Stand up comedy and the multi-dimensional character of performance

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Additional Information:

- A Doctoral Thesis. Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University.

Metadata Record: [https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/7271](https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/7271)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the multi-dimensional nature of talk surrounding the social phenomenon of performing. Informed by the conversational interview discussions of those closely involved with stand up comedy, the five primary discursive dimensions are considered. These dimensions have been labelled 'Art and Occupation', 'Self and Persona', 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed', 'Talent and Effort', and 'Truth and Believability'. Collectively these dimensions contribute to our understanding of performing, although this understanding is not exclusive to the performers and performance of the stand up comedy environment. The concerns of the particular participants are not necessarily regarded as fundamentally different from our own as we exist as performers in the performance of our own lives.

The five dimensions are not only similar in that they each contribute to our understanding of performers and performance, they are also similarly dyadic in nature, being constructed around the juxtaposition of two ostensibly oppositional concepts, as suggested by the labels given to them. Though participants do not necessarily treat all of them as straightforwardly oppositional, each dimension displays a certain tension between the poles.

The theoretical conception informing this work has developed in two ways: ethnographically, as the result of working with interview data, and through a close analysis of other pre-existing theoretical conceptions around the issues of knowledge, ideology and discourse. Specifically, five theoretical approaches are considered: Mannheimian sociology of knowledge; Foucauldian discourses; social representation theory; interpretative repertoires; and ideological dilemmas. It was found that these approaches divide (roughly) into group consensus theories and dilemmatic theories. The latter group was found to be more pertinent for the analysis of the material here. Nevertheless, neither dilemmatic theory alone, nor a simple combination of the two, did justice to the specifics under consideration. Thus, this thesis remains eclectic in terms of its theoretical underpinnings.

The tensions and oppositions that are evident in the talk around stand up comedy are clear indications of equivalent tensions inherent in performance, and the practice of performers, more generally. Indeed, it would appear that performing of all kinds is intrinsically paradoxical. Thus the results presented here have resonance and relevance beyond the world of stand up comedy alone.
Despite the presentation of an acknowledgement section at the beginning of a piece of work, it is customary to write this part at some point towards the completion of it. And this makes eminent sense. When I began this undertaking it would have been impossible to envisage the contribution that others would make. However, having finally completed the thesis, I am now in a position to acknowledge, and thank, those who have essentially propped me up for the last five years.

Mum and Dad. The thing I most want to thank you for is the unceasing sense of safety you give me. I would not have dared to try the things I have without the knowledge that there are two wonderful people always cheering for me, always loving me, and always there for me. I don’t think there can be any better platform on which to build a life... pounds, provisions and pot-plants also appreciated.

My friends, especially Rebekah, John, Cath, Carsten, Vicky, Pete and Neil. Thank you for endlessly listening, laughing and lounging, and for making me feel I must be doing something right. Without you the days would be pointless.

Malcolm. Thank you for getting me into this (I think!), for your eternal optimism and for, ostensibly at least, believing that I could make this work.

And Andy. Thank you for all the good stuff and for putting up with the bad stuff, despite the terrible stuff.
For Uncle John and Uncle Keith whose humour will be sadly missed, and lovingly remembered...
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE GENERAL IDEA

Talking about familiar phenomena would appear to be a straightforward task and, indeed, it often is. However, if we take a closer look at talk of this nature, ordinary talk, we may be surprised at the range of different ways it is possible to talk about the same thing, we may be surprised by the multi-dimensional nature of talk surrounding the most common sense, or every day, phenomena. Indeed, it is often the existence of these multiple concerns that forms the backbone of a prolonged discussion. After all, a perfectly straightforward discussion of any topic is likely to be concluded far sooner than one containing numerous contributory aspects. It is also plausible to suggest that it is the very familiarity of a topic that allows these multitudinous dimensions to come to the fore, be discursively examined and, on some level, whether conclusively or otherwise, be attended to. This thesis endeavours to illustrate the way in which the discussion of a relatively common phenomenon is abundant with multiple, interconnected, discursive dimensions.

The phenomenon to which this thesis attends is that of performing and, as such, we are interested in both performers and performance. This phenomenon has been studied within the context of stand up comedy, the performers under discussion being stand up comics, and the performances under discussion being stand up comedy routines. However, performers and performance concerns cannot be considered the sole province of those in this particular type of entertainment business, indeed it is not beyond the bounds of rationality to suggest that social interaction of any kind involves practical concerns of this nature. As we progress it will become apparent that the concerns of the research participants (agents and managers of stand up comics, teachers and judges of
stand up comedy, and stand up comics themselves) are not so different from our own as we exist as performers in the performance of our own lives.

The idea of a discursive dimension is one that will become evident as this work progresses but, for the moment, the notion of a 'dimension' shall refer to a topic or issue which repeatedly asserts itself as a prominent discursive concern for participants during the discussion of a particular phenomenon. As far as the phenomenon of performing is concerned, as discussed by the participants in this study, there are five conceptual, abstract and suppositional dimensions under the analytic spotlight.

Alphabetically, for want of any other organising principle, the dimensions under discussion herein are: Art and Occupation; Self and Persona; Spontaneous and Rehearsed; Talent and Effort; and Truth and Believability. The labels applied to these dimensions serve to alert the reader to a whole range of considerations and should be regarded as signposts rather than axiomatically significant identifications. As this text progresses the set of concerns relevant to each dimensions will evolve and develop and thus each title will come to stand in for a growing number of data-based issues. However, the two title components of each dimension's heading are locutions found within the data and, furthermore, they provide an immediate indication that there exists some kind of tension inherent in each particular dimension. As such they are not entirely arbitrary labelling choices.

For some readers the fact that this thesis details five dimensions rather than any other number, and names those dimensions as it does, rather than in any other way, may suggest that this enumeration is somehow exhaustive and irrefutable. However, the very nature of these dimensions (conceptual, abstract, suppositional) necessarily renders them open to interpretation. As such, their conceptualisation must be regarded as a particular interpretation. That is not to
say that these dimensions do not warrant serious consideration, rather that they do.

The five dimensions have a number of things in common, not least their persistent and repeated occurrence within the data which, for the analyst, translates into a clamour for analytical attention. They arise as concerns for the participants, with and without prompting from the interview schedule, and as such may be considered as in some way significant to those located within this specific environment. Nevertheless, their social location ought not be considered a feature which necessarily precludes their relevance for wider society and the issue of social consensus with regards to these themes is something that this work treats as a fundamental concern.

The primary feature shared by the five dimensions, aside from their existence as dimensions in the general discussion of performers and performance, is a dyadic nature, that is to say that each of these discursive formulations is constructed around an often uneasy juxtaposition of two ostensibly incompatible components, as indicated by the labels applied to them. The negotiation of these contrary elements by the participants provides a further analytical focus.

1.2 THE THESIS AS A COLLECTION OF CHAPTERS

If you are the sort of reader who prefers not to have any idea of what is coming next in the text you are reading then you might like to abandon the rest of this chapter and turn to the start of Chapter Two immediately. If, however, you would prefer to have an overview of the complete thesis almost before you begin then read on.
Chapter One (this chapter) establishes the general project of this work, grounding the reader in the fundamental concerns inherent in the thesis, and provides an overview of the chapters that are to follow.

Collectively, Chapters Two, Three and Four may be considered to provide the reader with a largely chronological account of the key stages in the development of this project. Chapter Two examines the exploratory methods which enabled the initial development, and established the primary purport, of this work. The incipient part of the research process followed a grounded theory-type approach as the means of identifying, contacting and interviewing the participants. Once the data had been collected this approach, coupled with an attention to discursive concerns, also provided the means through which to carry out an initial assessment of that data. It is contended that this early grounded approach to the data was fundamentally instrumental in setting up the type of analysis that followed, thus serving as a necessary precondition for the type of discussion found in the proceeding analytical chapters.

Chapter Three reviews significant literature and provides a theoretical orientation for this work with regards to how the repeated existence of a number of (discursive and dyadic) approaches to the same phenomenon could be considered. In turn, we will consider Mannheimian sociology of knowledge; Foucauldian discourses; social representations theory; interpretative repertoires; and ideological dilemmas. These five theoretical perspectives will subsequently inform the analytic process put into practice. While each of these perspectives presents an alternative possibility for the analysis of the five dimensions none shall be drawn on in their entirety, although each shall make their contribution. Therefore, the data analysis within this research may be considered an eclectic approach to the recurrent concerns of the participants.
Chapter Four examines the methods applied during the detailed process of data analysis. This chapter also considers the reasons behind the decision not to use discourse analysis as a complete methodological approach, and the relationship between the type of data analysis employed here and the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter Three.

Chapters Five through Nine concern the most pressing discursive concerns of the participants with regards to the content of the data. Respectively, these five chapters attend to the thematic dimensions in the discussion of performers and performance labelled as 'Art and Occupation'; 'Self and Persona'; 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed'; 'Talent and Effort'; and 'Truth and Believability', providing the reader with a clear and detailed impression of the character of each dimension. Each chapter attends to both the here and now aspects of these discursive instances and to how these instances may have relevance for a consideration of wider society in general.

Each of these five chapters begins with a consideration of the particular set of concerns as a dimension of the meta-level theme of performing. Data extracts relevant to, and constructive of, this dimension are then examined. In doing so, the phenomenon of performing is considered as negotiated by the participants. The particular dimension is also discussed with regards to its relevance for those involved with stand up comedy, and its connection to the other dimensions made known. The existence of the dimension is considered in terms of the perspectives presented in Chapter Three and, as such, its dyadic nature becomes a focus. Most importantly, issues of social cohesion, ideology and resources, and cultural dilemma are deliberated with regard to the status of the dimension as more widely relevant outside the realm of stand up comedy. This approach ensures that the dimensions maintain their status as relevant to wider society rather than the impression being given that they are merely the province of stand up comics and academics.
Chapter Ten, a discursive and conclusional chapter, deliberates over the type of performer and performance that the five dimensions have relevance for outside the stand up comedy environment. The dimensions are considered as a collection, or group: firstly, in terms of the different, yet complementary, aspects of performing they attend to; secondly, in terms of that which they have in common, with particular reference to the treatment they receive in the data; and thirdly, in terms of how the five dimensions collectively create two distinct constellations of value. The significance of the five dyadic dimensions is also considered with regards to the creation of the thesis itself.

