticipate a negative reaction from the lady, followed by relief and amusement when Astaire diffuses the situation with his retraction. This emotional regulation contributes to the overall comedic effect of the material.

Humour often arises from the exploration of taboo topics or the introduction of risk into a performance. In line 17g, Astaire broaches the sensitive subject of "friendly sexual harassment," which may be considered a risky move in a modern context. However, by introducing the topic in a light-hearted and nostalgic manner, Astaire can generate laughter by pushing the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable, while also encouraging the audience to reflect on the changing nature of societal norms and expectations. The relative age of the audience makes contextualising the final punchline in terms of then and now easier, though there is a relatively widespread shared cultural understanding of the widespread misogyny and objectification throughout the 1970s due to high-profile cases such as Jimmy Saville and Rolf Harris means that those who weren't present will still be able to contextualise the comment as outdated and backward.

Throughout the excerpt, Astaire's material demonstrates effective framing through his initial compliments to the audience and his playful banter with the lady in the front row. Additionally, Astaire's ability to swiftly recalibrate his material in response to audience reactions, such as when he backtracks on his insult in line 17e, allows him to maintain control over the performance and ensure a positive audience experience. The material encourages active participation by directly engaging with the audience, particularly the lady in the front row. This interaction invites the

audience to become invested in the performance and share in the humour, creating a more immersive and enjoyable experience. The performance taps into this dynamic by creating moments of shared laughter through his playful banter, direct engagement with audience members, and the exploration of potentially divisive topics like sexual harassment. This shared laughter reinforces the sense of connection between audience members and enhances the overall comedic experience.

Next, we will examine the performance techniques used in the selected material, drawing upon the previously outlined theories to shed light on the various aspects of the performance. One of the most crucial elements of comedy is timing, as it contributes to the delivery of punchlines and the overall pacing of a performance. Astaire demonstrates excellent timing in this material, allowing for enough pauses between lines for the audience to react, while keeping the performance moving at a brisk pace by having some overlap between the end of the laugh and the next lines (as denoted by the underlined words in the transcript). This is particularly evident in lines 17d and 17e, where Astaire carefully times the transition from an apparent insult to an apology, maximising the humorous effect.

Astaire's delivery is another essential aspect of his performance, as it helps convey the intended humour and emotion behind each line - his use of tone and intonation add depth to his material, ensuring that the audience understands the intended meaning behind his words based on their positive reactions. For example, in line 17c his implied tone of surprise effectively highlights the contrast between the current audience and the "train wrecks" he has seen in the past, while his apologetic tone in line 17e emphasises the intended humour of the sudden reversal. This section of the performance is heavily reliant on audience interaction, which serves to establish a rapport and make the audience feel included in the comedic experience; By addressing individual audience members, such as the lady in the front row in line 17d, Astaire reaches through the fourth wall and fosters a sense of intimacy and connection with the audience. This active engagement allows the audience to feel more invested in the performance and enhances the overall enjoyment of the material.

Astaire's use of self-deprecation in his material demonstrates his ability to poke fun at himself, making him more relatable and endearing to the audience. By admitting to his own surprise at the attractiveness of the audience in line 17c, he not only sets up the subsequent punchlines but also establishes himself as a fallible and flawed character, which can make his humour more accessible and enjoyable for the audience. The use of the term "train wrecks" in line 17c provides a strong visual image, creating a striking contrast between the current audience and those he has encountered in the past. Additionally, in line 17, the phrase "friendly sexual harassment" serves as an ironic juxtaposition, combining two seemingly contradictory concepts to elicit laughter.

The final lens to examine this material excerpt through is the comedian as provocateur. A key aspect of the provocateur is the willingness to push boundaries and take risks, and this is clear in Astaire's material. By addressing potentially divisive or controversial subjects, such as sexism and sexual harassment, Astaire demonstrates a commitment to challenging the status quo and potentially prompting meaningful discussion. His willingness to tackle difficult topics even at the risk of alienating or offending some audience members is a hallmark of the provocateur's approach. Throughout the selected material Astaire challenges various social norms, particularly those related to politeness and decorum - for example, in line 17c he uses coarse language ("fucking train wrecks") to describe the appearance of previous audiences, effectively subverting the expectation that performers should be polite and deferential towards their audience. By doing so, Astaire establishes himself as a provocative figure, unafraid to challenge conventional notions of appropriate behaviour.

Astaire also skillfully employs tension and discomfort as tools for provocation, forcing the audience to confront and engage with potentially uncomfortable subject matter. In lines 17d and 17e for instance, he initially targets a woman in the front row with a seemingly offensive remark, before quickly backtracking and offering a compliment. This sudden shift creates a sense of unease, encouraging the audience to question their own reactions and assumptions. The material also delves into the realm of taboo subjects, highlighting issues that are often considered off-limits or



inappropriate for public discourse. In line 17g, he alludes to "friendly sexual harassment" as a common occurrence in the past, using humour to draw attention to the deeply ingrained sexism that pervaded society during his youth. By tackling such a sensitive topic, Astaire positions himself as a provocateur, challenging the audience to confront and re-evaluate their own beliefs and attitudes.

One of the key aspects of the comedian as provocateur is the subversion of power dynamics, a theme that is evident in Astaire's material. For example, in line 17d he momentarily assumes a position of authority over the woman in the front row, only to relinquish this power by apologising and complimenting her in line 17e. This reversal of roles serves to undermine traditional power structures, forcing the audience to question their own assumptions about hierarchy and authority. At the same time, Astaire also embraces ambiguity in his material, inviting the audience to consider multiple perspectives and interpretations. Astaire's provocative material also encourages critical thinking by inviting the audience to reflect on their own beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions; Once again this is particularly evident in line 17g, where his reference to "friendly sexual harassment" encourages the audience to consider the ways in which societal attitudes towards sexism and harassment have evolved over time.

Finally, as a provocateur, Astaire also plays an important role in fostering empathy and understanding among his audience. By highlighting the absurdity and hypocrisy of certain social norms and conventions he invites the audience to reconsider their own positions and empathise with those who may have been marginalised or oppressed by these norms. This can be inferred once again from line 17g, where Astaire's allusion to "friendly sexual harassment" highlights the casual sexism that was once accepted as normal, encouraging the audience to empathise with those who were subjected to such treatment.

#### Mae Martin – Selected Material for Analysis

14a | I... Like I'm open to... and you put the gender you want to attract 74

14b	So I... I set... I put my settings to match with men and women, I was really <i>surprised</i> by	75
14c	Not just how shocked my friends were in England cos they've only known me to date this one girl	76
14d	But they were, <i>annoyed</i> at me {scoffs}[I] <u>about it</u>	77
14e	Like my friends were like they were like  (confused)"what?"	78
14f	They were like  (voice wavering)"no"{looking pained} [S→L]	79
14g	<u>They were</u> like  (confused)"but. your hair"  [L(4)]	80
14h	<u>They were</u> like  (accusatory)"you.. you lied"{flicks chin up}  [L]	81
14i	<u>I was like</u> "How did I lie?! I didn't mean to!" but they were like  (voice wavering)"you lied with your hair"  [L(3)]	82

Starting with the linguistic makeup of the transcript, there are a total of 9 lines with an average of 13.44 words per line. The material is primarily composed of declarative sentences, with no interrogative sentences present. This pattern suggests that Martin primarily uses statements to convey their ideas and engage the audience. Martin also employs repetition as a linguistic device to emphasise their point - for example, in lines 14e to 14h, they repeat the phrase "they were like" to stress the reactions of their friends to their selected gender preferences on a dating app. Moreover, they use direct speech in lines 14e to 14i, which serves to bring the audience into the conversation and make the material more relatable.

In the initial line (14a), Martin introduces the topic of gender preferences in dating, setting a tone of openness and inclusivity. This line serves as a foundation for the subsequent material, where Martin delves deeper into their personal experiences and the reactions of their friends. By starting with a broad statement

about gender preferences, Martin establishes a context for the audience, allowing them to better understand the nuances of the following lines. Continuing with the theme of inclusivity in the next line (14b), Martin reveals their personal settings on a dating app and expresses surprise at how their friends reacted to these choices. This line serves to humanise Martin, showcasing their introspective nature and willingness to publicise their own beliefs and preferences. The mention of being "surprised" also hints at a deeper internal conflict or revelation, which adds depth to the material.

