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Making Sense of Humour: Some Pragmatic And Political Aspects

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Abstract

This is a study of humour in context, but as humour is by its nature extremely mutable and so occurs in many forms in a multitude of contexts, this calls for certain constraints to be applied to the methods of investigation. Thus rather than attempt a panoramic view of such a polymorphic subject, the focus here is local and deep. The main analysis is of an utterance spoken by a comedian on a television chat show which is interpreted both as a joke and an insult, a situation which cries out for pragmatic attention. This dissertation sets out to uncover what is at work in this interaction by means of a pragmatic approach which uses, critically, some of the essential ideas of speech act theory and in addition also draws on certain aspects of conversational analysis (CA), the ethnography of speaking, and, given the nature of the joke, gender politics. CA provides useful analytical tools to reveal the organisational features of talk, the ethnography of speaking helps with an understanding of the interlocutors who do the talking, and a gender perspective helps with the political dimension.

After beginning with a survey of the main theories of humour, which give us some insight into what lies beneath the surface of joking behaviour, there is an in-depth look at the important contextual features of performance space and the comic figure. Both of these reveal the significance of licence, transgression, and performer-audience interaction. Then the linguistic resources available for the creation of humour are described and the social uses to which such creations can be put are demonstrated. Once out in the world humour can engender a wide variety of responses, a factor of clear significance for the main analysis. This factor is given due regard in a discussion of competence, permission, and ambivalence. There follows a detailed look at the particular pragmatic approach used in this study, in which an original model of joke comprehension is offered. The study then examines the relevant aspects of gender before the final analysis is then elaborated. Some of the findings challenge the conventional conversation analytical notion of preference organisation, draw attention, *contra* CA theory, to its significant subjective content, and also point up how politeness phenomena also play a prominent role, further underlining the subjective element. The work ends with a final consideration of the disputed utterance from both a formal and functional perspective by reprising the previously-mentioned model of joke comprehension in conjunction with Carrell's notion of 'humor competence'.

INTRODUCTION

To start at the end. The final section of this study is a lengthy analysis of an extract from a television chat show in which an utterance – ‘Margaret Thatcher was a man’ - is interpreted both as a joke and an insult. When I first saw this I thought it might be of some use in a dissertation about the pragmatic aspects of humour. What interested me was the fact that here was a simple utterance which caused an amiable free-flowing stream of conversation to suddenly boil up into a confrontation. The bone of contention was the sexism of the comment, but it could just as well have been a dispute about ethnicity, religion, football or food. Its immediate appeal was that it was a disagreement about the meaning of spoken words. When I came to transcribe it I realised that to better understand it I needed to go back a little to see what led up to the particular exchange. This I did only to find that perhaps it was necessary to go back a bit further... It soon became clear that rather than this extract providing a useful brief example of the problematic nature of assigning meaning to an utterance, the entire extract itself was a rich extended sequence which bountifully displayed many features of how pragmatic meaning is not arrived at with some convenient formula (meaning = words + context) but rather is something which unpredictably emerges from the flow of collaboratively constructed social action. It also became apparent that the context was both linguistically and socially much more complex than I had realised and, so, demanded a much more detailed examination than I had been at first prepared to give it.

I then set out to pragmatically pick apart the whole sequence. What were the important elements of the context which needed attention? Of immediate concern was the language environment: this was not a piece of mundane talk carried out in private but was talk done in performance space for an overhearing audience. It was talk carried out by ‘celebrities’ (two of whom were comedians), a significant part of whose discourse goals was to entertain and amuse. And at the core of it lay a blunt statement that provoked a sharp difference of opinion about the politics of gender. Not

to be overlooked also was the simple fact that it was *talk*, that most common form of everyday social action. These were the unavoidable features that had to be dealt with. This thesis, then, sets out to take a pragmatic look at humour. This bald statement might seem plain enough but further clarification is needed. Let us start with some comment on the key words 'humour' and 'pragmatics'.

'Help – call the Police. Murder has been done. This is NOT a joke.' This was the message an elderly man taped to his front door after killing his wife with a hammer. He then went into his garden shed and hanged himself (Lynch 2001). Why this is of interest here is his reference to humour at a time of murder and suicide. The fact that in such a situation he felt the need to underline (literally, four times) that this communication was not a joke indicates at least two important things about humour in our culture. One, humour is something that can reach, directly or indirectly, into all areas of our experience, the malignant as well as the benign. Secondly, following on from this (potential) ubiquity, it is not always easy to discern what is and what is not humorous. If it were, there would have been no need for the metacomment in the above note. Both of these issues are of interest to this dissertation, and the second one leads us on to the next point.

Pragmatics is a field of language study concerned with meaning. Unlike semantics, it is not concerned with the meaning of words *per se* but rather with the meaning of words used by people in concrete social situations, that is, with words in context. Given the wide variety of users and the wide variety of contexts in which we use language, the task of pragmatics is far from easy. Fortunately, in situations where there may be some doubt about meaning we usually work together to clarify matters, just as the additional comment in the note shows – 'This is not humour'. However, what about when we do use humour, which, as we have noted, is not always easy to interpret? Can pragmatics deal with this? This study believes that it can. More specifically, can it deal with cases where humour is offered (even with metacomment) but is rebuffed, that is, where the meanings surrounding humour are disputed? Again, this study believes it can, and, indeed, in order to rigorously test its methods, sets itself the task in its main analysis of tackling precisely such a situation.

Methodology and Transcription.

As pragmatics is a discipline for which contextual factors are crucial, and these can vary so much from case to case, this allows a certain flexibility of approach. (A recent textbook on methods of text and discourse analysis - Titscher et al, 2000 - offers no fewer than ten.) I have not been slow to take advantage of this. The pragmatic approach I take has the usual Austinian and Gricean elements of language as action and conversation as (predominantly) cooperative, though the limitations of speech act theory will be noted. But in addition to this, features of conversational analysis (CA) and the ethnography of speaking, both of which also insist on the central importance of contextual factors for meaning, are also included, as well as an emphasis on the important gender aspects of the exchange. It will be found that there is a strong correspondence between my approach and the characteristics of the anthropologist Geertz's 'thick description':

it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms... But there is, in addition, a fourth characteristic of such description, at least as I practice it: it is microscopic
(1973:20-1)

What this means for this dissertation is that rather than take such features as, for example, performance space, performers, or gender as given, or merely sketch in an outline of such elements, I undertake an intensive look at them in order to see their effect on such significant contextual features as space, social role, and utterance.

The actual coining of the term 'pragmatics' is usually attributed to Morris (1938) when he distinguishes between 'three dimensions of semiosis': the semantical dimension – 'the relations of signs to the objects to which they refer'; the pragmatical dimension – 'the relation of signs to interpreters'; and the syntactical dimension – 'the relation of signs to one another' (pp.6-7). (But Givon, 1989 Chapter1, discusses much older precursors of pragmatics.) Morris goes on to say that as all interpreters of signs are living organisms pragmatics 'deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs' (p.38).

If we step back a little further to Malinowski's essay of 1923 concerning the problems of ethnographic translations, we find a related point. He underlines the significance for meaning of *context*, the study of which, he says, 'must burst the bonds of mere linguistics and be carried over into the analysis of the general conditions under which a language is spoken' [1923] (1949:306). He comments further:

Meaning...does not come...from the contemplation of things, or analysis of occurrences, but in practical and active acquaintance with relevant situations. The real knowledge of a word comes through the practice of appropriately using it within a certain situation.

(p.325)

From these remarks we can gather that the consideration of the meaning of language in action involves not simply the words but also the *users* and the *context*. In this regard, Blum-Kulka reminds us of the important distinction between sentences and utterances, where the former are 'verbal entities definable through linguistic theory' and the latter 'verbal units of communication in specific contexts' (1997:39). It is the latter which is the concern of pragmatics (and also of this study), as a glance at recent definitions of the term confirms:

- 'how utterances have meanings in situations' (Leech 1983:x)
- 'the study of ...relations between language and context' (Levinson 1983:9)
- 'the theory of utterance interpretation' (Wilson and Sperber 1984:21)
- 'the science of language as it is used by real, live people, for their own purposes, within their limitations and affordances' (Mey 1994:5)
- 'the study of linguistic communication in context' (Blum-Kulka 1997:38).

Such issues, though, are not the concern solely of pragmaticians, they raise questions which have become the staples of sociolinguistic theory also. To try to discover more about language in action sociolinguistics asks a number of questions, first asked explicitly by Pittenger et al (1960) in their study of a psychiatric interview:

What does each participant say? Why does he say it? *How* does he say it? What impact does it have on the other participant? When and how is new material brought in to the picture, and by whom? ... How does the orientation of each participant change as the transactions continue?

and why? and how do we know? and does the other participant know?
and if he does, by virtue of what evidence?

(p.210, original emphasis)

Deeming such factors relevant adds to our further understanding of linguistic interactions but can also be problematic. Mey (1994), for instance, wonders whether Morris' original formulation isn't too inclusive. Dascal also cautions against an overemphasis of context, noting that there is a danger of 'assigning to pragmatics more than it can be reasonably expected to do' (1981:159). While these are basic practical concerns they are epistemological problems also – how can such a teeming mass be formalised and systematised? We will see (4.2) how stretches of language can be formally dealt with in terms of morphological, syntactic, semantic, and phonological systems ('sentence-as-object' as Brown and Yule would say (1989:24)), and also how longer stretches can also be handled systematically ('discourse-as-process' (p.24)). But, given the sheer scope of context as it is broadly-defined, it seems fair to comment that '[n]o strict rules and conditions can be set up for such a pragmatic "universe"' (Mey p.277).

However, a solution to this problem is available in *the way* we regard context. Context should not be seen as simply some reified environment in which language just happens to take place. As Goodwin and Duranti put it:

Instead of viewing context as a set of variables that statically surround strips of talk, context and talk are now argued to stand in a mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk and the interpretive work it generates shaping context as much as context shapes talk.

(1992:31)

If it is the case that context is so diverse and fluid, then clearly it is *not* amenable to any kind of principles applicable to all people at all times in all places. In an attempt to understand what is going on when we talk we need, rather, to look at the 'mutually reflexive relationship' between talk and local principles and practices of interlocutors' culture to discover what participants themselves are doing with their language. Great assistance can be had in this task by employing the heuristic devices made available by conversation analysis (CA). If we *are* to consider discourse as a process then a crucial aspect of utterances is their sequential placement, and CA notions of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference and so forth help lay bare the way in which we

collaboratively organise interaction in order to make sense to one another. (CA – and criticisms of it - will be dealt with in detail in 6.2)

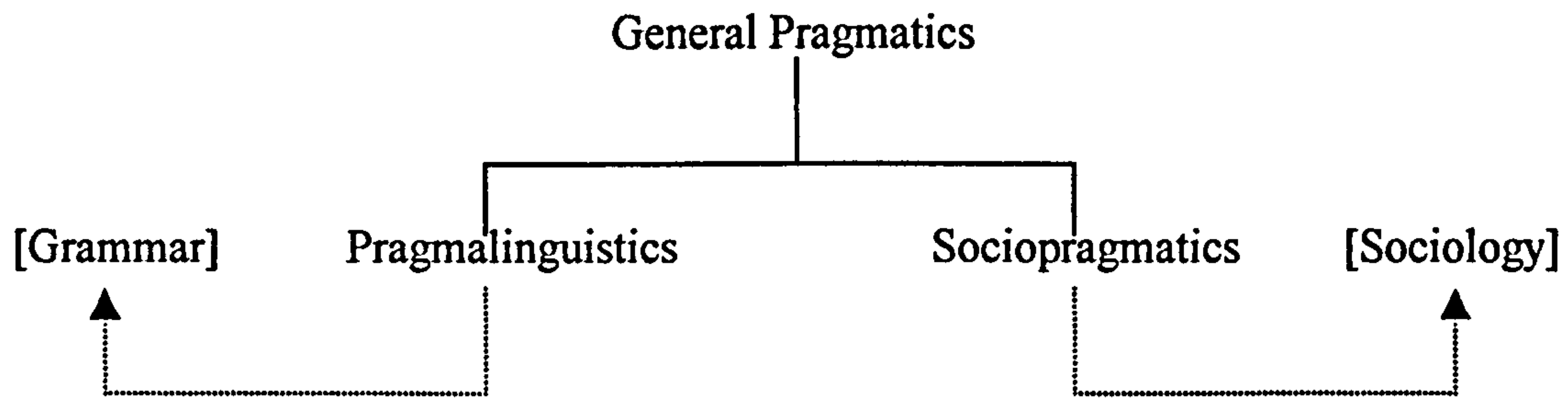
While CA may help us understand *how* meaning is constructed through talk in interaction, it cannot always help us understand *why* motivated social beings talk in the way they do. Though Schegloff asserts that CA ‘is at a point where linguistics and sociology (and several other disciplines, anthropology and psychology among them) meet’ (1992:104), Schiffrrin points out its shortcoming that, though it is an approach to discourse that emphasises context, ‘the relevance [for CA] of context is grounded in text’ (1994:236). This is confirmed by Schegloff when he stresses:

It is not for us to *know* what about context is crucial, but to *discover* it...Not, then, to privilege sociology’s concerns under the rubric ‘social structure’, but to discover them in the members’ worlds, if they are there.

(p.128, original emphasis)

Such rigid insistence on neutrality sets up a tension for the analyst not unlike that usually found between the degree of objectivity demanded by the natural sciences and that found in most of the interpretive (human or social) sciences. Nunberg reminds us here of ‘the crucial role of “understanding” (*Verstehen*) in formulating and validating hypotheses that proceed from assumptions about human beliefs and desires’, and this in turn entails that ‘the analyst has to be able to put at least part of his foot into his subjects’ shoes’ (1981:221). This does not mean, though, that we open the floodgates of subjective speculation but that we ‘*constrain the world of use* in accordance with our (explicit or implicit) knowledge of the users and with the expectations that follow from that knowledge’ (Mey 1994:278, emphasis added). This is where the analyst must make choices to constrain the world to suit his/her particular purposes. At this point I turn to the choices I have made.

In defining his terms in his discussion of pragmatics, Leech (1983:11) presents the following diagram:



Someone like Levinson would be on the ‘grammar’ side of this formulation, as for him pragmatics is ‘the study of those relations between language and context that can be *grammaticalised*, or encoded in the structure of language’ (1983:9, original emphasis). His footnote to this explains that he uses *grammaticalisation* ‘in the broad sense covering the encoding of meaning distinctions...in the lexicon, morphology, syntax, and phonology of languages’. For me this seems too formal and narrow. It would seem to be more concerned with co-text than context. A simple example should, it is hoped, demonstrate the narrowness of his view. It involves a television interview between Robin Day (D) and the Conservative ex-prime minister Edward Heath (H). The Conservatives, now under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, have just beaten Labour in the 1979 election, thus making Thatcher the new prime minister.

D: I think you know the question I’m going to ask you.

H: We’ll have to wait and see.

D: Would you like to?

H: It all depends.

(Searle 1992:27)

While this is a grammatical exchange, there is little about the grammar here that helps us fully understand what is going on. But given the (extragrammatical) contextual factors (some of which were given immediately before the extract), especially the fact well-known at the time that Heath and Thatcher strongly disliked one another politically and personally, the question of whether Heath would serve under Thatcher, if asked, was on everyone’s lips and helped interlocutors and audience make sense of what otherwise may have been a vague exchange.

Thus my choices put me more on the ‘sociology’ side of Leech’s schema. Unquestionably we cannot dispense with a study of the linguistic features in any exchange but it is the extralinguistic features of context that will be given much attention in what follows. As Hymes says, ‘the study of language is a

multidisciplinary field, a field to which ordinary linguistics is indispensable, but to which other disciplines, such as sociology, social anthropology, education, folklore, and poetics are indispensable as well' (1974:vii-viii). As already stated, the tools of CA, which originate in sociology, not linguistics, are of great assistance and will be used. Further, the nature of disputed utterance takes me into the realm of gender politics and so this, too, forms an important part of the investigative framework.

However, some of the limitations of the more stringent aspects of ethnomethodology (the particular branch of sociology from which CA arose) are also recognised. Atkinson (P.), in a wide-ranging review of ethnomethodology, notes that some of the more severe applications of its principles in CA show 'less concern with the explication of meaning than with the discovery of competence or methods whereby speakers generate orderly sequences of activity' (1988:449). He further argues that in some CA studies 'the hermeneutic-interpretive strand has been suppressed in favour of a more narrowly empiricist, even behaviourist element' (p.460). (Some ethnomethodologists, however, aware of criticisms from a wide variety of angles, would wryly point to the criticisms of, for example, Bourdieu 1989, that ethnomethodology was voluntaristic and subjective (in Watson 1992:xiv).) Buttny (1993:29) poses this problem more forcefully in a series of (perhaps oversimplified) binary oppositions of methodological approaches, with empiricism on the left and what he calls 'interpretativism' on the right:

• explanation	understanding
• prediction	thick description
• control of conditions	naturalistic observation
• variables	social practices
• experience far concepts	experience near concepts
• extensive sample	intensive analysis

While not agreeing with all of this (Buttny does, admittedly, note that some cross-fertilisation has taken place), I can say that much in the right-hand column would adequately describe much of the approach taken here. (Note, for example, how similar these points are to those of Geertz highlighted above.) I would just add,

however, that while the analyses in this dissertation are for the most part actually *empirical*, it does not necessarily follow that 'empirical' (even the strictly empirical) is the same as 'empiricist'. Further, a helpful step toward resolving the problems thus posed is, as Hammersley and Atkinson put it when discussing the principles of ethnography, 'to recognise the reflexive character of social research; that is, to recognise, that we are part of the social world we study' (1983:14). I have no qualms about such an approach and do not attempt to hide my membership of the culture in which the extended sequence takes place.

Further, in this discussion of methodology some stress has already been put on *local* principles and practices (Buttny's 'near concepts' in my reading) rather than universal principles ('far concepts'), and this is another point on which I would like to underline my divergence from some of the claims of the stronger versions of CA, specifically those concerning the universality of certain of their discoveries of the features of talk, such as, for example, the English turn-taking system. Duranti, too, takes issue with this, pointing out that even where this is not explicitly stated 'such a claim has been taken to be implicit in their practice' (1988b:224). Similarly, one conclusion that West et al (1997) reach in their discussion of gender and discourse is: 'what we "know" about gender and discourse is really about white, middle-class, heterosexual women and men using English in western societies' (p.137). This is applicable to many (but by no means all) CA studies also, and thus such studies can be viewed, even if only by default, as ethnographies, studies which cannot be seen as having universal application. As Hymes puts it when sketching the first outlines of an ethnography of communication: 'If the strict ethnographic approach requires us to extend the concept of communication to the boundaries granted it by participants of a culture, it also makes it necessary to restrict it to those boundaries' (1964:17). This still leaves us with a great deal of ground to cover, for, as Saville-Troike notes when speaking of patterns of communication, such patterns occur 'at all levels of communication: societal, group, and individual' (1989:13). At the societal level it involves such things as functions, categories of talk, attitudes and conceptions about language and speakers; at the group level factors such as age, sex, race, profession, etc.; and at the individual level such things as the expression and interpretation of personality play a part (p.13). A good deal of this also applies to my analyses, which make no claims to universality. Note that also included within the boundaries

sketched here (which are simultaneously constrained and yet rather elastic) are perspectives involving gender, psychology (fairly briefly), and politeness phenomena, as these help us toward an understanding of participants' motivations and responses.

The analyses carried out in this study are, necessarily, analyses of *transcribed* events. All commentators would agree that the transcription of utterances, far from being simply an objective method of presenting speech in written form, is an activity imbued with the concerns of the transcriber. Ochs calls it 'a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions' (1979:44). For Psathas and Anderson 'the transcription system used and the variations in individual transcriber's practices introduce directly and specifically the analysts' interests and theories' (1990:75). The transcriptions used in this study are no exception.

A more practical concern is that in presenting the spoken as the written much potentially significant detail can be overlooked. For example, the phoneticians Kelly and Local find that linguists' transcription practices leave 'a great deal to be desired, especially if applied to conversational material' (1989:197). Brown and Yule give the simple example of the utterance 'Great Britain'. Would it be transcribed phonetically as /greɪpbɪtən/? Or rendered orthographically as 'grape britain'? Most probably it would be normalised to the conventional orthographic form 'Great Britain', which would entail 'inserting conventional word boundaries in the orthographic version which do not exist in the acoustic signal' (1989:9-10). They note that other such significant features as intonation, rhythm, speed, voice quality, sex, age, class, race are also not easily transcribable, the result being a transcribed text that in many ways is the creation of the analyst (p.11). And as the importance of context is stressed throughout this study, this act of 'creation' has certain consequences, the full significance of which is brought out by Duranti when he says:

Interpretation is a form of re-contextualisation and as such can never fully recover the original context of a given act...When we as ethnographers bring the interaction we recorded to the printed page we engage in a similar kind of re-contextualisation. That is inevitable. We set up a context for a new audience to judge and appreciate what went on around and through that text on some other occasion.

(1986:244)

That is, the transcription an analyst presents is 'not the interaction' (Psathas and Anderson p.77) but is, rather, 'an artificial freezing of phenomena which are in constant change' (Chafe 1997:52).

Given all this, I am once more faced with methodological choices. Taking the foregoing as a starting point, I have chosen to present a transcription that is as easy to read as I can reasonably make it. Too often in CA studies analysts cover the text in transcription devices in a slavish attempt at verisimilitude and this can be a burden to the reader. Take, for example, laughter, something of pressing interest to this study. Jefferson makes the point that laughter in transcription is usually named (e.g. 'X laughs') but not quoted (e.g. 'Heh-heh-heh'). While this is adequate for many purposes it 'can also obscure interesting features of interaction' (1985:28). She then gives examples of where quoting laughter can prove useful for, among other things, showing why a participant has difficulty hearing what the laugher is saying, something which can have significant consequences for talk. It has since become common practice for CA studies to quote laughter's every occurrence, resulting in such transcriptions as the following, with no reference to the significance of such a manner of representation in the analysis.

M: she came up to me she's laughing she said I remember seeing you
(h)at(h) th(h)e (h)s(h)w(h)imm(h)ing (h) p(h)ool(h) heheh
(Alaoui 1990:403).

So much overbearing stress on the mechanics of conversation (this is actually a *simple* example of laughter transcription) can be distracting and off-putting and thus may even interfere with the reader's understanding of what occurred in the original event.

Because none of the laughter in the discussions to be analysed interferes with other aspects of the interaction in a way that demands special attention I choose not to quote it but instead I simply name it - [*Panel laughs*]. The other devices I use concern features I deem useful for my purposes – pauses, simultaneous speech, continuous speech, exaggerated features (stress, volume), and immediately relevant extralinguistic features. The way I represent these features on the page has largely been determined by what is available to me on my keyboard, which has been

sufficient to achieve my goals. I agree with Psathas and Anderson when they say, 'the final arbiter of the fidelity of transcription is not the skill or "artfulness" of the transcriber, but rather the adequacy of the transcription with a direct listening/viewing of the original data' (p.77). To this end a video recording of the extended stretch of talk in Section 8 is appended (Appendix 2).

Organisation

Before introducing the sections in order I should point out that while the extended analysis has greatly influenced the shape of this study, the other contents are not present solely as some kind of backwash from the final section. I had already made considerable progress with the dissertation, especially concerning the relevant aspects of performance space, the development of the comic figure, and the usefulness of CA for analysing spoken humour, before I encountered the chat show discussion, and much of this work is included in its own right, though now, of course, it points in a particular direction.

The dissertation starts with a consideration of the nature of humour as seen from the viewpoint of the main theories of humour – Superiority, Relief, and Incongruity. Though each has something useful to say about certain aspects of humour – we *are* often amused at the expense of the butt of the joke, we *do* use humour to deal with taboo subjects, the locus of humour *does* hinge on some kind of incongruity – we will see that none can completely cover all examples of humour and all 'leak' into one another. Even so, their consideration makes us aware of the complex nature of the subject and also that whatever happens on the surface of humour, there is often something at work underneath. Of the three, it needs to be said, it is incongruity which is given most space as it is difficult to exclude some element of incongruity from any example of humour.

Often in studies of comedy the notions of 'performance' and 'performance space' are addressed rather cursorily (Double 1992 and Rutter 1997 being notable exceptions) and it is the text which is focused upon. Certainly texts will be given their due in this work, and the extended sequence will receive particular attention, but the idea of performance and its spatial arrangements will also be given a deserved investigation. Thus, Section 2 offers a definition of performance and traces the roots of performance

space (in Europe) to ancient Greece and follows its developments through to what the modern audience would recognise as a theatrical space. Of importance in this arrangement is the formalised division between performers and audience. The key features for our purposes are the licence given to utterances in performance space and the dialogic relationship between performers and audience. These factors play an important part in the analysis of the extended sequence.

The type of performer of particular interest to this study is the comedian, here called 'the comic figure'. Such figures have a rich history in a wide variety of cultures and it will be seen that in some their roles have not been simply to provide amusement. Even where this is their only role it is one which allows comic figures to deal with, amongst other things, taboo subjects. That is, the comic figure is someone with a licence to transgress. Also of note is the figure's identity vis-à-vis other performers. Traditionally in many cultures the comic figure has had a distinct appearance, and furthermore, there has been a blurring between their personal identities and their performative identities in a manner that differs from, for example, the clearly separate identity of an actor and the role he or she plays. This matter of comic identity also has some bearing on the analysis in Section 7.

Perhaps the biggest difference between present-day comic figures and those of the past (certainly in our culture) is that more than ever today's comedian relies primarily on linguistic performance, and Section 4 surveys the linguistic resources available to the creator of humour. This analysis is both formal and functional. First, the structural features of language – morphology, phonology, syntax and so on – are considered. But as the chief interest of this study is what we *do* with these forms, more attention is given to how attitudes, beliefs, and other motivations inform linguistic choice. That is, how language is unavoidably a vehicle for ideology. This means, for example, that jokes can amuse in an innocently playful manner but can also be aimed at social targets with less than innocent intent. This too is a salient factor in the extended sequence analysis. (Note that a more detailed look at *conversation* is reserved until Section 6, where it has more immediate relevance.)

The social reception of jokes varies according to what here is called 'humour competence'. Section 5 uses Raskin's (1986) Semantic Script Theory of Humour as a

starting point and then considers a variety of other models, all of which discuss what it is we need to appreciate humour. It will be seen that Raskin's essentially cognitive model is implicitly or explicitly criticised by the other models in much the same way that Chomsky's (1965) notion of 'linguistic competence' is criticised by Hymes' (1972a) notion of 'communicative competence'. The former in each of these pairings is viewed as not being sufficiently helpful in understanding language in use in the social world of motivated beings. In social life the degree to which our humour competence is shared allows us to be amused by the same instances of humour but it is our *differential* competence that means what A finds amusing, B does not, and vice versa. Such differences raise the idea of 'permission', that is, how the earlier discussed licence to transgress can in no way be absolute, but varies according to the finely-tuned (or not so finely-tuned) interactive relations between performer and the differential competence within the audience. Thus, audiences can be said to *permit* a joke (or not). Such matters are also dealt with in this section. Further, this ambivalence of humour has a variety of manifestations and here is considered in three fields: the study of humour (specifically ethnic humour); what comedic performers themselves say about the limits of their licence; and how in performances different audience members express different responses to the same material. Many of these issues are involved in the analysis of the final extract.

Section 6 starts with some of the ideas of pragmatic theory (specifically speech act theory) which deal with indirectness, an important element of humour. Grice's (1957) idea of intentional meaning, Austin's (1962) notions of 'illocutionary' and 'perlocutionary', and Searle's (1975) discussion of indirect speech acts, all help towards an understanding of how language opens up possibilities of humorous play, and Dascal (1985) provides a useful model of how this can be achieved. I then offer my own original model of humour comprehension which I believe adds an extra dimension to the understanding of this matter. I also elaborate Dascal's model further in order to handle disputed meanings, something which raises the question of who 'owns' meaning, a matter of great concern in the extended analysis in the final section.

The section then points out the shortcomings of speech act theory – that it cannot help us thoroughly understand sequences of talk as 'embodied social action' (Duranti and Goodwin 1992). The 'tools' of CA do help in this regard and those concerning turn-

taking, adjacency pairs, and preference will be discussed. The last-mentioned will be of particular significance in the analysis of the disputed utterance. Such features also give us insight into the structure of humorous texts, but it is also noted that structural play alone is not sufficient to provide humour, humorists must also draw on cultural sources to create a humorous semantic content. Indeed, this is seen as one of the failings of CA, that it can be overconcerned with the methods members use to organise talk to the detriment of what it is they actually do with the talk, and is the reason I draw on support from the ethnography of speaking, with its explicit concern, as its name implies, with people and their motivations.

The utterance which is the focal point of the final analysis – ‘Margaret Thatcher was a man’ – clearly introduces certain issues of gender politics. Thatcher is not man and representations of her as such raise many questions about the nature of gender identity. Section 7, therefore, looks at aspects of gender which are relevant to the final analysis. These include a survey of the diversity of gender identities in various studies and theories which start with the psychoanalyst Riviere’s concept of ‘masquerade’ (1929), move on through Garfinkel’s detailed ethnomethodological analysis of someone undergoing a change of gender (1967), up to more recent discursive and deconstructionist views of gender identities and sexuality. The focus will then move to representations and will involve an enquiry into stereotypes and a brief look at pornography, both of which have some bearing on the final analysis. Also included in this section is an examination of gender and language which aims to point up certain features which may be relevant to the language use of the extended sequence. And as the final analysis hinges on an utterance offered as a joke, it is necessary also to consider gender and its relation to humour to see what sway this might hold on the delivery and reception of the utterance.

Finally, in Section 8 we come to the extended sequence itself. Let me immediately establish how this extract differs from many other texts which are given a pragmatic analysis. Firstly, the length itself. Unlike many analyses, this is not simply an extract of half a dozen or even a dozen turns. (Psathas, for example, talks of some extended sequences as being only ‘more than four turns long’ 1992:100). This deals minutely with a stretch of talk over two minutes long in which there are sixty-six accredited utterances and which runs to two full pages of transcript. This is, substantially, the

‘flow of social discourse’ and demands significant concentration to follow. Secondly, this not a dyadic exchange of the type A-B, A-B, where attributions of intentions and assignment of meanings, though always problematic, involve just the two interlocutors. There are five participants at work here, all except one of whom contribute at will, often more than one at a time, and some in what Falk (1980) calls a ‘duet’. Amongst other things this makes the attribution of responsibility far from easy. Thirdly, this is not an interaction involving obviously asymmetrical relations, in which the distribution of power is relatively transparent. The host of the show can be said to have more power deriving from his ‘institutional’ position (though the differential is not great), but the four panellists are formally there on an equal footing, and these more symmetrical relations make the role of power less clear and the attribution of responsibility problematic, though we will take note of the effect of gender on the proceedings. Then there is the setting to take into account. As noted earlier, this is not a conversation between intimates in private but a discussion on a chat show where the participants are relative strangers who are expected to produce entertaining talk for an overhearing audience. Again, this can cloud intentions and responsibilities. These are all points which need to be borne in mind throughout the analysis.

We make contact with the event through a transcript of it, and transcripts, as we noted above, are not some unproblematic neutral recording. (Note that the transcript is presented in full near the beginning of Section 8 and in addition a pull-out copy is also provided as Appendix 1 to assist reference while reading the analysis.) The transcript is followed by the contextual details: the participants and audience are situated in the studio space, the interlocutors are described, and their interaction in the talk analysed. The nature of the floor is highly significant in this interaction and how it shapes and is shaped by the talk is considered. The study then turns to look in detail at the differing responses to the utterance in question and how the possible meanings are negotiated. To go even deeper into the participants motivations two psychological perspectives are taken, the first reviews the validity of an ‘only-joking’ defence, the second explores the idea of unconscious motivations. This latter in turn raises the question asked earlier about who owns meaning. Finally, some of the main elements of politeness phenomena (as discussed by Brown and Levinson, 1987) are used in order to explain some of the apparently contradictory responses to the utterance. This

discussion around politeness also offers some support for Leech's (1983) notion of a Politeness Principle, that is, is also a (small) challenge to Grice's Cooperative Principle. I end with a consideration of how some of the features of the disputed utterance can be viewed formally as a joke and a look at how it can be received both as a joke and an insult with the help of the strong trace model from Section 6 and Carrell's notions of 'joke competence and 'humor competence' from Section 5.

To summarise this we can say, then, that to make (some) sense of humour pragmatically requires investigating humorous texts in their dynamic relationship with the relevant contextual factors using methods which stress such features. Choosing, within a broadly-defined pragmatic framework, CA, the ethnography of speaking, and relevant aspects of gender politics, allows this to be done. In terms of the organisation of the sections of this study, the opening discussion of the major theories gives us a grounding in the breadth of the *undercurrents* of humour, something which always needs to be borne in mind. The look at performance space and the comic figure's place within it (both crucial contextual factors) make us aware of licence and transgression and the way these affect utterances. The creation of utterances is dealt with in the section on style and content, which shows us what resources are available to the creator of humour and how these resources can be used for various purposes. Such humorous creations are not to be viewed as a given unproblematic stimulus which automatically triggers a predictable response; responses differ widely depending on all the various contextual factors and such variations in response receive necessary attention in the section on competence, permission and ambivalence. Another way to express this is that humorous utterances are assigned different meanings by different recipients and this moves us into the area of pragmatics, where problems of meaning assignment, particularly the assignment of meaning to indirect utterances, are discussed. Gender is central to the utterance and differing notions on the politics of this are examined in the penultimate section. We then finally move into an in-depth pragmatic analysis of an extended sequence in which the various methodological features are used to highlight the details of such a complex interaction.

This is by no means the first (or last) study of humour to take advantage of the analytical devices offered by CA. The pioneers of CA themselves have studied certain humour-related features of talk; Sacks (1974) looked at the structure of a joke told in

conversation, Jefferson (1985) discussed the significance of the accurate transcription of laughter, and Jefferson et al (1987) considered 'laughter as a systematically produced, socially organised activity' (p.152). Doctoral theses by Alaoui (1991) and Rutter (1997) also have used some aspects of CA methodology. But, as I have argued above, such approaches often do not go further than a somewhat formal understanding of the structures and mechanics at work in such situations. Further, such analyses invariably break up the interactions they study into shorter extracts in order to illustrate disparate points. Nor is this the first pragmatic look at humour. At least one other doctoral thesis (Ferrar 1993) does this, but it does not venture beyond the bounds of Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986).

I insist on going beyond the immediate given features and drawing on deeper aspects of context – the nature of performance space, the character of the comic figure, diverse notions of gender, the details of the participants, possible unconscious motives – to show how these also inform how meanings are assigned (or not) by the interactants and also by myself, the analyst. (This is another difference between this study and the others mentioned – I explicitly note the self-reflexive element of social study.) Although I also use short extracts to illustrate various points, in the main analysis I undertake an analysis of an extended sequence involving five interlocutors in order to try and capture as fully as I can the importance of sequential placement and the unpredictable changes in the flow of social discourse. In so doing my findings show a significant flaw in the usual conception of preference organisation – in brief, dispreferred turns do not necessarily conform to the standard CA model – and in the discussion of the politeness phenomena involved, show a shortcoming of Grice's cooperative principle. I can also add that most commentaries on humour comprehension talk in terms of the resolution of two meanings (M1 and M2) but here I put forward my own cognitive model which stresses a dialectical understanding which involves a synthesis of meanings leading to a third element, M3. However, the full social significance of this is better understood with assistance from Carrell's (1997) distinction between joke competence and humour competence.

It should also be noted that another feature of this study is that many of the original contributions may not be immediately apparent, as they come in the exemplification of others' models. For example, the discussion of the features of CA involves,

amongst other things, such items as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and insertion sequences. These are introduced in a straightforward manner and chiefly (but not entirely) through models and examples taken from the abundant sources available in CA literature, rather than from my own collected material. However, their application to humorous matters is entirely my own original work. To give just one example. In 6.3.2, the discussion of adjacency pairs is introduced with the definitive model of Schegloff and Sacks (1973), and the question/answer pair is elaborated with the help of Goffman (1981), Levinson (1983), and Heritage (1984a), amongst others. However, the comedic exemplification of this is through my own analysis of a scene involving this adjacency pair in the film 'Monty Python And The Holy Grail'. The discussion then moves on to the notion of 'conditional relevance' in adjacency pairs with the help once again of Levinson, but its application to humour is done through my own analysis of a relevant scene from 'Fawlty Towers'.

There are certain other organisational features which need to be noted, and these are now discussed.

References and bibliography. Whenever possible I have attributed references to an individual, whether that individual is an author, a TV or radio presenter, or the subject of, for example, a TV documentary:

Morecambe, Eric (2000) *Bring Me Sunshine*. BBC TV Broadcast 3.7.2000.

In the few examples where this has not been possible, the name of the publication has been used. Thus, the in-text reference is given as, for example, (Metro 13.2.2002), and the bibliographical entry is:

Metro (2002) Race Jibe Barrister Suspended. *Metro* 13.2.2002.

In the case of references from the Internet which cannot be personally attributed, I have given the main element of the URL address as the in-text reference, for example, (usanetwork.com, 2002), and the full entry is given in the bibliography:

usanetwork.com (2002) *Richard Belzer Biography*.

www.usanetwork.com/series/svu/belzer.html. Accessed on 3.8.2002.

Where the original date of publication of a work is considered significant in the chronology of ideas and the original edition has not been available, the original date is given in square brackets before the date of the source used in this study, but only upon the source's first in-text mention and the bibliography:

Freud, Sigmund [1905] (1991) *Jokes And Their Relation To The Unconscious*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Concerning TV broadcasts, the date of the off-air recording used is given even when this was a repeat of an earlier broadcast. Thus, 'Fawlty Towers' was first shown in the 1970s, but here an episode is given as follows:

Cleese, John & Booth, Connie (1998) *A Touch Of Class*. (Fawlty Towers.) BBC TV Broadcast 24.7.1998.

Whatever the medium of the reference – print, broadcast, film, the Internet – everything is listed in one bibliography.

Gender. I do not use the generic 'he' or 'she', but instead 'he/she' or 'him/her' etc. I have not changed or commented on the use of generic 'he' or 'she' in the original sources from which I quote.

Spelling. I use UK English spelling but do not change the spelling of the original sources from which I quote. This means that on occasion two different spellings may occur close together e.g. 'humour' and 'humor' or 'duetters' and 'dueters'.

Material used. The overwhelming majority of examples of humour I use are selected from many hours of either TV or radio broadcasts. I did make my own original recordings of conversation but did not find any examples of humour which were as useful for my purposes as those I took off-air. In the transcriptions of such materials I have kept the devices to a minimum. Such devices are briefly introduced before each transcribed interchange.

1. THEORIES OF HUMOUR

‘Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.’ These words of Hazlitt [1819] (1964:285) are echoed in others’ ideas of humour and laughter. Bergson’s first point, for example, is to stress that ‘the comic does not exist outside of what is strictly *human*’ (1911:3, original emphasis). Milner entitles his presentation of a semiotic theory of humour ‘Homo Ridens ’ (1972). Scruton goes further: ‘Man is the only animal that laughs, but it seems that laughter belongs also to the immortals’ (1982:197). Hyers would have us share that immortality.

To participate in comic insight is to participate in the immediacy and the spontaneity of the Now. It is not an argument going somewhere or having been somewhere, but a procession brought to a sudden halt and plunged into the laughter of eternity.

(1974:156)

However, there are those with more fundamental views. In a chapter entitled ‘Apes and Angels’, Jacobson begins his study of humour with a discussion of excrement. He offers a joke in which a statue of the Belvedere Apollo, when granted a wish by the woman who has spent years cleaning it, expresses the long-frustrated desire to ‘shit on a pigeon’ (1997:2). Jacobson adds: ‘If comedy, in all its changing forms, has one overriding preoccupation, it is this: that we resemble beasts more closely than we resemble gods, and that we make great fools of ourselves the moment we forget it’ (p.2). Nor is this an isolated view. The practising comedian Sue Perkins, in an interview about her work, states, ‘ I can make jokes about Dante and Dostoevsky and Chaos Theory but ultimately humour is about toilet jokes’ (Perkins 1999).

Given such disparate perspectives it is unsurprising that many commentators have remarked on the lack of clarity achieved by theorists of humour. Monroe sees the task of developing a theory of humour as a stumbling block ‘on which many great men have stubbed their toes’ (1954:13). Milner is unimpressed by the lack of progress and laments that ‘the riddle is still with us’ (1972:1). Wilson considers that given the

‘genius’ of those that have grappled with the problem over the last two millennia the results are ‘disappointing’ (1979:9).

Another common feature of commentaries is that the wide variety of theories are grouped into three broad categories (Monro 1954, Wilson 1979, Attardo 1994, Lippitt 1994, 1995a, 1995b). These are: superiority theories (Wilson calls them ‘conflict theories’ (p.9)); relief theories (Lippitt’s ‘release’ 1995b:169); and incongruity theories (Attardo’s ‘a.k.a. contrast’ (p.47)). Attardo tabulates them and calls them the ‘three families’ (See Table1), his table showing the wide variety of humour which can be subsumed under the three rubrics. It is to a discussion of these that we now proceed but first it is necessary to briefly comment on the terms ‘laughter’ and ‘humour’.

It will be seen that various of the theorists talk about a ‘theory of laughter’ in which they see laughter as being either the evidence or the measurement of humour. The aim of this dissertation is to study humour in as inclusive a way as possible, where humour is something that causes *amusement*, which may or may not be expressed through laughter. This study therefore agrees with the anthropologist Johnson when he says, ‘to see the existence of jokes as being defined by the presence of laughter is to reduce a cultural phenomenon to a physiological reaction’ (1976:197). There is widespread multidisciplinary support for this view. The psychologist Suls comments, ‘We can find something humorous but neither laugh nor smile. Conversely, laughter may be induced by many circumstances – fright, guilt, nervousness – that are not funny’ (1983:48). And the neuroscientist Provine (1998), in his research into the evolution of the brain, found that much laughter in social intercourse is not humour-related.

If you start to listen and write down what these people are saying it’s things like: ‘Hey, Joe, where you been?’, ‘Gotta go now!’, ‘Where did you get that tie?’, ‘Hey, here comes John!’. These are not jokes. But this is the kind of thing that is typically followed by laughter.

Thus, when a theorist is seen to be discussing ‘laughter’, for our purposes it is taken to mean ‘humour’ or ‘humour-related laughter’ unless otherwise specified.

Cognitive	Social	Psychoanalytical
Incongruity	Hostility	Release
Contrast	Aggression	Sublimation
	Superiority	Liberation
	Triumph	Economy
	Derision	
	Disparagement	

Table 1. The Three Families of Theories. (Attardo 1994:47)

1.1

Superiority Theories

Hobbes, writing in 1651, talks of the ‘sudden glory’ of humorous laughter:

Sudden Glory is the passion which maketh those Grimaces called laughter; and it is caused either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in a another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them, that are conscious of the fewest abilities; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour, by observing the imperfections of other men.

(1957:36)

Here laughter is clearly *at* someone, that is, directed down at ‘deformities’ and ‘imperfections’ from a position of perceived superiority. This is also a strong element of Bergson’s conception of humour, which he saw as a social corrective restraining behaviour ‘by the fear it inspires’ (1911:20). This aggressive idea continues to have its proponents in recent times also. Before continuing with such, attention is drawn here to Hobbes’ ‘by comparison whereof’, a clear suggestion of contrast, which some commentators would see as a manifestation of *incongruity* (at least indirectly). Indeed, it can be asked, can the notion of superiority avoid this? Further examples of leakage between the theories will be furnished throughout this discussion.

Of the various Hobbesian interpretations of humour perhaps Gruner’s is the most muscular. Taking a lead also from an important (but not the only) aspect of Lorenz’s notion that humour is derived from aggressive behaviour (Lorenz, 1996:253), Gruner claims the fact that ‘Homo Sapiens evolved into a race that can be convulsed into interrupted breathing, facial contortion, and incoherent vocalisation by sudden perceptions of glory (superiority)’ is why ‘Hobbes’ position is to be preferred over all

the others' (1978:30). He speculates that laughter originated from success in combat, where the great tension built up in battle is released in victory, which both permits a return to homeostasis and is expressed in bared teeth, grunts, grimaces and shoulder convulsions. (pp.42-3). (Mark that here 'release' is also a key issue. We will return to this shortly.) From such primordial beginnings he traces three 'civilising routes' to the joke - ridicule, a substitution for the real battle; suppression laughter, which is that reserved for hostility towards authority figures; and duel of wits, an intellectual battle of riddles, conundrums, and puns (p.83). He summarises his ideas in the following maxim: 'In any humorous situation find an element of superiority that has been perceived suddenly.' A review of his most recent work (1997) shows that he maintains the same position, insisting that in every humorous situation there must be a winner and a loser: if not, this renders the situation humourless (Apte 1997:222).

Jacobson, too, sees it as a key element, so much so that in the following example he cannot see the joke unless it has aggression. He comments on racist humour and discusses the traditional Northern comedian Bernard Manning. John Thomson, a young Northern comedian of the post-alternative comedy of the 1990s, parodies Manning in the form of the politically correct Bernard Righton. He takes to the stage wearing a frilled dinner shirt, clutching a pint of beer in a many-ringed hand and says in the harsh Mancunian rasp of Manning, 'There's a black feller...[so far so predictable] a Pakistani...[further into Manning terrain] ...and a Jew, standing in a night club having a drink. [Pause] What a fine example of an integrated community!' The audience laugh but Jacobson does not. He comments, 'Jettison the cargo of offence and you jettison the joke' (1997:37). He seems so intent on the need for aggression that it escapes him just who the butt of this joke is: Manning and not the ethnic groups in the narrative. That is, there is aggression there if that is what is sought. What is more pertinent for us here is Jacobson's insistence on it as a constitutive element of humour, or at least, humour involving race. (Jacobson's ideas of aggression and offence could just as well be dealt with below under 'relief' - in fact, Ross (1998) does so - a point that illustrates once more that in practice it is often not possible to keep these three major categories apart.) The relation between aggression, humour and gender will be taken up in 7.3.

Of the three major categories of humour theories superiority seems the most open to criticism, sometimes even unwittingly by its own purported supporters. For example, Ludovici, a follower of Hobbes, makes the point that not only do we laugh when the butt of a joke is a person of dignity i.e. someone to whom we may feel inferior rather than superior, but we may even laugh more heartily if this is the case (in Monro, p.103). Indeed, this could be extended to say that having a position of superiority (teacher, judge, politician etc.) could make people more liable to humorous sniping *from below* with proportionately greater consequences, based on the principle that ‘the higher they are, the harder they fall.’ Yet there is no talk of an ‘inferiority theory’. However, such anti-authoritarianism would at the same time lend at least partial support to superiority theorists as aggression is aggression whatever its source. We saw above how Gruner called this ‘suppression laughter’.

Lippitt has other objections. He says that we are sometimes amused out of a sense of sheer playfulness – word-play, nonsense, absurd humour- rather than out of feelings of superiority: ‘it is possible to be amused *at the wit itself, for it’s own sake.*’ (1995a:57-8, original emphasis). Where, for example, is the superiority or aggression in Steven Wright’s teasing nonsense: ‘Why is the alphabet in that order?’, ‘What does “definition” mean?’ (Wright 2000). Lippitt is also unimpressed with Hobbes’ claim that we can only laugh at our past selves (Bergson says we cannot laugh at ourselves at all). To counter this, Lippitt provides an anecdote concerning a friend of his, a highly capable post-graduate student. At home in the kitchen with his mother, who suddenly needed a tea-towel, he was asked to go upstairs to see if there were any in the airing-cupboard. This he did and returned empty-handed with the comment: ‘Yes, there are.’ When his mother laughed at such absent-mindedness, he saw the funny side of it and joined in the laughter. (p59) Many of us could think of similar incidents when people laugh at themselves immediately. On a larger scale we can consider Freud, Woody Allen, and Jackie Mason, all of whom strongly identify themselves as Jewish (Mason was a rabbi before he became a comedian), yet all provide a significant amount of Jewish jokes in which Jews are not always seen in the best light. (This notion of self-deprecation in humour – and its relation to gender – will be considered in 7.3.)

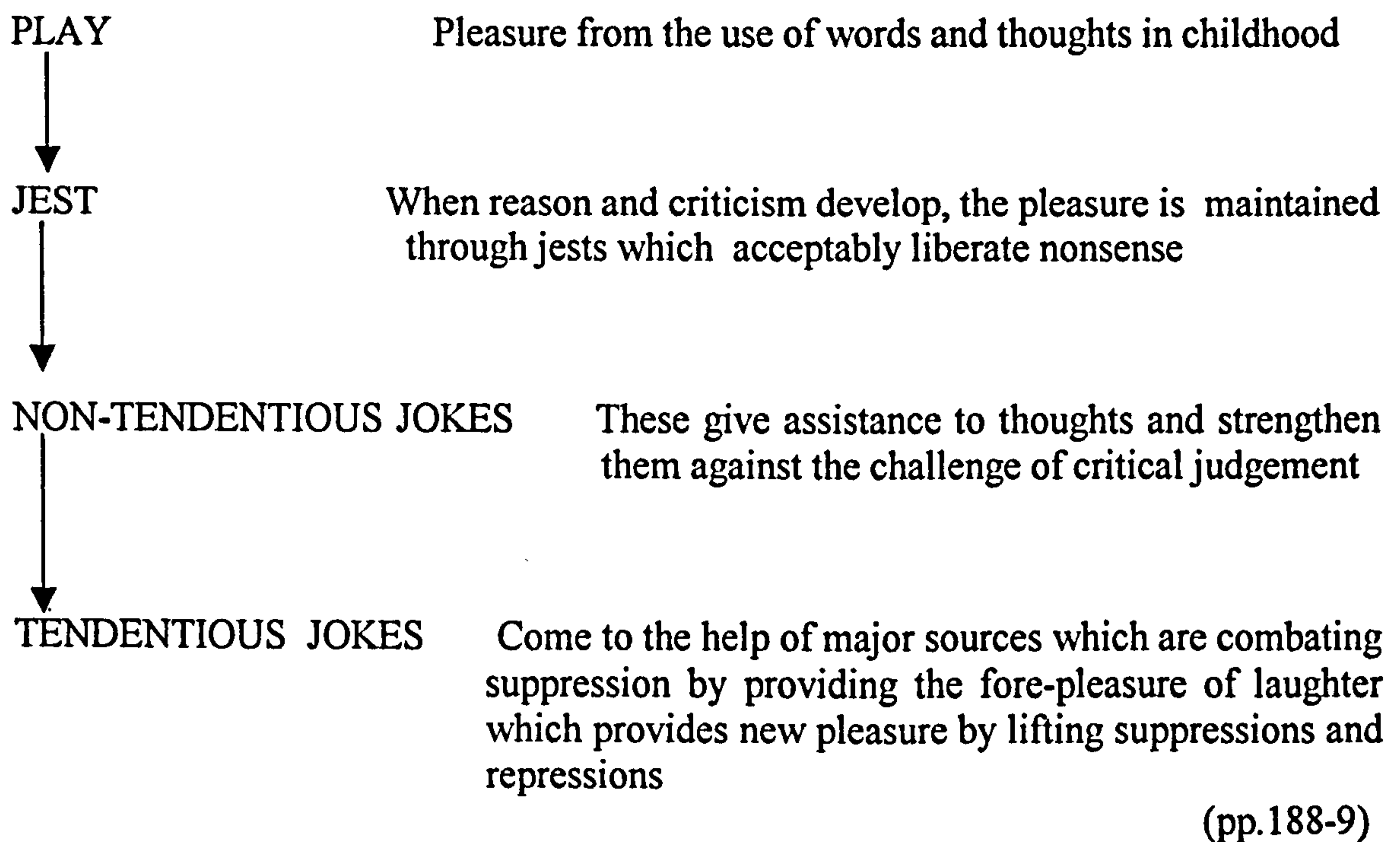
1.2

Relief Theories

This is primarily a psychological theory of humour, most famously associated with Freud, to whom we will presently come. Spencer also discusses release in relation to laughter but his is chiefly a physiological explanation, which sees laughter as the discharge of nervous energy. He gives the example of a stage play in which two lovers have been reconciled; this generates sympathy in the audience when suddenly a young goat appears and sniffs at the lovers, this incongruity (his word, note) causing the audience to laugh. He argues that if there had been no interruption 'the body of new ideas and feelings next excited would have sufficed to absorb the whole of the liberated nervous energy.' But the goat's appearance checks this flow. 'The excess must therefore discharge itself in some other direction...[and]...there results an efflux through the motor nerves to various classes of the muscles, producing the half-convulsive actions we term laughter' [1860] (1977:305). It is worth noting here that Lorenz also has something to say on this very point: 'Most jokes provoke laughter by building up a tension which is then suddenly and unexpectedly exploded' (1996:153). Gruner's description of the origin of laughter, as we saw (1.1), follows suit. (Gruner, recall, is primarily an advocate of the *superiority* theory.) This notion of discharge, as we shall see, plays a central role in Freud's formulation also, and though Freud is not the original source of relief theory (Monro, for example, first discusses Kline (pp.176-82), and Simon (1985, chapter 8) underlines Freud's borrowings from Groos), his 1905 text remains the chief contribution in this area and has had significant influence ever since (see below). The bulk of this section will, therefore, deal only with Freud's theory. What follows is an outline of what are seen as the essentials of his theory and commentaries on them.

Freud states that there is a strong link between the unconscious and both jokes and dreams, and that the latter two employ similar techniques (condensation, displacement) to carry out their 'joke-work' and 'dream-work' (1991. Chapter 7). As for the material which causes amusement, he distinguishes between jokes (*Witz*), the comic, and humour. (Certain problems of his text concerning translation and other matters will be considered below in 4.1) All of these are pleasurable as they provide various economies of psychical expenditure: jokes allow economies in expenditure on inhibition and suppression (pp.167-69), the comic on 'ideation'/thinking (pp.251-2),

and humour on emotion (pp.295-7). Most attention is reserved for a treatment of jokes and these he divides into innocent and tendentious (sexual, aggressive, cynical, and absurd). To simplify somewhat, tendentious jokes use the joke-work to evade the censor and give playful and acceptable expression to such otherwise repressed or inhibited emotions in the acceptable form of the joke. The element of play is important and can be better seen in the following developmental schema of the joke.



Simon notes that Freud's work has had a significant effect on the study of humour in various disciplines; for example, Wolfenstein's study of children's humour (1954), Legman's study of sexual humour (1968 and 1972), and Douglas' anthropological writings on jokes (1968) (all in Simon). He also adds: 'Freud's work on the comic has had influence well beyond the psychoanalytic community, particularly on comic theorists of literature like Frye, Barber and Bentley, and on experimental psychologists like Hom and O'Connell' (1985:237). But his ideas have many critics also and it is to some of these we now turn.

Monro focuses on the important feature of 'psychic economy'. He says Freud never makes it clear whether this term refers to a short cut not normally provided by reason or to a release from inhibition. The problem for Monro is that Freud also uses the term for stages before the inhibiting effect of reason is felt (1954:187). We can add here a

further criticism in this area concerning the fore-pleasure/pleasure distinction. In the Freudian scheme of things the fore-pleasure of laughter lifts the suppressions and repressions and thus provides new pleasure. But in order to laugh one must first have understood the tendentious material ('got the joke'), must therefore have already evaded the censor. That is, must *already* have overcome the suppressions and repressions *before* laughing. This view assumes that the suppressions and repressions *are* the censor (if not, then what is?) and thus sees the problem as one of cognitive/affective sequence (understanding comes before release), something which seems, in this reading of Freud, to be confused in his formulation.

As for the economy provided by this lifting, Freud (1991:166) comments that, for example, the feeling of propriety that prevents us insulting someone directly can be overcome if the insult is expressed in the form of a joke. Indeed, expressing the insult thus can become a source of pleasure (and we will see that this is a significant point in the final analysis in Section 8). Lippitt argues this is not always the case. In some circumstances, even when the butt of the joke feels obliged to join in the pleasure - rather than be seen as lacking a sense of humour - this same butt can be left looking foolish and the joker looking superior. (Here we see a link to the superiority theory, to which we will later return.) That is, such a joking insult can be even more wounding than a direct insult in which the insulter's behaviour may be socially censored and the insulted person receive sympathy. However, while this may be so in some cases with regard to the social consequences of the joking insult, this might not negate Freud's point that in the psychical processes in the joker the censor has been overcome in the expression of the insult as a joke. That is, there *is* release, in the joker at least. The problem here is the social reception of jokes, which will be discussed below in Section 5 and in great detail throughout Section 8. Here we will simply note that social relations can play a significant role in such situations (the joker is aware of *social* censors, also), as can be seen in Coser's study of humour in medical situations. Though some of Coser's conclusions are supportive of Freud - 'Humor helps to convert hostility and control it, while at the same time permitting its expression' (1960:95) - a significant finding of her study of humour expression in staff meetings at a mental hospital would provide some evidence to superiority theorists. She concluded: 'in a hierarchically ordered social structure it [humour] tends to be directed

downward' (p.95), such that '*[n]ot once was a senior staff member present a target of a junior members' humor*' (p.85, original emphasis). (Perhaps the key word here is 'present'. We have already twice had cause to mention humour directed at superiors; it may well be that such humour is more usually expressed when the superior butt is absent.)

Another point with which Lippitt takes issue is the notion of economy. Just as he used nonsense and absurd humour as counter-evidence against superiority theories, saying we can enjoy such plays for themselves, he also uses such kinds of humour against relief theorists. He argues, 'One of the pleasures of nonsense verse is trying, and failing, to make sense of it.' (1995b:173). That is, the pleasure here involves *expending* energy, not saving it.

1.3

Incongruity Theories

We start with a comment from Kant:

In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.

[1790] (1951:172)

(Where 'understanding' is interpreted as reason.) Monro (1951) comments that this strained expectation is rather like tensing your muscles waiting for the start of a race. (Note the relation here to Spencer's views on tension in the musculature discussed earlier under 'relief'.) Your mind is set on a certain outcome and then suddenly wrenched off its path. Lippitt wonders what this 'nothing' might be. A possible answer, and this parallels Monro's, is that 'nothing' is an unexpected meaning, one different from that originally anticipated (1994:147).

Schopenhauer's formulation is more detailed. A humorous situation arises when:

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. It occurs just as often however, that the incongruity between a single real object and the concept under which, from one point of view, it has rightly been subsumed, is suddenly felt.

[1818] (1957:76)

Here the incongruity is made explicitly manifest with two or more different objects ('object' is here interpreted to mean people, institution, ideas) subsumed, or thought of, under one concept, that is, understood in just one interpretation.

Bergson, too, can be seen to have incongruity as a central part of his theory, though earlier we saw that he viewed humour also as a form of superiority. 'A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time' (1911:96). But perhaps the most explicit and detailed formulation comes from Koestler. He first conceived his idea of 'bisociation' in 1949 and refined it in 1964. After providing two humorous stories he comments:

The pattern underlying both stories is the perceiving of *a situation or idea, L, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference, M1 and M2*. The event L, in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously, on two different wavelengths, as it were. While this unusual situation lasts, L is not merely linked to one associative context, but *bisociated* with two.

(1964:35.original emphasis. See Fig.1)

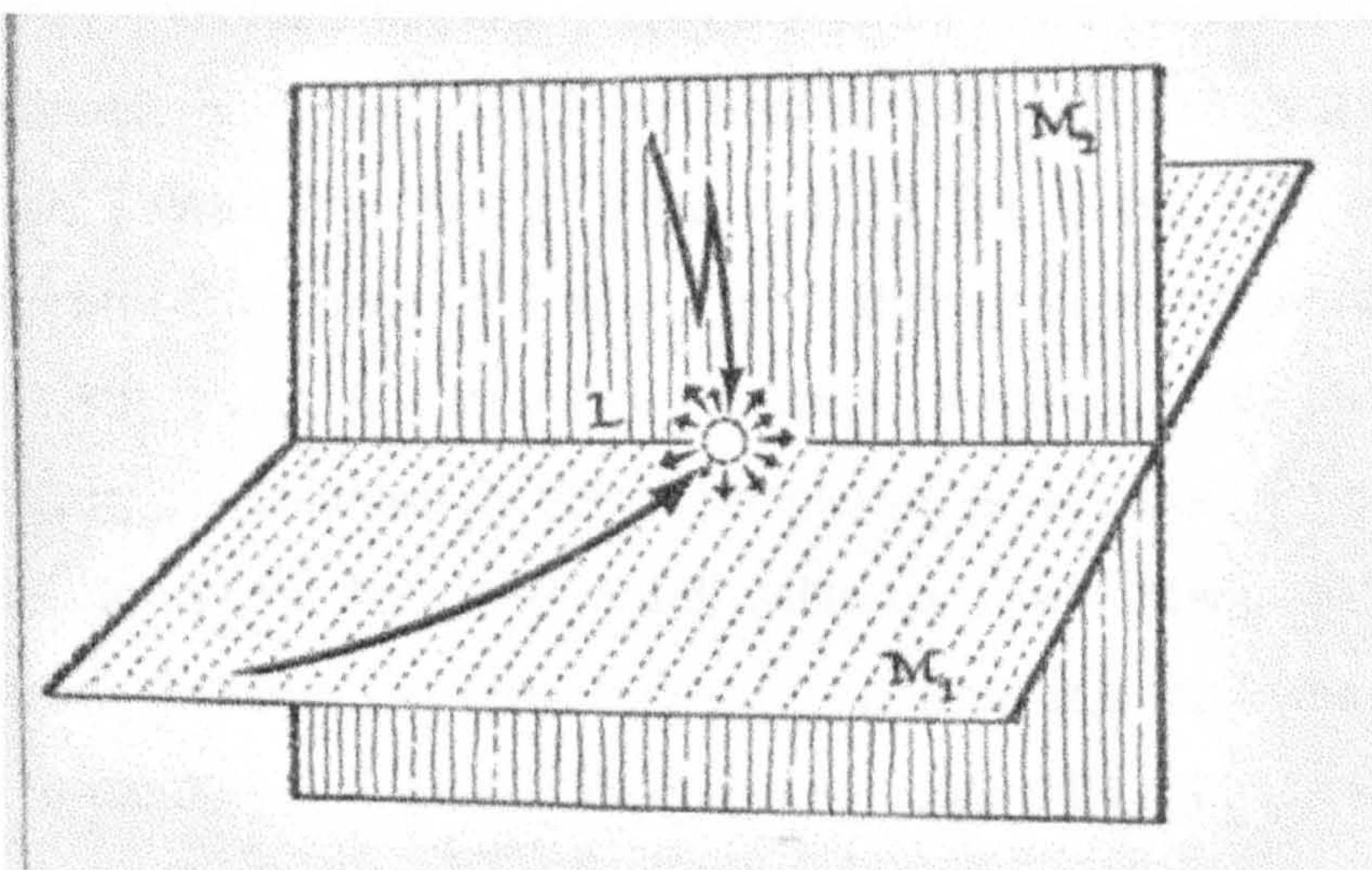


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic representation of Koestler's bisociation theory (1964:35)

Though this can be clearly seen as a case of incongruity, it should also be added that Koestler in his earlier formulation also included an element of relief when he said such bisociation 'causes a momentary dissociation of parts of the emotional charge from its thought context, and the discharge of this redundant energy in the laughter reflex' (1949:110). This could be Spencer again.

Scruton takes issue with the incongruity theory. Writing in the 1980s he argues that a caricature of the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, amuses 'not because it does not fit Mrs. Thatcher, but because it does fit her, all too well' (1982:202). He criticises the inaccuracy of the term 'incongruent', suggesting instead that we are amused when people act *in character*: 'What amuses us, it could be said, is the total congruence between the idea of the man and his action' (p.202). If we apply this point to any well-known comedy character we can see that Scruton may be making a valid point. For example, if the neurotic hotelier Basil Fawlty, the main character of the situation comedy 'Fawlty Towers', is rude to a guest or has a screaming fit, nothing seems out of character or incongruous about that. Indeed, it can be argued that this is a central feature of all situation comedies: establish the characters and their relationships and then reproduce this situation, in which the characters recognisably play in character.

However, Lippitt counters this with the observation that such behaviour may well be in character but it still nevertheless is incongruous when 'compared with "normal" people and how we expect them to behave' (1994:150). Thus, if we now apply Lippitt's idea to Basil Fawlty's behaviour we can see that such behaviour is, indeed, incongruous for a hotelier. And a moment's reflection reveals that sit-com characters invariably have traits which set them at odds with the moral and social codes of the world (Victor Meldrew of 'One Foot In The Grave', the cantankerous old cynic, Captain Mainwaring of 'Dad's Army', the pompous, officious incompetent, Del Boy of 'Only Fools And Horses', the inept, bungling small businessman, and so on). Further, it is common for these characters to have a more normal foil to underline their incongruity: Fawlty's wife Sybil, Meldrew's wife Margaret, Mainwaring's Sergeant Wilson, Del Boy's brother Rodney. (This point also raises the supplementary question of 'normality' and this will be dealt with more fully below in a discussion of 'common sense' in 6.1.)

There are two further counters to Scruton's observation which are worthy of note. The first is the formal point that it is clearly incongruous for someone who is not Mrs. Thatcher to sound and look just like Mrs. Thatcher; the actress fits the Prime Minister 'all too well' and this is incongruous. This can be seen as constitutive of all such caricatures: this is not A yet, somehow, it is A. Secondly, there is the question of intent. Discussing such examples of observational humour, Double comments: 'The aim of a caricature is not simply to say: Mrs. Thatcher looks like this; it is to say: isn't the way Mrs. Thatcher looks *funny*?' (1992:40, original emphasis). He relates such scenes to Brecht's stylistic theatrical device of *Verfremdungseffekt*, which aims to make the familiar appear different, incongruous, or, in this case, amusing.

Moving on to Bain, whom Monro classes as a relief theorist, we find he is heavily critical of the notion of incongruity. He lists at length examples of incongruity, which he says do not cause amusement.

There are many incongruities that may produce anything but a laugh. A decrepit man under a heavy burden, five loaves and two fishes among a multitude, and all unfirmness and gross disproportion; an instrument out of tune, a fly in ointment, snow in May, Archimedes studying geometry in a siege, and all discordant things; a wolf in sheep's clothing, a breach of bargain, and falsehood in general; the multitude taking the law into their own hands, and everything of the nature of disorder; a corpse at a feast, parental cruelty, filial ingratitude, and whatever is unnatural; the entire catalogue of vanities given by Solomon, are all incongruous, but they cause feelings of pain, anger, sadness, loathing, rather than mirth.

(1875:257)

Such an extensive list seems almost like a challenge and it is not difficult to propose a humorous fit for a number of them. A decrepit man under a burden could be Steptoe Senior unloading heavy junk from his cart, gross disproportion could be the unfeasibly obese Mr. Creosote in Monty Python's 'Meaning of Life', and so on. Clark (1987:141) and Lippitt (1994: 52) both make the point that nothing is intrinsically funny, a context is needed. Similarly, it can be said *contra* Bain that nothing is intrinsically unfunny, these listed items could all be sources of amusement in a suitable context. Perhaps the thrust of Bain's argument is related to this and he is saying that incongruity itself is not intrinsically funny, and with this we would concur. What is also interesting about

Bain's point is that incongruity can give rise to other emotions, a point which will now be pursued with Morreall.

He sees three possible major reactions to incongruity: negative emotion, reality assimilation, and amusement. Negative emotion is when we respond to an incongruous event with anger, fear, uneasiness, or some similar disturbed feeling. Reality assimilation (he takes the term from the psychologist McGhee) is when the incongruity puzzles us and challenges our usual understanding of the world. These two reactions share some common features which distinguish them from amusement. In both of them, Morreall argues, there is a feeling of loss of control and we are motivated to either change the situation or our reaction to it (negative emotion), or our understanding of it (reality assimilation). Amusement, in contrast, is pleasant – 'we *enjoy* the incongruity' (1987a:195), we do not feel the world is slipping out of our control nor do we want to change the situation or our reaction to it (pp.188-96). (Elsewhere he calls amusement 'a pleasant psychological shift' (1987b:132).) So, depending on a wide variety of contextual features, the items in Bain's list could well provoke a different range of responses as outlined by both Bain and Morreall, one of which responses could be, as suggested above, amusement.

Before moving on to a summary of all these theories, there is still an important aspect of incongruity to be dealt with. Palmer reminds us that on this point of incongruity and humour there are differing interpretations of the role incongruity plays, or rather, is seen to play. Is it simply the occurrence of incongruity that gives rise to humour or is it the resolution of such incongruity that is the crucial factor? (1994:95). Here we will look at three ways that incongruity in humour can be interpreted. Firstly, as simply the perception of incongruity; secondly, as the resolution of incongruity; and lastly, as the appreciation of incongruity.

The first category, the perception of incongruity, can be attributed to what might be called the 'classic' proponents: Kant's 'strained expectation into nothing' and Schopenhauer's 'two or more real objects are thought through one concept'. With these, it would seem, it is primarily the perception that there is an incongruity that is the major contributor to the humorous event.

Suls, however, puts forward the idea that perception of incongruity is not itself sufficiently explanatory. He argues it is not the mere presence of incongruity in the punch line of the joke which gives rise to humour, but that it is the *resolution* of this incongruity with what has gone before that is the key: 'humor derives from experiencing a sudden incongruity which is then made congruous' (1972:82). Further, 'the punch line is seen to make sense at some level with the earlier information in the joke. Lacking [such] a resolution, the respondent does not "get" the joke, is puzzled, and sometimes even frustrated' (1983:42)

There are also those, however, who are not troubled by incongruity and see no need to iron it out. Rather, they argue that the incongruity is not only necessary for humour but that it must be appreciated for what it is, it needs to be embraced. Monro notes that 'there is an element of appropriateness in the inappropriate, when it is funny. It is not really a question of something intruding where it does not belong, but of something which plainly does belong, but is not allowed for by our pre-existing attitude' (1951:255). Schaeffer emphasises that 'we accept a minor principle of congruity at the precise moment that we recognise incongruity' (1981:9). Mulkay sees the main problem with the resolution theory as one that does not distinguish between information-processing in the humorous mode and in serious discourse. Thus, in Suls' view, joke recipients expect a congruent outcome and when presented with incongruity have to somehow resolve it in order to understand the joke. Mulkay counters this as follows:

I suggest that jokes are designed to display congruity and incongruity at the same time; and that recipients presumably respond to them accordingly. Jokes do have to make sense. They have to furnish an understandable connection between the punch line and the rest of the text, and thereby between the frames of reference juxtaposed within the joke. But the range of interpretative connections allowed in the realm of humour is much wider than that permissible in serious discourse.
(1988:33)

Palmer, too, has reservations about simple resolution. His 'logic of the absurd' model has two parts, the second of which states that the joke process is 'implausible [and] ... nonetheless has a certain measure of plausibility' (1987:43). In a later work he is firmer: 'incongruity is both maintained and resolved simultaneously' (1994:96).

And speaking of one particular type of humour, Attridge is unequivocal. The intentional pun

is not just an ambiguity that has crept into an utterance unawares, to embarrass or amuse before being dismissed; it is ambiguity *unashamed of itself*, and this is what makes it a scandal and not just an inconvenience. In place of a context designed to suppress latent ambiguity, the pun is the product of a context deliberately constructed to *enforce* an ambiguity, to render impossible the choice between meanings, to leave the reader endlessly oscillating in semantic space

(1988:141, original emphasis)

This appreciation of incongruity can be seen to introduce a third element into the comprehension process. Johnson is explicit on the matter.

Jokes or the act of joking arise out of the perception of the presence of two realms of meaning. As such the joke constitutes a third realm, but because of its causal dependence on one or both of the two realms, it cannot be studied independently.

(1976:196)

Willis makes a related point with his 'strong trace model', in which the straightforward meaning (M1) towards which the recipient is led is understood but not fully established as it is replaced at the punch line with the second meaning (M2), which is both understood and established. Yet because the cues for M1 and M2 need to be the same until the final twist, the full joke comprehension is M3, in which M2 predominates but in which there is also a strong trace of M1 (1992:21). (This will be discussed in greater detail in 6.1 below.)

It is hopefully by now clear that though there are grounds for stating that each of these three major theories has some contribution to make to our understanding of humour, none works as a comprehensive theory and each has shortcomings, or, as Littlewood and Pickering have it: 'the problem with most theories of humour and comedy is that they claim an excessive applicability to themselves' (1998:293). Lippitt also notes their lack of comprehensiveness and points out that, for example, Hobbes' ideas on superiority and aggression ignore the structure of the object of amusement i.e. incongruity, whereas Schopenhauer, an incongruist, neglects the emotions and the attitude of the amused person and concentrates on the structure alone (1995a:57).