Finally, the success of this multi-dimensional approach to the study of social phenomena is deliberated and extended into a consideration of potential further research. As a whole, the thesis contributes to our understanding of the inherently paradoxical nature of performing, it considers the multi-dimensional nature of this phenomenon, as presented by the participants, and draws our attention to the way these dimensions are dealt with by members of our society at large.
2.1 Project Conceptualisation

Chapter Two and Chapter Four attend to the methods employed for the purposes of this thesis and, between them, serve to provide the reader with a comprehensive and largely chronological account of the development of the project as a whole. This chapter takes as its focus the primary research stages, from initial conceptualisation and literature search, through the development of an empirical approach and interview schedule, to the preliminary analytical steps and early findings. This chapter ends at the point of realisation that a further literature search had become a necessity. Chapter Four continues the methodological chronicle, focusing on the detailed data analysis, after the literature these initial stages led to has been presented in Chapter Three.

The impetus behind this project may be considered a love of stand up comedy. There is something quite remarkable about being an audience member at a stand up comedy performance. Something remarkable in the phenomenon of a great many people who have never met, and may never meet, laughing together at the verbal antics of a lone performer who simply talks. Something remarkable in the feeling of well-being initiated by the experience of sitting with strangers, listening to and watching another stranger say funny things.

As writers are encouraged to 'write about what you know', so researchers might be encouraged to 'research what you are interested in', if only for the single reason that this may help maintain their interest over what may become a lengthy period of time. This would be my advice. And I took it.
2.2 Initial Literature Review

A research topic choice sensibly necessitates a familiarisation with the pre-existing literature concerned with the topic, and the particular choice of stand up comedy directed the research to literature pertaining to comedy and humour in general, and entertainment comedy in particular (see Comedy Bibliography). The ubiquitous nature of both humour and comedy within almost every social environment is reflected in the literature, in that they have been examined from a multitude of perspectives and considered within a vast range of settings. The literature may be divided into two categories, that which considers humour and comedy as part of everyday life, and that which considers humour and comedy as tools for the purpose of organised entertainment.

The literature pertaining to the former is extensive and presents theories of humour; discusses the multitudinous functions of humour; expounds the differing types of humour; and considers the nature and purport of jokes and joking behaviour. The phenomenon of laughter is considered in detail, its causes, symptoms and social functions, as is the notion of comic creativity and the differences between men and women in relation to comedy and humour.

The literature pertaining to the generation of humour and comedy as an end in itself, for the purpose of entertainment, is relatively exiguous and less pedagogic than its 'everyday' counterpart. However, the existent texts provide the means with which to chart the historical development of stand up comedy from its roots in the Victorian era of Music Hall, through the politically motivated Alternative Comedy movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s, to its current status as a phenomenally successful form of entertainment. The potential reasons for the prolific popularity of contemporary stand up comedy are discussed and a consideration of the changes in nature and form evidenced during the course of its development presented, with particular emphasis on the fluctuating political
motivation with regards to the stand up comedy currently being performed on the contemporary comedy circuit.

This literature is written from within, and for, both academic (see Stebbins, 1990; Wagg, 1996; Walcott, 1974) and non-academic (see Cook, 1994; Wilmut and Rosengard, 1989) arenas, although some work attends to popular and academic concerns simultaneously (see Double, 1997).

2.3 Developing a Project

Stand up comedy is not only one of the fastest growing forms of entertainment, but 'arguably the oldest, most universal, basic and deeply significant form of humorous expression (excluding perhaps truly spontaneous, informal social joking and teasing)' (Mintz, 1985, p. 71). The present day prevalence of stand up comedy venues, and the increasing media attention paid to comics and their craft, has rendered an awareness of this type of performing largely inescapable. As such, it is perhaps surprising that there has been relatively little academic attention focused towards this social phenomenon. Those works that have attended to stand up comedy as a phenomenon are largely 'depopulated texts' (Billig, 1992), their pages filled with academic or conceptual concerns rather than with anything of the comics themselves.

Following this examination of the literature and having found relatively little in the way of substantive texts pertaining to stand up comedy, the decision was taken to enter the world of stand up comics and their associates in an endeavour to find out more about their environment and activities. It was considered that talking to those directly involved in the construction of comedy, for the specific intention of entertaining an audience, would open up a social environment hitherto left rather unexplored, and allow 'those that know' a voice which has previously been somewhat muffled.
The initial tenet for the empirical work was simply to gain access to the social space occupied by stand up comics and their associates, and to become familiar within these surroundings. In doing so, it was envisaged that areas of interest would make themselves visible, that the environment and the activity contained therein would suggest the direction for this project, rather than attempting to coerce those involved to consider an uninformed, ill-conceived, and potentially uninteresting set of presumptions. To this end an informal meeting with a friend of a friend who happened to be a stand up comic was arranged. Very little (just this) of that initial conversation is made reference to in this work, although the interest it prompted may be considered the catalyst for the ensuing project. The project, then, became focused on a specific type of performer and a specific type of performance.

2.4 FINDING PARTICIPANTS

Initially my concerns revolved around gaining access to those involved with stand up comedy, and to this end some three hundred letters were sent out to management companies and agencies who appeared to have some connection with the comedy business, as determined by their inclusion in one of the many ‘showbiz’ directories in existence (‘The White Directory’, ‘Artistes and their Agents’, ‘The Spotlight Directories’, ‘The Alternative Guide’, ‘Who’s Who...’).

Preliminary phone calls served to illustrate the wide range of individuals working in a variety of ways to maintain the high profile of stand up comedy and stand up comics in contemporary British society, and thus enabled the type of people who could provide some insight to be ascertained, and some useful contacts to be made. The groups I decided to focus my attention on were: stand up comics, agents and managers of stand up comics, and teachers and judges of stand up comedy. These groups present a collection of individuals all closely connected to the business of stand up comedy as a form of entertainment,
although their connections are vastly different. There are few other individuals connected to this form of entertainment, although two promoters and one producer who deal exclusively with stand up comics were also interviewed. Setting up and conducting forty interviews took this research to the 1995 and 1996 Leicester comedy festivals, on four lengthy trips to London, and to the 1996 Edinburgh festival.

Originally it had been my intention to speak to stand up comics at the beginning of their comedy career, as opposed to comics who had been performing for years. It was considered that the former group would be those who had not yet found a comedy formula on which they could feasibly rely, and would therefore be closer to the process of constructing a stand up comedy performance. The issues and decisions involved in the construction of a performance had been considered a probable topic of interest and there was a concern to avoid those whom Dewey could be talking about in saying 'If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats the same old model fixed like a blue print in his mind' (Dewey, 1935, p. 50).

However, once my identity had been established within the world of stand up comedy, opportunities to interview a whole range of comics presented themselves and the decision was made to interview those who became available, rather than excluding certain individuals because they had been performing for a long time. Furthermore, as I became increasingly acquainted with members of the stand up comedy community, opportunities to speak to various ‘famous’ comics arose and it did not seem good research practice to turn such chances down. In retrospect, the fact that my sample included certain very successful individuals only serves to make the data more fertile.

The following demographic characteristics describe the 40 respondents at the time I first spoke to them:
16 STAND UP COMICS: 14 men, 2 women (effectively reflecting the male domination of the business); ages ranged between 22 and 65, with the majority between the ages of 27 and 36; for 7 of them stand up comedy provided their sole source of income, although one of these 7 ran comedy clubs as well as performed in them; all were white; 2 were what might be considered ‘household names’ and 2 more on their way to becoming so; all had been performing regularly for over a year, one as long as 35 years, most somewhere in between; each of these individuals were interviewed once, and 10 were met on other, informal, occasions.

10 AGENTS/MANAGERS: 5 men, 5 women (which effectively reflects the fact that the business of management is neither male nor female dominated); ages ranged between 26 and 64, with the majority between the ages of 32 and 38; 4 classified themselves as agents, while the rest claimed to be agent/managers; all were white; all had been in this particular business over 4 years, and 4 ran their own company.

6 TEACHERS: 5 men, 1 woman, all had either been, or still practised as, stand up comics, one ran a comedy club; ages ranged between 28 and 51; all were white; 3 were met on other, informal occasions.

5 JUDGES: 3 men, 2 women; ages ranged between 20 and 33; 3 judged for the 1996 Perrier Stand Up Comedy Award, 2 for the 1996 Leicester Mercury Comedian of the Year Award; all were white; full time occupations were student, comedy critic for the ‘Evening Standard’, television producer, Leicester Comedy Festival organiser and assistant editor of the Leicester Mercury.

2 PROMOTERS: both male; both aged 26; 1 white, 1 Asian.
1 PRODUCER: female; white; aged 38; produces the Perrier Competition as well as theatre events.

2.5 **Empirical Grounded Theory**

Preparing to enter a social location largely devoid of pre-existing research footprints is both exciting and challenging, and the decision to enter empty handed, in terms of supposition and preconceived conceptualisation, was considered the most effective means of ensuring that this environment presented itself as naturally as possible, as opposed to being tainted by some sort of researcher bias. The research process as a whole may be considered one of learning and development, its strength being that, along with the 'results' it produced, it emerged as a product of the environments it existed within. As such, the methodology employed may be considered to be grounded theory.

The term 'grounded theory' was first applied by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, two sociologists who wrote the seminal 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' (1967). This theory developed in response to those methods which 'the authors saw as a preoccupation, on the one hand, with abstract grand theories and, on the other, with testing those theories through large scale quantitative studies. Grounded theory was intended to link theoretical developments... more closely to the particulars of settings, to ground middle range theories in actual qualitative data rather than to start from preconceived hypotheses' (Potter, 1998, pp. 123-124).