In the next line (14c), Martin introduces the reactions of their friends in England by highlighting the contrast between their own open-mindedness and the narrower views of their friends. The mention of only having dated "this one girl" provides context for the audience, explaining the source (but not the explanation) of their friends' shock. This line effectively sets up the punchlines in the subsequent lines, where Martin delves deeper into the specific reactions of their friends. The annoyance of Martin's friends is further emphasised in the follow-up line (14d), with Martin's sense of disbelief at their annoyance highlighted in the emphasis they put on the word "*annoyed*". This line serves to build tension, leading to an initial small laugh from the audience in anticipation of a punchline or resolution. The next four lines (14e-14h) delve into the specific reactions of Martin's friends, with each line building on the previous one and creating a laughcade. The repeated use of the phrase "they were like" serves to emphasise the incredulity of their friends, while also adding a comedic rhythm to the material. The use of vocal cues as indicated in the characterisation text paints their friends' tone of voice as "confused", "wavering", "confused" and "accusatory" respectively, serving to further enhance the humour and providing the audience with a vivid mental image of the friends' reactions.

Concluding with line (14i) Martin defends themselves against the accusations of their friends, expressing genuine confusion and disbelief. The punchline "you lied with your hair" serves as a climax to the laughcade and one of the bigger laughs of the extract, highlighting the absurdity of judging someone's sexuality based on their hairstyle. This line effectively ties together the themes of the material, challenging societal norms and encouraging the audience to question their own assumptions and beliefs.

In this material excerpt, Martin employs a mix of stance strategies, ranging from introspection and self-awareness to the use of direct speech. As before, these strategies can be understood in terms of alignment, stance-taking, and footing.

In terms of alignment, Martin demonstrates a keen awareness of societal expectations and norms, aligning themselves with the audience through shared experiences and challenges related to gender and dating. The fact that Martin expresses honestly their own dating app settings while noting their friend's surprise at this (14b) shows they are in alignment with the audience's potential reactions while acknowledging the fluidity and complexity of gender and attraction. From a stance-taking perspective, Martin's revelation about their dating preferences and the reactions of their friends in England (14c) can be seen as a form of stance-taking. By sharing this personal anecdote, they invite the audience to engage with the material on a deeper level, questioning societal norms and expectations. From Martin's perspective, there is an underlying theme of challenging traditional views on gender and relationships - the dynamic approach in lines 14d to 14i, where Martin moves between the reactions of their friends and their own responses, contributes to the overall impact of the material by keeping the audience engaged with the shifting nuances of the performance.

Finally, from the perspective of footing Martin skilfully navigates the narrative by positioning themselves as both the subject of the narrative and the observer. This ability to switch between different footings, from being the one who is judged (back foot -14c-14d) to the one who questions and defends (front foot - 14i), is key to the success of the performance. It allows Martin to maintain rapport with the audience while also asserting their identity and challenging societal norms.

Once again using positioning theory to examine the relative positioning of the participants on a line-by-line basis, we can infer the following from the selected transcript:

Martin begins by establishing the topic of gender and dating (14a), setting the stage for the subsequent lines. This initial positioning places Martin and the audience on a performer-audience footing, relatively close to equal with only the amplification

and staging raising them to a higher position in respect of the collective. The subsequent revelation (14b) further develops this narrative, positioning Martin as both an active participant in the dating scene and a reflective observer. Martin's confession of bisexual attraction shows a level of informed trust in the audience, with Martin now positioned as the subject and consequently positioned as the actor within the storyline, making the next line a direct critique of their actions,

The reactions of their friends in England (14c) introduce an active change, with Martin positioned as the subject of judgment and scrutiny and consequently lowering their relative position to the audience. The amalgam character of "the friends" enters the storyline at this point, creating a three-way dynamic with the friends being the subject and Martin becoming the object, pushing them to the bottom of the positioning structure below the collective audience and the friends. This dynamic is further developed going forward (14d), where Martin as both performer and object pushes back against the perceived narrow-mindedness of the friends in their demonstrated annoyance at Martin's non-conformance to preconceived ideas of gender and attraction by implying the absurdity of this position. In doing so, Martin repositions himself as the subject rather than the object and once again changes the relative position of the participants to reflect low status looking down on lower status (audience collective -> Martin -> the friends).

The subsequent four lines to (14e-14h), where the friends' reactions range from confusion to accusation, serve to reinforce this relative position and even raise Martin's standing somewhat as the accusation of lying becomes more and more absurd. Throughout this interaction, Martin is positioned as both the defender and the questioned, highlighting the complexities of gender and identity in modern society and how these preconceptions can serve as a barrier to recognition even between friends. The fact that Martin's hairstyle is used as a motivating factor in this assumption allows the relativity of the storyline participants to maintain the same trajectory throughout, with Martin being moved closer and closer to par with the collective audience while still existing as the subject of the material and the friends as the object.

The final line (14i) serves as a culmination of the narrative, with Martin asserting their point of view after three lines of confused and accusatory remarks. Their counter-protest of "How did I lie?! I didn't mean to!" finally raises Martin out of the subject position and back into the performer-audience equilibrium, with the objective focus switching from Martin themselves to their hairstyle and removing the character objectification that had been forced upon them. This line effectively ties together the themes of the material by encouraging the audience to question their own beliefs and assumptions and firmly places the friends at the bottom of the pecking order, below the audience collective and far below Martin as performer again and not subject/object.

Drawing from the previously outlined glossary of comic forms, the following can be arguably applied to Martin's material:

Exposure – Martin's material is full of honest and open truths, particularly in the way they discuss gender and dating preferences. The two line initial lines (14a-14b) are a clear example – while the ellipsis in "Like I'm open to... and you put the gender you want to attract" suggests a hesitation on Martin's part, the fact that they are then able to state "So I... I set... I put my settings to match with men and women, I was really *surprised* by"/"Not just how shocked my friends were in England cos they've only known me to date this one girl" shows an implicit trust in the audience that this exposure of identity will be treated with support and love.

Exaggeration – Martin uses exaggeration to amplify the reactions of their friends, making the situation more humorous. The emphasis on their friends' shock, as seen in "Not just how shocked my friends were in England" (14c), and the surprise and confusion of their friends, as depicted in lines like "they were like |(confused)"what?"|" (14e) and "They were like |(voice wavering)"no"#{looking pained}|" (14f), highlight the gap between expectation and reality. The friends' reactions are incongruous with Martin's own understanding and feelings about their dating preferences and the dramatic portrayal of their friends' reactions, such as "you lied with your hair" (14i), serve to exaggerate the supposed 'transgression' of not performatively expressing your gender attraction in line with others' expectations.

Ignorance – The act of deflating or puncturing pretensions is evident in Martin's recounting of their friends' reactions. The friends' focus on superficial aspects, like hair (14g), is presented as a humorous deflation of the deeper, more complex issues surrounding gender and identity. By highlighting these superficial concerns, Martin deflates any ignorant or overblown reactions to their dating choices.

From a reaction perspective, out of the nine extant lines in the excerpt, there are four full-room laughs and one minor laugh, making five in total, as well as an initial period of silence after line 14f as the audience caught up to what Martin was doing. This totals a reaction percentage of 55.56% of the provided transcript, or roughly a laugh every other line. None of the reactions come after a line I would not consider a punchline, making the punchlines in the section 100% effective at their intended purpose – though 14f has an initial period of silence, this is followed by a full-room laugh as the punchline eventually lands with the intended reaction.

As before, the efficacy of a piece of material relies on background knowledge to understand the context and make inferences about the humorous elements. In lines 14a and 14b, Martin establishes a rapport with the audience by discussing their openness to date different genders, acknowledging societal norms and setting a tone of self-reflection. The audience can infer from these lines that Martin is attempting to create a relatable and honest atmosphere, making them more receptive to the subsequent material. Martin then uses this shared rapport to create the incongruity in line 14c, where they express surprise at their friends' reactions in England, given they've only known Martin to date one girl. This shift from personal revelation to the unexpected reactions of friends introduces humour through the incongruity.

Effective comedy also depends on the comedian's ability to regulate the audience's emotions and guide them through tension and release - Martin demonstrates this skill in lines 14d to 14f, where they depict their friends' disbelief and confusion about their dating choices and how they were unable to ascertain these from Martin's appearance. The audience experiences a moment of tension as they anticipate a negative reaction from the friends, followed by relief and

amusement when Martin humorously portrays their friends' exaggerated reactions. This emotional regulation contributes to the overall comedic effect of the material.