It has also become clear at the same time that none of them is self-contained, they each have a tendency to spill over into one another. It was noted that different elements of Bergson's theory suited both superiority and incongruity theories, and that the aggressive aspects of Freud's tendentious jokes have a place in both his relief theory and in superiority also. Monro takes note of a number of significant leakages. He shows that Leacock, a Hobbesian who sees laughter beginning as a primitive shout of triumph (like Gruner), also believes that humour turns on the contrast between the thing as it is or ought to be and the thing as it isn't or ought not to be i.e. incongruity (1951:96). Similarly, Ludovici, who sees in every laugh 'that element of self-glory which Hobbes' noble mind detected' also thinks that all nonsense can be seen as a liberation from the rigid laws of reason and logic (in Monro pp.101-1), leaving Monro to comment that this is Freud not Hobbes (p.106). As for Freud himself, Monro sees his relief theory as a *transformation* of the superiority theory through his recognition of the repression of our aggressive instincts in our early years (p.192).

We are not yet finished with Freud nor the discussion of theories. There are two individuals who both claim a theory that encompasses all three of the major ideas discussed above – Morreall (1987b) and Matte (2001). Morreall says that all laughter involves a psychological shift and this can be either cognitive or affective. The former could be covered by incongruity theories, where we are aroused by things which do not fit into our conceptual patterns, the latter could involve both superiority and relief theories, where laughter involves an increase in positive feelings (superiority), a decrease in negative feelings, or the release of suppressed feelings (relief). Such a shift which is also pleasant provides laughter. Thus, his deliberately simple formula is, 'Laughter results from a pleasant psychological shift' (p.132).

Matte's theory is wholly based on a psychoanalytic perspective. He makes the novel claim that Freud's conception of humour, which most commentators regard as a relief theory (perhaps *the* relief theory) is, in fact, along with Kant's and Schopenhauer's, an *incongruity* theory. 'The incongruous tension of two different ideas which results in laughter is due to the operation of the psychoanalytical dynamic of unconscious and conscious' (p.239). Further, this psychoanalytical incongruity theory subsumes those of relief and superiority.

Relief and superiority are...as much a part of the psychoanalytical dynamic as the unconscious and conscious.. In the psychoanalytical sense they are the drives, and because the psychoanalytical dynamic has been shown to be an incongruous one, it means that superiority and relief are the drives of incongruity.

(p.238)

This leads him to claim there can be no other theory of humour besides an incongruous one: 'Incongruity becomes a grand theory, incorporating the drives of superiority and relief' (p.238).

While at first sight Morreal's definition of a new theory may seem to be so broad that it gives us a rather blunt instrument where a scalpel is required, it should by now be apparent that a truly comprehensive theory which covers all manifestations of humour is not yet available (and may never be available), and so his concept does at least have the merit of having the capacity to embrace a wide variety of humour, and thus resonates with the treatment of humour in this dissertation, a treatment which is inclusive rather than exclusive. As for Matte's proposition, it rather seems that as incongruity is a feature of humour that is hard to exclude, whereas not all examples of humour can be seen as instances of relief, Matte simply (and unconvincingly) effects a psychoanalytical colonisation of incongruity and relegates the other two major theories to the role of servants. To put this in plain terms, we may never know why the chicken crossed the road, but such attempts at the hegemony of humour are of little or no assistance to students using a wide variety of ideas trying to get to the other side.

2.

PERFORMANCE SPACE

In this section firstly the term 'performance' will be discussed and defined for the purposes of this dissertation. Then the structured division between performer and audience and the attendant creation of a performance space will be established. This will be followed by a discussion of the nature of such a space and how it provides different roles for performers and audience. Finally, how all of this has significant consequences for the meanings of utterances will be highlighted.

2.1

Performance

The term 'performance' has a special meaning in linguistics and the distinction between linguistic *competence* and linguistic *performance* was made by Chomsky, where the former is 'the speaker-hearer's knowledge of language' and the latter 'the actual use of language in concrete situations' (1965:4). Duranti (1998:15) notes that another notion of performance comes from Austin (1962) with his category of performative verbs which enable us not simply to use language for referential purposes but also to *do* something with words. For example, 'I order you to sit down.' is both the use of language and also an *act* of ordering. These notions are useful for consideration of our language behaviour in everyday life and further discussion of them will come shortly, but the idea of performance that will receive most attention here is that concerning what Bauman (after Milton Singer) specifies as 'cultural performances' (1992:46). These are, for Duranti, performances which are found in, amongst other activities,

verbal debates, story telling, singing, and other speech activities in which what the speakers say is evaluated according to aesthetic concerns, that is, for the beauty of their phrasing or delivery, or according to the effect it has on the audience

(1998:15-6).

For Bauman such events have a characteristic set of features. Performances are:

- *scheduled*: set up and prepared for in advance
- *temporally bounded*: there is a defined beginning and end

- *spatially bounded*: enacted in a space that is symbolically marked off either temporally or permanently e.g. theatre, festival ground, sacred grove
- *programmed*: there is a structured scenario or programme of activity e.g. the five acts of an Elizabethan drama, the liturgical structure of an Iroquois condolence ceremony
- *co-ordinated public occasions*: open to view by an audience and collective participation
- *heightened occasions*: available for the enhancement of experience through the present enjoyment of the intrinsic qualities of the performative display

(1992:46).

However, this does not mean that such performances are always distinguishable from other types of linguistic performance. Duranti notes that there is always an aesthetic dimension to utterances, that is, 'attention to the form of what is being said' (1998:14). For Bauman this sets up a continuum from 'a full performance', for example, a diva singing at La Scala, through a 'hedged performance', for example, someone tentatively trying out a joke amongst friends, to a 'fleeting performance', as when a child tries out a new word in conversation with peers as 'a gesture of virtuosity' (1992:44-5). The performance theorist Schechner is even more inclusive and sees theatrical performance as one mode on a continuum from the ritualisations of animals (including humans), through everyday performance – greetings, family scenes, professional roles, etc. – to play, sports, theatre, ceremonies, and so on (1988:xiii). He further notes that John Cage, in an interview in 1965, remarked that simply framing an activity as 'performance', simply viewing it as such, makes it into a performance. Thus, for Schechner, documentary filming can transform ordinary behaviour into performance (p.30). An example of this that can be given from television is the development in the last decade of the genre of 'docusoaps' - documentary films of actual persons in their everyday settings e.g. workers at an airport, which, shot over a lengthy period and broadcast over a number of weeks, give the people involved time to develop and take on some of the familiarity of characters in soap operas. A more recent example is the advent of 'reality TV', in which, to give just one instance, a group of people are selected to live together for a number of weeks under the constant watch of cameras. The very name of this type of programme - 'reality TV' - points up

both the juxtaposition and merging of the private ('real life') and the public ('broadcast television') in this type of performance.

Abrahams & Bauman make a related point in connection with the ethnography of speaking in St. Vincent, but their example involves not a broadcast performance but a 'live' performance in everyday life. Looking at the conflicting styles of 'talking sensible' and 'talking nonsense', they find that one aspect of the latter is *getting on ignorant*, within which is *talking trupidness* - without order or logic (1983:93). Such talk can be licensed in, for example, performers who take the role of fool in Carnival, but is also expected from people who are genuinely *trupidy* in everyday life, that is, people who are 'mentally defective, tongue-tied, or insane' (p.96). Such people's everyday speech can be framed as performance, especially in rum shops. Thus, one such man was asked to describe a film he had seen and 'the result was a nonsensical trupidy recounting of some of the dialogue, delivered with a great good spirit and animation, for which he was rewarded with much laughter, applause, and a drink' (p.96).

And in Afro-American culture, the many studies of male adolescent verbal duelling (variously called *sounding*, *the dozens* etc.), which is an everyday street activity among friends involving ritual insults, is invariably seen in performative terms. For example, Labov notes, 'One of the most important differences between sounding and other speech events is that most sounds are evaluated overtly and immediately by the audience [and] the primary mark of evaluation is laughter' (1972:144). However, such play can turn into serious argument when a ritual insult is not countered with another ritual insult but when an insult is countered with a *denial*. This, according to Kochman, transforms play into nonplay (1983:332). That is, the distinction between some everyday playful performances and 'serious social life' can be very fine. We shall see that this is an important factor in the analysis in Section 8. (All these examples also underline the importance of the role of the audience, a point which will be touched upon repeatedly in this study.)

This spectrum of possibilities has been recognised in certain approaches in the social sciences, most notably, perhaps, by Erving Goffman. His use of dramaturgic metaphor in such concepts as *actor*, *stage*, *foreground/background*, *frame*, has been noted by

Duranti (p.16). Schechner also comments that in Goffman's 'The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life' (1959) Goffman stated that performance is a mode of behaviour that can characterise any activity (Schechner 1988:30). However, it is worth repeating that the focus in this section will be mainly on 'cultural performances' as described above, as most of the humorous material dealt with in this dissertation falls within such a framework. It is to a survey of the construction of special spaces for such events that we now turn, though it will be borne in mind throughout this dissertation that it is not always easy to clearly delineate between 'social life' and 'performance'.

2.2

Possible Origins Of Theatre

We will start by looking at how dramatic/theatrical/cultural performances (which we will call 'theatre') originated, particularly, though not exclusively, in Europe. As this involved not only a separation of functions, for example, between the religious and the dramatic content of certain performances, but also a formalised physical separation of performer and audience, we will also look in detail at the creation of a performance space and its significance for the meaning of utterances.

A common view of the origin of theatre in Europe is that of the development of theatre in ancient Greece. Two broad views are what might be termed 'the hierarchical' and 'the horizontal'. The former is best known as 'the Cambridge thesis' attributed to Harrison (1912), Murray (1912) and Cornford (1914). This interpretation saw formalised theatrical performance as a development from ritual, more specifically, the rituals surrounding the religious festival of the Great Dionysia. Friedrich is strong on this point: 'Greek tragedy was as close to ritual origins as any form of drama could be. That there is a connection between the first fully-fledged European drama and religious ritual could not be more patent' (1983:159). (The time frame here is about 600-500 BCE.)

A different perspective is taken by Schechner. He believes the Cambridge thesis' emphasis on ritual origins has dominated our view of theatre to the detriment of other factors such as play, games, sports, dance and music. He notes that the English

language distinguishes between these whereas other languages (not specified) do not. All of these factors are, for him, related horizontally and not hierarchically, the latter perspective being the result of the foregrounding of ritual origins, something which he claims has never been proved archaeologically (1988:6). Brockett (1991), too, notes that certain post-war views of origin point to theatre's independent development in societies which have many performative activities such as weddings and courts. From this perspective ritual and theatre can be seen as co-existing modes (amongst others) in which the same elements might be used for different functions.

Whatever the precise origins may be, it is known that in Europe by about the 5th century BCE what is now called classical theatre was established in Greece. The Roman theatre came later, starting about 360-240 BCE and then spreading throughout their empire. Associated with Roman theatre were such performances as gladiatorial combat, *venationes* (in which humans fought animals) and the placing of such people as Christians into the arena with wild animals. (Such activities would seem to lend some support to Schechner's point about the horizontal relationship between ritual, play, games etc. though we are here dealing with a later time period to that of the origins' time frame.) However, with the eventual Christianisation of the Romans (Theodosius I outlawed all other religions in 393 CE) some of the excesses of the theatre were curtailed and there were fewer state festivals (and thus fewer performances) given in honour of pagan gods.

From c.400 the western and eastern sectors of the empire were formally divided for administrative reasons, Rome becoming the western centre and Constantinople the eastern. Rome was conquered in 476 but at first theatre was left untouched. Indeed, Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who ruled much of that area till 536, even restored the theatre at Pompeii. But as order crumbled during the 6th century, state recognition and support for the theatre ceased, causing it to decline and then fall into obscurity in the western territories. The last definite performance in Rome is known from a letter dated 533.

Though this signalled the end of European theatre for hundreds of years, theatrical elements survived in at least four different kinds of activities: the remnants of the Roman mimes; Teutonic minstrelsy; popular festivals; and pagan rites. The mimes

were storytellers, jesters, tumblers and rope dancers. (Skills we will later see exhibited by clowns and fools generally and the *Commedia del'arte* in particular.) The *scop*, a feature of the Teutonic tribes, was a singer and teller of tales and the principal preserver of the tribes' chronology and history (Brockett). MacKechnie mentions that the *gleeman* also had a similar tribal role (1931:2), and such a figure is listed in Christen's encyclopaedia of clowns and tricksters (1998). MacKechnie also traces the links between jongleurs and troubadours as itinerant entertainers in the 10th and 11th centuries (pp.4-6). And it was these wandering entertainers who are seen by Hartnoll as a transitional force, with links both forward and backward. 'Carrying with them the germ of the theatre, ready to take root again when conditions proved favourable, they lived as best they could and handed on the skills and technical tricks bequeathed to them by earlier generations of mime-players' (1976:32).

As for the festivals and rites that flourished in Europe, these were the events that attracted the itinerant entertainers and in which ordinary people could also sing and dance and behave out of character. Once again we find the Christian church imposing itself on these important aspects of social life either by moral denunciation or by recuperating them into the Christian calendar – Christmas and Easter correspond to two significant pagan festivals: mid-winter and spring-fertility festivals respectively (Brockett *passim*). Indeed, much of our knowledge about this theatrical 'dark period' comes, according to Molinari, from condemnations by the church. He cites those of Alcuin (c.791), the Council of Tours (813), and Bishop Abogard (836) (1975:75-8). Yet by a historical irony, it was the church that played a crucial role in the re-development of theatre in Western Europe.

In the 8th century in England tropes were introduced as a musical embellishment of the liturgy and these developed in the following century a dramatic dimension with identifiable characters representing Biblical action. Burns notes that during such performances a separation of functions evolved between the religious and the dramatic. For practising Christians a mass was a real transaction between heaven and earth, a genuine communication with God. But as these tropes were not essential for this communication to take place the congregation attended more and more to the *dramatic* content. 'In this way began the long slow process of structural division between actors and audience which seems to be essential before drama can develop as a separate art'

(1972:24). (We must not forget, however, that this division had occurred much earlier in Greece.)

The church remained central to its further development. These dramatic elements of Christian ritual were formalised into *introit* plays by monks writing in Latin between 950 and 1250. This was a European-wide phenomenon: the Mystery plays of England, the *mysteres* of France, the *sacre rappresentazioni* of Italy, the *autos sacramentales* of Spain, the *Geistspiele* of German-speaking lands, as well as examples in central and eastern Europe (Hartnoll 1976:37). Of significance is that in 1210 Pope Innocent III ordered that plays should be presented outside the church and when higher clergy further said that priests should not take part in the staging of sacred subjects outside the church this encouraged local people to take more control of the organisation of dramatic festivals (Bucknell 1979:83). In the early 14th century the action also moved out into and around the streets as it became part of the Corpus Christi processions (Burns p.73). Bucknell further notes: 'Once the drama left the church, the characters and the contents of the plays became less formal. Local customs, words, humour, accents, and impersonations of the local dignitaries were slowly woven into the fabric of the performance' (p.83). Hartnoll is very specific about the increasing secularisation, both in its causes and consequences. For example, the fact that the processional plays involved different scenes allowed a convenient division of labour so that different guilds were able to take responsibility for scenes connected to their work. Thus, the shipwrights staged the story of Noah's ark, the carpenters dealt with the Tower of Babel, and the fishmongers staged Jonah and The Whale (1976:44). Moreover, and this is of interest for the purposes of this dissertation, she underlines the crucial significance of the comic element in these plays.

It is important in the development of the theatre because it was the interpolation of comic scenes which did not appear in the original stories that led to the use of the vernacular. And this in turn was *the chief factor in the emergence of a national theatre in each separate country of Europe*. Greek tragedy, though it may have had touches of humour...reserved its buffoonery for the traditional satyr-play which followed. But almost from the beginning the mediaeval play, which was a tragedy with a happy ending, fused the two together.

(p.45, emphasis added)

Such secularisation continued and in 1576 Burbage built the first permanent theatre in England for plays only (called 'The Theatre') at Finsbury Fields in London (Burns p.72). And it is with this development of what for us is recognisably 'a theatre' that we can clearly see what Burns above called 'the structural division between actors and audience'. We now need to consider such separations and divisions in detail in order to see their impact on utterance.

2.3

Theatrical Space

Turning to theatre space we find that Elam (1980) takes a lead from Goffman's concept of 'frame analysis' (1974). For Elam, what he calls the 'theatrical frame',

is in effect the product of a set of transactional conventions governing the participants' expectations and their understanding of the kinds of reality involved in the performance. The theatre-goer will accept that, at least in dramatic representation, an alternative and fictional reality is to be presented, by individuals designated as the performers, and that his own role with respect to that represented reality is to be a privileged 'onlooker'.

(p.88)

This division is reinforced by such markers as the stage, the dimming of lights, the curtain, the banging of wooden clappers (in Chinese theatre) etc. which give a more precise spatial and temporal definition to what is included and excluded from the frame (p.88).

Scolnicov (1987) is even more precise in her delineation of dramatic spatial organisation, specifying three areas: 'theatre space', 'theatrical space', and 'theatrical space without' (pp.8-13). Theatre space is essentially the physical space which encompasses both actors and audience, most commonly (in our culture) a building called a theatre. Theatrical space is most usually defined by the stage, but can extend to appropriate other parts of the theatre space - aisles, the entire audience etc. - if required. Actors further define the theatrical space through words, movement, gesture and the aid of props, scenery, lighting and acoustic effects, thus creating a space that is cut off from the everyday and that within its boundaries achieves freedom from the

everyday (p.12). This allows actors to discuss what is happening in some other place or to leave the surroundings for some distant place, all of which serves to extend the theatrical space, and all of which, in terms of performance, are very real spaces, though they remain unseen. This creates the 'theatrical space within' and the 'theatrical space without', the former being the concrete visible space on stage (perceived space), the latter being extrapolations of that space (conceived space) (p13). Such a clear laying out of performance space is easily recognisable to a present-day theatre-goer; the necessary structural division between performers and audience discussed earlier appears 'given' and generally is a necessary component of participants' expectations. But how did it come about?

Scolnicov notes the parallels between the severing of theatrical space from everyday space and the separation of sacred space from profane space. Drawing on Ernst Cassirer, she points out that the word 'temple' indicates this separation as it is derived from the Greek root 'tem' which means 'to cut' or 'to delimit' (p.12). A further etymological point, which stresses both space and performance, is made by Issachoroff; 'theatre' comes from the Greek *θεατρον*, which means 'seeing place' (1987:187). One more similar point comes from Harrison, who, when discussing the move from ritual to art in ancient Athens, notes, 'a *dromenon* became the drama, and we have seen the shift symbolised and expressed by the addition of the theatre or spectator-place to the *orchestra* or dancing-place' (in Burns 1972:24). Thus, from its inception, theatre involves the delimiting and cutting of spaces which divide the performers from the 'onlookers'.

In his discussion of classical Greek comedy Slater refers to the Theatre of Dionysos on the southern slope of the Acropolis in 5th century BCE Athens. This theatre, which served as a model for many others built thereafter throughout the Greek world, had three components: the *skene* (a low stage with a backdrop building), the *orchestra* (dancing place), and the *cavea* (seating place). This was not a tripartite space but 'a simple, unified, hieratic space, a place where the entire city of Athens came together to worship the god of theatre Dionysos' (p.1). Of interest for our purposes is that he makes no mention of sacred and profane, it all seems to be sacred space (unless he speaks metaphorically). Also, it is the orchestra which takes up the central place at this point (Figure 2), coming between the stage and the audience, a point which fits in with

his sacred interpretation as the orchestra is the space which had an altar in the centre. But for Scolnicov, the orchestra was simply 'a reminder of the sacred nature of the theatrical performance: it is a sacred circle transformed into a theatrical space' (p.13). She gives no time reference so perhaps her view does not contradict Slater's; she may well be speaking of the later development away from religious ritual. Either way, what we have seen here is already the formalised division between theatre space and theatrical space with distinct places and roles for the performers and audience. (The foregoing views, it should be pointed out, favour the ritual origins perspective of theatre development.)

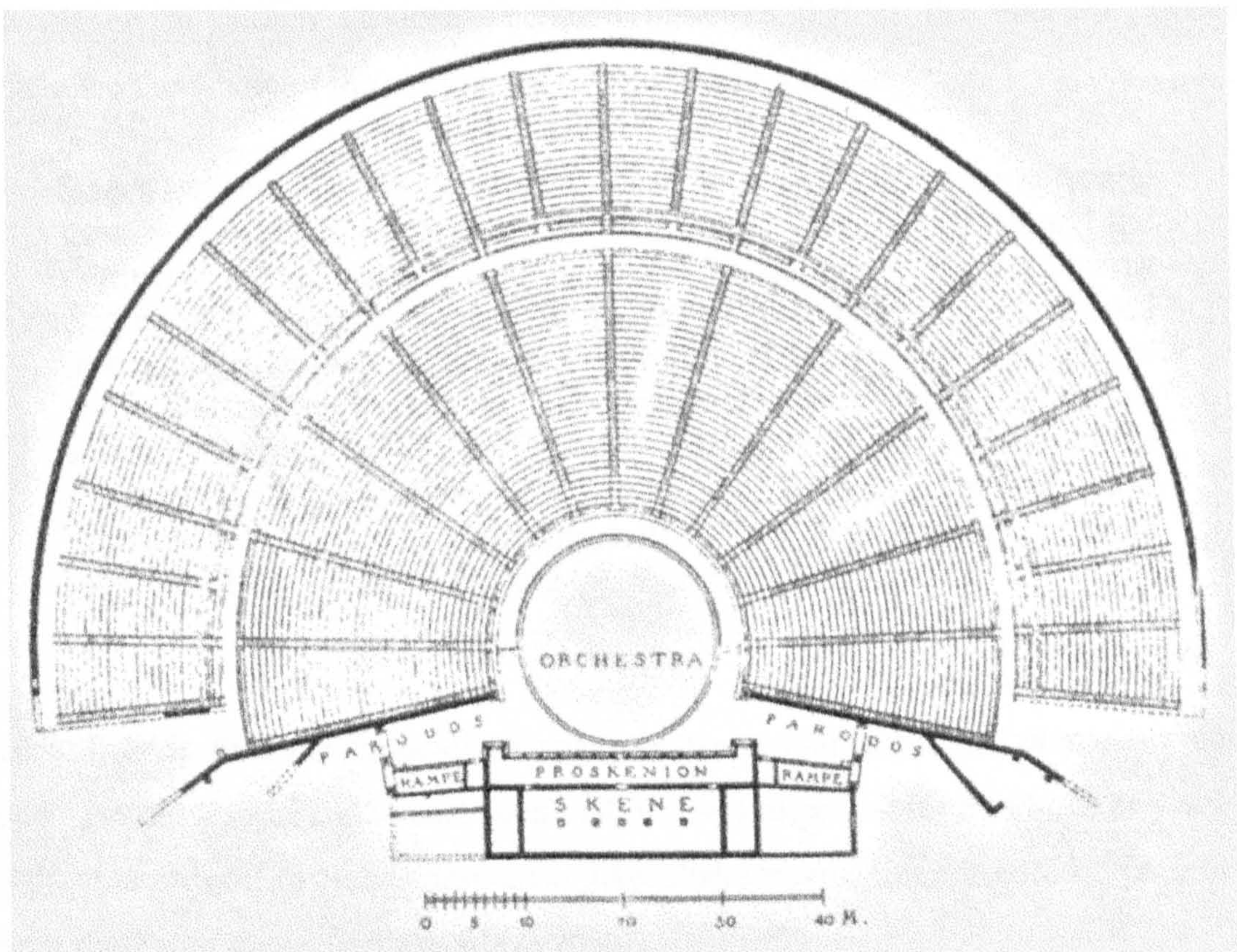


Fig. 2. Plan of the theatre at Epidauros c. 150 BCE. (Brockett 1995:42).

Roman theatres were different. Where Greek theatres had been built on hill-sides to accommodate the tiered audience i.e. they were a relatively natural, open space, Roman theatres were built on flat land with a surrounding wall of elaborately decorated masonry i.e. this was a more enclosed, and to a modern audience, familiar space. As there was no chorus the need for a dancing space (orchestra) disappeared. 'The focal point of the Roman theatre building was therefore the high stage, with tiers of benches in front and an elaborate stage wall, the *frons scaenae*, behind, often two

storeys high' (Hartnoll 1976:27). This raised stage looked back to the simple temporary platforms - the *phylakes* – used in southern Italy for farcical mime-plays, and forward to the raised stages used in dramatic performances from the medieval period onwards (pp.27-8).

However, we must not think that performance space was only formal and fixed. The itinerant performers of the interregnum between the collapse of Roman theatre and the start of liturgical tropes performed wherever there were people. Swortzell describes how '[t]he clown and his company, sometimes consisting of just his family, simply set up a small portable wooden platform and waited for a crowd to collect' (1978:26).

Moving on to church services, Bucknell observes that as the dramatic elements developed the whole of the church would be brought into use.

Stages (stages of the development of the story and the changing locale, usually referred to as 'houses' or 'mansions') were placed around the perimeter of the church and in its midst, allowing for continuous performance from one stage to the next. The player-clergy moved through the standing congregation from one defined place of action (as with Noh plays) to another. The mansions were simple structures symbolising such places as Heaven, the house of the Maries or the disciples, Emmaus, Galilee, Hell, or a jail, and so forth. They were most probably set up on little platforms, with a short flight of steps, up from the floor of the church to elevate the actor from his audience.

(1979:69)

Hartnoll adds that the unlocalised space between mansions (the *platea* – 'playing space') could also be put to use, such that it 'was to persist for hundreds of years and to prove so useful to future dramatists like Shakespeare, since it could represent any place the writer chose to make it' (1976:40).

The mingling of performance and audience which took place in churches also occurred in later theatrical developments outside the church in medieval England. One type of structure that was built was the Cornish round theatre in which actors were placed on different points on the raised perimeter and in the centre was a plateau, an arrangement of space notably different from the classical Greek or Roman theatre outline above. When the actors needed to interact they descended onto the plateau and the audience moved to accommodate them accordingly. Burns comments, 'Here the spectator must have become accustomed to constant forming and reforming of the boundaries of

illusions through conventions shared with the actors' (1972:73). That is, in Scolnicov's terms, both the theatre space and the theatrical space were, within one performance, not static but mobile, shifting spaces.

Later theatre design also had spatial conventions distinct from those of classical Greek theatre or from those of today. Burbage's 'Theatre', which was also in the round, had a stage which actors who were not dramatically present were not obliged to leave. They could remain visible but out of the play, ignored by an audience who knew the difference between perceived space and conceived space. Also, in the public theatres of the time (16th century) separate precincts, stage, and auditorium were allotted to the actors and audience, but to raise extra money spectators were allowed to buy stools on the stage. This sharing of the same physical space by the performers creating theatrical space and a selection of the audience sitting watching in theatre space continued in these theatres until the mid-18th century when Garrick drove such spectators off the stage in Drury Lane (Burns p.74). Thus, once more a clear distinction was made between space and roles for the actors and audience. And just as a further reminder of the variety of spaces it can be added here that formal theatres were not the only performance spaces. The *Commedia del'arte* from the mid-16th to the mid 18th century performed throughout Europe 'in a wide range of performance spaces from the streets and squares of towns, through hired rooms and halls, to the gardens, courtyards, great halls, and formal theatres of the nobility' (Richards & Richards 1990:1).

But to return to formal theatres, the differences between theatre space and theatrical space were also defined by developments in theatre design. According to Hartnoll, two of the major innovations spread outwards from Renaissance Italy from the late 15th century onwards. 'The first is the form of the new theatre building, with its proscenium arch, and the second is the development of painted scenery' (1976:52). In England in the early 17th century the proscenium arch was introduced into some theatres and Inigo Jones arranged the normally free-standing props and scenery according to the receding perspective of landscape. In these theatres the theatrical space was not framed solely by the action but also by the scenery and the physical boundaries of the stage and proscenium arch. Thereafter the forestage dwindled to the extent that theatres built from the 20th century onwards are designed without one. 'The

curtain is drawn to disclose a picture' (Burns p.75). Audience and picture are clearly separate.

The later development of moving pictures gave us cinema and television, two media which provide an even greater separation of performer and audience. For the first time the performers and audience were actually separate in time and space. The relationship of such audiences to the performance before them differs from that of a live audience and the significant details of this will be taken up in Section 8.

We have seen that at certain times particular theatre designs and conventions allowed for flexibility in the relationship between theatre space and theatrical space and yet the idea of performance did not lose its meaning or identity for the audience as audience awareness of spatial conventions has, necessarily, been there from the beginning. In her study of the spatial semantics of mediaeval theatre, King (after Twycross) points out that even when the drama left the confines of the church building (theatre space) in the form of processional plays which paraded through the everyday space of the streets, even then 'despite the lack of physical separation, the actors are still inhabitants of the world of the play, the audience still onlookers. The illusion is not broken' (1987:46-7). On this point Elam has noted that post-war performers and directors such as the Becks and Schechner have extended the bounds of the performance to include the audience explicitly (p.34). This idea was taken yet further by Peter Handke in his *Sprechstuck* (not 'play') 'Offending The Audience' (1966), in which four speakers (not 'actors') stand on a bare stage and address the audience directly in a fully lit auditorium. One of them comments:

There is no invisible circle here. There is no magic circle. There is no room for play here. We are not playing, we are all in the same room. The demarcation line has not been penetrated, it is not pervious, it doesn't even exist.

(in Scolnicov pp.24-5)

Handke refuses to repeat the divisions in actor/audience space and roles dealt with above and which are commonly seen as the defining elements of theatrical performance. He deliberately desecrates such notions. Scolnicov remarks on this foregrounding of space in certain contemporary dramas thus: 'Space is no longer a

mere environment in which the protagonists move. It has become a theatrical object in its own right' (pp.24-5)

Such reflexive elements need not always be dealt with so weightily, however. Woody Allen in his drama 'God (A Play)' presents the following dialogue.

WRITER: As long as man is a rational animal, as a playwright, I cannot have a character do anything on stage he wouldn't do in real life.

ACTOR: May I remind you that we don't exist in real life.

W: What do you mean?

A: You are aware that we are characters in a play right now in some Broadway theater? Don't get mad at me, I didn't write it.

W: We're characters in a play and soon we're going to see my play...which is a play within a play. And they're watching us.

A: Yes, it's highly metaphysical, isn't it?

W: Not only is it metaphysical, it's stupid!

A: Would you rather be one of them?

W: (*Looking at audience*) Definitely not. Look at them.

(Allen 1982:109)

Nor is this new. Swortzell observes that some of the comedic characters of the Commedia del'arte would, as part of their role, ignore the play and casually chat with the audience until hustled away by the other performers (1978:78).

However, Scolnicov also notes that such attempts cannot succeed in their aims because their 'as if' activities cuts them off from everyday space. (In Handke: there were still paid actors on stage speaking scripted words to a fee-paying audience who watched from their seats in the auditorium.) For example, street theatre may repudiate theatre space by going outside but it carries its theatrical space around with it, a point made in different terms above by King about medieval procession plays: the illusion is not broken. However, the illusion can be broken, but if it is then the performance breaks down and, however briefly, ceases to be a theatrical performance. (It may become a

performance of another kind, of course.) To give an example of this takes us on to the next point to be discussed, the performer-audience relationship.

2.4

Performer And Audience Interaction

The breaking of the illusion can be illustrated by the following anecdote from a member of a present-day theatre audience.

I once saw Nichol Williamson play Macbeth at Stratford. During the floating dagger scene, when all was hushed in anticipation of the soliloquy, someone belched. Though the audience controlled itself, Williamson didn't. Sitting down on a stool, he began to lecture the audience about how he was not going to be distracted from delivering one of the greatest speeches in English drama. It was a bizarre moment, because he'd broken the spell, making you want to pinch yourself, to check that it was really happening.

(Ball 1998:35)

A number of observations can be made here. Clearly both sides – actors and audience – must work together to maintain the theatrical frame, 'the illusion'. When one side refuses, the theatrical performance ceases, even if only momentarily. When Nichol Williamson stepped out of the role of Macbeth, he dissolved theatrical space into theatre space and became himself, Nichol Williamson, who then gave a lecture, a different kind of performance. This caused the audience, who were still maintaining the theatrical frame, to look upon someone who was speaking as his real self as something so unbelievable that (at least) one of them wanted to pinch himself to check that it was really happening, whereas had that person on stage continued to pretend to be a Scottish nobleman from centuries ago, that would have been eminently believable. Reality and illusion have been reversed. This is because the theatrical frame is a finely-balanced social construction with many delicate components, a construct which something as trivial as a belch can throw into disequilibrium.

These cultural roles involved in theatrical events have to be learned. As well as being aware of spatial conventions, audiences must know about and use other organisational cues – curtains, lighting, bells etc. – to help them know when to attend to the dramatic action. But audiences must also know when to disattend to extra-textual 'noise' such

as late arrivals, malfunctions, the sighting of stage-hands and, as we have seen, audience noises. Another disattendance is to see the performer-performer interaction as a model for face-to-face social intercourse. Real conversation and scripted dialogue differ significantly. In scripted discourse we find, unlike in real conversation, neat turn-taking, syntactically complete sentences, semantic coherence even in larger units, the blind aside etc. (Elam 1980:90). Fischer-Lichte (1984), when discussing utterances in dramatic performance (as opposed to the literary dramatic text), comments that such dialogue 'not only signifies a situation of direct communication but simulates it'. This means that such utterances are 'performed in linguistic as well as paralinguistic, mimial, gestic and/or proxemic signs. The persons on the stage use the same sign systems as are commonly used in conversation' (p.139). However, 'the dramatic dialogue is not to be considered a mere reproduction of everyday conversation, but it uses the reproduction in order to create a special aesthetic meaning' (p.163). The audience is aware of these differences but does its own cultural work of disattendance to such matters (Elam 1980:90).

There are two points to be made here. Firstly, such utterances are seen as somehow special, as having some kind of performative licence. Secondly, this does not mean that such talk inhabits some ethereal realm divorced from social life or is without social consequences. The social reception of performed utterances is one of the key features in a pragmatic consideration of humour and there will be a number of occasions when this issue will arise again – in 3.2 and 6.1, and particularly in Section 8.

However, as such frames can be both differently defined and learned in different cultures, disattendance may prove difficult in some circumstances. For example, Western observers may be irritated by the open intrusion of stage hands in Chinese theatre or find the authenticity of a Kabuki representation not easily accessible (Elam p.90). A clear example of this latter point is the simple fact that the Kabuki actor Nakamura Ganjiro III (b.1935) has been performing the role of an eighteen-year-old female in 'Love-Suicides At Sonezaki' since 1953, something which would hardly be credible in western theatre. Another point on disattendance, the programme for a performance of this play in London in 2001 (starring the sixty-six year old male as an eighteen year old female) had a notice inserted explaining the nature of *kakegoe*, the

calls from the audience made while the performance is in progress. It ends: 'These calls add to the atmosphere of a Kabuki performance. Please do not be alarmed' (Sadler's Wells 2001). And, further, where a belch can bring a Shakespeare production to a halt in Stratford, in Gimi ritual theatre in New Guinea the audience is free to interject comments when they feel like it: 'In a drama concerning a triangular love affair a man in the audience addresses the ugly husband: "I'd like to marry that lovely girl. You can't have her!" The audience erupts into laughter' (Gillison 1983:157). (We will see in the next section how comedic performance can play with these notions of attendance/disattendance.)

Even when there is a happy cultural correspondence between performance and audience and the roles on all sides are adhered to, this does not guarantee that a writer's or performer's meanings will always be understood. Carlson (1989) talks of audiences 'reading' a performance and uses Eco's semiotic perspective of reader response, which involves the ideas of 'model reader' and 'open' and 'closed' texts. The model reader is 'supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them' (Eco in Carlson p.84). Closed texts aim at generating a precise response from a more or less precise group of empirical readers, whereas open texts give fewer and fewer specific response indications and are increasingly open. Paradoxically, open texts are often less accessible than closed ones (p.84). It is in this generation and interpretation of meaning that Issacharoff sees an interplay of space and utterance: 'stage utterances can shape the way we perceive the context [space] of their occurrence. In its turn, context lends meaning or may modify meaning considerably' (1987:187). For example, Nell and Nagg from Beckett's 'Endgame'. They live in dustbins and thus all their utterances are framed by these, giving their discourse a tragicomic flavour (p.187). King also sees these connections and refers to the sophisticated contract between play and audience as the generator of meaning and she talks of, 'what is, effectively, the contribution of the use of space to the semantics of the play. Thus, it is an audience's laughter which defines the joke, and failure to laugh can determine the level of a comedic performance' (1987:47). Indeed, this has to be the case if a performance is to work as a performance. There needs to be not only what Elam calls 'organisational and cognitive principles' (p.87) at work in a recognisable cultural context but there must also be conscious interaction between the performers and the audience.

It has been shown in the foregoing section that in various cultures at various times a clearly defined performance space developed in which people performed and outside of which others watched. This space has taken a variety of forms – amphitheatres, wooden stools, churches, a hut normally used as living quarters, stages with a proscenium arch, a room in a pub, the street. It was also seen that the audience/performer relationship is a learned, cultural dynamic which allows appropriate attendance/disattendance behaviour. Thus it is acceptable in some cultures for audience members to participate in performed dramas (New Guinea) whereas in others it is not (the bench at Stratford). This in turn depends on the type of performance given, so that, for example, at stand-up comedy performances in the UK, in contrast to a performance of Shakespeare, audiences are required to participate and there are mechanisms to facilitate this. This is heavily bound up with the nature of comedy and the comic performer, to whom it is now time to turn.

3.

THE COMIC FIGURE

Having established as clearly as we can the structural divisions of performance space and the way in which the behaviour within that space is assigned a meaning by the audience outside the space, we now attempt to identify a specific cultural character who performs in that space. The aim here is to identify as best we can the performer whose primary function is to amuse, whom we shall refer to simply as 'the comic figure'. This will mainly involve individuals performing in their own right e.g. the court jester, but it will also take in mythical characters such as tricksters and dramatic characters such as the Harlequin figure made popular by the Commedia del'Arte. Comic figures have appeared in such a wide variety of guises in different times and places that it is necessary to begin with a look at some of the terms that have been used to discuss them.

3.1

Some Basic Notions

In the introduction to her encyclopaedia of clowns and tricksters Christen highlights some of the problems of the use of these two terms. (The term 'trickster' was first used in Brinton's 1868 work 'Myths of the New World' to describe the complex figure of Native American mythology and folklore (Christen 1998:ix, Pelton 1980:6).) She notes that Makarius distinguishes between the two terms by suggesting that tricksters are mythic figures and clowns their earthly counterparts. (in Christen p.ix), but Christen herself gives an example which uses 'clown' in both areas.

Although in western cultures the term *clown* may conjure up images of carnivals and foolish characters running around beeping horns...[i]n other cultures clowns hold privileged positions in religious ceremonies as well as important places in myths of origin. For example, the K'apyo Shure clowns of the Isleta Pueblo in the south-western US used their horns to lead people from the underworld out of darkness and into the upper world of lightness.

(p.xiii)

She also points out the changing attitudes of scholars to these characters over the years, with some earlier studies seeing cultures that possessed such figures as primitive, inferior, or childlike e.g. Radin (1956), Jung (1956), while others wish to get rid of

these terms altogether as they mask and misrepresent the uniqueness of the original characters e.g. Beidelman (1960/70s) and Sabbotocci (all in Christen p.x). Babcock-Abrahams (1970/80s)), on the other hand, sees the terms as expansive categories and she believes they, along with 'jester' and 'fool', cover a wide variety of cultural types from around the world (in Christen p.xii). Williams, too, makes such connections: 'the fool and the trickster, far from being utterly separate identities, resemble each other to a marked degree...[and] if not exactly the same animal...show signs of belonging to the same species' (1979:1). Recent studies which use play and laughter as analytical categories through which tricksters and clowns can be examined and interpreted e.g. Hynes and Doty (1995) seek to counter the seriousness of western intellectualism which can lead to a mistreatment or dismissal of such figures (in Christen p.xii). Janik (1998) discusses a wider range of terms - *fool, clown, jester, joker, buffoon, trickster* – and notes that the most common present-day meanings see 'jesters as verbally witty, buffoons as stupid, clowns as common circus figures providing visual foolery, and fools as dupes' (p.2). That is, such terms can be used to describe a different set of characters. However, in line with the general tenor of this dissertation, all these terms – 'clown', 'trickster', 'fool', 'jester', and others – will be used *inclusively* as examples of 'the comic figure'. This is not to indiscriminately conflate them but to point up their common thread of being performers who amuse.

It is clear that such figures are distributed throughout most if not all cultures (Christen's encyclopaedia lists over 180 such figures from all parts of the world) and that one of their primary functions is to elicit amusement. Pelton has it that trickster figures 'appear in all parts of the world in hunting and fishing, pastoral and agricultural societies at every stage of religious development' (1980:5). With a broad stroke Radin sweeps across a huge expanse of time and space when discussing the trickster myth:

We encounter it among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the Japanese, and in the Semitic world. Many of the trickster's traits were perpetuated in the figure of the medieval jester, and have survived right up to the present day in the Punch-and-Judy plays and in the clown.

(1956:ix)

Pelton is clear that in the attempts to create 'a secular sacredness' and to make the world human the trickster often fails and his failures inspire *amusement*. Ricketts

would add, 'in laughing at him men are set free for they are laughing at themselves...and in the end he saves them through their laughter' (in Pelton 1980:9-10). Jung also comments that 'the trickster has been a source of amusement right down to civilised times, where he can still be recognised in the carnival figures of Pulcinella and the clown' (1956:204). And for Radin also, amusement has always been a primary function of the trickster:

Laughter, humour, and irony permeate everything Trickster does. The reaction of the audience in aboriginal societies to both him and his exploits is prevailingly one of laughter tempered with awe. There is no reason for believing this is secondary or a late development.
(1956:x)

Such figures invariably have a complex character. They often do things backwards, out of sequence or use illusion and deception to get their way (Christen p.xiii). The Native American trickster can also be so unconscious of his own self that his body is not a unity so that his two hands can fight with one another, he can use his anus as an eye to keep watch while he sleeps, become a woman and bear children, and use his penis to make all kinds of useful plants. 'This is a reference to his original nature as Creator, for the world is made from the body of god' (Jung 1956:203). As well as being the slayer of monsters, the thief of daylight, fire, water, and the teacher of cultural skills and customs, the trickster

is also a prankster who is grossly erotic, insatiably hungry, inordinately vain, deceitful and cunning towards friends as well as foes; a restless wanderer upon the face of the earth; and a blunderer who is often the victim of his own tricks and follies.

(Ricketts in Pelton p.7)

In Europe such figures also have an ancient tradition. Brown cites Hephaestus, Hermes, and Prometheus from Greek mythology and notes that they 'have different characters as well as different roles in myth, they all revel in trickery and cunning. They are all creative, bringing forth marvellous inventions, including language, music, mathematics, agriculture, and many other boons to humans' (1998:244).

In an attempt to bring order to such complexity, Janik, in her discussion of 'fools', offers a taxonomy. She recognises the dangers in this – oversimplification, inflexibility etc.– and so insists that these categories will overlap in some cases.

1. The wise fool.

- A. perceives and acknowledges his own weaknesses and desires
- B. perceives and acknowledges the weaknesses and desires of others

2. The dupe or victim.

- A. perceives and acknowledges his own desires
- B. does not perceive the weaknesses and desires of others

3. The trickster or evil-doer

- A. does not perceive his own weaknesses
- B. perceives and acknowledges the weaknesses and desires of others

4. The innocent or holy fool.

- A. does not perceive his own weaknesses and desires
- B. does not perceive the weaknesses and desires of others.

This is a comprehensive formulation and one which at a stroke can be used to make significant comic connections across cultures and times. For example, this categorisation is almost the same as that of the four stock characters from the Atellan farce which preceded and inspired Plautus in ancient Rome. (Godfrey 1998:344) These were: Maccus, the natural fool or innocent (Janik's 4), Bucco, the glutton and Dossennus, the cunning hunchback who tricks others (both Janik's 3), and Pappus, the naïve old man (Janik's 2). Janik's own example of her four categories in action, however, comes not from a time BCE but from 20th century America – a Marx Brothers film. In such you have, in order, 1. The wise fool, Groucho, 'who knows his own acquisitiveness as well as the fanciful desires of others'. 2. The dupe or victim, Margaret Dumont, 'who understands only her own romantic feelings and not the world of avarice and trickery surrounding her'. 3. The trickster or evil-doer, Chico, 'the trickster breaking the rules in order to gain a prize, perhaps a pretty girl, money, or

huge piles of food'. 4. The innocent or holy fool, Harpo, 'who does not know how to manipulate the world, but when he acts the world offers him success anyway' (p.3).

Despite the complexity and contrariness of such figures (in some Native American tribes they are referred to as 'contraries' rather than 'clowns') they remain recognisable, says Jung, because they are a collective personification and not an individual outgrowth and so are 'welcomed by the individual as something known to him' (1956:201).

However, it would be misleading to believe that it is possible to simply extract the humorous aspect from these figures' behaviours and imagine we still had the measure of them. The emphasis of this study *is* humour but the tricksters' and clowns' complexity is such that it is not always apparent to the outside observer precisely which aspects of their characters can be interpreted as humorous. For this reason we need to look in more detail at some specific examples. All of these come from the Native American cultures of the Southwest United States (see Illustration 1).

Among the Zuni there are various clown societies, the Mudheads and the Neweekwe to name but two. The latter are more ill-tempered and fearless than the former yet are considered the wisest people in the pueblo. They are a curative society and membership is gained when someone (in fact, a male) with a stomach ailment seeks help from the Neweekwe Medicine Society. (There is a curative connection here with Kirby's (1974) ideas about the shamanistic origins of popular entertainment.) 'Neweekwe knowledge not only cures stomach aches but also enables clowns to eat any kind or amount of food or garbage, including excrement, and to engage in outrageous public behaviour' (Tedlock 1992:13). Kirby also notes that in shamanistic performances, where there is an attempt to make the real 'more real' or 'surreal' in order to demonstrate 'supernatural' physical abilities, elements of either illusionary or real danger will be introduced. 'It is for this reason that Zuni clowns will kill and dismember a dog or drink urine in the course of their activities' (1974:14). Stevenson, making an ethnological report in 1904, provides even greater detail, observing that the Neweekwe 'bite off the heads of living mice and chew them, tear dogs limb from limb, eat the intestines and fight over the liver like hungry wolves' (in Jacobson 1997:73).

(Tedlock, who lived with the Zuni for twenty years, calls her study of them 'The Beautiful and The Dangerous'.)



Illus. 1. Clowns, San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico c. 1935. (Jacobson 1997).

While these may seem to be extreme and exceptional examples, it is not difficult to cite related scenes in comedies from our own culture. For example, the old staple of the inevitable consequences of the appearance of the specimen glass in the doctor's surgery: according to John Lahr, the biggest single laugh in the history of the American stage – sixty-two seconds - came when his father, Bert Lahr, in a scene at the doctor's, filled the glass with whiskey and handed it back to the doctor (in Jacobson p.75). We can also note the preferred breakfast drink of Harvey in BBC TV's comedy 'League of Gentleman': 'Full of nitrates and enzymes. A natural antibiotic' (Dyson et al 1999). There are also numerous examples of cruelty to animals, for example, in such comedies as Monty Python's 'Holy Grail' (farm animals used as missiles), 'A Fish Called Wanda' (squashed dogs), 'There's Something About Mary'

(electrocuted dog), or the catalogue of inadvertent atrocities perpetrated by the grossly incompetent vet, Dr. Chinnery, in (again) 'League of Gentlemen'.

However, this is not to say that these performative events in the different societies mentioned have the same meaning for their respective audiences.. To understand them we need to be aware of what Douglas [1968] (1975) calls the 'full pattern of relationships' involved in each interaction. Without a full cultural contextualisation we cannot say that a Zuni clown biting the head off a mouse functions in Zuni culture the same way in which a cinematic or television dramatisation of, for example, a dog being squashed beneath a concrete block functions in our society. Similarly, Bakhtin notes the use of excrement and urine in European culture from ancient times – excrement throwing is described in Aeschylus' 'The Collector Of Bones' – to such events as the medieval religious festival 'The Feast Of Fools', in which clergy used excrement instead of incense. He makes the point, however, that such uses were ambivalent and were intimately connected with the other lower bodily function of regeneration. If such an 'essential link' is not made, then the death-birth pairing loses its relation to the whole and excrement and urine 'retain the merely negative aspect, and that which they represent (defecation, urination) acquires a trivial meaning, our own contemporary meaning of those words' (1984:147-50). Nevertheless, we can note that all these events share the characteristics of having licensed transgressors involved in violent taboo-breaking in a form that is appropriate to the local context.

Fine, in his study of obscene joking across cultures, points to another function of such clowns, a point hinted at above by Tedlock in her discussion of Neweekwe performances. Fine notes that clowns express behaviours which many tribe members (at least unconsciously) would like to engage in: the Wakchumni clowns burlesque sexual intercourse, the Ponca clowns attempt to touch women's genitals in broad daylight. All of this 'relieves the psychodynamic pressure on the rest of the tribe' (1976:138). It is not difficult to see that this concurs with the ideas of humour providing relief discussed in Section 1. But not all the clowns' activities are comprehensible in terms of humour alone. Parsons and Beals studied the Mayo-Yaqui tribes and noted a wide variety of functions of their clowns.

In general the clowns have a punitive and policing function in ceremonial matters and through their licence in speech and song a

somewhat similar function in domestic matters, ridicule being a strong weapon among the Pueblos...[Also] the clown groups have direct weather control and fertility functions. As scouts or war dance assistants the clowns have war dance functions. In short, through their police power, their magical power and their licence in conduct, all fear-inspiring characteristics, social regulation is an outstanding function of the clown groups.

(1934:449)

Nor need this hard edge of clowning be seen as exceptional. Jenkins reports the role of a clown figure at the head of a historic political march in Pretoria in 1992. Over 100,000 black demonstrators marched to the buildings housing the offices of President de Klerk where Nelson Mandela demanded majority rule. The clown wore the khaki uniform of the African National Congress' military branch and carried a painted wooden toy machine gun. 'The comic commando performed dazzling flips, rolls, and somersaults, but always managed to land in a combat-ready position with his machine gun ready to fire. His feistiness tickled the audience into laughter and applause' (1998:420). Jenkins elsewhere notes the conscious use of political clowning by the San Francisco Mime Troupe in the 1960s and a continuation of that tradition into the 1980s and beyond by such groups as The Big Apple Circus, The Pickle Family Circus, and The Flying Karamazov Brothers, whose acts engage with 'the tyranny of mass media, technological dehumanisation, political subterfuge, social alienation, [and] rampant consumerism' (1988:xi). (The aim here is to highlight the socio-political functions of clowns within these respective societies and not to suggest that the meanings of these functions can be seen as being the same across these different cultures.)

Before moving on to look at the comic figure in history, it is worth lingering briefly to take note of an idea mentioned explicitly by Parsons and Beals above and implicitly by the other descriptions of comic figures, the idea of *licence*. It has been shown that the structural division of performance gives marked space and roles to both performer and audience. It is also now becoming clear that the performing comic figure's role involves not simply the opportunity to appear before an audience but that this role also provides a licence to transgress, that is, to be publicly sexually explicit, eat excrement, kill dogs, be an idiot, cheat, lie and so on, activities which would normally induce social censure. We will have an opportunity to discuss in detail some of the problems

of licence below in 5.1 and 5.2, a foretaste of which can be had from comedian Scott Capurro when he says, 'it's not my job to find anyone's comfort zones. I don't give a shit what people like, or think they like, or want to like' (2000:138). It will be seen that this issue will also have a role to play in the detailed discussion of the disputed utterance in Section 8.

3.2

The Comic Figure In History

Swortzell dates the first appearance of a 'clown' as 2270 BCE in the reign of Pepi II, a pharaoh of the Egyptian 6th dynasty. This was a captured slave, possibly a pygmy, whose dancing was, so said the merchant who purchased him, guaranteed to delight (1978:8-9). However, Welsford places the fool Danga at the court of Dadkeri-Assi, a pharaoh of the previous dynasty (1935:61). She also notes that in classical Greece there were professional buffoons and parasites, men who would receive free meals in return for their skills in repartee and mimicry. 'Parasites and laughter-makers abounded at the courts of Philip and Alexander and other rich potentates of the Hellenic world' (p.4). Swortzell provides more details. 'Parasite' simply meant 'guest', and parasites were wandering entertainers who could sing, dance, joke, juggle, tumble and converse (1978:9). Bremmer relates an episode from Xenophon's *Symposion* concerning a social gathering which Socrates attended. A buffoon, Philip, who had entered uninvited, interrupted the feast by mimicking and parodying the dancers. But when he was about to impersonate certain individuals, Socrates politely enjoined him to be reticent on such matters (1997:11-2).

Bremmer makes two points of further interest: this performance by Philip 'did not take place in public space, as is the case with most modern entertainers [but] during a *symposion* [banquet] in...the so-called *andron*, which was the one room in the house to which male non-family members had access' (pp.12-3). Secondly, such people as Philip may have used joke books. Evidence for this comes from, amongst others, the Roman writer of comedies, Plautus, who mentions them in some of his works (p.16). (The Romans, too, had their fools; Welsford mentions Gabba, the buffoon of Emperor Augustus (p.7)). The oldest surviving Greek joke book was produced not later than the sixth century CE (Bremmer p.17). This second point will arise again in the discussion

of stand-up comedians below, but the first point can be dealt with here as it raises the issue of the identity of the buffoon, and fools in general. It is not always easy to distinguish clearly between their characters in performance and their social selves. That is, when they attended social gatherings (in what was usually a private space) they attended as themselves, or when they were kept as fools they were kept as themselves, rather than, say, as an actor who could perform as a variety of characters. This is another point we shall have occasion to return to as it is a further issue involved in the dispute to be analysed in Section 8.

Talk of actors brings us to the comedy plays of the classical world, particularly the characters they created. The Greek Menander (342-292 BCE) provided a host of comic characters, some of which became stock and have lasted well e.g. the braggart soldier carried on through to Falstaff (Swortzell 1978:14); the tricky slave is a comic character that continued right up to (at least) the 1970s in the figure of the slave played by Frankie Howerd in BBC television's 'Up Pompeii!' The foolish servants re-appeared in many places most notably perhaps in the Commedia del'arte's two *zanni* (from which the English 'zany' (Swortzell p.48)) and, more recently, is recognisable in Manuel of the television sitcom 'Fawlty Towers'. The Roman comedy writer Plautus (c.254-184 BCE) continued and extended such stock characters and they in turn inspired later playwrights: the miser, borrowed by Ben Jonson, the identical twin brothers in Shakespeare's 'Comedy of Errors' (p.17). Godfrey notes that the successful stage play/film of the 1960s, 'A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum', which concerns a cunning slave who plots his freedom in ancient Rome, draws names, plots, and situations from many of Plautus' plays (1998:349).

In the earlier discussion of performance space it was seen how after the collapse of Rome theatrical skills were carried on with wandering entertainers. 'In the market place or wherever they could gather a crowd, two or three of the mimes would entertain their public with songs, stories, dances, juggling tricks, acrobatics and clowning...' (Swortzell p.1). These were the same set of skills exhibited by the buffoons and parasites in Greece and Rome, and they were carried on through and beyond the 10th and 11th centuries by jongleurs and troubadours (pp.4-6) and by the Commedia del'Arte from 16th-18th centuries (Richards and Richards (1990:12), right through the music halls to today's circuses and street performers. Fairs, common

throughout Europe, for centuries provided a platform for the exhibition of such skills e.g. Bartholomew Fair in London, which lasted from the 12th to 19th century (McKechnie 1931:29-30).

Perhaps the best-known comic figure of the medieval and early modern period is the court jester or fool. Welsford tells us that during the stability after the Wars of the Roses in England the Tudor courts were plentifully provided with fools (p.158). She gives an example of performer/audience interaction between Henry VIII and his popular fool Will Somers which is worth taking up. A favourite amusement of theirs was improvising verse and capping one another's rhymes. As Henry, Somers and Cardinal Wolsey were riding past a place where Henry had a lover, Henry challenged Somers thus:

Within yon tower
There is a flower
That hath my heart

Somers' reply was 'unprintable' and Wolsey admonished him:

A rod in the school
And a whip for the fool
Are always in season

Somers instantly retorted:

A halter and rope
For him that would be pope
Against all right and reason

'at which Wolsey bit his lip' (p.167). This is of interest not only for the interaction at work here – who is the audience, who the performer? - but also for two other points. The first one has been mentioned earlier – that of *licence*. Comic figures throughout history have been granted permission by their audiences to transgress and this is a supreme example of such - a fool openly making fun of the two most powerful men in the country to their faces. (When Henry later had Wolsey beheaded he invited Wolsey's fool, Patch, to come and join his cousin Somers at court (Swortzell 1978:33). That is, a cardinal's transgression results in death, and his servant, a professional transgressor, is promoted.) The second point concerns comic persona, an issue already raised when buffoons and parasites were discussed. In this example Somers is Somers; in his role as fool he is performing for the king, yet they are out riding as part of their

social life together (Somers familiarly addressed the king as 'Harry' (Jacobson 1997:169)). It is difficult to be precise about where Somers' comic identity begins and ends. Welsford put it more succinctly when discussing Tarlton, Elizabeth I's jester: 'whereas Burbage [a renowned actor of the day] ceased to be Hamlet when the play was over, Tarlton was Tarlton both on and off the stage' (p.312). These are both key points and we shall have occasion to return to them.

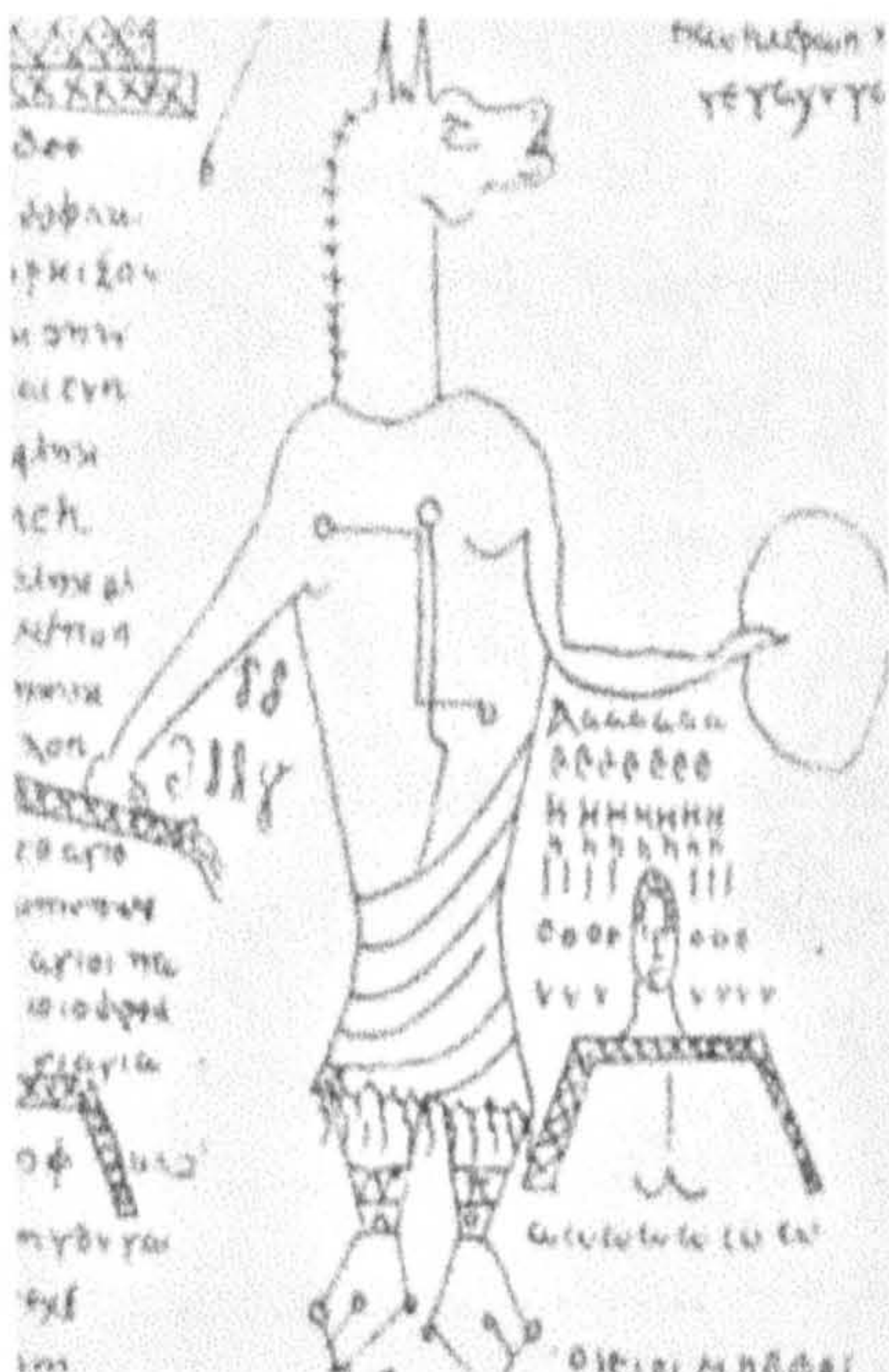
The discussion is at a point in history from which many pictorial representations of fools have come down to us. Swortzell describes the costume of the medieval fool in Italy as consisting of a hooded cap with ass's ears attached. He carried a stick (a *marotte*) which had a fool's head carved on one end; some fools held conversations with this head, others tied a bean bag to it (1978:32). Gifford (1979) studied fool imagery from the 13th-15th centuries and found that the common traits were that they carried a stick or club in the right hand, a disc in the left, and wore a cap with bells. 15th century images also show an ass-eared head dress. He then makes an interesting conjecture that traces such features back to ancient Egypt. He notes that late Roman curse-tablets (390-420 CE) show drawings of the god Seth-Typhon, who has an ass-eared head, a stick in his right hand and a disc in his left. Seth-Typhon originated in Egypt centuries before this; Gifford wonders if such striking similarities to the fool's features are merely coincidental. What is not conjectural is that the present-day comedian Ken Dodd has exhibited similar features. (See Illustrations 2a-c.) His stage persona at times involves having his hair shaped into one, sometimes two or three, thick spikes projecting from his head not unlike the spikes of a fool's cap or ass's ears. More famously, he often carries in his right hand his 'tickling stick' (usually a feather duster), and when asked about this on a television special dedicated to him, he answered directly that it was a jester's prop (Dodd 2001). In the music hall television show 'The Good Old Days', he dons a genuine fool's cap with three large spikes, telling the audience that is what comedians wore many years before (Davies 2000). As for the common denominator of the stick carried by these figures, Jacobson has little doubt about its significance:

Herakles has his club. Harlequin his *batte*. Grimaldi his stove-poker.
Punch his universal cudgel. The jester his *marotte* and bladder. Ken
Dodd's tickling stick is clearly in the ithyphallic tradition. Similarly

Chaplin's cane, pursuing an independent life of its own, finding its own way up the dress of a passing *ingenue*.

(1997:47-8)

This matter of dress and appearance is of some significance in comic traditions and is another point that will be returned to for, as Bogatyrev points out, costume is not simply a material object, it is also a sign (1989:13) – in this case a sign of the licensed transgressor.



Illus. 2a.
Roman depiction of Seth-Typhon
340-420 CE (Gifford 1979:30)



Illus. 2b.
15th century jester
(Gifford p.21)



Illus. 2c.
Ken Dodd
(Publicity material n.d.)

Before moving on to consider the two final manifestations of the comic figure to be dealt with in this study– the modern clown and the stand-up comedian – it should be pointed out that it has not always been only people designated as performers who have been given licence for outrageous behaviour. Fairs and carnivals have already been mentioned and these were social gatherings at which anyone could indulge themselves in food and drink and behave out of character. There were also ‘feasts’. Bucknell names The Feast of the Boy Bishop, The Feast of Fools, and the Feast of the Asses as regular festivals held in England and France. He believes they were based on the old Roman Saturnalia feast in which ‘the masters and servants changed roles’ (1979:70).

On such occasions boys became bishops for a day, arriving on a donkey; clerics were baptised with buckets of water; priests and clerics danced grotesquely in church and behaved obscenely (pp.70-1), and, as we saw above (3.1.), clergymen used excrement instead of incense (Bakhtin 1984). Jacobson notes, 'In the Feast of Fools it was the clergy who wore masks or blacked their faces or dressed as women...[and] in carnival the masquerade is universal. No distinction is made between watchers and watched; everyone participates' (1997:197-8). Clearly, though, such events were special calendrical events, like April Fool's day today, and for the rest of the time it was indeed performers who performed and audiences who watched.

At the beginning of this section Christen distinguished between tribal clowns and the modern conception of the clown. Here the latter will be given attention. The figure of the clown that is most commonly recognised – the painted-faced bumbler in the circus – is most closely associated in origin with Joseph Grimaldi (Illustration 3b). In eighteenth century England Harlequin was a popular comic figure but Welsford dates the change from this to the modern clown figure precisely as Grimaldi's performance in *Mother Goose* at Christmas 1805, a performance 'which diminished the vogue of Harlequin [Illustration 3a] and was the beginning of a new development of the art of clownage' (p.309). She then traces the clown figure through various stages after this: in the circus, music halls (Dan Leno, for example – Illustration 3c), silent movies (Chaplin, Keaton) to the Marx Brothers. McKechnie also gives similar due to Grimaldi, crediting him with the creation of the modern clown's make-up and costume, noting the latter was a blend of the French Pierrot and the old English jester (1931:108). Grimaldi's new clown character was named 'Joey' and had characteristics comparable to those of the trickster:

Joey was a clown with an insatiable appetite – gobbling down countless strings of sausages, ropes of macaroni, trays of tarts, bowls of pudding, innumerable oysters – and a bit of a drunkard as well... Joey was also an accomplished and indiscriminate thief. Pies and legs of mutton, lighted candles and bottles of water vanished into his bottomless pockets with sleight of hand unmatched since until the advent of Harpo Marx.

(Swortzell 1978:111)

It is worth momentarily staying with Harpo simply to note that Esslin makes an even greater link across time with him, connecting him to the mime play of antiquity. (1968:320), and saying of the Marx Brothers as a collective entity that ‘they clearly bridge the gap between the Commedia del’arte and vaudeville on the one hand, and the Theatre of the Absurd on the other’ (p.236). Here we can add that though clowning may not be as popular or appreciated as it once was (the circus declining markedly and the solely visual demands of silent cinema having long since gone), there has still been space over the years for comedians exhibiting clownish traits: in the US, Jerry Lewis and more recently Jim Carrey, in the UK, Norman Wisdom and more recently Lee Evans.



Illus. 3a.
Harlequin c.1580.
(Hartnoll 1976:58)



Illus. 3b.
Grimaldi as the Clown 1811.
(Hartnoll p.188)



Illus. 3c.
Dan Leno c.1900.
(Double 1997)

The mention of Lee Evans brings us into the realm of the stand-up comedian, which is perhaps now the best-known manifestation of the comic figure in the English-speaking

world. This comic figure is embodied by a diverse collection of performers and performance styles, from the softly-spoken, low-key delivery of Arnold Brown, through the rambling stream-of-consciousness of Eddie Izzard, to the vicious verbal assaults of Gerry Sadowitz. As Cook observes: 'no two are alike' (1994:6).

Though a stand-up is, amongst other things, carrying on the tradition of being a licensed fool whose primary function is to elicit amusement, a tradition we have seen that has been manifested in a multiplicity of forms in different times and places, perhaps the primary distinguishing feature of this figure is the dependence on linguistic performance. More than any other of the comic figures surveyed here, the stand-up's performance is, with few exceptions, overwhelmingly based on the use of words and not physical skills and appearance. The name of the form itself says this: someone who stands up before an audience and speaks. As Rutter observes, the symbol of stand-up is the solitary microphone standing centre stage (1997:74). Double puts it thus:

A stand-up comedy act usually involves a solo performer speaking directly to an audience with the intention of provoking laughter within the context of a formally organised entertainment, but it is an entity in itself, and is not contained within a larger narrative structure.

(1992:4)

The role of the audience, something which has been underlined throughout this study, is crucial in stand-up and deserves special attention. Cook notes that 'the craft consists of telling stories to an audience, rather than interacting with other performers behind an imaginary fourth wall' (1994:4). The comedian Ken Dodd confirms this when he says of performing that, though he is standing alone on stage, '*I am* part of a double act, because my straight man is the audience' (Hind 1991:177, original emphasis). We should, however, note that the stand-up's performance is dialogic in a more direct sense also. In a discussion of dramatic dialogue and the plurality of actors, Veltrusky notes,

in folklore, certain tellers of traditional tales put on a solo theatrical performance, impersonating the characters of the tale, miming their gestures and even complicated actions, constantly moving from spot to spot and changing the pitch, the loudness, and the speed of delivery in the course of the dialogue in accordance with the alternation of the speakers.

(1989:95)

This could be a description of many stand-up comedians.

So, given that linguistic performance is so important, as is the interaction with the audience, in the remaining space available we will consider 'the context of formalised entertainment' from which stand-up developed and finish with a look at how the figure is introduced to the audience to give their relationship a clear grounding.

Most observers agree that in the UK it was the music halls that gave birth to the modern comedian that was the forerunner of today's stand-up (Double 1992:53; Wilmut 1980:xvii). The halls themselves grew out of 'tavern singing, free-and-easies, Pleasure Gardens, fairs, singing rooms, and Catch and Glee clubs' (Double 1992:49) [recall the *gleeman* minstrel figure of the medieval period]. McKechnie sees the 1843 Theatres Act as significant. This forbade drinking and smoking by audiences during a theatre performance but not during variety shows. Thus, venues which chose variety could not produce plays but attracted the more interactive audiences who were used to smoking and drinking during pub sing-songs etc. Soon thereafter purpose-built music halls sprang up (1931:140). Charles Morton opened the first, the Canterbury Hall, in 1852, and by 1868 there were 500 across the country (Double 1997:25).

The comic performers of the halls would not be recognisable as stand-ups as they practised other skills such as singing, tumbling, juggling and so on. They wore exaggerated costumes and make-up (note how all these are traits of the clown) and expressed their humour through sketches and comic 'patter songs', and it was not until the 1890s that the term 'comedian' was used in programmes (Double 1992:53). A typical act would be a series of songs performed in character, a little dancing and a number of costume changes (Double 1997:23). Though by that time food and drink had been banished from the auditorium and a certain distancing had taken place between audience and performers, '[m]usic hall culture in general never lost its sense of *bon accord* and its performer-audience interplay' (Pickering 1993:413), which, as we have seen, is so important for the live comic figure. By the turn of the century more gags and patter were included and Dan Leno emerged as an innovator. A contemporary commentator describes his act consisting not so much of songs but of

diverting monologues in a style of which he was undoubtedly the originator...With him the character was the first consideration; the amusing wealth of monologue or 'patter' was the means whereby he gave his audience an insight into that character, whilst the verses struck one as being in most cases, a somewhat unnecessary interlude.

(in Double 1997:23)

Music hall, which after the First World War became more commonly referred to as 'variety', continued until beyond the Second World War and this means that the older performers of recent times and even of today had personal experience of them and with some their influence still shows. Ken Dodd (b.1927), for example, still incorporates some of the above features in his act – his hair and tickling stick were remarked upon earlier; he is also given to wearing outlandish overcoats and hats and punctuating his performances with (non-humorous) songs. Many of the stand-ups of the 1970s also would perform straight songs.

However, by the 1930s, there were changes which began to make comedians more recognisable as 'stand-ups': comic style became less theatrical and situation-based and new comedians like Tommy Handley, Tommy Trinder, and Ted Ray started wearing smart contemporary suits and based their acts mainly on a series of unconnected jokes (Double 1992:58). That is, there was a clear shift away from exaggerated costume and character towards a greater reliance on individual linguistic performance. After the war some of the music hall comedians continued in variety shows but these too were effectively dead by the early 1960s. However, there were other places to perform – night clubs, theatres, radio, the new medium of television, and films. Some, like Bob Monkhouse, were able to perform in all of these (Monkhouse 1994). In the North there was also the possibility of performing in the working men's clubs, where there was a virtual comic sub-culture, invisible on a national level, which was to be an important training ground for the form and content of many of the comedians who were to break through on a national scale in the 1970s television show 'The Comedians' (Double 1997, chapter 4).