Grounded theory offers an approach to both the collection of data and to the analysis of that data, and this chapter will illustrate the data gathering part of the research process, as well as providing a general overview of grounded theory. Chapter Four will continue with the detailed data analysis as we consider the secondary stage in the development of the five dimensions. However, the different stages of a grounded theory research project cannot be considered as
exclusive to each other, as each informs the other and each may need to be returned to in order that the process of refinement be completed to an optimum. Indeed, the information from the first stage, the data gathering stage, develops the approach taken in the second, the analysis of that data.

The emphasis that grounded theory places on 'emergence' was the feature of this research method that initially suggested its suitability for use within this particular project, 'One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Due to the dearth of literature concerning stand up comedy it was largely impossible to map out a complete research project before commencing the empirical work. Not knowing what the key areas of interest are makes it difficult to ask questions about them. However, a 'grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 23). When using the grounded theory approach, a detailed and substantive overview of the whole project is not formally a necessary requirement prior to commencement.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the initial research question should be 'how do they do what they do?', and that the answer be developed through the discovery of relevant categories and the relationship between them. Grounded theory is an approach suitable to a whole range of research questions pertinent in a whole range of research settings, and its focus is relationships and patterns, '... these are not relationships between numbers but between ideas or categories of things, and the relationships can take a range of different forms' (Potter, 1998, p. 124).
It is during the process of data collection that areas of interest emerge and the project begins to develop in shape and form. In this particular project the main method of data collection took the form of conversational interviews, although, as a burgeoning member of the stand up comedy environment, the research is also informed by participant observation-type activity. Supplementing interview data with ‘participant observation in the research domain, generating fieldnotes which can be added to other data sets or simply used to improve the researcher’s understanding so they can better deal with other materials’ (Potter, 1998, 125) is a fairly typical feature of grounded theory research. We will therefore consider, in turn, interviewing and ethnographic practice.

2.6 INTERVIEWING

The first interview schedule developed as a result of what little knowledge I had and what I thought I might want to know about. However, after the 1995 Leicester Comedy Festival and my first trip to London, I decided to completely remodel my interviews as it became clear that the original set of questions were somewhat leading, ideas being generated and discussed through my insistence, rather than because they were necessarily important to the participants.

The first set of interview questions (see Appendix One) developed for the stand up comics were structured around three distinct stages of the creation of a comedy performance, as perceived by the poorly informed researcher: the choosing of various subject matters; the writing of material; and the on stage presentation. During the interviewing process, however, it became apparent that these issues were not necessarily concerns for those actively involved with stand up comedy, that there were other issues which the participants were keen to talk about, and that, according to the stand up comics, the business of constructing performance comedy was rarely divisible into three unconnected phases. The questions developed for the agents, managers, teachers and judges, were few,
based entirely on what I thought these people do without any real knowledge of what this may entail.

The second set of interview questions for stand up comics (see Appendix Two) began with discussing most recent performances and worked backwards away from the stage, through pre-performance preparation and rehearsal, to the actual creation of material, before discussing some more general ideas. The questions for the other participants were based on the knowledge that had been developed as a result of the first set of interview questions, and should be considered as far more informed. In practice, I was less concerned to ensure that these interviews followed the prescribed layout, thus allowing the interviewee the freedom to steer the conversation to areas they felt were important or were eager to discuss. The former interview questions were useful in an illustration of whether the ideas I put forward had any relevance for the participants, although after modification it was interesting to see what issues arose without me being as specifically directive.

As well as developing a new set of interview questions, the decision was made to relax with regards to the structure of the interviews. Whatever the participants wanted to talk about was fine by me. The transcription process revealed a collection of what could be considered conversations along a particular theme (stand up comedy) as opposed to a collection of unequivocally determinable interviews. Each conversational interview lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours, with the majority lasting around an hour.

Forty interviews may seem a fairly excessive amount although I would argue that without at least this many the areas of interest, the five conceptual themes depicting the different dimensions inherent in a discussion of performers and performance, would not be supported by the satisfying amount of detail that can be found in the data. Indeed, Potter and Wetherell (1987) state 'researchers have
conducted interviews across an extensive sample, because the commonplace or important patterns are not recognizable in advance and recurrently used systems of terms need to be elucidated' (pp. 161-162). Also, while this thesis makes no claims for generalisability it is argued that the five discursive dimensions are widely recognised as debatable, or dilemmatic, concerns, and thus the fact that they were discursively engaged by such a high number of participants allows a certain amount of surety with regards to their significance. From the number of interviews it has, therefore, been possible to identify regular thematic patterns and these essentially form the backbone of this work as a whole.

With this research inclination the interviews as data are treated as conversational encounters in which the interviewer is just as much of an active participant as the interviewee, and as such the treatment of these thematic concepts by both parties is considered essential to their existence.

2.7 Ethnographic Tendencies

'Because I talked with a number of respondents multiple times and sometimes saw them in a variety of other informal social settings, in certain respects the study edged towards participant observation' (Charmaz, 1991, pp. 273-274).

There is something of an element of 'membership' to the stand up comedy circuit. It is not difficult to get known as a new comic, a new agent or manager, or even a new writer about comedy. The business of doing stand up comedy involves going to the same places as other comics, of talk, of gossip, of debate, and any new face repeatedly materialising in these locations becomes a matter of interest and rumination for pre-established members. As such, it was not difficult to make myself known to these people, and thus the ethnographic practice of negotiating access to this environment was accomplished, albeit on a superficial level initially, fairly swiftly. 'Ethnography exploits the capacity that any
social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which this process gives rise. Even where he or she is researching a familiar group or setting, the participant observer is required to treat this as 'anthropologically strange', in an effort to make explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted as a culture member. In this way, it is hoped, the culture is turned into an object for study' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 9).

During the process of locating those individuals I would be keen to interview, and arranging future meetings with them, I became what could be described as a temporary member, slightly off centre, somewhat peripheral, of the stand up comedy network. Before long, people began to have heard of me before I met them, people began recommending that I spoke to this person or that person, and helped in arranging it. Ultimately, areas not normally accessed by 'non-members' opened to me: backstage at gigs, in the pub afterwards, in 'waiting areas' before shows commenced. I got in to venues for free, or tickets were left behind counters, I looked after people's jackets, bought drinks and had them bought for me, friendships were made on certain levels.

The notion of simply getting out there and getting on with it is something that in many respects forms the basis of both ethnographic research in general and grounded theory specifically, although there are few manuals to guide the ethnographer along their research path. 'One of the reasons for this reluctance to give advice about how to do ethnographic research is awareness of the fact that such research cannot be programmed, that its practice is replete with the unexpected, as any reading of the many published research biographies will confirm' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 23). In this particular case, becoming a quasi-member of the stand up comedy set essentially involved 'playing it by ear', learning when it was appropriate to forge conversations, developing the ability to recognise occasions when my presence would be perceived as an intrusion, hanging around,
grinning inanely at all and sundry, and generally making myself available for every potential research opportunity.

The ethnographic practices employed within this study were not initiated by any ‘foreshadowed problems’ (Malinowski, 1922), or any theory or hypotheses, which, as a feature, serves as a commendation for the adoption of a grounded theory approach. Here theory is developed through the data gathering rather than before the empirical investigation commences. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) most notably advocated, the data is used to provide, rather than support, the theoretical thrust of the work. ‘In ethnography the analysis of data is not a distinct stage of the research... Formally it starts to take shape in analytic notes and memoranda; informally, it is embodied in the ethnographer’s ideas and hunches. And in these ways, to one degree or another, the analysis of data feeds into research design and data collection. This iterative process is central to the ‘grounded theorizing’ promoted by Glaser and Strauss, in which theory is developed out of data analysis, and subsequent data collection is guided strategically by the emergent theory’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 205).

During the time spent engaged in a particular sort of participation in the social arena peopled by stand up comics, their agents and managers, teachers and judges, the daily business of arranging and conducting interviews was heavily interspersed with data gathering of a different kind. Conversations, observations, comedy performances, backstage contemplations, audience confabulations, judging considerations, and so on, were continuously made part of the research process by virtue of their occurrence within the presence of the researcher. As such, the interview data and the areas of interest emergent during the process of transcription were continually augmented by that which was

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1 The role of the researcher is difficult to define in a study such as this. It may be considered a composite of interviewer, acquaintance, friend, interlocutor, nuisance, ‘hanger on’, interested audience member, student with project to write, etc.
taking place outside the actual business of interviewing, within the arena under study. 'Some of the ideas... are hard to explore through typical interview methods. But they can be pieced together from informal conversations, personal accounts, or witnessed during participant observation' (Charmaz, 1991, p. 275).

2.8 TRANSCRIPTION

Essentially, the data collected for the purposes of this project are the stack of audio tapes which capture the interview discourse. However, it is not possible, or at least extremely difficult, to work directly from this material with regards to analysis. Therefore, the transcriptions of this discourse may be considered to be 'working data', and once the active business of interviewing participants was complete the rather more sedentary business of completing the mammoth task of transcription was entered into.

While the transcription process may be lengthy (estimates have put transcribing at somewhere between 10 and more than 20 hours per hour of recorded material, depending on the depth of transcription notation, see Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and frustrating, it does ensure that the researcher becomes intimately acquainted with their data. 'transcription, which of necessity entails repeated listenings to a tape, becomes an integral part of the analytic process. This, then, precludes 'farming out' the transcription (i.e., having it done by a professional transcriber or clerical help). Time-consuming and tedious, it nonetheless provides the analyst with an intimate acquaintance with his/her data' (Du Bois, 1991, p. 77).

Grounded theorists claim that it is at some point during the research process that the full portent of the work is realised, and this can be said to be the case here. While certain data-based categories and relationships had been established before this point, their worth as the focus of the entire project could not have possibly been realised until the detailed transcription process was underway.
Indeed, exponents of ethnography recommend 'a careful reading (indeed probably several readings) of the corpus of data, in order to become thoroughly familiar with it' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 210), and the intense and concentrated attention to every word, pause and intonational inflection required for an accurate transcription of recorded conversation ensured a thorough grounding in the data even prior to the existence of its printed reams.

The Jeffersonian Transcription System (1985, see Appendix Three) was used to create the working data and this is a particularly detailed transcription notation, most usually used by conversation and discourse analysts with their interest in the minute nuances of talk. 'One of the fundamental aspects of this transcription system is that it originated from and is deeply embedded in the work of conversation analysis. That is, the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analysis represents, like all systems that attempt to provide a description or representation of the details of produced speech and/or action, an analytic interpretation and selection' (Psathas and Anderson, 1990, p. 75).