Humour often arises from the exploration of societal norms or the introduction of personal revelations into a performance. In lines 14g to 14i, Martin broaches the humorous notion that their hairstyle somehow dictates or reveals their sexual orientation, and by introducing this topic in a light-hearted and self-deprecating manner, Martin can generate laughter by pushing the boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable while also encouraging the audience to reflect on the often-absurd ways society tries to categorise and label individuals based on superficial traits. The relative youth of the audience makes contextualising the punchlines in terms of modern dating apps and gender fluidity easier, though the growing shared cultural understanding of evolving gender norms means that even those less familiar with these concepts will still be able to contextualise the comments as a humorous reflection on societal expectations.

Throughout the excerpt, Martin's material demonstrates a keen understanding of societal expectations and the complexities of identity. Their initial revelation about being open to dating different genders sets the stage for a deeper exploration of societal norms and personal experiences. Martin's ability to weave personal anecdotes with broader societal observations, as seen in lines 14b and 14c, allows them to connect with the audience on multiple levels, and the material encourages active reflection by presenting scenarios that challenge traditional notions of identity and relationships.

Furthermore, Martin's performance is marked by a series of revelations and reactions, particularly from their friends. This dynamic invites the audience to empathise with Martin's experiences, creating moments of shared understanding and humour. Martin's playful portrayal of their friends' exaggerated reactions showcases their ability to find humour in everyday interactions and challenges. By presenting these scenarios in a light-hearted and self-deprecating manner, Martin invites the audience to reflect on their own experiences and preconceptions, further enhancing the comedic experience. The performance in its entirety serves as a testament to



Martin's ability to seamlessly blend personal anecdotes with broader societal observations, creating a comedic narrative that resonates with a diverse audience.

Next, we will delve into the performance techniques utilised in Mae Martin's selected material, referencing the theories in this category to illuminate various facets of the performance. A pivotal component of comedy is impeccable timing, which plays a significant role in punchline delivery and the overall rhythm of a comedic act. Martin showcases adept timing throughout this material, ensuring pauses between lines to allow audience reactions, yet maintaining a lively tempo by slightly overlapping the conclusion of laughter with the commencement of subsequent lines. This technique is particularly discernible in lines 14g to 14i, where Martin adeptly times the transition from a statement of surprise to a portrayal of their friends' reactions, amplifying the comedic impact.

Martin's delivery stands out as a cornerstone of their performance, aiding in conveying the humour and sentiment behind each line. Their modulation in tone and pitch adds layers to their material, ensuring that the audience grasps the nuances and intended connotations of their words, as evidenced by their positive responses. For instance, in line 14c, their tone of astonishment underscores the contrast between their current dating preferences and their friends' expectations, while their bemused tone in line 14e accentuates the intended humour of their friends' confusion. This segment of the performance leans heavily on recounting interactions through characterisation, which serves to build a narrative and immerse the audience in the comedic experience. By recounting conversations with their friends, as seen in lines 14d to 14i, Martin bridges the gap between the stage and the audience, fostering a sense of camaraderie and connection. This active engagement ensures the audience remains invested in the narrative, enhancing their overall appreciation of the material.

Martin's self-reflective humour is evident in their ability to jest about their own experiences, making them more approachable and resonant with the audience. By highlighting their openness to dating different genders in line 14a and expressing surprise at their friends' reactions in line 14c they not only set the stage for ensuing punchlines but also portray themselves as an individual navigating societal

expectations, making their humour more relatable. The term "your hair" in line 14g offers vivid imagery, suggesting a superficial basis for assumptions about their dating preferences. Moreover, in line 14i, the phrase "you lied with your hair" serves as a humorous exaggeration, juxtaposing the triviality of a hairstyle with the gravity of deceit to evoke laughter.

As before, the final lens through which we will scrutinise Mae Martin's material is that of the comedian as provocateur. A defining trait of the provocateur is their audacity to challenge boundaries and embrace risks, and this is palpably evident in Martin's material. By addressing topics that might be seen as divisive or unconventional, such as gender fluidity and societal expectations, Martin showcases a dedication to questioning societal norms and potentially sparking insightful discussions. Their readiness to broach challenging subjects, even at the peril of unsettling some audience members, epitomises the provocateur's ethos. Throughout the selected material, Martin challenges various societal expectations, especially those related to gender and identity. For instance, in line 14a, they discuss their openness to dating any gender, effectively subverting traditional societal expectations and norms surrounding sexuality and relationships.

Martin adeptly utilises tension and discomfort as tools for provocation, compelling the audience to grapple with and reflect upon potentially disconcerting subject matter. In lines 14d to 14i, they recount their friends' reactions to their dating preferences, oscillating between surprise, confusion, and accusation. This narrative creates a sense of unease, prompting the audience to introspect on their own reactions and preconceptions. The material also ventures into areas that might be considered taboo, highlighting issues that are often sidestepped in public discourse. In line 14g, the reference to "your hair" alludes to societal assumptions based on appearance, using humour to spotlight the superficial judgments people often make.

A salient feature of the comedian as provocateur is the subversion of power dynamics, a theme that resonates in Martin's material. For instance, in lines 14d and 14i, they challenge their friends' accusations, questioning the basis on which they are being judged. Again, this confrontation serves to undermine traditional notions

of identity and societal expectations, urging the audience to re-evaluate their own beliefs about gender and appearance. Concurrently, Martin embraces ambiguity in their material, offering the audience a spectrum of perspectives and interpretations. Their provocative material also fosters critical thinking, inviting the audience to reflect on their own biases and assumptions. This is particularly evident in lines 14b and 14c, where Martin's recounting of their friends' reactions encourages the audience to ponder the deeply ingrained societal norms surrounding gender and relationships.

By underscoring the inconsistencies and prejudices of certain societal conventions, they beckon the audience to re-assess their stances and empathise with those who might be marginalised or misunderstood due to these norms. This sentiment is encapsulated in lines 14g to 14i, where Martin's discussion about their hairstyle and the assumptions it evokes highlights the superficial judgments that society often makes, urging the audience to empathise with those who are frequently misjudged based on appearances.

Nish Kumar – Selected Material for Analysis

4a	Because the problem is that's the problem with comedy like...	19
4b	I love being a comedian and it's a job that I absolutely adore	20
4c	But it's a strange job because I might do it to the best of my abilities	21
4d	And you might not, enjoy it	22
4e	That's the nature of comedy it's an inherently subjective medium no two people can agree on what's funny	23
4f	So if you don't think I'm funny that's absolutely <i>fine</i>	24
4g	The only problem that I have <i>as a comedian</i> is that if somebody thinks what I'm doing is not funny, it <i>stops being comedy</i> [1]	25

4h	And there's no other job like that	26
4i	If you're a builder and you build a wall people go {hands up in shrugging motion} "That's a good wall" or {hands up in shrugging motion} "that's a shit wall"	27
4j	No-one says " <i>That is not a wall!</i> " [L(3)]	28
4k	<u>You...</u> "You built a bloody duck mate what were you thinking?" [L]	29

Starting with the linguistic composition of the transcript, there are a total of 11 lines with an average of 14.09 words per line. The material is predominantly made up of declarative sentences, with a noticeable absence of interrogative sentences. This pattern indicates that Kumar primarily utilises statements to convey his thoughts and engage the audience. Kumar also employs repetition as a linguistic device, particularly evident in lines 4g to 4j, where he revisits the theme of what constitutes comedy and the subjective nature of the medium. Moreover, he uses direct speech in lines 4i to 4k, which serves to immerse the audience in the narrative and make the material more relatable.

In the opening line (4a), Kumar introduces the topic of the inherent challenges of comedy, setting a tone of introspection and self-awareness while maintaining a high-status tenor. Beginning with a broad statement about the nature of comedy, Kumar provides a context for the audience enabling them to better grasp the subtleties of the following lines. Continuing with the theme of passion for his profession in the next line (4b), Kumar reveals his deep love for comedy, juxtaposing this with the inherent challenges of the job. This line serves to humanise Kumar, showcasing his dedication and the internal conflicts he faces.