But before taking this discussion into the 1970s a pause will be made to briefly return to the idea of comic character/persona touched upon earlier in the look at parasites/buffoons and royal fools ('Tarlton was Tarlton'). Double notes that

performers such as George Formby (Snr) and Beryl Reid (this would be around the 1930/40s) would perform in the guise of well-known characters they had developed, 'John Willie' and 'Marlene' respectively. In the publicity for such shows they would be billed under their real names and so 'the comedian would be very obviously speaking as a fictional character rather than as him/herself' (1992:63). In contrast to this, comic *persona*, for Double, involves no division between performer and character and he notes that as more comedians developed a persona this was another shift away from the theatricality of music hall. 'The implication of this change was that whilst comedians like Max Miller, Albert Madely, or Oliver Wakefield use exaggerated stage personae, they were still ostensibly projecting *themselves*' (1992:63-4, emphasis added). However, this view needs to be tempered somewhat. Bob Monkhouse, a comedian of many years' standing, in an interview with Terry Wogan in 1984 comments, 'I came into the business...in order to get laughs but that meant inventing a persona, offering something that is not necessarily me, it's an invention, a construction' (Tolson 1991:186). Even so, this feature is one that is now commonplace with the majority of stand-up comedians and is a point that will appear again shortly. It can also be added that Littlewood and Pickering make a gender point here. They suggest that it is female comedians who have excelled at character studies such that 'there can be no doubt that this kind of comedy is one which women have made a speciality', tracing the tradition back from music hall performers such as Jenny Hill and Marie Lloyd, through mid-century performers such as Joyce Grenfell and Hermione Gingold to present-day comedians such as Victoria Wood and French and Saunders. Littlewood and Pickering see stand-up as having 'a definite masculine stamp on it' and wonder whether women can further transform its nature 'though there are few immediate signs of this happening' (1998:309). This topic will be returned to in a discussion of gender and humour in 7.3.

The comedians who came to dominate the stand-up scene in the 1960s-70s were predominantly white working class males who had spent years touring the circuits of night clubs and working men's clubs with little or no changes in their material, which consisted largely of strings of unconnected standardised jokes. Some of their material could be 'borrowed' from other comedians or the public domain or purchased from gag writers. (In 3.2 we saw how Bremmer (1997:16) noted that in Ancient Greece some buffoons used joke books, but they may have been collections of their own material.)

For example, in his teens Bob Monkhouse made money supplying such material to practising comedians (Monkhouse 1994:55-6.) It is revealing to compare the material of one of the better-known of these comedians, Les Dawson, with some of the material that was performed in the music halls more than 50 years earlier. Max Beerbohm, in a 1923 article discussing popular humour, commented that the public liked to hear the same jokes and he lists, in order, the following typical subjects: mothers-in-law, hen-pecked husbands, twins, old maids, Jews, Frenchmen, Italians, Negroes and eight further subjects (1970:215-6). An analysis of the themes of a Les Dawson joke book from 1979 reveals the top three themes to be: wife, mother-in-law, other women (31.7%); Irish, Jewish (11.8%); North/South regionalism (10.9%) (Paton 1988:215). That is, more than half of Dawson's subject matter was similar to the most common themes of the music halls – gender and ethnicity/regionalism - half a century earlier (as seen by Beerbohm). It could be argued that this is unproblematic; this dissertation has, after all, taken pains to stress the common comic links in different times and places. But given the enormous social and political changes that had taken place in the UK over that time – full suffrage for men and women, the role played by women at home in the war, the significant increase of women in the work force, the end of Empire, the changing ethnic composition of society, the re-emergence of Irish nationalism, the growth of active feminist, ethnic, and gay groups, to name but the most obvious – it is surprising that such similar themes presented in sexist and racist terms continued to prevail. Let us look at a few examples in order to get the flavour. The first comes from Dawson's joke book.

I'm not saying my wife's thick...but she was late for work the other day because she got stuck on an escalator during a power cut.

(in Paton p.214)

This next comes from 1970s primetime television.

Hear the one about the Paki who applied for a job as a conductor? They nailed him to a chimney in Oldham.

(in Cook 1994:14)

A critique of the social conservatism of such comedy was made in 1975 in Trevor Griffiths' play 'Comedians'. Some see this play as an example of 'astonishing foresight' (Cook p.10), others as 'inept as a parody of racist comedy' (Jacobson 1997:35), the former commentator a keen advocate of alternative comedy, the latter a keen advocate of aggressive comedy ('Jettison the offence and you jettison the joke.').

But the greatest criticism of this traditional stand-up and its 'aggressively masculinist jokes where women, "queers" and ethnic minorities are the staple butts' (Littlewood and Pickering 1998:297) came in the form of alternative comedy itself, which in the late 1970s and early 1980s revitalised stand-up comedy. Though it soon came to dominate the comedy scene in all media, it did not spell the end of traditional comedy and there are still traditional comedians performing today who have steadfastly refused to acknowledge the change, most famously the explicitly racist Bernard Manning.

Although it has never been clear what precisely constitutes 'alternative comedy' it is reasonably safe to point up the following as essential features. Firstly, it took an explicitly political stance in eschewing sexist and racist jokes - 'alternative comedy attacks the strong and not the weak' (Cook 1992), that is, it 'kicks up' not 'down' (Littlewood and Pickering p.295). Double puts it succinctly: 'It was the first time in the history of stand-up that comedians had voluntarily adopted egalitarian moral guidelines in their work, and the repercussions of this are still with us today' (1997:174). Secondly, taking inspiration from punk, it was open to any audience member to become a performer, every comedy venue having 'open mike' spots, and this broadened the social composition and therefore the subject matter and styles of the performers. (Though Littlewood and Pickering (1998:300) are quick to remind us that, despite changes, alternative comedy 'has remained elitist in that the majority of alternative comedians have been male, white and heterosexual', a point that will be taken up again in 7.3). Thirdly, its performers 'kick-started a renaissance by performing and writing their own jokes which were particular to their own personalities and experiences' (Cook 1994:15). That is, their individual personae had as much weight as their material, and in some cases their personae *were* their own material. (Consider, for example, Jo Brand, an overweight feminist, many of whose jokes in her early career were on the theme of overeating and the problems of gender relations.) And a further essential feature is that alternative comedians moved away from performing a string of unconnected packaged jokes (which had been innovative in the 1930s) to longer connected narratives, observational comedy, or streams of consciousness.

Though in the 1990s there was a move away from the political correctness of alternative comedy and its major exponents themselves became targets for young new

comedians, these three features still (in varying degrees) dominate today. Another change has been that comedy, having worked hard to mark a decisive break with the past, has relaxed a little and, in tune with other post-modern developments in popular culture, has reflexively foregrounded some of its own older traditions. Three of these will be looked at here - the use of stage names and characters, comic appearance, and catch-phrases.

It was said earlier that modern-day comedians present themselves as themselves rather than as a comic character. However, this is not the whole picture; some present-day performers have either adopted a stage name different to their own or have, in fact, developed a character. For example, 'Vic Reeves' is Jim Moir, 'John Shuttleworth' is Graham Fellows, and Boothby Graffoe is named after a market town in Lincolnshire. There is also Stu Who and Charlie Chuck, among others. In the early 1990s John Thomson presented himself as 'Bernard Righton', a parody of the traditional stand-up Bernard Manning, and more recently Al Murray has had great success with his character 'The Pub Landlord'. Steve Coogan has made famous such characters as Alan Partridge (hosting a spoof chat show in that guise), and the brother and sister Paul and Pauline Calf. Harry Enfield is nothing but a host of different characters. And there is also the complex character of Ali G (more about whom in 5.3.1 below) performed by Sacha Baron-Cohen.

It was seen how in the middle of the 20th century some comedians moved away from the theatricality of music hall by wearing smart suits rather than exaggerated costume and make-up. Such latter traits, however, never completely disappeared; Max Miller wore baggy floral suits and a white homburg, Max Wall wore tights, a baggy jacket and ridiculously long shoes, and it is difficult to picture Tommy Cooper without his fez. Some of the more recent comedians have also exhibited exaggerated costume in marked degree. Though Julian Clary's glitteringly outlandish costumes and heavy make-up might at first glance be seen as continuing the tradition of the male dressed as the female, of which Danny La Rue was perhaps the most famous exponent, Clary dressed openly as himself, a gay man, not as a female character. What is of particular interest here is that such an outfit was not out of place for a comedian. Similarly striking costumes have been worn by the transvestite comedian Eddie Izzard, who is also dressing as himself, not as a character, and, it is worth repeating, whose

appearance is not out of keeping with comic traditions. Charlie Chuck has a fuzzy halo of back-combed hair and a bow tie (non-revolving), and Harry Hill wears shirts with huge pointed collars, Eric Morecambe spectacles, tight suits, and shoes with enormously thick soles. At least two comedians – Malcolm Hardee and Phil Kay – have on occasion completely dispensed with any dress and appeared stark naked. In the 21st century it is noteworthy that on the television show ‘Jack Dee’s Happy Hour’ the costume of virtual comedian ‘Jed’ (actually digitally-enhanced images of comedian Hugh Dennis), with his colourful suit and large hat, bears a distinct resemblance to that of 1940s comedian Max Miller. And to round off this survey of costume mention should be made of a comic costume never worn before in the UK – the *burka*, the enveloping public dress of Muslim women which includes a covering for the hair. Shazia Mirza makes a point of wearing this on stage for her stand-up routine to make it clear to the audience just what her identity is. The only other time she wears it is when she attends the mosque (Mirza 2002).

Another feature of traditional comedians that was deemed ‘corny’ and old-fashioned was the catch-phrase. As far back as the 1890s (and no doubt further back) music hall entertainers would use gestural or vocal signatures (a wink or the cry of ‘Coo-ee!’, for example) as a form of short-hand communication with their audiences (Pickering 1993:413). In the politically-charged atmosphere of the early days of alternative comedy catch-phrases were seen by some of the new comedians as a mark of reaction. This is Alexei Sayle (self-proclaimed Marxist comedian) commenting on the catch-phrases of the traditional comedians Jim Davidson and Larry Grayson. ‘You’ve gotta have a catchphrase as well, you know, like “Nick nick” or “Shut that door” or “Sieg Heil!”’ (in Double 1997:169). Not all traditional comedians used them but those that did became permanently associated with them to such a degree that they became part of their comic identity. Among the better-known are: Tommy Trinder – ‘You lucky people’; Arthur Askey – ‘Hello, playmates!’, Sandy Powell – ‘Can you hear me, mother?’; Tommy Cooper – ‘Just like that!’, Frank Carson – ‘It’s the way I tell ‘em’; and Ken Dodd – ‘How tickled I am’. (Dodd explains that it was the search for a catch-phrase that also led him to his most famous prop – his tickling stick (Billington 1977:28).) The 1990s saw some comedians resurrect the catch-phrase, most notably Harry Hill with his ‘What are the chances of that happening?’ said after one of his unlikely stories. BBC television’s ‘The Fast Show’, which also toured in a live stage

version, created many such: 'Suit you, sir', 'Scorchio', 'I'll get my coat', and the tag phrase '...which was nice' among others. Indeed, 'The Oxford Dictionary Of Catchphrases' lists television as the major source of 'quotable quips' and it is 'The Fast Show' which has the most entries – a total of twenty-six (Radio Times 2002). In fact, one 'catch-phrase', that of the character Bob Fleming, was not even an utterance but an uncontrollable cough. Speaking of the show, one of the creators, Charlie Higson, clearly states: 'The idea was to just cut the fat out so at it's simplest it would be a character coming on, doing the catchphrase and getting off' (Wood 2001). Further, Higson sees the catchphrase not simply as an in-performance sign to reinforce comic identity, but also one which the audience can take away and reproduce in their social lives, an interesting point which again raises questions about the boundaries of theatre space. All of the above traits exhibited in the post-alternative era can be seen as the ironic use of British comic traditions.

In the discussion of performance space and the comic figure the role of the audience has been pointed up throughout and this has been especially important in connection with live comedy performers because of their relationship with the audience which demands an immediate, constant and audible response. We shall close with a look at how all these elements – space, performer, audience - come together when the most common of today's comic figures, the stand-up, is situated within the performance space in an organised manner which clearly establishes the relationship and roles of both performer and audience. Rutter studied the interaction between audience and stand-up at various venues and among his conclusions was the finding that there is a common introduction sequence given by compères which consists of six turns. These are:

- *Contextualisation*, in which small details of the comedian's background are offered.
- *Framing of response* that directs the audience towards greeting the comedians with a certain attitude
- *Evaluation* of the comedian by the compère as he or she passes comment on the performance skills of the comedian
- *Request for action* from the audience by the compère, usually for applause
- *Introduction* of the comedian by the compère

- *Audience applause*

(2000:446)

The paced revelation of this information both encourages the audience's participation and provides a social context into which they can place the comedian.

Given this organisation, jokes performed by stand-up comedians cannot be seen as isolated texts. They cannot be seen as hermetically separated from the ongoing performance, as they are located within, and are part of, the developing interaction of stand-up. Once this is recognised, it becomes crucial in differentiating the telling of jokes from the performance which is stand-up.

(p.481)

This last point is indeed a useful one to make. However, as we shall see, this does not elevate comedic performers to a space outside social life, nor does it relegate the everyday telling of jokes to some distant nether world. We have had occasion to comment on this before in 2.4 and it is a point which will recur in 5.3.1 and 6.1, and is also highly relevant to the dispute analysed in Section 8.

The comedian's situated entry, documented in such detail by Rutter, is a telling moment for it transforms the theatre space of the venue into theatrical space. As the dynamic interaction between performer and audience is essential for stand-up, the theatrical space, though predominantly on the stage with the performer, is always present in the audience also. At times it can shift in varying degrees between the two but, as noted earlier by Dodd, there does seem to be, even with low-key introverted performers, a double act at work. We need to look at some examples to see this at work.

A Jack Dee concert immediately begins not with him commencing a humorous monologue but with him reflexively making fun of the welcoming applause. Before he can continue with this, presumably planned, avenue of banter he is interrupted by a heckler.

[Loud welcoming applause, cheering and whistling. Dee stands, in keeping with his persona, looking glum and slightly pained.]

Dee: [*Gruffly*] Thanks. [*Pause*] Thank you for the thunderous round of applause. [*Pause*] Of course, you weren't to know that I have a headache. [*Laughter. Pause. At this point Dee hears a comment from the front, which he repeats.*] Widget, widget. [*This is a reference to a beer commercial which Dee did. Laughter. Dee now looks at and addresses heckler directly.*] Oh, you could be so sorry you said that. [*Laughter. Dee moves back to the mike stand.*] I'll look away and he'll think I've finished with him. [*Laughter. Heckler shouts again.*] Eh? Where's my ladybird? It's in the dressing room. Why? Where's your self-respect? [*Prolonged laughter, applause and cheering. Dee again addresses heckler.*] I know you took a bow then but I don't think they were applauding you, I have to say. [*Laughter.*] Sorry to take the wind out of your sail, there. Or is it a shirt? I don't know. [*Laughter.*]

(Dee 1998)

There is much to comment on in this exchange but we shall focus on just a few items relevant to the present topic. Firstly, Dee uses the conventional welcoming round of applause as raw material, thus immediately incorporating the audience into his act. Rather than disattend the shouted interruption he again uses this as a resource for his humour. As the exchange develops there is an interesting switch of pronouns by Dee when referring to the heckler, from second ('you could be so sorry') to third ('he'll think I've finished'), and suddenly there are three parties involved, the performer, the majority of the audience, and the heckler, all part of this comedic interaction. The heckler even takes a bow, an action usually reserved for performers, and Dee, who at that moment has the major share of the tripartite distribution of power (he has just had a rousing reception and is in the process of getting eight rounds of laughter in the ninety seconds of this exchange), reminds the heckler that the applause is for him, Dee, not the heckler. The exchange concludes with Dee, clearly in confident control, having the last laugh at the expense of the heckler's attire.

A couple of final comments are added here. Firstly, we should note although that Dee embarrasses and insults the heckler, his utterances – the utterances of a comic figure in performance space – are sources of amusement for those present. Secondly, it should not be thought that once this matter had been dealt with Dee then 'got on with his act'. His act started as soon as he walked on the stage and any audience behaviour – applause, heckling – was engaged with in a way that allowed humour to emerge from it, to be part of the act. This approach would seem to be common among stand-ups, as the next extract from a conversation between two, Dee and Mark Lamarr, shows.

Dee: You got heckled on your gala night, didn't you, which is almost like a gift anyway.

Lamarr: It was, yeah. I mean, I don't like heckles when they're sort of 'anti', and I don't like heckle put-downs when they're 'anti'. I like it to be sort of an interaction with the audience, and I always think a good comedy night is like that.

(Dee 2000)

Here a heckle is seen as 'a gift' and such interactions are what make 'a good comedy night'. However, heckles can be 'anti' and in the discussion of permission to come (5.2) we will see how in extreme circumstances performers can face legal and physical opposition to their practices. That is, power can also be exercised by the audience, or at least one part of it.

Before moving on to the resources available for the creation of verbal humour, a brief summary of the salient points of the previous two sections is in order.

Though formally separated in theatre space, performers and audience are locked into an interaction in which meanings are jointly created. A significant aspect of this is the licence afforded performative utterances; given the appropriate cues and expectations, it is entirely appropriate for someone to be seen and heard as, for example, a Scottish nobleman of many centuries ago. This does not mean that such utterances, though spoken in a specially-created place, somehow exist outside of social life. This is particularly clear in the case of comedic performers, an important part of whose licence is to directly 'work the audience', at times in a highly transgressive manner. This can lead, as was seen, to confrontations, and most of Section 5 is given over to a detailed discussion of this. Of note also in these roles and relationships is the identity of comic performers. Traditionally such figures have worn costumes – often garish and exaggerated – to make them immediately distinguishable from other performers. But at the same time they also have at times had comic identities not always separable from their private identities. All of these features will be seen to have some bearing on the lengthy analysis in Section 8.

Stand-up comedians are just one form of comic figure and this section has made clear across a wide variety of cultures that there have always been comic figures, mythical or actual, who have had a licence for behaviour which normally would be socially censured – tricksters, clowns, buffoons, parasites, fools, jesters, comedians. But such

behaviour is not exclusively the domain of such performers as societies have always had events at which everyone has the opportunity to behave out of character - Saturnalia, Feast Days, carnivals, fairs. The happy convergence of all these elements - space, performer, audience – is seen in the performance of the stand-up comedian. People who create verbal humour, whether on the stage or in everyday life, clearly need raw material to provide the substance of their play. It is to a look at this raw material – language – that we now turn.

4. CLASSIFICATION, STYLE, CONTENT

As the study deals with verbal humour a look at the use of words is essential, not simply their use in the creation of humorous meanings but also their use in how we actually describe these creations. Given the variable nature of humour it is perhaps no great surprise that there is no common agreement about how to differentiate between the varieties of forms. The forms themselves draw on all the resources language has to offer and can be used for purposes both innocent and tendentious.

4.1 Problems Of Classification

The common collocation '*tell me a joke*' shows that in our culture a joke is often perceived as a verbal package designed to amuse. Sherzer, for example, states simply: 'The term "joke" (and related terms in European languages, for example, *histoire drole* in French and *chiste* in Spanish) refers to a discourse unit consisting of two parts, the set up and the punch line' (1985:216). Here is one such, taken from the public domain:

The miser withdrew his money from the bank for a holiday. Once he thought it had had enough of a rest he put it all back.

However, when Douglas (1975) discusses events such as someone lying in a freshly dug grave at a funeral and refusing to move, or someone upon meeting a friend enquiring about their parents' genitals, she also uses the term 'joke'. And many essays on humour in general use this word in their title - Freud (in translation, at least), Hockett (1972), Wilson (1979). All of this begs the question: are we talking about the same phenomena when we use the term 'joke'? While it is the view of this dissertation that there can be no definitive answer to this question, it is a convenient starting point for a brief survey of the difficulties inherent in simply discussing the subject of 'humour'. The survey will start with Freud (1905), which remains a significant text, then move on to a study by Esar (1954), which is a clear illustration of the grave difficulties that can be had in this area, and finish with a more recent attempt at a taxonomy by a linguist, Hockett (1972).

Strachey (1991) had such problems translating Freud's work that he saw fit to discuss them at some length in an introduction. He chose not to translate the original 'Der Witz' (singular) as 'wit' as others had done, but as 'joke' (in fact as the plural 'jokes'). Yet 'Scherz', which is a common translation of 'joke', is rendered as 'jest', a word not immediately distinguishable in English from 'joke'. He had similar problems with 'das Komische' and 'die Komik', the use of which he sees as Freud's way of avoiding stylistic repetition, and so he translates them both as 'the comic' (pp.34-6).

Freud himself does not always help matters. When discussing the pleasure which jokes provide he attempts to distinguish between jests and jokes. (Bear in mind Strachey's translation as just discussed.)

We may now turn to the further development of jests, to the point where they reach their height in tendentious jokes. Jests still give the foremost place to the purpose of giving enjoyment, and are content if what they say does not appear senseless or completely devoid of substance. If what a jest says possesses substance and value it turns into a joke.

(1991:181)

This seems to suggest that jests are content (as jests) if they have substance; yet if they do have substance, they become jokes, a seemingly contradictory state of affairs. Nor is this a trivial matter, for when discussing the genesis and development of jokes from childhood through to adulthood these terms are used for humorous items at different levels of development and thus need to be much more precisely distinguished than they are in the above quote. (See 1.2 above for Freud's ideas concerning the development and purposes of jokes.)

This is not to say that there is no order in Freud. He gives a detailed summary of the many techniques used in jokes, as follows:

I. Condensation.

(a) with formation of composite words

(b) with modification

II. Multiple use of the same material

(c) as a whole and in part

(d) in different order

(e) with slight modification

(f) of the same words full or empty

III. Double meaning.

(g) meaning as a name and as a thing

(h) metaphorical and literal meaning

(i) double meaning proper (play upon words)

(j) *double entendre*

(k) double meaning with an allusion

(pp.76-7)

To all this he also adds the extra category of 'puns' (p.80).

But even such a seemingly exact taxonomy presents problems. For example, (f) multiple use of the same material full or empty. An example of such a joke is given as:

How are you getting along?' the blind man asked the lame man. 'As you see,' the lame man replied.

(p.68)

Here *see* has both the 'full' meaning related to the sense of sight and the 'empty', or what Freud calls the 'watered-down', meaning of, let us say, 'it is apparent'. But (f) is in category II, multiple use of the same material, and 'double meaning' is given an entirely separate category of its own, category III. (This also begs the question: which joke does *not* have a double meaning? This question will be raised again below.) The confusion is compounded when he lists sub-divisions of double meaning (g-k) yet sees puns as an entirely separate category on the basis that double meaning jokes (category III) use identically the same word (but so does his example of (f), category II), whereas puns need only use words which have some 'vague similarity'.

Such a distinction may have been acceptable in German 100 years ago but more recent studies (in English) do not concur. Empson, for example, discusses all manner of linguistic ambiguities (he identifies seven distinct types), defining an ambiguity as 'any verbal nuance, *however slight*, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language' [1930] (1995:19, emphasis added). Sherzer accepts both identical and similar words as puns: here as a play (unintended) with identical words:

In his search for economic and military aid, Anwar Sadat has not exactly
been greeted with open arms. (CBS radio news report)
(1978:337-8)

where 'arms' can mean both 'weapons' and 'limbs'. Next as a play with 'vague similarities':

When shooting elephants in Africa I found the tusks very difficult to remove
but in Alabama the Tuscaloosa. (Groucho Marx)
(p.340-1)

where 'Tuscaloosa' resembles 'tusks are looser'.

Attridge regards puns in a way diametrically opposed to Freud, seeing them as the use of the same word. He gives the following example from Pope (first cited in Empson p.134):

Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport
In troubled waters, but now sleeps in port.
(1988:141)

Here 'port' can either mean 'harbour' or 'wine'. For Attridge a pun is either 'one signifier with two possible signifieds, which in a particular context are simultaneously activated', or 'two identical signifiers, which are in a particular context made to coalesce' (p.144).

But Freud himself was aware that words 'are a plastic material which can do all kinds of things' (1991:68) and he frankly stated the problems inherent in his classification. When discussing multiple use of the same material, he commented:

The further cases of multiple use [category II] which can be brought together under the title of 'double meaning' as a new, *third* group, can

easily be divided into sub-classes, which, it is true, *cannot be separated from one another by essential distinctions* any more than can the third group from the second.

(p.70. emphasis added)

Thus, both the sub-classes and the larger groupings are liable to blur into one another, a state of affairs which does not help the reader understand the complexities of what is already a dense text.

Indeed, merely creating new categories of humour which differ only negligibly or not at all can serve to befog rather than clarify. Esar (1954) bemoaned the lack of scientific rigour in writing about humour and set out to provide such, naming his science of humour 'humorology' (p.10). He ventured, 'What this budding science needs is another Agassis to do for its nomenclature what he did for zoology' (p.11). The results of focusing on the naming rather than on something deeper leads Esar into complexities and contradictions which are difficult if not impossible to resolve.

He presents us with 16 chapters, each of which discusses at least 5 varieties of humour (or sub-categories of these varieties). While his aim is to distinguish between different types of humour, his 'scientific' explanations do not always help. For example, the difference between a 'wisecrack' and an 'epigram'. According to him a wisecrack always deals with a particular person or thing (p.15), which here is interpreted to mean that a person or thing is the butt of the joke. He gives the following example.

He's a man of letters; he works in the post office. (p.15)

The epigram 'refers to a general group of persons or things' (p.18):

Age gives people away; it tells on them.

Thus simply switching the subject transforms one into the other, so that

The man who is buried in thought is generally of grave appearance
is an epigram, but

Whenever John is buried in thought he has a grave appearance

is a wisecrack (p.18). Thus the locus of these jokes - 'bury', 'grave'- is ignored in favour of focusing on whether the subject of the sentence is named or not. It is indeed the case that the naming of the subject can be significant if, for example, the teller wishes to target a specific butt. However, as such a butt can be either an individual (a certain authority figure, for example) or a group (a certain reviled group, for example), Esar's distinction would seem to take us no further forward in our understanding of such jokes.

Elsewhere he attempts to distinguish between 'joke', 'gag', and 'anecdote'.

A joke is a distinct element of humour although it is loosely applied to related elements like the gag and the anecdote. It lies somewhere between the two, being longer than the gag which is dialogue and shorter than the anecdote which is often an extended joke. Like the gag the joke is of irreducible brevity, but unlike the gag it applies to situation comedy. Like the anecdote the joke is a story, but unlike the anecdote it bears no illustration of a moral point of a celebrity's character.

(p.28)

It is not the wisest strategy to attempt to define three items in terms of one another, so there is much that is unclear in this. To focus on one aspect only - length. The gag seems to be the shortest item, the joke is longer, and the anecdote is longest. Yet both the gag *and* the joke are of irreducible brevity. Further, the anecdote is often an extended version of the '*distinct* element' (emphasis added), the joke. This does not in any way approach the scientific rigour that Esar claims. Throughout the entire work not once is something as schematic as a list or a tree diagram offered, only the blurred outlines of more and more parts which seem to take us further away from the substance of the jokes. The major problem Esar would seem to have is that he views humour as an object in the world without subjective content, as if it actually were something like zoology. But as it not such an object, it is not amenable to as rigid a scientific approach as he would like. Even if it were, he falls well short of the standards his own approach demands.

When we now turn to someone who is a well-known linguist, Hockett, we find that he avoids giving a definition of jokes, perhaps realising the difficulties inherent in such a position. He uses the term 'jokes' as the title of his essay and thus the reader infers that for Hockett everything discussed therein is to be considered a discussion of the

term 'joke'. He comments that '[o]ur concern with jokes is purely taxonomic' (1972:154), but this does not lead him into the same maze as Freud and Esar, for whether discussing puns, riddles, games, or verses, they would all seem to be embraced implicitly by the title, 'Jokes'. He does, however, divide jokes into two major categories, and this is worth further comment.

For him jokes are a genre of literature (p.154) and just as literature distinguishes between poetry and prose, so he makes the distinction between 'poetic' and 'prosaic' jokes. He argues that 'any language presents the literary artist with a vast and intricate tracery of partial resemblances between words and phrases in sound and in meaning' (p.157). (Note how this echoes Freud's 'words are plastic material' above.) Thus, for Hockett, poetic jokes are ones which 'turn on accidental resemblances between words in sound and meaning' and are either difficult or impossible to translate (p.157). An example of a poetic joke (p.155).

Mr. Wong a Canadian of Chinese extraction, visited the nursery in the maternity ward, and then hastened, perturbed, to his wife's bedside. Said he: 'Two Wongs don't make a White!' Said she: 'I can assure you it was purely occidental.'

Here the coincidence between the key nouns in the fixed idiom 'Two wrongs don't make a right' and the words 'Wongs' and 'White', as well as the similarity between 'accidental' and 'occidental' are the loci of the joke and must remain exactly as they are. It is extremely doubtful that this is translatable. An example of a prosaic joke:

An irate man walks into a drugstore. 'Yesterday I came in for a hair tonic,' he complained, 'but what you sold me was glue. This morning I tried to tip my hat and I lifted myself two inches off the sidewalk.'

(p.154)

Here the joke centres on the confusion of X for Y, which leads to mishap Z. It would not be too problematic to change one or more of these constituents and still have a working joke. Further, this could well be translated into most if not all languages.

This distinction between poetic and prosaic calls to mind a distinction of Freud's between 'verbal' and 'conceptual' jokes, with the former category demanding a word (or words) that cannot be changed and the latter having their centre in an idea that can

take a variety of verbal forms. While such a correspondence between these two commentators may suggest some kind of consistency in what constitutes jokes, Chiaro is sceptical. When discussing Freud's distinctions between 'multiple use', 'double meaning' and 'puns' above, it was asked which joke does *not* have some kind of double meaning. Chiaro's criticism of Hockett is more explicit when she says: 'It seems to be a contradiction in terms to suggest that a verbal conceit such as the [prosaic] joke does not in some way play on words' (1992:15). This is a valid argument – all verbal jokes play with words - but it must also be said that the constraints on Hockett's poetic jokes are far greater than on his prosaic jokes and thus they can be seen as technically different.

This brief survey shows that there is no widespread common ground among observers on what, for example, something as apparently obvious as a 'joke' is, and this because the problem here is chiefly one of the protean nature of humour, which resists neat classification; as Palmer puts it, 'it appears to exist in a series of different dimensions' (1994:5). Further, such individuals' attempts at classifications, while having significant areas of overlap, tend to be particular to their purposes and so do not always have a general application. Taking this into account, this dissertation favours an inclusive view of humour, and does not attempt any rigid taxonomy. We do, though, need to further consider what this section has touched on – the forms of humour – and this we now do. However, this will not be done as a purely formal analysis, as this dissertation is more concerned with what meanings we construct with these forms, that is, what we *do* with humour.

4.2

From Style To Content

In his 1987 discussion on humour Palmer raises the question of what should be the unit of analysis - the individual joke or larger scale units such as comic narrative (p.20). We have just seen some of the difficulties in trying to create an exact delineation of humour along these lines, but this question does make us aware of the wide variety of stylistic resources available to the humorist. Following this lead we will here consider different aspects of style, first taking a brief look at linguistic items within the sentence, before going on to a fuller discussion of items beyond the

sentence. Note, however, that style is not a matter of simply *linguistic* choice. Different choices can be identified formally, but, as we shall see, the meanings created by such choices are laden with social significance also. That is to say, this section will combine both a formalist and functionalist perspective.

Sherzer has observed that puns ‘manipulate different levels and aspects of language’ (1985:213), and we start with a simple one-line example of such which allows us to deal with morphological, lexical, phonological, and syntactic matters in one stroke.

I’d rather have a full bottle in front o’ me than a full frontal lobotomy.

When I first heard this it was credited to an utterance by the singer Tom Waits. However, Norrick (1993) discusses it (in a slightly different form) as an anonymous piece of graffito, that is, as a written joke. As the sound play is central it will be here treated as primarily a spoken joke.

The key items are ‘a full bottle in front o’ me’ and ‘a full frontal lobotomy’. Closer examination reveals not simply a neat morphological transposition but also a remarkable phonological symmetry.

- (a) a full bottle in front o’ me
- (b) a full frontal lobotomy

- (a) 8 syllables
- (b) 8 syllables

- (a) ○ ● ● ○ ○ ● ○ ○

sequence of stress.

- (b) ○ ● ● ○ ○ ● ○ ○

- (a)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
[ə-ful]	bɒt	-əl	-in	-frʌnt	-ə	mi:]	
- (b)

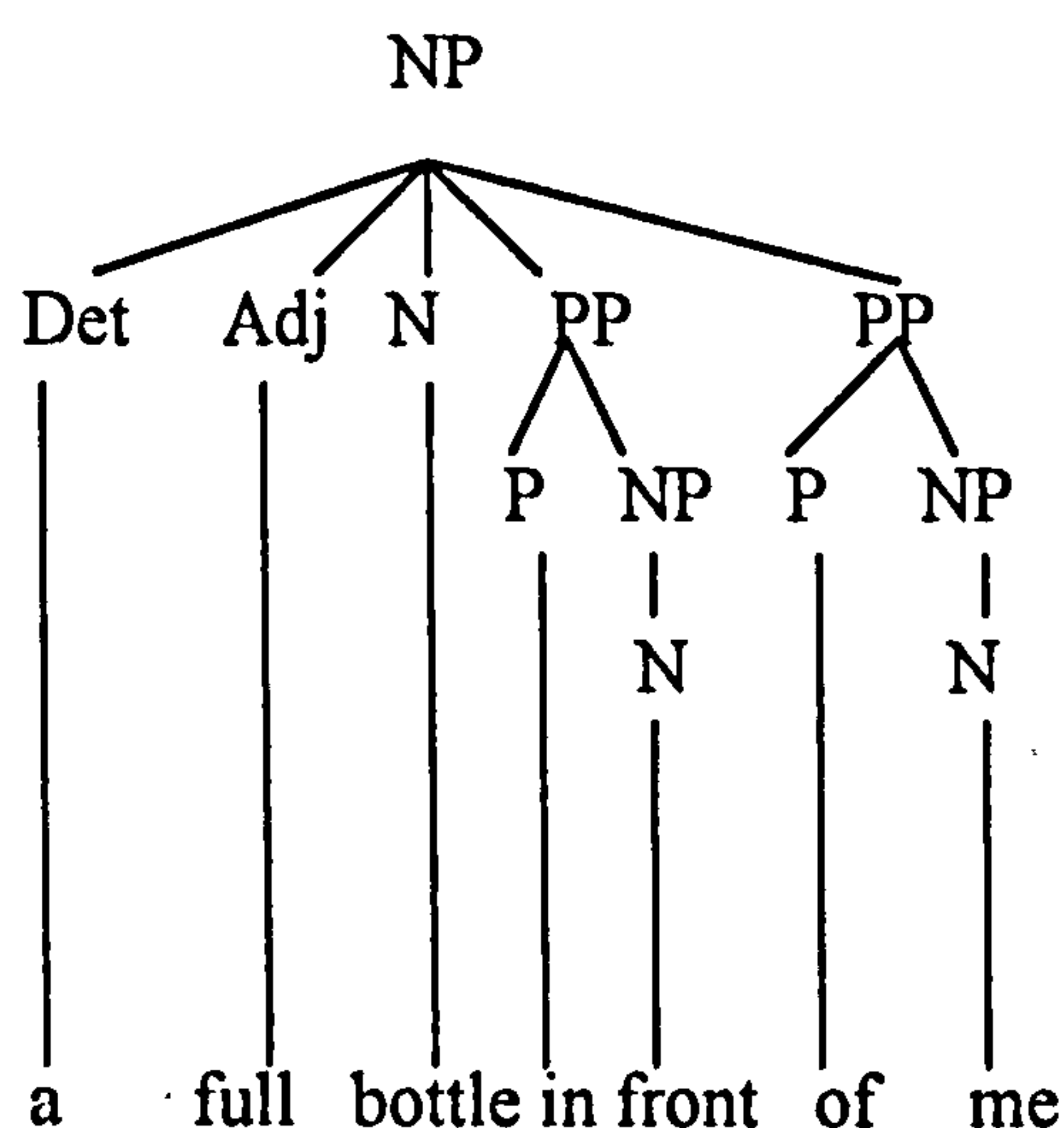
1	2	6	4	9	3	7	8
[ə-ful]	frʌnt	-əl	-lə	-bɒt	-ə	mi:]	

phonetic realisation

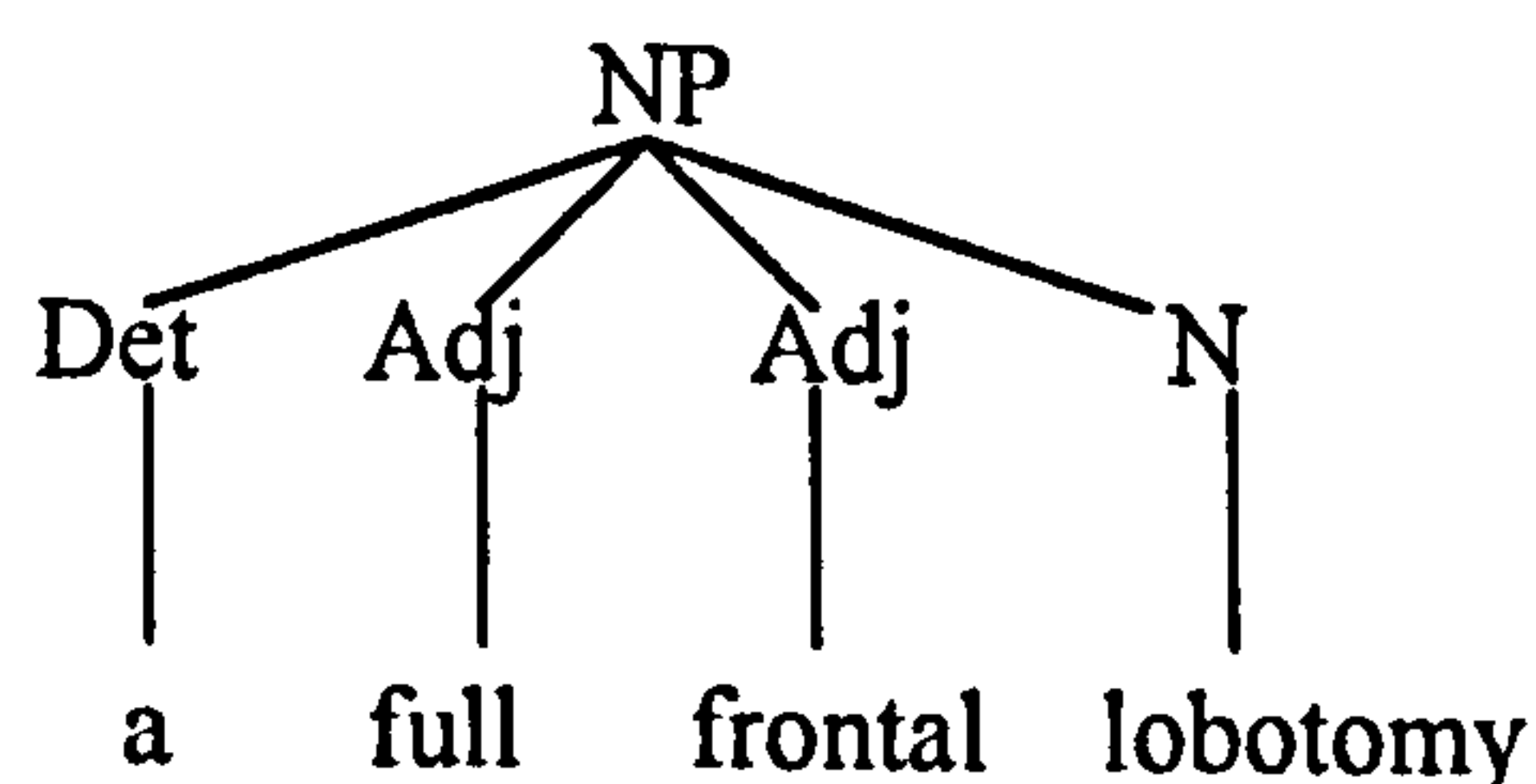
Both items have the same number of syllables and precisely the same sequence of stress. The first two and last two syllables are repeated in exactly the same place in (a)

and (b) with the same phonetic realisation. In a) these four syllables are all free morphemes (they can stand alone), whereas in b) 1 and 2 are free morphemes, but 7 and 8 are together part of the bound morpheme (cannot stand alone) 'otomy'. Within the four central syllables number 4 is repeated in the same place in (a) and (b), and in (b) finds its 'mirror image' in the next syllable, number 9 ([əl] → [lə]). Also within that central area syllables 3 and 6 in (a) are diagonally transposed in (b). The weakness of the play is that only seven of the eight syllables of (a) are repeated in (b); the one new syllable [lə], number 9 in (b), replaces [ɪn], number 5 of (a) but as it, like 5, is unstressed, it causes no dissonance.

All of this neat morphological, lexical, and phonological play also creates a new syntagm. Where a) is a noun phrase (NP) consisting of a determiner, an adjective, a noun, a preposition, a noun, another preposition, and another noun, thus:



b) is a simpler NP constituted as follows:



With its neat interplay of, in Saussurian terms, the paradigmatic (vertical) and syntagmatic (horizontal) [1915] (1966), and its identical rhythms, this creates not only a strikingly contrastive and humorous meaning (which, after all, is the point) but is

also a strong example of Jakobson's 'poetic'. In his formulation he refers to the paradigmatic as *selection* and the syntagmatic as *combination*; selection is based on equivalence, similarity and dissimilarity, synonymity and antonymity; combination is based on sequence, contiguity.

The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence. In poetry one syllable is equalised with any other syllable of the same sequence; word stress is assumed to equal word stress, as unstress equals unstress

(1960:358 original emphasis)

Such play with forms allows the creation of humour which can also be used, if so desired, for social comment. Take the following simple play on words. It comes from a scene in the television situation comedy 'Steptoe & Son'. The characters are a father and son who run a rag-and-bone business, from which they barely make a living. Here father Albert (A) and son Harold (H) are having a dispute about the state of the house, which H finds disgusting. As they sort through a pile of old newspapers in the living room A is delighted to remember some of the stories he comes across.

1. A: Here (1.0) I remember this. [*Reads headline*] 'Mussolini Invades Albania.
2. King Zog Flees'
3. H: That's nothing, mate, we've got king-size fleas here.

(Galton & Simpson 2000)

This is another play involving morphemes, sounds, and syntax in the two items (a) 'King Zog flees' and (b) 'king-size fleas'. The morphological play involves transforming the two free morphemes of the title and name 'King Zog' into the compound adjective 'king-size', and the two morphemes of 'flees' (the free morpheme 'flee' + the third person singular bound morpheme 's') into 'fleas' (the free morpheme 'flea' + the plural ending bound morpheme 's'). In the sound play the first and third morphemes in each item – (a) 'king' and 'flees', (b) 'king' and 'fleas' - have the same phonetic realisation: /kɪŋ/ and /fli:z/, and the middle morpheme in each – 'Zog' and 'size' - has the same sibilant sound /z/. Both items (a) and (b) consist of three syllables. Normally, the compound adjective 'king-size' would carry the primary stress (1) on the first syllable with the second syllable taking secondary

stress (2), and this would give (a) and (b) a different stress pattern of, respectively, 1-1-1, and 1-2-1. But H, to make the play complete, gives 'size' additional emphasis, thus giving the two items the same stress pattern, 1-1-1. The syntactic transformation is as follows:

King Zog flees
N N Verb

King-size fleas
Adj N

The significance here, however, is not simply the formal play but the way it is used by H in 'a hierarchy of different acts whereby we do X *by* or *while* doing Y' (van Dijk 1997:5, original emphasis). Thus, H does not simply indulge in word play, he also uses the play in his argument with his father to underline his own views concerning the dirtiness of the house. Elsewhere van Dijk notes, when discussing the developments in discourse analysis:

Whereas grammars would often be constrained to the possible grammatical forms of a given language system, style had to do with the context-dependent variations of language use. Thus sociolinguistics paid attention to the choice of a specific style as a function of social situation, class, or ethnic membership, or of social factors such as gender, age, status or power.

(1985a:2)

Such considerations clearly take us into the social world of motivated beings using language for specific purposes, that is, language in context. This leads us away from the purely formal aspects of language such as, for example, the sentence, into discourse, which at its simplest is 'extended sequences of text and talk' (Blum-Kulka 1997:38) in which *utterances* are the primary building block. We will consider utterances to be 'contextualised sentences' (Schiffrin 1994:41). Utterances make us think of both context and sequence and so 'defining discourse as utterances seems to balance both the functional emphasis on how language is used in context and the formal emphasis of extended patterns' (Schiffrin p.40). If we look at discourse used for humorous purposes we find points of concurrence among various commentators. Lodge, when discussing comic situation and comic style, comments that both 'crucially depend upon timing, that is to say, the order in which the words, and the

information they carry, are arranged' (1992:110). For Palmer jokes have a two-part structure:

all jokes, verbal or visual, have two stages, the preparation stage and the culmination stage; and this is true of even the most minimal gag, such as the traditional custard pie in the face, for the custard pie in the face is the culmination of a brief sequence in which the preparation consists, minimally, of the face without custard pie all over it.

(1987:40)

Note that this accords precisely with Sherzer's view above (4..1).

Double, a practising comedian, would add that this basic structure is true for more complex performances also.

Even in the most conversational, anecdotal, observational routine in the world, where there's no obvious split between build-up and punch line, where it all seems to be a seamless flow of thoughts, there are still punch lines...the audience needs some sort of cue to let them know it's time to laugh.

(1997:243)

Wilson and Sperber show the importance of all this when they contrast two ways of discussing what is essentially the same proposition:

(8) Two taxis collided and thirty Scotsmen were taken to hospital.
(Woody Allen)

(9) Scotsmen are very mean. They travel in enormously overcrowded taxis to avoid paying the full fare. Once two taxis containing thirty Scotsmen collided. The passengers were taken to hospital.

(1984:23)

Both extracts can be seen to carry very similar information, but it is the syntactic arrangement of the professional comedian in (8) that is more liable to cause amusement. What seems also to be one of the important factors in (8) is that what is *omitted* is just as important as what is included. That is, the connection between Scotsmen and meanness is not made explicitly by the teller but is inferred by the audience from the cues supplied. The role of the audience is a factor which will receive much attention throughout this work.

It must not be thought, it is worth repeating, that all of this is about purely linguistic choices. We see how the taxi joke isn't simply a play with words, but also provides social comment: all Scots are mean. Let us reconsider for a moment the miser joke.

The miser withdrew all his money from the bank for a holiday. When he thought it had had enough of a rest he put it all back.

A syntactic analysis would clearly show the locus of the joke to be the dual operation of the ambiguous prepositional phrase (PP) 'for a holiday'. Attridge points out that most modern linguistic theories comfortably account for such ambiguities, especially transformational grammar: 'indeed ambiguity plays a crucial part in the distinction between deep and surface structures which is central to transformational syntactic theory' (1988:141). The founder of transformational grammar, Chomsky, when discussing verb subcategorisation, draws attention to such ambiguity: 'in Verb-Prepositional Phrase constructions one can distinguish various degrees of "cohesion" between the verb and accompanying Prepositional Phrase' (1965:101). Thus, to take a well-known example, the following sentence

the boy saw the man with the telescope

can be interpreted in two ways due to the ambiguous positioning of the PP 'with the telescope'. This PP can modify the verb 'saw', and as the boy is the doer of the action of seeing we can interpret this to mean the boy had the telescope. However, the PP can also modify the object 'man', making possible the interpretation that it was the man who had the telescope (Fromkin and Rodman 1998:117). So, in one interpretation (A) of the miser joke, 'for a holiday' would modify the verb 'withdrew', the subject of which (the 'doer' of the action), is the miser, and this favours the miser having a holiday. (This interpretation is also abetted by our knowledge of the world – having a holiday is essentially a *human* activity.) Another interpretation (B) is that the PP modifies the noun 'money' and this favours the money having a holiday. This second one, despite its clash with the 'normalcy of facts' (van Dijk 1985b:111) is the one that coheres in the text, as the second sentence uses the pronoun 'it' twice as a cohesive device.

A.

The miser withdrew all his money from the bank for a holiday



B.

The miser withdrew all his money from the bank for a holiday



However, let us assume for moment that the joke was as follows:

A Scot withdrew all his money from the bank for a holiday. When he thought it had had enough of a holiday he put it all back.

(A Scot was actually the subject when I first read it in Chiaro (1992:40).) The syntactic analysis for this joke would be as it was for the miser joke, the one slight difference being that it would show the head of the leftmost NP was the N 'Scot' rather than 'miser'. Though useful, this would tell us nothing about inferred national traits. (Freud would note the difference here between an 'innocent joke' and a 'tendentious joke'.) Here is yet another version:

A Jew withdrew all his money from the bank...

Given the consequences of anti-Semitism within living memory, the joke now has even greater potential to offend, and this due to a simple lexical choice which itself does not affect the syntactic mechanics of the joke. This can be taken a step further:

A yid withdrew all his money from the bank...

With this choice we not only get a social comment on the mean-ness of Jews, but the teller's use of the pejorative 'yid' explicitly informs us of his/her racist intent. Ervin-Tripp discusses such choices in terms of *alternation* and *co-occurrence*, where the former is the choice of alternative ways of speaking, and the latter the interdependence within a chosen alternative. She provides the following strong example of an interaction between a white policeman (P) and a black doctor (D) in the southern US in the 1960s.

P: What's your name boy?

D: Doctor Poussaint. I'm a physician.

P: What's your first name boy?

D: Alvin.

(1972:18)

Here the social hierarchy and the participants' adherence to it (or not) are manifested in the choice of terms of address. Thus, the term 'boy', considered as a linguistic item, has the common *denotation* in English of 'young male' but here is realised in the racist discourse of the policeman as a term of subordination, that is, its use in this way gives it a racist *connotation*. Kress, in a discussion of ideological structures in discourse, comments:

It is because linguistic forms always appear in a text and therefore in a systematic form as the sign of the system of meaning embodied in specific discourse that we can attribute ideological significance to them. The defined and delimited set of statements that constitute a discourse are themselves expressive of and organised by a specific ideology.

(1985:30)

The following exchange is a particularly rich comedic example of playing with these notions. It comes from the film 'Monty Python And The Holy Grail' and in this scene King Arthur is travelling the land to recruit knights to help him in his quest for the Holy Grail. He encounters two peasants who are members of an anarcho-syndicalist commune who do not understand the concept of monarchy and challenge Arthur's status, much to his annoyance. They ask him how he became king.

Arthur: [*In noble tones, head turned skyward, with angelic choir in the background*] The lady of the lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water, signifying by divine providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. [*End of choir. Turns to peasants. In sharp tones*] That is why I am your king.

Male Peasant: [*Working-class accent*] Listen. Strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.

A: Be quiet!

MP: You can't expect to wield supreme executive power just cos some watery tart threw a sword at you!

A: Shut up!

MP: I mean, if I went round saying I was an emperor just because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me, they'd put me away.

A: Shut up! Will you shut up! [*Attacks peasant*]

(Chapman et al 1974)

Superficially, the humour is here centred on the use of synonyms to describe the same process - Arthur receiving Excalibur - and the clash between the connotations of the king's choice and the peasant's choice, which are presented in the following table.

Arthur's words	MP's words
lady of the lake	strange women lying in ponds watery tart moistened bint
held aloft	distributing threw lobbed
Excalibur	swords sword scimitar
divine providence	mandate from the masses
to carry Excalibur/ I am your king	supreme executive power system of government wield executive power
The lady of the lake (...) to carry Excalibur	farcical aquatic ceremony

Table 2. Stylistic choice in 'Monty Python And The Holy Grail'.

The play in semantic space has Arthur's choice of words occupying a place of formality, nobility, and awe - 'lady', 'held aloft', 'divine providence' (aided cinematically by an angelic choir), whereas the peasant's choices are in the mixed registers of the vernacular and sexist - 'tart/bint', the administrative - 'distributing', and the polemical - 'mandate from the masses' and 'supreme executive power'. (There will be more to say about this 'multivoicedness' below.) The play, however, is not merely linguistic but also involves social and political juxtapositions (as well as a significant time warp), with the king's words, spoken in received pronunciation, having 'the divine right' of majestic authority and the peasant's, spoken in a working-class accent, having a combative, egalitarian, and demotic assertiveness. There is a close correspondence between the explicit views that each protagonist expresses and the forms in which they are expressed, or, as Kress would see it, between the discourse and the text (1985:27).

Such verbal ideological struggles are not uncommon, particularly where the subject matter itself is highly contentious. In this dialogue the struggle is between the divine right of monarchs and anarcho-syndicalism, a clear opposition. Concerning oppositions, Hodge and Kress (1993) analyse newspaper coverage of the Gulf War and develop the notion of an 'ideological complex'. Such a complex has two components, 'the S-form', and 'the P-form': the S-form 'represents the world in a way that blurs differences, antagonisms, differences of interest' (solidarity function); the P-form 'exacerbates difference, hostility, superiority' (power function) (p.157). If we apply this to the Excalibur exchange we see there is no solidarity, the two opponents are at loggerheads, and their choices are P-forms. In sociolinguistic terms there is deliberate language divergence.

Comedy is often keen to point up social differences and an obvious way to do this is through contrastive language choices. The choices of King Arthur and the peasant are so divergent that they touch on what Ferguson (1959) calls 'diglossia'. This refers to a situation where either two languages or two varieties of the same language co-exist in a speech community and they are used for different functions. Commonly one is a standard variety used in government, the courts, education, and the media (the H-variety), and the other is a less prestigious variety used in the family, among friends, and similar informal situations (L-variety). An example of a diglossic situation involving two varieties of one language is the German part of Switzerland, where the H-variety is *Hochdeutsch* (High German), and the L-variety is *Schweyzertuutsch*, a range of local dialects (Richards et al 1990:81-2). However, the distinctions are not always so clear cut, particularly where there is cultural heterogeneity. For example, Abrahams (1983) discusses diglossic situations in various parts of the Caribbean and notes that many Afro-Caribbeans recognise they have a diglossic H and L in their two forms 'talking sweet' (H) and 'talking broad' (L) (p.34). However, in certain of the usages of these forms the distinction between them is not always apparent, given the diverse cultural history of the users. He gives this example of a linguistic performance in a tea meeting speech contest.

Your honour, the judges, I see that you are fully impregnated with love of your people. I see that you are willing to fulfil the great duties of teachers, as spiritual guides. I see your love of your country. Your motto,

sir, is to let those who have light give unto others. Sirs, tongues fail me, to consult my Webster for words to compare you, but I do hope that you will give justice unto whom justice belongs, when this meeting shall have come to its close.

(p.37)

Abrahams comments: 'Whereas the content and H variety are obviously derived from European sources, the style and mode of use are not. Although performance H is primarily derived from oratorical style in Standard English, it is recognisably a substitution for similar codes found in Africa' (p.38).

Naturally, a language situation can be even more complex. Platt (1977) talks of 'polyglossia' when discussing the language complexities of Singapore and Malaysia. For example, the repertoire of an English-educated Chinese in Malaysia might consist of up to seven languages and dialects (p.365). Platt's continuum runs from H through M (Middle) to L varieties, depending on which domain is being spoken in (p.367).

Such examples of stylistic mixing are an obvious resource for anyone seeking to create humour; the incongruities come 'ready-made', as it were. But it is not necessary to look just at such obvious cultural heterogeneity; style-mixing occurs not simply in multicultural situations and not just between two different speakers from the same culture, but also occurs within one speaker, and this too is a convenient resource for comedy. We saw above how the peasant's argument against Arthur came in different styles – vernacular, administrative, polemical. Bakhtin's view of language is one that stresses such 'multivoicedness':

language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages, with prim but moribund aristocrat-languages, with parvenu languages and with countless pretenders to the status of language...

(1986:356-7)

For him any single national language is not uniform and univocal but is made up of social dialects, professional jargon, languages of different age groups, of authorities, of various circles and passing fashions, languages serving specific sociopolitical purposes and so on (pp.262-3). This *heteroglossia*, the 'multivoicedness' referred to above, finds its aesthetic expression in, to give just one example from Bakhtin - the English comic novel of the 19th century, through such things as

the forms of parliamentary eloquence, then the eloquence of the court, or particular forms of parliamentary protocol, or court protocol, or forms used by reporters, in newspaper articles, or the dry business language of the City, or the dealings of speculators, in the pedantic speech of scholars, or the high epic style, or Biblical style, or the style of the hypocritical moral sermon

(p.301)

This section will close with an example to illustrate this notion of heteroglossia. We return to the scene in Steptoe & Son where they are arguing about the state of the house. They have agreed to redecorate the house but are now disputing the nature of the redecoration. A = Albert, the father; H = Harold, the son. The scene has been edited.

1. H: We seems to have reached our usual impasse, don't we?

2. A: If you like.

3. H: You won't give way on anything will you? You don't give a toss what colour

4. we have. You just want to go against me, don't you? If I wanted flock wallpaper

5. in the bog, you wouldn't. Whatever I want, you don't.

6.A: I'm entitled to my opinion.

[EDIT]

7.H: I, I'm not, I'm just not putting up with this filth any longer. Ugh! I'm warning

8. you, dad, unless something is done about it I shall be forced to make alternative

9. arrangements.

10. A: Do what you like.

11. H: I mean. I'm afraid our paths have now grown too diverse for any possibility of

12. reconciliation.

13. A: If you like.

14. H: And not to put too fine a point on it, dad, your very presence tends to impinge

15. on my aesfetic moments, my little bits of relaxation.

16. A: In other words, I get on yer tits.

17. H: It's crude but apposite [*Pause*] Verefore vere's only one course of action open

18. - one of us will have to go.

(Galton & Simpson 2000)

The focus here will be on Harold's language. In the first part of the exchange (1-6) we see that Harold's language is an unremarkable example of the vernacular of one working class male speaking to another: he gives the first person plural verb a third person singular 's' in 1 – 'we seems'; he uses the mild expletive 'couldn't give a toss' (3); and refers to the toilet as 'the bog' (5). In the terms of Hodge and Kress these can be seen as S-forms, or in broader sociolinguistic terms, there is language convergence. However, when the argument becomes more heated there is a distinct change in Harold's language. In order to stress the division between himself and his father he uses more formal and official expressions:

- I shall be forced to make alternative arrangements (8)
- I'm afraid our paths have grown too diverse for any possibility of reconciliation (11-12)
- your very presence tends to impinge (14)
- only one course of action open (17)

This is almost the language of a diplomatic press release when compared to his earlier utterances (1-6). But at the same time from his own mouth there is another voice speaking, the voice of the working class son. As he deliberately diverges from his father with his formal 'I shall be forced...' he at the same time addresses him as 'dad' (8). And what his father's 'very presence tends to impinge on' is not Harold's 'aesthetic moments' [əsθetik] but his '*aesfetic* moments' [əsfetik], this single simple vernacular phonemic choice speaking with a different voice from *within* the formal paradigmatic choice. In his next turn (17) we again get more than one voice; his response to his father's 'I get on yer tits' is to use the divergent and formal 'crude but apposite', but in the same utterance his conclusion is not, 'Therefore there's only one course of action open...' but '*Verefore vere's* only one...', another example of the

clash between vernacular phonemic choice and formal paradigmatic choice. As Pollock has it:

Heteroglossia is a web of dotted lines within language – dialects, sociolects, idiolects, as well as national idioms – which allow for change. At these lines, or boundaries between idioms, are the “free zones”, where words can cross over from one contextual meaning to another.

(1993:233)

And it is such ‘free zones’ which lend themselves so easily to comic manipulation.

In one sense, as we have seen, the entire language can be considered a ‘free zone’ inasmuch as those wishing to create a humorous meaning choose from the full range of linguistic resources available, from the smaller units to the larger units. Such choices can be used simply to amuse (Freud’s ‘innocent’) but also, if so desired, for other purposes (‘tendentious’), and this can be done either directly through denotation, or, as is more usual with humour, indirectly through connotation. Such indirectness presents problems in the assignment of meanings, and it is this grey area which is of central concern to this work as it lies at the heart of the problem to be encountered in Section 8. It raises the pertinent issue of why it is that the same material can have noticeably divergent responses, an issue with which we shall now deal in some detail.

5. COMPETENCE, PERMISSION, AMBIVALENCE

In the previous section the discussion started with a treatment of language and humour and it soon became apparent that the social aspects of language simply cannot be ignored. This section will now consider in detail the different possible interpretations of humorous cues; what one person finds funny, another person may not. The lack of an amused response can be due to various factors: incomprehension, the recipient simply doesn't 'get' the joke; style, the joke is not in a form which amuses the recipient; offence, the topic and/or content of the humour upsets rather than amuses the listener; environment, it may be inappropriate to show amusement at the present event, and so on. We now turn to some models which explore this area, and in doing so assume we are dealing with adults with undamaged brains. A number of neurophysiological studies have shown that people with right hemisphere brain damage (RHD) have certain problems processing humour. Brownell & Gardner (1988) note that such damage 'affects patients' abilities to process one of two major components of humour: the ability to revise an initial interpretation in order to integrate a sentence (or final frame of a cartoon strip) back with what has come earlier in a discourse' (p.30). Winner et al, when considering theory of mind deficits, also note that 'a comparison between RHD patients and normal controls demonstrates clearly that for RHD patients the ability to distinguish lies from jokes can be fragile and unreliable' (1996:14). And McGhee cites a study he carried out in 1974 into children's development and humour in which he found that 'children were neither able to discriminate humorous from non-humorous riddle answers, nor to create their own humour based on word play' until around the age of six (1980:132). Similarly, a study by Lefort (1992) showed that when two 'fake' jokes were presented with eleven actual jokes to three groups of children aged between six and eleven, only 35% of the youngest group detected them, rising to 88% in the oldest group. Such neurophysiological and developmental concerns are not given attention here.

Related to the idea of competence is the notion of 'permission' – which jokes are or are not permitted, by whom, and for what reasons? Central to this is humour's ambivalence, which is manifested in, among other things, studies of humour, comedic

performers' attitudes to their work, and audiences' reactions to humorous material. This section will consider these features also.

5.1

Some Models Of Competence

Raskin, in the detailed formulation of his Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) discusses the idea of humour competence. The main hypothesis of the theory is that a text can be considered a humorous text if two conditions are satisfied. These are:

- i) the text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
 - ii) the two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite.
- (1985:99)

His concept of 'scripts' will be discussed below but first let us come immediately to this idea of competence.

The semantic theory of humour is...designed to model the native speaker's intuition with regard to humor or, in other words, his *humor competence*. The theory models and thus defines the concept of funniness...[and] is formulated for an ideal speaker-hearer community i.e. for people whose senses of humor are exactly identical

(1985:58,original emphasis)

This is more strongly formulated by Attardo, someone with whom Raskin has collaborated.

The SSTH models the humorous competence of an idealised speaker/hearer who is unaffected by racial or gender biases, undisturbed by scatological, obscene or disgusting materials, not subject to boredom, and, most importantly, who has 'never heard it before' when presented with a joke.

(1994:197)

For Attardo, the context of a joke's telling is 'irrelevant' to its humorous nature (p.197). Clearly, then, this is a purely cognitive model (Raskin calls it 'a mechanical symbol-manipulation device' (p.58)) which echoes Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence with its 'ideal speaker-hearer' (1965:3). Before commenting further on this we look at another model, that of Chiaro.

Her model involves the interaction of three systems to constitute the competence needed to get a joke. These are the linguistic, the sociocultural, and the poetic (1992:13). To illustrate this she offers the following children's joke.

A: How many ears has Davy Crockett?

B: Two, hasn't he?

A: No, three. He's got a left ear, a right ear, and a wild frontier.

(p.13)

To understand even this simple joke, Chiaro argues, the hearer needs (a) linguistic competence to understand the meaning of the words and also that a joke is being signalled, (b) sociocultural competence to know who Davy Crockett was and also that the phrase 'wild frontier' comes from the theme song of the children's television show about him, and (c) poetic competence to read 'wild frontier' as 'wild front ear'. This formulation clearly includes a strong social dimension and would seem to be in contrast to Raskin's model in the same way that, for example, Hymes' 'communicative competence' (1972a) contrasts the earlier-mentioned linguistic competence of Chomsky, in that, whereas Raskin's and Chomsky's models are essentially cognitive, Chiaro's and Hymes' are grounded in actual use of language in the world.

However, Raskin does, in fact, include the social world in his theory in the notion of 'scripts'. His semantic theory has two components - a *lexicon* and *combinatorial rules*. The lexicon is 'script-based', where a script is 'a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalised by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world' (p.81). These scripts he divides into the linguistic and the non-linguistic, with the latter consisting of general knowledge scripts, relative knowledge scripts, and individual scripts (pp.134-5). We can flesh these out with some examples, respectively: the Earth is round (general knowledge); the English Football Association headquarters are in Soho Square, London (relative knowledge); I know where I keep my passport (individual knowledge). This is straightforward enough, yet in this reading it does seem to pose problems for the SSTH model. If one of the key components of the theory – the lexicon – is based on scripts which can clearly differ greatly from person to person, then individuals'

internalised cognitive structures will also differ. If this is so, then it surely follows that there is a *differential competence* and this cannot accord with his idealised humour competence which is 'identical' for everyone. If this is the case, then it seriously undermines his claim that the output of the theory, which is the assignment of the feature of funniness to texts, should coincide with 'the native speaker's judgement of texts' (p.58) when such judgements will differ significantly. There are other ideas on humour competence which also make a similar point about its variability and it is to these we now turn. In order, we will look at the notions of Raju, Carrell, and Hay.

Raju (1991) states that humour can be compared to a triptych painting with the three interrelated panels of response, structure, and disposition (p.72). She concentrates on response and divides the 'mental operations' in getting the joke into three: perception, understanding, and appreciation, and it is this last feature which is of interest to us here. She refers to people's 'reference groups' and 'identification groups', the former being the social groups in which *other* people place individuals, the latter being groups with which people identify *themselves*. These social factors have a strong bearing on people's ability to appreciate humour.

The Irish intellectual, for example, may prefer to identify himself with 'intellectuals' not 'Irishmen', an elegant and friendly mother-in-law may prefer to identify herself with other elegant women of her age not with 'The Mother-in-Law', and so on. A person's response to jokes which rely on racial or social stereotypes will therefore depend on how far his/her identification group corresponds with his/her reference group.

(p.80)

A first-hand account of such differences comes from Paul Davis, a black footballer discussing the problems of racism in English football in the 1980s.

I think that with me that was the biggest problem, the cultural thing – some of the humour wasn't what I had grown up with. Not that they [jokes] were necessarily aimed at me, but the general joking around the dressing-room, I don't know, it could be something they saw on TV that was funny to them, but less funny to me.

(Davis 2001:26)

Carrell (1997) makes an explicit criticism of Raskin with her distinction between ‘joke competence’ and ‘humor competence’. For her the former is the ‘ability of the native speaker (audience for the joke text) to recognise a text or a joke without determining whether or not the text is funny’, and the latter is the ability to then ‘pass judgement on the humorness of a specific text’ (p.174). She argues that while the former may seem simplistic, it is a discrete part of humor competence in the same way that humor competence is a discrete part of linguistic competence (p.175). She adds that ‘these processes most often operate at an unconscious or subconscious level and nearly simultaneously’ (p.179). In her opinion, Raskin’s notion of humour competence conflates the two (p.175). Her distinction is not without significance as this cognitive lacuna can be seen as a point of entry for phenomena from the physical and social worlds. She cites the following as being great influences on how individuals interpret particular situations: ‘hormonal imbalances, religious beliefs, political convictions, sexual orientation, psychological problems or hang-ups, and/or a recent or long-standing personal involvement with, for instance, a particular disease or death’ (p.183). Clearly, then, in her formulation a hearer may well recognise that a joke is being presented but its contents will have to pass through a fine filter before being adjudged humorous or not. And as our physical, mental, and social conditions, as well as our beliefs, differ widely, our humour competence will also differ.

Hay (2001) talks of qualified and unqualified humour support, the latter involving a scalar implicature (where ‘implicature’ is taken to mean communicative implication). The three implicatures are 1. recognition, 2. understanding, and 3. appreciation (p.67). (Note the similarity to Raju’s three ‘mental operations’ above.) In her formulation, 2 entails 1, and 3 entails both 1 and 2, which we can represent here diagrammatically.

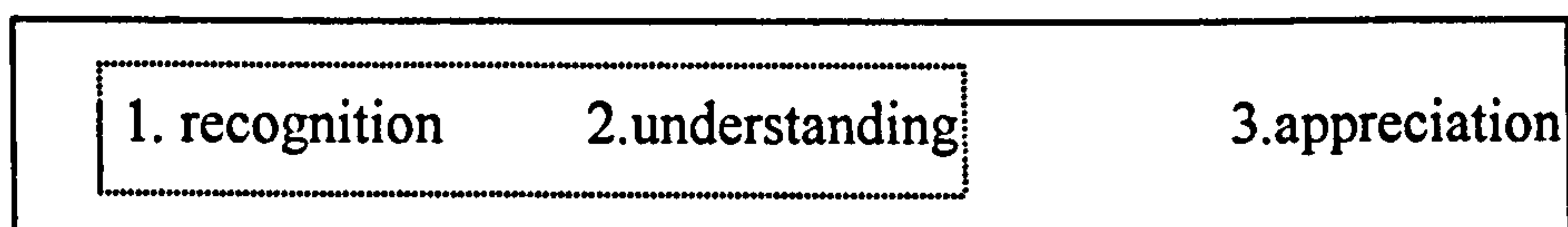


Fig.3. Hay’s scalar implicature of unqualified humour support.

On this scale we see once more there is a gap between understanding a joke and appreciating it (2 and 3), a gap which needs to be traversed across people’s differing belief systems. It is this, Hay adds, which enables an audience, if they so wish, to withhold full support i.e. show understanding but not appreciation (p.67). She then

explicitly associates this with Carrell's comments on joke and humour competences (p.68), discussed above.

Thus, what Carrell, Chiaro, Hay, and Raju would all agree on is that the social world and our places in it are crucial elements in any conception of humour competence, which cannot be simply a universal cognitive skill.

Powell would support much of this. His view of humour as deviance from the ideal operates at various levels – individual, group, and societal (1977:53). This model of humour as 'normality vs. deviance' recognises that different people/groups recognise different norms and rules and consequently find different ideas and events funny, or find the same stimuli funny for different reasons. For example, take an audience watching 'Modern Times', in which Chaplin plays an assembly worker having difficulties with the modern production process. Audience members of a left-wing persuasion might locate the problem in the conditions and relations of production and be amused by Chaplin's resistance to these. Those of a right-wing bent might be amused by the incongruity of Chaplin's failure to conform to acceptable norms. 'We are not talking of abstract realities, but rather of a world of multiple realities and constructed meanings' (p.54). This also means, as stated earlier, that what some people may find amusing others will find unamusing or even offensive. 'The crucial point is that people respond according to what they think is the meaning of a given text' (p.54). For example, we earlier had occasion to note (1.1) that Jacobson was not amused by the parody of Bernard Manning, whereas most of the audience were. This also raises the notion of *permission*, and it is to a discussion of this which now follows.

5.2

Permission

Many commentators have remarked on this concept, some explicitly, some implicitly. Freud, when discussing the differing roles involved in joking, touched upon it.

The third person cannot be ready to laugh at an excellent obscene joke if the exposure applies to a highly respected relative of his own; before a gathering of priests and ministers no one would venture to produce Heine's comparison of catholic and protestant clerics to retail tradesman and employees of a wholesale business; and an audience composed of my

opponent's devoted friends would receive my most successful pieces of joking invective against him not as jokes but as invective, and would meet them with indignation and not with pleasure.

(1991:196-7)

The concept of permission has been more foregrounded in anthropological studies of African tribal joking relationships. Radcliffe-Brown, who is commonly seen as one of the initiators of such studies, was direct about the notion. For him the joking relationship

is a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism. The behaviour is such that in any other social context it would express and arouse hostility; but it is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously. There is a pretence of hostility and a real friendliness. To put it another way, the relationship is one of *permitted* disrespect.

(1952:91 emphasis added)

Of further interest here is Griaule's criticism of Radcliffe-Brown. Griaule questioned the whole notion of joking relationships when he said that what the Dogon tribe exchanged were not jokes but insults. That is, not only was there no permission, there was no joke to be permitted (in Douglas 1975:92). This problem is at the heart of the discussion in Section 8.

It was Douglas herself who made the concept of permission central to the joking act. According to her it is not merely enough to perceive the joke, recipients must also permit it. Both aspects involve 'the social dimension'. As for perception:

If the Kagura think it witty to throw excrement at certain cousins or the Lodagaba to dance grotesquely at funerals or the Dogon to refer to the parents' sexual organs when they meet a friend, then to recognise the joke that sends all present into huge enjoyment we need not retreat into cultural relativism and give up a claim to interpret. The problem has merely shifted to the relation between joking and the social structure.

(1975:97)

To understand these jokes we need what she calls 'the full pattern of relationships', that is, if we don't have the whole social context we won't get such jokes. For Douglas, '[t]he social dimension enters at all levels into the perception of the joke'

(p.97). (Indeed, the original title of her essay (1968) is ‘The Social Control Of Cognition: Some Factors In Joke Perception.’) But the process does not end there; she is equally firm on the point of permission: ‘[T]here are jokes which can be perceived clearly enough by all present but which are rejected at once. Here again the social dimension is at work’ (p.98). We can also see here some parallels with Carrell’s notions of ‘joke competence’ and ‘humour competence’ discussed above in 5.1. And this signals that it is time to take a look at some concrete examples to help illustrate these claims. We will consider four examples from a variety of sources: two involve recourse to law, one involves (possibly) a cross-cultural misunderstanding, and the last one is a comedic performance.