It must be noted that any transcription system is designed to support a particular kind of analysis, 'there is not, and cannot be, a 'neutral' transcription system. The presumably 'neutral' presentation of the details of produced speech/action would be the actual, embodied and situated original spoken production' (Du Bois, 1991, p. 72). The Jeffersonian system attends to an analytical interest in the use of language, rather than treating language as a medium through which speakers unproblematically reveal what they think and know. While this may not be the exact purport of this work, firstly, I am very familiar with this system and, secondly, it was seen as the most suitable means of transcribing the gathered data in ensuring that all aspects of the participants talk could be drawn on if required. 'Hesitations, pauses, glottal constrictions, false starts, and numerous other subtle evidences observable in speech but not in writing provide clues as to how participants mobilize resources to plan
and produce their utterances, and to how they negotiate with each other the ongoing social interaction' (Du Bois, 1991, p. 73).

In that this particular transcription system requires an intense attention to detail, it fulfils one of the main requirements of a grounded theory approach to data, line-by-line reading. In order to produce a detailed transcription the audio material is necessarily listened to repeatedly, and the developing transcript continually revised. In attempting to create an exacting representation of the discourse the transcription is read, line by line, innumerable times. 'The common practice of only transcribing those utterances that appear to be significant to the analyst when she listens to the tape simply to "hear what is said," means that the research conclusions become heavily dependent on the unacknowledged interpretative practice of the analyst. With a complete transcript, and by careful reading of whole collections of participants' statements on given topics, utterances can be seen in their context of occurrence rather than selectively extracted to appear as documents of... actions and beliefs beyond the text' (Potter and Mulkay, 1985, p. 268).

2.9 Early Findings and Summary

'It is frequently well into the process of inquiry that one discovers what the research is really about' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 206). During the process of interviewing, and the inevitable conversation and environmental interaction that goes along with that, the focus of my work began to change. Having initially been concerned to focus on how individuals actively go about constructing a performance intended to make others laugh, it seemed that the discourse being produced contained something far more worthy of attention, far more engaging in terms of a research endeavour.

The close attention paid to the details of the discourse during the process of transcription served to compound these newly burgeoning ideas. It is my
contention that the essential shape and focus of this thesis really only began to make itself evident at this stage. After months of interviewing. Months of chatting, drinking tea, interviewing, watching, chatting, attending comedy clubs, being part of and mingling with audiences, of laughing, looking, drinking, chatting, interviewing. After months of listening to and transcribing data. Data, data, data. Of coming to know every recorded word, every word, pause and laugh, and of knowing the people interviewed, the comics, the others, the people I hung out with for months... something began to emerge.

Connections, similarities, differences, oddnesses, brilliance, voiced opinions, comments, examples, analogies, all surrounding the same subject, stand up comedy, performers and performances. These things endlessly, actively, insistently agitated the mind and, for me, there was a frustrating, nagging belief, circling at all times, that there was 'something going on' in the data. 'The researcher has to be thinking about the data - preferably be steeped in them, know a lot about the area under study. At the same time he or she has to be puzzled or disturbed about some feature of those data or about their interpretations, so that questions and answers will be raised and sought. These are raised and sought even if on a subliminal level of consciousness, and sometimes for quite a time, before the vital question or answer breaks through to consciousness' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 29).

Finally, gradually, piece by piece, the unique character of the data was revealed, or revealed itself, came to be, or made itself, known. In retrospect it may be considered that the accretion towards this seemingly insightful, penetrative, crucial revelation had subtly and surreptitiously been taking place for a long time. However, there were so many interesting diversionary interludes, that may equally have proved to be the fundament of this work, that there was a sense of

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2 The idea that the focus of a study can make itself evident to the researcher implies that the data gathered has a certain autonomous quality, and surely this cannot be so. However, with regards to the project in hand, this is not entirely inaccurate. The initial conception of this thesis is barely recognisable in the finished product and I defy anyone to be more surprised by that than me.
deliverance in finally feeling satisfied that 'this' is the best thing that can be done with this project.

And what is 'this', this thing that the researcher is finally contented with?

Initially, an extensive concern with issues of 'truth' and 'believability' became apparent, and although these issues were treated in a variety of ways by different individuals their prevalence in the talk of almost all the participants rendered them a concern for me. Continued immersion in the data revealed other prominent 'discursive couplings', and suggested potential connections between them. As such, the focus of this work is five discursive dimensions, of a similarly dyadic nature, all pertaining to the issue of performing.

One of the main difficulties involved with an exposition of a number of separate, and yet connected, entities, such as the five dimensions, is the seemingly simple matter of where to begin. When dealing with such intricately connected concepts there does not appear to be any one particular 'order' in which they could be arranged, which lends itself to a straightforward discussion, over and above any other so-called order. Therefore, the following elucidation is not constructed around any notion of superiority or inferiority as regards the different dimensions, rather it is based on the necessity of having a starting point, an end point, and something to separate the two.

Alphabetically, then, the dimensions are 'Art and Occupation', 'Self and Persona', 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed', 'Talent and Effort', 'Truth and Believability'.

It should not be considered that these five conceptualisations emerged as the orderly collection presented here. In fact, what emerged at this point seemed something of an unruly mass of only partially founded ideas, categories and
relationships. These machinations, as the project developed, would of course go on to inform the development of the five dyadic dimensions presented here. However, even at this stage of only having completed initial readings and analysis it was clear that there was something interesting to be said, even if the exact nature of that was relatively imprecise at this time.

In fact, what I was faced with at this time was pages and pages of transcribed data, roughly organised into some attempt at categorisation based on vaguely developed notions of the sorts of issues surrounding performers and performance practices. I had also generated copious amounts of 'notes to self' about the type of significance these categories and the relationship between them might constitute. It seemed that there were a number of prevalent issues that remained somehow unresolved for the interview participants, interviewee and interviewer alike. Not only that, but it seemed possible that these issues might exist in the collective cultural mind as in some way unresolved, or duplicitous, or dichotomous, or dilemmatic, or dyadic, or something. It therefore became apparent that these issues, concerning performing, might have some significance for people other than those connected to stand up comedy.

In this sense, the first part of the methodological approach adopted for this work generated the means with which to make a reasonably informed decision with regards to the topics, issues, areas of interest, being developed by the research, and ultimately the information with which to determine the essential nature of the project as a whole. Particularly in terms of a grounded theory approach, reaching this stage is eminently satisfying.

What is eminently less satisfying is the realisation that this discovery will require a different sort of contribution from the pre-existent literature than the one I had studiously developed with regards to the literature pertaining to comedy and humour. The next stage in the research process, and one which Glaser and
Strauss and the like neglect to detail, is to see whether there exists any literature that might be used to inform the development of a number of different dimensions all pertaining to the same phenomenon. It was also necessary to consider pre-existing work that could help to explain the dyadic nature of the five dimensions as constructed in the data.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the literature for means of understanding what we are looking at when we consider the so-called discursive dimensions of performing. In this, then, we are looking for other works which may help explain why particular phenomena, if not all phenomena, can be attended to in terms of more than one dimension, why phenomena are multi-dimensional as they are found in conversation. We are also concerned with the apparent dyadic nature of the dimensions pertaining to performing, whether this nature is a feature specific to this phenomenon, or whether it is quite commonly found in talk about other things.

It is not being suggested that there necessarily exists an approach that will accurately describe these dimensions. However, it is hoped that certain other perspectives will provide alternative means of looking at the five dimensions and thus add to our understanding of them. As such, the point of attending to these other perspectives is not to detail them in their entirety but to take from them that which may be useful with regards to developing a greater understanding of the five prevalent dimensions in the participants' discussions of performing.

While any number of approaches may be taken with regards to the study of discourse, the overriding focus within this work is the posited existence of repeatedly occurring dimensions, and their inherent tensions, as found in the data. Therefore, the consideration of possible alternative approaches is limited to
those which appear to attend to such instances. While this work makes a claim that the analytic approach it adopts is the best suited, it does not claim that this approach is a novel one, indeed this chapter serves as a detailed acknowledgement of those pre-existing theoretical approaches which have informed its development.

This chapter, then, aims to orient the reader with pre-existing theoretical perspectives which could have been considered as alternatives to the analysis of the dimensions which serves as the methodological approach adopted for the purposes of this work if it had not been considered that an eclectic approach informed by more than one of these perspectives would provide a far superior methodology. In this respect, a number of theoretical perspectives will be considered and the way they inform the developing version of the analysis uncovered.

Firstly, Mannheimian sociology of knowledge and its approach to the nature of ideology is considered, with its emphasis on the differences in perspectives between social groups. This approach helps develop an idea of what is meant by the concept of ideology, although Mannheim focused not on discourse but on thought. Secondly, Foucauldian discourses are examined. Here we are interested in Foucault's idea that knowledge, and its representation in discourse, is dependent on time, or historical epoch, and organisations, in that each will generate its own discourse. Thirdly, social representation theory will be considered. This perspective also considers that different social groups have different ways of representing the world, indeed it is suggested that these differences actually define groups. This approach does have discourse as its focus.

Penultimately we consider the notion of interpretative repertoires. This approach can be considered to extend the ideas developed as part of social representation
theory into a consideration of the way in which individuals use different repertoires dependent upon a whole range of factors, and thus there is not necessarily any consistency, group or individual, in their dialogic presentation. This approach focuses entirely on discourse. Finally, we consider the notion of ideological dilemmas. This approach attends to the dilemmatic nature of not only intellectual ideology but of common sense itself, and suggests that evidence of this dilemmatic quality can be seen in both formal and informal discourse.

The various approaches to the study of discourse listed above share a concern with the way in which people actively interpret, explain and make sense of their social worlds. As such, they may all be considered as part of the constructivist branch of the social sciences. However, the existence of an ever-diversifying range of theoretical standpoints falling under this general rubric means that there are innumerable internal discrepancies with regards to how cerebral and practical sense is achieved. Indeed, the perspectives under consideration here collectively produce a number of different ways in which the social process of sense-making may be perceived. It is not, however, being suggested that these perspectives add in some way to each other, rather they are separate and often very different approaches to knowledge and ideology and there are numerous conflicts or tensions between them, which will be brought to attention as they are presented in more detail.