In the subsequent line (4c), Kumar touches upon the unpredictability of audience reactions, highlighting the contrast between his efforts and the subjective nature of comedy. The mention of doing his job "to the best of my abilities" provides a backdrop for the audience, setting up the punchlines in later lines. The

unpredictability of audience reactions is further emphasised in line (4d), with Kumar's candid acknowledgement of the potential for varied audience responses. This line serves to build anticipation, leading to a deeper exploration of the subjectivity of comedy in line (4e). The repeated reference to the nature of comedy and its inherent subjectivity serves to emphasise the challenges faced by comedians while also adding depth to the material. The use of direct statements paints a clear picture of Kumar's perspective, serving to further engage the audience.

Concluding with lines (4i to 4k), Kumar uses an analogy of a builder to highlight the unique challenges faced by comedians. The punchline "That is not a wall!" and the subsequent topper "You built a bloody duck mate" serve as climactic moments, creating a *reductio ad absurdum* in the local-logical conclusion of the analogy Kumar is building here. These lines effectively tie together the themes of the material by showing Kumar's deep understanding of the demands of comedy and performance and his ability to effectively communicate this understanding with the audience.

In this material excerpt, Kumar employs a combination of stance strategies, encompassing introspection, self-awareness, and the use of direct speech. As with the previous two analyses, these strategies can be understood in terms of alignment, stance-taking, and footing.

From an alignment perspective, Kumar demonstrates a profound awareness of the challenges and intricacies of comedy, aligning himself with the audience through shared experiences and the universal understanding of humour. The fact that Kumar candidly discusses the subjective nature of comedy (4e) shows he is in alignment with the audience's potential reactions, acknowledging the fluidity and complexity of humour. From a stance-taking viewpoint, Kumar's reflection on his profession and the inherent challenges (4c) can be seen as a form of stance-taking. By sharing this personal insight, he invites the audience to engage with the material on a deeper level, questioning societal norms and expectations. Kumar's perspective is one of challenging the traditional views on comedy and its reception - the dynamic approach in lines 4d to 4g, where Kumar moves between his own experiences and the potential reactions of the audience, contributes to the overall impact of the

material by keeping the audience engaged with the shifting nuances of the performance.

From the footing perspective, Kumar adeptly navigates the narrative by positioning his brand of comedy as both the subject of the narrative and the audience as both the observer and the arbiter. He showcases a distinct nimbleness in his footing, from being the one responsible for the audience's entertainment (front foot – 4a-4c) to the one who is judged by the audience (back foot – 4d-4f) and back to the potential victim of the inherent subjectivity of comedy (equal footing – 4g-4k). This allows Kumar to maintain rapport with the audience while also subtly managing audience expectations going forward.

Using positioning theory to examine the relative positioning of the participants on a line-by-line basis, we can infer the following from the selected transcript:

Kumar begins by establishing the inherent challenges of comedy (4a), setting the scene for the subsequent material. This initial positioning places Kumar higher relative to the audience by establishing the notion that he understands comedy in a way that his status as a performer gives him insight into. The subsequent revelation of his love of the craft (4b) further develops this narrative, centralising Kumar as both an active participant as a performer and a reflective observer of comedy itself, positioning himself as the subject of the narrative with comedy performance as the object, giving equal footing to the performance aspect with the analytical side of the craft.

In the next line (4c), Kumar changes the relative positioning of the objectified 'comedy performance', relegating it from an object of affection to a mere profession with the additional descriptor of a "strange job", one that he professes as the subject of the line to do to the "best of his abilities". This simultaneous shifting of the perspectives of the job in hand against the confession that he will try his best serves to lower both in terms of standing, relegating Kumar to be much closer to the positioning of the audience and the objectified 'comedy performance' lower than Kumar but higher than the audience with the revelation that comedy is a strange job. The audience becomes the subject of the next line (4d) in relativity to the still

objectified 'comedy performance' with the admission that they may not enjoy the performance itself, again lowering the relative positioning of the 'comedy performance' to now below the audience in the idea that they might not enjoy it and are the subjective judge of what is funny (as compared to humorous, which Kumar is implying is inherent to what he is doing). In positing the abstract idea of the performance as the object, Kumar insulates his position relative to both, and so, his stature is not really reduced.

The next line (4e) serves to remove both the audience as the subject and the 'comedy performance' as the object, instead once again showing performative insight that the audience may not possess about the nature of comedy and its inherent subjectivity. This removes the 'comedy performance' as an entity from the relative positioning order and acts as a neutral buffer statement that maintains the relative positioning of Kumar and the audience. This is followed up by a repositioning of both Kumar and the audience in the next line (4f), with the audience as the subject and Kumar as the object in a reversal that sees Kumar confess that it is fine for the audience not to find him funny, positioning himself for the first time below the audience as arbiters of funniness and lowering his own relative status.

After this low point of positioning, Kumar then moves once again to himself as subject (4g) with the confession that if 'somebody' thinks what he is doing is not funny, it ceases to be comedy. This 'somebody' once again insulates the relative positioning, but this time it is for the audience as neither subject nor object, lowering Kumar against the abstracted 'somebody' while maintaining the audience as relatively superior in terms of positioning. The next line (4h) sees Kumar in a positional fightback, as he reestablishes with a reminder of his role as a performer doing a job relative to the audience, raised up above by amplification as well as physical positioning.

The final lines (4i to 4k) serve as a culmination of the narrative, with Kumar using an analogy of a builder to highlight the unique challenges faced by comedians. The abstraction of the builder character serves as the foil to the subjectivity of comedy by creating the notion of a concrete and measurable product that is unable to be easily judged on a subjective basis. The punchlines "That is not a wall!" and

the subsequent topper "You built a bloody duck mate" serve as climactic moments, underscoring the relative absurdity of judging the existence of the work of another profession based on subjective opinions.

Drawing from Berger's anatomy of comic forms, the following can be arguably applied to Kumar's material:

Exposure – Kumar's material is replete with candid revelations, especially about the nature of comedy and the subjective reactions it elicits. The initial lines (4a-4b) are a clear example. Kumar's statement, "I love being a comedian and it's a job that I absolutely adore" (4b), is an open admission of his passion for his profession. However, the subsequent lines expose the inherent challenges and vulnerabilities associated with comedy, particularly the line "But it's a strange job because I might do it to the best of my abilities" (4c). This exposure of the comedian's internal struggles and the unpredictable nature of audience reactions shows an implicit trust in the audience to empathise with the performer's perspective.

Misunderstanding – Kumar highlights misunderstanding to reveal the unpredictable nature of comedy and the varied reactions it can evoke. The emphasis on the subjective nature of comedy, as seen in "That's the nature of comedy it's an inherently subjective medium no two people can agree on what's funny" (4e), underscores the gap between the comedian's intent and the audience's perception. The portrayal of the consequences of not finding something funny, as depicted in "The only problem that I have as a comedian is that if somebody thinks what I'm doing is not funny, it stops being comedy" (4g), serves to highlight the fragile boundary between comedy and mere speech, and the power of the audience in determining that boundary.

Comparison – The comparison between comedy and other professions, particularly the builder analogy in lines 4i-4k, serves as a humorous deflation of the unique challenges faced by comedians. By juxtaposing the straightforward judgments associated with tangible professions like building ("That's a good wall" or "that's a shit wall" in 4i) with the subjective nature of comedy, Kumar deflates any ignorant or overblown reactions to his comedic performance. The punchline "You



built a bloody duck mate what were you thinking?" (4k) further underscores the absurdity of misjudging a comedian's intent, drawing parallels to the ludicrous idea of mistaking a wall for a duck.

From a reaction perspective, out of the eleven extant lines in the excerpt, there are two full-room laughs and one minor laugh, as indicated by the [I] and [L(3)] notations, making two in total and a reaction percentage of 27.28% of the provided transcript. All three of the reactions come after a line I would consider a punchline, making the punchlines in the section 100% effective at their intended purpose.

With the efficacy of a piece of material relying on the audience possessing the necessary background knowledge, in lines 4a and 4b, Kumar establishes a rapport with the audience by discussing the inherent challenges and joys of being a comedian. The audience can infer from these lines that Kumar is attempting to genuinely reflect on his profession, making them more receptive to the subsequent material. Kumar then uses this shared rapport to reverse expectations in line 4c, where he expresses the unpredictability and subjectivity of comedy despite giving his best.