The first involves an incident of African joking relationships. Pedler reports a case involving *utani* joking relationships in Tanganyika in 1934. A Zaramu tribesman was accused by a Sukuma woman of assault when he grabbed her by the arms and pushed her to the ground in a beer hall. The man’s defence was that the custom of *utani* existed between their tribes and this permitted such behaviour. He produced witnesses to support this view. The woman claimed no such joking relationship existed, though under cross-examination she admitted she had indulged previously in *utani* with the defendant but only verbally not physically. The magistrate found that, in law, assault had taken place but, as Pedler notes, ‘the plea of *utani* was admitted as a very strong extenuating circumstance, and the sentence inflicted by the court was accordingly a light one’ (1940:172). (The problem here would seem to be not simply about the existence of joking relationships and what they entail, but also about the conflict between tribal custom and colonial law.)

A harsher sentence was passed in Burma when the popular comedians U Pa Pa Lay and Lu Zaw, associates of the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, were sentenced to seven years’ hard labour, ostensibly for joking about the generals (Pilger 1996). Comment on this reaction is perhaps best left to comedian Mark Thomas, who, in an investigative television programme on Burma, remarked: ‘That’s a fuck of a heckle’ (Thomas 1999). We can also note in passing that this is a helpful comment on comedian/audience relations generally, more details of which will come below in 5.3.3.

It should be further noted that it is not rare for comedians to fall foul of various political regimes around the world as evidenced by a special edition of *Index On Censorship* (Vidal-Hall, ed., 2000).

The next example comes from a television interview. New Year's day of the year 2000 (CE) occurred at the same time as the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. On that day, the first of the new Christian millennium, BBC TV sought to cover the UK in a wide social and geographical sweep. To cover the Muslim event they went to Glasgow, where Fred McCauley, a white Scottish comedian and chat show host, interviewed a leader of Glasgow's Islamic community in a large hall where many Muslims were eating a communal meal after sunset. The interviewee was a middle-aged man in smart Western dress and his accent and physical features identified him as someone originally from the Indian sub-continent. The short interview was mainly about Ramadan. McCauley also ate and commented on the spiciness of the food. The piece ended with the following brief exchange (reconstructed immediately after viewing):

McCauley: Do you do carry-out?

Interviewee: I'm a GP. I'm a general practitioner.

(McCauley 2000)

Here McCauley seems to be jokingly reproducing his side of a familiar social situation in which, when presented with spicy food and a middle-aged Asian host, he immediately thinks of the context ('script') of an Indian restaurant, most of which provide a take-away ('carry-out') service. His host's reply can be interpreted in at least three ways, the first two in which he assumes the question is in the serious mode, and the other, which interests us here, in which he takes it to be a humorous communication. Taking the question seriously, his reply could be an indirect 'No' or it could be an attempt to clarify the situation: 'You've made a mistake, I'm a doctor.' However, it could also be a recognition that McCauley (a comedian, recall) is constructing a humorous meaning in which he (the host) is a caterer but he refuses to play this role and asserts his proper professional position and so denies McCauley permission to make the joke. Nevertheless, this would not prevent any viewer from perceiving and permitting the joke and being amused (or not) by it. Similarly, it may also cause other viewers to see the doctor's *response* as amusing, in that it creates the incongruity of a comedian having his punch line rebuffed and, thus, tables turned, *his*

role demeaned. It is also a situation at least mildly reminiscent (though much less aggressive) to the one above (4.2) concerning Dr. Poussaint and the Southern US policeman, though here, significantly, the white figure of (a much less threatening) authority is rebuffed.

The last example comes from the Channel 4 comedy series 'Jam'. This series was described in *Radio Times* in the following manner. 'Reality-bending comedy as the ever unpredictable Chris Morris dredges up more nightmare scenarios and turns them into twisted jokes' (15-21 April 2000). Each episode would begin with a warning about strong language and sexually explicit images. In short, it can be described as dark, adult comedy. What follows is the transcript of an entire scene. It should also be noted that each scene in the series was acted 'straight' or even underplayed, and accompanied by a kind of ambient muzak. Sometimes film speed and soundtrack were slowed. Further, there was no laughter, either canned or from a live audience. All of these combined factors often gave the show a sombre, uneasy feel. The following scene was shot from outside through French windows into what looked like a kitchen. It was shown in negative. A man and a woman enter arguing.

Simon: I did nothing!

Lucy: Oh, fuck off, Simon!

S: I love you.

L: I bet you said the same thing to her.

S: I don't give a fuck about her.

L: Do you expect me to believe that?

S: It was just a spur of the moment thing and it meant nothing.

L: Nothing!? Ohhh!

S: Yes. I didn't even know her name, for God's sake.

L: How come Marlin saw you snogging [*unclear*]?

S: Oh, she said that, did she?

L: Yes.

S: Well that's bollocks, Lucy, cos I had my hand over her mouth.

L: So?

S: So I didn't even get one kiss off the woman. I was bloody raping her. [*Pause*]
See?

L: [*Pause, and then unsurely*] Really?

S: I'd never even met her before. I mean, I was out of there as soon as I'd done it.
I'm not going to see her again, am I?

L: Promise?

S: What am I, a nut?

[*Woman moves to man and they cuddle and moan contentedly*]

L: Sorry.

(Morris 2000)

What we have here is a lovers' tiff, during which it is revealed that the man's infidelity was, in fact, a rape, for which his partner forgives him. We saw earlier, even in a situation where there was the custom of *utani*, how a participant was found guilty in a court of law of assault for indulging in what he claimed was traditional joking horseplay. Clearly, the crime of rape is a much more serious matter and an extremely delicate subject for verbal joking in a society in which there is a tradition of highly public struggle around gender relations, further details of which will come in Section 7. Thus, some people watching this performance might not have accepted this as comedy and therefore would not even begin to find it funny. Rather, that such a topic was chosen to amuse at all would not only have been unamusing but also offensive. de Sousa would call this an example of *phthonic* humour ('malicious', 'evil' - he borrows the word from Plato) and claims that enjoyment of such jokes makes the amused person complicit in the breach of the moral code:

In contrast to the element of wit, the phthonic element in a joke requires *endorsement*. It does not allow of hypothetical laughter. The phthonic makes us laugh only insofar as the assumptions on which it is based are attitudes actually shared. Suspension of disbelief in the situation can and must be achieved for the purposes of the joke; suspension of attitude cannot be.

(1987:240, original emphasis)

Hay (2001) makes a similar point when discussing humour support strategies. In addition to the three implicatures discussed above (recognition, understanding, appreciation) she adds a fourth: agreement. She argues that an unqualified show of humour support 'implicates agreement with the message including any attitudes, presuppositions or implicatures contained in the humor' (p.72) and that certain types of humour –she cites ethnic and sexist humour – depend on the recipient sharing a certain attitude, without which 'the humour may fall completely flat' (p.76). That is, in such cases there is a dependence between appreciation and agreement. However, she also notes that it is possible for someone to be simultaneously offended and amused so that they support the humour but express disagreement e.g. 'laughter followed by an explicit cancellation such as "that's cruel"' (p.76). (There is a detailed discussion of such an occurrence in Section 8.) Such ambivalent attitudes to humour are not uncommon and can be found in studies of the subject, amongst performers, and in audiences, as we will now see.

5.3

Ambivalence

5.3.1

Studies: Ethnic Humour

Certain degrees of ambivalence are expressed in studies of ethnic humour. Davies has studied this area in great detail and is something of an authority. He maintains that this humour emanates from the centre and is aimed at groups 'living on the social or geographical periphery of the country where the jokes are told'. The essential point of such jokes is that 'they reflect a deep-seated need that people have to tell jokes about a group of stupid outsiders' (1988:2-3). It is not, though, an area that is easy to delineate. He spends most of the introduction to his comparative study on ethnic humour around the world carefully trying to describe the boundaries of the object of his study. So problematic is the area that when he suggests excluding jokes about religion *per se*, jokes about people of particular towns or villages, or about groups such as Aggies, aristocrats and apparatchiks, he finds this 'futile' and 'senseless' (1996:2). Yet he is hostile towards those who see ethnic humour in terms of conflict, saying it is 'pointless to analyse jokes in terms of their practical consequences' as jokes are 'not important because of their consequences but as a phenomenon in their own right, as a favourite pastime of many people and a great source of popular entertainment and creativity' (p.9). Those that would deal with ethnic humour in overtly political terms 'deserve all the extra derision they incur for they are indeed fools' (p.9).

Such a view would tolerate Oshima's study of Hawaii, where, according to her, ethnic humour is 'used to lubricate local people's everyday communication in Hawaii's multi-ethnic society in accordance with a matrix of specific and unspoken rules' (2000:41). These rules involve being able to laugh at and tell jokes about one's own ethnicity. An example:

- What do you get when a Yobo [Korean] marries a Buddha head [Japanese]?
- Four angry parents.

(p.52)

However, she points out that ethnic humour in Hawaii differs very greatly from that on the mainland (she does not say how or why), and that what she calls 'a healthy ethnic joke' should be 'harmless'. Further, 'a positive ethnic joke creates laughter through recognition of ethnic characteristics in a respectable fashion, not to promote the notion of lesser comparative races of people' (p.45). She gives no indication of the socio-economic or political backgrounds of the ethnic groups she talks about nor does she say what happens when such cleansing of ethnic jokes is not adhered to.

We can now look at some examples of jokes which Oshima would not find healthy or positive. Kuipers (2000) comments that in the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards the arrival of several immigrant groups saw a rise in ethnic jokes. 'These "foreigner jokes" were, and still are, highly offensive and are not usually made public' (p.141).

An example:

- What's the difference between a Turk and a bucket of shit?
- The bucket.

(p.166)

Dundes & Hauschild studied the persistence of Auschwitz jokes in Germany. This example was heard in Mainz in 1982.

- How many Jews will fit in a Volkswagen?
- 506. Six in the seats and 500 in the ashtray.

(1988:57)

A more recent group of economic migrants also feature alongside Jews.

- What's the difference between Turks and Jews?
- The Jews have behind them what the Turks now have before them.

(p.62)

Dundes and Hauschild note that while it could be healthy for Germans to openly acknowledge the significance of Auschwitz in their history, it is 'disturbing to think that the recognition of the grim reality has not ended centuries-old anti-Semitic sentiments in Germany' (p.64).

However, Dundes has been criticised for his collecting of such jokes and commenting on their purported cathartic effect. Billig (2001), for example, points out that 'merely collecting these jokes in no way provides evidence about the nature of their

communication nor about any “cathartic value” that they might possess for the tellers’ (p.270). Davies (1991), in a reply to a criticism by Oring (1991) that Davies’ 1990 study (in this dissertation cited as 1996) overlooked aggressive use of ethnic jokes, also refers to the need to study such jokes in actual performance to be able to decide on their racist intent. As he did not have such resources to do this, he explains, it was not a main feature of his study.

But this is precisely what Billig (2001) does in his study of the humour and hatred of the Ku Klux Klan as exhibited on three joke websites. In this work Billig stresses the importance of the context of utterance and what a speaker is actually doing with words, communicative features which are also central to this study. To show what these sites are doing with words, it is sufficient to give their names: ‘Nigger Jokes KKK’, ‘Nigger Jokes’, and ‘Nigger Joke Central’ (pp.273-4). These sites provide not only racist jokes but also games in which the player can kill black people in various ways. Billig concludes that there can be strong connections between hatred and humour and that such jokes bring pleasure to the bigot. Further, ‘[n]ot only can the targets of hatred be savagely ridiculed but, by using the discourse of humour, the bigot can simultaneously mock the demands of reason’ (p.285). Jacobson, though, would not agree. In the earlier-mentioned criticism of Griffiths’ play ‘Comedians’ (3.2), which he combines with a defence of Bernard Manning, Jacobson comments:

Once accept that a joke is a structured dialogue with itself, that it cannot, by its nature, be an expression of an opinion, and you have conceded its unalikehood to racist discourse, which by *its* nature is impermeable and cannot abide a contradiction.

(1997:36)

It should be clear by now that this study does not accept that jokes stand outside of history, locked in some perpetual self-regarding loop, but that they are the utterances of social beings engaged in activities with other social beings in particular places and at particular times. Without doubt a primary purpose of humour is to provide pleasure, but the question is, what is the nature of that pleasure?

Clearly the KKK jokes investigated by Billig, as well as those from the Netherlands and Germany cited above, are not dialogues with themselves, nor are they simply about stupidity and neither do they serve as social lubricants, but they are ‘ethnic’ and

they are intended as 'jokes', yet they are significantly downplayed in Davies' 1996 work, and those that would highlight them are pilloried by him for doing so. However, there are other students of humour who see ethnic humour in much more inclusive terms, as we have seen. Apte is one such, and it is perhaps fitting to draw this discussion to a close with a definition from him:

Ethnic humor mocks, caricatures, and generally makes fun of a specific group or its members by virtue of their ethnic identity; or it portrays the superiority of one ethnic group over others. In addition, its thematic development must be based on factors that are the consequences of ethnicity, such as ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination. Such a broad-based definition of ethnic humor subsumes many types within it...

(1985: 139-40)

But one group disparaging another, to whatever degree, is not the only manifestation of ethnic humour. The fact that societies become more multicultural and integrated over succeeding generations also finds its expression in humour. A prominent example of this in the United Kingdom is Ali G, a comedic character so complex that he at first caused confusion. The comedian Sacha Baron-Cohen, a white, middle-class, Cambridge-educated Jew performs as Ali G, a foul-mouthed, inarticulate, white, working-class young man pretending in his dress and speech to be a street-wise, black gangsta rapper. Some blacks find this offensive. Curtis Walker, a radio presenter, comments, 'I don't like the concept of a white guy playing a black guy anyway, and when he is playing a stupid stereotype it's even worse' (Eboda 2000). However, Michael Eboda, editor of black magazine *New Nation* feels differently: 'Ali G works because he is a white guy trying to be black who gets it terribly wrong' (Eboda 2000). He also notes that the name 'Ali G' suggests that the character might even be an Asian who wants to be black, which further complicates matters.

5.3.2

Performers

But Walker is not the only one who is uneasy when humour is created about someone's ethnicity by a performer who is not, to use Lawson's words (2000), 'wearing the team shirt'. The comedian Shazia Mirza believes that in such situations

the ethnicity of the performer is paramount. When asked what makes comedy material racist she replied:

I don't think it's the material, although sometimes it can be. I think it's more the person who's telling the joke. I mean, I would never do jokes about black people cos I'm not black, you know. I as a Muslim woman I feel I have the right to do Muslim jokes cos I'm giving you first-hand information about what it's like to be a Muslim woman. A white laddy bloke telling that, telling Muslim jokes, is second-hand information and I think in the back of my mind would always be the question: 'Does he really find that funny or does he really not like Muslim women?' You don't know, you know, if he's making jokes at us or with us.

(Bakewell 2001)

This is just one of a whole variety of views held by comedians about what is and what is not acceptable in performance, ranging from the desire for complete freedom to the acknowledgement of certain limits. Gerry Sadowitz insists on being allowed free rein. 'Doesn't [it] make you sick? That jokes and opinions should be censored? It's absolutely ridiculous. Why the fucking hell can't I say whatever I want? I'm a comic...' (Hind 1991:70). Elsewhere he states that he is misogynist and that he sees it as his job to cause offence (Sadowitz 2000). Shazia Mirza is equally forthright concerning limits: 'It's good to offend people, it makes them think...I think there's nothing that can't be joked about' (Bakewell 2001). Rich Hall was criticised at the Edinburgh Festival for singing a country and western ballad about child abuse (this was at a time – summer 2000 – of widespread public and media concern about the topic) and defended himself thus: 'The purpose of comedy...is to take people where they are not sure they want to go. There is no unchartable territory' (Lawson 2000). Lee Mack also claims he has no problem with taste, commenting, 'There are things that are very sick that can be very funny, so I'll tell a joke about almost anything' (Naughton 2001), although his use of 'almost' is notable.

Others also express reservations. John Cleese recounts an experience he had with the Monty Python team in Germany. On arrival they were told by their hosts that they would be immediately be taken to see a concentration camp. When they reached the camp their hosts became involved in an argument at the gate and it became clear that it was too late to gain entry, at which point Graham Chapman shouted out, 'Tell them we're Jews' (Hind 1991:158). Cleese comments, 'It's one of the funniest things I've

ever heard...But it's a joke which still leaves a nasty taste in the mouth' (p.158, original emphasis). And a similar ambivalence is expressed by Paul Whitehouse when asked if he found any subject unsuitable for comedy. 'Yes...but I don't want to sound wet, so, no.' (Driver 1995:83) And finally, a comment from Rowan Atkinson. One of the many effects of the attacks in the USA on September 11th and the subsequent attacks on Muslims was an attempt by the British Home Secretary to introduce legislation to outlaw incitement to religious hatred. This spurred Atkinson to write a letter to *The Times* in which he states, 'I have always believed that there should be no subject about which one cannot make jokes, religion included...comedy takes no prisoners'. He goes on, 'I believe it is the reaction of the audience that should decide the appropriateness of a joke, not the law of the land' (2001).

5.3.3

Audiences

Audiences do play a crucial role in this interpretation of meaning – is this funny or is it offensive? Ross makes a point concerning this ambivalence in relation to sexist and racist jokes, which, she says, 'can be told with an element of mocking allusion' to those very genres (1998:57). However, this cannot guarantee that such jokes will be perceived in the way intended. She cites Johnny Speight's creation of the racist bigot Alf Garnett in the television sitcom 'Till Death Us Do Part' as an example; Garnett's racist comments were enjoyed both by people who saw the intended mockery of Garnett *and* those who didn't. So we can say that there were those who laughed *at* Garnett and those who laughed *with* him. Those who laughed at him need not have suspended their anti-racist attitude, but clearly the object and the motive of their amusement differ from those of the recipients who laughed with him. While this conflicts with de Sousa's notion of phthonic humour, it adds support to the point being made here – that different audience members will assign different meanings to humorous texts. Some may express their approval through explicit displays of amusement, while some may express their disapproval through, among other things, verbal abuse or the use of violence, as we shall now see.

The comic figure who is sometimes seen as the modern-day equivalent of Alf Garnett, Al Murray's character 'The Pub Landlord', has had unexpected responses from his audiences: 'I can hardly believe it when people take the Pub Landlord seriously –

during one of my stage shows, somebody stood up and shouted: “You’re racist and xenophobic!”. You think: “Come on, work it out”” (Murray 2002). Jacobson (again) is one who feels he has it worked out when he comments:

We know when we listen to a joke that we are entering, of our own volition, a world of dramatic make-believe, that we are lending ourselves to a fiction, that the I of the comic narration is not the I of the actual comedian’s private life.

(1997:36)

These comments on audience response involve once again the ideas of audience dis/attendance (2.4) and comic identity (3.2), but this situation, though often unremarkable, is not as clear cut as these commentators would like to think, for some audience members clearly do not disattend the nature of comedic performance utterances and hold the person on the stage (in whatever guise) socially responsible. Andy de la Tour, talking of the early days of alternative comedy, recalls that when he made a joke in performance about Airey Neave’s death (Neave was assassinated leaving the House of Commons’ car park by an Irish National Liberation Army car bomb) there was almost a fist fight. ‘So I brought my act rapidly to a close and got off the stage double quick’ (Deayton 1999). Elsewhere a joke about an IRA bomb which killed members of an RAF band playing to the public in a London park resulted in the teller, comedian Keith Allen, being knocked unconscious by a military audience member (Littlewood and Pickering 1998:298). And Gerry Sadowitz, a deliberately provocative performer, has also been assaulted, his ‘physical heckle’ coming at the international comedy festival in Montreal. (Sadowitz 2000). However, it should be noted that this is not the same as attacking the comedian because he ‘has no punch lines’ or his act does not meet other minimum performance requirements, as was the case with, for example, Lee Evans in his early days (Cook 1994:219-20). In these examples the comedians were attacked for the *topic* of the humour, a topic for which (at least some) audience members would not grant permission. This again raises the question of ‘licence’ which was part of the discussion of the ‘comic figure’ in Section 3.

Another kind of attack worthy of mention is that made on Shazia Mirza, merely for daring to perform comedy in public. Appearing in Brick Lane in London, a predominantly Bengali area, she was manhandled backstage by three Asian men who

told her, 'You shouldn't be doing this. You're a woman, you're a disgrace to your religion' (Bragg 2002). (Further details of women's exclusion from comedy are included in Section 7.3.)

A less extreme form of the denial of permission comes in the letters column of TV listings magazines such as *Radio Times*. Two letters (out of many) are given attention here. The first concerns the sitcom 'Heartburn Hotel', which is set in a seedy hotel, most of whose guests are sent there by the local social services department. One viewer saw it as follows: 'Congratulations and thanks to BBC1 for giving me one of the best laughs from a sitcom I've had in years. The writing, actors and timing of 'Heartburn Hotel' are all brilliant' (Oldfield 2000:4). In the same issue the TV reviewer comments on the same show as follows:

Jokes about people in community care and those seeking asylum aren't funny. And giving asylum seekers "funny" things to say in subtitles does not make up for the show's sheer offensiveness. How many more times – foreigners aren't funny just because they're foreigners.

(Graham 2000:46)

Here the dispute concerns the role of foreigners and the socially vulnerable, the former commentator wholly accepting their use in the series, the latter offended.

The next letter is from an offended viewer but it is not only the offence that is to be focused on here but also the idea of place. The viewer had watched the chat show 'Patrick Kielty Almost Live', during which Kielty made jokes about the then recent disasters involving Concorde and a Russian submarine. In both disasters all aboard had died. The viewer considered such jokes 'disgusting' and 'a disgrace' (White 2000:4-5). He then added, 'If you see a cutting edge comedian late at a smoky comedy club then you expect these jokes, but not on national TV' (p.5). Here, then, such jokes are seen as offensive but only in certain performance spaces. At a club specifically arranged for comedy, jokes about mass accidental death are 'expected'; in your living room, 'a disgrace'. That is, comedic licence to transgress is subject to certain social and spatial constraints, both of which are concerns of this study. The latter was dealt with in detail in Section 2, the former has been the general concern of this subsection and will be treated in greater detail in Section 8. We can pause for a moment here to add a few more details of the social consequences of struggles around humour.

Double (1997:175) notes that as a result of the change in the targets of jokes after the emergence of alternative comedy (in short, a move away from sexist and racist humour) a leading British holiday firm, Thompsons, banned from their resorts comedians who used such material. A recent survey of 700 office workers in the UK found that 54% were worried about causing offence when telling a joke to colleagues at work, and 63% censored their jokes to avoid causing offence (Pertemps 2002). Indeed, jokes at work can have legal consequences. In February 2002 a senior barrister, Gordon Pringle, was called before a Bar Council disciplinary hearing accused of racially abusing a solicitor's clerk; he was suspended for a year and fined £1,000. Pringle asserted he was merely 'jesting in a postmodern, ironic, anti-PC way' (Metro 13.2.2002). Given the increase in pressure groups over the last few decades – according to Grant the number runs into tens of thousands in the UK (2000:18) – each making a case for its membership, thus making public those social groups and issues that were previously marginal and voiceless, such disputes about who or what can be the butt of public humour are likely to continue.

With all of this we find ourselves back again with Powell's idea of 'constructed meanings' (5.1), meanings based on recipients' attitudes. If this is the case, and it is the view of this dissertation that it is, then this again questions Raskin's notion of a 'humor competence' that is identical for all. Once again it would seem to be unable to make the assignment of funniness of texts coincide with the native-speaker's judgements of texts. As the above examples show, we cannot avoid asking: *which* native speaker experiencing *what*, *where*, and *when*? The abstract concept of humour competence as outlined by Raskin would seem to have little or no practical application, which for such a social event as humour is a significant limitation. However, there might seem to be some implicit, partial support for his view from de Sousa in some of the further details of the above discussion of the phthonic (where the amused person is complicit in any breach of the moral code). He says that we cannot find a joke amusing simply by imagining we share its phthonic assumption. 'Nevertheless we intuitively know that sharing these assumptions is what would enable us to find it funny...[and furthermore] the butt of the joke is someone who typically does not find it funny but knows only too well what's funny to those who do' (1987:240). This indicates a *shared* competence but still not an identical competence which would

enable each to assign funniness to a given text. That is, sexist assumptions, for example, might well be in the general knowledge script of the overwhelming majority of adults in a given society (and most certainly in the scripts of those struggling around gender relations) and thus what could be funny to sexists would be known to almost all, but this is not the same as all assigning funniness to, for example, a rape text.

Another point needs to be made here, and that is that there is a significant difference between the first three examples given above in 5.2 (Tanganyika, Burma, Ramadan in Glasgow) and the last one (the rape sketch): the first three are taken from social life and the last one is a comedic performance. This is important for meaning because comedic performance, like all performance, occupies a special space within which the contextual constraints of social life either do not operate or operate in different ways. Thus, utterances and behaviour which might have serious social consequences were they carried out in social life e.g. being punished in court for assaulting a woman, even 'jokingly', would not have the same consequences in performance e.g. raping a woman. (The obvious fact that the rape did not actually take place underlines the point being made here.) This is not to say that social life and performance are two completely separate worlds. We saw above how the two merged when the comedian Fred McCauley was given the task of carrying out an enquiry into one aspect of social life in Britain, and, more gravely, how the Burmese comedians' performance of jokes about the generals landed them in prison. Social life, broadly defined, encompasses performance but as we saw in Section 2 this does not preclude the fact that performance occurs in a special space which gives performers a greater freedom of expression, the meaning of which is constructed and perceived differently from similar expression outside that space. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there is a multitude of possible responses to humorous material wherever it might take place, as this section has clearly shown. This is because we have a humour competence which not only allows many to be amused by the same material (a shared competence), but also allows people to have extremely divergent responses to the same material (a differential competence). Both of these aspects of our humour competence, it is argued here, are grounded in what we believe and practise in our social lives. All of this brings us closer to a lengthy analysis of a disputed utterance by a comedian that occurred in performance space. But before that we need to give

greater attention to the general problems of assigning meaning to utterances in context, particularly those of an indirect nature.

6. A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO HUMOUR

This section looks at the major proponents of what is commonly called ‘speech act theory’ and their ideas about meaning assignment. The shortcomings of these ideas when dealing with talk in interaction are made clear and the usefulness of the findings of conversation analysis (CA) are highlighted. However, certain aspects of CA are also criticised for their claims to universality and their mechanical approach. (The reader is reminded that a detailed introduction to these matters is given in part B of the Introduction.)

6.1

Speech Acts

In this subsection we will consider the relevant items from Grice, Austin, Dascal, and Searle. In an early discussion of utterances and meaning Grice comments:

Perhaps we may sum up what is necessary for A to mean something by x as follows: A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognised as so intended.

(1957:383)

This opens up the possibility of there being a difference between the meaning of certain words (x) and what the speaker intends to convey by using those words, a point of great interest for our purposes.

Related ideas about indirectness and intent came from Austin, who saw three possible layers of meaning: the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary.

Act (A) or Locution

He said to me, ‘Shoot her!’ meaning by ‘shoot’ shoot and referring to ‘her’ as *her*

[we call this here the saying of something]

Act (B) or Illocution

He urged (or advised, or ordered etc) me to shoot her.

[to *do* something in saying something]

Act (C.a) or Perlocution

He persuaded me to shoot her

[to produce effects in the hearer (with oblique reference to (A) and (B))]

Act (C.b)

He got me to (made me etc) shoot her.

[to produce effect in the hearer (with no reference to (A) or (B))]

[1962] (1975:101-2)

What is of particular interest is not only the gaps between the layers of meaning, ripe for exploitation by, as we shall shortly see, anyone with humorous intent, but also the attention Austin gives to words as actions in context. For example, when in a marriage ceremony someone says 'I do', they don't merely say something, they also do something – they marry. Similarly when someone says 'I name this ship' or 'I bet you sixpence' they are not merely speaking they are also acting (p.5). This gave rise to another important distinction that Austin makes, that between 'constative' utterances and 'performative' utterances, where the former are, in plain terms, descriptions of the world/statements of fact which can be proved true or false ('Paris is the capital of France'), and the latter are utterances used to do things in the world. Austin says of the examples just cited that 'it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it' (p.6). But for these actions with words to be valid the necessary *felicity conditions* ('appropriate circumstances') must apply; the wedding participants must all have genuine roles and be in a wedding ceremony, the namer of the ship must be empowered to do so and needs to be at the naming ceremony and so on. If such felicity conditions do not apply then these actions are invalid (pp.14-8). This view of language as action also points up the importance of the role of the other participants in the interaction, the audience, a feature of context which will be dealt with at length later. However, Austin's formulations have had their critics and here we shall look at three, Derrida (1972), Bauman (1984), and Bauman and Briggs (1990).

Derrida's criticism of Austin is twofold. First he claims that Austin's felicity conditions which are necessary for the operation of a performative utterance exclude too much so that Austin is presented with a risk-free context in which intention is transparent, meaning is clear and the performative pure. Austin, for example, admits that performative utterances are vulnerable to the problems that affect all utterances

and so excludes performatives 'said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy' (1975:22). Such limiting of contexts, Derrida contends, seriously weakens much of Austin's argument (1972:323). Derrida's second point concerns the 'iterability of the sign', that is, that signs themselves can be cited in any context and can break free from any context and this renders inoperative any felicity conditions. 'Austin seems to consider only the conventionality that forms the circumstances of the statement, its contextual surroundings, and not a certain convention of that which constitutes locution itself' (p.323).

It is Derrida's first point that would seem to carry more weight. Excluding certain contexts as invalid does make Austin's argument less forceful, and Bauman will have more to say on that point in relation to (cultural/theatrical) performances in a moment. However, Derrida's second point seems to say little more than that the raw material of language can be shaped to fit a variety of contexts, that signs have no absolute context themselves. Few would disagree, and, indeed, we saw earlier how Freud put it in plainer terms when he said that words 'are plastic material that can do all kinds of things' (1991:68). However, and this point would lend support to Austin, once we use that material (once we *do* something with words) we drastically reduce the possible meanings. As Hymes puts it:

When a form is used in context it eliminates the meanings possible to the context other than those that form can signal: the context eliminates from consideration the meanings possible to the form other than those that context can support.

(in Wootton 1975:44)

Note that Hymes is also implicitly aware of the iterability of the sign when he talks of the meanings (plural) possible even within a specified context. As Austin's primary concern was with *doing* things with words it appears that the main flaw of this second criticism of Derrida's is that it applies the perspective of locution to the problems of illocution. (It would, however, apply to things such as unintentional puns.)

Bauman also criticises Austin's comments concerning utterances in the context of (dramatic or literary) performance. Such utterances as those performed on the stage, in poems and so on Austin describes as 'not serious', 'parasitic', and 'etiolations of language', and he contrasts them with utterances occurring in a serious literal frame

(Austin 1975:22). However, Bauman points out that there are many other frames within which communication occurs (insinuation, *joking*, imitation, translation, quotation) and there are no clear grounds for giving priority to the literal frame, which itself is difficult enough to define (1984:10, emphasis added). In a later work Bauman and Briggs argue more forcefully that the formal elaboration of utterances in performance does not

relegate discourse to a Kantian aesthetic sphere that is both purely subjective and carefully insulated from cognition, social relations, and politics... [and further] poetic patterning, frames, genres, participatory structures, and other dimensions of performance draw attention to the status of speech as social action

(1990:65)

(This echoes a point made above in 2.4. and 3.2. It will be seen to have great relevance to the discussion in Section 8.) Such a view does not mean that Bauman and Briggs do not see any difference between an utterance said in performance space and an utterance said in everyday social life, but simply that they do not believe performance somehow *invalidates* utterances. This would concur with the view of this dissertation and we can use the simple example of joke telling to illustrate this. Language used to tell a joke in performance (or, indeed, in social life) may in some way be considered 'not serious' but it is not '*in a peculiar way* hollow or void' nor is it '*parasitic* upon its normal use' (Austin p.22, original emphasis). Telling a joke can be seen as a perfectly 'normal' use of language, the illocutionary force of which may or may not have the desired perlocutionary effect. We have seen how in certain circumstances some comedians have been imprisoned, physically assaulted, and verbally abused for their performance utterances, a clear demonstration that there was nothing 'hollow or void' about their stage talk.

The pragmatist Dascal saw precisely how the opening up of meaning (by such people as Grice and Austin) was applicable to humour when he said, 'Jokes...depend on the existence of [these] sociopragmatic devices that make indirectness possible' (1985:98). He sees three different levels of utterances, his formulation owing much to Austin and also having parallels with some of the models of humour competence discussed in 5.1.

- (i) *sentence meaning*: understanding a speaker's words

- (ii) *utterance meaning*: understanding those words in their specific reference in the context of the utterance
- (iii) *speaker's meaning*: the speaker's intention of uttering those words in that context.

(p.96)

Speaker's meaning, for Dascal, can be conveyed in two different ways, directly or indirectly. It is direct when it is identical to the utterance meaning; in this case pragmatic interpretation can be seen as the 'endorsement' of the utterance meaning by the listener. It is indirect when it is different from the utterance meaning and pragmatic interpretation then consists of finding out from the cues in the context and by using the utterance meaning as a starting point what the speaker's meaning is. Jokes systematically exploit this indirectness ; they point to a preferred meaning (M1) and, for Dascal, this *must* be done indirectly, for to make M1 too explicit would not allow the alternative meaning (M2) to be recoverable. This indirectness about M1 means that

such an interpretation is actually contributed by the listener more than the speaker himself. In fact, the listener construes that interpretation in the course of hearing the joke, and *expects* the rest of the story will confirm her interpretation. The comic effect arises when an alternative, non-favoured and therefore non-expected interpretation is revealed, at the punch line, as the correct one

(p.97, original emphasis)

Such a description recalls Kant's comment (1.3) that humorous laughter arises from 'the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing' (1951:172), and also the point made in 4.2 concerning the audience's contribution Woody Allen's taxi joke.

We cannot let the opportunity pass to show how these pragmatic interstices are exploited for humorous ends not only in the simple act of 'telling a joke' but also by comedians explicitly referring to such gaps. This example comes from the film 'Annie Hall', in which Woody Allen plays Alvie Singer (S), a New York comedian, who has a troubled relationship with budding singer, Annie Hall (H), played by Diane Keaton. In this scene these two characters are standing on a flat roof, drinking wine and having a shy and nervous conversation. The humour is constructed by juxtaposing the text of

what is actually said and audible to both characters and the audience (utterance meaning) with the subtext of what each actually means (speaker meaning), which is not known to the other character but is made known to the audience through the use of subtitles.

Spoken

S: So, did you do those photographs in there or what?
H: Yeah, yeah. I sort of dabble around, you know.
S: They're they're wonderful, they have they have a quality.
H: Well I I would like to take a serious photography course.
S: Photography's interesting because it's it's a new art form and er er a set of aesthetic criteria have not emerged yet.
H: Aesthetic criteria? You mean whether it's a good photo or not?
S: [*Extemporising nervously*] The mediums [*unclear*] enters in is a condition of the art form itself. [*Looks surprised at his own words*]
H: Well, well er to me I, I mean it's it's it's all instinctive. I just try to feel it you know I try to get a sense of it and not think about it so much.
S: St-still you need a set of aesthetic guidelines to put it in social perspective, I think. [*Still not sure of what he is saying*]

Subtitles

H: I *dabble*? Listen to me – what a jerk
S: You are a great-looking girl.

H: He probably thinks I'm a yo-yo.
S: I wonder what she looks like naked?

H: I'm not smart enough for him. Hang in there.
S: I don't know what I'm saying – she senses I'm shallow.

H: God, I hope he doesn't turn out to be a shmuck like the others.

S: Christ, I sound like FM radio. Relax.

(Allen and Brickman 1977)

Once again we note that this is not simply a question of manipulating the structural forms, the writers also need to create humorous meanings, and here it is the pragmatic distance between utterance meaning and speaker meaning that is clearly exaggerated for comic effect. It would also seem to involve the expression of certain 'Freudian elements' in the gap between conscious speech (photography) and unspoken desire (sexuality).

We will now make two observations about Dascal's model. The first is an alternative view of joke resolution and the second involves an expansion of the model to cater for the problem of disputed meanings. We start with a diagrammatic representation of

Dascal's model. Note that his model is for situations where there is agreement on meaning between speaker and hearer whether this is direct or indirect.

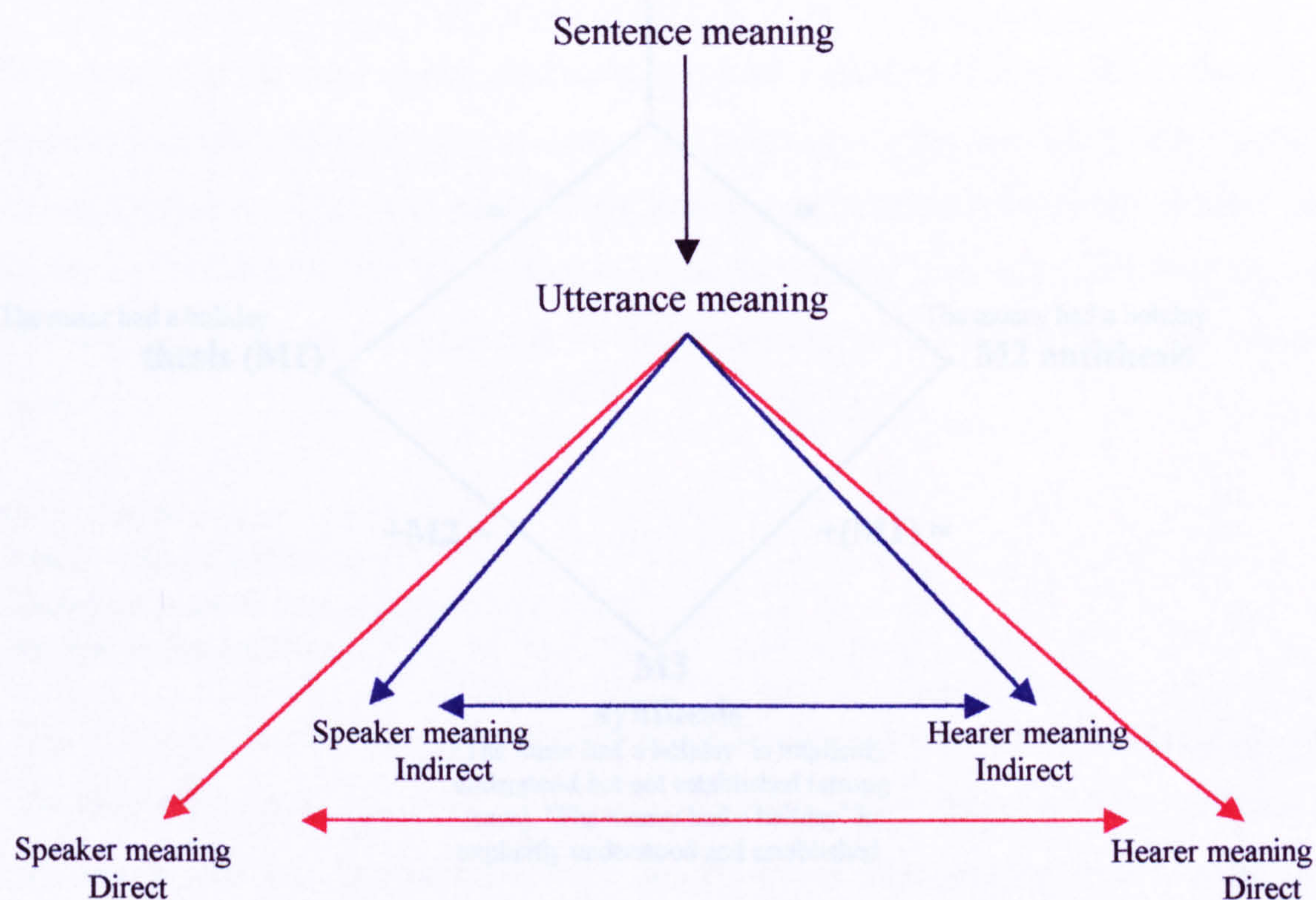


Fig.4. Diagrammatic representation of Dascal's model of utterance interpretation.

We have already on various occasions remarked on the collaboration of speakers and listeners in joke telling and Dascal's views would seem to add strong support to this. Let us look at a now familiar joke for further confirmation and also to get a fuller pragmatic explanation of such interactions.

The miser took all his money out of the bank for a holiday. When he decided it had had enough of a rest he put it all back.

The expectation aroused by the first sentence is that the miser, acting against type, is about to spend all his money (M1). The second sentence reveals, however, that he did not spend it (M2). This does indeed concur with Dascal's model. However, Willis (1992) sees the pragmatic interpretation as somewhat more complex. For him there is a dialectical relationship between M1 and M2 which leads to a synthesis in a new unit of meaning, M3. If we apply this model to the miser joke we get:

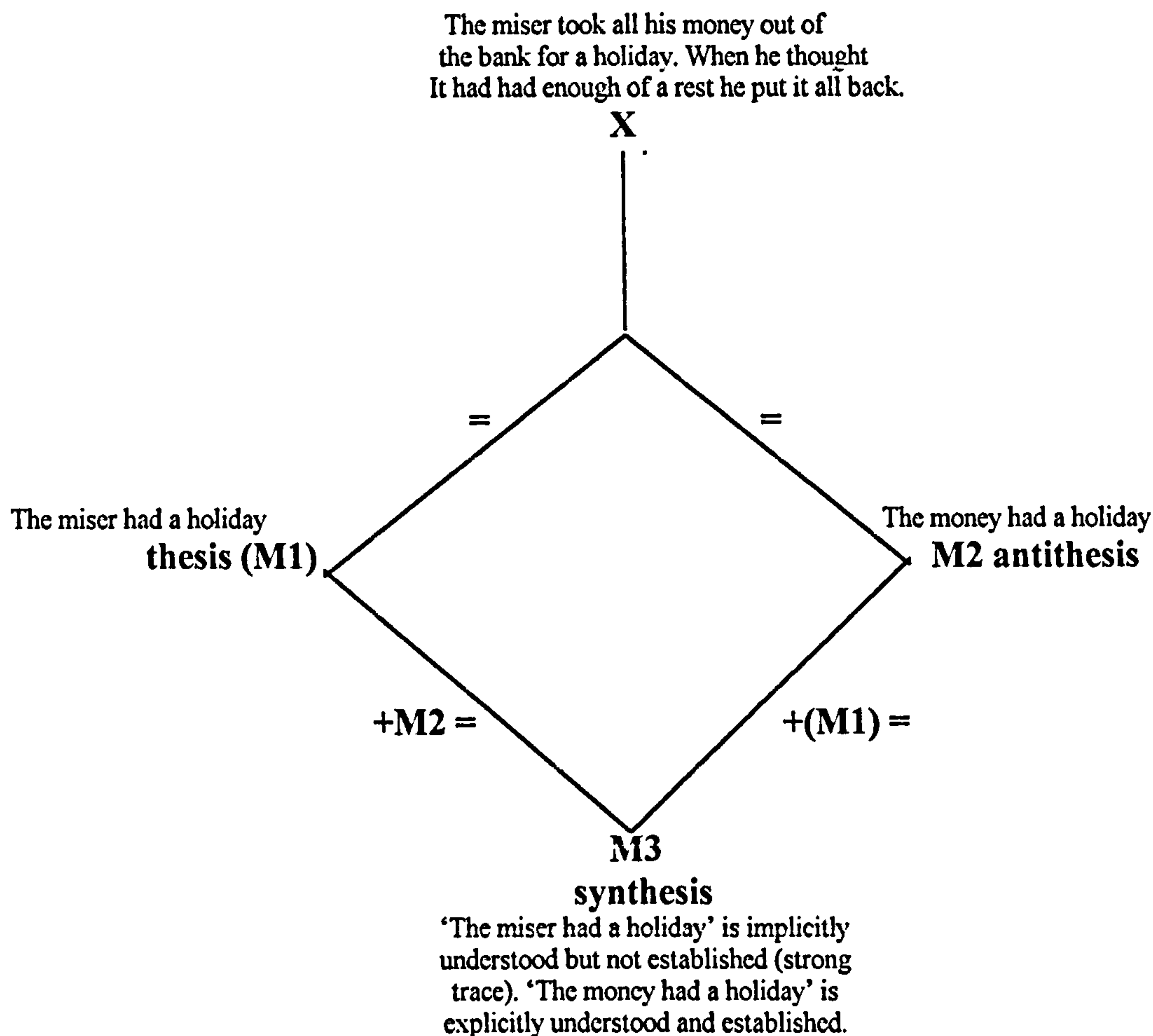


Fig. 5. Dialectical joke resolution: the Strong Trace Model. (Willis 1992:21, adapted)

In this model of spoken standard jokes, as the special meaning M2 (the punch line) of any such joke (X) is presented as late as possible in place of the expected meaning M1, it is clear that much of the interpretation of the textual cues for both is identical. Thus, M2, the punchline, can only be perceived to have a special meaning by virtue of its relationship to M1. If the joke led the listener directly to M2 without any strong hints at M1 there would be no incongruity, no poetic clash, as M2 would have no *special* meaning. However, in the dialectical model, an implicit understanding (but not establishment) of M1 is integral, and, *together with* an explicit understanding and establishment of M2, provides complete comprehension, M3. (Note that this model, too, is for situations of agreed meaning i.e. joke comprehension.) Some support for this view comes from a study by Dews and Winner of how irony is processed, in which their results 'support a multiple meaning model of irony processing in which both literal and non-literal meanings are obligatorily processed' (1999:1579). We note here that this model is primarily to do with *cognitive* matters i.e. joke comprehension, or what in 5.1 Carrell called 'joke competence'. It does not deal with the *social*

reception of jokes, or what Carrell calls 'humor competence'. We will, however, have occasion to return to the strong trace model at the end of Section 8, where it will be used in conjunction with Carrell's notions.

On a second point we can expand Dascal's model a little as follows. When there is a dispute about the meaning of an utterance this gives rise to the possibility of a *separate* hearer's meaning. That is to say, if there is a dispute over meaning, both speaker and hearer can claim that their interpretation is the 'legitimate' one, is, in fact, the 'proper' utterance meaning, as the following exchange demonstrates. The dispute concerns this text:

I am a baby Aryan
Not Jewish or sectarian
I have no plan to marry
An ape or Rastafarian

This is a verse that was sung by the historian David Irving to his infant daughter and was later recorded in his diary. This came to public notice during a libel court case in London in which Irving claimed that a description of him as a holocaust-denier in a book by Deborah Lipstadt was libellous. Irving lost the trial, during which he was described by the judge as 'racist'. Later that evening he was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman on BBC TV's 'Newsnight' and it is from this interview that the following exchange comes. Paxman (P) repeats the judge's comment that Irving (I) is 'racist' and as evidence of this reads out the above verse. The exchange has been slightly edited. Note that vertical lines join simultaneous stretches of speech, and numbers in brackets represent pauses in seconds. (.) represents a pause of less than half a second. >> joins unbroken talk from the same speaker which in transcription goes beyond one line. Underlined words are emphasised by the speaker.

- 1.P: [*Reading*] 'I am a baby Aryan, not Jewish or sectarian, I have no plan to marry, an
 2. ape or Rastafarian.'
 - 3 .I: What's racist about that?
 4. (1.0)
 5. P: You're not being serious.
 6. I: Come on tell me what's racist about that poem? Line by line.
 7. P: Right...
 8. I: 'I'm a baby Aryan'.
 9. P: 'Baby Aryan'. You think that is not a racist term?
- [EDIT]

10. P: You are seriously suggesting that a verse which begins 'I am a baby Aryan',
 11. 'Aryan' being a raci... term of racial categorisation
 12. I: Well she was, she's a baby Aryan.
 13. P: You're seriously suggesting this is nothing to do with racism?
 14. I: Should I say 'baby Caucasian'? It wouldn't have rhymed then, it wouldn't have
 15. rhymed with 'vegetarian' or 'Rastafarian' or any other words.
 16. P: But you see you didn't use the word 'vegetarian' you used the word
 17. 'Rastafarian'.
 18. I: I'm kicking myself. I should have said 'vegetarian', it would have rhymed it
 19. would have been an iambic pentameter and it would have fitted in with the
 20. bounce that children like
 21. P: But it wouldn't have fitted with your purpose which is a comparison
 22. with a baby Aryan. (0.5) That's the point.
 23. I: A comparison of what with a baby Aryan?
 24. P: A Rastafarian (.) or an ape(.) as you choose to put them side by side with a
 25. baby Aryan.
 26. I: What is racist about 'ape' or 'Rastafarian'? (1.0)
 27. You see you make you make the racist mistake that>
 28. P: You're making you're making
 29. I: >Rastafarians are black or coloured and they're not they're every colour (0.5)
 30. You can have white Rastafarians. There's a, it's very well known you see there's
 31. an MP who's a Rastafarian (0.5) You see you're the racist you're the one with
 32. the attitude not me
 33. P: You said in your diary that you recited this as you passed a 'half-breed'.
 34. I: Yes indeed.
 35. P: What is a (.) 'half-breed'?
 36. I: Some-something which didn't exist in England at the time I was born shall we
 37. say.
 38. P: Right. A 'half-breed' you would accept is a term of racial categorisation.
 39. I: I think you're absolutely right.
 40. P: As is 'Aryan'.
 41. I: You're absolutely right.
 42. P: And you're seriously trying to maintain that there is nothing racist about
 43. this verse?
 44. I: This is this is a vestige of I think English patriotism in me and of erm my
 45. Englishness and not of racism. I think you will find that ninety-five per cent of my
 46. generation hold exactly the same attitude.

(Paxman 2000)

There is much that can be said about this extract but we shall focus solely on the immediate argument between the two participants of whether or not the verse is racist. Irving says that it is not, and Paxman asserts that it is. As they make their views increasingly explicit to one another, the argument is seen to hinge on issues discussed in 4.2, namely, paradigmatic relations (choices between individual lexical items – the vertical), syntagmatic relations (choices of combinations of words – the horizontal), and their merging in the poetic (we are back here with Jakobson). In lines 14-5 Irving

talks of the paradigmatic choices that were available to him and why he chose ‘Aryan’ over ‘Caucasian’, because it rhymed with ‘vegetarian’ and ‘Rastafarian’. Paxman immediately points out (16-7) that Irving did not choose ‘vegetarian’ but chose ‘Rastafarian’, and then goes on to point out precisely the syntagmatic relations which that paradigmatic choice had with ‘baby Aryan’ and ‘ape’ (24-5). Irving ignores the crucial syntactic point, vainly trying to isolate the words ‘ape’ and ‘Rastafarian’ (26), but the argument is lost and he admits that ‘Aryan’ is a term of racial categorisation (41) yet still maintains the verse is not an example of racism but of middle-aged Englishness (44-6). We can also note at this point that given the notion of shared competence as discussed in Section 5, we can recognise that those of a racist bent could find this doggerel amusing, while at the same time, because of the notion of differential competence, there are those who are unable or unwilling to see any humour in it.

To return to our point concerning the expansion of Dascal’s model, we can represent this dispute over meaning diagrammatically.

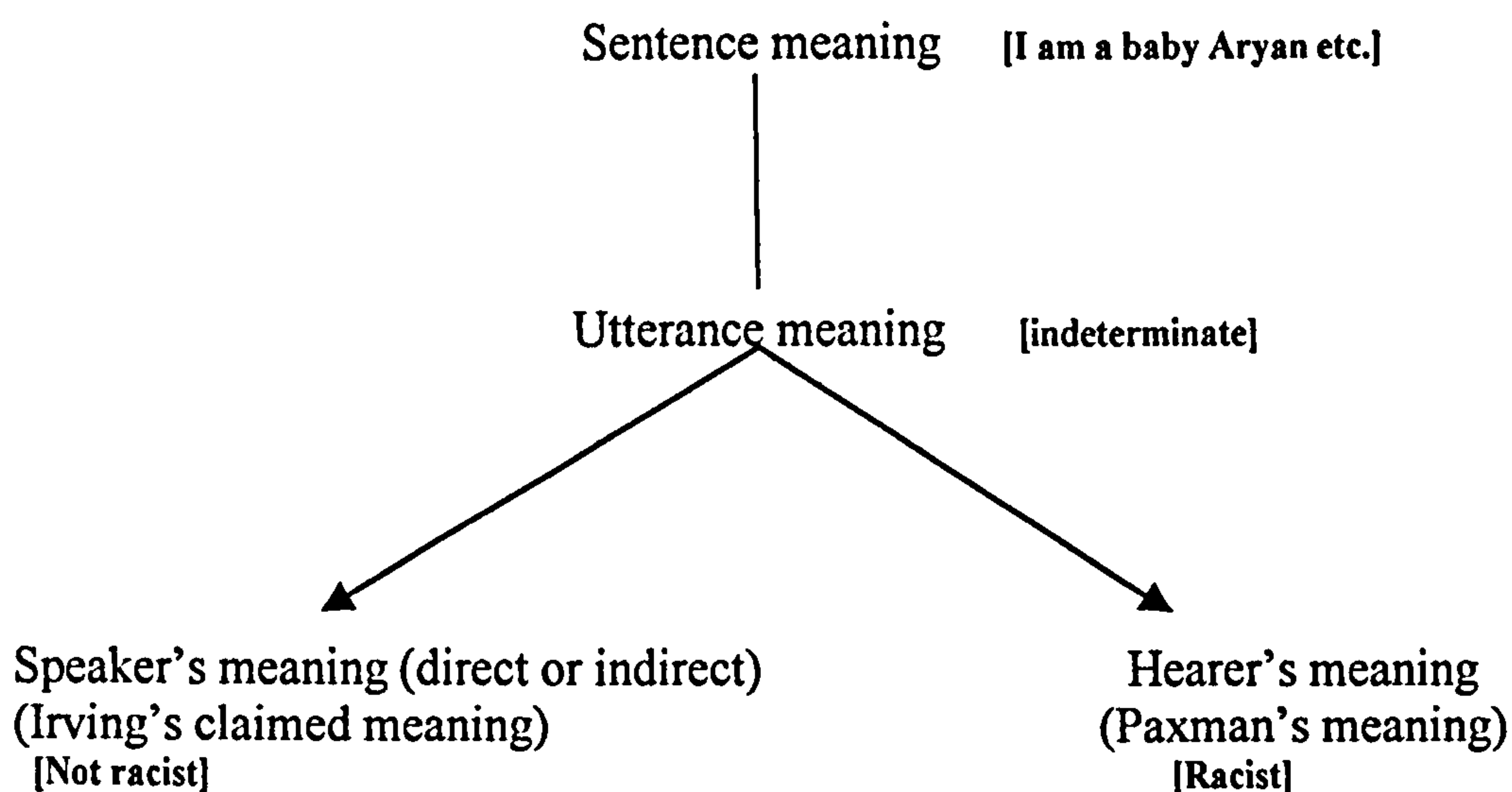


Fig. 6. Dispute Over Meaning

Although this explicates the matter in a little more detail than Dascal’s model would – there is no neat congruence between speaker’s meaning and hearer’s meaning – it also points to the ever-present problem of the role of the analyst. In Dascal’s model the factors which determine the utterance meaning are not made explicit; in a sense, they

are treated as given. In the above expanded model the utterance meaning is missing as there is no agreement on what it might be. In Dascal's formulation, the speaker and hearer meaning, whether direct or indirect, eventually coincide. Here the utterance meaning is strongly contested resulting in distinct speaker and hearer meanings and, thus, in the diagram is given as 'indeterminate'. However, if a completed picture were required, it would not be difficult to insert the following:

Utterance meaning [I am white and superior...]

This interpretation would be based on the following textual and contextual cues.

Textual: 'Aryan' is the term used by the Nazis to refer to the 'master race' of white people, ideally those with blond hair and blue eyes. In this verse it was chosen in preference to the more neutral 'Caucasian', and contrasted by 'not' with 'Jewish' (millions of whom were murdered by the Nazis), and by 'no' with 'ape' and 'Rastafarian' (not 'vegetarian'), a quintessentially black religious group. These terms themselves are tightly syntactically linked as the alternate objects of the verb 'marry'.

Contextual: The immediate physical context of Irving and his daughter passing someone of mixed race (whom Irving describes as 'a half-breed'), which is a mundane event in British culture, inspired this response and the response itself shapes the context as a racist encounter. Then there is the wider context (which involves background knowledge, knowledge available to the judge and Paxman) of Irving, who, through numerous publications and lecture tours, has been a well-documented apologist and propagandist for the Nazis for over forty years.

The insertion of this interpretation in lieu of 'indeterminate' raises two important issues: 1. the 'ownership' of meaning, and 2. the role of the analyst. In the above case, is it Irving, the speaker, who, when there is some dispute, should ultimately determine the utterance meaning? That is, is the utterance meaning always the utterer's? Further, when such a dispute renders the utterance meaning 'indeterminate' should the analyst intervene? Is not the analyst also a member drawing on virtually the same resources as the interlocutors? These are issues which will be returned to in this discussion of humour, as these models of pragmatic interpretation provide insight into a problem

discussed earlier under the notion of 'permission' (5.2), that is, when an utterance is intended as humorous but actually causes offence. It is the pragmatic interstices between sentence meaning, utterance meaning, and speaker meaning that afford the speaker the defence of 'It was only a joke' if such humorous intent is denied permission by a hearer who is offended by the utterance. As Crawford notes,

humor is perhaps the most flexible and powerful of indirect modes. When someone sends the message, "I consider women to be less than full human beings" framed as humor, it is difficult for others to reject or even directly address the message. After all, sexist intention can easily be denied. "I was only joking", "Can't you take a joke?", "Lighten up", "Just kidding".

(1995:134-5)

Precisely such a problem will be given great attention in Section 8 below. But for the moment the discussion seems to be getting ahead of itself and we now return to speech act theory and indirectness.

The initial developments in speech act theory were later refined by, among others, Grice once again with his notion of the Cooperative Principle (CP) and Searle with his views on indirect speech acts. Let us take Grice first. His CP has four maxims which he claims govern conversation and which enable us to interpret direct speech acts but also such indirect speech acts as the following:

A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girl friend these days.

B: He has been paying lots of visits to New York recently.

(1975:51)

Though logically B's utterance is a non sequitur in relation to A's, it is not difficult to understand that B is suggesting that Smith has a girl friend in New York. This is, according to Grice, because interlocutors apply the maxims of conversation, which are:

- (1) Quantity – do not say too much or too little
- (2) Quality – be honest
- (3) Relation – be relevant
- (4) Manner – be brief, clear, and orderly

(pp.45-6)

Thus, even though B's utterance is not logical, we assume that he is following these maxims and so make inferences ('compute implicatures') that accord with A's utterance. But just as earlier (1.3) Bain's list of incongruities seemed to invite a comedic retort, so too do Grice's maxims, and it is a commonplace of dialogue comedy to flout them. Take the following example from the Marx Brothers' film 'Duck Soup', in which Chico has been paid by Trentino, the Sylvaniaian ambassador, to spy on Firefly, the head of state of Freedonia. Here Chico makes his report in Trentino's office.

Trentino: [*Wagging his finger*] I want a full detailed report of your investigation.

Chico: All right, I tell you. Monday we watch Firefly's house, but he no come out. He wasn't home. Tuesday we go to the ball game but he fool us, he no show up. Wednesday he go to the ball game and we fool him, we no show up. Thursday was a double header. Nobody show up. Friday it rained all day. There was no ball game so we stayed at home and listened to it over the radio.

(Kalmar and Ruby 1972:117-8)

While this is brief, clear and orderly (Chico states the essentials of each day's activities in order), and is frankly honest (he might be expected to lie about such a gross dereliction of duty), it is not a full and detailed account (but the problem may lie in Grice's potentially contradictory formulation of maxim 1 'do not say too little' and maxim 4 'be brief'), and, more particularly, it is more about the ball games than it is about surveillance. Indeed, on none of the days did Chico carry out any spying on Firefly, which is the *relevant* factor to be reported, a clear breach of maxim 3 'be relevant'. (Nor, 'reading between the lines', can any implicatures concerning the surveillance of Firefly be computed from what he says.) Indeed, this point is the most common criticism levelled at Grice, that all maxims can be subsumed under 'relevance'. This is precisely what Sperber and Wilson did as a basis for their Relevance Theory (1986).

For Searle, indirectness is possible because of the gap between a primary illocutionary act and a secondary illocutionary act. (Searle makes no distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary (1969:23 footnote).) The secondary is the literal meaning and from it the primary can be inferred. Take the following example.

(1) Student X: Let's go to the movies tonight.

(2) Student Y: I have to study for an exam.

(1975:61)

In speech act terms this consists of a proposal (1) followed by a refusal (2). The question posed by Searle is: how does X interpret Y's statement as a refusal to go to the cinema? He provides ten steps of inference made by X, from which these three suffice for our purposes.

Step 5. He (Y) probably means more than he says. Assuming his remark is relevant, his primary illocutionary point must differ from the literal one.

Step 6. I know that studying for an exam takes a large amount of time relative to a single evening, and I know that going to the movies normally takes a large amount of time relative to a single evening.

Step 10. Therefore, his primary illocutionary point is to reject the proposal.

(p.63)

In summary Searle says what is needed to understand this exchange is 'mutual background information, a theory of speech acts, and certain general principles of conversation' (p.64), all of which is paraphrased here as (a) knowledge of the world, (b) to know what a proposal and a refusal are, and (c) to follow the cooperative principle (see Grice above). (Searle acknowledges that the above steps are not gone through consciously in conversation.) We are familiar with (b) and (c) but more needs to be said about (a) knowledge of the world. But before doing that let us have another joke which demonstrates that not everyone goes through the steps of inference to comprehend indirect speech acts, particularly when they have a humorous intent. It comes from a Frank Skinner television show and here Skinner is talking about taking his driving test.

The examiner said, 'Would you like to turn right down here, please?' And I said, 'No, there's a really difficult junction down there.'

(Skinner 1999)

The examiner's utterance can be seen as Searle's secondary illocution (literal sentence meaning) and its form is that of a yes/no question (inversion of subject and auxiliary),

but its primary illocution, given the context, is that of an instruction for Skinner to make the turning. Skinner, not wishing to make the turning, exploits the gap made available by the indirectness and deals with the utterance purely as a secondary illocution to which he can answer ‘no’.

In all attempts at understanding utterances the component ‘knowledge of the world’ comes into play, and we come across this area under different names: Chiaro’s ‘sociocultural competence’, Nash’s ‘generic reference’ (1985:9), Raskin’s ‘scripts’ and van Dijk’s ‘normalcy of facts’ (1985b:111). Garfinkel, too, dealt with this area, under the name of ‘common sense’ (1972) (this everyday term was first used as a technical term of sociology by Schutz), and his treatment is of particular interest as he dealt with it not only theoretically but also through practical tasks he set his students – part of his ‘breaching experiments’. In these tasks the students reported common conversations they had by writing on the left side of a sheet of paper what the participants actually said and on the right what they and their interlocutors understood they were talking about based on their knowledge of the world/common sense. Here is an example of a conversation between one of the students and his wife. (Note that there is no implication here that Garfinkel was a speech act theorist, merely that he as an ethnomethodologist was also interested in background knowledge.)

<u>ACTUAL</u>	<u>UNDERSTOOD</u>
Husband: Dana succeeded in putting a penny in the parking meter without being picked up.	Husband: This afternoon as I was bringing Dana, our four year old son, here from the nursery school, he succeeded in reaching high enough to put a penny in the parking meter when we parked in a meter zone, whereas before he had always had to be picked up to reach that high.
Wife: Did you take him to the record store?	Wife: Since he put a penny in the meter that means that you stopped while he was with you. I know that you stopped at the record store either on the way to get him or on the way back. Was it on the way back, so that he was with you, or did you stop there on the way and somewhere else on the way back?

When Garfinkel asked for further accuracy, clarity, and directness students gave up with the complaint that the task was impossible (p.317). Even the simple two line dialogue reproduced here rests on a significant amount of background knowledge which permits an efficient linguistic exchange. However, what is significant for Garfinkel is not simply the coincidence of participants' background knowledge i.e. *what* is said, but *how* something is said, that is, shared rules of interpretation which arise either antecedent to the exchange or are negotiated in the process of conversation. 'The appropriate image of a common understanding is, therefore, an *operation* rather than a common intersection of overlapping sets' (1972:320 original emphasis). Simply put, such understandings require continuous work between participants and are not merely given. So even though the interlocutors in this exchange can converse easily because of the shared rules of interpretation which they have developed together in their history, the wife still needs to ask for clarification concerning the location of the parking meter. Humour is no exception; comedians and joke tellers also rely on such background knowledge and shared interpretations (as we saw, for example, with Chiaro's Davey Crockett joke in Section 5) and jokes can stand or fall by the degree to which such 'operations' are carried out successfully. We can see this in greater detail by looking at a few more examples of humour. In the first the comedian exploits the background knowledge in such a way that it is the audience who finish the joke; in the second the comedian claims that the rules of interpretation he developed with an audience were such that they could get to the punch line *before* him; and in the last example it is the background knowledge itself which is actually foregrounded and used explicitly as a major resource for a significant part of the text.

The first is from a Jack Dee concert at the London Palladium. He is describing how he got into trouble with the police for using a bus lane in the morning rush hour in London. The text has been edited.

Dee: I was going down the bus lane and erm I was in a yellow Fiat 127. (1.0) which is what alerted the constable [*Laughter*] Comes out and he stops me [*Mimes policeman with upraised arm*] Comes to the window of the car. You know what he says? He says [*slow deliberate authoritative tones*] 'Are you a bus?' [*Laughter*] ... (EDIT)... I said to him 'You're new to traffic aren't you?' [*Laughter*] Unfortunately he thought I was taking the piss, right. He gets his book out and he's going to book me for it, right. Amazingly just as this happens another yellow Fiat 127 pulls up behind me [*Expectant look at audience*] (1.0) So I said [*pointing back over his shoulder*] 'He-he-he-he. Isn't

that just typical' [*quiet laughter builds to loud general laughter and applause*] Now I had him confused, I had him confused. He was going [*mimes policeman scratching his head*] 'Errrrr all right, fair enough, guv, off you go.' 'Thank you, officer.' [*Mimics sound of bus bell. Winks*] 'All aboard.'

(Dee

1998)

The locus of the joke here is the exploitation of the common belief of most London inhabitants that London buses always travel in groups of three, and the transference of this knowledge to an object that is incongruously different from a big red double-decker London bus: a small yellow Fiat. Many public transport users in London have experienced a long wait for a bus only to find three on the same route arrive at the same time. The main laughter here comes not after the policeman is fooled (when he scratches his head) but before that as the audience (eventually) takes up the cue 'Isn't that just typical' after the arrival of another yellow Fiat 127 in the bus lane. Indeed, when Dee emphatically ('Amazingly... another yellow Fiat 127') announces its arrival in the previous line he pauses, most probably in the hope of this being a sufficient cue to stimulate the audience's background knowledge, but this pause, this attempt to work towards the meaning of the utterance, is to no avail. When nothing is forthcoming he becomes more demonstrative and explicit (points over his shoulder, laughs, refers to other Fiat's arrival again) and this has more success. At first the laughter is quiet but as more of the audience are alerted to the joke and delve into their background knowledge the laughter spreads and people also applaud in recognition of this implicit reference to everyday London life. The incongruity is further underlined by the obvious visible difference between a small yellow car and a huge red double-decker bus. We note that there is no explicit reference to buses arriving in groups, this comes in the negotiation of meaning with reference to background knowledge

Once an audience is familiar with a performer they can fill in much of the background themselves if the performer provides the appropriate cues. This is seen in sitcoms when once the characters have been established (i.e. the background is known) the merest gesture in character can be a source of amusement, for example, Father Dougal's look of innocent idiocy in 'Father Ted'. The same can be said of catch-phrases; once they develop a history of utterance they can accumulate a certain charge, for example, the tailors' 'Suit you' in 'The Fast Show'. Thus, when a stand-up comedian has developed a following, the audience, given their history with the

performer, can actually be ahead of the him/her. Steve Coogan comments, 'When I did live performing some audiences would get to the punch line before I did so I'd have to adjust the joke because they were quicker than I thought they'd be' (Bragg 2001).

The last example is that of a comedian not relying on the background knowledge but actually exploiting it as a resource for the bulk of the material for his sketch, not unlike the way Garfinkel's students were expected to 'foreground the background'. This comes from the pre-war music hall comedian, Horace Kenney, in a sketch called 'The Music Hall Trial Turn', which featured deliberately badly performed versions of music hall acts.

Kenney: A Scotchman and an Irishman were one day havin' a walk along a street, side by side, together, it was on a Monday they were walking, no Wednesday, no Saturday...

Manager: It was during the week.

K: Yes, it was. One day of the week. And as they was walkin' along they suddenly came to a big shop window with glass all over it, and the Scotchman, 'e turned round to 'ave a look in the window, as he...wanted to see in it. And the Irishman, 'e looked on the other side of the road. And on the other side of the road was a very big tree, very high and tall, with leaves and branches sticking out all over it, it was growing there. And, er, when 'e saw the tree, he turned to the Scotchman and he said, "'Ere, Murphy,' he said, 'if that big tree was to fall into that big window and break it, as it would, if it did,' 'e said, 'what would the window say to the tree?' Yes, oh yes, this is good. Then said the Scotchman to the Irishman, 'Well, I don't know, Sandy, tell me what would it say?' Then said the Irishman, 'Why the window'd go and say "Enormous."'

M: Enormous?

K: Yes, sir, that's what it'd... No, no take that back. 'Tremendous'. Yes, 'tremendous.' It wouldn't say 'enormous'. Well that's the end of that one.

(in Double 1992:73, note 79)

There is much to comment on in this text but for our purposes here we shall focus only on background knowledge. Most of the humour arises from the way Kenney makes explicit the implicit, the way he tries for, in Garfinkel's words, 'further accuracy, clarity, and directness' - unnecessary detail which a competent comedian omits. The audience know this incident must have occurred on one day of the week, that when people walk along the street conversing they do so side by side, that windows are made of glass and that trees grow and have leaves and branches. They really don't need to be told this, just as the husband and wife in Garfinkel's student's dialogue knew the common facts about their world. Dee negotiated the meaning of bus arrivals

in London in stages; first with a significant pause, then with an explicit emphatic utterance. Here, Kenney, in order to fulfil the role of a bad comedian, includes much that should be left implicit and provides us with a clear sight of what is usually going on beneath the surface. Also note the important role of the 'straight man', the manager. He it is who acts as a kind of anchor in the world of common sense, his role not unlike, in Garfinkel's terms, the 'actual', in contrast to Kenney's 'understood'.

We have seen, then, that speech act theory does provide some insight into how meaning is assigned to utterances. However, it was not long before the largely theoretical concerns of these notions (which arose at the same time as the first flushes of success of generative grammar and the 'Chomskyan revolution') were put to test in the field, often in non-Western cultures, and there they were found to be lacking. To take just one such study. Rosaldo (1982) spent two lengthy periods living in the Philippines with the Ilongot and found that the way they did things with words was not in keeping with how speech act theorists, and Searle in particular, envisaged. The theorists, she argues, see speech as the achievement of 'autonomous selves, whose deeds are not significantly constrained by the relationships and expectations that derive from their local world' (p.204). For example, Searle chooses the act of promising as a strong paradigm of speech. The promise, she says, 'leads us to think of meaning as a thing derived from inner life. A world of promises appears as one where privacy not community is what gives rise to talk'. Yet the promises we make are different according to whom we make them: promises to one's children, a promise by a politician, a promise to colleagues, are not the same (p.211). Acts of speech are not only concerned with speakers' individual intentions, they are also heavily bound up with participants' expectations, which in turn are shaped by 'particular forms of socio-cultural being' (p.228). She concludes: 'Ilongot views of language – and in particular their emphasis on commands – suggest alternatives to the philosopher's account of referential, individually deployed systems of speech' (p.228). In short, then, Rosaldo is critical of the speech act theorists' lack of a wider context.

Earlier (5.1) it was pointed out that Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence was challenged by Hymes' notion of communicative competence, the former being essentially individually based, the latter much more socially based, and we have just seen a similar criticism made of speech act theory. Other criticisms of speech act

theory also reflect this conflict, where the speech act theorists are largely seen as part of what the social psychologist Shotter (after Harre) calls 'the first cognitive revolution', a perspective which he describes as 'instrumental, individualistic, systematic, unitary, [and] ahistorical', whereas 'the second cognitive revolution' concerns itself more with 'the poetic and rhetorical, the social and historical, the pluralistic, as well as the responsive and sensuous aspects of language use' (1994:7). Potter and Wetherall concur, seeing speech act theory as primarily a philosophical thesis developed to criticise other philosophical perspectives 'rather than a theory able to cope with the vicissitudes of real talk' (1987:29). A more specific criticism comes from Duranti and Godwin who argue that the work of speech act theorists (like much of that of generative grammarians) was based not on actual speech but on texts

built by the analyst in terms of specific theoretical problems. The utterances are in fact dealt with as *printed samples of language possibilities* whose natural home is other printed language...The linguistic context for these very specialised samples of language is of either talk by the linguistic [linguist?] *about* the written sentences (rather than responses to them as embodied social action) or juxtapositions with other written samples in an organised 'data set'.