Furthermore, while some of the approaches provide specific direction with regards to data analysis others, the more theory based approaches, do not. As such, the latter section in this chapter and section four in Chapter Four detail more specifically how this collection of approaches will be used to inform the data analysis presented in the ensuing five analytical chapters.

The most obvious and initial feature of interest with regards to the five dimensions is their location within discourse. They are discursively constructed
entities. Therefore, the primary object of study is discourse. Before continuing, the nature and understanding of discourse put into practice in this work must be understood. Here discourse is not taken as somehow representative of the way things actually are, it is not considered as a means of getting at the 'truth', rather discourse is taken to be 'the material content of utterances exchanged in social contexts that are imbued with meaning by the intention of utterers and treated as meaningful by other participants' (Dant, 1991, p. 7).

In terms of the content of the dimensions, the analytical interest is focused on their contribution to an understanding of performers and performance and their dyadic nature. In considering these dimensions, 'Art and Occupation'; 'Self and Persona'; 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed'; 'Talent and Effort'; and 'Truth and Believability', the endeavour is to proffer reasons for their existence and reasons for their construction as dyadic entities. In this sense, they are being discussed both in relation to their existence as part of 'ideology', as conceived as 'the general determinative relationship between the social and material conditions of existence and the abstract relations construed in knowledge' (Dant, 1991, p. 6) and in relation to their existence as part of 'knowledge', as conceived as the 'construal of relations between abstract entities that are taken to represent the world of human experience, that can be shared by humans through communication and that can be used by them both to understand their experience of the world and to guide their actions' (Dant, 1991, p.5). These three aspects of the consideration of the dimensions (ideology, knowledge and discourse) are possibly not as separate as listing them as above suggests. Indeed, Dant (1991) suggests that ideology and knowledge and discourse are 'social processes that are inextricably linked' (p. 3).

Having proposed that the theoretical approaches under consideration within this chapter will be used to inform the subsequent analysis it would be useful to explain more specifically the nature of their contribution, and thus their treatment, at this point. Indeed, it is only certain aspects of these perspectives
that will be drawn on and therefore the reader should not expect to be provided with a complete overview of their entireties. Specifically, it is the attention that each of these approaches pays to the construction of facts or knowledge, with particular reference to discourse, and their approach to consensus or commonality with regards to this construction. In other words, what this chapter aims to establish is the variety of potential alternatives for suggesting the source of the five dimensions, for whom are they a concern, and what they can be said to add to an understanding of performers and performance.

3.2 MANHEIMIAN SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Karl Mannheim is considered to be one of the most significant theorists with regards to the sociology of knowledge. Once the overriding influence of religion was demoted, in the eyes of the intellectual tradition, from the position as main contributor to, and informant of, knowledge, the world was offered up to a far greater realm of interpretation. This shift in the development of knowledge was largely initiated by the rapid growth of scientific knowledge which displaced religion as the means through which the world was considered and understood. 'From a sociological point of view the decisive fact of modern times, in contrast with the situation during the Middle Ages, is that this monopoly of the ecclesiastical interpretation of the world which was held by the priestly caste is broken, and in place of a closed stratum of intellectuals, a free intelligentsia has arisen' (Mannheim, 1936, p. 10). This development opened the floodgates for a vast range of interpretative perspectives, 'those fundamentally new modes of thought and investigation, the epistemological, the psychological, and the sociological' (Mannheim, 1936, p. 11) to vie for attention, and Mannheim 'felt the need for grasping different perspectives in such a way that each could understand the other' (Dant, 1991, p. 12).
Grounded in the study of political debate, Mannheim's perspective concerning knowledge suggested that 'world-views' are dependent upon the social group that produces them and the historical location of these groups. 'He proposed the sociology of knowledge as a perspective that could understand the various world-views as contingent on the experience and interests of particular groups' (Dant, 1991, p. 10). However, Mannheim did not undertake to come to any conclusion as to the validity or truth in any version, any knowledge, of the world, rather he maintained a respect for the differences he found and interpreted them 'in terms of a 'totality' that might be seen as an incorporation of differing knowledges' (Dant, 1991, p. 11). The purport of Mannheimian sociology can 'be summed up as the attempt to study the relation between knowledge and social structure' (Dant, 1991, p. 54). From this perspective, 'knowledge' is understood to be the shared presuppositions of a social group and the meanings given to their experiences and actions, 'as a whole it may be recognized as the perspective of the social group' (Dant, 1991, p. 54).

It is this aspect of Mannheim's work, that concerning the social location of knowledge, and the idea that the mental structure of an epoch contains an inner unity, that is our concern, rather than his grand project to establish a 'science of politics'. In this our concern is with how Mannheim understood the form and content of 'knowledge' to be determined by the social processes of organisations. 'Men living in groups do not merely coexist physically as discrete individuals. They do not confront the objects of the world from the abstract levels of a contemplating mind as such, nor do they do so exclusively as solitary beings. On the contrary they act with and against one another in diversely organized groups, and while doing so they think with and against one another. These persons, bound together into groups, strive in accordance with the character and position of the groups to which they belong to change the surrounding world of nature and society or attempt to maintain it in a given condition' (Mannheim, 1936, p. 3). In examining the social processes of organisations as determinant of the form and content of knowledge, and suggesting that people
'act with and against one another' and 'think with and against one another', Mannheim acknowledges the contrary or dilemmatic nature of knowledge. This idea is presented more fully in section 3.6, as we consider ideological dilemmas, but at this point may be regarded as a reminder that the different perspectives presented in this chapter attend to similar issues and may therefore have something to add to one another.

Mannheim studied the idea of knowledge in relation to thought or 'style of thought' (1936, p. 3) and suggested that it is this that individuals learn from their social group; an individual ‘thinks in the manner in which his group thinks. He finds at his disposal only certain words and their meanings’ (1936, p. 52). In this sense, the 'social basis of knowledge lies in the categories of meaning used to think or perceive or understand the world rather than in the full contents of cognition' (Dant, 1991, p. 18). For Mannheim, the notion of a group means ‘not merely classes, as a dogmatic type of Marxism would have it, but also generations, status groups, sects, occupational groups, schools, etc.’ (1936, p. 248), although he states that class stratification is the most significant, as all other groups ‘arise from and are transformed as parts of the more basic conditions of production and domination’ (1936, p. 248). He claims that each group has its own particular differentiation of concepts, categories and thought-models.

Mannheim suggests that ‘it becomes our task not only to indicate the fact that people in different social positions think differently, but to make intelligible the causes for their different ordering of the material of experiences by different categories’ (1936, p. 246), although it remains largely unclear as to how exactly this is to be accomplished. He also develops the idea of 'thought-models', 'the model that is implicitly in the mind of a person when he proceeds to reflect about an object' (1936, p. 247), claiming that if we were to trace the origin and diffusion of any thought-model we would find 'the peculiar affinity it has to the social position of given groups and their manner of interpreting the world' (1936, p. 247). However, again, it is not made clear how this
could be actively carried out. Mannheim further suggests a correlation between ‘life situation and thought-process’ (1936, p. 239) and states that empirical investigation will show how strict this correlation is, or ‘what scope exists for variations in the correlation’ (1936, p. 239).

Interestingly, Mannheim reflects upon discussions between ‘socially and intellectually homogeneous participants and between socially and intellectually heterogeneous participants’ (1936, p. 251). He claims that the latter type of discussion, which has become more common place as social groupings are less isolated than hitherto and are now ‘in one form or another, merging in to one another’ (1936, p. 251), are often carried out with each participant speaking as if their differences are confined only to the matter in hand. As such, the fact that their differences are the product of completely antagonistic outlooks remains ignored.

In studying the ‘positionally determined’ (1952, p. 120) nature of knowledge, Mannheim acknowledges that his own propositions are dependent upon location and, as is the case with all knowledge, they ‘are not transcendent of the context of their emergence. That is, they will not necessarily endure over time since they are dependent on an historically specific quality’ (Dant, 1991, p. 16).

Mannheim developed the term ‘relationism’ to distinguish his own history-based approach to knowledge from those of absolutism and relativism with their respective concerns with the truthful or false nature of knowledge, and the multitude of ‘truths’ which prevents this nature ever being determined. ‘Relationism signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have reference to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal interrelationship in a given frame of thought. Such a system of meanings is possible and valid only in a given type of historical existence, to which, for a time, it furnishes appropriate expression’ (Mannheim, 1936, p. 76). Mannheim uses the example of
fictional peasant boys to furnish this notion of relationism. He suggests that the mode of thinking and speaking characteristic of the village in which the boys have grown up in will be taken for granted by them. However, for the boy that leaves the confines of this village and adapts to life in a city, this mode of thinking and living will cease to be something he takes for granted. This boy will develop the, often conscious, ability to distinguish between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ ideas. ‘That which within a given group is accepted as absolute appears to the outsider conditioned by the group situation and recognized as partial (in this case as “rural”). This type of knowledge presupposes a more detached perspective’ (1936, pp. 252-253).

As he considers the ‘essential penetration of the social process in to the “perspective” of thought’ (1936, p. 242), Mannheim opposes the idea that knowledge develops simply over time, mistaken or ill-conceived thought being corrected as time progresses, such as in, he contends, the ‘exact sciences’. He states instead that ‘Every epoch has its fundamentally new approach and its characteristic point of view, and consequently sees the “same” object from a new perspective’ (1936, p. 243). He goes on to illustrate this ‘historico-social process’ in terms of art, stating that just as art history is able to date particular art-forms according to their style, just as each art-form is only possible under certain historical conditions and is therefore reflective of that particular time, so knowledge can be associated with particular historical periods. He suggests that if ‘thought-structure’ is subject to ‘pure analysis’, as different kinds of art may be, it should be possible not only to determine when and where the world presented itself in a particular manner, but also ‘why the world presented itself in precisely such a manner’ (1936, p. 244).