In being able to regulate the audience's emotions and guide them through tension and release, Kumar demonstrates his skill in lines 4d to 4f, where he acknowledges the subjective nature of comedy and the varied reactions it can evoke. The audience experiences a moment of tension as they anticipate a negative invocation of the perils of comedy and their own subjective judgement that contributes to this situation, followed by relief and amusement when Kumar humorously notes that if the audience doesn't find him funny that is absolutely fine and subsequently relieves the burden that they could feel in sitting in judgement.

In observational comedy, the humour often arises from the exploration of societal norms or the introduction of personal revelations into a performance. In lines 4g to 4i, Kumar broaches the humorous but accurate notion that if someone doesn't find his comedy funny, it ceases to be comedy. By introducing this topic in a light-hearted manner, Kumar can generate laughter by revealing the fragility inherent in the realm of comedy. The analogy of the builder in lines 4i to 4k further

enhances the comedic experience by drawing parallels between the straightforward judgments associated with tangible professions and the subjective nature of comedy as a performance form.

Throughout the excerpt, Kumar's material demonstrates a keen understanding of the challenges faced by comedians and the unpredictable reactions of the audience. His initial revelation about the nature of comedy sets the stage for a deeper exploration of comedic norms and personal experiences. Kumar's ability to weave personal anecdotes with broader societal observations, as seen in lines 4b to 4g, allows him to connect with the audience on multiple levels, and the material encourages active reflection by presenting scenarios that challenge traditional notions of comedy and performance.

Furthermore, Kumar's performance is marked by a series of revelations about the nature of comedy that the audience may not have considered before. This dynamic invites the audience to empathise with Kumar's experiences, creating moments of shared understanding and humour. Kumar's playful portrayal of the challenges faced by comedians showcases his ability to find humour in the everyday interactions and challenges that his profession presents. By discussing these scenarios in a light-hearted manner, Kumar invites the audience to reflect on their own personal experiences and preconceptions, further enhancing the comedic experience.

Next, we will delve into the performance techniques utilised in Nish Kumar's selected material, referencing category non-framework theories to illuminate various facets of the performance. A pivotal component of comedy is impeccable timing, which plays a significant role in punchline delivery and the overall rhythm of a comedic act. Kumar demonstrates keen timing throughout this material, ensuring pauses between lines to allow audience reactions, yet maintaining a lively tempo by slightly overlapping the conclusion of laughter with the commencement of subsequent lines. This technique is particularly discernible in lines 4i to 4k, where Kumar adeptly times the transition from a statement about the non-subjective nature of the product of building as a profession to the ridiculousness of an

existential statement about the wall itself in the same subjective vein as comedy is viewed under.

Kumar's delivery is measured and decidedly academic, aiding in conveying the humour and sentiment behind each line. His modulation in tone and pitch adds layers to his material, ensuring that the audience grasps the nuances and intended connotations of his words, as evidenced by their positive responses. For instance, in lines 4c-4d, his honest tone underscores that he himself may be a victim of the unpredictability and subjectivity of comedy, while his assertive tone in line 4h accentuates the strangeness of the unique challenges faced by comedians. This segment of the performance leans heavily on drawing comparisons, which serves to build a narrative and immerse the audience in the comedic experience. By juxtaposing the nature of comedy with other professions, as seen in lines 4i to 4k, Kumar fosters a sense of shared understanding and this active engagement ensures the audience remains invested in the narrative, enhancing their overall appreciation of the material.

Kumar's observational humour is evident in his ability to jest about the intricacies of his profession, making him more approachable and resonant with the audience. By highlighting the inherent challenges of comedy in line 4a and expressing the subjectivity of humour in line 4e, he not only sets the stage for ensuing punchlines but also portrays himself as an individual navigating the complexities of his craft, making his humour more relatable. The term "builder" in line 4i offers vivid imagery, suggesting a straightforwardness in tangible professions. Moreover, in line 4j, the phrase "That is not a wall!" serves as a humorous exaggeration, juxtaposing the clear-cut judgments associated with tangible professions with the subjective nature of comedy to evoke laughter.

The final lens through which we will scrutinise Nish Kumar's material is that of the comedian as provocateur. By addressing the inherent subjectivity of comedy and the unique challenges faced by comedians, Kumar showcases a dedication to questioning societal norms and potentially sparking insightful discussions. His readiness to confess his own potential shortcomings this early in the set epitomises the provocateur's ethos. Throughout the selected material, Kumar challenges the

very nature of comedy, its reception, and the expectations placed upon comedians. Kumar adeptly utilises tension and discomfort as tools for provocation, compelling the audience to grapple with and reflect upon the unpredictable nature of comedic reception. In lines 4d to 4g, he underscores the precariousness of a comedian's job, where a single dissenting opinion can transform a comedic act into something entirely different. This narrative creates a sense of unease, prompting the audience to introspect on their own reactions and preconceptions. The material also ventures into areas that are often sidestepped in public discourse due to the need to maintain the illusion of control that is central to a comedian's craft. In line 4h, the assertion that no other job is quite like comedy serves as a reflection on the unique challenges faced by comedians, using humour to spotlight the often unrealistic expectations placed upon them.

As with the previous two examples, a salient feature of the comedian as provocateur is the subversion of power dynamics and this is a theme that resonates in Kumar's material. For instance, in lines 4i and 4j, he juxtaposes the straightforward judgments associated with tangible professions against the subjective nature of comedy. This confrontation serves to undermine traditional notions of success and failure, urging the audience to re-evaluate their own beliefs about art and subjectivity. Concurrently, Kumar embraces ambiguity in his material, offering the audience a spectrum of perspectives and interpretations. His provocative material also fosters critical thinking, inviting the audience to reflect on their own biases and assumptions. This is particularly evident in lines 4e and 4f, where Kumar's discussion on the subjectivity of humour encourages the audience to ponder the deeply ingrained societal norms surrounding art and personal preferences.

### **Evaluation of Material Level Analysis**

Finally, to close the chapter it is worth performing a quick analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach at the material level – just as before, this is not meant to pre-empt the conclusion chapter but more to focus specifically on the pertinent details of analysis at this level.

Starting with the strengths, one of the most obvious ones is the ability to perform a line-by-line reading of the extant comedy artefact through the focus of multiple different but interconnected lenses. This provides the material level analysis with the closest reading by far of the approaches, down to the active dynamism of relative positioning on a blow-by-blow basis. This level of analysis, in contrast to the difference between the frame and narrative level, uses the same performance artefacts as the narrative level (and in fact, the notation for this level of analysis is built into the previously proposed transcription system) so no new artefacts need to be created – in theory, this level of analysis could be applied to an entire performance artefact with relative ease.

However, just as before with the other levels there are some weaknesses with this level of analysis, the major one being scalability – a reading at this level of analysis would extrapolate to circa 80,000 words for Mae Martin’s seven-minute thirteen-second set, circa 168,000 words for Frank Astaire’s seventeen-minute twenty-three-second set and 215,000 words for Nish Kumar’s nineteen-minute fifty-five-second set (as already noted, Nish Kumar speaks much more than I do in the time he has). 463,000 words to analyse at total of forty-four minutes and thirty-one seconds of stand-up material, or 173.34 words per minute, is very expensive in terms of pure text never mind the hundreds if not thousands of hours of work this would take to complete. As a result, the other weakness that this level of analysis suffers from is a lack of context – the practicalities of a full material level of analysis mean that only selected material would likely be analysed, and this would divorce it from the holistic context. The framework is designed to mitigate this, as in order to perform a material level analysis one would have to have performed a cursory narrative level analysis to generate the artefact, however, if someone was to take an extant transcription from the corpus it could conceivably have this level of analysis attempted without understanding the contextual narrative and frame structure it has been taken from, thus abandoning the holistic approach sought by this approach.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to debate the following question - What is the most effective way to capture and analyse stand-up comedy from a structuralist perspective? – through the examination of extant multidisciplinary academic approaches to stand-up comedy and a corpus of anglophonic stand-up comedy performances. There is lots of interesting, effective and insightful research going on in the culturalist and post-structuralist traditions of stand-up comedy, but no unifying and effective structuralist framework for either capturing at a scalable level a performance artefact for shared analysis or comparing and contrasting different performers within the same genre due to variations in style, tone and content of said performances.