(1992:32, note 8, original emphasis, square bracket added)

In view of these shortcomings this discussion now moves on with a look at some ideas which consider language as 'embodied social action'.

6.2

Talk In Interaction

We shall start with a look at speech as it most commonly occurs – spoken utterances exchanged between people – which has been dealt with in detail by conversation analysts. Conversation analysis (CA) arose from ethnomethodology, the main insight of which was that 'the primordial site of social order is found in members' use of practices to produce, make sense of, and thereby render accountable, features of their local circumstances' (Boden and Zimmerman (eds.) 1991:6). It is such features that are useful for the purposes of this dissertation as they allow us to see how texts are created, interpreted (as humorous or not) and responded to (with laughter, silence,

censure etc), all in situated contexts. This is not to eliminate the individual from the equation. Rather, because these activities are collaborative and accountable accomplishments, '*agency* emerges not as a metaphysical principle or a member's illusion but as an essential feature of the organisation of the social interaction' (p.8, original emphasis). Thus, talk is not seen in isolation from social and institutional organisations but in fact acts as a mechanism for the local achievement and reproduction of such things.

Further, CA uses only naturally occurring conversation and not invented examples or experimentally produced data and emphasises conversation's sequential nature (Heritage & Atkinson 1984:4-5). For them the many difficulties of speech act theory 'ultimately derive...from the failure of its proponents to grasp that utterances are in the first instance contextually understood by reference to their placement and participation within sequences of actions' (1984:5). Thus, the illocutionary force of talk will be determined not in isolation but by reference to what the particular turn accomplishes in a sequence of prior and following utterances, or what Heritage calls 'the architecture of intersubjectivity' (1984a:254). Where there is uncertainty, the sequence can be extended to clarify the matter – Heritage says that talk is both 'context-shaped' and 'context-renewing' (1984a:242). All of this also has a significant methodological advantage in that it is public and thus affords analysts clearer access than the isolated or invented text materials that require considerable hypothesising and speculating on the observer's part (Heritage & Atkinson pp.8-9). 'Analysts may thus proceed to study with some assurance the factual exhibits of understandings that are displayed and ratified at the conversational surface' (p.11).

Potter and Wetherall exemplify these points with the following extract taken from Button and Casey.

N: Anywa::y
H: pk! Anyway,
N: So::
H: p
N: You'll come about eight, Right?
H: Yea::h
N: Okay
H: Anything else to report
H: (.3)

N: Uh::::: m:::,
H: Getting my hair cut tomorrow,=
N: Oh, rilly

(1987:13)

They comment that generative grammar (the data of which is ‘regularised, standardised, and decontextualised’, they quote Lyons (1967) as saying) has little to say about such speech, much of which is not relevant to generative grammarians’ purposes. ‘For example, utterances are regularly ungrammatical in everyday talk without eliciting comment [as the above extract shows], they cohere into sequential discourse, and they are commonly the joint achievement of two or more people’ (p.13). Further, against the Chomskyan emphasis on the limitless creativity of the native-speaker, much of everyday speech has been found to be quite predictable. ‘Far from being impossibly unique, performance data is often boringly repetitive’ (p.13). (‘performance’ here is used with the meaning of ‘language in use’, in contrast to ‘competence’, our unconscious knowledge of language. It is not a reference to ‘cultural/dramatic’ performances.) Indeed, it is such predictability of certain utterances in certain situations that allows, for example, writers of foreign language teaching materials to create a wide variety of gap-filling exercises and cloze tests. And, not forgetting the topic of humour, it also allows comedians to enact such scenes as in this extract from a monologue from Shelley Berman (SB). He is speaking on the telephone.

SB: Oh, hello, er Nichols’ Department Store? See, I (0.5) [*Resignedly*] All right. [*Audience laughter* 3.0] Emergency, emergency! Hang on there for just a second, this is an emergency and I’ll let you go in just a second, er, see, here’s the thing, see. You don’t know me. I, I work in the office building right across the street from your-er-er-er store, and I was (0.5) no-er-the south west, and I was just sitting, I was looking out of my window and I noticed there’s, there’s a woman hanging from a window ledge on your building about ten flights up and she’s – no operator you’re missing the point, I don’t wish to speak to the woman. No, I, er [*Audience laughter*] you know I’d, you know I’d like someone to go up there and pull her in (0.5) Well I don’t care who. How about you? You’re over there, what about yourself? (.) I, oh, I, what time is your coffee break? [*Audience laughter*] No I don’t think she can wait till then. You know, who knows how long she’s been hanging there before I noticed her? I can see her from here and her knuckles are very white. The woman’s [*Audience laughter*] been hanging there for hours obviously. I’m afraid she’ll slip you know before your break comes. What? Oh, I see. Well do you think that department can help? Well, all right. Would you connect me please?

(Bird 2000)

Although this is a monologue, the mechanism of the humour is entirely dependent on the audience being able to deal with it as a dialogue and construct (at least approximately) the utterances of the other interlocutor in order to make this text cohere. Not for the first time, then, we see that it is what is absent, what the audience themselves contribute, that completes this sketch, and this is possible primarily because of the predictability of such exchanges, or, to put it another way, because the construction of meaning in a conversation is invariably a joint exercise. However, the audience are not free to contribute according to their own random desires but, as in any conversation, are constrained by what the speaker says. As this is not an actual conversation, and as Berman is in control of what is said, he is able through his own sequential development to strongly influence what it is that audience members contribute. Here, as a comic figure fully exploiting the licence his role in performance space gives him, he leads the audience into creating the absurdly inappropriate replies given by the dull functionary at the switchboard to news of a serious life-threatening situation.

6.3

Some Features Of Talk

The study of conversation as interaction gave rise to the discovery of certain systematic features of conversational organisation. Many of these discoveries were the work of such pioneers as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, working both individually and collectively, and involved such conversational features as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, pre-sequences, side sequences, insertion sequences, opening and closing routines, as well as routines for repair and preference. Here we will look at three major organisational features – turn-taking, adjacency pairs (which necessarily includes insertion sequences), and preference. Though superficially such features may seem to be merely the mechanisms of conversation, the nuts and bolts of talk, if you will, it is worth underlining that they are the social manifestation of the means whereby we all interactively construct meaning. As Heritage and Atkinson put it, ‘the sequential next-positioned linkage between any two actions is a critical resource by which a first speaker can determine the sense that a second made of his or her utterance’ (1984:8). It is through such organisation that ‘a context of publicly-displayed and continuously

updated intersubjective understandings is systematically sustained' (p.11). For Levinson, the methods which use such tools of analysis are important because they 'offer us a way of avoiding the indefinitely extendable and unverifiable categorisation and speculation about actors' intents so typical of DA[discourse analysis]-style analysis' (1983:319). This is an important point which has already arisen – to what degree can analysts impose themselves on the data – and one which we shall have occasion to return to.

6.3.1

Turn-taking

It has been emphasised that a great advantage of conversation analysis (CA) is that it looks at language in sequence, not as isolated units. The most fundamental organisational feature of an interactive sequence is turn-taking, where one speaker follows another. Sacks et al (1974) list fourteen 'grossly apparent facts' about turn-taking, the most relevant for our purposes being

2. overwhelmingly, one party speaks at a time
5. turn order varies
6. turn size varies
9. relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance
10. number of parties can vary
12. turn allocation techniques are used – a current speaker may select a next speaker or parties may self-select
13. various 'turn-constructive units' are used e.g. they can be merely one-word phrases or full sentences.

(pp.700-1)

They go on to elaborate two rules about turn allocation techniques.

(R1) For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn constructive unit:

- (a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to

take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfers occur at that place.

- (b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to not involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then the self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires right to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.
- (c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a 'current speaker selects next' technique, then the current speaker may, but need not, continue, unless another self-selects.

(R2) If, at the initial transitional-relevance place of an initial turn-constructive unit, neither 1(a) or 1(b) has operated and, following the provision of 1(c), current speaker has continued, then the rules set of (a)-(c) re-applies at the next transition relevance place and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected.

(p.704)

These are here paraphrased as:

R1.

- a. speaker chooses who speaks next
- b. if speaker doesn't so choose, next speaker can self select
- c. if speaker doesn't so choose, speaker can continue

R2. the above points are recursive

Once again it may be felt that such rules are grossly apparent but they are in fact open to a variety of criticisms and the rest of this section will deal with these. Edelsky (1981) distinguishes between the 'single floor' and the 'collaborative floor', where the former refers to dyadic conversations and the latter to multiparty informal speech where the floor is open to all simultaneously. This is a significant distinction and one which will receive more detailed treatment below and again in Section 8. The above rules can be said to apply to the single floor, and we firstly consider some criticism of them as such.

Tannen (1992) is wary about being too mechanical in defining turns and interruptions of turns. It is not always enough to have a set of objective rules to follow:

To determine whether a speaker is violating another speaker's rights you have to know a lot about both speakers and the situation. For example, what are the speakers saying? How long has each one been talking? What has their past relationship been? How do they feel about being cut off? And, most important, what is the content of the second speaker's comment relative to the first? Is it a reinforcement, a contradiction, or a change of topic? In other words, what is the second speaker trying to *do*?

(p.190, original emphasis)

Searle (1992) adopts a prescriptivist standpoint and simply dismisses Sacks et al's rules as rules, saying, 'A statement of observed regularity, even when predictive, is not a statement of a rule' (p.19). Levinson, approaching from the opposite direction to Searle, casts a methodological eye over them saying that it needs to be demonstrated that such examples of conversational organisation are 'actually adhered to (i.e. implicitly recognised) by participants rather than being an artefact of analysis' (1983:319). Whether or not this latter point is the case is most clearly seen, says Levinson, when some problem occurs. Thus, in turn-taking, interruptions are subjected to standard resolution procedures or overt reprimands, both of which show participants' orientation to the basic rules. In the following example from Levinson // indicates the point at which the current utterance is overlapped by that transcribed below it, and * indicates the alignment of the points at which the overlap ceases.

Collins: Now // the be:lt is meh*
Fagan: is the sa:me mater*ial as // thi:s
→ Smythe: Wait a moment Miss Fagan

(1983:320)

Here we see Fagan's interruption censured by Smythe at →, that is, a participant is seen to orient to the turn-taking rule. Clearly in this interaction Smythe must have the power within this relationship to exert such authority, and this is a point worth dwelling on as it takes us beyond purely structural concerns. Power is not an absolute but is context-dependent, and reprimands for interruptions are not always as

forthcoming as might be expected, as we shall now see. This next extract is an interview between Jeremy Paxman (P) and the Secretary of State for Transport, Stephen Byers (B). At this point they are talking about Byers' decision to refuse Railtrack any more subsidies and to put it into administration. Note that vertical lines join overlapping segments of speech; = = joins utterances with no gap; >> joins continuous speech by Byers; ## joins continuous speech by Paxman.

1. B: ...I said no on October 5th and now we need to move forward with a new
2. structure for railways=
3. P: =Well we don't know what precisely happened at that critical meeting in July
4. because er crucially er oddly no minutes were taken. You say at the request of the
5. Railtrack chairman who was er present (1.0) Do you let anyone walk into your
6. office and say 'I don't want any minutes taken'?
7. B: (0.5) Well we had (.) as you er well what I would say is very often where you
8. have meetings people will say 'This is commercially confidential, I'd rather you
9. didn't minute this part of the meeting'. | So that's what happened
- 10. P: | There have been dozens of secretaries of
11. state in your position in the past and they've got around that by having agreed
12. minutes which are produced at the end of the meeting. You chose not to do that.
13. You let somebody come in and say 'I don't want any minutes taken of this' and
14. you went along with that.
15. B: I went along with the request that was made. | I make no apologies for that
- 16. P: | You don't think that reflects on
17. your judgement?
18. B: No I don't because it was | a decision
- 19. P: [Quickly] | Does it reflect on your judgement the way that the
20. minutes came out?
21. B: I don't think it does. I think the | important thing
- 22. P: [Quickly] | Five minutes into the Chancellor's Autumn
23. statement?
24. B: It was done to meet a deadline set set by the Transport Select | Committee that
- 25. P: [Insistently] | In that case
26. why
27. wasn't it released to everybody?
28. B: It was released in the way in which it was done | to the Select Committee.
- 28. P: [Quickly] | It wasn't it was faxed to four
29. newspapers
30. B: No it was put out wide(.) it was put out to the Select Committee | which is>
- 31. P: [Rapidly] | Why(.) why#
32. B: > the appropriate way of doing it
33. P: #wasn't it given to the Press Association National News Agency. Why wasn't it
34. given to the BBC or ITN?
35. B: Well (.) the the situation is this Jeremy. That's all been gone through, evidence
36. has been given to the Select committee we've we've | done all we need to do.
- 37. P: | I'm asking you about your
38. judgement. That's what's at issue here.
39. B: Well well the issue isn't about how things are presented because that was done

40. in a way which was agreed within the department. It was done in that way. | The>
 → 41. P: | Was#
 42. B: >important thing
 43. P: #Jo Moore party to the decision?
 44. B: No she wasn't. The decision to | put it out that day was | to comply with the>
 → 45. P: | Was it your decision? |
 46. B: >needs | of the select Committee. It was as simple as that.
 → 47. P: | Was it your decision that it was put it out five minutes after Gordon
 48. Brown stood up=
 49. B: =No it was my decision to put it out on the day requested by the Select
 50. Committee.

(Paxman 2001)

Bearing in mind Tannen's stricture concerning mechanical definitions of turns and interruptions and the need to consider what a second speaker is trying to do, we can see here that there are good grounds for considering that many of Paxman's utterances are interruptions. It must be high on his list of priorities as an interviewer to elicit information from his interviewee – this is, after all, 'talk for an overhearing audience' (Heritage, 1985) – and in order to do this it is necessary to give the speaker a chance to finish what he is saying. It is well-known that politicians are expert at avoiding the issue and some extra pressure is sometimes necessary to make them focus on the topic of questions. For example, Harris' study of broadcast interviews with politicians leads her to conclude that politicians 'demonstrate a disproportionately high degree of indirection and a disproportionately low percentage of Direct Answers' (1991:93). But here Paxman allows Byers little or no time to give a complete answer and repeatedly interrupts with a new question or statement, his speech becoming both faster and more insistent. It is possible to count as many ~~as eleven~~ interruptions (at →) in this short extract from the interview. Labov and Fanshel have noted the cumulative nature of pragmatic force in that, for example, repeated requests can be seen as challenges (1977:95). Here it is Paxman's repeated and insistent interruptions that can be seen as a challenge to the Secretary of State's authority. However, Byers, whose office endows him with significant power in this culture, does not reprimand Paxman, and one of the reasons for this is, as stated, power is context-related. Here it is not the person with high government office who has the upper hand but the broadcast journalist in the television studio. Also, to repeat Tannen's point, what the second speaker is trying to do is also crucial. Here it would seem that Paxman, who is known for his hard interviewing style (what might be called his 'strategy of

discombobulation'), wants to unsettle Byers and not allow him time and space to respond with prepared statements. This he does with the use of deliberate interruptions.

It should come as little surprise that such a basic feature as turn-taking should also be used as a resource by comedians. However, in order to provide amusement we would not expect the rules to be followed and in the following example we see that they are not. It comes from the film 'The Life Of Brian', which is set in Roman-occupied Judea. Here an anti-Roman resistance group is discussing strategy. They are Reg, the group leader (R), Judith, the only female member (J), Francis (F), and Stan (S). Note that == connects speech by different speakers with no gap between. Underlined words are said with emphasis.

J: I do feel, Reg, that any anti-imperialist group like ours must reflect such a divergence of interests within our power base.

R: Agreed. Francis?

F: Yes, I think Judith's point of view is very valid, Reg, provided the movement never forgets that it is the inalienable right of every man=

→ S: =Or woman

F: Or woman. To rid himself=

→ S: =Or herself

F: Or herself=

R: =Agreed.

F: Thank you, brother=

→ S: =Or sister

F: Or sister. (1.5) Where was I?

R; I think you'd finished.

F: Oh right

R: Furthermore, it is the birthright of every man=

→ S: =Or woman

R: Why don't you shut up about women, Stan, you're putting us off?

S: Women have a perfect right to play a part in our movement, Reg.

F: Why are you always on about women, Stan?

S: I want to be one.

R: What!?

S: I want to be a woman. From now on I want you all to call me Loretta.

(Chapman et al 1979)

Clearly the play here is with, among other things, gender identities, and a detailed treatment of this topic will come in 7.1. The immediate concern here is is turn-taking and it is with this we continue. We note that in this setting, which has elements both of egalitarianism and formality (they are freedom fighters who have an agenda to get

through), Reg, the group leader, enacts Sacks et al's Rule R1a, current speaker chooses next speaker, with his utterance 'Francis?' Francis attempts to speak and does not himself invoke any such rule, yet finds Stan constantly and inappropriately taking a turn, and it is the lack of any reprimand in this more egalitarian setting that allows the flow of interruptions from Stan (at →) and it is their disruption of the business at hand that builds the comic effect. (We shall shortly see that in certain situations such turns are not seen as 'interruptions' but as 'collaborations', something which challenges Sacks et al's notion of turn-taking.) They come so thick and fast that the interrupted speaker, Francis, forgets his own topic ('Where was I?'), as does at least one hearer, Reg ('I think you'd finished'). Here it is Stan repeating his corrections that has the cumulative effect of being disruptive and when he persists with them after Reg begins to speak Reg eventually asserts his authority by telling Stan to shut up. Note that although according to Rule 1b of Sacks et al's turn-taking rules a next speaker can self select, and thus this might seem to legitimate Stan's interruptions as simply a next turn which he has self selected, his interruptions do not occur at the *transition-relevance place* (the minimum requirement for which would seem to be the completion of a *turn-constructive unit*, in this case at least a finished utterance by Francis or Reg), and thus are seen by the others as open to reprimand. So even though the flouting of these rules are here used for comic ends (again through a technique of exaggeration), the eventual response to such interruptions can be seen to lend some support to the force of this organisational feature of conversation (albeit in conjunction with the power relations present in the situation). The strength of this feature has led some analysts to put forward a strong version of CA rules that may overstate the case, something which we shall now examine.

Levinson is aware that in some non-Western cultures there are ways of speaking which challenge, for example, turn-taking rules as outlined above. In a study of talk in Burundi, to which Levinson refers, Albert (1972) reports that turn-taking is carried out according to a formal hierarchy based on age and social rank.

At the opening stage of talk strict order of seniority is observed. After the first or second round of remarks, the senior person will speak first, the next in order rank opens his speech with a statement to the effect, "Yes, I agree with the previous speaker, he is correct, he is older, and knows best etc."

(p.81)

Levinson points out that this is not so unusual for in our own society also there are contexts such as in classrooms, courts, formal meetings etc. where turns are similarly pre-allocated (1983:301) (Albert's report, it should be noted, does not contain any transcriptions of spoken utterances, concerns males only, and does not specify whether the discussion concerns everyday mundane talk or talk in formal settings. It would strongly seem to be the latter rather than the former and if this were the case it would add support to Levinson's point here.) Levinson then goes on to reach a sweeping conclusion: these turn-taking rules, like many other aspects of conversational organisation, 'are valid for the most informal, ordinary kinds of talk across *all cultures of the world*' (p.301, emphasis added). Nor is he alone in such a view. Boden and Zimmerman also state, 'This machinery [of conversational organisation] is assumed to underlie the construction of conversations of all sorts, and *to be invariant to historical progression and cultural variation*' (1991:12, emphasis added). Such strong views can be traced back to Sacks et al when they say that their turn-taking model is a local management system dealing with transitions and 'no other systems can organise transitions independent of the turn-taking system' (1974:725). These are strong claims which do not hold up to detailed scrutiny as the following case demonstrates.

In a study in Antigua in the Caribbean, Reisman focused on the 'contrapuntal' nature of talk. He found that many of the accepted features of conversation – not just turn-taking, but also adjacency pairs, topic maintenance etc. – are not adhered to. Newcomers to a group discussion are not introduced to the topic; a newcomer will speak when he is ready regardless of whether it is his turn; he may or may not be listened to; if no one attends he will repeat himself till someone attends or he will give up; people already involved will press their point repeatedly. 'Fundamentally there is no requirement for two or more voices not to be going at the same time' (1974:113). This can be even more forceful in disputes, as Reisman further elaborates.

He distinguishes between 'cursing' and 'arguing', where in the former there is a complementary pattern of utterance and response, whereas the essential feature of argument is the 'non-complementarity of repetition'.

Each person takes a point and repeats it endlessly, either one after the other or both at once or several at once depending on the number of people participating. Points of view are rarely developed, merely re-asserted.

(p.121)

He gives the example of a group of young men arguing thus for an hour or two after a game of cricket. It should not be thought, however, that in such interactions no-one is listening 'There is a kind of scanning process at work which listens with multiple attention and *which ultimately determines* which voices will prevail' (p.121 emphasis added). Thus, once again we have a situation where the hearer has a significant role in the assignment of meaning. But perhaps even this is not an accurate reflection of the interaction. In such a multi-party encounter, with many voices sounding at once and with hearers attending to more than one voice, the usual speaker-hearer distinction becomes blurred, so much so that Reisman comments that to enter into conversation (not just argument) in Antigua is more an assertion of one's presence 'rather than to participate in something formalised as an exchange' (p.115). He is not clear (perhaps understandably) about whether it is repetition alone, volume, or some other factor which settles an argument, or whether, indeed, the argument remains unsettled. What is clear is that this challenges the claims about the universality of the turn-taking system claimed above and that such claimants once again need to remember the significance of local cultural factors.

Moerman, an anthropologist, is someone who demonstrates such an awareness and is cautious about sole reliance on what he calls the 'sometimes arid and always exacting techniques' of CA. His approach to studies of Thai conversation draws not just on CA but also ethnography 'with its concern for context, meaning, history, and intention' (1988:iii). Thus, he happily uses CA techniques to locate culture *in situ*, but

[t]o show how those conversational events were meaningful parts of the worlds created and inhabited by their participants, I will have to point to such larger features of the social world as the obligation of friendship, or fealty, or fear, to the power of the Thai state and the practices of the police, to the programs and proclivities of its officials

(p.5)

(There is much in this approach which will be found in this study.)

Before moving on to discuss the 'collaborative floor', which is another feature which challenges the turn-taking rules of Sacks et al, let us take a look at how comedic

performance can make use of multiparty simultaneous speech in a predominantly single floor setting, that of exchanges within the military hierarchy. This example comes from the film MASH, which is set in an American front-line military hospital in the Korean War. In this scene Captains Pierce (P) and Forrest (F) have just arrived at the front-line in a jeep stolen by Pierce. Instead of presenting their papers to Colonel Blake (B) they immediately started flirting with some female medical staff. Blake tamely reprimands them and proceeds to inform them of life at the front. M is Father Mulcahey.

Note:

> and >, and also # and # join a stretch of continuous speech by the same speaker which is simultaneous with that of another speaker and goes beyond one line of transcription

= = indicates no gap between turns

[unclear] is speech not clear to the analyst

- 1.B: Now we have our slack periods here but when the action starts you'll get more work
2. in twelve hours than | most civilian surgeons|
3. P: |How many nurses do we | have on the base, sir?
4. B: Seventy=
5. P: =How many nurses will there be in my=
6. B: =Four. than| a civilian surgeon does in a month>
7. P: |Can I select this young girl here sir#
8. B: >Yes I think that could be arranged yes|
9. P: #Can I[unclear]cos I can use her because[unclear]and the young girl here the blonde
- 10.F: |What the hell you mean [unclear]
- 11.B: [Looking off] Oh, Father Mulcahey! I'd like you to meet Captain Pierce our new
12. surgeon. [To P] This is the Catholic Chaplain. [To M] And here's Captain Forrest
- 13.M: [Telling P his nickname] | Dago Red
- 14.P: Dago Red?

(Lardner 1969)

Pierce and Forrest are introduced to four more characters, all of whom are introduced by their rank and surname by Blake and all of whom immediately tell Pierce and Forrest their nicknames before going on to exchange greetings and pleasantries with the new arrivals, so that at any one time up to eight people are speaking at once in a way impossible to transcribe. The camera's point of view is that of Pierce and Forrest who are seated at a table, and the shot has all five of the people they have just been introduced to crammed into the frame, their glances and direction of speech rapidly shifting from left to right, their arms outstretched likewise, their words an

incomprehensible cacophony for the most part. Colonel Blake then raises his head to look around for someone. (R is Radar a.k.a. Corporal O'Reilly.)

- 15.B: [*Commandingly*] Radar! [*He jumps, as Radar, who is shorter, is standing*
16. *just before him*] Oh! [*He then starts to introduce Radar to the new arrivals*]
17. Corporal O'Reilly | this is Captain Pierce and Captain Forrest. Take them over>
18.R: [*Ignoring Blake*] | Gentleman I'm Corporal O'Reilly, they call me Radar.#
19.B: >to Major Burns' tent. Get everything out of the jeep, all their duffel bags all>
20.R: #You'll be staying in Major Burns' tent. I'll take you over there. Don't worry#
21.B: >their gear | make sure [*Calling after Radar*]
22.R: #about the jeep I'll change the number plates | [*Leaves*]
23.B: Oh, and change the number plates on that jeep!

It is not simply the simultaneous speech which is the source of the humour here but the use to which it is put; the play with form breaches the usual turn-taking rules, particularly in such a hierarchical setting as the military at war, but that in itself is not necessarily a source of amusement. However, the content adds comedic weight by mocking the normal power relations between differently ranked army personnel. It is Blake who militarily has the power and he uses it to reprimand Pierce and Forrest for their failure to report to him immediately upon arrival. He then starts to inform them that, rather than being a place to idly flirt, the front line is a place where hard work lies ahead of them (lines 1 and 2), but he is interrupted by Pierce, who, inappropriately, pursues his sexual interest in the female staff with a question (3). Rather than further reprimand Pierce not only for interrupting his commanding officer but also for maintaining the topic which Blake has just warned him off, Blake answers the question (4). This is immediately followed by another from Pierce (5), which, in order to quickly return to the topic started in (2), Blake interrupts with the answer (6), before, without pause, going on to actually finish the comment about civilian surgeons. But this continuation too is interrupted by Pierce asking another question about the female staff (7). Again Blake does not reprimand Pierce but instead, once more without pause, flawlessly switches topic from the civilian surgeons to answering this new question (8), demonstrating that as he uttered (6) he simultaneously listened to Pierce's (7), reminding us of Reisman's above comment on simultaneous speech: 'There is a scanning process at work which listens with multiple attention...' (1974:121). While Blake is giving his answer (8) as part of a continuous flow of speech, Pierce also continues talking (9) on the topic of the woman he talked about in (7). Precisely at the point where their simultaneous speech finally stops (8 and 9) Forrest enters the

conversation (10), thus ensuring that there are always at least two people talking at the same time. At only one point in this burst of talk is there an uninterrupted turn-constructual unit with a clear transition-relevance place, and that is (4), but even this single word utterance is immediately latched by Pierce's (5), thereby maintaining continuous talk. The net result of this is that we see that Blake's power is easily challenged, that Pierce is no respecter of authority, and that the film satirises military life/war in a rather off-centre manner. (The film was made at the height of the Vietnam War.)

But the talk has not yet finished. Blake, his authority seeming to be undermined with every turn, breaks the cycle and shifts the focus out of the immediate conversation by introducing another participant to the talk. This new participant is not just anybody but the unit's chaplain, a safe figure unlikely to speak insubordinately. This begins a rapid and simultaneous sequence of introductions and greetings involving up to eight interlocutors speaking at once. What is interesting here is that this period of intense simultaneous multiparty speech is, in fact, *not* unusual. It is to be expected that when up to eight people informally introduce themselves around a table there will be a significant amount of simultaneous speech. What *is* incongruous and a source of humour here is that such simultaneous speech occurs in scripted dialogue in such a way as to make the utterances impossible for the audience to follow. Recall that in 2.4 Elam commented in his discussion of the semiotics of performed speech: 'In scripted discourse we find, unlike in real conversation, neat turn-taking, syntactically complete sentences...' (1980:90). Thus here the script flouts performance conventions not real life conventions to create humour by further satirising military discipline and order. We can also note that in such an informal multi-centred exchange the direct one-to-one threat to Blake's authority has faded, but only briefly.

Blake, his sense of self seemingly restored, calls out authoritatively for Radar, but Radar is already there preparing to introduce himself to the newcomers. Blake goes through the formality of introducing Radar to Pierce and Forrest (17) but Radar, who is standing immediately before his superior, ignores him, introducing himself and telling the new arrivals where they will be staying, that he will transport them there, and not to worry about the stolen jeep (18,20,22). We note that Blake's simultaneous speech is delivered in the imperative, as would be expected of military orders, and it

consists of the same information that Radar is independently conveying to Pierce and Forest (17,19,21). Indeed, Radar's initiative is such that he is already leaving to carry out these tasks before Blake has finished issuing the orders. Thus, this exchange ends with the putative authority figure, Colonel Blake, tardily calling out (23) to the disappearing back of a man of inferior rank, Corporal O'Reilly, an order which is already redundant. All of which further serves to underline the film's anti-authoritarian stand, a stand achieved in this scene chiefly through the exploitation of the turn-taking system.

However, as Edelsky (1981) has shown, it cannot be assumed that there is simply 'the' floor over which participants compete for possession. In a study in which she initially sets out to look at gender roles in mixed-sex, multiparty talk in five meetings involving seven women (of which she is one) and four men, she encounters such difficulty in establishing exactly who has the floor that she gives much of the focus over to the nature of the floor and the nature of the turn. In reviewing the literature she finds that much analysis of dyads is in service encounters, therapy sessions, and classrooms, and such studies have little difficulty in showing who has the floor and what constitutes a turn. Further, they usually express a general bias against more than one speaking at a time (p.396). But this does not help her analyse her own data, in which she found that 'instances of more than one at a time are not always brief, repaired, or degenerate' (p.397). In her view the literature too often sees turns as objective mechanical behaviours (see Sacks et al above) which overlook the participants' sense of whether or not they are/are not having a turn. This can lead to, for example, analysts imposing their own view of what counts as an interruption (p.397). (It is acknowledged here that this is what I did with the Paxman/Byers interview. However, it was not done on mechanical grounds. It was seen, hopefully, that Paxman used interruptions as a deliberate strategy to achieve his discourse goals.) Moreover, some analysts see such things as questions of clarification, brief restatements, nods and *mmhm*'s as simple back-channelling while others treat them as turns. Much of the literature does not distinguish between 'floor' and 'turn'. She concludes that such mechanical and technical views 'presume the primary goal in conversation is to conduct the event rather than to make meanings' (p.400).

For the purposes of her own study she defines 'turn' and 'floor' to include as much as possible speakers' intentions. For her, the floor is

the acknowledged what's-going-on within a psychological time/space. What's-going-on can be the development of the topic or a function (teasing, soliciting a response, etc.) or an interaction of the two. It can be developed or controlled by one person at a time or by several simultaneously or in quick succession. It is official or acknowledged in that, if questioned, participants could describe what's going on as 'he's talking about grades' or 'she's making a suggestion' or 'we're all answering her'.

(p.405)

Thus she distinguishes between what she calls the 'single floor' (F1) and the 'collaborative floor' (F2), where the former is the more familiar one-at-a-time type of floor and the latter either an apparent free-for-all or, more usually, a case of several people being 'on the same wavelength' (p.391). A strong example of interlocutors being 'on the same wavelength' is what Falk (1980) calls the 'conversational duet', which is when two speakers work together in starting and completing one utterance. This occurrence, with which we are all familiar, also challenges a too mechanical description of turn-taking. Says Falk: 'Dueters are engaged in an essentially cooperative enterprise. This fact overrides many behaviors which outside of a duet would have considerably more impact, among which is being interrupted' (p.510). This distinction between floors will be important for the analysis carried out below in Section 8 and more details of it will be provided then, but here we can briefly use these notions of F1 and F2 to re-view the above scenes from Monty Python and MASH to see what this different perspective yields.

In the analysis of the Python extract the ambivalent nature of the context was already noted (on the one hand they are revolutionaries, on the other they have an agenda to get through) and this led to Stan's utterances being tolerated for a while before he was finally stopped by Reg, the group leader. That is, Stan's initial comments would seem to be seen as contributions on a collaborative floor (as revolutionaries they have an egalitarian attitude) until their inappropriate repetition, which builds the comic effect, is seen as a pedantic obstruction to the progress of the meeting (people have actually

forgotten the topic of Francis's point), at which stage Reg imposes the formality of the single floor by telling Stan to shut up.

As for the MASH scene, the situation is rather extreme – a military hierarchy at the front of a war zone – and there is little space for the collaborative floor. Indeed, it is the strength of the constraints in operation, allied with the wholly inappropriate sexual content, which gives the insubordination such comedic force. There is, however, a collaborative floor when the newcomers are introduced to all those present, which gives rise to much simultaneous talk – this is what Edelsky might call a 'free-for-all' (p.391) – and this, as noted, gives the writer the opportunity to flout the performance conventions concerning scripted dialogue, which, coming in sequence after the preceding comic (mis)communications, is framed as part of this humorous episode..

Thus, when considering such a fundamental organisational feature as turn-taking, it is not sufficient to assume that the basic CA rules are 'grossly apparent' or that they are universally applicable. We need to be also aware of a number of other factors: the nature of the floor – is it a straightforward dyad between A and B or is it a multiparty encounter?; power relations between interlocutors – are they symmetrical?; local cultural factors – is there anything about them which challenges the usual interaction expectations? Such considerations should help us to a fuller understanding of talk in interaction.

6.3.2

Adjacency Pairs

Hill and Irvine, when discussing dialogic approaches to discourse analysis, note that 'many aspects of linguistic form may usefully be seen as having interactional processes profoundly embedded in them' (1993:1). Here adjacency pairs are claimed as one such. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) state that an adjacency pair has these features:

1. two utterance length
2. adjacent positioning of the component utterances
3. different speakers producing each utterance

4. relative ordering of parts i.e. first pair parts precede second pair parts
5. discriminative relations i.e. the pair type of which a first pair part is a member is relevant to the selection among second pair parts

(pp.295-6)

A simple rule of adjacency pair operation is that when a speaker produces the first part of some pair he must stop speaking and the next speaker produces a second part of the same pair (p.296). Such pairs can be: question-answer, summons-answer, greeting-greeting etc. (In the discussion to follow it is the question-answer adjacency pair that will receive most attention.) This may seem straightforward enough but both Levinson (1983) and Heritage (1984a) see certain problems with such a bald formulation and add their own qualifications. Both recognise that such pairs are not always uttered in immediately adjacent positions. Here we use an example from Goffman to illustrate this.

- Q1. A: Have you got the time?
Q2. B: Standard or daylight saving?
Q3. A: What are you running on?
A3. B: Standard.
A2: A: Standard, then.
A1. B: It's five o'clock.

(1981:7)

Here we note not only that the answer to question one (Q1) is not given immediately (it actually comes in the sixth utterance of this exchange) but also that even though the intervening 'insertion sequences' (Schegloff 1972) Q2 to A2 also conform to the adjacency pair rule and thus all questions are eventually answered, Russian doll fashion, one inside the other, only pair Q3-A3 is literally adjacent. Heritage makes a further point that such a feature as adjacency pairs is not based on statistical calculation ('it may be the case that 99% of greetings are promptly returned or 95% of questions immediately answered' (1984a:246)) but that it is a *normative* framework for action which is *accountably* implemented (p.247 original emphasis). That is, its absence is problematic and requires some explanation. (Dascal speaks more forcefully of 'conversational demand' (1992:45)). We can use another example from Goffman to show how participants can orientate to this normative framework in highly efficient ways.

A: Have you got coffee to go?

B: Milk and sugar?

A: Just milk.

This exchange, which takes the form of Q-Q-A rather than, say, Q-A-R (response), can be expanded to

A1: Have you got coffee to go?

[B1:] B2: [Yes.] Milk and sugar?

A2: Just milk.

thus showing that B's response is both a second pair part to 'Have you got coffee to go?' and a first pair part to 'Just milk' (1981:7-8).

Question routines such as these, which raise certain expectations concerning responses, and which can have additional material inserted between the corresponding pairs, clearly provide space for humorous play, as we shall see in the following example. It comes from the film 'The Holy Grail', and in this scene King Arthur and his knights, in their quest to find the Grail, have reached The Bridge Of Death, which crosses The Gorge Of Peril. The bridge is guarded by a bridgekeeper (B) and the knights take it in turns to attempt to cross the bridge. First to go is the adventurous Sir Lancelot (L).

B: [*Holding up outstretched palm*] Stop! Who would cross the Bridge Of Death must answer these questions three, ere the other side he see.

L: Ask me the questions, bridgekeeper, I am not afraid.

B: What is your name?

L: My name is Sir Lancelot of Camelot.

B: What is your quest?

L: To seek the Holy Grail.

B: What is your favourite colour?

L: Blue.

B: Right. Off you go. [*Signals him across bridge.*]

The cowardly Sir Robin (R), seeing the ease of this task, eagerly steps forward.

B: Who approaches the Bridge Of Death must answer me these questions three, ere the other side he see.

R: Ask me the questions, bridgekeeper, I am not afraid

B: What is your name?

R: Sir Robin of Camelot.

B: What is your quest?

R: To seek the Holy Grail.

B: What (1.0) [*quickly*] is the capital of Assyria?

R: [*Perplexed*] (2.5) I don't know that! [*He is hurled screaming into the Gorge of Peril by unseen forces*]

Next Sir Galahad (G) approaches the bridge.

B: [*Holding up outstretched palm*] Stop! What is your name?

R: Sir Galahad of Camelot.

B: What is your quest.

G: I seek the Grail.

B: What is your favourite colour?

G: Blue. (1.0) No... [*He is hurled screaming into the Gorge of Peril by unseen forces*]

Now it is King Arthur (A) who comes forward.

B: Stop! What is your name?

A: It is Arthur, King of the Britons.

B: What is your quest?

A: To seek the Holy Grail.

B: What (0.5) [*quickly*] is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?

A: What do you mean? An African or European swallow?

B: [*Confused*] I, I don't know that. [*He also is hurled screaming into the Gorge Of Peril by unseen forces*]

(Chapman et al

1974)

Before analysing these exchanges we need to make some comments on the nature of questions themselves. When discussing illocutionary acts Searle distinguishes between two types of questions, (a) real questions, and (b) exam questions. 'In real questions S [speaker] wants to know (find out) the answer; in exam questions, S wants to know if H [hearer] knows' (1969:66). Such questions can be distinguished not only by their semantic content (a. 'What's the time?' asked of someone in the street; b. 'What's the capital of France?' asked of a child in the classroom) but also by, and this is what is relevant to the present discussion, the patterns of the sequences in which they occur, with the response playing a significant role in determining what type of question has been asked. Discussing 'real' questions, Heritage comments that conversationalists can use various 'third turn' resources to show that an answer to a question has provided them with new information. "'Oh" is one such resource, "really", "did you"' "God", "wow", etc. are other, related resources' (1984a:287). For example,

S: .hh When do you get out. Christmas week or the week before Christmas (0.3)

G: Uh:m two or three days before Christmas |
S: Oh:, |

(p.285)

The pattern is Question-Answer-Response (Q-A-R), with the response ('Oh') being what Heritage elsewhere calls a 'change of state' token (1984b) or 'news receipt' (1985), the change of state here being the acquisition of new knowledge. With 'exam' questions, however, which commonly take place in an educational setting, the teacher's response of acceptance or rejection 'proposes independent knowledge of the answer' (Heritage 1984a:288). Such a classroom sequence comes from Levinson.

Teacher: Why do you eat all that food? Can you tell me why you eat all that food?
Yes.

Child: To keep strong.

T: To keep you strong. Yes. To keep you strong. Why do you want to be strong?
Why would you want to be strong?

C: Sir – muscles.

T: To make muscles. Yes. Well what would you want to do with your muscles?

(1979:386)

Levinson says such questions are a useful resource in the classroom because 1. they enjoin participation, 2. they test for knowledge, and 3. they allow students to express any problems they might have with the subject (p.383). As for the pattern, it is, as with 'real' questions, Q-A-R, with the response, in this case, being confirmation of the already known answer.

These, though, are not the only question pattern sequences. Levinson, when discussing activity types and language, gives this extract from a criminal trial.

A: ...you have had sexual intercourse on a previous occasion, haven't you?

B: Yes.

A: On many previous occasions?

B: Not many.

A: Several?

B: Yes.

A: With several men?

B: No.

A: Just one?

B: Two.

X A: Two. And you are seventeen and a half?

B: Yes.

(1979:380-1)

Because the questioner here is not asking for information that he does not have (it is a counsel's job to have such information and the tag 'haven't you?' in the first question strongly indicates this is so) nor is he testing the witness to see if she knows the answers (it is clear that people know such things about themselves), these questions are neither 'real' questions nor 'exam' questions. Levinson says that their function is 'to extract from the witness answers that build up to form a "natural" argument for the jury' (p.381), and Heritage notes that this is shown by, *inter alia*, 'the questioner's avoidance of any form of third turn receipt item in favour of a move to the next question' (1984a:289). Thus, the sequence here is a repeated Q-A pattern, not a Q-A-R pattern as in the other two types of question sequence discussed above. (Perhaps the counsel's response of 'Two' at X can be seen as an exam-like response. Even if this is so, it can also be seen as a repetition for the judge's and jury's ears in order to further strengthen a crucial point of the argument he is building – 'This is a woman of loose morals' – and it is immediately followed with another question to start up the Q-A pattern once more to add yet more weight to the argument.) We can call these questions 'cross-examination' questions.

If we look at the range of questions and responses in the exchanges from Monty Python we see that they provide a richly varied source of material for analysis. It is to be expected that the keeper of the Bridge of Death, which crosses the Gorge of Peril, would want to submit anyone wishing to cross the bridge to some kind of test. Indeed, his opening line is a direct challenge: 'If you want to cross the bridge you must answer these three questions.' Given this, it would be expected that his questions would be 'exam' questions with a 'right' and a 'wrong' answer, and giving the wrong answer would result in failure to cross the bridge. Yet the three asked of Lancelot seem to be 'real' questions, at least in terms of their semantic content, ('What is your name/quest/favourite colour?'), and by simply providing the apparently ignorant bridgekeeper with such simple information Lancelot succeeds in passing across the bridge. That is, he 'passes the exam' simply by talking about himself. Yet this strange amalgam of real and exam (the questions are 'real' and the context is 'exam') does not have the sequence pattern of Q-A-R, which would be expected of both. The sequence is the repeated Q-A pattern of cross-examination found in trials. This leads

the observer to ask: what is the argument being built, and for whom is it being built? The answers come in the following exchange, which is with Sir Robin.

Two points emerge from this exchange. The first is the sudden shift from two real questions to a third that is clearly an exam question: 'What is the capital of Assyria?' (We could almost be back in a geography class.) Robin, expecting another straightforward real question about himself, is taken aback and fails to answer. At this point we see that failing to give the right answer not only results in failing to cross the bridge, but also in a violent death at the hands of unseen forces. And it is for these forces, it would seem, that the argument is being built by the cross-examination sequential pattern which dominates the exchanges. Thus, these forces are both judge and jury in these 'trials'. But they are more than this; they are also executioner, hurling Robin to his death, and, moreover, this action can be seen as a response, a rejection of his answer, thereby completing the Q-A-R pattern of exam questions. If this is the case, then Lancelot being allowed to cross the bridge earlier can also be viewed as a response, an acceptance of his answers. This means, then, that the immediate cross-examination pattern taking place between the keeper and the knights takes place within a larger 'exam' pattern involving the unseen forces.

The next exchange, between Galahad and the keeper, reveals an interesting attitude on the part of the questioned participant, Galahad. The keeper, having tricked Robin with a sudden exam question, here returns to the real questions he first asked of Lancelot. Galahad has seen Lancelot successfully cross the bridge by giving three acceptable answers to the three real questions. He has also seen Robin fail to cross the bridge and be hurled to his death by failing to answer a third question which was an exam question. It would seem that in answering his own three questions Galahad scrambles what he has seen take place in the preceding two exchanges and treats the third question he is asked ('What is your favourite colour?') not as a real question, as was asked of Lancelot, but as another sudden 'trick' exam question, as was asked of Robin ('What is the capital of Assyria?'). Having seen Lancelot succeed with the answer 'Blue', which for Lancelot was the true answer to a real question, Galahad now sees this as the right answer to what he sees as an exam question and so he also answers 'Blue', only to immediately realise his mistake ('Blue. (1.0) No...') Once again failure results in a violent death, his main failure here not being in not knowing the answer

but in not recognising the type of question asked. (This, of course, might well have been the intended result of the keeper using the power his position gives him to change back to three real questions. If this is so, then it was a 'trick' real question.)

Once again, in the final exchange, the keeper's questions change tack as he reverts back to a sudden exam question, this one of unusual difficulty: 'What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?' (This also reincorporates a joke about swallows from earlier scenes.) Unperturbed by the question, Arthur asks one of his own to clarify the situation. (This recalls Levinson's third point above concerning the usefulness of questions in the classroom: they allow students to express any problems they might have with the topic.) Arthur's insertion sequence here is not unlike that in the above example from Goffman where 'Milk and sugar?' has the dual role of being a second pair part of the previous turn and a first pair part of the next turn. Here Arthur's 'What do you mean? African or European swallow?' can be seen to perform a similar function and might be glossed as follows.

B1: What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?

[A1:] A2: [I know the answer but I would like you to be more specific.] What do you mean? An African or European swallow?

B2: I, I don't know that.

Note that in this gloss Arthur's question 'An African or European swallow?' is seen as a 'real' question and the keeper's answer can be seen as appropriate.

Of more significance, though, is the powerful effect that this simple insertion sequence has on the relationship of the interlocutors. Suddenly it is King Arthur who has the power of questioner and it is the bridgekeeper who has the role of the questioned. When the latter fails to answer, the blind justice of the unseen forces hurl him into the gorge. Thus, the above gloss could be amended as follows.

B1: What is the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow?

[A1:] A2: [This is an incomplete question to which I cannot give an answer which is as specific as I would like. Do you, a man whose questions can decide if another man lives or dies, really know what you're talking about? Let us see.] What do you mean? An African or European swallow?

B2: I, I don't know that. [*He is hurled into the gorge*]

Note that in this gloss Arthur's question is seen as an 'exam' question and the keeper's answer can once again be seen as appropriate. What determines it as an exam question, however, is the *response* of the unseen forces – hurling the keeper into the gorge for failing to give the 'right' answer.

Before moving on to further discuss insertion sequences, a brief summary of the foregoing is in order. While there are different types of questions which are distinguishable not simply by their semantic content but also structurally, one way of exploiting them for humorous ends is to blur such organisational distinctions, as was done in the extracts from Monty Python. It was seen how in an 'exam' context such non-exam questions as 'What is your favourite colour?' were asked. Further, the sequential patterns of such exchanges unexpectedly took the form of yet another question type, that of cross-examination, but, on closer examination, this pattern was seen to be contained within a larger, 'exam' pattern involving the unseen forces, the real seat of power in these exchanges. This deliberate obfuscation led to one of the examined, Robin, failing to predict a change in question type, and another, Galahad, confusing the type of question asked, both failures having fatal consequences. The final exchange saw how the use of a simple insertion sequence unpredictably transformed the participants' roles, resulting in the death of the bridgekeeper. An overview of the various relationships between participants, parts, types and patterns is given here.

participants	sequence part	type	pattern
bridgekeeper	Q	real/exam	CROSS-EXAMINATION
king and knights	A	real/exam	
unseen forces	R	exam	EXAM
			determining framework

Fig. 7. Questions in the bridgekeeper scene.

Insertion sequences in everyday talk might be seen as disruptive of the coherence of a conversation (witness Arthur's insertion sequence just discussed), but this is not necessarily the case. Levinson gives an example where there is a considerable delay between the initial question and, in this case, the non-answer. (Note that = = indicates adjoining utterances with no gap between them)

B: ...I ordered some paint from you uh a couple of weeks ago some vermilion

A: Yuh

B: And I wanted to order some more the name's Boyd

→ A: Yes // how many tubes would you like sir

B: An-

B: U:hm (.) What's the price now eh with V.A.T. do you know eh

A: Er I'll just work that out for you =

B: = Thanks

(10.0)

A: Three pounds nineteen a tube sir

B: Three nineteen is it =

A: = Yeah

B: E::h (1.0) yes u:hm ((*dental click*) (*in parenthetical tone*)) e:h jus-justa think, that's what three nineteen. That's for the large tube isn't it

A: Well yeah it's the thirty-seven c.c.s

> B: Er, hh I'll tell you what I'll just eh eh ring you back I have to work out how many I'll need. Sorry I did- wasn't sure of the price you see

(1983:305, slightly amended)

Here we see that the question asked at → has an intervening eight turns before it is finally dealt with at >. Also note that it is not answered with a number (the question was 'How many tubes?') but with an account as to why B can't give a direct answer ('I have to work out how many I'll need'). Levinson says that such a delay does not interfere with the coherence because of 'conditional relevance'. This is a notion taken from Schegloff (who in turn attributes it to Sacks) which entails that in an adjacency pair situation 'given the first, the second is expectable; upon its occurrence it can be seen as a second item to the first.' (1972:364). Thus, despite all the turns between the question and the account for not answering the question, the participants do not lose track of the topic and find their exchanges to have relevance. And once again it underlines the importance of the *interaction*; meaning is here established and maintained jointly, with the hearer's role being as significant as the speaker's. And

also once again it is clear to see that any such gap that can occur between items provides an opportunity for comedic exploitation, as we will now see.

Because of the potential delay between items this is a feature that can be worked in and out of a narrative over a lengthy period. In this example, which comes from *Fawlty Towers*, we see how such an extended sequence allows for what would ordinarily be a simple non-humorous exchange to be repeated and become a focus for humour. In this episode a confidence trickster is posing as a peer, Lord Melbury, and Fawlty has been taken in. True to character, Fawlty displays a grovelling attitude to this supposed aristocrat and this has led him in an earlier scene to move a family, the Wareings, from their window table, so that Lord Melbury could have a table with a view. The scene we look at here occurs towards the end of the episode and involves Fawlty (F), Mr. Wareing (W), Lord Melbury (M), and Fawlty's wife, Sybille (S). Fawlty is standing behind the bar when the Wareing family enters. The scene has been edited.

F: Ah, good evening, Mr. Wareing.

W: [*Coldly*] A gin and orange, a lemon squash, and a Scotch and water.

F: Certainly. [*Turns to get glasses*]

(2.0)

W: Oh, is there any part of the room that we should stay away from?

F: What? [*Understands reference*] Oh – ha-ha-ha.

W: [*Sourly*] We'll be over there, then. [*Moves towards a table near the window*]

[*Edit*]

[*Enter Lord Melbury*]

M: Evening, Fawlty.

F: Ah, good evening, Lord Melbury.

W: [*To Fawlty, indicating the whole room with a sweep of his arm*] Anywhere?

F: Yes, anywhere, anywhere. [*To Lord Melbury*] Lord Melbury, may I offer you an aperitif as our guest?

M: Oh, that's very kind of you. Dry sherry, if you please.

F: [*Admiringly*] What else? Ahh...!

Fawlty then moves from behind the bar to present Melbury with his drink. They then have a conversation about Fawlty's coin collection. In the background Wareing can be seen looking at Fawlty expectantly. Melbury eventually leaves and Sybille Fawlty draws Fawlty's attention to Wareing.

S: Basil.

F: Yes, I'm just talking to Lord Melbury, dear.

- > W: A gin and orange, a lemon squash, and a Scotch and water.
 < F: I do apologise. I was just talk|ing to
 M: [*Re-enters*] |Fawlty, er, I was, erm, I was thinking...

They converse further about the coin collection. Melbury once more begins to leave in the direction of reception. Again Sybille Fawlty draws her husband's attention to Wareing.

- S: Basil!
 F: [*Grinding his teeth*] I'm talking to Lord Melbury!
 > W: [*Insistent*] A gin and orange, a lemon squash, and a Scotch and water. [*Slams hand on table*]
 < F: [*Begrudgingly*] All right, all right. [*Goes behind bar*]

At this point the bell in reception rings and Fawlty, believing it to be Lord Melbury, leaves the bar and goes to reception. Here a train of events ensues involving the police, who arrest Melbury as a confidence trickster. Fawlty, upset, disappointed, and completely distracted by these events, is now hanging a picture in reception. Sybille enters from the bar closely followed by Mr. Wareing.

- S: Basil.
 > W: [*Shouting*] A gin and orange, a lemon squash, and a Scotch and water!
 [*As the titles roll Fawlty charges at him, grabs him, drags him into the bar where he pushes him into his chair before giving him the glasses and bottles and tells him to serve himself.*]

(Cleese and Booth 1998)

Here we have the adjacency pair of request-acceptance in which a request for a drink seems to be immediately attended to (Fawlty turns to get the glasses) but which is delayed by other action. The request is made a total of four times at the following intervals in broadcast time:

First request: 0 minutes 0 seconds
 Second request: 1m 30s
 Third request: 2m 05s
 Final request: 7m 33s.

The seven and a half minutes between the initial request and its corresponding response amounts to 25% of the thirty minutes broadcast time of this episode, a significant period, and clearly such structural delays provide a useful narrative device. It might be argued that this example doesn't correspond precisely with the example given concerning the request for paint. Apart from the fact that this involves a request-

acceptance pair and not a question-answer pair, there is also the fact that here the utterances between the initial request and its response are (a) not exchanges between the original interlocutors, Fawlty and Wareing, and (b) not conditionally relevant to the topic, the purchase of drinks. This is in part accurate, as Fawlty discusses a different topic with a different interlocutor (we are not privy to Wareing's utterances, but we do see him in the background looking expectantly at Fawlty i.e. maintaining topic). But the exchanges at > and < *are* between the original participants and they *are* conditionally relevant (Fawlty's apology and then his reluctant compliance both attest to this), so despite Fawlty's distractions with Melbury, there *is* a relevant and continuous interaction taking place between Fawlty and Wareing, in parallel, as it were, with their more immediate concerns.

This device allows humour to be provided in at least two ways, both tied in with a point made earlier in the discussion of the incongruous nature of comic characters (1.3), namely,

that they invariably behave in a manner that sets them at odds with the world. Here it is primarily Fawlty's naked snobbery and rudeness – significant elements in his make-up – which generate the comic incongruities. Firstly, there is the cumulative humour in the move from Fawlty's initial polite and obliging response to the drinks request (Certainly. [*Turns to get glasses*]), through an increasing scale of dereliction and impoliteness ([*Begrudgingly*] All right, all right.), to the final action in which he actually assaults the customer and orders him to serve himself. Secondly, in the spaces between the first three requests, Fawlty's ignoring of Wareing is in complete contrast to his fawning to 'Lord' Melbury, a glaring comedic juxtaposition. Typically, his grovelling class obeisance is eventually rendered meaningless by the exposure of Melbury as a charlatan.

However, it should not be thought that it is only in the exaggerated world of comedy that we find extended sequences of such length. It has been established earlier (6.1) that background knowledge and shared methods of interpretation play a crucial role in the assignment of meaning between interlocutors. Clearly, in the personal histories between two people who have known one another over a period of time there is much common ground and this can assist in easy communication. It can also facilitate exchanges which are both subtle and remote, as this example from Barbados shows.

Fisher (1976) discusses the Barbadian practice of 'dropping remarks', which he defines as

An organised and typically clever routine used by Barbadians to goad an opponent during an intermediate stage of dispute. In a prevalent form the speaker makes a comment ostensibly for one hearer, though the intention is to demean an overhearer who recognises the speaker's intention to insult.

(p.227)

He offers the following diagram by way of illustration.

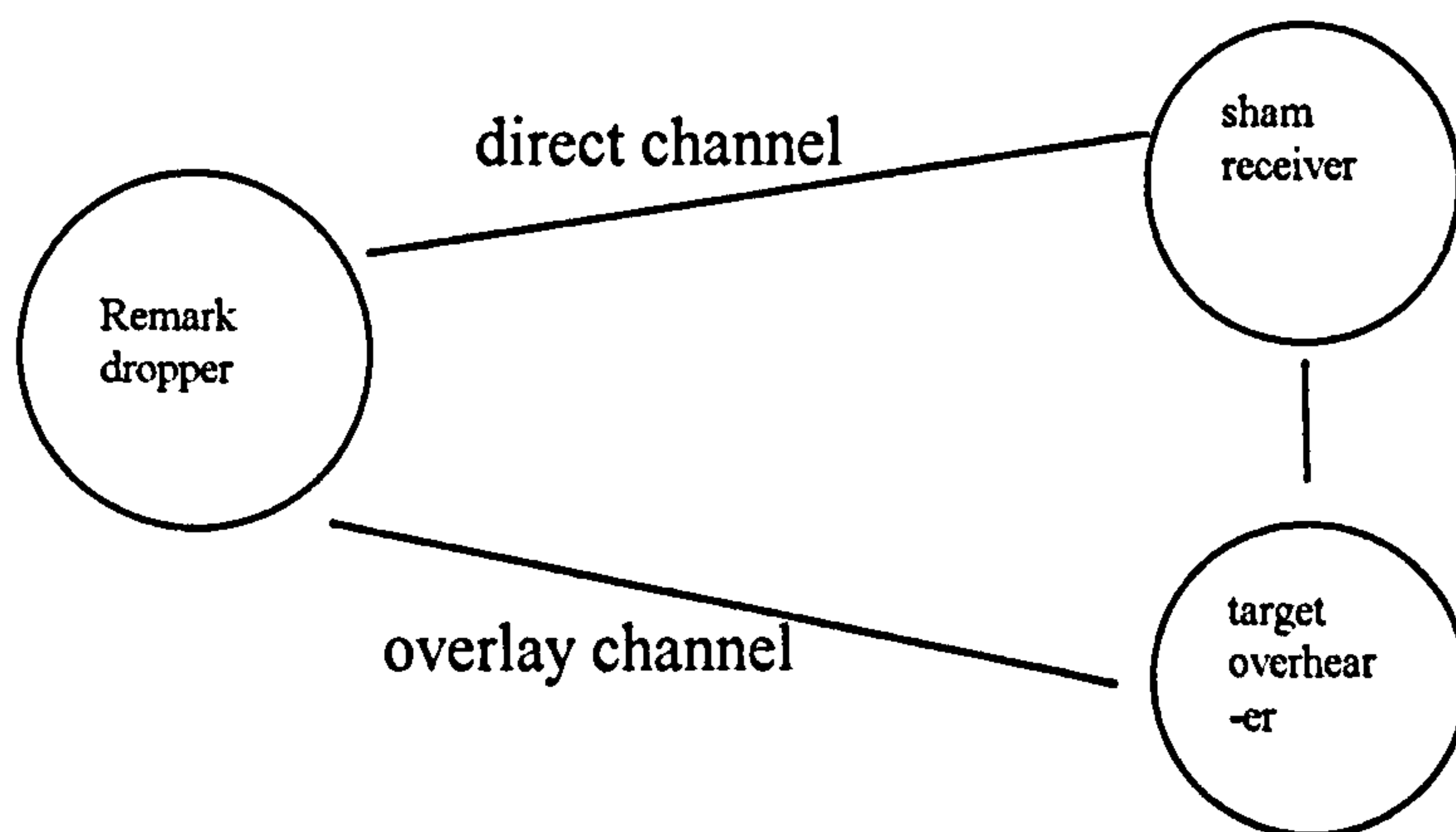


Fig . 8. Schematic diagram of remark dropping, triangular situation
(p.232)

As an example of this practice he relates how a woman wore a very bright shade of lipstick to a party where she heard another woman remark to a man whose lips were in a normal state: 'Oh, I thought your mouth was burst'. Fisher comments, 'The remark is imperfectly contained within the dialogue of the speaker and the sham receiver. As she [the target] explained to me "She *mean* it to me, but she say it to him"' (p.231, original emphasis). It is apparent that the dispute between the remark dropper and the overhearer has a history and will, presumably, continue in the future, thus continuing a sequence the individual components of which are remote from one another in space and time. Naturally, the talk that occurs between such turns (which will only be with other people, given the state of affairs between the two involved in the dispute) cannot be considered to be insertion sequences, as the days', weeks', or months' talk would not be guided by the conditional relevance of the dispute. Such relevance would seem only (or mainly) to be activated by the participants' mutual physical presence. We can

attempt to grasp this rather intangible state of affairs by considering it in terms of an adjacency pair sequence, or a string of such sequences, extended over time and having different places of utterance. Elaborating previous diagrams of pragmatic interpretation to accommodate these new factors gives us the following representation (Figure 9) of the above 'I thought your mouth was burst' utterance.

In the diagram we see we see that the turn of the extended sequence between the speaker and the overhearer is contained within the turn of the immediate sequence between the speaker and the sham overhearer. Within the immediate sequence there are not only two possible speaker meanings, direct and indirect, there are also two possible hearer meanings, the sham hearer and the overhearer. It is the indirect speaker meaning and the overhearer meaning which constitute the turn of the extended sequence between those two interlocutors. It is entirely possible that the sham hearer too will share the overhearer meaning, depending on his/her knowledge of the history of the relationship between the speaker and the overhearer. Being a member of the same culture and thus knowing about the practice of dropping remarks, the sham hearer will at least be aware that the utterance, not being relevant to the immediate sequence the sham is involved in, is almost certainly for someone else's ears. Also important to note here is that this is not simply a matter of formal structures having extensive capabilities but the fact that what sustains this adjacency pair sequence through time and space is the social relationship between the interlocutors. That is, it is the extralinguistic, nonformal features of the situation which breathe life into the formal structures.

Dropping remarks may be a common cultural practice in Barbados but this is not to say that it is unique to that island. Goffman sees it as a not uncommon practice in American culture and refers to it with the common phrase 'innuendo'. He notes further that the speaker 'overlays his remarks with a patent but *deniable* meaning' (1981:134, emphasis added). Fisher similarly reports an informant telling him that were someone to challenge a remark he had dropped he would reply, "'Who told you I was referrin' to you? You must be hearin' things'" (p.234). In such games of pragmatic ping-pong there is clearly a divergence between utterance meaning and speaker's meaning, or, in Austinian terms, between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, where the speaker, if challenged, can always deny any speaker's meaning attributed to him/her or claim that the perlocutionary effect does not match the illocutionary force. Thomas

In the 1995-6 season Newcastle United took a significant lead over their nearest rivals, Manchester United. The season runs from August to May and as the end neared Newcastle's lead slipped point by point and by April Manchester had overtaken them at the top. The Manchester manager, Alex Ferguson, is a very experienced campaigner noted for, among other things, the 'mind games' he plays with competing managers. The Newcastle manager, Kevin Keegan, was, in contrast, a novice in management at that time. After a hard-fought home win by Manchester over Leeds, Ferguson, knowing that Leeds were due to play at home to Newcastle only twelve days later, commented that he couldn't understand Leeds, they only seemed to play well against Manchester United: "...it's pathetic the way [Leeds] have been playing. If they played every week like they did tonight it would be a different story" (Hughes 1996). The overlay channel message/indirect speaker meaning (if there was one; all such innuendo is deniable, recall) could here be interpreted in at least two ways. One, to Leeds, 'Give Newcastle a hard game', and two, to Keegan, 'You have it easier than us'.

The mild-mannered Keegan remained silent until after the Leeds game (which his team won) when he famously exploded in a post-match TV interview. His voice cracking with emotion, he gave a reply explicitly naming Alex Ferguson, even though there had not been any *direct* comment to Keegan from the Manchester United manager. Keegan said, somewhat contradictorily, 'It's not part of the psychological battle, when you do that with footballers like he said about Leeds. I've kept really quiet, but he went down in my estimation when he said that. *It really has got to me.* The battle is still on and Manchester United have not won it yet' (Ball 1996, emphasis added). Ferguson did not comment further, having achieved any ulterior objective he may have had, without the risk of direct exposure.

It is to be expected that such an indirect method of address would be used by writers of comedy and we close this section with an example of comedic remark dropping. It comes from the situation comedy series 'Frasier'. Frasier is a celebrity psychiatrist with his own phone-in radio show. Roz is his producer. In this episode she has got a commission for a special programme of her own on 'Space'. She takes on Frasier to narrate her show but when he tries to dominate they fall out and Frasier leaves that

production. Here Frasier (F) is conducting his usual telephone counselling radio show. He is in the studio in front of the microphone and Roz (R) is sitting in the control booth to his left. They can see one another through the glass window. (Figures in brackets are pauses in seconds. Colon : indicates lengthened vowel.)

1. F: I've gone on here a bit, Fred, so let me try to boil this down for you. (1.5) if you
2. want to be a good leader (0.5) you've got to be able to admit when you're wrong.
3. (2.0) No-one ever stood so tall (0.5) as when he (1.0) [*Sideways glance at Roz*] or
4. she:: [*Cut to Roz acknowledging reference*] stooped to say 'I'm sorry'.
5. Fred: What's that got to do with my fear of intimacy? [*Cut to Roz who looks at*
6. *Frazier expectantly*]
7. F: [*Looking embarrassed*] Which brings to mind another phrase. (1.0) There is
8. none so blind as he (1.0) [*Sideways glance at Roz*] or she who will not see. (1.5)
9. We'll be right back after the news. [*Switches off main microphone*]
10. R: Subtle, Frazier. But just so you know (0.5) I do not owe you an apology. You
11. were trying to take over my show and that's why I fired you.
12. F: You didn't fire me. I quit.

(Johnson & Marcil
2001)

Here we see the indirect continuation of the dispute through Frasier dropping remarks. In the direct channel he is talking on the phone to (primarily) Fred (line 1) and (secondarily) many thousands of listeners about Fred's fear of intimacy. Yet his remarks are addressed to Roz through the overlay channel: talking about leadership (2), the need to apologise (2, 4) and giving the pronoun 'she' great emphasis with the use of dramatic pause (3) and stress (4). This confuses Fred, who is not party to the dispute, and he seeks repair (5). However, Frasier persists in dropping remarks to Roz (8) before cutting Fred off without properly addressing his problem. Roz is clearly aware throughout that she is being addressed (4) and confirms in her remarks in 10-11 that she has understood this and even, like Keegan, makes a direct reply to the topic of their dispute. Frasier, however, is too vain and pompous to remain silent (as Ferguson did) or to deny that the remarks were for her (as in Fisher's example), and cannot resist taking up the dispute in the direct channel (12). The humour arises not only from being aware of the meaning behind Frasier's indirect references (unlike Fred, we are party to Roz's role as overhearer) but chiefly in the way these confirm the main traits of Frasier's comic character – arrogance, superiority, childishness, hopelessly incongruous traits for someone whose social role is that of a public counsellor.

To briefly summarise the foregoing, then, it can be seen that ‘adjacency’ is not always the same as ‘contiguity’. *Relevance*, that most important of conversational maxims, would seem to be the crucial determining factor. It was seen how relevance can help answer the fundamental CA question concerning sequences – ‘why that now?’ – in immediate terms, in sequences within greater sequences, in parallel sequences, and also in encounters remote in time and place.

6.3.3

Preference

The purpose of this short section is to introduce and clarify the notion of ‘preference’, which will be a significant factor in the analysis to come in Section 8.

Levinson notes that because of the wide variety of possible responses to, for example, questions (there are not only insertion sequences of variable length but also items like re-routes – ‘Better ask John’ – or challenges to the sincerity of the question etc), this might seem to undermine the situational significance of adjacency pairs. However, *preference organisation* ensures that not all potential second parts are of equal standing: there is a ranking at work in which there is at least one preferred or dispreferred category of response (1983:307). Atkinson and Heritage point out that such choices ‘arise at the level of lexical selection, utterance design, and action or sequence choice’(1984:53). In spite of the associations which the word ‘preference’ may have (most attribute the notion to Sacks) commentators are keen to stress that it does *not* refer to the individual preferences of interlocutors, a person’s private desires, or participants’ subjective and psychological leanings (Levinson 1983:307, Heritage 1984a:207, Atkinson and Heritage 1984:53). Rather, it deals with ‘highly specialised and ...institutionalised methods of speaking’ (Heritage 1984a:207) and is ‘a structural notion that corresponds closely to the linguistic concept of *markedness*’ (Levinson p.307 original emphasis). Let us look at some concrete examples for further clarification.

A.

Child: Could you...could you put on the light for my .hh room
Father: Yep.

B.

1. C: Um I wonder if there's any chance of seeing you tomorrow
2. sometime (0.5) morning or before the seminar
3. (1.0)
4. R: Ah um (.) I doubt it
5. C: Uhm huh
6. R: The reason is I'm seeing Elizabeth.

(Levinson p.309)

In A we have a request and its acceptance (preferred); in B we have a request and its refusal (dispreferred). While this may still not take us away from ideas of personal preference (we would all like our requests to be accepted) the above commentators' remarks that preference is situated and institutional is supported if we look at how the preferred and dispreferred responses in A and B respectively are organised. The former is immediate, minimal and not accounted for, whereas the latter, the dispreferred, is delayed, strung out over two turns, and is accountable. One of the earliest comments on this (1972) comes from Sacks in a public lecture. Whereas a preferred response 'pretty damn well occurs contiguously' a dispreferred response 'may well be pushed rather deep into the turn that it occupies' (1987:57).

Heritage, too, remarks that preferred responses have the features of:

1. simple acceptance
2. no delay

as in:

B: Why don't you come up and see me some|times

A: |I would like to

(1984a:265-6)

However, dispreferred turns are noticeably different in their organisational features. Sacks remarks that '[c]omponents like "well" and/or "I don't know", for instance, at the beginning of an answer turn, characteristically precede something less than agreement' (1987:59) Levinson shows more fully that they are marked by

1. delays – a pause before delivery, displacement by use of such items as insertion sequences

2. prefaces – markers such as ‘uh’, ‘well’, apologies, token agreements
3. accounts – explanation of dispreferred act
4. declination component – often indirect and mitigated

(1983:334-5)

If we apply this to exchange B above we can see there is delay in lines 3 and 4, a preface in line 4 (‘Ah um’) followed by an indirect declination (‘I doubt it’ rather than ‘no’), and finally in line 6 an account (‘The reason is I’m seeing Elizabeth’).

As further evidence of the structural rather than the psychological nature of preference, Heritage (1984a:268-9) points to Pomerantz (1984), who considered self-deprecations, where the preferred response is *disagreement* and not agreement (Pomerantz pp.83-90), and also to a study by Heritage and Drew (1979) where *denial* not admission is the preferred response to blaming as the latter could well signal a conflict between the accused and the accuser. (It must be said, however, that both these preferred responses could well lead to accounting – in the first instance, an explanation from the hearer of why the speaker’s self-deprecation is wrong, in the second, the hearer’s presentation of an alibi/excuse. Accounting, we have just seen, is generally presented as a feature of *dispreferreds*.) This underlines, Heritage continues, that preference organisation is strongly associated with politeness and the concept of ‘face’, and preferred and dispreferred responses can be seen to be ‘affiliative’ and ‘disaffiliative’, respectively (p.268). We will see later (8.6, 8.7) the strong connections between preference and politeness.

However, though these views are now largely accepted without too much questioning, it is possible to highlight some problems with this notion of preference, problems related to subjectivity, frequency, and context-sensitivity. If we go back to one of the early mentions of the concept by Sacks (in a public lecture in 1972) we find that it is but a tentative notion and one that does seem to involve people’s desires to some extent. Talking of question-answer adjacency pairs he says,

if a question is built in such a way as to exhibit a preference between ‘yes’ and ‘no’, or ‘yes-’ or ‘no-’ like responses, then the answerers will tend to pick that choice, or a choice of that sort will be preferred by answerers, or should be preferred by answerers.

(1987:57)

Terms such as 'tend to' and 'should' do involve people's desires to a more significant degree than later commentators acknowledge. Further, acknowledging preference's intimate association with politeness, which Heritage does strongly, is an inadvertent way of connecting it with people's subjective states, as politeness strategies are based on what the literature would call people's 'face wants', that is, how they see their own public image. (A detailed discussion of politeness is to come in 8.7.) This does not negate the fact that preference does have a structural basis, but it is worth noting that is not entirely the case.