Mannheim used examples to reinforce these claims. He considers particular words and suggests that ‘the same word, or the same concept in most cases, means very different things when used by differently situated persons’ (1936, p. 245). He considers 19th century Germany and the word ‘freedom’, and cites three different interpretations of the meaning of this word. Firstly, he claims that ‘when an old-
style German conservative spoke of “freedom” he meant thereby the right of each estate to live according to its privileges (liberties)” (1936, p. 245). Secondly, he contends that if an individual ‘belongs to the romantic-conservative and Protestant movement he understood by it “inner freedom”, i.e. the right of each individual to live according to his own individual personality’ (1936, p. 245). Thirdly, he states that ‘When a liberal of the same period used the term “freedom”, he was thinking of freedom from precisely those privileges which to the old-style conservative appeared to be the very basis of all freedom’ (1936, p. 245).

However, Mannheim did not appear to consider the implications of simultaneous multiple group membership with regards to his notion of knowledge or style of thought. An acknowledgement of the likelihood of any individual, or indeed any collection of individuals, being a member of more than one group at any given time may throw some of his ideas into confusion. Furthermore, the emphasis Mannheim put on the shared nature of knowledge, that members of a particular social group or historical epoch orientated to the same version of the world, and his stressing of the differences in perspectives between groups, meant that differences within groups were neglected and to some extent camouflaged.

An additional problem with Mannheim’s proposals concerns their possibility for study. With his focus on styles of thought as determined by social location, it is impossible to see how these things could be elucidated on. He proposes a method of ‘imputation’ which directs the linking of certain ideas to certain social groups and their specific styles of thought, but how exactly this would be carried out conclusively remains rather unclear. As Dant (1991) suggests, ‘it is not clear what will count as evidence of links between knowledge and other social processes’ (p. 30).
Despite these problems, Mannheim’s contribution lends an awareness of the relationship between social processes and knowledge. He asks himself what this approach to knowledge can tell us about ‘the validity of an assertion that we would not know if we had not been able to relate it to the standpoint of the assertor?’ (1936, p. 254), and offers three plausible responses. Firstly, he suggests that ‘It may be said that the absolute validity of an assertion is denied when its structural relationship to a given social situation has been shown’ (1936, p. 254). Secondly, he states ‘In opposition to this, there may be another answer, namely that the imputations that the sociology of knowledge establishes between a statement and its assertor tells us nothing concerning the truth-values of the assertion, since the manner in which a statement originates does not affect its validity’ (1936, p. 254). Finally, and as an illustration of his own hopes for the sociology of knowledge, he provides a third answer which ‘differs from the first view in that it shows the mere factual demonstration and identification of the social position of the assertor as yet tells us nothing about the truth-value of his assertion. It implies only the suspicion that this assertion might represent merely a partial view. As over against the second alternative, it maintains that it would be incorrect to regard the sociology of knowledge as giving no more than a description of the actual conditions under which an assertion arises (factual-genesis). Every complete and thorough sociological analysis of knowledge delimits, in content as well as structure, the view to be analyzed. In other words, it attempts not merely to establish the existence of the relationship, but at the same time to particularize its scope and the extent of its validity’ (1936, pp. 254-255).

Despite offering little specific direction with regards to empirical or analytical research practice, the awareness of social context, both historical and environmental, proffered by Mannheimian sociology will serve to inform the following analysis and discussion. Although the method of imputation remains poorly expounded by Mannheim, and thus it is rather unclear as to how it would work in practice, it is conveyed that words, or indeed discourse, are suitable objects for empirical study, ‘The slightest nuance in the total system of thought
reverberates in the individual word and the shades of meaning it carries. The word binds us to the whole of past history and, at the same time, mirrors the totality of the present’ (1936, p. 74).

3.3 **FOUCAULDIAN DISCOURSES**

Michel Foucault, a sociologist and historian of knowledge (Potter, 1996), like Mannheim, considered knowledge to be socially and historically contingent and his interests lay in the social process of knowledge. However, Foucault also considered knowledge to be discursively constructed and therefore did not look to ‘style of thought’, but to discourse. In this, Foucault was not concerned with the adequacy or correctness of knowledge, his endeavour was not to somehow get at the truth behind discourse, rather he aimed to reveal the ‘contingent nature’ of knowledge as it exists within discourse.

This approach to discourse, ‘*with its claims to truth and meaning bracketed*’ (Dant, 1991, p. 129), focuses on historical and social location which, for Foucault, are the determining, or contingent, factors in the production of knowledge. ‘Foucault thinks of discourse (or discourses) in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language (in the sense of a linguistic system or grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline... Fundamentally, then, Foucault’s idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)’ (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 26). In this respect we should think of particular discourses or ‘discursive formations’, as Foucault referred to them in The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972b), ‘not in terms of the expression of the universal themes of the author or subject, but rather as an event opened up by a specific culture at a particular moment’ (Barker, 1998, p. 8).
Foucault's post-structuralist approach to the development of knowledge and truth, with an emphasis on the construction of facts, renders discourse a crucial area of study. His concern is with 'how knowledge is constructed through discourse, the exchange of speech and writing between members of a society, and has effects on the lives of people' (Dant, 1991, p. 120). It is thus suggested that, on a practical level, discourses control what can and cannot be said, 'Every discourse is part of a discursive complex; it is locked in an intricate web of practices' (Henriques et al, 1984, pp. 105-106). Therefore, the important element of that which people say is not whether these verbalisations accurately reflect their thoughts, or what those thoughts may be, but 'that which systematises them from the onset, thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the talk of transforming them' (Foucault, 1976, p. xix).

Continuing this argument, Foucault suggests that discourse has no 'inside', in thought, and no 'outside', in things. In claiming that discourse has no inside, Foucault encourages us to 'forget the idea of a thinking process operating prior to the use of words and symbols in order to make these things possible' (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 35). Discourse is considered the result of certain 'conditions of possibility', rather than as the result of some inner thought process. The claim that discourse has no outside suggests that there is nothing exterior, no collection of 'things', no external reality, to which a discourse is 'really' referring to. 'What we are concerned with is not to neutralize discourse, to make it the sign of something else, and to pierce through its density in order to reach what remains slightly anterior to it, but on the contrary to maintain it in its consistency, to make it emerge in its own complexity. What, in short, we wish to do is to dispense with 'things'... To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse' (Foucault, 1972, p. 47).

It is, then, the contingent factors that can be seen to shape discursive formations that concern Foucault. In 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972) Foucault
focuses on the period in time as a contingent factor. He suggests that languages are historical in that the thought of different periods of time arises from different sets of linguistic systems or 'discourse formations'. He claims that any particular period has its own discourses which condition what counts as knowledge. He explained in interview that 'my object is not language but the archive, that is to say the accumulated existence of discourse. Archaeology, as I intend it, is kin neither to geology (as analysis of the sub-soil), nor to genealogy (as descriptions of beginning and sequences); it's the analysis of discourse in its modality of archive' (quoted in Gutting, 1994, p. 29).

While Foucault is not concerned with the truthfulness of knowledge per se, he is concerned with that which any particular society at any particular time holds to be true. In 'Power/ Knowledge' he states 'Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded values in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

If each society has its own version of truth, its own knowledge, it is therefore possible to compare and contrast, if you will, these knowledges and thus develop an awareness of those contingencies which produce competing versions of the world. Indeed, in his analysis of discourses Foucault used 'transgression' as a means of illustrating the 'situatedness' of a society's collection of knowledges: 'Foucault's analysis uses transgression as a resource to cut across these discourses, demonstrating their situatedness - specifically in relation to other discourses but with allusion to other social forces such as the social organization of bodies required by developing capitalism.' (Dant, 1991, pp. 126-127). In doing so Foucault was able to make his readers aware that the contents of discourse as knowledge are contingent on 'historical, social and discursive features.' (Dant, 1991, p. 127).
In order to further this understanding, Foucault looked to different social organisations and approached the production of knowledge through various institutions, such as medicine or the law. In this respect, the notion of a truth, or a reality, is related to specific social organisations. Foucault focused on the way these organisations developed discourses which produced 'objects or descriptions which seem solid and unproblematic' (Potter, 1996, p. 101), and thus implied that there is little disagreement or ambiguity between members of the same social group and between the concepts shared by those members. Foucault was also able to demonstrate differentiation between the discourses of socially or historically different groups. In 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (1972) he formulated the hypothesis that 'statements different in form, and dispersed in time, form a group if they all refer to one and the same object' (p. 32). He then went on to disprove this, showing that both time and social grouping will effectively differentiate between statements in terms of that which they refer to. Foucault uses the concept of 'madness' as an example and suggests that this is dependent upon the definitions produced within particular time periods and by particular groups, 'the object presented as their correlative by medical statements of the seventeenth or eighteenth century is not identical with the object that emerges in legal sentences or police action... it is not the same illnesses that are at issue in each of these cases; we are not dealing with the same madmen' (1972, p. 32).

It is clear then that the discourses of different organisations, institutions and historical epochs, in their development and maintenance of knowledge, as perceived by Foucault, have the power to produce both objects and subjects. In the same way that Foucault's own discourse has produced new objects, regimes of discourse, he argues that the discourse of other disciplines, such as medicine, repeatedly produce new objects, such as homosexuals. Indeed, Foucault treats discourses as 'fundamental for the construction of objects such as illnesses and categories of persons: the mad or homosexual' (Potter, 1996, p. 95). In that specific organisations produce and operate within specific discourses 'the image of a simple
countable object is undermined by stressing the procedures and assumptions that go into its production, and how these are related to an institutional organization' (Potter, 1996, p. 86).

The production of subjects is closely linked to the production of objects. Foucault suggests that 'forms of speaking about objects relate closely to particular identities. For example, the medical discourse of examination, questioning, diagnosis, prescription and so on constitutes a range of objects... However, that discourse also constitutes the doctor as a particular person. The doctor is produced as a subject with particular authority, knowledge, skills and so on' (Potter, 1996, p. 86). In this, discourses are regarded as highly productive.