To make steps towards creating this structuralist tradition and capture and analyse these performances effectively, I have proposed a holistic and extensible poetics framework comprised of three layers – frame, narrative and material – with each subsequent layer being a closer reading of the material while informing the layer above, the closer reading not possible without the more basic reading being in place. On each layer, I have created five categories of analysis based on the necessary and sufficient conditions for stand-up comedy as explored in the initial literature review, with each category on each layer being assigned a body of extant research (non-framework theories) as a lens in which to examine the stand-up performance, as well as definientia contributions of my own in the concept of joke acts, sontext and laughcades.

To enable this analysis, I have in parallel developed the concept of stand-up performance artefacts – notation and transcription methods that are designed to record in an immutable form the most pertinent data from a live or recorded performance for shared analysis and critique. These artefacts have been refined over multiple drafts and applications to produce a corpus of thirty-five performance transcriptions ready for analysis and from these, three were chosen to demonstrate the effective synergy of the performance artefact with the poetics framework at each level. Through the analysis of three performances from the same year – that of

myself in character as Frank Astaire, Mae Martin and Nish Kumar – I have demonstrated the applicability of the non-framework theories in each category to the analysis of the chosen performances at each of the three levels and shown through this analysis the strengths and weaknesses of each.

This creation and demonstration of the applicability of the framework on stand-up performance artefacts, as well as the creation of a corpus of those artefacts, means that there are now the beginnings of a multidisciplinary reference framework for anglophonic stand-up comedy as well as a significant first step in defining a structuralist tradition for stand-up performance studies as a distinct discipline. This is now a shared body of work along with a framework in which to analyse it which can be used by different comedy scholars to create their own artefacts to add to the corpus as well as performing further analysis on the already created ones, something that was out of the scope of this study. This study also helps towards a contextualisation of extant theories within the field by defining the extent of the field and grouping together similar ideas and approaches from related fields so that those theoretical perspectives can be leveraged to the benefit of stand-up comedy scholars – that the categories use theoretical perspectives from literary studies, performance studies, theology, comedy studies, folkloristics, linguistics and oral tradition means that a multidisciplinary approach is fostered and encouraged as well as locating stand-up performance studies within the wider field as adjacent to these disciplines.

In terms of comic efficacy, this study offers many insights for the aspiring and experienced comedy scholar – for those just starting out in the field, it offers a concise and referenced framework linking extant, multidisciplinary approaches to performance analysis of stand-up comedy in specific, something that I found to be lacking in the wider discipline when I first undertook my PhD work. The framework and corpus are intended to provide a ready resource to contextualise and analyse stand-up comedy for the undergraduate or amateur scholar while providing enough flexibility to be expanded, altered and improved in terms of theoretical work while leaving the framework that underpins this in place. As someone with high-functioning autism, the lack of this accessible approach frustrated my initial efforts to analyse my own performances in terms of measurable fundamentals, and with

this framework, a student can assess the fundamental efficacy of a set, bit or piece of material within the context of a corpus, individual performance or performer history.

For the experienced scholar, the framework offers a holistic multidisciplinary approach rarely seen within the context of stand-up performance studies. Analysing the efficacy of comic performance in the context of a static post-hoc artefact allows not only a much more in-depth analysis but also the sharing and peer review of that analysis using the same artefact for all parties. The more the corpus expands, the more shared data there will be to draw on for scholars and students alike, and my aim is for one day this framework to be used as part of a course teaching stand-up comedy at the undergraduate level and beyond. Again, the quantification of efficacy through measurable statistics, even in the abstract as here, allows for a variety of visualisations that would not be possible through live performance analysis – the graphs included here are just the start, and with improvement in accuracy of transcription of data comes improvements in visualisation and analysis of efficacy.

This study is not intended to discard or supplant the excellent theoretical work that has been done in support of this discipline over the last thirty-five years, nor to discourage future culturalist and post-structuralist work in the field – instead, the contribution that this study makes is as a jumping off point for further research and analysis, a drawing together of the structural elements of stand-up comedy for reference and reflection in these types of works. Though this study makes no pretence at having discovered or defined the tradition of stand-up comedy, the aim has been one of context and organisation of the existing literature in a way that can be effectively applied to the analysis of stand-up comedy performance in a way that is specific, measurable and comparable between performers and performances.

No study is without limitations, however, and in both the creation of the artefacts and the subsequent analysis limitations with the structuralist approach at each level have come to light. At the framing level, the limitations of effectively encoding performance in real-time mean that the level of effective detail is much lower than it would be otherwise and the subsequent analysis, while as comprehensive as it can be with the data provided, is much shallower than the lower



levels. I would argue this is a limitation of human fallibility and the restrictions that a temporal performance recording places on that fallibility however – the notation template and system have been designed with the intention of recording the most pertinent details from the performance in the restricted time that is available, with shorthand notation for tonal stance and comedic technique as well as distinct parallel categories to keep the transcriber on topic, however even with these aids a researcher is restricted by how much information they can process and transcribe.

At the narrative level, there is a necessity to create the transcription from recorded material due to the multiple passes that are required to check the transcript for accuracy, divide the transcript up into narrative sections, transcribe the audience reactions and finally number the material and individual lines for analytical reference. This restricts its utility to recorded performances only and the number of passes means it is much more labour-intensive to produce, though this is offset by the much more in-depth analysis that this allows. The visualisation of audience reactions at this level is restricted by the tools available and while the visual approximation of the ebb and flow of a performance that the graphing provides is adequate it would be ideal to be able to visualise this at a greater level of detail such as sound waves to really give an impression of the size and duration of the reaction. Finally, at the material level, it is the sheer level of available detail that becomes a detriment to the analysis – the multiple lenses that can be applied holistically to a close reading means that applying this level of analysis would require a huge number of hours and word to complete to a similar standard, and while technically possible to complete this limitation means that holistic analysis and by extension comparative analysis is severely limited.

With these limitations in mind, the answer to the original question is not a particular level of transcription or analysis but the framework itself, enabling a researcher to choose the right tool for the right job based on the access they have to the original performance. For further research I would be interested in leveraging the tools that AI offers – there is already a small integration of AI as the initial transcriber of performance videos using Descript as a tool, and the possibilities of a specialist implementation of AI using a reference corpus of material based on these

transcriptions alongside a more generalised dataset would open the possibility of dedicated transcription and notation software for stand-up comedy performance. This would be a tool for creating artefacts rather than analysing them, but the ability to generate accurate transcriptions to a specific template based on the parameters outlined in this study is entirely feasible and would open a world of possibilities: would it be feasible with enough tuning to enable transcription in real-time and thus eliminate the limitations of the frame level of artefact creation? If so, what level of human intervention would be required to get the resultant artefact to a standard that matched (or even surpassed) the accuracy of human transcription?

In my own professional experience, the utility of AI as a tool comes not in its generative capability but its power of being able to statistically analyse input in a way that is beyond human capability – for instance, could a series of specialist implementations be created to simultaneously transcribe the comedian's speech? Analyse their movements on stage using motion analytics? Record the tone and tempo of a comedian's speech and transcribe this into a form of musical notation? Separate and visualise audience reactions through soundwaves overlaid of the musical transcription to sync the length of reaction with the tempo and tone of the comedian's performance? All this data could then be categorised and analysed by the human researcher in a similar way to the above using the same poetics framework, the only difference being that the increased level of detail recorded with the AI tools would enable a more in-depth and through analysis, thus moving stand-up performance studies forward as a shared discipline though more detailed shared research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Performance Transcription Notation

[A/a]	Applause/Minor Applause
[Aw]	Aww (e.g., disappointment, sadness)
[B/b]	Booing/Minor Booing
[C/c]	Cheering/Minor Cheering
[H/h]	Hissing/Minor Hissing
[L/l]	Laughter/Minor Laughter
[sl]	Scattered Laughter
[O]	Ooh (recognition of taboo topic)
[S]	Silence (pronounced)
[W/w]	Whooping/Minor Whooping

#### Audience Sound Notation - Qualifiers

:	Simultaneously occurring e.g. [L:C] – Laughter and Cheering
→	Transition e.g. [L→A] – Laughter to Applause
<xxx>	Discernible words e.g., heckling, answering
!xxx!	Single shouted word e.g. [!yeah!]
(Number)	Extended reaction length in estimated seconds e.g. [L(3)]

#### Performative Notation

Line Break	Cadence\Interruption
Italicised	Specific emphasis
Underlined	Spoken over sustained preceding audience reaction
,	Short Pause

.	Pause
..	Longer Pause
...	False Start
{xxx}	Nonverbal Cues\Stage Directions
xxx	Characterisation (other than principal persona)
(xxx)	Tone\Accent qualifying following phrase in double quotes e.g. (timidly) "who are you?"
(!)	Sarcasm
♪	Singing
[...]	Non-transcribed section

Structural notation

Italic	Bit Structure start e.g., <i>B1</i>
Numbering	Material Structure e.g., 1x.
Lettering	Material Morpheme e.g., xa.