The second point too is non-structural. Bilmes (1988), in his discussion of the concept of preference, also notes the psychological point just made, and also observes that in CA literature there are references with a bias towards the significance of the frequency of preferred actions. He quotes, amongst others, Heritage & Watson as saying that confirmations are 'massively preferred', and Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks finding that self-correction is 'vastly more common than other-correction' (pp.172-3). We can also add here that Heritage talks of third-turn receipt objects in question-answer sequences in courtroom and news interview interaction as being 'massively absent' (1985:98). Bilmes is firm in his criticism of (what he sees as) such methodological lapses and reminds practitioners that 'CA is a structural and not a statistical undertaking' (p.173). While elsewhere I have criticised CA for being merely structural, the point here is not intended to insist on it being *more* structural, but simply to point out that it is incumbent on CA analysts to be consistent in the use of their own methods.

Further, context, as always, plays a significant part in preference considerations. Thus, in a therapy session, a self-deprecation would not, *contra* Pomerantz, necessarily get a disagreement, but might be used as the starting point for a serious discussion (Kotthoff 1993:196). We can add here that among friends a self-deprecation could well get an amused response of laughter. Moreover, there are cultural factors to take into account. Tannen (1981) and Schiffrin (1984) both point out that argument and disagreement are a normal part of (American) Jewish conversational style (Schiffrin talks of 'Jewish

argument as sociability’) and this clearly gives a different expectation concerning the preference for agreement.

Both Levinson and Heritage provide very similar tables of preferred and dispreferred turns for a variety of actions. This is Heritage’s.

Action	Preferred Format Response	Dispreferred Format Response
Request	Acceptance	Refusal
Offer/Invitation	Acceptance	Refusal
Assessment	Agreement	Disagreement
Self-Deprecation	Disagreement	Agreement
Accusation/Blaming	Denial	Admission

Table 3. Preference Format For Some Selection Types (1984a:269)

Levinson’s table of the ‘correlation of content and format in adjacency pair seconds’ has the following in addition to the above.

FIRST PART	Question
SECOND PART	
Preferred	Expected answer
Dispreferred	Unexpected answer or non-answer

Table 4. Correlation of Content And Format In Adjacencey Pair Seconds (p.336)

Here we would like to extend these tables further and add the following pair:

Action	Preferred response	Dispreferred response
Humour	Amusement	Non-amusement

Table 5. Preference Organisation Of The Action Of Humour

This is a not unreasonable addition. Sacks (1974) remarks that the expected response at the end of the joke he analysed is (amused) laughter. Norrick (1993), too, sees these features in a similar way: ‘we can say that joking and laughter are linked as two parts of an adjacency pair as well’ (p.23). In such formulations it seems clear that some type

of amusement is the preferred response. It is worth repeating here that we are talking about *amusement* and not simply laughter. Hay (2001) criticises Norrick for citing joking and *laughter* as an adjacency pair when, she says, there are other forms of humour support. She lists the following (*passim*): contributing more humour, playing along with the gag, using echo or overlap, offering sympathy, contradicting self-deprecating humour, and heightened involvement in the conversation. She further notes that appreciation of humour can be withheld or there can be a complete lack of reaction. All of these examples can be subsumed in the adjacency pair formulated here. That is, the humour support items can be seen as types of ‘amusement’ (preferred response), and withholding appreciation or not reacting can be classed as ‘non-amusement’ (dispreferred response).

In this section we have seen how speech act theory shows, amongst other things, that to speak is to act, and also that we can speak directly or indirectly. Even indirect speech is interpretable as there are certain conversational maxims we follow (the chief one of which is the maxim of relevance) which, allied to shared background knowledge, allows us to assign meanings to such talk. Such features as these are also essential components of humour, which by design fully exploits them in its creation of multiple meanings. However, speech act theory is found wanting when it comes to the sequential complexity of talk in interaction, but great assistance can be had from CA with its findings on turn taking, adjacency pairs, and preference, which provide great insights into how we cooperatively organise talk in order to make sense to one another. But CA itself is of limited use when the analyst wishes to look at what lies beneath the structures of talk, so further help from ethnographic sources is called for, as will be particularly evident in the final analysis in Section 8. Before that a key feature of the disputed utterance – gender – is now examined and its relevant aspects for our purposes noted.

7.

SOME GENDER ASPECTS

In her review of gender studies Hawkesworth (1997) notes that their scope includes history, language, literature and the arts, the media, politics, psychology, religion, medicine and science, law, and the workplace (p.650). However, the consideration of gender here need not be so wide, as it is determined by the salient facts relating to the disputed remark which occurs in the final analysis – ‘Margaret Thatcher was a man’. The relevant contextual factors to be considered will be: the notions of gender identities and representations, gender and language, and gender and humour. The investigation of gender identities will be one that deliberately points up the diversity and ambivalence of contemporary gender and sexual identities in order to both show their complexities and display the scope for play they provide. The main concern in the discussion of gender and language will be to demonstrate that though the main schools of thought are those of difference and dominance, at least one recent trend is moving away from this basic divide. And the look at gender and humour will deal with the past exclusion of women from comedy and the debate concerning the similarities and differences between ‘masculine’ humour and ‘feminine’ humour.

7.1

Gender Identities And Representations

The starting point for our look at gender identities is Riviere’s concept of ‘masquerade’ and we will then move on to look at in some detail an interactionist approach (Garfinkel), which is in keeping with other, significant parts of this study. Both of these in their own way prefigure some of the postmodern/deconstructionist views on gender, sexuality and the body which will be discussed in due course. The discussion will also include some of the relevant social and economic aspects of gender.

The psychoanalyst Riviere (1929) speaks of ‘womanliness as a masquerade’, and bases this notion on a case study of a female patient, an intellectual, who in 1920s London excelled in the public performances her job as a ‘propagandist’ entailed. The high level of competence she displayed in the public realm (a masculine domain much

more than than now) caused her anxiety which she sought to alleviate by seeking reassurance from 'father figures' (p.304) with whom she 'flirted and coquetted' (p.305). The strain caused by this incongruity of attitude (competition/approval) caused sufficient difficulties for her to seek psychoanalytical help. Looking at the gender strategies involved in these practices, Riviere concludes:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it... The reader may ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the 'masquerade'. My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.

(p.306)

Such a view leads a present-day commentator to declare: 'Riviere pioneered the idea that gender is constructed according to social codes, where the subject becomes gendered by a process of mimesis' (Phoca 1999:60).

A related study, also pioneering in being one of the first detailed treatments in social theory of the sexed body, is that by Garfinkel (1967). He discusses an intensive series of interviews he had in the late 1950s with Agnes, an intersexed person (but see below). Agnes was at that time in her late teens and had fully-developed female breasts, no uterus, ovaries or facial hair; she had a penis, testes, and a male chromatin pattern. She was raised as a boy but had always felt herself to be a girl. She fully accepted society's strict male/female dichotomy and, in Garfinkel's words, behaved as '120% the woman'.

Just as we have seen how Garfinkel used breaching experiments to 'foreground the background' of everyday life (Section 6.1), he also saw how Agnes' behaviour performed a similar function; in deliberately acting 'like a woman' and avoiding acting 'like a man' Agnes highlighted the way in which such 'normal' behaviours are socially managed accomplishments. For Garfinkel, the normally-sexed environment (he is talking of 1950s/60s USA, but this still holds good as a present-day description of developed western society) is rigorously dichotomised into male and female. 'The

dichotomy provides for persons who are “naturally”, “originally”, “in the first place”, “in the beginning”, “all along”, and “forever” one or the other’ (p.116). This is no small matter because of ‘the omnirelevance of sexual statuses to affairs of daily life as an invariant but unnoticed background in the textures of relevances that compromise the changing actual scenes of everyday life’ (p.118). Someone like Agnes, whose body and practices transgress this divide ‘permits an appreciation of these background relevances that are easily overlooked or difficult to grasp because of their routinised character and because they are so embedded in a background of relevances that are simply “there” and taken for granted’ (p.118). Such relevances are the socialised behaviours performed by people depending on their possession of a penis or vagina. However, this does not mean that Garfinkel’s is an essentialist view, as at this point he distinguishes between biological genitals and what he calls ‘cultural genitals’ (p.123). Biologically, Agnes had a penis but by her own accounts (perhaps exaggerated for effect, according to Garfinkel) it had never been erect, was an object of no curiosity for her, had not entered into games with other children, was never a source of pleasurable feelings, was, in fact, an accidental appendage used solely for urination (p.129). However, because she saw herself as a female (who happened to have a penis) she knew that to fit culturally, she needed a vagina and insisted on ‘the possession of *either* a vagina that nature made *or* a vagina that *should have been there all along*, i.e. the *legitimate* possession. The legitimately possessed vagina is the object of interest. *It is the vagina the person is entitled to*. Although “nature” is a preferred and *bona fide* source of entitlement, surgeons are as well’ (p.127, original emphasis). Agnes had an operation to remove the penis and scrotum and a vagina and labia were created. In this view and in these acts we see, then, how such basic biological features are shaped and informed by cultural considerations also.

Thereafter she had the task of achieving a female identity in the social world and this she did by becoming, in Garfinkel’s words, a “secret apprentice” (p.146). From her boyfriend’s mother (who did not know her biography) she learned certain skills – cooking, dressmaking, shopping, home management (recall this was the 1950s); from her female roommates, who also were unaware of her history, she learned how to talk about parties, men, and dating; and from her boyfriend (who did know Agnes’ situation) she learned from his criticisms of other women that she should be passive, obedient, and accommodating (pp.146-7). What was significant about all of this was

that these gender practices were all self-conscious acts with others in concrete social situations. This was gender management done under the gaze of and in interaction with normal male and female others (who assumed she knew such behaviours in the first place) and was done without being able to indicate that she was learning such acts in the process of performing them (p.147). Such performances led Garfinkel to see her as a 'practical methodologist', 'the doer of the accountable person'. His summary is worth quoting at length:

Agnes' methodological practices are our sources of authenticity for the finding, and recommended study policy, that *normally sexed persons are cultural events* in societies whose character as *visible orders of practical activities* consist of members' recognition and production practices. We learned from Agnes, who treated sexed persons as cultural events *that members make happen*, that members' practices alone produce the observable-tellable normal sexuality of persons, and do so only, entirely, exclusively in actual singular, particular occasions through *actual witnessed displays of common talk and conduct*.

(p.181, emphasis added)

Though extremely insightful, Garfinkel's study is now found wanting in at least two respects. Firstly, he never uses the term 'gender' in his discussion but instead the term 'sexuality', and the reader is at times unsure if he is discussing 'sex' as in male/female, or 'gender' as in masculine/feminine behaviour which is assigned a social meaning in relation to a person's attributed sex, or hetero/homo-sexual behaviour. Such distinctions are important and at that time Garfinkel evidently lacked the tools to make them. The second point concerns power. Garfinkel does not raise any questions about the nature of the social relations between men and women, so that (to give just one example from many) when Agnes learns to be passive with her boyfriend, this is not problematised in any way. That is, he does not question the basis of such displays of power asymmetry. As Brittan points out, 'Garfinkel's incorrigible propositions about reality and gender do not in themselves tell us why gender

inequality and patriarchy exist' (1989:43). Both of these matters will be addresses in what follows.

But before moving on to West and Zimmerman's further elaboration of Garfinkel's ideas, it should be pointed out that it was necessary for Garfinkel to add an appendix to his study. This was because five years after the operation Agnes returned to see the doctor with whom Garfinkel collaborated, Robert Stoller, about a routine matter. In the course of an informal talk with Stoller she casually revealed that 'she had never had a biological defect that feminised her but that she had been taking estrogens since age twelve' (Stoller in Garfinkel p.287). As a twelve-year-old boy who wanted to be a girl, Agnes had, most improbably, stolen the oestrogen from her mother who was taking it after having a hysterectomy. Thereafter Agnes filled in the prescription herself and paid for the drugs with money stolen from her mother. She knew that it was a 'female substance' but did not know what effects it would have. She took the dose her mother had been taking and continued this throughout adolescence and thus she was able to prevent the onset of all male secondary sexual characteristics and develop female secondary sexual characteristics instead. She had then been able to keep this secret from everyone even during the stringent vetting process she underwent in the process of changing sexes, which included tissue tests and searches for drugs. Garfinkel notes that her unlikely disclosure does not alter the fact that his study shows (and, indeed, it is added here, may even underline the fact) that 'the recognisedly rational accountability of practical actions is a member's practical accomplishment' (p.288).

West and Zimmerman (1987) elaborate and expand on Garfinkel's work. Their vocabulary is more precise and they use three distinct concepts: *sex*, *sex category*, and *gender*. *Sex* is 'a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males' (p.127). (Note the use of 'socially' rather than 'scientifically', a point which will recur.) *Sex category* means that 'categorisation is established and maintained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category' (p.127). *Gender* is 'the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative concepts of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category' (p.127).

Thus, Agnes, born with a penis and testes, was sexed as a male, claimed herself to be in the sex category of a female, and in her social acts constituted her gender. Clearly, then, for West and Zimmerman, as for Garfinkel, gender is not tied to the body in some straightforward sociobiological manner, but, as the title of their work makes plain – ‘Doing Gender’ – also involves something we perform socially. ‘Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society’ (p.126).

These gender divisions are, indeed, fundamental to society and find expression in the basic characteristics which are attributed to females and males. Time and again in the literature a set of familiar traits are related. Even a casual recording of such from the reading done for this section gives us:

Females	Males
girls learn the value of managing themselves as ornamental objects	boys affect the world through physical strength
	(West and Zimmerman 1987:141)
warmth, expressiveness, nurturance	competency, instrumentality, activity
sentimental, submissive	adventurous, forceful
	(Basow 1992:4)
women assumed to be expressive, nurturing, emotional	men assumed to be rational, practical, aggressive
	(Beynon 2002:56)
	boys are taught to favour masculinities that are dominant and hegemonic
	(Clatterbaugh 1997:4)

While this establishes clear gender differences and a world in which, put bluntly, men dominate women, our actual experience of the world is more complex than this. It is more complex in that these dichotomies are frequently transgressed (the case of Agnes being an extreme example) and also in that gender is not the only feature of our social identities. The contestation of gender identities has been carried out mainly by women, and the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s has since developed along many divergent paths – liberal, socialist, separatist, radical, lesbian, deconstructionist and so on. But this has happened at the same time as many other extra-parliamentary struggles have vied for a more central place. Thus, for Spelman, a major sticking point in gender struggles has been that too often 'the focus on women "as women" has addressed only one group of women – namely, white middle-class women of western industrialised countries' (1988:3). And Basow reminds us: 'each of us is situated in sociological space at the intersection of numerous categories – for example, gender, race or ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and able-bodiedness' (1992:4). Even when for our theoretical purposes we put such issues a little to one side so that the focus is a sharper one, that of gender, the struggles in this area also provide a complexity of ideas and identities. Kemp and Squires see this positively as 'feminism's political commitment to diversity – its validation of a multiplicity of approaches, positions, and strategies' (1997:3). This could hardly be otherwise because if gender is a social construction then it surely cannot have a stable and fixed form. Riley, discussing the category of 'women' in history, is clear on this point:

'women' is historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change; 'women' is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject 'women' isn't to be relied on; 'women' is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for the individual, 'being a woman' is also inconstant, and can't provide an ontological foundation.

(1988:1-2)

These changing grounds of 'women' in conjunction with the other factors of identity mentioned above ensure that social identities are extremely complex, and Fraser points out that as people act in a multiplicity of social contexts the various elements of social identities move in and out of focus.

Thus, one is not always a woman in the same degree; in some contexts one's womanhood figures centrally in the set of descriptions under which one acts; in others it is peripheral or latent. Finally it is not the case that people's social identities are constructed once and for all and definitively fixed. Rather, they alter over time, shifting with shifts in agents' practices and affiliations

(1997:380)

A corresponding picture of diversity emerges concerning males' contestation of dominant gender identities. Brittan insists that 'we cannot talk of masculinity, only masculinities' (1989:1). A more detailed view comes from Clatterbaugh, who articulates eight major perspectives on masculinity: the conservative, profeminist, men's rights, mythopoetic, socialist, gay, African American, and evangelical (1997:2). This not only shows the breadth of masculine identities but also indicates that many of these are in fact or potentially at odds with one another – conservative/socialist, profeminist/men's rights, gay/heterosexual, African American/white. This need not, however, be the case and different elements can be used inclusively. Nixon, commenting on contemporary work on masculinity, believes that the best examples come from 'the articulation or interweaving of particular attributes of masculinity with other social variables' (1997:297). In this regard Johnson comments that in such anti-essentialist approaches to masculinity 'theorists emphasise the nature of masculinity as socially constructed, highly contextualised, hence fluid and variable' (1997:19). She also notes, drawing on Gill (1993), that a political corollary of this is that because men cannot be simply grouped into one homogeneous bloc, this does not weaken the power they have over women and, further, actually makes it more difficult for women to focus their critiques of them (p.21).

Butler, drawing inspiration from, among other sources, Riviere's concept of 'masquerade', is highly critical of the binary gender system altogether and seeks to undermine it, claiming that it 'implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it' (1990:6). If gender is theorised as separate from sex then it becomes 'a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one' (p.6). Further ideas of Butler, and criticisms of them, will occur again below in a discussion of representations. Suffice it to say here that, though there is a certain leeway in people's choices of gender identity, this in itself cannot overcome the severe constraints of the dominant cultural gender dichotomisation and its consequences.

This sharp dichotomisation of society into male and female which we have been discussing is tightly bound up with reproduction and sexuality. So strong is this tie that Rich (1980) speaks of 'compulsory heterosexuality'. Butler (1990) agrees, adding that prevailing sexuality assumes 'a model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality' (p.151, note 6). Indeed, if we look back at our starting point of intersexuality, Hird & Germon would add it is the same compulsion that contributes to the imposition of binary gender divisions on a body that is naturally intersexed.

The medical obsession with constructing pseudo-male and female bodies from intersexed bodies is driven by a heterosexual imperative. If we are to understand that gender serves as a regulatory mechanism of heterosexuality, then by extension it is clear that heterosexuality is itself a regulatory mechanism: of reproduction.

(2001:172-3).

Sexuality, like gender, is also subject to arguments of whether it is biologically or socially determined, but for Weeks this is not the issue, the pertinent question for him being 'what are the meanings this particular culture gives to homosexuality however it may be caused, and what are the effects of those meanings on the ways the individuals

organise their sexual lives' (1995:34). Nor is sexual identity always transparent. Weeks points out that there are people who politically identify as gay and are active in the gay community but do not practice homosexual activity. Similarly, there are those who are homosexually active who do not identify as gay (1991:79). As we have observed above, other social factors are also involved in the construction of identities and Weeks observes, for example, that some black homosexuals make the choice to identify themselves politically as black rather than gay (1991:79). Further, Harding notes that 'sexuality is at the centre of gender, race, and class politics in local and global campaigns against forced sterilisation of poor and black women, pornography, paedophile rings and sex tourism' (1998:1). Weeks concludes that forging a sexual identity involves 'a perpetual invention and re-invention, but on grounds fought over by many histories' (1995:40).

The ideologies at work in these gendering and sexualisation processes are subtle and not immediately apparent. Garfinkel, talking of Agnes, pointed out that her 'anguish and triumphs resided in the observability, which was particular to her and uncommunicable, of the steps whereby the society hides from its members its activities of organisation and thus leads them to see its features as determinate and independent objects' (1967:182). Duerst-Lahti and Kelly would agree, noting that 'ideologies operate such that their underlying assumptions may not be clear to their users, and the invisibility of assumptions increases their potency' (1995a:21-2). Hawkesworth warns that this naturalisation of gender identities can lead to even those that would contest such configurations implicitly accepting a base/superstructure role for sex/gender so that there is a subtle shift from accounts of "how" gender operates under specific historical conditions to a universal claim about "why" gender performs a particular social function. In this shift, gender is transformed from an analytic category into a causal force. The heuristic tool is displaced as gender is accorded ontological status' (p.680). Thus, Kessler and McKenna point out that some scientists construct dimorphism where for them there is continuity: 'Biological, psychological, and social differences do not lead to our seeing two genders. Our seeing two genders leads to the "discovery" of biological, psychological, and social differences' (1978:163). Further, Kessler (1990) forcefully asserts that when physicians determine and assign gender to intersexed infants they take into account not simply biological factors but also 'such cultural factors as the "correct" length of penis and capacity of the vagina' (p.3). As

Lorber succinctly puts it in the title of her essay on such matters: 'Believing is Seeing' (1993).

A significant way this has been challenged is by the taking of a 'discursive turn' in which, as Squires (1999:64) states, the body is not conceived as a neutral anatomical fact separate from a mind that is socially conditioned, but to note, like Foucault (1979), that the biological and the social are themselves bound together. As Connell makes explicit, 'the body is never outside history, and history never free of bodily presence and effects on the body' (1987:87). The male body, he says, does not simply confer masculinity but receives it (p.83) so that:

The social definition of men as holders of power is translated into not only mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel, and texture of the body. This is one of the main ways in which the power of men becomes 'naturalised' i.e. seen as part of the order of nature.

(p.85)

Even those that would insist on a distinct and independent anatomy cannot avoid the fact that the discourse of anatomy is produced in a particular culture. 'Another culture might take the clan totem as the essence or truth of particular bodies. The human body is always a signified body and as such cannot be understood as a "neutral object" upon which science may construct "true discourses"' (Gatens 1992:131-2). To take just one example of this 'non-scientific' outlook we can look at the Zuni culture of the South Western USA.

Williams notes that many cultures around the world have had beliefs about gender markedly different from the Western Judaeo-Christian view. In various Native American Indian tribes (not all) an alternative to the male/female category has been what anthropologists call the *berdache*, that is, a category of people (some biologically male, some biologically female), who mix together the dress and behaviours of men and women and are seen as not being either. (Williams himself uses the term to refer to biological males only, preferring the term *amazon* for biological females.) The word

itself originated from the Persian *bardaj*, and via Arabic spread to Italian as *bardasso*, to Spanish as *bardaxa* or *bardaje*, and by the sixteenth century to French as *bardache* (Williams 1992:9). It was used in French to refer to the passive male homosexual partner and it was applied to the Native American social phenomenon by early French explorers of the New World who lacked any precise cultural term for such practices. By the late nineteenth century the word appeared in anthropological reports as *berdache*. Williams does not give any native term for such people, presumably because there are as many such terms as there are native languages.

Among the Zuni (a tribe already encountered above in 3.1 when discussing clowns), the berdache is a morphological male who dresses and behaves outside the usual binary categories. (See Illustrations 4 and 5.) The Zuni berdaches act both as mediator between men and women and also between the physical and spiritual worlds (Williams 1992:1-3). Thus, an important element of the Zuni creation myth involves a battle between the agricultural Zuni and the enemy hunter spirits. A Zuni spirit is captured by the enemy and is transformed, and in this new state mediates between and merges the farmers and hunters. In the four-yearly re-enactment of this myth it is the berdache who performs the role of the mediating spirit. The moral of this, says Williams, is that the berdache was created for a special purpose and that this led to an improvement in society. 'The continued re-enactment of this story provides a justification for the Zuni berdache in each generation' (p.18).

While this can be seen as a possibly liberating alternative to the restrictions of fixed genders that predominate in most cultures, there are those who are wary of such situations. Mathieu (1996) for example, does not see that such third genders are liberating to women. She observes that in those societies which have berdaches 'the technical skills of the male-to-woman are often judged superior to those of ordinary women, while those of the female-to-man are rarely judged superior to those of ordinary men' (p.66). Such evaluations, she adds, 'do not subvert, and may even strengthen the social effectiveness of bi-categorisation' which itself 'generally functions to the detriment of the social sex "woman"' (p.67).

such an arrangement is not difficult [we have just noted above how some cultures have actually practised a form of this for many centuries]; to have it become more than theoretical is extremely hard' (1997:688). Extremely hard because, as we have earlier seen, the actual society in which we live is clearly divided into male and female with concomitant roles and expectations. And it is to this area that we now return as the next part of the discussion will look at the division of (paid) labour with particular reference, for our purposes, to politics and governance.



Illus.4. We-wha, Zuni berdache, ca. 1885 (Williams 1992).



Illus. 5. A group of Zuni, females on the left, males on the right and the berdache We-wha in the middle, signifying the position of the berdache between women and men. (Williams 1992)

Bradley observes that ‘in virtually every society of which we have knowledge men and women normally perform different types of work’ (1989:1). Kelly and Duerst-Lahti, mindful of the commonsense view of the world, remind us that when one thinks of a soldier, surgeon, or physicist, typically a male image arises, and when one thinks of a homemaker, a nurse, or an elementary schoolteacher, then a female comes to mind. ‘These roles have gendered dimensions that are usually part of the individual who performs these role identities. Even entire industries have come to be gendered’ (1995:56). So much so that Kelly (1991) talks of the ‘gendered economy’. To give just one example from many: McElhinny (1998) studied the nature of police work in the American city of Pittsburgh. She noted how such work has been traditionally seen as men’s work and ‘despite increasing numbers of women, is still so viewed by many citizens and by police officers, even by female police officers who consider themselves and other females very good at their work’ (p.310).

However, this does not mean that labour is to be seen as stable and predictable, as it is another area that is subject to historical change. The changes in the restructuring of capitalism and the equal opportunities legislation brought about by struggles around gender (Beynon 2002:87) have meant that more women have taken up paid work in recent decades, especially in developed countries. At the same time men’s traditional labour roles have also changed so that, for example, the ‘numbers [of men] working in manufacturing fell while numbers working within finance, estate agency, and business

services rose' (Hearn in Squires 1999:75), all of this leading some to talk of the 'feminisation of the labour force'. While this clearly has to some extent affected traditional roles of males as breadwinner and females as homemaker, male dominance is still maintained in earnings. Thus if we consider a gender breakdown of low-paying jobs (in countries where there is equal pay legislation) we find the following: in the USA 33% of working women hold such jobs compared to 20% of working men; in the UK the ratio is 31%: 13%; in Japan 37%: 6%; in France 25%: 8%. The inequality is even greater in the developing world (AFL-CIO 2002). If we consider female earnings as a percentage of male earnings on a global scale we find it ranges from 92% in Vietnam to as low as 42% in Bangladesh (AFL-CIO 2002). Nowhere do women earn more than men for the same work. Corresponding figures in the US for women working full time all year (up to 1995) show they earn about 75% of their male counterparts (Jacobs 1995:9-16). This male dominance, which we can call 'masculinism', is 'reproduced and reaffirmed in the household, in the economy, and in the polity' (Brittan 1989:6). As it is this last which is directly relevant to the final analysis, it is to this we now turn.

For Brown, politics (in the sense of party politics and governance) has an explicit masculine identity: 'It has been more exclusively limited to men than any other realm of endeavour [see Table 6] and has been more intensely, self-consciously masculine than most other social practices' (in Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995a:24). Gatens forcefully asserts that given that the public sphere has been an almost exclusively male domain 'it has developed in a manner which assumes that its occupants have a male body. Specifically, it is a sphere that does not concern itself with reproduction but with production' (1992:124). As for the traits needed to be a public figure of authority, Jones notes that in the standard analysis of authority in modern Western discourse such a figure must be *official* (have a public professional role), *knowledgeable* (meet certain epistemic criteria for issuing orders), *decisive* (have a singular will and dispassionate judgement), and *compelling* (constructs political obedience through institutionalised hierarchy). A significant consequence of this is 'the separation of "women-qua-women" from the process of authorising' (1993:103-5). (We will have occasion to return to these points in the final section.) At the same time, given this hierarchy and the pluralities of masculinities discussed above, some men will dominate other men, so that 'there is a strong set of similarities among the powerful men who sit on

boardrooms, in legislatures, and other responsible positions (See Illustration 6). And there are strong similarities among men who are excluded from positions of power and prestige' (Clatterbaugh 1997:4).

Such facts of political life are often used to present women as apolitical, but part of the problem here is the notion of politics itself. As traditional politics is primarily defined and practised by men, many women are alienated from such activities (Wilkinson and Diplock in Squires 1999:197). But if we consider the feminist watchword 'the personal is political', then we see in this statement 'the claim that women are political, where the political is held to include all power-structured relations from the interpersonal to the international. If we adopt this broader notion of the political, it becomes evident that women have long been key political actors' (Squires p.197).

Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% W	Elections	Seats	Women	% W
1	Sweden	09 1998	349	149	42.7	---	---	---	---
2	Denmark	11 2001	179	68	38.0	---	---	---	---
3	Finland	03 1999	200	73	36.5	---	---	---	---
4	Norway	09 2001	165	60	36.4	---	---	---	---
5	Iceland	05 1999	63	22	34.9	---	---	---	---
6	Netherlands	05 2002	150	51	34.0	05 1999	75	20	26.7
7	Germany	09 1998	666	211	31.7	N.A.	69	17	24.6
8	Costa Rica	02 2002	57	18	31.6	---	---	---	---
9	Argentina	10 2001	257	79	30.7	10 2001	72	24	33.3
10	Mozambique	12 1999	250	75	30.0	---	---	---	---
119	Niger	11 1999	83	1	1.2	---	---	---	---
120	Yemen	04 1997	299	2	0.7	---	---	---	---
121	Morocco	11 1997	325	2	0.6	9 2001	270	1	0.4
122	Djibouti	12 1997	65	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
"	Kuwait	07 1999	65	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
"	Micronesia (Fed. States of)	03 1999	14	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
"	Nauru	04 2000	18	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
"	Palau	11 2000	16	0	0.0	11 2000	9	0	0.0
"	Solomon Islands	12 2001	50	0	0.0	---	---	---	---
"	United Arab Emirates	12 1997	40	0	0	---	---	---	---

Table 6. Women's Representation In Parliament. The 10 highest and lowest ranking in the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2002).



Illus. 6. The most powerful people in the world., all male. G8 leaders, Canada 2002 (G8 2002).

However, it is inside the masculinist institutions where political decisions are made and it is to these that more women aspire. But once inside there are still problems to encounter. For example, in state legislature committees in the USA, women are disproportionately assigned to lower status committees (Kathlene 1995:168). Further, because socialisation shapes the interests of men and women differently, 'women choose lower status social policy committees such as education, health and welfare and are largely absent on business-related and big budget committees' (p.168). Even attempts to create a balance through positive discrimination and quotas meet with obstacles. Yoder reviewed many studies of tokenism among race, class, and education groups, and found that women suffered in their new positions through pressure to perform above average, social isolation, and role encapsulation (a particular woman was seen to represent *all* women). She also refers to the 'intrusiveness effect' whereby the dominant group 'can effectively restructure the workplace to reduce the competitive threat posed by the growing minority' (1991:188). Nor do increasing numbers ensure that male institutions will become less masculinist and more feminised or women-friendly. 'On the contrary, individual women in senior bureaucratic positions may perforce have to learn to act like men in order to function effectively at these levels' (Savage and Witz 1992:43). This can place women in an ambivalent position. Jones remarks that because leadership is encoded for masculinity 'a women ruler appears to be an oxymoron'. So much so that she is placed in a double bind: 'call attention to the feminine and risk losing authority, or

‘a women ruler appears to be an oxymoron’. So much so that she is placed in a double bind: ‘call attention to the feminine and risk losing authority, or adapt masculine norms and risk social disapprobation’ (1993:103). In fact there is more than one way to regard such behaviour. For those who see the world as rigidly dichotomised, a woman in a traditional male role can be judged as performing a ‘sex-role crossover’ (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995b:6). These authors themselves would call it a *transgendered* act, that is, one that is no longer considered to be appropriate only for women or only for men. Even so, this does not make such acts somehow gender-neutral, as ‘(e)valuations of these acts are not synonymous’ (p.6). That is, such actors will still be seen as acting ‘like a man’ or acting ‘like a woman’.

Of course to know if someone is acting ‘like a man/woman’ we need the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in our heads. These categories are formed both through direct experience of the world and, increasingly, through *mediated* experience of the world. In McQuail’s view the mass media ‘constitute a primary source of definitions and images of social reality and the most ubiquitous expression of shared identity’ (2000:4), and this ‘provides a benchmark of what is normal, empirically and evaluatively’ (McQuail 1994:1). This does not mean that ‘the media’ should be seen as one homogeneous bloc. Briggs and Copley remind us that ‘media’ is plural and they consist of ‘a diverse collection of industries and practices, each with their own methods of communication, specific business interests, constraints, and audiences’ (2002:1). Audience diversity is a point that has been stressed through out this study and we saw, for example, in Section 5 how humour gives rise to multiple interpretations, and this is necessarily the case with media representations also. In this regard, Pickering reminds us that ‘what is taken as normal or legitimate in such texts and images is never absolute, never fixed for all time. And always the site of conflicting ways of knowing it’ ((2001:xiv).

The sharpest contestations concerning identities have been around media representations of such groups as women, ethnic minorities, homosexuality, the disabled, ‘where questions of under-representation, over-representation, and misrepresentation are necessarily high on the critical agenda’ (Pickering p. xiii). Such groups’ previous exclusion or marginalisation in the mass media led to their near invisibility, but their

struggles have led to an increasing visibility as more people have spoken *for* themselves rather than being spoken *of* by others. Thus, to take the issue of homosexuality on television as just one example, all the major soap operas have had gay story lines at one time or another, there are comedies with gay leads ('Gimme, Gimme, Gimme' and 'Rhona' in the UK, 'Will And Grace' in the US) at least one highly successful drama series ('Queer As Folk'), and one of the most successful chat show hosts is the openly gay Graham Norton. However, Harding (1998:40-2) cautions that while, for example, 'lesbian chic' is now not uncommon in the mass media, one function of this may simply be to titillate jaded heterosexual palates. The latest example of this is BBC's tale of Victorian lesbianism 'Tipping The Velvet' (the title itself being a term for cunnilingus), trailers for which stated that this was 'What the butler wished he'd seen', and also about which the mass circulation tabloid newspaper *The Sun* (traditionally conservative and more about which below) ran a large feature exclaiming: 'Four Days To Go To The Most Explicit Lesbian TV Drama Ever' (Iozzi and Nathan 2002).

While there are clearly still problems with representations there are also problems with contestations of representations. First, let us consider representations of women in the media. There are complaints that such representations are often *not* realistic, for example, showing women as sex objects at the service of men. A notorious example of this in the UK, and one that is relevant to the final analysis, is what has become known as the 'Page Three Girl'. Started by *The Sun* newspaper in the 1970s and copied by other tabloids, this is a daily photograph on one of the inside pages of a naked or semi-naked female 'glamour model' accompanied by a punning sexually-loaded caption. As it has no relevance whatsoever to any news item it is thus a prime example of how this newspaper – the largest-selling in the country – represents women.

At the same time there are complaints that media representations are *too* realistic, for example, too often showing women in domestic or mothering roles (Barker 1989:207, Pickering 2001:15). As Macdonald puts it, 'Realism, especially for non-dominant groups, may amount to no more than a depressing reproduction of how things currently are' (1995:3). Nor is it helpful to try and merely reverse the situation, for, as Margolis points out, 'The problem with simply replacing negative images with positive images is getting agreement on the nature of the positive images without imposing a particular set of values

as dominant' (1998:214-5). And this observation leads us neatly onto another problem, which is the nature of representation itself.

Many of the criticisms concerning the lack of visibility of marginalized groups or their misrepresentations have implicit within them the notion that somewhere there is actually an essential identity of, for example, 'woman', which just needs to be accurately represented. However, as was pointed out earlier in this section, there is no such essential identity waiting to be simply reflected in the media. Identities are created in embodied social interactions, and representations of them, rather than being simply reflections, are themselves also acts which help constitute identities. (Hall 1997:5-6). The various media cannot simply re-present reality. To accept this we would need to believe "“reality” is directly knowable and accessible, unfiltered by our own perceptions and beliefs, and capable of being presented through the media in virtually unadulterated form' (Macdonald 1995:3). However, as Bonner and Goodman make clear, representation necessarily involves some kind of modulation and interpretation: 'Not even photographs are reflections – they are two-dimensional representations which we learn to read and interpret in many different ways' (1992:2). In such views of representation, cultural identities can be seen as 'a “production” which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation' (Hall 1990:222). (These are points which have not been lost on propagandists throughout history.)

If it is indeed the case that identities and representations are so fluid and malleable, this means that they are never stable and are subject to change. In this light we will continue the discussion by looking at two areas which are useful for our purposes: stereotypes, and pornography.

Earlier in this study we discussed the notions of 'scripts' (5.1) and 'background knowledge' (6.1), that is, cognitive categories that help us make sense of the world. Without such mental devices we would need to reconstruct most of our world anew on a daily basis in the way that Garfinkel's students had to flesh out everyday simple activities at great length. However, it is not difficult to see how in the daily grind of existence some of these cognitive shortcuts can fossilise into unthinking stereotypes, a topic first broached in the discussion of humour competence in 5.1. Thus commentators see it as

crucial to distinguish between *categories*, which are an indispensable part of mental life, and *stereotypes*, which can be vehicles of entrapment.

It was the political writer and journalist Walter Lippman who, in 1921, first used the term 'stereotype' with its present reference, saying stereotypes are 'an ordered, more or less consistent picture of the world, to which our habits, our tastes, our capacities, our comforts and our hopes have adjusted themselves. They may not be a complete picture of the world, but they are a picture of a possible world to which we are adapted' (1922:95). The psychologist Allport, when discussing the nature of prejudice, insists on making an important distinction concerning stereotypes.

A stereotype is not identical with a category... If I say 'All lawyers are crooked' I am expressing a stereotyped generalisation about a category. The stereotype is not itself the core of the concept. It operates, however, in such a way as to prevent differentiated thinking about the concept.

(1954:191)

For Medhurst the process of stereotyping involves *selection* of a particular attribute of a group, its *magnification* above all others, and its *reduction* to a kind of cultural shorthand that represents that group (2002:315). Stereotypes may not only be untrue for a particular group, they may not even be true for any specific member of the group (Basow 1992:3). Yet their creation and use persist. Lippmann says that 'in the individual person the limited messages from outside, formed into a pattern of stereotypes, are identified with his own interests as he feels and conceives them' (1922:30), and Allport asserts that we use them in order to justify our behaviour towards the categories with which they are associated (1954:191). Pickering puts it more explicitly, saying stereotypes serve structures of power. 'The comfort of inflexibility which stereotypes provide reinforces the conviction that existing relations of power are necessary and fixed' (2001:3). This does not mean, however, that stereotypes themselves are fixed, nor that they are simple. Let us look at one example to show this.

Perkins (1979) considers the stereotype of 'the dumb blonde'. She notes that should someone 'correctly' refer to another as a dumb blonde this implies much more than hair colour and intelligence. It also refers to the female sex, the corresponding social status, the relationship with men, the lack of a rational capacity, and, we can add here, ethnicity, as most blondes, natural or dyed, are Caucasian. Thus, as this apparently simple reference entails a knowledge of a complex social structure, it is misleading to see such a stereotype as simple rather than complex. For Perkins, such stereotypes are simple *and* complex (p.76). She goes on to say that stereotypes, being ideological concepts subject to change, are not always rigid. This can be demonstrated here by extending the stereotype of 'the dumb blonde' with some present-day elaborations. Reviewing media use of the word 'blonde', Watson, who herself has blonde hair, comments on how its range has grown. 'Having blonde hair now say so much about a person – a woman – that you can chuck it in a headline and it will happily substitute for "slut" or "educationally subnormal" or "gold digger" or "bit on the side", depending on the context' (2002). She then provides six basic categories into which 'blondes' now fit. There is the *Hard Blonde*, 'superfit' and 'flashy', of which Madonna is an example. The *Modern Sloane* is a high society upper class woman, for example, Camilla Parker Bowles. The *Closet Mouse* is 'a sucker for uniform dress', neat, pretty, who helped popularise the pashmina amongst the middle class. Then there is the *Successful Blonde*, the middle-aged professional who is now financially comfortable, such as Rosemary Conley, the creator of diet and exercise programmes for women. The *Trophy Blonde* has different rankings ranging from the extremely rich Ivana Trump, through famous model Elle McPherson, to the 'working class princess' Britney Spears. Finally there is the woman with three shades of highlight who is 'as ubiquitous as denim', who makes up the *Common Blonde* (2002). Some might feel this is a little too subjective, speculative or superficial. This may be the case but the example does underline the point that stereotypes are pliant and renewable and such qualities greatly aid their persistence. Nor should we forget that Watson's representation of these women in a mass medium also serves to create and strengthen such stereotypes, which, of course, may be contested from other sources.

But if this one example says something about the complexity of representations and identities, it also says something about their instability. Both Weeks and Butler find identities troubling. Weeks, for example, finds sexual identities problematic because they

assume fixity (the rigidity of sexual dichotomies was discussed above) but in the reality of people's actual sexual practices they confirm diversity (1995:37). Butler comments that she will appear under the sign of lesbian on political occasions but as, for her, sexual categories can be the instruments of regulatory regimes, she 'would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies' (1991:14). Fuss also adds that the borders between sexual identities are 'notoriously unstable' and liable to transgressions (1991:3). Given this state of affairs, Weeks talks of the 'necessary fictions' (1991:viii) of sexual identities, that is, how such identities are not simply given but are constructed through choices made in specific social and historical conditions of uncertainty. Similarly, Jackson and Scott talk of 'composing the body' by playing on the double meaning of the verb *to compose*. 'We compose narratives of self and hence compose ourselves. To be composed is to be in control and bodily composure suggests control of a potentially unruly body' (2001:22).

But a practical note of caution comes from a number of sources. Kotthoff and Wodak (1997) are critical of some of these postmodern theories, particularly deconstructionist theories, for what they see as their voluntarism and lack of a broader social contextualisation. In their view such approaches to gender 'occasionally exploit gender-framed presentation forms, but leave the prevailing power order largely untouched. This order is located in the institutions of socialisation such as family and school, in religion, politics, media, and the labour market' (p.xi). Jones (1993) refuses to give up the sign 'women' as an important subject of feminist theory (p.ix) and criticises the play with diverse identities: 'To insist on plural subject positions within the global political economic setting of increasingly monopolised wealth, power, and violence seems ironic and politically dangerous' (p.14). And Squires observes that '[t]hese diversity theorists have a challenging task in negotiating the connection between their abstract theoretical insights and their practical political proposals' (1999:225).

The talk of the composing of sexual and bodily representations brings us to another relevant aspect of the final analysis, the question of pornography. In the 1970/80s there seemed to be an unequivocal view about what it is that constitutes pornography but this, like much theorising about sexuality and gender, has seen a number of changes. Dworkin took an etymological view, taking as her starting point the meaning of the Greek roots

porne, the lowest class of prostitutes, and *graphos*, writing, etching, or drawing (1981:200):

Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word's root meaning: the graphic depiction of vile whores, or, in our language, sluts, cows (as in: sexual cattle, sexual chattel), cunts. The word has not changed its meaning and the genre is not misnamed.

(p.200)

(We have seen throughout this study, however, the problems of the decontextualised meanings of words.)

Dworkin was instrumental in helping with the passing of anti-pornography legislation in the USA but came under criticism for her alliance on this matter with conservative forces who also were anti-abortion and extremely critical of homosexuality. In the UK the Labour MPs Clare Short and Dawn Primarolo also attempted to get anti-pornography legislation through parliament and found themselves criticised in the same way Dworkin was in America (Segal 1992:11). Also of note was that they included in their anti-pornography drive an attempt to have 'Page Three Girls' banned from newspapers, seeing them as much the sexual objectification of women as explicit pornography, only, worse, they appeared in a 'family newspaper' (McNair 1996).

Since the earlier feminist theorising on pornography there has been a much wider and more contested spectrum of views expressed on the matter as people have considered sexual representations in broader social contexts. Segal points out, for example, that 'the higher levels of overall economic, political and other indices of gender equality in Sweden and Denmark compared to the USA [are] coupled with far more liberal attitudes to pornography' (1992:7-8). (To take just the point of the political representation of women: Sweden and Denmark are first and second in the world rankings given above in Table 6; the US and the UK are fifty-ninth and forty-seventh respectively.) Loach notes further that women are also users of pornography: '30% of consumers in Australia are women, a third in Copenhagen, 40% in the States' (1992:269). We can add that women also produce sexually explicit material (which some might call pornography), usually for consumption by women, for example, the photographs of Della Grace, and the output of

the Black Lace publishing house. And, of course, pornography has become a source of humour for comedians. Jenny Éclair, who introduces herself as 'the rotting, rotting old whore', talks about watching pornographic videos and invites the audience's collusion: 'You know the kind – where the boy gets the girl – in the eye' (1998).

Part of the problem here is, once again, context and audience. Thus, it is possible, in Gilbert's view, to see Dworkin's novel *Mercy*, with its graphic depictions of 'the sexually explicit subordination of women' as itself as pornographic as de Sade's *Justine*. She says it could be so in the same way that 'a Robert Mapplethorpe penis, while seen as "art" on a gallery wall, would, if encountered in a Soho bookshop by someone to whom his name meant nothing, be seen straight away as pornography' (1992:219). Such context-sensitive considerations lead some to attempt to create a distinction between 'pornography' and 'erotica'. To give just one example: Goodman says that erotica entails equal power, consent, active subjects, a more democratic gaze, whereas pornography involves unequal power, where a male maker objectifies the body of someone else (usually female) (1992a:274-5). However, others believe attempts to make such a distinction mask wider concerns, such as, for example, class, calling erotica simply 'the pornography of the elite' (Angela Carter in Gamble (ed.) 1999:297).

What is not contested is a development which McNair calls 'the pornographication of the mainstream' (1996, chapter 8). As support he cites such examples as 'Last Tango In Paris' in popular cinema (many others could be added), the marriage of postmodern artist Jeff Koons to the pornography actress La Cicciolina and subsequent representations of their sexual activities in his work, the sado-masochistic chic of advertising, and, in pop music, the woman referred to above as a 'Hard Blonde', Madonna, whose use of pornographic representations in videos, dress, and the book 'Sex' has been well-documented (Schwichtenberg (ed.) 1993, among others). In fact, we have already had occasion to mention pornography and the mainstream in discussion of 'Page Three Girls', and it is worth pausing to make further connections between pornography and newspapers. The main distribution of a great deal of soft-core pornography in the UK has been for many years not through back street sex shops but high street and corner shop newsagents. Hence the attempt referred to above by Short and Primarolo to have that connection severed. A further connection is that at least two national newspapers – the low circulation *The Daily Sport/The Sunday Sport*, and the long-established *Daily*

Express/Sunday Express – are owned by men, David Sullivan and Richard Desmond respectively, whose fortunes were made through pornography. The relevant aspects of these issues will be taken up once again in the final analysis.

7.2

Gender And Language

The grounds on which issues of gender and language have been written about over the last thirty years have always been diverse. Though it is common to conveniently categorise such writings as either those of *difference* or *dominance*, such a broad view masks a complex situation. If we take Lakoff's (1975) work on 'women's language' as a starting point we can see the variety of attitudes in the (at times) conflicting interpretations of it. Lakoff identified a number of features of 'women's language' (as opposed to the assumed male 'norm') such as 'empty' adjectives (*divine, adorable*), milder expletives, greater use of tag questions and hedges (*well, erm* etc.), superpolite forms, hypercorrect grammar, and (interestingly for this study) an inability to tell jokes and lack of a sense of humour (pp.53-6). Lakoff's work is most often seen as a study of difference, that is, 'women's language' as opposed to 'men's language'. But even here a distinction is made, with Maltz and Borker (1982:199) seeing it as one of 'psychological difference' in contrast to their own approach of 'cultural difference' (more of which below). However, Henley and Kramarae (1991:20) and Cameron (1995:33) see Lakoff's model not as one of difference but one of *deficit*. That is, they see 'women's language' as commonly being considered as somehow lacking when compared to the (assumed male) norm.

Lakoff's initial work was largely intuitive and was criticised for being so. The most common form of opposition came from those feminists whose work was not speculative but was based on empirical studies which showed that in much cross-sex verbal interaction men dominate women by, for example, interrupting (Zimmerman and West 1975, West and Zimmerman 1983) and that women did much more support work than men: 'The active maintenance of a female gender requires women to be available to do what needs to be done in interaction, to do the shitwork and not complain' (Fishman 1978:405). This *dominance* view was perhaps best summed up in the title of a work by Spender (1980), *Man Made Language*. It should be noted, however, that Johnson

(1997:9) actually places Lakoff herself within the framework of the dominance model because Lakoff speaks of women's use of language as 'powerless' vis-à-vis that of men's.

More recently these divergent approaches to gender and language came to a head with the publication of Tannen's (1992) popularisation of gender and language issues, *You Just Don't Understand. Men And Women In Conversation*. This was explicitly based on Maltz and Borker's 'two cultures' model. Maltz and Borker distinguish their approach from both Lakoff and the proponents of the dominance model: 'We place stress not on psychological difference or power differentials...but rather on a notion of cultural differences between men and women' (1982:199). Their model in turn was derived from Gumperz's work concerning interethnic communication (1982), where problems of interpretation and meaning derive from interlocutors different cultural upbringing. A key element of Gumperz's work is to show that when such miscommunication occurs neither of the parties is 'right' and blame should not be apportioned.

Maltz and Borker argue that this approach 'can be applied to cross-sex communication as well' (1982:196). According to them, males and females are socialised into different subcultures throughout childhood. Drawing on a wide variety of studies of children's play and interaction they say that girls and boys use language in different ways:

Girls

1. to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality
2. to criticise others in acceptable ways
3. to interpret accurately the speech of other girls

(1982:205)

Boys

- 1.to assert one's position of dominance
2. to attract and maintain an audience
3. to assert oneself when other speakers have the floor

(p.207)

They claim that (American) men and women come from these different sociolinguistic subcultures and this leads to cultural miscommunication between them (p.200).

Tannen based her 1992 work on this model and says that these different styles mean that for women conversations are 'negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support, and to reach consensus', whereas for men 'conversations are negotiations in which people try to achieve and maintain the upper hand if they can, and protect themselves from others' attempts to put them down and push them around' (1992:24-5). She calls women's style 'rapport talk' and men's 'report talk' (p.77). According to this model, much talk between women and men can lead to miscommunication for which neither side is to blame. This two cultures approach (which has a familiar binary ring about it), and Tannen's widely disseminated exposition of it in particular, has many critics, but before turning to them brief mention is made of two oft-cited examples of male/female differences in language use which are directly relevant to the discussion to come in the final section. These are the nature of the floor in interactions and the concept of politeness. The former was first mentioned in 6.3.1 in the discussion of turn-taking and receives detailed treatment below in 8.3, the latter will also receive a greater focus below in 8.7.

The main criticisms of the two cultures model are that it tends to be apolitical and, being based on an interethnic model, it simplistically conflates two distinct phenomena, ethnicity and gender. On the first point Cameron states that 'it must be acknowledged that many of the differences that exist between the sexes are a direct result of inequality between them. Researchers must take explicit account of this and reflect on the political character of sex-difference research in a society which is still profoundly unequal' (1988:11). Tannen, however, does not position men and women unequally but symmetrically, and thus, power disappears. Coates concludes a wide overview of the literature which takes in overlaps, interruptions, use of hedges, tag questions, commands and directives, and the use of taboo language, with the comment that 'men dominate conversation by interrupting women, controlling topics of conversation and also by being silent' and their differences stem 'directly from women's and men's membership of a patriarchal society' (1993:139). Crawford takes issue with the too-narrow focus of the two cultures model, claiming that it overlooks '*which* women in *which* social groups' so that '[w]hen sex is the only conceptual category, differences attributable to situations and power relationships are made invisible' (1995:101, original emphasis). The most virulent criticism comes from Troemel-Ploetz, who says that, when reading Tannen,

one searches in vain for concepts like dominance, control, power, politics of gender, sexism, discrimination... Concepts like patriarchy or feminism never occur, being evidently far too radical for the author. Tannen is selling political naiveté, but neither is sociology quite so naïve nor linguistics quite so apolitical as Tannen would have us believe.

(1991:491)

To press this point further, Henley and Kramarae suggest that male-female miscommunication is not some simple cultural by-product of gender relations. 'The construction of miscommunication between the sexes emerges as a powerful tool, maybe even a necessity, to maintain the structure of male supremacy' (1991:42).

Tannen, though, is not unaware that men dominate women in conversation and also that many see the two cultures model as a form of, in her own words, 'copping out' (1992:209). She goes on to say that though she is sympathetic to this view, accepting the dominance model means also accepting the view that 'high-involvement' speakers such as blacks and Jews are domineering in cross-cultural communication (p.209).

But this would seem to conflate gender with ethnicity. Simply stated, gender is not ethnicity. On this point, Eckert (1989:253-4) notes that they are not equivalent categories. Though gender roles mean that men and women exhibit many differences, these are constructed in such a way that they are seen as a source of attraction (see the discussion of compulsory heterosexuality above). Further, while there are parallels in the power relationships between all dominant and subordinate groups, they are practised in distinct ways. Thus:

It is not a cultural norm for each working-class individual to be paired up for life with a member of the middle-class or for every black person to be so paired up with a white person. However, our traditional gender ideology dictates just this kind of relationship between men and women.

Further, Crawford notes that, 'the ethnic examples chosen to illustrate the two cultures model are often selective, and conveniently naïve about social hierarchies of race, class, and color' (1995:104). Troemel-Ploetz would also concur on this point, saying that

Tannen's leaving power out of the equation is like saying that Black English and Oxford English are simply two varieties of English with the same validity, 'it just so happens that the speakers of one variety find themselves in high-paying positions with a lot of prestige and power of decision-making, and the others are found in more low-paying jobs, or on the streets and in prisons' (1991:498).

Indeed, one element of this last point – that concerning equal validity – is worth further consideration. Cameron (1995:37), in an attempt to understand why Tannen may have used the two cultures model so sweepingly, suggests that it quite simply is founded on the basic assumption of twentieth century anthropological and linguistic theory, which sees all cultures and languages as equal. Initially this was a radical view, which took researchers away from formulations of 'primitive' languages spoken by 'savages', and it eventually became the normal assumption of all linguistic enquiry. But when differences arise from positions of inequality, says Cameron, then cultural relativism 'is not only theoretically naïve, it is politically damaging' (pp.41-2).

However, this is not to construct the difference and dominance approaches as polar opposites. Coates notes that it is oversimple to see it as an either/or situation, and that both approaches are necessary to account adequately for women's and men's language use. (1988:72-3). Crawford, too, cautions against a naïve use of the dominance approach and calls for a 'more textured concept of power' which takes all the relevant complexities of talk and gender into account (1995:130). More recent developments, though, have seen some researchers move away from this basic divide, seeing it as a limitation, and we will now consider some of their criticisms.

Such a development can be clearly seen, for example, in the two editions of a collection of feminist writings on language, *The Feminist Critique Of Language*, edited by Deborah Cameron. In the 1990 first edition, part three is entitled 'Dominance And Difference In Women's Linguistic Behaviour'. In the 1998 second edition, part three is entitled 'Talking Gender: Dominance, Difference And Performance', this new title taking into account certain postmodern developments in feminist linguistics in the 1990s, some of which will be now dealt with.

Johnson notes that both the difference and dominance approaches share two weaknesses: firstly, they problematise women, that is, see women's use of language as somehow marked vis-à-vis the (assumed male) norm (1997:10). (Many dominance theorists would

no doubt argue that their work problematises men, or, at the very least, positions men as culpable for the inequalities that are identified.) Secondly, both approaches see gender as based on a binary opposition and that 'speech constitutes a symbolic reflection of that opposition' (p.11). This she sees as problematic for both language and gender. Once again origins for such a line of thought are traced back to twentieth century linguistic theory, this time to the broad tradition which has its roots in structuralist approaches to language, deriving from the Saussurian paradigm of language as a series of contrasts (p.14), here the contrast being between males and females.

Cameron, too, highlights certain problems in contemporary linguistics, lamenting that feminist scholars in other disciplines have made progress but feminist linguistics has stagnated. Part of the problem for her is that language is the phenomenon to be explained and 'gender' is offered wholesale as the explanation; gender itself remains untheorised, 'it is a given; the bottom line' (1995:39). Too often this merely leads to linguistic research routinely and unthinkingly cataloguing what men do with language and what women do with language without actually considering how gender itself is constituted (echoes of Lorber's 'believing is seeing' there).

Gal is also highly critical of 'variationist sociolinguistics' for counting the use of certain linguistic variables as used by men and women and simply reading off power relations from them (1995:170-1). In an approach sharing much with the views expressed in the above discussion of representations, she insists that categories such as women's speech, men's speech, and prestigious and powerful speech are not simply reflections of (already) given speakers' identities. Our utterances are constitutive of identity. She continues:

These categories, along with broader ones such as *feminine* and *masculine*, are culturally constructed within social groups, they change through history and are systematically related to other areas of cultural discourse such as the nature of persons, of power, and of a desirable moral order.

(p.171, original emphasis)

Cameron would agree, pointing out that though there are styles which are produced as masculine and feminine, men and women do not mechanically produce these according to their sex but instead individuals choose what they need from these styles in the process of producing themselves as gendered subjects (1995:43). As we saw above, Johnson too does not see masculine and feminine as binary opposites and she furthers her argument by saying they are, rather, *mutual constructs*, and so, for her, masculinity is dependent on femininity for its own definition. Thus, the construction of male heterosexuality will involve the exclusion and denial of both women and homosexual men. Such a dialectical view of gender entails that gender identities can never in fact be complete (1997:22). And at this point it is worth looking at some empirical studies to flesh out these ideas.

We start with gossip. Jones (1980) sees women as a distinct speech community and claims gossip as a part women's oral culture. She defines gossip as 'a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event' (p.194). Subsequent empirical studies, however, have shown that gossip is not a gender specific language behaviour. Johnson and Finlay, for example, analyse an episode of a television football discussion programme (all male) and this leads them to move away from gossip as a female speech genre and see how men also use gossip to create solidarity with one another, that is, 'how men use very similar discursive strategies when doing "identity work"' (1997:142).

Cameron (1997a) studied the speech of a group of five young male white American middle-class suburbanite friends, and she defines gossip as 'discussion of several persons not present but known to the participants, with a strong focus on critically examining these individuals' appearance, dress, social behaviour and sexual mores' (p.51). As a starting point she refers to Tannen's two cultures model and notes that if one reverses the gender in Tannen's anecdotes it is still possible to furnish a script to make sense of them (once again the role of the audience and background knowledge play their part). For example, Tannen attributes men's reluctance to ask for directions while driving to their wish to avoid the appearance of helplessness. Cameron suggests that if it were a woman who did this, another equally plausible script would be available – women don't like to impose on others, or they are afraid to stop and talk to strangers (p.48). What this means is that a general discourse on gender difference is used to explain the linguistic behaviour,

whereas she believes it could be more useful to say that this discourse constructs the differentiation, 'makes it visible *as* differentiation' (p.48, original emphasis). She proposes that conversationalists often do the same thing, they 'construct stories about themselves and others, with a view to performing certain kinds of gender identity' (p.48). Taking a lead from Butler's performative view of gender identity, where gender is 'the repeated stylisation of the body' (Butler 1990:33), Cameron views gendered speech acts as a repeated stylisation which congeals into making us 'proper' men-women. However, people can and do choose from the repertoire of different linguistic styles and 'behave in ways we would normally associate with the "other" gender' (p.50).

In the study of the male group Cameron found, like Johnson and Finlay, that men do gossip and she also underlines the performative point that it is what this group of men *do* with gossip that is of interest. These men gossip about their sexual adventures with women and about other male students whose behaviour they see as gay. 'Their conversation is animated by entirely traditional anxieties about being seen at all times as red-blooded heterosexual males: not women and not queers' (p.62).

A study by Pujolàr i Cos (1997) considers the construction of masculinities in a multilingual setting. He studies two separate groups of young (17-23) working-class people in Barcelona, the Ramblers (six women, five men) and the Trepas (six women, seven men) (p.87). He shows how the males in the different groups created and displayed different masculinities through their linguistic choices and attitudes. Thus, the Ramblers constructed a 'simplified masculinity' (a cult of the body, transgressive behaviour, verbal and physical aggression) which showed a resistance to Catalan (with its politically correct associations) and the cultivation of a distinct Andalusian dialect (with its simple and common peasant associations of the migrant workers from the south) (p.104). The Trepas males, a more politicised group, chose to use Catalan and spoke with an Andalusian accent only when mocking people they considered sexist or stupid (pp.97-8).

Turning now to two studies of women's use of language, we start first in Japan. Japanese is a language that is often referred to in the literature as one that is heavily gender marked (see, for example, Shibamoto 1985), so it is useful to consider the way people actually use it. Okamoto (1995) studied the conversations of ten female Japanese students, aged 18-20, transcribing 150 consecutive sentence tokens per speaker. Her analysis focused on

sentence-final forms, each of which was identified as feminine, masculine, or neutral, where feminine were those considered in the literature to be traditionally used by women, masculine those traditionally used by men, and neutral by both. The feminine and masculine forms were divided into 'strong' and 'moderate' (pp.300-1). She found that of the 1,500 tokens used by these women, 12.3% were feminine forms (and only 4.5% 'strongly feminine'), 18.9% were masculine forms, and 68.8% neutral (p.303). This shows that speech styles cannot be simply read off from the speaker's gender and Okamoto stresses that other factors also play a part in speakers' choices. She underlines that her subjects were all middle-class and so not representative of working-class speech. Age, too, is significant and she draws on a study by Okamoto and Sato (1992) to show, for example, that women in the age group 45-57 use far more feminine forms than 18-23 year olds (p.306). Further, when she showed two young women a letter from a newspaper which strongly condemned the modern trend of women using 'men's language', they replied that they were not using 'men's language' but the 'language of young people' (p.313). Other studies of women's language use show that occupation also influences women's speech, with homemakers using more feminine forms than students, and female office workers using more than professional or self-employed women (p.307). Okamoto underlines the fact that speakers make strategic choices to communicate certain pragmatic meanings in particular social contexts. 'These choices...require the context-specific consideration of multiple social attributes associated with the speaker's identity and interpersonal relationships (such as gender, age, occupation, intimacy) as well as the speaker's knowledge and evaluation of the relevant linguistic norms' (p.312).

Hall (1997) discusses how women telephone sex workers in San Francisco use aspects of Lakoff's 'powerless' women's language (see above) in their work identities and through this achieve economic empowerment. Hall comments,

In their interactional histories (e.g. at school, in the family), the female fantasy-line operators have received positive reinforcement for this style of discourse, and now, through additional reinforcement in the workplace, they are selling it back to the culture at large for a high price.

(p.208)

Some of the (stereotyped) identities they are expected to create in this linguistic performance can be seen in a list given in a training manual for operators which was

reprinted in *Harper's Magazine*: bimbo, nymphomaniac, mistress, slave, transvestite, lesbian, foreigner, virgin (Hall 1997:190-1).

However, as has been repeatedly made clear, sex and gender practices do not take place in isolation from others social considerations and a note of caution needs to be sounded when considering the positioning of speaking subjects. While the choices made by the women sex workers may be economically empowering and this in turn gives them a greater measure of social autonomy, Cameron (1997b) points out that in such a market women can be the sellers but they are always the goods: 'Whatever advantage individual women may derive from developing a particular kind of language in telephone sex work, the system of meanings on which the marketability of that language depends does not advantage women collectively' (p.31).

7.3

Gender And Humour

It will come as no surprise that a survey of gender and humour will also find that issues of dominance and difference come to the fore. We have already seen how women have historically been excluded from large parts of public life, and performing comedy is no exception. Many commentators believe this (as well as other factors) has led to the development by women of a different sense of humour to men. These issues will be discussed below.

The Restoration comedy of manners playwright Congreve, writing in 1695, speaks, somewhat contradictorily, of women's lack of humour. 'I must confess I have never made any Observation of what I Apprehend to be true Humour in Women. Perhaps Passions are too powerful in that sex to let Humour have its Course, or maybe by reason of their Natural Coldness, Humour cannot exert itself to that extravagant Degree, which it does in the Male Sex' (1964:212-3). Here women are represented as having both passions which are too powerful yet also a natural coldness. If it is thought that such views are centuries out of date, Blyth, in a 1959 work on humour in English literature, is even more damning, seeing women as some kind of animal force of nature which kills humour, fit only as an object of male laughter.

The truth is ...that women have not only no humour in themselves but are the cause of the extinction of it in others. This is almost too cruel to be true, but in every way women correspond to and are representative of nature. Is there any humour in nature? A glance at the zoo will answer this question... [w]omen are the undifferentiated mass of nature from which the contradictions of real and ideal arise and they are the unlaughing at which men laugh.

(in Barreca 1988:4)

As for performing, women were forbidden to perform on the stage until the Restoration of 1660, when female characters for the first time in the English theatre were actually played by women rather than boy actors. This does not mean, however, that their progress since then has been untroubled. To take just one example. The Cambridge University Footlights Club, formed in 1883, which became famous for providing many writers and performers for British stage and film, and which particularly played a significant role in British comedy for at least two decades after 1960 ('Beyond The Fringe' on stage, 'That Was The Week That Was' on television, 'The Establishment' club, 'Private Eye' magazine, 'I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again' on radio, 'Monty Python' on television and film, 'The Goodies' on television, etc...), is often seen as a source of much intellectual and sophisticated British humour. However, women were not allowed to perform in the club until 1932, but this was considered to be such a disaster that they were again excluded and the following year's show was called *No More Women* (Wilmot 1980:1). It was as late as 1960 that women were allowed to perform again when Eleanor Bron was permitted to take part in a production after a campaign by John Bird and Peter Cook (Thompson 1998:67). Even this does not mean they were actually full members of the club. Two years later, for example, the actor Miriam Margolyes, was 'in the Company but, as a woman, could not be a member of the Club' (Margolis 1992:61). A further flavour of the gender relations at this time is revealed in an interview Graham Chapman later gave to *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1979. Chapman was at Cambridge from 1959 to 1963 and later became a member of the Monty Python team. He relates of his time at Cambridge: 'There were no women actors at Cambridge, and the women we wrote were certainly not meant to be attractive, so there was no reason to actually have real breasts. We might as well do them' (Margolis p.64).

This marginalisation and exclusion of women naturally has certain consequences for the recording of the history of humour. Banks and Swift point out that 'because women have for centuries been considered second-class citizens, the public development of their personal humour has been arrested and they have been bypassed by the documentation of comedy history' (1987:261). A brief chronological review of some of the literature read for this section bears this out.

Nathan (1971). Not one of the fourteen chapters of this survey of 'laughtermakers' is about female performers or writers. Of the three hundred and more index entries, only five refer to women artistes.

Fisher (1973). In this history of comedy performers only one of twenty-six chapters deals with women. Of the seven pages of this chapter, almost half actually concerns men in drag, not women. The chapter itself is entitled *Are Women Funny?*

Priestley (1976) His historical survey of English Humour, largely literary, has sixteen chapters, one of which is on 'feminine humour'. It is the longest chapter in the book, but he is not greatly impressed with women writers' humour, referring to Jane Austen's as 'feminine small potatoes' (p.126), and that in Mrs. Gaskell's 'Cranford' as 'very small beer' (p.127).

Hind (1991). Only two of the twenty comedians discussed or interviewed in this 'comic inquisition' are women – Margaret Rutherford and Victoria Wood.

Cook (1994). Of the thirty biographies given in this survey of contemporary comedians, three are of women – Jo Brand, Jenny Éclair, Donna McPhail.

Driver (1995). Two of the twenty-seven chapters of writings on comedy are by women – Hattie Hayridge and Anita Chaudhuri.

This might indicate that since the advent of alternative comedy in the late 1970s there has been a slight improvement in women's representation, although earlier (3.2) we noted that Littlewood and Pickering commented that alternative comedy remained elitist (1998:300). Cook comments that his selection 'reflects the one in ten ratio of women to men on the circuit' (p.13). However if we recall the point made earlier concerning the constitutive nature of representations, such works will tend to merely reproduce the status quo. No doubt this is why it has been necessary for women to produce their own documentation of women's humour, for example, Banks and Swift (1987), Barreca (ed.) (1988, 1992, 1997), Morgan (ed.) (1995), Hengen (ed.) (1998). Though women's presence as writers and

performers on, for example, television has increased in the last five or so years – Rhona Cameron, Kathy Burke, Roni Ancona, Meera Syal, the *Smack The Pony* team, Arabella Weir, among others – are all familiar comedy performers, the ratio to men is still low.

One further point on this matter. The image of women as lacking in humour has, according to Crawford and Gressley, also been ‘scientifically’ constituted by psychological studies of humour. They find that traditional psychological humour experiments use materials that are often hostile in nature, whereas their own qualitative data show that their participants considered caring and creativity were more important aspects of a sense of humour. (1991:228). Further, Crawford finds that many such studies have ‘male oriented stimuli, androcentric biases in research design and sampling, decontextualised settings, and an individualistic focus’ (1992:25). This construction of women as somehow ‘outside’ and not having a sense of humour has two consequences which are worthy of further discussion. These are that women are often positioned as butts of jokes, and individual women, whether in jokes or as performers, are seen to encapsulate all women.

Gray finds that women’s position as ‘other’ means that women are not only the object of the male gaze but also of the *male laugh*. ‘Hence the relentless stereotyping of women into roles which permit them to be looked at, judged, and laughed at as sexual objects: the dumb blonde [again], the wisecracking tart, the naïve virgin, the dragon who is sexually past it’ (1994:9). Fisher, who doubts that women can be funny in their own right, says that women do not even appreciate that they are being laughed at: ‘great comedians have exploited the funniness of women...[who are] unable...to comprehend the laughter they evoke in the presence of their male colleagues’ (1973:197). Further, the fact that humour is an indirect mode of discourse (Section 6) means that such dominant practices can be masked. As Crawford indicated in 6.2, this means that men can deny sexist intention with an “I was only joking” defence (1995:134-5). (A prime example of this is to come in the final section.) Thus, she continues, men can use humour in conversation ‘to silence women, negate their personhood, and maintain conversational control’ (p.195).

Turning to the second point, that of ‘encapsulation’, where women are not seen as individuals, LeBell observes: ‘Mentioning a woman in a joke is frequently done so as to make some kind of statement about the nature and motivations of women. And the most

effective way to make this statement is to have women function as the butts of jokes rather than as the subjects' (in Crawford 1995:138). Banks and Swift make the point that for women comedians it has been all too common for newcomers to be discussed as "the next" someone or other', which suggests that 'there is only room for one at a time, and that once "the next" has arrived, "the original" must bow out gracefully' (1987:vii). This may not be as valid in 2002 but there is still nowhere near the same scope given to humorous women as that afforded to men. A comedian who is female is still likely to be seen primarily as a 'woman comedian' rather than simply as a comedian. And this attitude can also be seen in general documentations of comedy where 'women's comedy' is dealt with as a separate item. We saw how Fisher (1973) dealt with women in one chapter while the other twenty-five chapters dealt with a wide variety of individual males. This was the case with Priestley (1976) also. Similarly, in the more recent Driver (1995) collection, one of the two pieces of writing by women was generic ('Women In Comedy'), whereas the remaining twenty-five were by men commenting on a wide variety of humorous topics. The issue of under-representation (and attempts to correct it) is indeed a thorny problem and, unquestionably, elements of the attitude described here have been difficult to avoid in this section also.

Again it is to be expected that the kind of comedic separate development outlined above should lead many commentators to focus on the different senses of humour of men and women. Men's humour, it is commonly argued, is more aggressive than women's, a point first mooted in Section 1 in the survey of humour theories. For example, an Internet survey finds that, based on a sample of approximately 100,000 people from 70 countries, men prefer aggressive humour more than women (Radford 2001). Further, the responses to a questionnaire by Crawford and Gressley (1991) suggested men also *use* hostile humour more than women. Moreover, they practised more formulaic joke-telling, whereas women showed a preference for stories and anecdotes (p.228), a view which concurs with that of Littlewood and Pickering's introduced in 3.2 concerning women excelling in character studies. The comedian Victoria Wood has a similar standpoint. Talking of Joyce Grenfell's use of language, she said Grenfell used humour 'to communicate rather than attack – which I think women generally can do better than men' (in Hind 1991:93). Goodman (1992b) also makes a point about gender forms, seeing 'jokes with punch lines' as male, and forms such as 'narrative comedy, theatrical comedy and cabaret' as female (p.294-5).

There are also those who see women's humour as more discerning. Men's humour is 'broad and exaggerated' compared to women's 'subtle' humour, according to Merrill (1988:274). The writer Vicky Pile is quoted in Banks and Swift as saying, 'I think we [women] are demanding of what we want on television, and of what we laugh at in public' (1987:51). And Barreca asserts, only half-jokingly, that it is just men who find the 1940s American slapstick troupe *The Three Stooges* funny. 'There is a chromosomal link between masculinity and the Stooges; show Larry, Moe, and Curly at the Olympic Games and we can do away with genetic testing: if you laugh, you play on the men's team' (1997:7).