In line with his general concern with power, Foucault suggests that social power is made visible in discourse. The knowledge presented within any discourse can be regarded as the knowledge of the powerful, or knowledge as determined by the powerful. Therefore, the social cohesion that Foucault posits is a result of the ideology of the powerful having been accepted and adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by the other members of their social organisation. Indeed, Billig (1987) comments that 'Foucault tends to lock discourses, and thereby regimes of thinking, into particular historical periods, as if certain critical thoughts are unthinkable until the prevailing regimes of discourse start to crack' (p. 15).

The idea that knowledge is constructed and maintained by the more powerful elements of a social organisation implies that this knowledge will remain static. However, the idea that discourses are an expression of the knowledge of the powerful does not mean that these discourses, or this knowledge, will withstand change, revision or overthrows indefinitely. Organisations such as those studied by Foucault, which are 'likely to be hierarchical, potentially oppressive', are 'subject to radical change in coups d'état and revolutions' (Potter, 1996, p. 86). As such, the changes or development in certain discourses, in certain knowledges, can be
likened to Kuhn’s ideas of scientific paradigms (1970). ‘Kuhn claims science is cyclical, the cycle taking the following form: normal science - crisis - revolution - new normal science - crisis - revolution - new normal science and so on’ (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p. 65), and this process in the development of knowledge can be regarded as something similar to that which happens within the formation of Foucauldian discourses between historical periods and between different social groupings.

If we accept Foucault’s account of the development of knowledge then a traditional notion of history, as a linearly developing collection of information, has to be radically re-thought, and in ‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’ (1972) ‘Foucault criticizes the traditional problematic of history and proposes a new one... The domination of the study of history by chronology is replaced by a variety of time series reducible to no particular origin. For the new history of ideas there is no single, linear schema but series that are juxtaposed to one another, that overlap and intersect. Gone are the themes of origins and consciousness, of spirit and, most importantly, the aspiration to any form of absolute truth.’ (Dant, 1991, p. 121).

Foucault’s approach to discourse, then, is concerned with the questions ‘what can be said? And what can be thought?’ (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 36), rather than being concerned with discourse as an interactional or linguistic accomplishment. This approach differs from those that study the methods or techniques of saying things, such as conversation or discourse analysis, in that Foucault’s theory of discourse studies the possibilities and limits of saying things. “A discourse would then be whatever constrains - but also enables - writing, speaking and thinking within such specific historical limits’ (McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 31). More specifically, Foucault considered the set of rules that, at any given time, and in any given society, define: ‘1) the limits and the forms of expressibility... 2) the limits and the forms of conservation... 3) the limits and the forms of memory... 4) the limits and the forms of reactivation’ (1978, pp. 14-15, quoted in McHoul and Grace, 1993).
In a paper entitled ‘Politics and the Study of Discourse’ (1978) Foucault makes three recommendations: firstly, ‘Treat discourse not as a theme for a commentary which would revive it, but as a monument to be described in its character-disposition’; secondly, ‘Seek in the discourse not its laws of construction, as do the structural methods, but its conditions of existence’; and, thirdly, ‘Refer the discourse not to the thought, to the mind or to the subject which might have given rise to it, but to the practical field in which it is deployed’ (quoted in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 49).

However, this approach to discourse is not without its problems in that ‘the relation of Foucault’s notion of discourse to any particular instance of talk or writing is not always well specified. As it stands the notion of discourses producing objects has shortcomings both with its specification of discourse and its account of production’ (Potter, 1996, p. 87). Potter (1996) also comments that in looking at discourses as objects, the contexts and practices in which they are embedded may be neglected.

Having said that, what we can take from Foucault’s approach to discourse for the purposes of this work is his awareness of the contingent nature of discourse. As Foucault aimed to show the impact of both historical and social location on the discourses of his study, so we can look to the contingent factors in the production of the discourse of the participants of this particular study. We are already aware that the participants all hail from the particular social group populated by stand up comics and their colleagues, and it will be interesting to see whether what they have to say about performers and performance practices only essentially relates to this group, or is the product of this particular group, or whether, in fact, their discourse has relevance for, and could be constructed by, other social groupings within the same historical period.
'There exists no individual who is "naive" enough to observe reality with untutored eyes, nor to take it in as though he were Adam in front of creation. He can never avoid insertion in a communication network with all those present and absent beings constituting the society in which he lives.' (Moscovici, 1984b, p. 962).

The theory of social representations, as initiated by the social psychologist Sergei Moscovici, concerns the way people make sense of the world and communicate with each other on the basis of that sense. This theory proposes that it is these shared representations, 'mental schemata or images which people use to make sense of the world and to communicate with each other' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 138), that define the boundaries of a social group. Social representation theory is said to offer 'a new framework for understanding the organization of attitudes, beliefs and attributions and... to provide a principled criterion for distinguishing the members of different social groups.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 138).

Moscovici introduced the idea of social representations as systems of practices, ideas and values which serve two purposes. Firstly, they establish an order which allows individuals to orientate themselves to their world and to understand it, and secondly, they provide codes for communication and for classifying and naming the varied aspects of their world, including individual and group history (Jaspars and Fraser, 1984).

In so far as Moscovici is concerned, all understanding and thought is based on the working of social representations. 'Social representations provide, quite literally, the means for people to understand and evaluate their worlds' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 139), and all interaction presupposes such representations. These representations are mental constructs, 'made up of both abstract and concrete elements (concepts and images, respectively). In each representation these elements have a
specific structure. For most representations the concrete elements or images are the most important; in these cases the representation will be built around what Moscovici calls a 'figurative nucleus' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 139).

The idea that representations are organised around a nucleus is discussed by Abric in his 'Theoretical and experimental approach to social representations' (1984). He suggests that the nucleus, or 'structural core', determines the meaning and the structure of the representation and is therefore the fundamental element of it. He also states that the nucleus performs two essential functions: firstly it performs a 'creative function' in that 'it is through this element that the other elements comprising the representation acquire or change their meaning. It is that by virtue of which these elements acquire meaning and value'; and secondly it performs an 'organising function' in that 'it is the nucleus which determines the nature of the links uniting the elements of the representation. In this sense it is the unifying and stabilising element in the representation' (p. 180).

In considering the nature and determination of the nuclei of social representations, Abric suggested that the 'nucleus of a representation is determined on the one hand by the nature of the object presented, and on the other by the relationship which the subject has with this object... the nucleus is thus a sub-assemblage of the representation comprising one or more elements whose absence would either dismantle or radically alter the representation considered as a whole' (1984, pp. 180-181). He also considers the role of nuclei in the evolution and transformation of a social representation and states that as the nucleus is both the creator and organiser of a representation it is therefore the most stable and most resistant to change aspect of that representation. Abric, however, does note the enormous problems inherent in attempts to locate the nucleus of any particular representation, and indeed in locating the organisation of the representation.
The concept of social representations is one that has arisen from the idea of 'collective representations'. Durkheim is considered to be the first sociologist to have considered the existence of collective representations woven into customs, institutions and language as an important consideration with regards to the relationship between social thought and individual thought (Moscovici, 1984b). Social representations, however, 'can be distinguished from the Durkheimian notion of collective representations, which are shared by a whole society, and also from individual representations, which may be unique to one or a few persons. Within this range, however, a considerable variation in degrees of consensus and types of consensus is possible, and this has yet to be addressed in the social representations literature' (Litton and Potter, 1985, p. 372).

In challenging the idea of both collective and individual representations, Moscovici stresses the social in social representations. 'For him, social representations are irreducibly social in at least three senses' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 140). Firstly, it can be said that representations derive from social interaction. Moscovici (1981) stated that a social representation is a 'set of concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communication' (p. 181), and thus may be considered 'intrinsically linked to communication processes, and in particular to people's unstructured everyday talk: their gossip, chat, pub arguments and family discussions' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 140). Secondly, Moscovici (1981) suggests that 'every representation tends to turn an unfamiliar thing, or the unfamiliar in general, into something familiar' (p. 188), which, he proposes, develops social consensus within groups in providing an agreed means of communication. Thirdly, representations are social in that they can be seen to offer a means of distinguishing between different social groups. Moscovici (1981) argues that social groups generate their own social representations, that the 'angle from which a group will try to cope with the non-familiar will be determined by the images, concepts and languages shared by that group' (p. 189), and therefore that these shared representations generate homogeneity.
and unity within any such group. ‘In Moscovici’s theory, then, what makes a group a group is exactly the sharing of representations among members; the edges of representations will mark the edges of groups.’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 141).

The consideration of social groups and group boundaries is fundamental in social representation theory and underlies every aspect of this sociological approach. Dependent upon the group to which an individual belongs is that individual’s approach to their environment, the world in general, and their own life. Moscovici suggested that social representations have two roles: firstly, they ‘conventionalise’ the events, objects and persons we encounter, providing them with a location within a particular category and subsequently establishing them as a certain type of model. These categories and models are shared by particular social groups. As such, every new encounter is added to a reality ‘predetermined by conventions’ (1984a, p. 8). Moscovici suggests that ‘Nobody’s mind is free from the effects of the prior conditioning which is imposed by his representations, language and culture. We think, by means of a language; we organise our thoughts, in accordance with a system which is conditioned, both by our representations and by our culture. We see only that which underlying conventions allow us to see, and we remain unaware of these conventions’ (1984a, p. 8). Even if one does become aware of the socially contingent nature of reality it is not possible to become free from convention or the prejudice inherent in any convention.

Secondly, representations are ‘prescriptive’, ‘that is they impose themselves upon us with an irresistible force’ (Moscovici, 1984a, p. 9). Moscovici defines this force as something which exists in a structure and a tradition which are both in place even before we, as individuals, are born. ‘While these representations, which are shared by many, enter into and influence the mind of each they are not thought by them; rather, to be more precise, they are re-thought, re-cited and re-presented’ (1984a, p. 9). In this sense, social representations can be seen to have a ‘constructive effect’, they do not simply provide a connection between beliefs and objects, rather they
provide a particular sense of the world. The world is 'constructed by, and in terms of, social representations. Experience of political parties, say, is constrained by social representations. If the leader of the Conservatives acts in a certain way the meaning of her actions will be constructed by people's representations of the Party and politics in general' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 141). As a representation is generated and becomes established, through conversations, through the media, and so on, it becomes normalised as part of conversation and 'the way things are', and it is thus presupposed that the representation is 'unavowedly literal and factual. The people who share this representation are, in an important sense, a social group: they will understand, evaluate and ultimately act in the same way.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 141).