## **Appendix B**

### Live Stand-up Venue Cover Sheet

Date:

Venue:

Capacity (approx.):

Audience Size (approx.):

Advertised Start Time:

Actual Start Time:

Seating Arrangement:

Music:

Alcohol:

Standard Ticket Price:

Stage Setup:

Lighting Setup:

Recorded Stand-up Film Cover Sheet

Date of Recording:

Venue:

Date of Viewing:

Distributor:

Time of Viewing:

No. of viewers:

Stage Setup:

Lighting Setup:



Performer Name:

Topic	Time	Comedic Technique	Tonal Stance	Sociopolitical Narrative	Sociocultural Signifiers

## **Appendix D - Glossary of Symbols on Comedic Technique**

- v - Relation of "personal" events\experience – empathy focused
- ^ - Generalisation – recognition focused
- > - Combative
- < - Reflective
- S - Link to Dropped Topic
- ) - Callback\stitchback
- AI - Direct Audience Interaction
- H - Heckler
- Hp - Heckler Putdown
- D - Dropped Punchline
- M - Demonstrative Mime
- / - Tangent
- @ - Applause
- I - Irony

## Appendix E – Live Performance Notation

Recorded Stand-up Film Cover Sheet

<u>Date of Recording:</u> 1/6/2016	<u>Venue:</u> BBC's Radio Theatre
<u>Date of Viewing:</u> 3/2/2018	<u>Distributor:</u> BBC
<u>Time of Viewing:</u> 5pm	<u>No. of viewers:</u> 1

Mae Martin  
Nish Kumar

Stage Setup:  
Studio theatre style, fixed seating  
Low stage flats, black painted, Panelled backdrop, balcony area  
Single microphone with stand

Lighting Setup:  
Staircase decorative lights + hanging decorative lights  
Decorative footlights along backdrop  
Stage shaped floodlit in white  
Backdrop lit red + blue

Performance Review (Draft Four)

Performer Name: Mae Martin

Line-up Position: Opener

Dominant Philosophy	Dominant Style
<u>Naturalist</u>	<u>Observational</u>
Negative Exemplars	
<u>Childish</u>	
<u>Indecisive</u>	

Topic	Time	Comedic Technique	Tonal Stance	Sociopolitical Narrative	Sociocultural Signifiers
hello	0:00 (0:35)	✓	Friendly	Introduction Childhood is over	Female Canadian young
Canada	0:35 (0:41)	U		From Canada	
Parents	0:54 (1:24)	U	Confessional	Parents worried Mum is stressed Parents call all the time	Parents are worried! Protective
Relationships	2:18 (1:35)	<	Self Dep	Long term "Relationship" Putting a duvet cover on a duvet	Lesbian? Single
Parents	3:54 (1:17)	^		Parents confront about relationship switching it up	Bisexual
Tinder relationships	5:11 (1:49)	>	Sarcastic	Friends were annoyed about "lesbian look" First boyfriend lack of sympathy	Ian Peach Young
		(	Frustrated	Interview question magazine "Why are you gay" "maybe eating a peach in grade 9" - misquote	Mum - checking up
	(7:00) End			"Your brother ate the same peaches"	

Performance Review (Draft Four)

Performer Name: Nish Kumar

Line-up Position: Headliner

Dominant Philosophy		Dominant Style	
Realist		Observational	
Negative Exemplars			
Confrontational	Pessimistic	Selfish	
Resentful	Withdrawn	Haughty	

Topic	Time	Comedic Technique	Tonal Stance	Sociopolitical Narrative	Sociocultural Signifiers
Intro	0:00 (1:08)	AF Hp	Approachable	goddenunge from croydon	Confident - hands raised Smiling Male From croydon
Comedy	1:08 (0:43)	^	Honest	Apologetic Strange job - Subjective medium Building a wall - that's not a wall doesn't like rap music	Comedian Apologetic argumentative
Dad	1:51 (3:12)	^  		Misogyny, homophobia - not really getting a laugh	
2 years a slave	<del>1:51</del>	> M	Sarcastic <del>no</del>	Rap is too easy - Poing stuff badly Drap m'ic 2 friends didn't go and see - not a good film - slavery Eddie murphy's 4 slaves Incredible	Affected by film Crying in public
				Slavery was bad - not a twist ending	





Performer Name: Nish Kumar

Topic	Time	Comedic Technique	Tonal Stance	Sociopolitical Narrative	Sociocultural Signifiers
Ego	(1:24)	^	Self Dep	Personality under no real intimate scrutiny - not the best version of myself	More Self Aware
	14:43	V	Scathing	18 yo - jet powered hellend - giant Ego!	More Mature
	(0:30)	V		Colae with Friend - I am being very interesting here	Egocentric
Australia	15:14	V	Honest	Gigs at melbome comedy festival Q + A interview - if your comedy show was a dog... - <del>Had a bone</del>	International Comedian
gigs	17:15	^	Sarcastic	Muslim question - my parents are Hindus	Hindu upbringing
	(0:46)	M		Non white people meetings gig in UK	Ethnic Minority
Question	18:02	( >	Angry	black man tops nose to nish You cant jump back into whimsy!	

Performer Name: Nish Kumar

Topic	Time	Comedic Technique	Tonal Stance	Sociopolitical Narrative	Sociocultural Signifiers
	(1.42)	A	Triumphant	<p>Feed me -            write the punchline            A book walks into            a bar -            how come christians...            - I don't know            I am a book            case, brown            book case            thats why you            asked me</p>	
	19.44 End				

## **Appendix F – Calculations Derived from ONS Data 2016**

Ethnicity % by Region for Over 16's (9 UK Categories)						
Code	Region	Total Respondents	White (1)	Mixed\Multiple Ethnic Groups (2)	Indian (3)	
E12000001	North East	14404	95.97%	0.31%	0.69%	
E12000002	North West	28432	90.74%	0.64%	1.83%	
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	92.55%	0.64%	0.85%	
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	87.48%	0.94%	5.21%	
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	85.37%	0.94%	4.48%	
E12000006	East of England	14881	89.29%	1.04%	1.75%	
E12000007	London	19160	62.59%	2.58%	7.16%	
E12000008	South East	26762	89.98%	0.87%	2.66%	
E12000009	South West	18843	95.96%	0.65%	0.86%	
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	98.41%	0.16%	0.18%	
S99999999	Scotland	29698	97.39%	0.25%	0.43%	
W99999999	Wales	26051	97.45%	0.35%	0.41%	

Code	Region	Total Respondents	Pakistani (4)	Bangladeshi (5)	Chinese (6)
E12000001	North East	14404	0.67%	0.39%	0.37%
E12000002	North West	28432	2.72%	0.60%	0.42%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	2.74%	0.29%	0.31%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	1.39%	0.17%	0.48%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	3.04%	0.87%	0.48%
E12000006	East of England	14881	1.76%	0.95%	0.37%
E12000007	London	19160	2.48%	2.67%	1.36%
E12000008	South East	26762	1.52%	0.19%	0.48%
E12000009	South West	18843	0.19%	0.12%	0.29%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	0.00%	0.00%	0.22%
S99999999	Scotland	29698	0.50%	0.02%	0.24%
W99999999	Wales	26051	0.17%	0.17%	0.17%

Code	Region	Total Respondents	Any Other Asian Background (7)	Black/African/Carribbean/Black British (8)	Other Ethnic Group (9)
E12000001	North East	14404	0.36%	0.58%	0.59%
E12000002	North West	28432	0.47%	1.59%	0.97%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	0.56%	1.09%	0.91%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	0.92%	2.39%	0.85%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	0.75%	2.79%	1.24%
E12000006	East of England	14881	1.12%	2.78%	0.93%
E12000007	London	19160	3.98%	10.96%	6.05%
E12000008	South East	26762	1.26%	1.89%	1.07%
E12000009	South West	18843	0.56%	0.62%	0.71%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	0.41%	0.12%	0.43%
S99999999	Scotland	29698	0.21%	0.36%	0.46%
W99999999	Wales	26051	0.41%	0.33%	0.48%