Slapstick is comedy of the body and, clearly, the bodily humour of women will differ from that of men, particularly concerning the major differences related to reproductive functions. Marti Caine relates how, when playing the club comedy circuit in the 1970s, she could be sexually explicit (if she did it through the reported speech of someone else) but she was forbidden to 'mention tampax or anything to do with the menstrual cycle' (in Banks and Swift, 1987:20). In the different climate of alternative comedy this was not a problem, and, indeed, Jo Brand made a point of making jokes about periods, saying, 'It's in my contract' (in Gray 1994:155). It may seem unlikely that such basic bodily functions would be found objectionable by an adult comedy audience, but they are matters which upset some men, particularly those of an older generation. For example, the comedian Bernard Manning, whose act has always featured much swearing, sexual explicitness, and, notoriously, racist material, draws the line at such things: he says he never makes jokes about such things as 'shit' or 'tampax' (Bakewell 2001, Duncan 2002). But female comedians have now got to the point where, for example, Jenny Eclair can merrily discuss the effects of age, sex and childbirth on her genitals, informing her audience that she now has 'labia like a bloodhound's ears' (1998). However, it is worth noting that when this concert was broadcast on television (on Channel 5, with its youth-oriented and sexually explicit programming) her use of the word 'cunt' was censored.

This is a long way from the days when, it is often proposed, women were expected to be reserved and self-deprecating in order to be accepted as comedians. Fisher thinks the few women who have succeeded have done so 'by smothering any element of femininity, of sexual attractiveness that might obtrude in their stage characterisations, emphasising their ugliness, their ungainliness' (1973:197). It is usually Phyllis Diller and Joan Rivers who

are cited as the prime examples of this, Merrill (1988) being just one who criticises their denigration of women (p.275), advocating instead a self-conscious feminist humour aimed at a female audience.

But this idea that self-deprecation is a component of *women's* humour, or at least of 'old-style' women's humour, is easily challenged. Barreca, for example, talks of women creating comedy 'in order to intrude, disturb and disrupt...comedy constructed by women is linked to aggression and to the need to break free of socially and culturally imposed restraints' (1988:6). Thus, Jo Brand has never been shy to express her views on men: 'Never trust a man with testicles', 'The quickest way to a man's heart is through his breast pocket with a bread knife'. Nor have her references to her own fatness been self-deprecating; her love of chocolate and beer are positive assertions of her own desires and disdain for the fashionable norms of bodily shape and diet. Indeed, it can be said that overt criticism of men became a common and almost routine part of female comedians' repertoire from the late 1970s.

It can, in fact, be equally argued that self-deprecation is a common trait for many male comedians. Fisher considers it 'a mainstay of the great funny man'. Many openly present themselves as self-confessed fools and idiots, forever getting the wrong end of the stick, seasoned failures. Perhaps none have perfected this so well as Woody Allen. In a study of Allen's work, Yacowar describes Allen's comedy persona as 'inadequate' and 'inept': 'His remarkable gift to his audience is his candor in shamelessly exposing his dreads and his dreams – even though his weakness and failure are fictitious' (1979:8-10). And what this leads us to is a realisation that what we have been discussing here is another form of the binary opposition of men and women, this one concerning humour, a binary opposition which once again both lacks sufficient explanatory force and leads to a tunnel vision in which we see what we believe and project pre-conceived, taken-for-granted gender attributes into any manifestation of humour. It is not difficult to take many of the comments made about 'women's humour' and replace the word 'women' with 'men' and still make sense of it. For example, Barreca's following claim would be equally valid if the genders are reversed: 'The creation of nonsense, puns, and language play associated with eradicating the boundaries between the imaginary and symbolic reaffirms that women's use of language in comedy is different from men's' (1988:19). This dissertation has argued (and maintains) that such *forms* are the necessary raw material for the creation

of verbal humour and are used by whoever wishes to create humorous meanings. It is what people choose to *do* with these forms that matters.

A different suggestion concerns another feature of interaction – the power of the audience. Goodman (1992b), when discussing sexist humour, proposes that women position themselves outside of the joke by using Rich's concept of 're-vision'. This notion comes from an article originally written in 1971.

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.

(Rich 2001:11)

Goodman applies this to the following joke, which she identifies as one usually told to illustrate the supposed humourlessness of feminists.

Q: How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: That's not funny.

By dint of re-vision, such jokes, says Goodman, can be decontextualised, re-told and re-interpreted as the unimaginative and stereotyped representation of women in the public domain. This light bulb joke, then, could actually be a feminist joke told against patriarchal stupidity. 'In this way, feminists as the tellers and the audience, can position themselves in the critical domain outside of the joke, rather than within the joke as "the punch line"' (p.288).

Klages, too, calls for a strategy of re-interpretation, though without reference to re-vision. She focuses on Helen Keller jokes in America, Helen Keller being the woman who overcame the great adversity of being born deaf-blind and who is often cited as a model for children to follow. Klages says it is possible for women to analyse and re-interpret these jokes rather than to ignore or censor them. To take one example.

Q: How did Helen Keller go crazy?

A: Trying to read a stucco wall.

Klages suggests, half-seriously, half-jokingly, that a postmodern re-interpretation of this could discuss the following points:

- Keller's desire to 'read' the material surfaces of the world as texts, or
- her inability to interpret 'text'-ual surfaces meaningfully as a figure of the alienated human subject moving blindly in a universe of incomplete and fragmentary signification, or
- the significance of 'wall' as both text and barrier, the enclosing substance which makes close(d) reading possible.

(1992:14)

Such jokes make us laugh and wince, says Klages. 'Laugh' because they criticise the saintly, sanitised and miraculous representation of Keller in dominant cultural values; 'wince' because we should not laugh at the disabled, these being seemingly contradictory points which were raised earlier in the treatment of permission (5.2). However, she concludes by recommending that women tell such jokes.

Helen Keller jokes insist that disabled people, even disabled women, even world-famous deaf-blind American Heroines, have bodies that need to be, and have a right to be, publicly visible, publicly represented, in their own terms, and with their own differences.

(p.22)

Both of these suggestions, however, are, like all types of humour, subject to the notions of shared and differential competences discussed in Section 3. Goodman's idea is only really practicable within a closed circle; everyone involved would need to be in a very similar position and hold very similar views, otherwise telling, for example, ostensibly anti-feminist jokes to a wider audience would run the same risk as that experienced by the Alf Garnett character – some would laugh at the stupidity of the male originators of the joke, but some would laugh with them at the ostensible butt. Klages' main problem is that she talks in the third person of the disabled being represented in 'their own terms'. Can able-bodied comedians be sure that the terms of the joke are the terms of the disabled? It seems unlikely the Helen Keller jokes originated from deaf-blind people, but even if they did, is it then the same performance with the same social significance for able-bodied people to tell them to other able-bodied people? This is the 'team shirt' problem (5.3.2) where, for

example, Shazia Mirza feels justified to tell jokes about Muslim women, being one herself, but she is suspicious of white males doing the same as she is uncertain whether the jokes are made 'at us or with us' (Bakewell 2001). There is also the danger of an implicit elitism in the position of Klages, containing as it does the suggestion that a certain self-selected group have a licence to tell any kind of joke about any kind of butt as if they were somehow above or outside of historical contingencies. But certain speech acts can have certain social and legal consequences as we saw in 5.3.3 when a senior barrister was fined and suspended for 'jesting in a postmodern, ironic' manner (Metro 13.2.2002).

We have now reached the point where we can go on and carry out the final analysis, but before doing so a brief summary of the foregoing section is in order. It was seen that identities of gender and sexuality are complex combinations involving many social, political, and ideological factors and cannot be viewed as one-dimensional phenomena which fit neatly on either side of a binary opposition. They are not independent objects which are simply reflected in the various media but, in fact, do not exist outside of representations. This is not say that social forces have a straightforward determinist role to play; individuals themselves are active agents and can to some degree shape their own identities. This is also the case with language. While there are styles which are gender preferential, individuals have some leeway in the linguistic choices they make in specific contexts with diverse interlocutors to convey pragmatic meanings, a usage which may not conform to simple gender expectations. And we saw how this diversity and complexity is also to be found in humorous matters, where, whatever gender differences there are, individuals can exercise choice from the entire resources of humour to communicate their comic meanings. What all of this means is, put simply, that should anyone want to create gender-based verbal humour, a wealth of social, political, and linguistic material is there in abundance. We can now go forward and explore in detail how a small group of men and women did just that and what the consequences of their actions were.

8. HUMOUR IN CONTEXT: THE THATCHER JOKE

This leads us now to the analysis of an exchange involving an utterance seemingly offered as a joke and the responses to it. It comes from a television show 'Politically Incorrect', which is a hybrid between a chat show with celebrity guests, and a discussion programme, with the host, Bill Maher, nominating the various topics. Before looking at it a few words are in order.

In various ways the main points of the preceding discussion are brought together in the following analysis. The disputed utterance is seen by some as a joke (that is, something amusingly incongruous), by others as an insult, an act of aggression, but, as we shall see, it may also be seen as a kind of release, all matters touched upon in Section 1. In Sections 2 and 3 it was seen that within performance space, and its attendant roles for performers and audience, a certain leeway is given to utterances and also that the comic figure is a person with a certain licence. This means, as we have seen, that in performance comedians frequently transgress social norms without censure; indeed, some would argue that such performers and performances play an important and necessary therapeutic role in society (Holden 1993, Jacobson 1997). The nature of the perceived insult in this exchange is described as 'sexist', and it was seen in Section 4 how speakers' use of language can be ideologically charged and disputatious. But the utterance is also greeted with amused laughter and this recalls the discussion of shared and differential competences in Section 5. Section 6 demonstrated how pragmatic ideas and methods assist greatly in understanding how participants in talk interactively construct meaning. Finally, in the previous section, the relevant aspects concerning gender were surveyed. It will be seen that all these factors play an important role in the discussion to follow.

The show in which the following talk occurs occupies an ambivalent space in which the participants are expected to amuse and entertain but also to engage in serious discussion. This can cause a certain tension, as this extract demonstrates. As pains have been taken in the preceding discussion to underline the significance of sequential placement in determining meaning in talk, the whole extract is reproduced here in full at the beginning.

To assist the reader in following the details of the analysis, there is also a pull-out copy of the transcript at the back of the dissertation. The reader is also reminded of the discussion in the Introduction of the problems of transcription.

‘Politically Incorrect’ is a regular chat show in America, hosted by the comedian Bill Maher. On its short run in the UK it ran for five consecutive evenings on Channel 4 from 10.00-10.30 p.m. As its name implies, it sets out to discuss topical issues in a way which may not always consider the sensitivities of a complex pluralistic society. One half of the audience consisted of Americans and one half of British members. Similarly, the panel of guests usually consisted of two Americans and two British. The topic of this particular extract is ‘sex in this country’ and the participants are: Bill Maher (BM), the male American host; Richard Belzer (RB), a male American actor/comedian; Julie Kirkbride (JK), a female British Conservative Member of Parliament; Lynda La Plante (LL), a female British writer; and Elle Macpherson (EM), a female Australian model. Short biographical details of these discussants are given in 8.2.4 below. The devices used in the transcription of their talk are:

(0.5)	Time of pause in seconds. (.) represents a tiny pause.
a very	Simultaneous speech
Quite a gal	
> >	Connects continuous speech of same speaker
!	Increased volume
No:::	Lengthened vowel
[Panel laugh]	Extralinguistic features
<u>mean</u>	Said with emphasis
= =	No gap between utterances
[unclear]	Indistinct utterance

- 1.BM: OK erm (1.0) I wanna I’d like to talk a little bit about er sex in this country.
2.EM: We like that.
3.BM: Yeah [Panel laugh] | Because |
4.RB: | Just talking | about it.
5.BM: Because I’m confused (0.5) and we have three women on the panel today
6. | and you [to RB] are |
7.RB: | Speak for yourself! |
8.BM: I was gonna say you are | a very |
9.RB: | Quite a gal! | [General laughter]
10.BM: [Laughing] Quite a gal | always an | outspoken er (0.5) of the cause of>
11.RB: | I’m a queer gal |
12.BM: >feminism | You’re much er | women would say you’re much more>
13.RB: | Yes I am I’m |
14.BM: > enlightened than I am
15. (0.5)

16.RB: About (0.5) | women's rights |
17.BM: | Well (.) | Yes
18.RB: OK
19.BM: OK. [*To audience, defeated*] Whipped! Anyway (.) [*General laughter*]
20.RB: Feels good!
21.BM: I don't understand. In this country like on page three of the newspaper (0.5)
22. well you know what I'm saying [*Looking around at panel and studio audience*]
23. (0.5) they have a naked woman [*unclear*] we would never do (0.5) in America>
24.EM: | Right |
25.JK: [*Nodding*] | Mm-mm |
26.BM: > in a newspaper
27.RB: Page four in America
28.BM: No:: come on. You'd have to get Hustler or something | to see | what they>
29.RB: | Right |
30.EM: | Right |
31.BM: >show in the newspaper. And yet (0.5) you (0.5) had Margaret Thatcher
32. and we would (1.0) [*Audience begin tittering*] we've never come
33.JK: Come close | you've never come close |
34.EM: [*Smiling*] | I don't know how you can | equate the two
35.LL: She was never on page three! | Ever! |
36.BM: | No |
37.EM: I can vouch for that.
38.LL: | Yes |
39.BM: | Right |
40.RB: No | they [*unclear*] |
41.EM: | Certainly not | naked anyway.
42.BM: I'm saying (0.5)
43.RB: No you (.) they objectify women and yet they elect a woman as their leader
44.BM: | Exa-thank you |
45.EM: | Right |
46.RB: How do (0.5) | you explain that |
47.BM: | Yes right. | Explain that!
48.EM: | How do you explain that |
49. (1.0)
50.JK: We appreciate all women's talents. [*Panel laugh*] As great political leaders
51: | and as other | things. I mean what's wrong | with that?
52.EM: | There you go |
53.RB: | But Margaret Thatcher really
54. in the end turned out to be (1.0) a man, didn't she? [*Smiles wryly, shrugs*
55. *shoulders and lifts hands at sides, palms upwards. General laughter and some*
56. *applause. RB continues in sing song voice*] I don't know if she qualifies [*General*
57. *laughter continues*]
58.JK: [*Laughing*] The great conspiracy theory!
59.BM [*Straight-faced*] Now see that to me is a sexist comment because you're=
60.RB: =Now that to | me was a joke |
61.JK: [*To BM*] | You tell him! |
62.BM: Yeah | Yeah but you're saying because she was strong>
63.RB: | Now wait a minute |
64.BM: >she had to be a man
65.RB: No I think (.)

- 66.BM: [*Knowingly*] Aaah!
- 67.RB: Not because she was strong (1.0) because she was mean
- 68.EM: | [*unclear*] |
- 69.JK: | [*unclear*] the same! | [*smiling*] Shame!
- 70.RB: [*Now animated*] Milk (0.5) Snatcher Thatcher! Wasn't that her name?
71. [*Leaning forward across the table towards JK and stabbing the air with*
72. *pointed index finger*] Didn't she take money from children's milk fund in
73. Amer- in England? (1.5) Didn't she?!! [*Pounding the table in mock anger*]
74. Answer my question! [*General laughter*]
75. (1.0)
- 76.JK: No I plead the fifth | amendment | on that one (.) but erm
- 77.RB: | Didn't she? | Didn't she? | Yes or no?
- 78..BM: | No she tried
79. to stop=
- 80.RB: [*Leaning towards BM with outstretched arm*] =Excuse me Bill! [*General*
81. *laughter. RB points to JK*] Yes or no? Did they call her Milk-Snatcher
82. Thatcher?
- 83.JK: [*Smiling*] There might have been a time | when that was the case |
- 84.RB: | Ah! OK. Thank you |
- 85.BM: But what | she tried to do |
- 86.JK: | But you know | she moved on from there | she's a great | leader | >
- 87.RB: | Yeah | great |
- 88.BM: | Yeah she was |
- 89.JK: | >she you know | transformed this country | she was fantastic
- 90.RB: | Madeleine Allbright is Margaret
91. Thatcher | in drag
- 92.EM: | Madeleine Allbright [*unclear*] we have lot lot more instances of
93. women being I think powerful within politics in America than you do in
94. England for example. Margaret Thatcher was an exception (0.5) but I think
95. there are more women...

It is worth remembering at this point that the analysis to come is not a conventional CA study but will also involve elements of ethnography, sociology, psychology, gender politics, and politeness phenomena. First we will look at the immediate context, which is that of a televised studio discussion performed in front of a live studio audience. Two salient factors will be looked at: the composition of the audience(s) and the nature of what will be called here 'TV talk' (as opposed to mundane everyday conversation). This will then be followed by a more detailed look at the composition of the key participants, the panel who carry out the discussion, as it is who they are and their roles in the discussion which are of great significance for the outcome. Once the nature of the audiences and type of talk have been established, the focus will then be on the different types of floor that can be constructed in multiparty talk and how they both shape and are shaped by the interlocutors' relationships as constituted and reconstituted in the flow of talk. Specifically, the features of the collaborative floor and the single floor (as discussed

above in 6.3.1) will be given attention. Next there will be a sociological survey of the negotiation of the serious import of humour, something which is a key feature of the discussion under review, followed by a view from two psychological perspectives, which will take in both the conscious and unconscious levels. This discussion also raises once again the question of the 'ownership' of meaning. The analysis will then reprise an important element of conversation analysis – preference organisation – and show how humour can confound the usual predictions of CA in this regard. Though the findings contradict much of the CA literature concerning preference, an explanation is offered in the final section with reference to politeness phenomena, which also helps to explain certain other moves made by the participants.

Two organisational points. From here on the extract to be analysed will be referred to as PI ('Politically Incorrect') and the topics within PI will be referred to as 'macrotopic' or 'microtopic'. Chafe (1997:42) talks of 'supertopics', 'basic-level topics', and 'subtopics', but here we will simply talk of the macrotopic – 'sex in this country' - and the various microtopics which develop out of it.

8.1 The Performers, The Audiences And Space

Bell (1991) notes that mass communication is structurally different from face-to-face communication not only because the former involves a disjunction of place and, often, time (p.85) but also because, for example, in television debates there is what he refers to as an 'embedding' or 'layering' of audiences. He offers the diagram below by way of explanation (Figure 10).

In the discussion under review we have the host and panellists in the centre surrounded by the studio audience, outside of which there is the mass broadcast audience watching the show on television. The situation can actually be a little more complex when a panel discussant addresses a remark to a particular individual; at that point the rest of the panel becomes the first layer, outside of which is the studio audience and so forth. This point will be significant in the discussion below of different types of floor. As for the larger audiences in the studio and at home, there can be some significant differences in their perspectives. The studio audience can see all of the panel and thus can see actions – facial expressions, gestures – that happen off-camera, things the broadcast audience are not

aware of. However, the studio audience is usually some distance from the panel, so these actions need to be of some strength to be clearly perceived by the studio audience. The

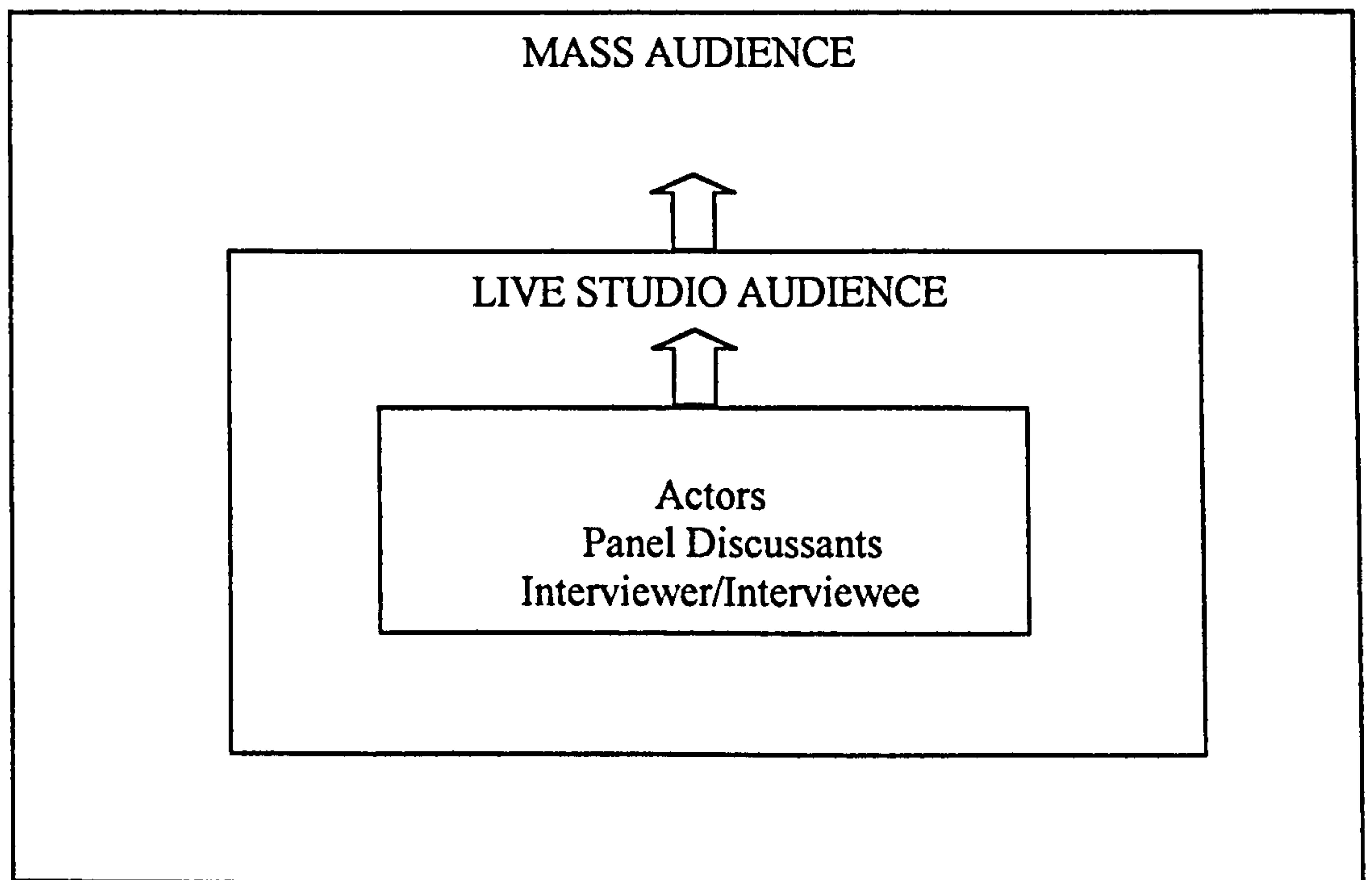


Fig.10. Audience layering in Mass communication (Bell 1991:96).

broadcast audience only sees the images selected by the producer for broadcast, and thus misses off-camera events. The studio audience, too, have a view of many monitors and sometimes a large screen so they too can see what the broadcast audience see. While these differences can be significant in the different perceptions of the studio and broadcast audiences, they are not considered to play an important role in the extract under review. (We can also mention in passing that such spatial arrangements themselves can be used as a resource for humour. The comedy chat show 'The Kumars At No. 42' involved the talk apparently taking place in the host's own home – actually a stage set in the television studio - with his family – actually other actors - also present and taking part, while a live studio audience sat and watched.)

It needs to be kept in mind that a special feature of this discussion is that it is TV talk deliberately designed to be overheard as opposed to, say, everyday talk between friends in private. Here the guests – relative strangers to one another – are briefly and individually introduced to the audience before taking their seats in the performance space (see diagram below) where they are expected to discuss topics nominated by the host (or arising from such nomination) while the studio audience looks on live and the mass broadcast audience looks on at home, in this case at a later time. However, while the host

has the power to nominate topics, and can nominate next speaker if he so wishes, the turn-taking system is largely extemporised as in everyday informal talk, and so what occurs is, as Alaoui notes, the private putting its imprint on the public 'thus generating talk which is halfway between talk that is produced as private and that whose design exhibits its production for overhearing' (1991:388-9).

Alaoui also remarks (p.7) that on chat shows the arrangement of space 'is an attempt to simulate ordinary conversation in a living-room between friends or close acquaintances' (Cf. 'The Kumars At No. 42'). The setting here fits this description reasonably well. Whereas some chat shows favour a sofa for situations involving more than one guest, in PI there are four individual chairs, which may be a shade more formal. The chairs are in pairs either side of a low table, at the head of which is the host. Thus all discussants can clearly see one another. We note that the one male panellist, RB, is seated next to the male host, BM, and that RB is seated diagonally opposite JK. These are points which will be returned to. It is worth noting also that the panellists all remain in the same seat throughout, unlike in a chat show where a series of individual guests take it in turns to occupy the seat next to the host, a spatial arrangement which temporarily gives that guest greater speaking rights. There are two books on the table which are never referred to throughout the show, so it is assumed the table has a primarily decorative function, thus giving the set some semblance to a living room. The studio audience is arranged around three sides of the stage (see Fig. 11) so that the panellists are also facing at least part of the audience. This spatial arrangement is not like that in, for example, a discussion programme such as 'Question Time', where the panel is arranged on stage in almost a straight line facing the audience who sit in tiered rows directly 'opposite' them. That is, the space on such shows is arranged to facilitate panel-to-audience interaction as much as, or even more than, intra-panel interaction. Here on PI the spatial arrangement is clearly designed to encourage talk among the discussants sitting in performance space, with a greater interactive distance between them and the studio audience.

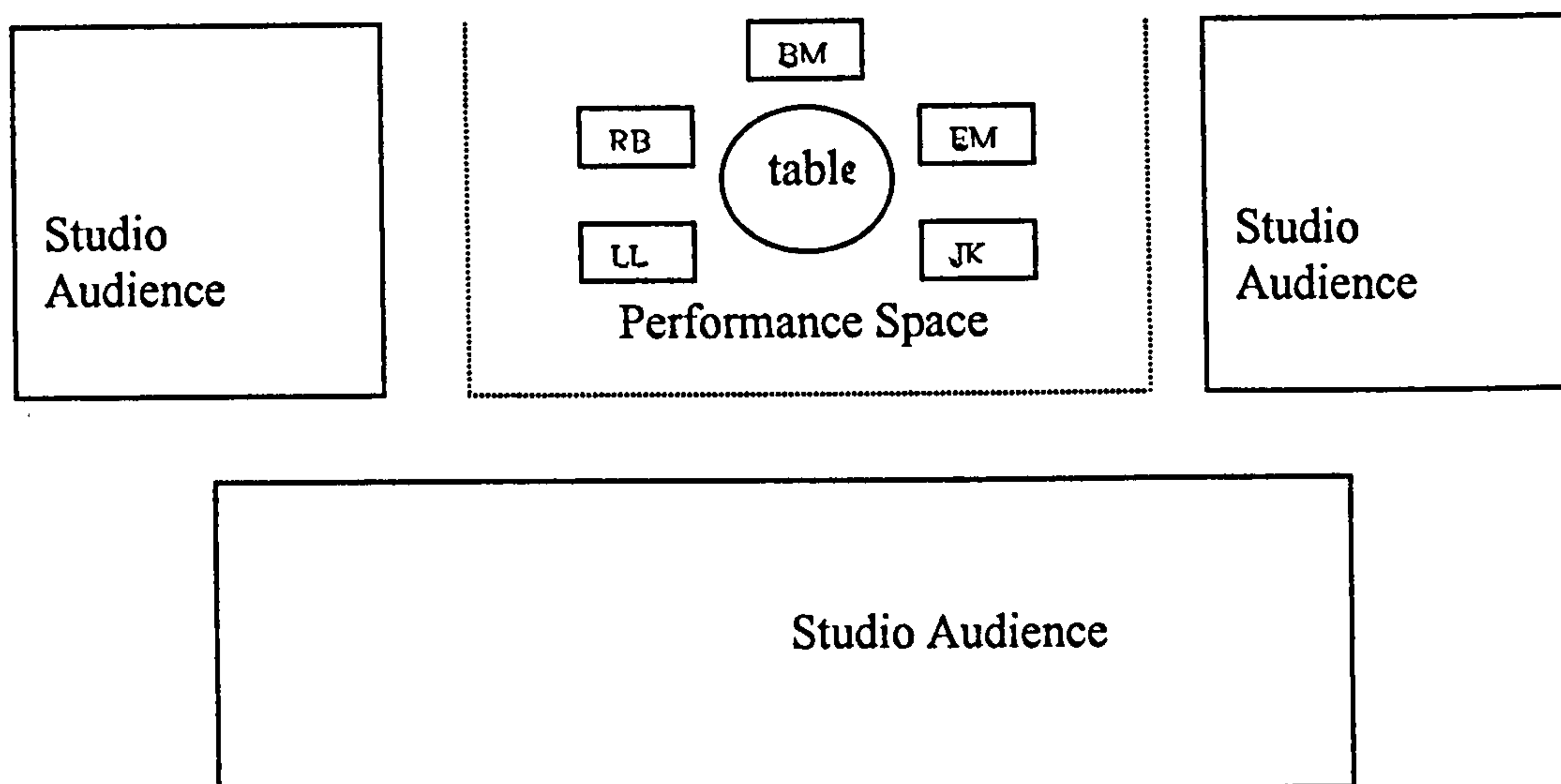
This brings us to the format of 'Politically Incorrect'. It is not a chat show in the mould of, say, 'Parkinson', where celebrity guests are brought on separately, and in question and answer sequences are expected to inform the audience about their careers, often with a series of anecdotes. Nor is it a serious discussion programme like, say, 'Question Time', where a mixture of politicians and politically-minded celebrities answer questions on

current affairs put to them directly by the studio audience. Mulkay (1988, Chapter 9) notes that certain situations can be more (or less) conducive to humour. He discusses a range of social events from a marriage ceremony, which (barring mistakes) provides no room for humour as all the words are rigidly laid down, through a formal ceremony like the Nobel Prize awards, where in his 1987 study he counted just three humorous items per ceremony, on through a workplace setting such as a formal staff meeting in a hospital (Coser's 1960 study, referred to in 1.2), where humour is hierarchically distributed, to informal situations such as dinner parties, in one study of which (Tannen 1984) over two hundred humorous or ironic instances were freely contributed by all participants. 'Politically Incorrect' is towards the informal end of such a spectrum and so occupies a rather more ambivalent position than 'Question Time'. While it has an element of the discussion of weighty topics just like 'Question Time' it also shares with chat shows the injunction that an important function of guests' talk is to *entertain*, not simply to inform (Alaoui p.6). Talking of such developments in the chat show format from the 1980s into the 1990s, Tolson remarks on the 'mixing of genres' so that chat 'may still be serious, or it may be comic, but more often than not it has now become a complex and entertaining mixture of the two' (1991:187). This is underlined by the fact that the host, Bill Maher, is a comedian, and it is the role of the host to act as 'mediator between the realms of stage, studio audience and viewer' (Morse 1985:10).

It should not be thought, though, that as mediator he is some empty vessel, a mere medium of transmission. As Lindstrom notes: 'When people come together to talk, they arrive endowed with different conversational rights and resources' (1992:102). As host, Maher is the most powerful figure in this event (he starts the show alone, during which time he has a brief humorous monologue, he introduces the guests to *his* show, he nominates the topics for discussion etc.) with the panellists, who are also endowed with speaking rights throughout the show, a close second. A point to note about the panel members in terms of power is that they are *formally* on an equal footing. They are all introduced at the same time at the beginning of the show and, as we have seen, they maintain the same place for the whole length of the show. Their role as 'guest' creates no significant formal power imbalance among them, though we cannot forget the imbalances and inequalities that can occur in cross-sex conversation which were discussed in 7.1.

The studio audience also are not without power, as the manner of their reception of the fare provided is key. We may recall what King earlier said (2.4) about the use of space and the semantics of a performance: 'it is the audience's laughter which defines the joke, and failure to laugh can determine the level of comedic performance' (1987:47). Thus, an utterance from the panel intended to amuse which is met with their silence will be seen as a failure. Indeed, to ensure their receptivity, it is common practice for the audience of such shows to be 'warmed up' by a comedian before recording. (Landes (1999) would call this being 'semiotically aroused'.) In contrast, audiences at serious broadcast discussions are not warmed up in this way. This does not, however, prevent them from expressing amusement in a manner which underlines the point being made here concerning the power of audience response in determining how utterances of discussants – formally a more powerful group – are perceived. A strong example of this can be taken from Thomas' discussion of ambiguity in which she reports the case of the Liberal MP Cyril Smith's involvement in a radio discussion about immigration in the 1980s. (It should be noted that Smith was better known for his obese proportions and blunt manner than his political views.) He remarked that people's racist attitudes were not to be changed by tinkering with the language and signalled his credentials on such matters by saying he spoke as someone who 'does a very great deal of work amongst the immigrant population – I had sixteen of 'em for lunch at the House Of Commons last Thursday' (Thomas 1986:153-4). The audience's amused laughter was so strong that Smith had to stop speaking and, not recognising the ambiguity of his statement, he became angry at what he saw as the audience's doubting of his sincerity concerning immigrants. Though such a choice of reaction is a powerful weapon all audiences have, it is a rather blunt instrument and not always useful for articulating a detailed response. Also the fact that PI is a talk show on which they have no speaking rights (unlike the limited speaking rights enjoyed by the studio audience on 'Question Time', for example) is a further constraint on their power. These are also further points to be borne in mind in the discussion to follow.

Before moving on to a more detailed description of the discussants, we can summarise the foregoing with a quote concerning space and television from Scannell: 'Considerations of the spaces from which broadcasting speaks...is a precondition for understanding the communicative character of broadcasting and the talk it produces' (1991:2). It is the host and panellists who do the talking and here we show their places in the performance space.



Where BM = Bill Maher, EM = Elle Macpherson, JK = Julie Kirkbride, LL = Lynda La Plante, RB = Richard Belzer.

Fig. 11. Arrangement of theatre space in 'Politically Incorrect'.

8.2

The Discussants

Goodwin (1986) video-recorded a conversation among a group of five friends during which one of them related a story of a fight he had witnessed the day before. Goodwin's discussion centres on audience diversity, participation and interpretation in this multiparty activity, and from the wide variety of points he makes six are of help for the discussion here. These are:

- differential competence in a domain of discourse (p.288)
- assessing competence in the details of talk (p.290)
- non-engrossed recipients (p.293)
- heterogeneity of the audience (p.296)
- audience interpretation of the story (p.297)
- reconstituting the audience (p.306)

These points will be applied primarily to the five participants in the performance space, who, it was noted earlier, are an audience for one another as they each take turns at talk. Reference will also be made to the studio audience where necessary.

8.2.1 Different Competence In A Domain Of Discourse

In any exchange there will be some degree of difference in competence and background knowledge (Sections 5 and 6 above) and this exchange is no different. For example, in 37 EM draws on her expertise as a professional fashion model to confirm with some authority – ‘I can vouch for that’ – that Thatcher never appeared on page three, ‘certainly not naked anyway’ (41). Of course, expertise is not needed to know such an obvious fact, so while she is referring to her own experience of the domain of professional modelling, she is doing so in the jokey, bantering manner that has been established in the conversation.

The question that is asked concerning the presentation of women as sex objects in newspapers in a country (the UK) which elected a woman as political leader, though a general question answerable by any panellist, is in three consecutive turns by three separate participants (46,47,48) actually addressed to JK for the reason that she is a female Conservative MP and, thus, presumed to have a greater competence to answer. She is also British, whereas the three who ask for the explanation are not. However, on the more general theme of the role of women in society, all discussants – a female politician, a female model, a female dramatist, a male (purportedly) feminist comedian, and a male host who has presumably given this topic some thought before nominating it, would seem to be capable of contributing to this domain of discourse. This is not to say without qualification that all of these are from the ‘same’ speech community. Hymes defines such as ‘a community sharing rules for conduct and interpretation of speech, and rules for the interpretation of at least one linguistic variety’ (1972b:54). The discussants are all from English-speaking countries – the UK, the US, and Australia – and each of these has a variety of speech communities based on such factors as class, ethnicity and so on. However, given that these countries have a comparable level of development and these performers are all white, middle-class celebrities with experience of appearances on broadcast media, and also given that the practices of such media chat shows do not differ radically between these countries (PI is, recall, a show from the US), it is reasonable to

say that they have a similar competence to discuss the issues at hand. However, there are gender differences and the degree to which these shape the verbal interaction will be highlighted throughout the analysis. (A discussion of LL's small contribution comes below in 'non-engrossed recipients'.)

8.2.2

Assessing Competence In The Details Of Talk

Though all participants would seem competent to contribute, this does not prevent speakers from ensuring that this is actually the case. The macrotopic, 'sex in this country', is introduced by BM in line 1 and others introduce and elaborate microtopics before BM in 21 introduces the microtopic of page three nudes. As this is a UK and not a US phenomenon, as BM makes clear in 23 (and as discussed in 7.1), he wants to make sure that all the panel, two of whom are not British, and all the studio audience, half of whom are American, know what the 'page three' reference means: 'well you know what I'm saying' (22). It is here noted that this is the first explicit reference in the talk to the nature of representations of women in the UK. This draws two affirmative responses from EM and JK, respectively – 24 'Right' and 25 'Mmm-mm'. Nobody expresses ignorance of the reference and the discussion continues. (In CA terms this move of BM can be seen as a *presequence* used to clear the way for a further utterance.)

It might be thought at first glance that RB's persistent questioning of JK from 70 onwards is a way of assessing her competence in the details of the talk, but his questions about Thatcher are not real nor exam questions but cross-examination questions designed to build his case concerning Thatcher's 'mean-ness', with the various audiences acting as jury. Further, they are sequentially different to BM's question in 22, a point which will be developed below (8.6).

8.2.3

Non-engrossed Recipients

It is of note that of the sixty-six accredited utterances in this exchange only two come from LL. (She does, however, contribute more in other sections of the show.) Certain aspects of her behaviour raise questions: at one point (not in the section under

review) she is seen slumped in her chair with her head tilted back seemingly staring at the ceiling; her contributions are usually made at high volume with slightly slurred speech; shots of her face show her to be noticeably glassy-eyed. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that LL is inebriated. This is not a rarity in shows of this kind, as some guests have too much to drink in the Green Room beforehand. It is difficult to be sure, therefore, what precisely her lack of participation in this particular extract is due to. Her leading role in the discussion shortly after this suggests that her 'non-engrossed' attitude here could be due to lack of interest in the political microtopic. Evidence for this is that after 95 there is a cursory discussion of feminism before LL asks, 'Why have we got off sex?' and then steers the talk back to newspapers' sexual gossip, a topic about which she is voluble. Whatever the reasons may be, in the stretch of talk being analysed she is clearly not engrossed and this means she is largely absent from much of this analysis.

8.2.4

Heterogeneity Of The On-Stage Audience

Here we will focus on the political differences that are evident in the talk, specifically those concerning feminism and party alignment. A small further comment on nationality will be added. But first, the potted biographies of the discussants are presented in alphabetical order.

Richard Belzer. Middle-aged American comedian, actor and author. Little-known in the UK but well-known in the US on television as detective John Munch, and for comedy specials, as well as many appearances on chat shows. One of his books is 'How To Be a Stand-Up Comedian' (usanetwork.com, 2002).

Julie Kirkbride. Born in 1960 in Halifax, England. Studied Economics and History at Cambridge University. Has worked as a news and current affairs producer for BBC and ITN, and as a journalist for 'The Daily Telegraph'. Has been a Conservative since she was fourteen and was elected as MP for Bromsgrove in 1997. Her husband is also a Conservative MP (conservatives.com, 2002). She has refused to sign a pledge drawn up by the Commission for Racial Equality outlining principles of conduct to ensure that all political campaigns are free from racial hatred and prejudice, a pledge endorsed by all party leaders (worcs.com, 2002).

Lynda La Plante. Born in Liverpool, England in 1946. In the 1970s and early 1980s she was an actress, appearing in minor roles in television dramas. Usually typecast as a prostitute or gangster's moll, she started to submit scripts which created roles for women which were more independent and less subordinate. Since then she has had many television successes and is also a best-selling novelist. Though women are central in her writing she has, according to Jennings, 'eschewed any identification with feminism or feminist agendas'. She has had her own production company since 1995 (Jennings 2002).

Bill Maher. Middle-aged American comedian, television presenter, and author. He describes himself as 'a libertarian'. A political review of him (Halem 2001) places him 'left of centre'. Maher variously supports some form of gun control, public (i.e. state) schooling, an active foreign policy, the death penalty, and is pro-abortion rights (Halem 2001). He is described elsewhere as 'still politically incorrect' (Shister 2002), particularly for criticising two male television reporters for crying on camera after the September 11th attacks in the US. He is reported as saying, 'It's womanish. Men shouldn't cry, certainly not publicly, in a time of war' (in Shister 2002).

Elle Macpherson. Born in 1964 in Sydney, Australia. Internationally known as one of the first 'supermodels', in which role she acquired the nickname 'The Body'. She is also an actress, appearing mainly in minor roles in films, and a businesswoman – she has her own lingerie company and a restaurant (netglimse.com, 2002). In the discussion of stereotypes in 7.1 she was referred to by Watson (2002) as a 'Trophy Blonde'. In the same article Watson further describes her as a 'healthy yacht girl'.

We saw in 7.1 that men are not some simple monolithic bloc, but among them there are a whole variety of different masculinities. Some of these differences can be seen in the two males discussants, BM and RB. It is clear from his 59 ('that to me is a sexist comment') that BM has certain feminist views on gender roles in society, even though he earlier (12, 14) claims not to be enlightened on such issues (which corresponds to his views expressed in his potted biography above). His 59 and 62-64 indicate his support for women having a strong role in political life. The support he receives from JK (61, 69) and EM (68) suggests they have similar views. As for RB, we see BM 'duet' with him in order to construct for RB an image of him as a feminist (10-17). Yet his 53 and attempted

explanation in 67, as well as his comment on Madeleine Albright in 90, all are wide open to the interpretation that for him women *as women* are not valid political leaders, a view which contradicts his earlier constructed feminism. And it is this heterogeneity of the panel, further complicated by what might be called the heterogeneity within one of its members (RB), that provides the conflict we see from 53 onwards.

RB's utterance in 53 concerning Thatcher being a man causes a rift that continues to the end of the extract. Up to that point (53) the conversation can be seen as highly collaborative, a feature that is often highlighted as being more closely associated with women's speech than men's (for example, Edelsky 1981, Coates 1997a, 1997b). But no-one would argue that it is gender-exclusive and here we see that both men are closely involved too. (The nature of the floor is an important element of this conversation and will be dealt with in detail below.)

Once the utterance has been made it is notable that it is the men whose linguistic behaviour becomes competitive. Indeed, 53 itself can be seen as the first move of confrontation which breaks the camaraderie. RB's utterance in 53 can, in one interpretation, be seen as a strong example of aggressive male humour discussed in 7.3, a type of humour which, as we saw in Section 1, comes within the provenance of superiority theories. However, it can be noted that it is also incongruous – a woman is not a man – and, as we will see below in 8.5, can also be read as a kind of release.

Though it is a woman's gender that is questioned in the utterance ('Humor in conversation can be used by men to silence women, *negate their personhood...*' to repeat Crawford's words from 7.3 (1995:145, emphasis added)), it is nevertheless BM, a male, who challenges RB with the bald statement that 53 was a sexist comment, whereas all the women panellists' initial reaction is to laugh. This can perhaps be variously explained by BM's position as host, and also through politeness, which can be related to the support work women do in cross-sex conversations. As host, BM has the responsibility (and the power) to intervene to keep order and here he feels that one guest is insulting women and intervenes to resolve matters. As for politeness, further details of which are to come in 8.7, it is a feature of the difference approach to gender and language that women are more polite than men, though this is contested (Holmes 2001, amongst others). It may well be

that the women laugh as this is the polite response to a supposed humorous remark. (We saw in 7.1 how Fishman (1978) referred to such behaviour as the 'shitwork' that women do in conversation with men.) However, these comments may be too simplistic. If we can at least partially explain BM's intervention with reference not to his sex but to his job, then we could also do the same for JK and EM. The former is a politician and is thus practised at being diplomatic, smiling, and laughing appropriately. EM is a fashion model, a major part of whose job is to appear happy on cue. These are factors which also need to be taken into consideration when considering their responses. As Crawford says,

One of the most persistent methodological problems is the difficulty of separating sex from all the other factors it is related to in our society. The number of variables that interact with sex has been called the most pervasive problem in sex and gender research.

(1995:6)

Both JK and EM, after an initial amused response, follow BM's challenge with criticisms of their own (68/9), a seemingly contradictory change of attitude which was earlier discussed in the examination of permission (5.2) in relation to Hay's fourth implicature concerning 'agreement'. Their criticisms lead to a further change in the conversation. At this point, when JK cries 'Shame!' (69), RB singles her out for attention (she is, recall, like Thatcher, a female Conservative), and what follows can be seen as a distinct piece of dominant behaviour. Focusing entirely on her (in 80 he excludes BM from the discussion), and using a mixture of raised voice (throughout), the imperative (74), interruptions (77 – it can now be seen as a single floor between RB and JK), negative questions (70, 72), repetition (73 and 77, and 81), and aggressive gestures (71, 73, 80, 81), he extracts the answer he requires from JK – Thatcher was called 'Milk-Snatcher', a stereotype that was later superseded by 'The Iron Lady', amongst others – which justifies his description of her as 'mean' and, thus, for him only it would seem, justifies his comment in 53. (His approach here is not unlike Paxman's strategy of discombobulation used against another politician and discussed in 6.3.1.) We should note that spatial arrangements also play their part here. The contiguity of RB and BM, which earlier had assisted them in their duet in which they constructed RB as a feminist, now aids RB's almost physical exclusion of BM from RB's argument with JK. Similarly, some of the physical aspects of RB's communication with JK – the direct eye contact, the pointing with outstretched arm, the table banging – are given greater dramatic impact by these discussants' positions opposite one another. A further element in the aggressiveness is that RB's 53 was an indirect

utterance but here in his confrontation with JK he allows her no indirection, compelling her to give a direct answer. She does her best to be indirect, referring to the American constitutional right to silence (76), but RB does not let up in his pursuit of the answer he wants. It is noteworthy that JK's response to this domineering behaviour is to eventually answer the bullying questioning with a smile (83), which may be seen as yet more 'shitwork'. It is also noteworthy that RB does not have this aggressive confrontation with the person who challenged him – BM, a male – but with JK, a woman. Again there are other factors at work here which we should not forget: BM is the more powerful host, with whom a confrontation may be best avoided; JK, as a female Conservative, has become the focus of everyone's attention on the question of Thatcher and not just RB's. Even so, it cannot be denied that by aggressively shifting the focus in this way RB also changes the topic – from his alleged sexism (and this so soon after the construction of him as a feminist) to Thatcher's mean-ness. Such a unilateral seizing of control of the floor is a clear example of domination. His remaining comments in 87 (sarcastic agreement) and 90-1 (a further slur on a woman politician *as a woman*) are further acts of hostility. The piece ends with one of the women, EM (92), using the topic of his new slur, Madeleine Albright, as a starting point to open the discussion out and away from the specific area of conflict, a move that attempts to restore some harmony to the proceedings.

Turning to party politics, there are clearly also differences of opinion. JK is a strong Thatcherite calling her 'a great political leader' (50, 86) who 'transformed the country' (89). BM would seem to be similarly-aligned, supporting JK's views with his 'Yeah she was' (88) and on two occasions (78, 85) attempting to defend Thatcher against RB's criticisms. RB himself is evidently a strong opponent of Thatcher, seeking to demonstrate her 'mean-ness' by establishing that she abolished free school milk. Further, whereas BM supported JK's assertions of Thatcher's greatness, RB snipes at JK with his sarcastic repetition of 'great' in 87. EM does not make herself clear on party lines. She is one of the three who ask for an explanation of the objectification of women and the election of a woman prime minister from JK in 48, but this does not entail that she is of a different political view to JK. As made clear above, as a female British Conservative MP, JK is adjudged by EM (and two other non-British) to be best placed to explain the seeming contradiction of having naked women in newspapers and also electing a woman as leader. EM shows some support (52) for the explanation, but again this does not help us determine her political stance. As for LL, there are insufficient contributions from her to

give any clear idea of her views on these matters. We see her laughing, seemingly to herself, in response to RB's 53, but as this was the most common reaction at that moment, including from JK, this does not help us further.

Remember the macrotopic is 'sex in *this country*'. The fact that the PI audience and panels were of a predominantly Anglo-American composition has already been noted. This led to, for example, BM seeking clarification that everyone understood the 'page three' reference. The different nationalities would seem to have no noticeable effect on the dispute in question but of note is the use of pronouns by the only panellist who is neither British nor American, EM. She is, in fact, Australian, but has spent much time both in the UK and the US. The discussion takes place in a studio in London and in response to the opening line in which BM says he wishes to discuss sex in this country (the UK) EM says (2) 'We like that'. This could be seen as an identification of herself with the British. It may also be interpreted more generally as 'We human beings all like that', but its immediate sequential placement after 'this country' seems to favour the former interpretation. Then in the section where JK is asked, as a British person, to explain the seeming contradiction of a country electing a woman as leader but also publishing pictures of naked women in daily newspapers (46-8), EM is one of the non-British askers of the question (48) along with the two Americans BM (47) and RB (46). That is, at that point she appears to take the stance of someone who is not British. Then in the final utterance of the extract (92-5) she appears to take on an American identity with her 'we have a lot more instances of women being I think powerful within politics in America' (92-3). It can be argued that once again she could be using 'we' in a general, impersonal sense and not in order to claim any particular identity, but she immediately follows this up with the second person 'than you do in England', which contrasts with the first person 'we' used immediately before. Either this is very lax use of pronouns or she, an Australian in London in mixed English speaking company, is (at least unconsciously) not sure herself where her immediate identifications lie. This is of significance as one of the features of the show is the juxtaposition, always pointed up by the host in order to generate talk, of 'Things British' vs. 'Things American', with the implication that panellists and studio audience will affiliate accordingly in disputes. However, as the topic here is one of international interest, such alignments may play no immediate part in the dispute, but prior alignments in the show's talk may have some slight influence on her

affiliations. The point here is that, taking such points into consideration, even EM herself displays uncertainty.

8.2.5

Audience Interpretation Of The Story

Here there is no 'story' as such, the problems of interpretation centring on the comment from RB in 53, which is received by some as a joke and by others as an insult. Of the discussants, all except BM show some kind of amusement as an immediate response. Once BM objects (59), however, both JK (61) and EM (68) express their agreement with BM's critical interpretation of 53. The studio audience respond with general laughter and some applause. This does not mean that every single member of the studio audience is amused by 53, but the fact that a good number were amused shows an interpretation of 53 as a joke. An explanation for these differing interpretations will be offered below.

8.2.6

Reconstituting The On-Stage Audience

What has become evident in this point-by-point discussion is that the relationships among the audiences are fluid and changing. This means as the talk flows along the audiences are to a greater or lesser degree constituted anew. Everyone in the studio is a member of one audience or another. The panellists are each members of an audience as they sit and listen to one of the others speak. This is true of all interlocutors involved in talk, but this is not what is meant here by reconstitution. This term is used here to refer to how, for instance, RB is initially constituted as a feminist (10-17) but then after 53 is cast out as such (59, 61, 62, 68, 69), that is, he is reconstituted as a sexist in the eyes of most of the other discussants. Similarly, BM is reconstituted from someone who is, in his own words, not enlightened about women's rights (12, 14), to someone who challenges RB's 53 (59), takes him to task for it (62, 64) and, thus, is reinvented, at least in this one respect, as a supporter of women's rights.

Also worthy of comment is the way that up until 53 there is a good deal of collaborative work carried out by all the panellists to create an informal humorous atmosphere and sense of common ground which is then transformed into a more competitive situation

after 53, with RB on one side and BM, JK, and EM on the other. That is, there is a reconstitution of the panel from co-operative to confrontational. This is a key event within this extract and one which will now be analysed in greater detail.

8.3 The Collaborative Floor vs. The Single Floor

Having discussed the basic similarities and differences of the panellists and seen how their relationships change during this stretch of talk, we now will look at how these features are actually talked into being through the conversational organisation. We earlier (6.3.1) distinguished between the single floor and the collaborative floor, where the former usually occurs in dyadic conversation and involves regular turn-taking between the interlocutors, and the latter can occur in groups of equals who all feel free to contribute to the discussion, sometimes simultaneously with other speakers. These terms are most useful for the exchange under review here and it is through them that we will now see how the problem of assigning a particular kind of meaning – joke or insult? – to 53 is intimately connected to the nature of the floor. It has also been noted that some observers (Edelsky 1981. Coates, 1997a, 1997b) see the collaborative floor as a chiefly female form of conversation, but we will see here that, at least until the fateful remark in 53, men, too, also use this mode of communication. Of course, it is what is done with such forms that matters, and comments about this will be made in the appropriate place.

BM, as host, nominates the macrotopic of sex in the UK (1). Immediately EM contributes 2, 'We like that', which causes laughter. This 2 is then elaborated with RB's 4, 'Just talking about it', before BM returns (5) to further elaborate the topic he started in 1. Though 2 and 4 do not add any great weight to the topic and may even be seen by some as distractions, they are significant utterances for at least two reasons. Firstly, they give immediate notice that the floor is not solely the host's, and secondly, that such additional contributions need not be strictly referential but can be, if so desired, affective (in this case humorous). That is, the primary function of utterances 2 and 4 is not to directly convey further information about the topic, but to create a jovial atmosphere around it.

In 7.1 the varieties and complexities of contemporary sexual and gender identities were given attention. Clearly such diversity presents itself as a resource for humour, and this proves to be the case here. As BM utters 5 there is again additional comments from RB, this time about the possibility of gender confusion (7) 'Speak for yourself!', gender inversion (9) 'Quite a gal!', and sexual orientation (11) 'I'm a queer gal'. Note that BM does not protest that he is being interrupted even though he has still not made his point clearly or fully. Indeed, it is seen in 10 that he actually appreciates these comments – laughing as he repeats RB's 'Quite a gal'. Also note that these contributions, like 2 and 4, are primarily made to amuse and, further, are, to use Sherzer's (1978) term, 'centripetal' to the topic of sex introduced in 1. This underlines, then, that the kind of exchange we have here is one that is collaborative, where all present are free to contribute when they wish and to do so in a manner that does not strictly adhere to 'one-at-a-time' turn-taking. All of this is a joint effort where meanings are constructed co-operatively, though not necessarily unequivocally.

In fact this co-operation takes on a particular form from 10 onwards as BM and RB work closely together on the microtopic of feminism. Between 10 and 19 BM and RB are so close in their exchanges – aided also by their physical proximity – that they demonstrate some of the key features of Falk's 'conversational duet' (1980). Duetters, says Falk, can show they have the following characteristics: (a) mutual knowledge of the topic, equivalent authority to express that knowledge, and a sense of camaraderie; (b) a shared communicative goal; (c) a mutual audience, and (d) that each of their contributions counts on both their behalves (pp.507-8). Between lines 12 and 16 BM and RB both show: a knowledge of the topic (the specific microtopic here is RB's political views on women, evidently something also known to BM); an equivalent authority to express such knowledge (it has been established that this is a collaborative floor); a sense of camaraderie (their banter). They both share the communicative goal of establishing RB's feminist credentials in front of a mutual audience, and what they each say can be seen to also represent what the other is at the same time saying.

- 12.BM: >feminism | You're much er | women would say you're much more>
13.RB: | Yes I am I'm |
14.BM: > enlightened than I am
15. (0.5)
16.RB: About (0.5) women's rights

Falk comments that duetting is carried out in such a way that ‘a written version of their [duetters’] resultant in-sequence text would be indistinguishable from that of a single speaker’ (p.507). We see from the transcript that our pair’s utterances could indeed come from a single speaker: ‘Women would say you’re much more enlightened than I am about women’s rights’. Coates notes in her discussion of jointly-constructed utterances that such collaboration ‘demonstrates careful monitoring in terms of semantic, syntactic and also prosodic levels’ (1997a:57). Their following utterances in 17 and 18, ‘Yes’ and ‘OK’, confirm that they have been accurate in their joint construction of meaning.

Some might see this duet as a dominant move by the men, as for its duration they hold the floor and the women are excluded. Even if this is the case, it is brief: five lines out of the ninety-five in the extract. But it is also worth recalling the point made in 7.2 that men and women both draw on all manner of linguistic resources and here these men are, for reasons of clarification to the others and the studio audience, briefly duetting to establish someone’s footing in relation to the topic. This also involves their prior knowledge of one another – right at the beginning of the show they exchange remarks which demonstrate that they know one another.

Once this element of RB’s identity is established BM presses on with the macrotopic in 21, introducing a new microtopic of page three nudes, which he further develops from 28 onwards with microtopics of ‘Hustler’ (a pornographic magazine) and Margaret Thatcher, the former reference establishing, in his discourse at least, a link between pornography and newspapers (see the discussion on representations in 7.1 for a similar link.). That is, he is questioning the seemingly contradictory nature of representations of women in the UK. In this he is given some support by RB (29) and EM (30). We can also note that the exchanges at this point reaffirm that the floor is a collaborative one – note how JK’s 33 completes BM’s 32 (‘we’ve never come/come close’), for example, and, important for this discussion, also note that a serious topic – sex in this country – is continuously handled in a humorous manner. The (possibly unintentional) source of humour at this point would seem to be BM’s sequential placement of ‘Hustler’ and Margaret Thatcher, this establishing in the studio audience’s discourse an incongruous and humorous coupling to which they respond accordingly (32 [*Audience begin tittering*]), which once again underlines the importance of the audience in determining meaning. Panel members further contribute with EM’s amused surprise at the pairing (34), LL’s assertion that

Thatcher was never on page three (35), and EM's mock-authoritative confirmation of this in 37 and 41.

Before continuing let us pause here to take stock. It has been established that there is a collaborative floor through which a serious topic has been developed in a largely humorous manner, with the discussants displaying many of the features from Hay's (2001) list of different types of humour support discussed in 3.1 – contributing more humour (EM in 2, RB in 4, 9,11, 27, LL in 35), echoing speaker's words (BM in 10), overlap (RB in 4,7,9,11, EM in 41), and a general sense of heightened involvement (LL excepted). The macrotopic of sex in this country invokes the panels' scripts about sex and related matters, and the free-for-all that follows builds to the collective amusement (initiated by the studio audience) around Thatcher and a pornographic magazine.

This latter mixture of sex and Thatcher is not seen as objectionable by the participants, and this is understandable as in many ways it is not such unfamiliar territory. Thatcher herself on a chat show with Michael Aspel related the story of how as prime minister she received an important dispatch and earnestly remarked: 'I have the latest red hot figure' only to find those present collapse into laughter (Alaoui 1991:25-6). Elsewhere she also commented in praise of her Home Secretary William Whitelaw: 'Every prime minister needs a Willie'. (It is not entirely clear if this play was intended or not, or, indeed, if the utterance is apocryphal. The important fact here is that it is a well-known story.) And in the satirical television puppet show 'Spitting Image' she was invariably shown as a man. Ian Hislop, one of the writers on the show, comments in a TV interview:

Mrs Thatcher was undoubtedly the star of 'Spitting Image'. Her very masculine qualities were played up. [*Shot of Thatcher puppet shaving her face in front of mirror*] She always wore a suit and smoked cigars and went to the gents loos and was generally incredibly tough (0.5) and much tougher than the rest of her cabinet, who were presented – I think accurately – as a bunch of wimps.

(Wood 2001)

Further, it was common among Tory shire ladies at the peak of Thatcher's popularity to say that 'Thatcher is the best man for the job' or 'Thatcher is the only man in the cabinet' and such similar remarks. And Young (1991:615) notes in his biography of Thatcher that in 1984 Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, referred to her

as the 'Iron Man' of British politics (Cf. the usual stereotype of 'The Iron Lady'). That is, humorously (and, indeed, seriously) intended remarks on Thatcher and sex/gender are not unusual, and sometimes have come even from her own mouth. These latter remarks call to mind comments made in 7.1 concerning gender and the polity. Brown stated that politics is 'more intensely, self-consciously masculine than most other social practices' (in Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995a:24), and Gatens noted that the public sphere has developed in such a way 'which assumes that its occupants have a male body' (1992:124). Such views are given greater weight by these observations concerning Thatcher.

As the talk flows further we get more collaboration. Once more RB briefly duets with BM in 42-44 to establish a serious point about page three nudity and a woman prime minister, a point supported by EM in 45. We then get the triple request from three non-British panellists for an explanation of this seeming contradiction. JK's answer in 50-1 (which recognises a multiplicity of female identities) receives two responses; the first is unequivocally supportive – EM's 52 'There you go' – and as such continues the collaborative floor. But the other is RB's 53, which leads to a turning point in this exchange, not simply because it is unequivocally lacking in support or directly hostile, but as much because of its equivocal and indirect nature. From one perspective it can be seen to continue the free-for-all nature of the floor up to that point: it is delivered with a set-up nominating Margaret Thatcher followed by a comedian's pause for effect in 54 (1.0), which is followed immediately by the punch line accompanied by exaggerated facial expression and gestures – the wry smile, the shrug of the shoulders etc (54-5). Such 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz 1982) can be seen to be delivered in what Bateson would call 'a play frame'. That is, just as Bateson observed monkeys playing in such a way that 'the playful nip denotes the bite but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite' (1972:180), here the manner of delivery (by a professional comedian who has written a book on how to be one) can be seen as a paralinguistic metastatement: 'This is a joke'. (More on reflexivity shortly.) The majority response of both the studio audience and the panel (including JK) is one of amusement, and, given the crucial determining role an audience's response has for humour, it is for many simply a continuation of the joking cooperative work. It is also coherent in that it obviously develops the subtopics of Thatcher and sex/gender.

But there are also sound reasons for seeing it as a negative development in the conversation. In the discussion of gender and humour in 7.3, Crawford and Gressley (1991:228) found that men showed a preference for formulaic joke-telling, and women for telling stories and anecdotes, which we can reformulate here as men having a more competitive and aggressive style in their use of humour. Victoria Wood (in Hind 1991:93) added some support to this when she said she believes men use humour more to attack than to communicate. Thus RB's reversion to a rather formulaic delivery of his 53 in the midst of a free-flowing collaboration can be seen as formally disruptive. More to the point, it is not simply a linguistic choice of words designed to amuse. We saw in 4.2 how such choices can involve 'a hierarchy of acts' (van Dijk 1995:5) and how language is a vehicle for ideology. Here with this seemingly simple comment RB deliberately overrides a person's obvious biological identity with the dominant gender identity of politicians to make an ideologically-loaded rhetorical point about the limits of women's potential. His is a deliberate misrepresentation of a woman as a man based on the premise that women cannot be great political leaders. (In 56 he demonstrates that he knows her sex: 'I don't think *she* qualifies', but at the same instant denies certain possibilities to her gender.) This once again brings to mind the comments made in 7.1 concerning politics being a male domain, particularly Jones' observation that women in such positions are faced with a double bind: if they are perceived as feminine they risk losing authority, and if they are perceived as masculine they risk social disapprobation (1993:103). It seems to be the latter which is the heart of RB's 53.

However, the host, who is, recall, the mediator between all the layers of the audience, is not amused by the remark and explicitly condemns it as 'sexist' (59). This serious accusation from someone who has played a significant role in the construction of RB as 'enlightened' and 'outspoken in the cause of feminism' is a complete reversal of attitude and this, in terms of conversational organisation, marks an end to the general collaborative floor. For the rest of the extract RB would seem to be on his own but the others (with the exception of LL) still do some work together against RB; JK in 61, for example, immediately lends support to BM with her 'You tell him'. BM pursues his charge (62,64,66) in answer to which RB chooses not to indicate that the majority response of amusement would seem to confirm his assertion in 60 that his comment was a joke, but instead attempts an explanation in 67: Thatcher was a man not because she was strong but because she was mean. EM and JK reject this simultaneously (68 and 69) and

JK adds the admonishment 'Shame' (69). It is easy to see why RB's defence is rejected in this manner. He seems to believe that substituting 'mean' for 'strong' has some genuine explanatory force, whereas it is received as just another crude example of a gender characteristic from one side of some simplistic binary opposition (as discussed in 7.1). Jones identified (also in 7.1) what she saw as some of the essential traits needed by a public figure of authority: *official, knowledgeable, decisive, and compelling* (1993:103-5). *Mean* is not among them.

This admonishment of RB triggers another change in the floor and this change, too, hinges on political diversity. The collapse of the collaborative floor after 59 was brought about by an overt disagreement about gender politics. Now after 69 we see another change, this one brought about by overt party political differences. (We will see, though, that the politics of gender dominance are also still at work to some degree in this confrontation.)

In response to JK's admonishment RB becomes excited and directs all his attention on her. His position is not now one of defence but one of attack through which he aims to establish a justification for his joke. His attitude, it was noted above, is one of aggression. Though masked in mock anger (he is an actor and comedian) it is clear that he is also genuinely angry too; for example, he has difficulty controlling his facial expression. A significant move in terms of the floor is that, whereas earlier he had happily duetted with BM to construct the image of himself as feminist, he now firmly excludes BM from the floor with what Moerman (1988:21) would call an 'obliterative' interruption in 80. (Moerman notes such interruptions are obliterative socially not simply acoustically.) In doing this RB maintains the dyad he seeks with JK (this might be called a 'duel' as opposed to a 'duet') and in 83 obtains the 'admission' that his cross-examination has sought in order, in his terms, to justify his joke. His thanks (84) can be seen as an act of magnanimity and, for him only, a kind of closure. However, it is clear that to get himself to this position (which he seems to see as one of safety) he has had to physically and verbally dominate anyone who opposed his sexist views, casting aside any masquerade of feminism and cooperation he had previously had.

One more comment here. Scott & Lyman, borrowing from Austin's work on excuses, broadly divide accounts into two types: justifications and excuses. Justifications are

‘accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it.’ Excuses are ‘accounts in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility’ (1968:47). From the exchanges it is perhaps possible to conclude that RB believes he has justified his 53 – ‘I said it but there was nothing wrong in it’, whereas the other interlocutors may well feel that his offerings at this point have been mere excuses – ‘Being a purported feminist, I know it was wrong to say such a thing but I’ll wriggle out of the responsibility by changing the subject’. As Perinbanayagam notes, ‘Accounts are signs that indicate self, and the contents of accounts...allow that self to be read by others’ (1991:127).

However, for every argument there is a counter-argument and JK continues her praise of Thatcher (86>), which seems to take place on two floors. As she praises Thatcher she receives sarcastic snipes from RB (87) and this can be seen to continue their dyad, and at the same time BM responds with a supportive comment (88), which can be seen as a continuation of the collaborative floor BM, JK, and EM have maintained throughout. That is, her remarks are addressed to the discussants generally but in practice, given that there has been a division among them, they are responded to on one floor with sarcasm (RB), and on another with support (BM). A strong indicator that RB is at this juncture outside the shared floor is the fact that in 90 he makes yet another comment which misattributes gender to a powerful female politician (Madeleine Albright was the then US Secretary of State) and this is studiously ignored both as a joke (no-one laughs) and as an insult (no-one chides him). Instead it is cleverly used by EM as the starting point of a new microtopic of women in politics.

Thus in the 95 lines/ 2 minutes of this multiparty talk we see how the nature of the floor is changed by certain sequences (59 is formative in the change from generally collaborative to RB exclusive, for example) and how these changes in turn shape the subsequent sequences (the dyad from 70 onwards is the necessary ground for a cross-examination). We can illustrate these changes diagrammatically.

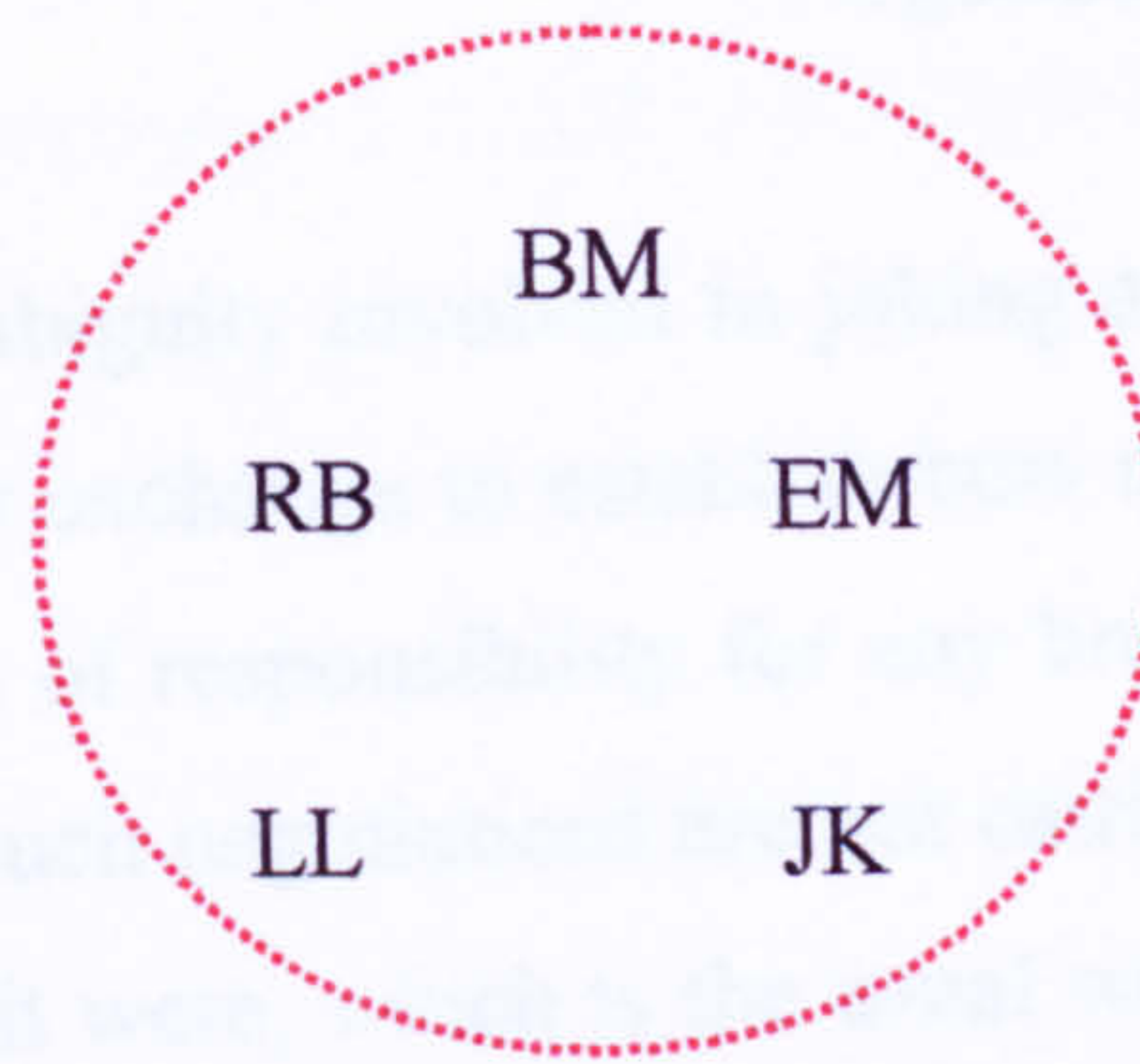


Fig.12. The collaborative floor up to line 59

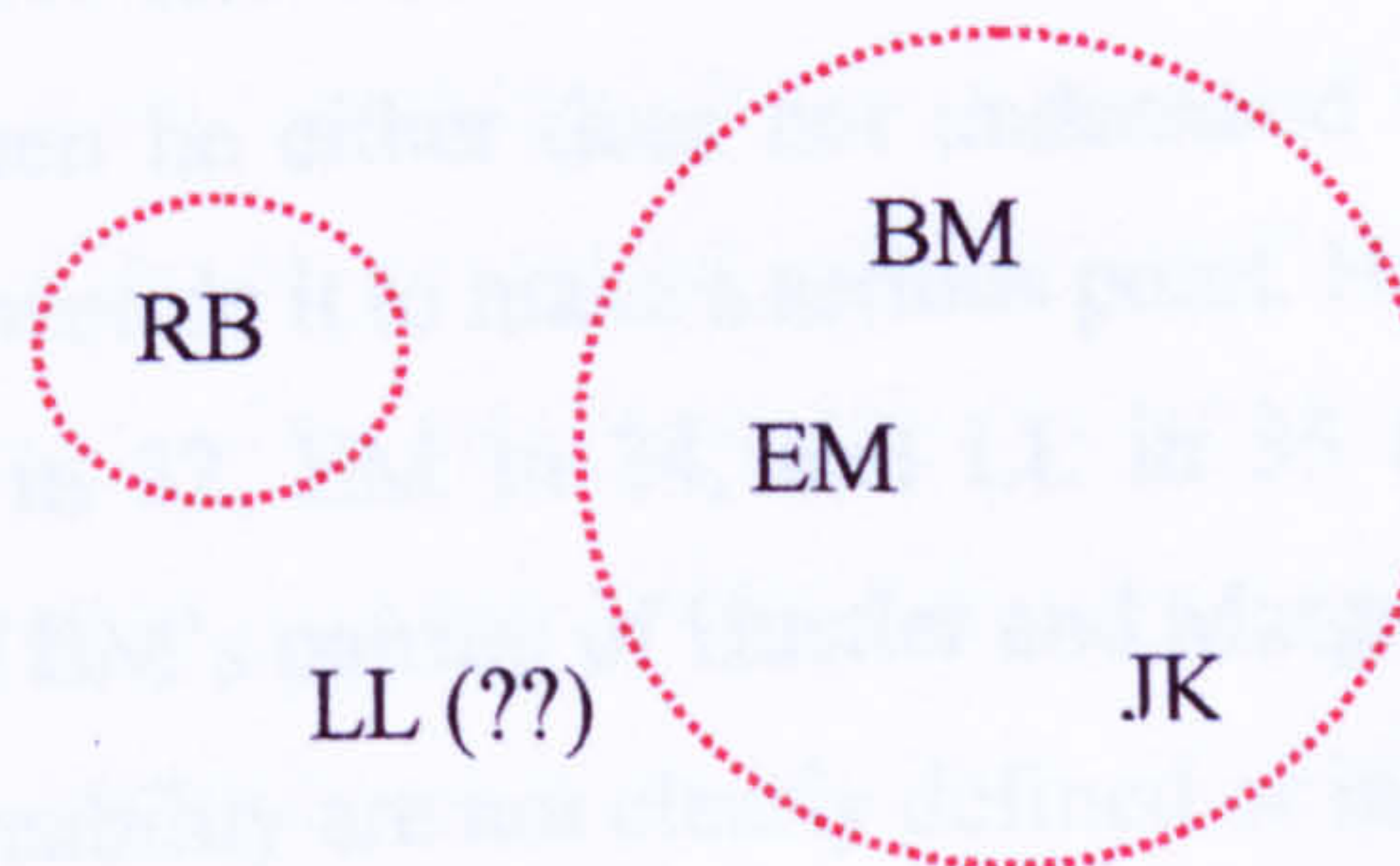


Fig. 13. The change in the floor after 59

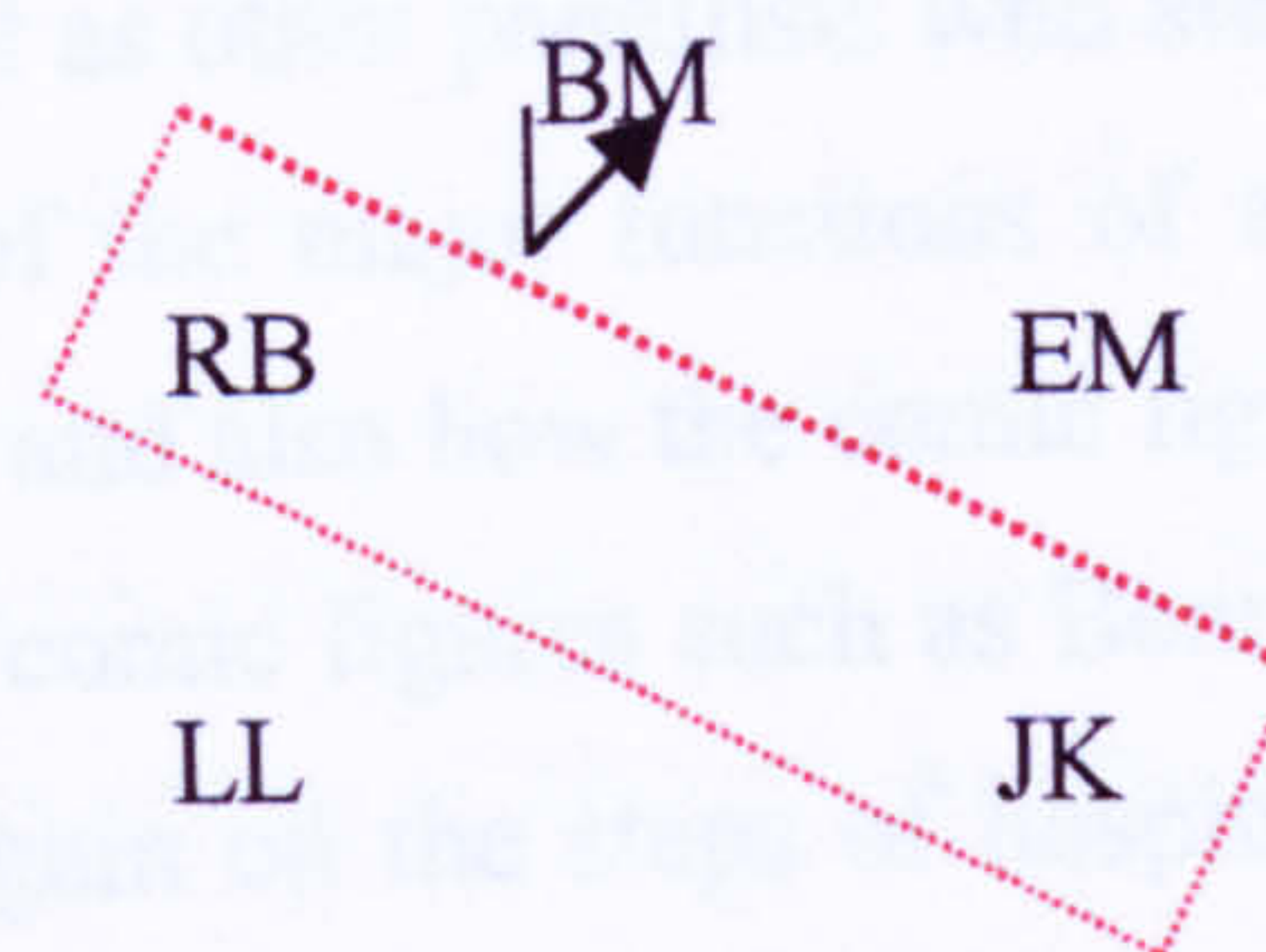


Fig.14. The RB-JK dyad from 70-84 (BM excluded).

8.4

Negotiating The Serious Import Of Humour

In her study of the serious import of humour Emerson (1969) makes a variety of points relevant to this discussion, four of which will be focused on here. These are:

- negotiating prior permission to joke (p.170)
- the interactive establishment of meaning (p.171)
- treating a joke seriously adds to its import (p.175)
- three possible positions a joker can adopt when challenged (p.176)

8.4.1 Negotiating Prior Permission To Joke

Emerson recognises the ambiguity involved in joking and suggests that negotiations are necessary in each particular exchange to establish how much joking license may be taken and also to create a system of responsibility for any breaches of decorum (1969:170). In PI we can see that though such negotiations are not carried out explicitly or formally, they are undertaken 'by ear' as it were, which is the usual way in informal conversation. From the start (lines 2,3,4) we see humorous comments are made and appreciated as people feel their way in a collaborative situation. The first brake on such comments comes in BM's 28 ('No:: come on') when he either does not understand that RB's 27 is a humorous remark or he wishes to override it to make a serious point. However, this does not stop the joking as the audience in 32, EM in 34, and LL in 35 all show appreciation of the humorous incongruity of BM's pairing of Hustler and Margaret Thatcher. Thus, the extent of the licence and responsibility are not clearly defined or individually attributable.

Further, it must not be forgotten that this is a performance space within which two comedians are present as well as other panellists who are expected to entertain. We saw in Sections 2 and 3 that one of the major functions of a performance space is to give a certain leeway to utterances, and also how the comic figure has a licence to be foolish and to transgress. For example, comic figures such as Benny Hill and Eric Morecambe, both when appearing in public again on the steps of hospitals after having had serious heart attacks could not refrain from playing the fool – 'Tarlton is Tarlton' (Hill 2000, Morecambe 2000). Similarly, Tommy Cooper in his private life, upon entering the club bar after a round of golf, asked for a drink. The barman responded to this simple request with laughter, much to the annoyance of Cooper (Cooper 2000). Bob Monkhouse remarks that whenever he has been introduced to someone in his private life and has announced his profession, he has invariably been asked to tell a joke i.e. perform (2002). These examples show that even in non-humorous situations both performers and audiences can behave as if there actually was a humorous performance due to certain expectations that come with certain people. In the extract being analysed, the contextual features are even stronger (everyone is 'semiotically aroused') and so jokes abound: jokes about sexuality, gender inversion, pornographic publications, and Margaret Thatcher all stake out the permissible ground and are appreciatively received. These factors weaken the notion of

responsibility somewhat, particularly when the important role of the audience (and their crucial but unpredictable responses) is added to the equation.

8.4.2

The Interactive Establishment Of Meaning

We take it as given that in the period of the collaborative floor most if not all meanings are established interactively. From 53 onwards there is a failure in this interaction. Emerson remarks that in such situations the joker is strongly obliged to indicate that he intends humour and that if the recipients do not accept the humorous intent it is the joker who becomes responsible (p.171). However, the exemplification she provides in support of this seems to miss an important point. She gives the example of cabaret performers in Nazi Germany who were arrested for making jokes about Hitler, though they themselves did not feel they were committing any crime - they were, after all, comic figures in a performance space in front of a fee-paying appreciative audience. Likewise, RB in uttering 53 may feel that he is simply performing another joke as he has done up to that point without problem. Indeed, with 53 he is even more explicit than hitherto as he provides distinct comic features to signal his intent – the pause, the wry smile, the shrug. Yet this does not save him from criticism. The reason for this is quite simple, as it was in the more extreme Emerson example of Nazi Germany: power.

No matter how much the audiences appreciated the cabaret jokes, it was the state whose power easily overrode that. Here, even though the majority response to RB's 53 is amusement, it is the discussants who have more power in the layering of the audiences, and within the discussants it is the host who has most power of all. As Buttny observes, 'The labelling of an incident and the ascription of responsibility for it is not enacted by a distant, neutral observer or judge, but by interactants variously positioned and aligned in social contexts' (1993:5). Here you have the rest of the panel using what Buttny calls 'the group's folk-logic of action' (p.10), their 'commonsense understandings about social and moral orders' (p.8), to take RB to task for his utterance. This concurs with a point made by Douglas in her study of African joking relationships. She distinguishes between joking and obscenity: joking 'exists by virtue of its congruence with the social structure. But the obscenity is identified by its opposition to the social structure, hence its offence'

(1975:106). It also recalls a point of Freud's mentioned above (5.2) concerning permission and joking invective: an audience which identifies with the butt is hardly likely to provide a humorous response. So with the host and the majority of the rest of the panel pitted against him, RB is forced to take responsibility for his comment, a responsibility which, despite his initial resistance, he, if only inadvertently and partially, accepts, and which leads us into the next section.

8.4.3 Taking A Joke Seriously Adds To Its Import

It was noted earlier that RB could respond to the challenge by simply indicating the majority response of amusement. Instead he chooses to respond to BM's serious challenge with a serious explanation in 67 ('Because she was mean') which takes him further away from the terrain of joking into the serious realm, and at the same time acts as an acceptance of responsibility for the utterance. His pursuit of a confirmation of the main proposition of his explanation (that Thatcher was 'mean'), which he seems to view as a justification for his joke, actually takes him ever more into the serious realm and away from the utterance of 53 as a joke. And as it is the others who have defined this serious terrain - BM's 59 ('sexist'), EM's complaining vocalisation in 68, and JK's 69 ('shame') - RB finds himself on foreign soil. On such ground RB is outnumbered and even though he seems to take some succour from JK's acknowledgement of Thatcher's nickname (83), he is alone in this and stands seriously disempowered. Thus when he returns to the joking mode with another barbed comment about Madeleine Albright (90) he is quite simply ignored, as if he has been de-voiced. This latter 'joke' is therefore not taken seriously by anyone and, consequently, has little or no import.

This point does not end there, however, as it raises a significant aspect of this whole exchange, that between seriousness vs. humour. We have seen that up until at least 53 there is a collaborative floor with a cooperative determination of meanings. We have also seen that up to this point the licence to joke and responsibility are not clearly defined. It has also been noted that 'Politically Incorrect' occupies an ambivalent position - its chat show element demanding entertainment, its discussion show element demanding serious discourse. What this creates, then, is an atmosphere that is neither strictly serious nor strictly humorous, but which is, rather, *indeterminate*. For example, note how in quick succession RB's ironic comment in 27 ('Page four in America') is misunderstood by BM,

and how BM's attempted serious point about Hustler and Margaret Thatcher (28>31) is greeted with amusement by the audience and some panellists. In such an ambivalent environment meanings are not neatly polarised into *bona fide* and *non-bona fide* as in, for example, Raskin's semantic theory of humour, but, rather, they shift restlessly back and forth along a pragmatic continuum made up of each participant's own scripts and the interactions of this conversation, so that RB's 53 is simultaneously both a joke *and* an insult, depending where the respondent is on the continuum at the particular moment of the utterance. Immediately after 53 RB has sufficient support to remain standing by the utterance as a 'joke', but, as we have seen, in his attempted explanation he moves along the continuum towards 'insult' and this marks a significant shift in power. As Bilmes has it,

the meaning of behaviour is not fixed at the moment of production according to what the actor 'meant' by the behaviour or the socially significant features of the behaviour. Rather, the meaning is negotiated by the participants over a course of activity.

(1988:162)

8.4.4 Three Possible Positions A Joker Can Adopt When Challenged

Emerson provides three positions for the joker who is challenged (p.176):

- (a) a belief that a response to an act will be within the same framework as the act itself
- (b) the actor will not be held responsible in the serious realm for an act in the joking realm
- (c) retrospective definitions of the framework are frowned upon.

It needs to be immediately made plain that these points of Emerson's are based on an understanding that the serious realm and the joking realm are always clearly distinguishable. In many cases this can be so. But in ambivalent situations such as the one delineated here, these distinctions are not so easily applied and these points are undermined to a certain degree. It has been noted that equally important is the question of power, which once again does not feature in this part of Emerson's formulation, and which is the decisive factor in relation to these three positions a joker can adopt when challenged. Because after 59 BM, JK, and EM collectively have more power than RB, the actions they take seriously challenge these three points. There is ample evidence that for

many people in the studio 53 was a joke and, indeed, this majority response is in the same framework as the act, thus conforming to Emerson's point (a). But the more powerful and detailed response from the rest of the panel (LL excluded), which is in a different framework, holds sway. This further means that, *contra* point (b), RB is held responsible in a different framework. As Buttny has observed, 'How an actor or event is described is crucial for understanding what happened and who is culpable' (1993:18). BM, JK, and EM, the latter two after a little hesitation, describe the utterance as 'sexist', and determine that RB is culpable for this act.

As for point (c), it is clear that RB is angry at the way he is suddenly held accountable for what to him is simply another joke, and he may feel that this shift in attitude amounts to a retrospective redefinition of the framework, a situation which accords with Emerson's point. He may also feel, like Davies in the examination of the study of ethnic humour in 5.3.1, that it is 'pointless to analyse jokes in terms of their consequences' (1996:9), or, like fellow-comedian Bernard Manning, that you should never take a joke seriously (Duncan 2002). However, RB is no innocent and is presumably aware of the pitfalls of being a comedian. We saw in Section 4.2 that certain linguistic choices are loaded and it is to be expected that someone who makes his living from the precision of his verbal selection will show a marked degree of accuracy. But, as this study has underlined, social encounters do not simply require linguistic competence but also communicative competence. As Perinbanayagam notes when discussing the perils of joking relationships: '*In creating this [joking] act the articulator needs to calibrate, with varying degrees of precision, the cautions, liberties, and licenses that he or she can take in the relationship*' (1991:130, original emphasis). Thus, given the indeterminate mode of much of the exchange, it can be argued that there is no clearly-defined framework up to that point (hence RB's *faux pas*) and that these objections to 53 are, in fact, the first explicit definitions of the framework of the entire extract, within which sexual banter is acceptable but sexist banter is not. Calling a powerful female politician 'a man' is deemed to be sexist by those with more power and RB is therefore held accountable. Worth noting here also is that this judgement is not simply a matter of automatically imposing a set of antecedent rules on a particular type of behaviour. Buttny again:

The social control function involves more than simply matching conduct to social rules and invoking accountability for deviance. Instead, social control is seen as an *emergent* feature of interaction which arises from

how persons orient to and actively respond to the regulative function of the rules.

(p.23, emphasis added)

8.5 Two Psychological Perspectives On Joking

Here we will consider, first, a study of attitudes to joking, and then recall Freud's idea of the role of the unconscious in humour. This latter will in turn reprise the question of the ownership of meaning.

Earlier (5.2) it was noted that de Sousa in his discussion of attitudes involved in joking remarked that laughter at a dubious joke showed a congruent attitude on the part of the audience: 'the phthonic element in a joke requires *endorsement*' (1987:240). Johnson (1990) carried out a study of this problem and came to the conclusion that there are two broad interpretations possible – attribution bias and impression management.

In the former, the joker is focused on the intent to amuse and the immediate expectations of the audience and genuinely has no offensive motive. The audience, however, are focused on the joker and his/her 'internal, attitudinal, motivational, or personality factors' (p.1051) and thus are more likely to attribute any offence to the joker's attitudes. Even so, in this attribution bias account the joker's 'only-joking' defence is seen as sincere. In the latter case, impression management, jokers can use joking as a kind of managed risk through which they can express potentially offensive feelings in a social setting. Should offence be taken, the joker can decommit to allow face-saving impression management in order to maintain a socially desirable impression (p.1052). In this impression management account the joker's 'only-joking' defence is seen as insincere.

Johnson put these ideas to the test in an experiment involving 92 male and 43 female college students, asking if there was a congruence between joke-telling and attitude when (a) they themselves told such jokes, and (b) other people told such jokes. They were also asked if audiences who laughed at such jokes had a congruent attitude. Johnson, who does not provide a detailed breakdown of the figures, concludes:

The evidence suggests that people believe that their own jokes do not usually reflect their attitudes even when people are offended. In contrast, people seemed to attribute consistency of attitude to others' jokes about half the time. This is a tremendous gulf and no doubt a significant source

of conflict between tellers and audiences, likely to leave tellers feeling misunderstood and audiences at first offended and later deceived.

(p.1054)

Before relating this to the study at hand, some qualifications are necessary. Without more details we cannot be sure that the gulf is 'tremendous', but we accept the main thrust of the argument. Further, note is taken that the sample used in this study – college students – was not broadly representative, and also that this was not a study of humour in action in concrete social situations. Despite this, the two broad categories of attribution bias and impression management are useful for our purposes.

If we relate this to PI we do not get an immediately clear picture as the majority response to RB's 53 is amused laughter, but BM's 59 ('sexist') changes the situation and RB produces his 'only-joking' comment (60). As we have seen, BM continues the criticism and is joined by EM and JK. Collectively their comments exhibit a close fit with Johnson's conclusion: they are at first offended and then feel deceived – JK's 69 'Shame!' suggests that a purported feminist such as RB should know better than to make such comments as his 53. That is, they take an impression management view of the situation and regard RB's defence as insincere. (It is not known what LL's views are on the matter.)

But there is also a fit with RB's feelings as he is left feeling misunderstood (and angry). The cumulative nature of pragmatic force was discussed in 6.3.1 concerning repeated interruptions being seen as challenges. Thomas (1986) comments that pragmatic force is also cumulative 'in the sense that participants assign value to utterances in the light of what has gone before' (p.215). In this regard RB has seen a whole variety of humorous comments from various panellists on the microtopics of sex, gender, nudity, Thatcher etc. not only go unremarked but meet with an appreciative reception by both panel and studio audience. Yet suddenly his 'joke' about Thatcher is assigned a different value by other discussants.

As a comedian (and an actor) in performance space he also feels he has a certain licence, though it has been noticed that it is not always easy to know the exact extent of such, particularly given the ambiguity of a comedian as a comedian and as a private individual. For instance, the comedian Steve Coogan makes a point concerning the identity of the

comedian him/herself vs. the character they portray. He gives the example of one of his creations, the drunken, violent, chauvinistic, working class Mancunian, Paul Calf. In the character of Calf he says, 'I'm a radical feminist. I am. I am, really. I think you've got to be these days if you want to get your end away.' He then adds, speaking as himself, that Calf's last comment 'subverts what he has just said, you know, and he doesn't know that... so it works on that level of his ignorance and the audience's knowledge, and it is kind of on one level offensive but because, you know, *you do it within the conceit of the character*, it's infinitely excusable' (Bragg 2001, emphasis added). But it is evident that RB is not performing within the conceit of a comic character, where separation of identities is clearer, but in the more ambivalent role of himself, a comic celebrity on a chat-cum-discussion programme in a television studio in front of a live audience, all of which may raise the question: 'Who is speaking?'. Here is Tarlton Tarlton? Possible explanations such as a change of 'footing' between the roles of 'author', 'animator', or 'speaker' (Goffman 1981, Chapter 3) or between 'speaker' and 'addressor' (Hymes 1972b) come to mind. There may also be a distinction to be made between his 'social role' of actor/comedian and his 'discourse role' of panellist (Thomas 1986:92), which can involve one speaker being another's 'mouthpiece' (p.111). Even so, RB does not avail himself of any such explanations and his 'only-joking' defence and following utterances are, however unintentionally, an acceptance of some kind of personal responsibility for the utterance. Troemel-Ploetz would require a greater degree of responsibility, pointing out that as social actors 'we have the obligation to inform ourselves about which acts are seen as discriminatory, i.e. as sexist or racist or both, by our hearers, and we have to guarantee that our speech acts are such that they are not offensive if we do not want to offend.' She insists there is a limit to how an utterance can be understood and misunderstood (1991:493).

Even so, he would no doubt claim that his primary focus is on amusing people and at the moment he utters 53 he may well have no offensive motive – after all, in 9 he merrily swaps his own gender ('Quite a gal') and in 11 tops that by changing his own sexuality ('I'm a queer gal'). That is, such misattributions cause him no concern and are, for him, simply more comic fodder (though, it must be said, they are done from the comparative safety and comfort of the dominant social position of a male heterosexual). Thus it is possible from this perspective to see his defence in 60 as sincere, that is, to take an attribution bias view. However, it is not possible to take this view of his 90 concerning

Madeleine Albright as at that point in the sequence it has been made abundantly clear to everyone what the permissible framework is. This latter remark of his would probably confirm to the others that their attitude to his 53 was appropriate but, given the conflict that occurred between 53 and 90, it could be construed as an expression of hurt defiance (with offensive intent) and so not necessarily have the same grounding as 53.

It is worthy of note, however, that this discussion is of surface or near-surface features, that is, of *conscious* positions. It is appropriate, then, to recall Freud's view discussed above in 1.2 that joke-work allows the pleasurable expression of thoughts and feelings which are usually repressed and inhibited i.e. which are usually *unconscious* (1991, Chapter 7). In Freud's formulation, the feeling of propriety which prevents us from insulting someone can be overcome if the insult is expressed in a joke. If such a view can be applied here, then it could indicate that RB may well be a proponent of feminist views ('outspoken in the cause of feminism', 'enlightened about women's rights') but this free-and-easy, indeterminate mode of conversation, in which all manner of sex- and gender-related jokes have been made, creates a most receptive environment into which his unconscious feelings can bubble up. If this is the case, then his 53 can be seen as an expression of his unconscious feelings and he cannot be accused of conscious malicious intent and so his 'only-joking' defence would be seen as sincere. This does not, however, prevent him from being held *socially* responsible for the contents of the utterance (there are indeed limits to how far utterances can be mis/understood), and this once more brings us back to an earlier question concerning 'who owns meaning?' (6.1).

Duranti studied speech in Samoa, and, like Rosaldo in the Philippines earlier, found that meaning was established differently there to the way speech act theorists would have it. He contrasts what he calls the Western personalist view of meaning with the Samoan. The former proposes that 'the meaning of an utterance is fully defined in the speaker's mind before the act of speaking' (1988a:13-4). He also adds support for this from Holquist, who, in a discussion of Polynesian cultures, contrasts their interpersonalist notions with this personalist view which 'holds that "*I own meaning*". A close bond is felt between the sense I have of myself as a unique being and the being of my language' (in Duranti p.27, original emphasis). Duranti elsewhere notes, however, that in Samoa

[i]nterpretation is not conceived as the speaker's privilege ...[but] is based on the ability and power that others may have to invoke certain conventions...Meaning is collectively defined on the basis of recognised (and sometimes) restated social relations

(1986:241)

Clearly, as can be seen from the preceding discussion, communal meaning is not the sole preserve of Polynesian cultures. Whatever the reasons may be for RB's utterance in 53, whatever he may say it meant, however so many may have been amused by it, and no matter the degree to which he can 'prove' his point, it is that particular group of people on that particular panel using the power arising from that particular combination of contingencies (what Buttny earlier called 'the group's folk-logic of action', 1993:10) which determine the main outcome. This not only demonstrates the significant role of power in determining meaning but also impacts on the nature of preference organisation, to which we now turn.

8.6

Preference

The conflict that arises from 53 gives rise to a sequence of talk which confounds the usual literature on preference organisation, particularly that aspect of it to do with accounting. To investigate this the section begins with a reminder of the role of humour in preferred and dispreferred turns. Earlier it was added to the two separate tables of Levinson and Heritage, as follows:

Action	Preferred Response	Dispreferred Response
Humour	Amusement	Non-amusement

Table 5. Preference organisation of the action of humour.

If we consider RB's 53 as a humorous action we have seen that there is a mixed response - amused laughter from many and a serious criticism from BM. It is this latter response that shapes much of the rest of this stretch of talk and it is this response which will be focused on here. First we will consider possible reasons for a non-amused dispreferred response and then look at how, given such a conflict, accounting is done.

Labov and Fanshel (1977), when discussing the dispreferred second pair part of requests, that is, refusals of or putting off requests (in this case requests to do some dusting), provide the following possibilities.

Existential status:	Isn't it dusted already?	I did dust it.
Time:	Is it 3.00?	It's not the time I usually dust the house.
Need for the action:	It looks clean to me.	Doesn't it look clean to you?
Need for the request:	Don't worry, I'll do it.	Don't you think I'll do it?
Ability:	Do you know where the dust rag is?	I don't have time to do it today.
Obligation:	Is it my turn to dust the room?	It's not my job.
Willingness:	I may if I'm in the mood.	I don't feel like it right now.
Rights:	Who are you asking to dust the room?	You're not my boss.

Table 7. Some dispreferred second pair parts to requests (p.87)

A similar taxonomy can be offered for the dispreferred second pair part of humour, that is, for non-amusement. (This does not aim to be exhaustive. We may like to recall the list of differing factors affecting humour support given by Carrell in 5.1 above.)

Comprehension:	I don't understand.
Actor's incompetence:	The joke is badly/incorrectly told.
Ideology:	The joke offends my morals/beliefs.
Time/Place:	I can't express amusement here now (my boss is here/this is a funeral.)
Enmity:	I hate the actor.
Butt:	The joke is at my/my group's expense.
Mood:	I am not presently receptive to humour (I have a headache/ I have just received bad news.)
Status/Power:	The actor is my inferior.

Table 8. Some dispreferred second pair parts to humour

As the focus here is on the dispreferred response of non-amusement, we will start from BM's critical 59. This is an ideological response, condemning RB's 53 as sexist. JK's 61 ('You tell him') lends support to this ideological critique. (Her initial response of amusement will be considered below in the discussion on politeness phenomena.) Her ideological objections could well be twofold: doubly ideological – she objects in terms of her beliefs about women's role in society and also because she is a Thatcherite Conservative; doubly as butt – she is a woman and also a Conservative MP, both characteristics she shares with the target of 53. EM's dispreferred response could well be for some of the same reasons as JK; ideological (her views on women's social role), and

also as butt (she is a woman). (LL is seen laughing in response to 53 and so provides a *preferred* turn. She is silent for the rest of the extract.)

It needs to be remembered that in the textbook treatment of dispreferred responses the dispreferred turn is (1) delayed (2) may have delay components and (3) is accounted for. Recall this example in which all three features occur, as numbered.

- C: Um I wonder if there's any chance of seeing you tomorrow sometime (0.5)
 morning or before the seminar
 (1) (1.0)
 (2) R: Ah um (.) I doubt it
 C: Uhm huh
 (3) R: The reason is I'm seeing Elizabeth
 (Levinson 1983:309)

What happens in PI, however, is not that the respondents' utterances have these key features, but, on the contrary, it is the *actor's* speech which actually exhibits them. And at this juncture two points concerning accounts can be added. Scott and Lyman in their seminal work on accounts define an account as 'a linguistic device employed when an action is subjected to valiative enquiry' (1968:46), and Buttny sees the canonical accounts sequence as:

problematic event – blame – accounts – evaluation
 (1993:24).

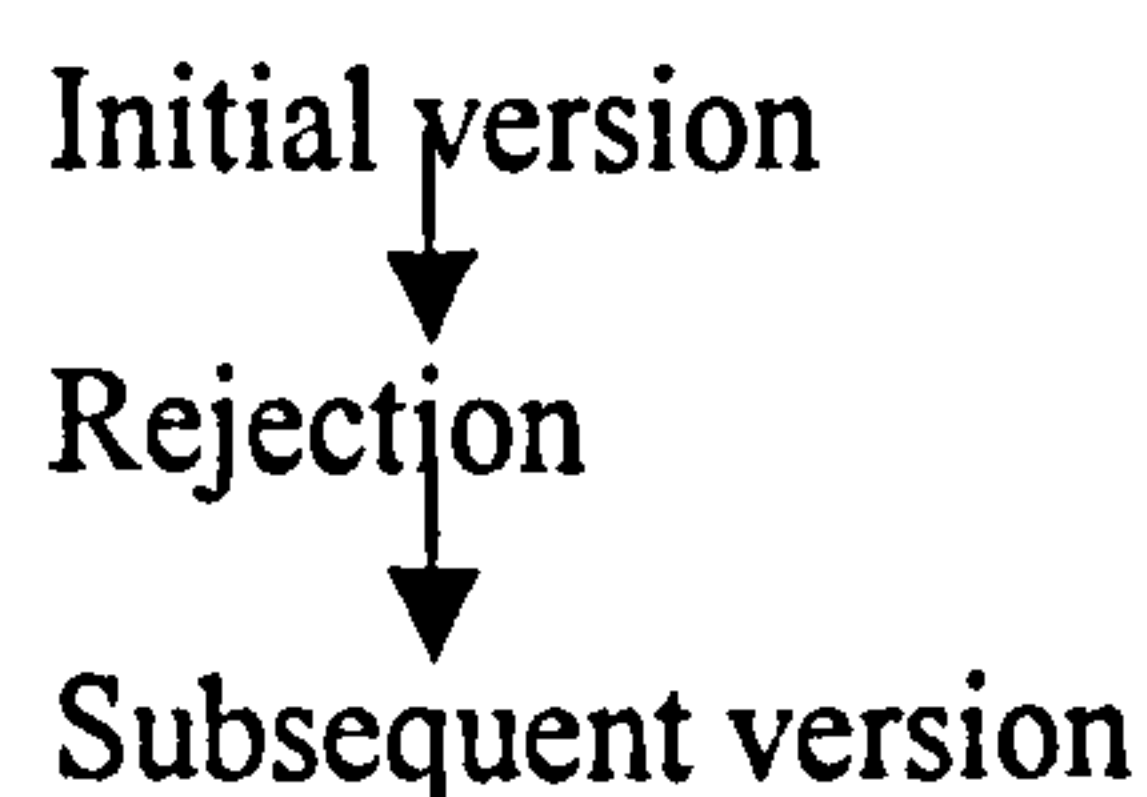
Though this is not always the case with accounts – a cursory look at the example given immediately above shows that culpability is not always a factor – this model is applicable to the situation under review here. Certainly RB's action is subjected to valiative enquiry (59), and certainly blame is apportioned (69):

- 59.BM [*Straight-faced*] Now see that to me is a sexist comment because you're=
 60.RB: =Now that to me was a joke |
 61.JK: [*To BM*] | You tell him! |
 62.BM: Yeah | Yeah but you're saying because she was strong>
 63.RB: | Now wait a minute |
 64.BM: >she had to be a man
 65.RB: No I think (.)
 66.BM: [*Knowingly*] Aaah!
 67.RB: Not because she was strong (1.5) because she was mean

68.EM: [unclear] the same! |
69.JK: [unclear] the same! | [smiling] Shame!

But here it is RB's 63 ('Now wait a minute') and 65 ('No I think (.)') which can be seen as delay components and his 60 ('Now that to me was a joke') and 67 ('Not because she was strong (1.5) because she was mean') as accounts for his action, the latter of which, note, also contains a significant delay. Although this confounds the usual conversation analytic findings on dispreferred turns, there is an explanation and this will be provided shortly. Of further interest at the moment is the way that BM, JK, and EM each in their own way reject RB's various attempts to account which leads him, the actor, to yet further accounts.

Their challenges produce from RB what Davidson (1984) calls ‘subsequent versions’. Davidson discusses such actions as invitations, offers, requests and proposals, to which we here add ‘humour’. One of the situations she describes is ‘subsequent versions after actual rejection’ (p.107), something of obvious relevance for this discussion. This can lead to a sequence such as:



(p.108)

Naturally, subsequent versions can also be rejected, as in this example.

1. A: Gee I feel like a real nerd you c'n ahl come up
2. here
3. (0.3)
4. B: Nah that's alright wil stay down he re
5. A: We've gotten
6. color TV
7. B: tch hh I know but u- we're watching the Ascent
8. 'v Man, 'hh en then the phhreview: so: y'know wil
9. miss something if we come over

(pp.108-9)

Thus, A's initial version in 1 and 2 (an invitation) is rejected in 4 and the subsequent version in 5 and 6 is also rejected in 7-9. (Note also that this exchange follows the usual

dispreferred pattern concerning delay (3), delay components (7), and account (7-9), all such features coming from the recipient of the action.)

In PI we get the following:

Initial version:	RB's 53 Joke - 'Thatcher was a man'
Rejection:	BM's 59 Criticism - 'That is sexist'
	JK's 61 Criticism - 'You tell him'
Subsequent version:	RB's 60 Account - 'That was a joke'
Subsequent rejection:	BM's 62 Criticism - '...because she was strong'
Subsequent version:	RB's 67 Account - 'No...because she was mean'
Subsequent rejection:	EM's 68 Criticism - '...the same!'
	JK's 69 Criticism - '...the same!' and Admonishment - 'Shame!'

It is at this point that RB, angry that *he* has to account to interlocutors for his action to which *they* have responded with dispreferred turns, seeks a rational justification for his joke. We shall shortly return to this sequence with help from Pomerantz but first we note that the above sequence of versions and rejections fits neatly with Pomerantz's view on the sequential consequences of pursuing responses.

If a speaker suddenly realises that what he or she had suddenly asserted is insulting or offensive to the recipient, he or she might modify the assertion in the direction of being less insulting and offensive. Part of the job would be to be convincing, to present the different position as a credible one.

(1984:162)

It has been established that RB's 'different position' is *not* seen as credible by the pursuers of an account – BM, JK, and EM.

As for RB's move away from accounting to attacking JK (70), Pomerantz has another point which is relevant here. (It is recognised that it is also possible to see RB's 70> as a *continuation* of his accounting via justification, and not as a move away from accounting.) She comments that a speaker, when meeting with a dispreferred response, can go over presumed common knowledge to see 'what, if anything, is not established and accepted as fact' (p.159). This is precisely what RB does with his questions about 'Milk-Snatcher Thatcher' through which he turns his defence into attack. That is, rather than having to continue his accounting himself, he tries to get some kind of account from one of those who have responded with a dispreferred turn. However, he has no support and his joke and accounts remain rejected. (Note that this episode is not the same type as that

discussed earlier in 8.2.2 ‘assessing competence in the details of talk’. There is a significant *sequential* difference. The former was a kind of *pre-sequence* to clear the way for further talk; this latter comes after a problem has been encountered and so is a kind of *repair*.)

There are two further features of this part of the exchange that need to be discussed - its self-reflexive nature and what Thomas (1986) would call a ‘hierarchy of obligatingness’. First, self-reflexivity.

Cicourel notes the ability of talk to ‘fold back’ on itself (in Watson, R., 1992:7). Such activity Garfinkel and Sacks call *formulating*:

A member may treat some part of the conversation as an occasion to describe that conversation, to explain it, or characterise it, or explicate. Or translate, or summarise, or furnish the gist of it, or take note of its accordance with rules, or remark on its departure from rules. That is to say, a member may use some part of the conversation as an occasion to *formulate* the conversation...

(1970:350, original emphasis)

This is precisely what happens with BM’s 59 – ‘that to me is a sexist comment’. His talk is explicitly about the talk.

Heritage and Watson (1979) see formulations as ‘deeply implicative for subsequent talk’ (p.142), and the details of the above discussion would confirm that this is indeed the case for the stretch of talk under review. BM’s metacomment in 59 explicitly marks the end of the collaborative nature of the group’s talk. Heritage and Watson further see formulations as part of an adjacency pair: formulation – decision, where the decision about the formulation can be a confirmation or a disconfirmation. A disconfirmation ‘may minimally terminate an ongoing stream of topical talk and initiate a search for a fresh basis on which concerted comprehension can be established – thereby bringing some stretch of talk “back to square one”’ (p.144). Thus RB’s disconfirmation (60) of BM’s formulation (59) does lead to talk that tries (unsuccessfully) to explicitly establish a new framework, and this in turn eventually leads to a change of microtopic (92). This all tallies perfectly with the claim made in 8.4.4 that it is at the point in the talk when RB’s 53 is challenged that the first explicit definition of what is and what is not a fit subject for

humour within the group is made. That is, it becomes necessary for the participants to lay down guidelines and this is initiated through formulations; until a 'square one' is explicitly established, the subject of the talk at this point is the talk itself.

Concerning the second point, 'obligatingness', Thomas remarks that it is not the case that in any given interaction illocution A is automatically followed by perlocution B. She suggests a hierarchy stretching from the minimally obligating, for example, phatic utterances, to the highly obligating, for example, summonses which name the addressee (1986:249). (She notes that such obligatingness differs between languages – in Russian and German, for instance, 'Thank you' is more obligating than in English.) All of this is made stronger if you include features concerning the relationship between the interlocutors, S and H: 'The size of discursial imposition is...determined by the degree of "obligatingness" + the power of S over H' (p.250). (Once again, social relations have a strong bearing on matters.)

This leads us to ask just how obligating is a joke, and what of the power relations in this interaction? It is not easy to treat these two factors separately, for the degree of obligatingness to laugh at a joke is heavily context-dependent. Not only is power an issue, but such a simple factor as others being present is also a necessary consideration. If there are only two interlocutors, the requirement for the recipient to laugh when told a joke is greater than if there are many present, as in the latter case responsibility to be amused (a politeness consideration) is distributed in proportion to the size of the audience. Here the immediate audience layer is quite small (the three other panellists and the host) and they are all physically close to one another, so for the discussants, given their collaborative indulgences up that point, there would seem to be a reasonably strong obligation to display amusement.

Power is indeed also a factor, and we have seen that in, for example, Coser's (1960) study of hospital staff meetings (1.2, 8.1), the degree of obligatingness is usually greater for those lower down the hierarchy. As for relations of our interlocutors, it was stated in 8.1 that the relations among the discussants were *formally* symmetrical, apart from the fact that BM, as host, has a certain institutional power over the guests. It is of note that what we get in response to RB's 53 is an amused response from the majority of the studio audience and his equals on the panel but an offended response from BM, the person with

institutionally more power. JK and EM do support BM's objection once it is made, but their initial response is one of (perhaps reluctant) amusement. Such equivocal responses are heavily bound up with politeness and it is to this area we now turn.

8.7

Politeness

The reversal of the usual dispreferred patterns in these responses to RB's 53 can be explained if we consider these exchanges in terms of politeness. While joking in conversation is usually considered a friendly and sociable action (Norrick 1993; Tannen 1984) here RB's 53 also causes offence and so, in the terminology of Brown and Levinson, threatens another's face and is thereby deemed impolite and thus needs to be accounted for. By delving into the relevant aspects of politeness the details of this matter will be made clearer and it will also help explain the seemingly contradictory behaviour of JK and EM, both of whose first response to 53 is amused laughter. The following key features of politeness phenomena will be looked at here: the notions of face, face threatening acts (FTAs), and strategies for doing FTAs.

As mentioned in 6.3.3, there is a case for linking preference organisation and politeness phenomena. For example, Heritage (1984a) is keen to point up the role of solidarity in preference organisation, seeing preferred format responses as supportive of social solidarity and dispreferred responses as destructive of social solidarity (p.268). Brown and Levinson are even more explicit. 'If one asks which kind of responses are preferred vs. dispreferred, in the sense of marked and unmarked respectively, a large part of the answer must lie in face considerations' (1987:38). And it worth remembering that the point was also made earlier that such considerations are culturally specific.

Brown and Levinson define face as:

The public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition

- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image of 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants

(p.61)

Also worth noting is that, '[g]iven that face consists in a set of wants satisfiable only by the actions (including the expressions of wants) of others, it will in general be to the mutual interest of two [interactants] to *maintain each other's face*' (p.60, emphasis added). (Their notion of face is derived from Goffman and the English folk term (p.61). Their notions of positive and negative are derived from Durkheim's 'positive and negative rites' (note 8, p.285).)

Corresponding to these concepts of face are notions of 'positive politeness' and 'negative politeness', where the former is solidarity based and the latter maintains social distance. Some simple examples. If A's nose is running and B gives A a tissue, this would be an act of positive politeness. If B, not wishing to embarrass A, ignored it, this would be an act of negative politeness (Brown and Levinson p.104). Or, if a superior at work, in an attempt at familiarity, suggested the reciprocal use of first name with inferiors, that would be an act of positive politeness. If he or she suggested the reciprocal use of title and last name, that would be an act of negative politeness (Holmes 2001:268). Put simply, positive politeness is approach-based, negative politeness avoidance-based. (Note that negative politeness is, despite its name, a form of politeness.)

Certain behaviours can pose problems for interlocutors' faces and these are called 'face threatening acts' (FTAs) (p.60). FTAs can threaten both positive and negative face and Brown and Levinson give a list from which the following are directly relevant to our discussion. From those that threaten the positive face of the hearer (H):

- (ii)d. divisive topics e.g. politics, race, religion, women's liberation (p.67)

In raising such matters a speaker (S) can create 'a dangerous face atmosphere' (p.67). This is what RB does (indirectly i.e. 'off record' – see below) with his 53 vis-à-vis JK and, through her, to all supporters of women's rights, such as BM and EM. Thus his joke is perceived as an FTA, an act of impoliteness, and as such, needs to be accounted for.

Acts can also threaten the speaker's own face and two from Brown and Levinson are relevant:

- (i)c. excuses (p.67)
- (ii)d. self-humiliation (p.68)

Concerning the former, 'S indicates that he had good reason to do, or fail to do, an act which H has just criticised; this may constitute in turn a criticism of H, or at least cause a confrontation between H's view of things and S's view' (p.67). The confrontation in our discussion is now familiar territory, and RB's 60 ('it was a joke') and 67 ('because she was mean') can be seen as excuses for 53. Concerning 'self-humiliation', RB's image is reconstituted from one of being an enlightened supporter of women's rights (10,12,14,16-18) to one of being a shamed sexist (59, 61, 62 etc.), a major volte-face in terms of personal image, and one which can be seen as a form of humiliation brought about by himself with his use of 53. Such self-humiliation would at least partly help explain the motivation for his angry demands of JK and his defiant comment about Madeleine Albright (90).

As for face threatening acts, there are a number of strategies for carrying them out. Reading from the left:

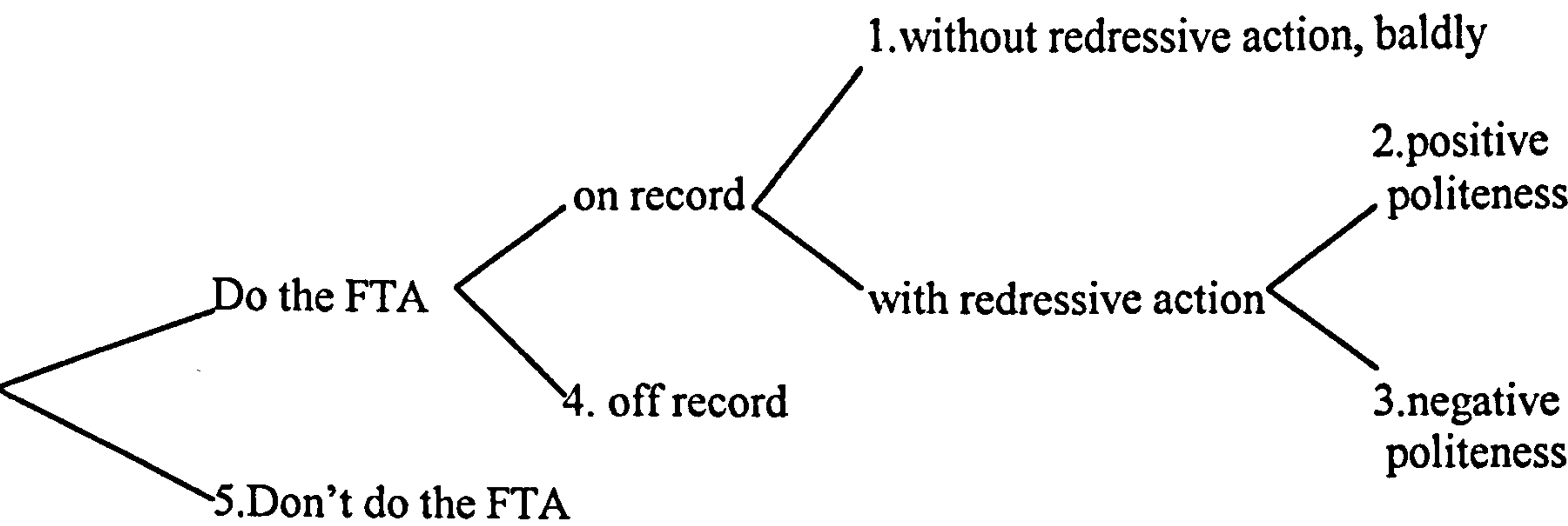


Fig. 15. Possible strategies for doing FTAs (p.69)

[Note: 'the more an act threatens S's or H's face, the more S will want to choose a high-numbered strategy; this by virtue of the fact that these strategies afford payoffs of increasingly minimised risk' (p.60)]

In the PI conversation, RB chooses '4. off record', BM '1. on record, baldly', and JK displays ambivalence but when she does choose to execute an FTA chooses 'on record with redressive action, 3. negative politeness'. These terms are now explained in further detail.

Brown and Levinson say that an off record FTA involves 'more than one unambiguously attributable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent' (p.69). They give such examples as metaplay, irony, rhetorical questions, understatement, tautologies, all kinds of hints; here, not unreasonably, jokes are added to this list. An off record strategy, they claim,

affords the S the opportunity of avoiding responsibility altogether (by claiming, if challenged, that the interpretation of x as an FTA is wrong), and simultaneously allows S to avoid actually imposing the FTA x on H, since H himself must choose to interpret x as an FTA rather than as some more trivial remark

(p.73)

(Note the resemblance here with Emerson's point concerning recipients giving a joke more weight by taking it seriously.)

This neatly summarises what RB does with his 53. His subsequent turns show him to dispute H's interpretation and to attempt to avoid responsibility. The key issue is that his 53 is interpreted not as a joke but as an FTA which, being destructive of the need to mutually maintain face, needs to be accounted for. It is BM who makes this explicitly clear.

BM's 59 is a bald on record FTA towards RB, and, in terms of expected joke sequences, is a dispreferred turn. But, as already established, BM does not account for this (the reason for this is now clear), but, on the contrary, his 59 calls for an account from RB. In such a bald FTA 'there is just one unambiguously attributable intention' (pp.68-9) which gives S the advantage that 'he can enlist public pressure against the addressee or in support of himself...he can avoid the danger of being misunderstood' (p.71). Once again this would seem to neatly fit with the occurrences in PI for BM's 59 is, unequivocally, a direct criticism of RB's 53. We can also add here that BM's direct confrontational response can be seen as coming from his position as host and also, gender difference theorists would argue, it can be seen as a more *male* response.

Although JK is a critic of RB's 53 her position is actually ambivalent, as her initial response is one of amused laughter, that is, a preferred turn. But once BM utters his 59 in criticism she lends support against RB. This seeming contradiction can, however, be explained in terms of politeness strategies. Her initial laughter (which takes place on a collaborative floor, recall), which is an act of appreciation, would seem to be addressing RB's positive face – she does not immediately receive 53 as an FTA but as another joke in what has been a long series of jokes. (She may also be addressing her own face by letting it pass as a joke rather than taking offence (Zajdman 1995:335).) But even then her accompanying utterance in 58 ('The great conspiracy theory!') shows she does not completely accept the remark as a joke, is aware that it also contains some kind of threat, and that she is prepared to counter it, however mildly. Once BM utters his bald on record counter FTA (59) she is prepared to be more explicit in her disregard for the comment (61 'You tell him'), and eventually demonstrates an assertive criticism (69 'Shame!') in response to RB's attempted explanation. Whereas BM was bald on record, a low-numbered (1) and therefore more threatening strategy, JK is on record with redressive action (negative politeness), a higher-numbered (3) and so less threatening strategy. Brown and Levinson note that such an FTA can consist of, among other things, 'attention to very restricted aspects of H's self-image' and also 'safety mechanisms' (p.70). The aspect of RB's self-image she attends to is that of feminist with her admonishment of 'Shame!'. In all her FTA utterances she uses softening mechanisms: reference to a general theory that is not directly attributable to RB (58), use of third person (61), and smiling (69). Once more we might like to use Fishman's (1978) term of 'shitwork' to describe such female behaviour in cross-sex conversations (when compared to BM's).

It is not clear from the little we see and hear of EM's response to be sure what type of politeness strategies she employs. Her comment in 68 is spoken simultaneously with JK's 69, and has an intonation of complaint. (Once again we should note the spatial arrangements: their contiguous seating positions across the table from RB assist them in their joint attack and also lend it more dramatic force.) At that precise point the camera is on RB but switches to a shot of both EM and JK immediately after 68/9 and we see EM smiling. Thus there is weak evidence that she may, like JK, be adopting strategy (3). It is of note, however, that she seizes on RB's comment about Madeleine Albright (90) to

move the interaction away from the ongoing conflict, which may be seen as another act of negative politeness.

Thus we can see how politeness phenomena inform this part of the exchange. They help explain why it is the actor, RB, who has to give the account when the recipients BM, JK, and EM respond with dispreferred turns rather than the recipients themselves, as is usually the case. They also help explain the seemingly contradictory behaviour of JK and EM, both of whom respond initially with the preferred turn of amused laughter, but who then utter a series of dispreferred turns criticising RB.

It also needs to be pointed out that the reversal of the usual patterns for dispreferred turns discussed here is not a case of the exception that proves the rule, as a look at another example will show. The following exchange comes from the trial in which Neil Hamilton, a former Tory MP, accused Mohamed Al Fayed of libel over the latter's allegations that the former had taken bribes to ask certain questions in the House of Commons. At this point Hamilton himself (NH) is in the witness box and is being cross-examined by Al Fayed's counsel (FC). The extract comes from a television dramatisation of the trial's transcripts.

- 1.FC: Sir Gordon Downey found that your trip to the Ritz was part and parcel of a
2. a business relationship.
- 3.NH: Sir Gordon Downey did, but I would not pay too much attention to that if I
4. were you.
- 5.FC: Do you avoid paying too much attention to anything you find disagreeable?
- 6.NH: No, I am paying close attention to you, Mr Carman. [*General laughter*]
- 7.FC: I'm sorry you find the question disagreeable, or me, but you understand I
8. have a professional duty to put important matters to you.
- 9.NH: That was a joke, by the way, I do not mean it.
- 10.FC: A rather bad joke. But the case is about corruption in politics we allege.
- 11.NH: Yes.
- 12.FC: And serious to you.
- 13.NH: Oh, I can assure you, Mr Carman, the seriousness of this is not lost on me.
- 14.FC: Serious to Mr Al Fayed and to the witnesses who have given evidence on his
15. behalf, who have been accused of perjury. You understand that?
- 16.NH: It certainly is. But I can assure you that the risks I have had to endure for the
17. last five years on account of that are far greater.

(Hamilton 2000)

Once again an utterance offered as a joke (6) causes laughter (6) but also offends, and when non-amusement is expressed (7,10, 12) i.e. a dispreferred response is given, it is the

actor and not the recipient who accounts (NH's 9,13,16), an acceptance of the act as an FTA.

Nor should such a reversal be seen as the preserve of humorous exchanges. It is not difficult to imagine other actions which could meet similar responses. For example, A offers B assistance with a relatively simple task and B takes offence: 'How dare you assume I am unable to etc.', to which A accounts: 'I was only trying to be helpful etc.'. If this is the case, this once more shows the power of the audience in determining meaning, and would also call for a revision of previous conceptions of preference organisation to take such factors into account. For example, if recipient response really can be so powerful in interactions that it can override speaker intention, then it can be problematic for analysts to *a priori* name certain speech acts which are presumed to have a predictable set of possible preferred/dispreferred responses. These findings also underline a point made earlier (6.3.3) that preference organisation, though describable as a formal structural feature, is also shaped by subjective and cultural considerations.

In a broader pragmatic framework, these findings would also lend some support to Leech's assertion that Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP), in which speaker's intentions are of primary significance, and on which Brown and Levinson avowedly base their politeness model, is not always able to explain problems interlocutors encounter. Leech (1983) suggests a Politeness Principle to complement the CP to help account for such exchanges as the following:

A: We'll all miss Bill and Agatha, won't we?

B: Well, we'll all miss BILL.

(p.80)

Here B fails to meet the maxim of quantity, as when asked to confirm A's opinion he only confirms part of it, the implicature being that they will not miss Agatha. Leech notes that had B added 'but not Agatha', thereby conforming to the maxim of quantity, the utterance would remain equally true, relevant, and clear. So why is this indirect form used? 'Our conclusion is that B could have been more informative but at the cost of being more impolite to a third party: that B therefore suppressed the desired information in order to uphold the politeness principle' (p.81).

Brown and Levinson refute such criticisms of the CP, saying there is no need for yet more maxims to cover every pattern of language use. But in their own defence against the need for a Politeness Principle, they do seem to concede that the CP alone is not always enough: 'In our model...it is the mutual awareness of "face" sensitivity, and the kinds of means-ends reasoning this induces, that *together with the CP* allows for implicatures of politeness' (p.5, emphasis added).

We can finish by coming back to the utterance that was offered as a joke: 'But Margaret Thatcher really in the end turned out to be a man'. This will now be considered in terms of its linguistic make-up as a joke, and also in terms of the earlier mentioned (6.1) strong trace model of humour comprehension, which, when coupled with Carrell's 'humor competence' (5.1), will reveal its social significance

In 4.2 it was stated that jokes have two stages, the preparation stage and a culmination, that is, a set-up and a punch line. If we view RB's 53 as a joke we see that the preparation is simply the mere mentioning of Margaret Thatcher, and the punch line is that she turned out to be a man. Or, possibly, the preparation is 'Margaret Thatcher turned out to be...' and against most expectations this is completed with the culmination 'man'. That is, formally it can be seen as a joke.

If we recall, the strong trace model states that the comprehension of verbal jokes involves not just two meanings, M1 and M2, where the latter simply replaces the former, but that full comprehension of verbal humour is dialectical, and involves a third element M3, in which M1 and M2 are synthesised in a higher unity. That is, the humorous meaning M2 is explicitly understood and established but the other meaning M1 is not wholly excluded, remaining as a strong trace with M2 within M3. Now that we have looked in some details at RB's 53 it is apparent that no matter how it was intended (or how RB *claims* he intended it), this utterance was received both as a joke (majority audience response) and as an insult (BM's response). Some recipients, as we saw, had an ambivalent response (JK and EM). All of this, it is argued here, would seem to add support to the strong trace model. Let us place that utterance within the framework of the model.

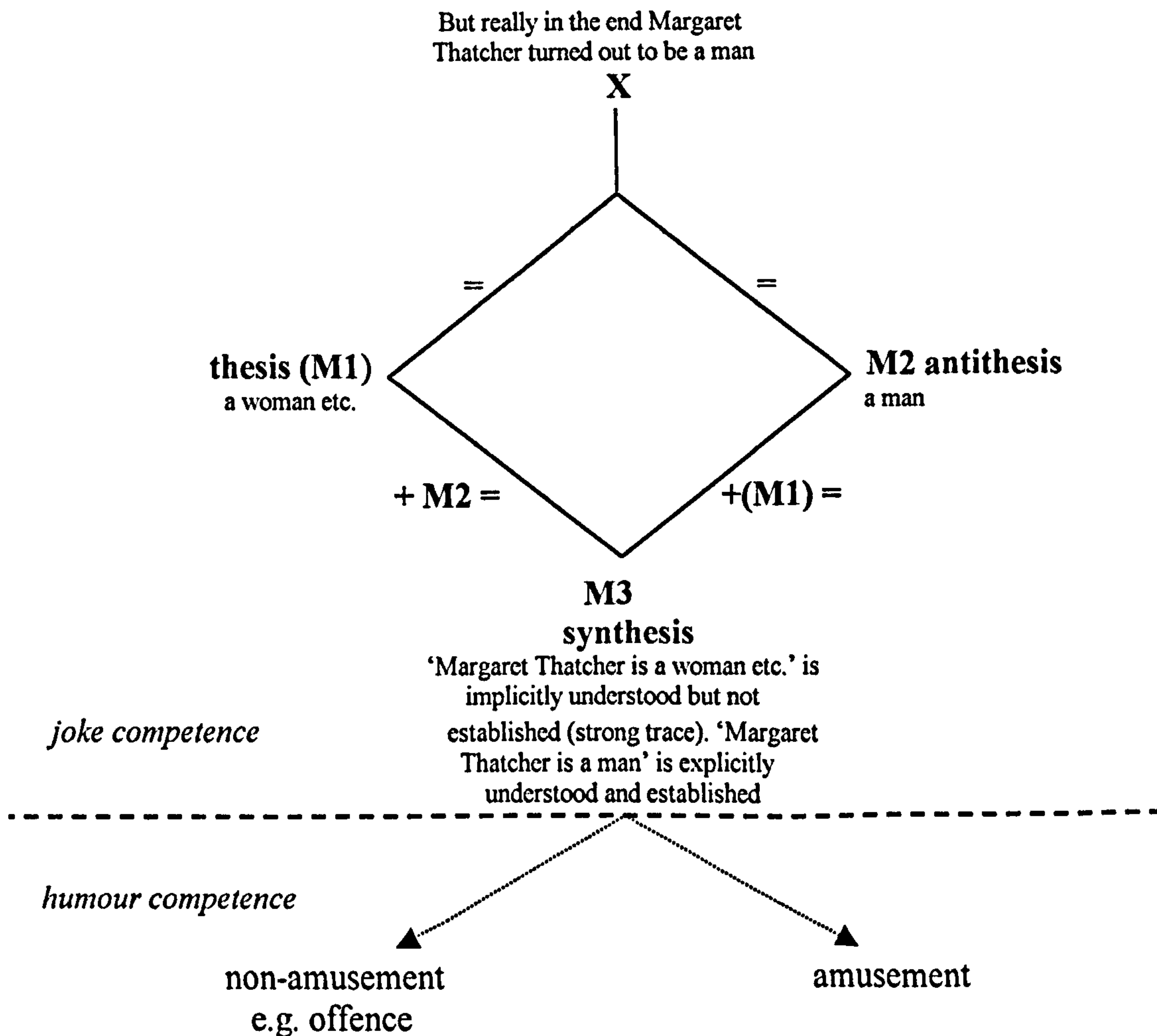


Fig.16. Cognitive and social aspects of RB's utterance.

In this diagram M1, the thesis, is given as 'woman'. This is not the only possible completion of the syntagm which begins 'But really in the end Margaret Thatcher turned out to be...'. This paradigmatic slot could be filled by any of a host of noun, verb or adjective phrases: 'tired', 'stupid', 'a wet', 'a dictator', 'living on borrowed time', 'a-coming round the mountain' etc. However, as the antithesis M2 is 'a man', it is not inappropriate to insert a similarly gender-based noun phrase in the slot, so long as it is one which contrasts with M2. As it is a fact that Margaret Thatcher is a woman, this choice is certainly one that fulfils most normal expectations. To note that it is just one of many other possibilities it is actually given as 'a woman etc.'.

The model works as it did for the miser joke – here in the full joke comprehension we have M1 being implicitly understood but it is M2 that is explicitly understood and established. Nevertheless, a strong trace of M1 remains in the synthesis M3. It is again claimed here that anyone who comprehends this utterance as a joke, or understands that it

is intended as a joke or that it has the form of a joke, understands M3. However, if we recall Carrell's distinction between 'joke competence' and 'humour competence', such understanding is not the same as *appreciating* the joke. For Carrell, the former is the 'ability of the native speaker...to recognise a text or a joke without determining whether or not the text is funny' and the latter is the ability to then 'pass judgement on the humorness of a specific text' (1997:174).

If we apply Carrell's notions to the strong trace model (in Fig.16 the distinction between the competences is shown as a horizontal dotted line) we find that M3 can be appreciated with amusement or it can fail to elicit an amused response, for example, it can cause offence. The fact that this is possible is seen here as support for the strong trace model as if there were no strong trace, the recipient would quite simply have no grounds for complaint, would have no choice but to accept that Thatcher was a man or behaved like a man. As we have seen, there were such grounds and they provided the platform for a forceful criticism of the utterance.

CONCLUSION

As humour is such a complex cultural phenomenon it demands an outlook that is wide and inclusive. This often leads to studies of the subject feeling almost obliged to be definitive and to offer all-encompassing conclusions. This is a dilemma I hope I have avoided in this study. Though I have taken a broad view of (verbal) humour, I have no wish to extrapolate my discoveries into the realms of the universal. Thus this work has used a wide variety of (Western) humorous material to illustrate the relevant linguistic and social points, drawing on work from stand-up comedians, situation comedies, and sketch shows from the media of radio, television and film. But the main analysis has focused in great depth on just one particular chat show excerpt, and in particular on just one thirteen-word utterance from that excerpt. In order to establish the framework within which to place this utterance much ground has been covered.

A start was made by surveying the major theories of humour to see the diversity of ideas which various writers claim underlie humour. Though no single one was found to satisfactorily explain all humour, it is difficult to see how some aspect of incongruity can be excluded from humorous occurrences, and so more attention was given to this. Those that would seek to monopolise explanations – such as Gruner with his all-conquering claims for Superiority, and Matte with his hegemonic reformulation of Freud's ideas – were given less attention, as one thing that became clear was how the theories, when looked at in detail, leak into one another, and none stands supreme.

The basic and important factor of performance space was not simply taken as a given nor sketched in mechanically but was thoroughly delved into in order to identify the relevance of its features to utterance. It is evident that from its origin onwards its major constituent has been the formalised division between performer and audience and the way this affects interaction between the two. Both have learned cultural roles and these are played out in a complex interdependent relationship. A crucial part of this is that performance utterances are granted a certain licence yet at the same time are not beyond

the bounds of social responsibility. This is primarily because the audience is no mere passive receptacle but is actively engaged in the making of meaning.

This is particularly the case in comedic performances, where the audience is used directly as a resource, particularly by stand-up comedians. It was also noted, however, that comic figures are not simply makers of mirth but they can also have a darker side. This is particularly noticeable in the nature of their performative licence, which is a licence to transgress. It was seen how in most if not all cultures such figures openly exhibit taboo behaviour in speech and/or deed. Such licence has traditionally found its visible expression in distinct costumes, which have allowed immediate identification of the comic figure. Thus it was possible to make direct visual connections between comic figures across large expanses of time and space. Another significant distinction from other performers was found to be that whereas the actor who plays, for example, Hamlet is himself off stage, the clear distinction between the comedic performer's on-stage identity and off-stage identity is not always apparent. This was noticeable in figures ranging from the buffoons of ancient Greece, through the medieval court jesters, to present-day stand-up comedians. This clearly can raise questions of personal responsibility.

An important aspect of the comic figure's development in recent history, certainly in the English-speaking world, is his/her greater reliance on linguistic performance rather than on physical or musical skills. It was shown that humorous discourse, like any other type of discourse, exploits all available linguistic resources to do its work, but must ensure that it uses them to create a semantic content clearly cued for humorous interpretation. This it does through the deliberate creation of multiple meanings. It was also demonstrated that this does not simply involve linguistic choices but, if so desired, ideological choices also. Thus, according to the intent of the comedian, money can be taken out of the bank for a holiday by a miser, a Scotsman, a Jew, or a yid.

Being thus marked means that humour necessarily finds a reception which fluctuates from one audience to the next, a factor of great relevance to this study. It was thus shown that purely cognitive models of humour competence are insufficient for explaining divergent interpretations of the same material. Any working model of humour competence must be one which shows this *differential* competence, a competence that is grounded in *social* differences. This is because, as has been underlined throughout this

work, humour is not merely formal play or language in a dialogue with itself (though such elements can be present), but is also a form of social communication and is fraught with all the complexities and contradictions that entails. This ambivalence of humour is something that is not confined to the audience but is also manifested in how comic figures themselves see their own licence and also how academic studies of the subject – such as this – can exhibit significant disagreement over what the scope of study should be.

To adequately tackle humour in action a pragmatic approach is needed in order to get access to the contextual specifics. Some assistance was afforded by the staple ideas of speech act theory, particularly in its pointing up of indirectness. However, these notions were found wanting when it came to understanding utterances in sequence in real conversation. In this regard, some of the analytic tools of conversation analysis were found to be extremely useful. But even they were found to focus primarily on formal structures and did not offer insights into participants' motivations. Further, disagreement was expressed with the stronger CA claims of universality concerning some of their ideas of how talk is organised. Thus, further assistance was drawn from the ethnography of speaking with its concerns for local cultural conditions and mores. (It seems clear that if intention is such an integral part of communication, then it is of no small import to try to get closer to what can drive intentions.) As a key feature of the disputed utterance was its sexism, a survey of the relevant aspects of gender was undertaken, which included the important points of gender identities and representations, gender and language use, and gender and humour. Thus equipped, a detailed analysis of the excerpt from the chat show was carried out and, it is believed, much of what went on in that interaction was revealed as all the foregoing groundwork started to come together.

The participants were situated in their performance space, a space designed to encourage their cooperation. Their highly collaborative talk was used to discuss a serious topic in a humorous manner not only for one another's benefit but, significantly, for an overhearing audience whom they were obliged to entertain. Their conversational work was an undoubted source of pleasure for themselves, the studio audience and the broadcast audience sitting at home. It was not until one of the participants spoke an utterance that gave rise to conflicting interpretations – was this a joke or an insult? – that collaboration stopped and it became possible for individual responsibility to be clearly assigned. It was

as the details of this conflict unfolded that the relevance of much that had gone before – the nature of humour, performative licence, transgression, ideological language choice, differential competence, gender positions, the importance of the immediate contextual elements – shone through.

It was found that the utterance could be interpreted simply as a joke or simply as an insult (or as a joking insult or an insulting joke) and this highlighted certain important points. One, the *indeterminacy* of illocutions, particularly those, like jokes, which are designed to display such a feature, and, two, that humour competence, being grounded in the social world of motivated beings, is necessarily *differential*. Further, language use, whether direct or indirect, is not without certain social and political consequences and the significance of the distribution of power became apparent when it was shown that whatever the utterer's intentions, he was adjudged to be socially responsible for his actions by the rest of the discussants despite the utterance giving pleasure to most of the studio audience.

Of particular interest in the turns taken in this dispute were the findings concerning preference organisation. The findings here demonstrated that responses are not as predictable as CA theory suggests, and further, that preference organisation is more subjective than CA theory allows. It is not always the case that those offering a dispreferred response are obliged to account for such. This incident showed it was actually the speaker and not the hearers who was forced to explain his actions. Strong connections were made with politeness phenomena and some support was found (*contra* Grice, and Brown and Levinson's defence of Grice) for Leech's Politeness Principle. This once more underscores the subjective elements of preference organisation. Whether these factors are effects solely of humour, with its inherent incongruities, is a matter to be settled not by speculation here but by further empirical research of speech events in non-humorous contexts. Finally, the disputed utterance was reviewed formally and functionally by applying the strong trace model of humour comprehension in conjunction with Carrell's joke competence/humour competence model, and this was seen once again to emphasise the social nature of humour.

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APPENDIX I

- 1.BM: OK erm (1.0) I wanna I'd like to talk a little bit about er sex in this country.
- 2.EM: We like that.
- 3.BM: Yeah [*Panel laugh*] | Because |
- 4.RB: | Just talking | about it.
- 5.BM: Because I'm confused (0.5) and we have three women on the panel today
6. | and you [*to RB*] are |
- 7.RB: | Speak for yourself!
- 8.BM: I was gonna say you are | a very |
- 9.RB: | Quite a gal! | [*General laughter*]
- 10.BM: [*Laughing*] Quite a gal | always an | outspoken er (0.5) of the cause of>
- 11.RB: | I'm a queer gal |
- 12.BM: >feminism | You're much er | women would say you're much more>
- 13.RB: | Yes I am I'm |
- 14.BM: > enlightened than I am
15. (0.5)
- 16.RB: About (0.5) | women's rights |
- 17.BM: | Well (.) | Yes
- 18.RB: OK
- 19.BM: OK. [*To audience, defeated*] Whipped! Anyway (.) [*General laughter*]
- 20.RB: Feels good!
- 21.BM: I don't understand. In this country like on page three of the newspaper (0.5)
22. well you know what I'm saying [*Looking around at panel and studio audience*]
23. (0.5) they have a naked woman | [*unclear*] | we would never do (0.5) in America>
- 24.EM: | Right |
- 25.JK: [*Nodding*] | Mm-mm |
- 26.BM: > in a newspaper
- 27.RB: Page four in America
- 28.BM: No:: come on. You'd have to get Hustler or something | to see | what they>
- 29.RB: | Right |
- 30.EM: | Right |
- 31.BM: >show in the newspaper. And yet (0.5) you (0.5) had Margaret Thatcher
32. and we would (1.0) [*Audience begin tittering*] we've never come
- 33.JK: Come close | you've never come close |
- 34.EM: [*Smiling*] | I don't know how you can | equate the two
- 35.LL: She was never on page three! | Ever! |
- 36.BM: | No |
- 37.EM: I can vouch for that.
- 38.LL: | Yes |
- 39.BM: | Right |
- 40.RB: No | they [*unclear*] |
- 41.EM: | Certainly not | naked anyway.
- 42.BM: I'm saying (0.5)
- 43.RB: No you (.) they objectify women and yet they elect a woman as their leader
- 44.BM: | Exa-thank you |
- 45.EM: | Right |
- 46.RB: How do (0.5) | you explain that |
- 47.BM: | Yes right. | Explain that!
- 48.EM: | How do you explain that |
49. (1.0)
- 50.JK: We appreciate all women's talents. [*Panel laugh*] As great political leaders

51: | and as other | things. I mean what's wrong | with that?

52.EM: | There you go |

53.RB: | But Margaret Thatcher really

54. in the end turned out to be (1.0) a man, didn't she? [*Smiles wryly, shrugs*

55. *shoulders and lifts hands at sides, palms upwards. General laughter and some*

56. *applause. RB continues in sing song voice*] I don't know if she qualifies
[General

57. *laughter continues*]

58.JK: [*Laughing*] The great conspiracy theory!

59.BM [*Straight-faced*] Now see that to me is a sexist comment because you're=

60.RB: =Now that to | me was a joke |

61.JK: [*To BM*] | You tell him! |

62.BM: Yeah | Yeah but you're saying because she was strong>

63.RB: | Now wait a minute |

64.BM: >she had to be a man

65.RB: No I think (.)

66.BM: [*Knowingly*] Aaah!

67.RB: Not because she was strong (1.0) because she was mean

68.EM: | [*unclear*] |

69.JK: | [*unclear*] the same! | [*smiling*] Shame!

70.RB: [*Now animated*] Milk (0.5) Snatcher Thatcher! Wasn't that her name?

71 [*Leaning forward across the table towards JK and stabbing the air with*

72. *pointed index finger*] Didn't she take money from children's milk fund in

73. Amer- in England? (1.5) Didn't she!! [*Pounding the table in mock anger*]

74. Answer my question! [*General laughter*]

75. (1.0)

76.JK: No I plead the fifth | amendment | on that one (.) but erm

77.RB: | Didn't she? | Didn't she? | Yes or no?

78..BM: | No she tried

79. to stop=

80.RB: [*Leaning towards BM with outstretched arm*] =Excuse me Bill! [*General*

81. *laughter. RB points to JK*] Yes or no? Did they call her Milk-Snatcher

82. Thatcher?

83.JK: [*Smiling*] There might have been a time | when that was the case |

84.RB: | Ah! OK. Thank you |

85.BM: But what | she tried to do |

86.JK: | But you know | she moved on from there | she's | a great | leader |>

87.RB: | Yeah | great |

88.BM: | Yeah she was |

89.JK: | >she you know | transformed this country | she was fantastic

90.RB: | Madeleine Allbright is Margaret

91. Thatcher | in drag

92.EM: | Madeleine Allbright [*unclear*] we have lot lot more instances of

93. women being I think powerful within politics in America than you do in

94. England for example. Margaret Thatcher was an exception (0.5) but I think

95. there are more women...