Code	Region	Total Respondents	No Answer (0)	Total
E12000001	North East	14404	0.08%	100.00%
E12000002	North West	28432	0.04%	100.00%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	0.06%	100.00%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	0.17%	100.00%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	0.04%	100.00%
E12000006	East of England	14881	0.01%	100.00%
E12000007	London	19160	0.18%	100.00%
E12000008	South East	26762	0.07%	100.00%
E12000009	South West	18843	0.05%	100.00%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	0.06%	100.00%
S99999999	Scotland	29698	0.14%	100.00%
W99999999	Wales	26051	0.07%	100.00%

*Table 12 - Ethnicity % by Region - ONS Data*

Religion % By Region for Over 16's (8 UK Categories)						
Code	Region	Total Respondents	No Religion (1)	Christian (All Denominations) (2)	Buddhist (3)	
E12000001	North East	14404	29.92%	66.42%		0.28%
E12000002	North West	28432	25.46%	66.50%		0.28%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	33.06%	60.44%		0.20%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	35.94%	53.81%		0.40%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	29.75%	59.06%		0.30%
E12000006	East of England	14881	33.24%	58.65%		0.38%
E12000007	London	19160	26.21%	48.50%		1.24%
E12000008	South East	26762	33.60%	58.55%		0.49%
E12000009	South West	18843	34.10%	60.63%		0.47%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	0.00%	0.00%		0.00%
S99999999	Scotland	29698	37.66%	58.32%		0.14%
W99999999	Wales	26051	35.44%	60.40%		0.34%

Code	Region	Hindu (4)	Jewish (5)	Muslim (6)	Sikh (7)	
E12000001	North East		0.33%	0.03%	1.62%	0.22%
E12000002	North West		0.58%	0.47%	5.19%	0.17%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber		0.45%	0.14%	4.16%	0.18%
E12000004	East Midlands		2.78%	0.10%	4.11%	1.22%
E12000005	West Midlands		1.58%	0.07%	5.26%	2.48%
E12000006	East of England		1.11%	0.54%	3.88%	0.30%
E12000007	London		5.34%	2.03%	12.41%	1.35%
E12000008	South East		1.63%	0.26%	2.71%	0.80%
E12000009	South West		0.44%	0.22%	0.70%	0.06%
N99999999	Northern Ireland		0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
S99999999	Scotland		0.24%	0.15%	0.84%	0.07%
W99999999	Wales		0.22%	0.04%	0.69%	0.05%

Code	Region	Any Other Religion (8)	No Answer\Not Asked (NI) (0)	Total	
E12000001	North East		1.09%	0.08%	100.00%
E12000002	North West		1.23%	0.12%	100.00%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber		1.21%	0.18%	100.00%
E12000004	East Midlands		1.30%	0.35%	100.00%
E12000005	West Midlands		1.38%	0.10%	100.00%
E12000006	East of England		1.68%	0.21%	100.00%
E12000007	London		2.52%	0.41%	100.00%
E12000008	South East		1.75%	0.22%	100.00%
E12000009	South West		3.16%	0.23%	100.00%
N99999999	Northern Ireland		0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
S99999999	Scotland		2.34%	0.24%	100.00%
W99999999	Wales		2.59%	0.22%	100.00%

Table 13 - Religion % by Region - ONS Data

Age Band Over 16's % By Region						
Code	Region	Total Respondents	16-17 (2)	18-19 (3)	20-24 (4)	
E12000001	North East	14404	2.65%	2.37%	5.36%	
E12000002	North West	28432	2.76%	2.50%	5.84%	
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381	2.82%	2.70%	6.44%	
E12000004	East Midlands	11175	3.15%	2.92%	6.54%	
E12000005	West Midlands	18798	2.73%	2.64%	6.00%	
E12000006	East of England	14881	2.88%	2.42%	5.46%	
E12000007	London	19160	2.84%	2.73%	6.36%	
E12000008	South East	26762	2.75%	2.47%	5.34%	
E12000009	South West	18843	2.60%	2.60%	5.30%	
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918	3.60%	2.91%	7.71%	
S99999999	Scotland	29698	2.34%	2.08%	4.97%	
W99999999	Wales	26051	2.50%	2.25%	5.16%	

Code	Region	Total Respondents	25-29 (5)	30-34 (6)	35-39 (7)
E12000001	North East	14404		6.05%	6.44%
E12000002	North West	28432		6.86%	7.83%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381		6.68%	7.01%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175		6.85%	7.86%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798		6.68%	7.07%
E12000006	East of England	14881		6.55%	8.08%
E12000007	London	19160		8.47%	10.47%
E12000008	South East	26762		5.54%	7.43%
E12000009	South West	18843		5.24%	6.47%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918		7.85%	7.77%
S99999999	Scotland	29698		5.23%	5.88%
W99999999	Wales	26051		5.65%	5.83%

Code	Region	Total Respondents	40-44 (8)	45-49 (9)	50-54 (10)
E12000001	North East	14404		6.92%	8.18%
E12000002	North West	28432		7.16%	8.63%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381		7.87%	8.85%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175		7.87%	8.64%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798		7.59%	8.07%
E12000006	East of England	14881		8.55%	8.67%
E12000007	London	19160		9.33%	9.31%
E12000008	South East	26762		8.29%	9.09%
E12000009	South West	18843		7.37%	8.42%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918		8.72%	9.23%
S99999999	Scotland	29698		6.86%	8.43%
W99999999	Wales	26051		6.41%	7.72%

Code	Region	Total Respondents	55-59 (11)	60-64 (12)	65-99 (13)	Total
E12000001	North East	14404		8.99%	8.50%	28.63%
E12000002	North West	28432		8.49%	8.30%	25.13%
E12000003	Yorkshire and the Humber	18381		8.39%	7.54%	25.64%
E12000004	East Midlands	11175		8.15%	7.77%	23.89%
E12000005	West Midlands	18798		7.89%	7.88%	27.41%
E12000006	East of England	14881		7.86%	7.47%	24.96%
E12000007	London	19160		7.01%	6.18%	18.34%
E12000008	South East	26762		8.25%	7.93%	25.64%
E12000009	South West	18843		8.76%	8.17%	29.61%
N99999999	Northern Ireland	4918		8.15%	8.01%	19.36%
S99999999	Scotland	29698		9.38%	9.23%	30.19%
W99999999	Wales	26051		8.74%	8.84%	31.88%

Table 14 - Age Band % by Region - ONS Data

### **Appendix G - Negative Exemplar Traits**

Abrasive	Grumpy	Obsessive	
Addictive	Gullible	Oversensitive	
Antisocial	Haughty	Paranoid	
Apathetic	Hostile	Perfectionist	
Callous	Humourless	Pessimistic	
Catty	Hypocritical	Possessive	
Childish	Ignorant	Prejudiced	
Cocky	Impatient	Pretentious	
Compulsive	Impulsive	Promiscuous	
Confrontational	Inattentive	Pushy	
Controlling	Indecisive	Rebellious	
Cowardly	Inflexible	Reckless	
Cruel	Inhibited	Resentful	
Cynical	Insecure	Rowdy	
Defensive	Irrational	Scatterbrained	
Devious	Irresponsible	Self-destructive	
Dishonest	Jealous	Self-indulgent	
Disloyal	Judgemental	Selfish	
Disorganised	Know-it-all	Sleazy	Unintelligent
Disrespectful	Lazy	Spoiled	Ungrateful
Evasive	Macho	Stingy	Unethical
Evil	Manipulative	Stubborn	Vain
Extravagant	Martyr	Subservient	Verbose
Fanatical	Materialistic	Superstitious	Vindictive
Flaky	Melodramatic	Suspicious	Violent
Foolish	Mischievous	Tactless	Volatile
Forgetful	Morbid	Temperamental	Weak-willed
Frivolous	Nagging	Timid	Whiny
Fussy	Needy	Uncommunicative	Withdrawn
Gossipy	Nervous	Uncooperative	Workaholic
Greedy	Nosy	Uncouth	Worrywart