In considering the crucial effect of representations with regards to the way the world is perceived by its populace, 'Moscovici also proposes a mechanism for peoples' methods of coping with new and unfamiliar experiences. Familiar experiences can, of course, be simply dealt with in terms of a person's existing storehouse of social representations. The unfamiliar is more problematic. Moscovici suggests that novel or strange objects are dealt with in two stages, known as 'anchoring' and 'objectification' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 141).

In the anchoring stage the unfamiliar entity is considered in terms of what is already known, is aligned with some part of an existent representation with which it has some similarity. In the objectification stage the novel entity is assimilated into the representation, altering the representation to a greater or lesser extent, and this new or modified version of the representation is then disseminated, during the course of discursive interaction, throughout the social group. 'Thus what was novel and disrupting now becomes, for that group, part of their concrete reality.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 142).
This process of assimilation may, however, provide grounds for conflict within society at large should different social groups attempt to anchor the previously unknown entity to different existing representations. This situation may lead to the identity of the novel entity being determined 'in a competition between different institutionally founded social representations. A new variant of deviant behaviour, for instance, may, from different ideological positions within our pluralistic society, be baptized respectively as crime, illness, or cultural innovation. What will become 'public knowledge' about the initially unfamiliar and controversial phenomenon, moreover, will be contingent upon which questions are raised about it at a very early stage. An active minority with a consistent perspective may therefore have considerable impact upon the course of cultural assimilation' (Rommetveit, 1984, p. 355).

The theory of social representations is attractive in that it implies that if we can understand the social representations people use, we can understand why they behave in certain ways and why they hold certain opinions. Social representations are 'assumed to underpin attributions or the causal explanations people give for events... The representation thus provides a model of the causal processes speakers might use in explanation.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 140). However, this theory is not without its problems or detractors. Most frequently, criticisms have been levelled at Moscovici’s interpretation of social groups and his notion of social consensus.

Moscovici claims that social representations 'have their own properties which can only be discovered by studying their relations with social groups' (Moscovici, 1984, p. 135). Although Moscovici is evidently referring to naturally occurring social groups his theory does not present any means of identifying these groups independently of their shared representations. 'If the relevant groups cannot be identified independently, analysis slides into unenlightening circularity: the group is identified from its social representations, and yet the group itself is taken to generate
those social representations' (Litton and Potter, 1985, p. 384). While the theory of social representations is theoretically coherent, this inherent tautology renders it problematic in terms of empirical research. To begin with a specific social group and attempt to define the representations of that group 'presupposes the correctness of the notion that representations delimit groups. There is a vicious circle of identifying representations through groups, and assuming groups define representations' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 142). Furthermore, it is essentially impossible to define a social group without relying on members’ representations of that group. ‘This leads to damaging inconsistencies. On the one hand, group categories will be treated as naturally occurring phenomena which can be used as a clear base for research conclusions. On the other hand, group categories can themselves be understood as social representations constructed in the course of participants’ communication’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, pp. 142-143).

There are also certain problems with regards to Moscovici’s notion of consensus, and it is suggested that the emphasis placed on homogeneity and unity within social groups masks the existence of variety and differentiation therein. Potter and Litton (1985) state that ‘if social representations are developed a priori as a group diacriteria - and it will always be possible to find linguistic phenomena which mark off one group from another - there is a risk of excluding linguistic phenomena of like kind (which are shared and used to make sense of the world) but which cross-cut group boundaries. To make groups the central focus of attention and social representations characteristics of those groups, encourages the analyst to draw cleavages between groups, ignoring similar sorts of data which link those same groups’ (p. 373). The lack of attention paid to the existence of representations that are not neatly contained within a particular social group may be considered a rather serious omission in a theory that presents these representations as homogenising forces that serve to maintain undisturbed consensus.
Neglecting the existence of representations shared by members of different social groups is not the only potential shortcoming with regards to this theory, there is also the issue of exactly how a representation is presented during interaction and how this affects the notion of consensus. ‘The point is that consensus may be assessed at each of these three levels - mention, use in theory, use in practice - and important information is lost if they are simply collapsed together’ (Potter and Litton, 1985, p. 85). While social consensus is undeniably an extremely difficult phenomenon to gauge, social representation theory presents a rather misleading picture as it so obviously fails to attend to differential circumstances. Of course, social representation theorists necessarily apply their own representations during their analysis, as they collapse the specific language used by participants into a series of representations. There have been few attempts to consider the meanings of the participants, and thus the developed set of representations are often little more than the analysts attempts to find social order.

Problems such as these have, in part, prompted the idea of ‘interpretative repertoires’ which is not dependant upon the notion of social consensus in the same way, and is able to account for ‘contextual variation: respondents modifying their discourse in the light of the exigencies of the current interaction rather than reproducing the social representation which they hold’ (Potter and Litton, 1985, p. 86).

3.5 Interpretative Repertoires

Interpretative repertoires (formerly referred to as linguistic repertoires) are repeatedly used groups of terms drawn upon to evaluate and characterise events, actions and other phenomena. Repertoires are ‘constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions. Often a repertoire will be organized around specific metaphors and figures of speech (tropes)’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). Applying an understanding of interpretative repertoires may be considered similar to the work of social representation
theorists in that attempts are made to systematically consider the way in which beliefs, attitudes and attributions are organised.

However, unlike social representations, interpretative repertoires are not regarded as intrinsically linked to social groups, 'repertoires are available to people with many different group memberships, and patterns of accounting may not be the neatest way of dividing up society, or confirming conventional group categorizations.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 156). Developed in the analytic practice of discourse analysis, the study of interpretative repertoires asserts that these systems of evaluation are constituted linguistically, rather than cognitively, and thus the ambiguity over this matter with regards to social representations is avoided. This approach also 'emphasizes flexibility: instead of thinking of an entire representation as either present or absent, the suggestion is that selections are made from the available themes to best suit the function to which the discourse is put' (Wetherell, Stiven and Potter, 1987, p. 61).

The idea of repertoire is, therefore, not concerned with illustrating social consensus, within-group consensus, or otherwise, rather it looks to the particular social features of any situation and aims to relate the chosen repertoire to that specific context. This approach does not, consciously or unconsciously, limit the analyst to those constructions shared by participants of a particular social group. Indeed, 'different linguistic repertoires are found to be produced in functionally different contexts; by drawing upon a specific repertoire the same person may account for the same event in very different ways on different occasions, or may account for certain types of event in certain systematic ways. And, crucially, these regular features of linguistic usage can be shown to relate to the interpretative exigencies of the situation in hand' (Potter and Litton, 1985a, p. 89).

Interpretative repertoires are considered as tools for performing a range of different accounting tasks within a range of different social situations. As such,
very different repertoires are drawn upon dependent upon the contingent factors in hand. 'From this theoretical perspective what is predicted is exactly variability rather than consensus. Consistency is important in discourse analysis, it is useful to identify the occasions where some people draw on one repertoire and some another, but analysts do not assume that on other occasions these people would necessarily produce the same repertoires.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 156).

While social representation theory suffers from an inability to distinguish between the different ways in which representations are brought into conversation, and thus presents an unrealistic picture of consensus, the study of repertoires acknowledges that these interpretative schemes can be both 'used' and 'mentioned': 'a linguistic repertoire is used when it is drawn upon to explain certain events. It is mentioned when it is recognized as an available explanation, but not used. Use in theory is further distinguished from use in practice. For instance, a particular explanatory form might be used to account for voting patterns in general or the speaker's own voting at a specific election. These differences may be subtle, but are evidently important when consensus is at issue' (Potter and Litton, 1985b, p. 100).

Although the study of repertoires is far less concerned with consistency than the study of representations that is not necessarily to say that it does not exist. In fact, 'it may be possible to demonstrate that participants give primacy to certain kinds of account in specific contexts or to certain repertoires when accomplishing certain kinds of interpretative outcomes, such as jokes, justifications, or utility accounts' (Potter and Mulkay, 1985, p. 267).

In the social sciences the idea of repertoires has been studied extensively with regards to the discourse of pure scientists, where two main repertoires are said to exist: the empiricist repertoire and the contingent repertoire. The empiricist repertoire is found to be based on the way scientists present their findings as though they constitute an exact reflection of the way things are. 'Empiricist
discourse is organised in a manner which denies its character as an interpretative product and which denies that its author’s actions are relevant to its content.’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 56). The contingent repertoire is said to be based on rather more personal attributes, such as feeling, choice, persuasion and intuitiveness, ‘scientists’ actions are no longer depicted as generic responses to the realities of the natural world, but as the activities and judgements of specific individuals acting on the basis of their personal inclinations and particular social positions.’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 57).

The existence of these two very different accounting practices within the discourse of scientists effectively illustrates that this discourse cannot be regarded as a literal representation of activity or belief in any given scientific field. Instead, the nature of discourse as dependent upon the social exigencies of the situation in hand is made visible. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) make this variability evident in their work as they describe the way scientists ‘select from the full meaning potential of their language as they construct formal and informal contexts within the scientific domain’ (p. 40). It is shown that scientists tend towards the contingent repertoire in their informal or experimental research papers, that ‘they make their results meaningful by linking them to explicit accounts of social action and belief’ (p. 40). Conversely, scientists tend towards the empiricist repertoire within the realm of formal discourse, ‘formal accounts are couched in terms of an empiricist representation of scientific action’ (p. 40).

Illustrating the variability in the accounting practices of scientists in this manner serves to provide an understanding of the ‘recurrent appearance of interpretative inconsistency in scientists’ discourse’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 40). However, it should not be assumed that these seemingly incompatible repertoires are easily distinguishable. Potter and Mulkay (1985) comment that ‘there are no unproblematic means for separating those accounts that are literal descriptions from those that are not’ (p. 265). In order to study this variability further the spoken accounts
and records of participants are considered ‘as the products of participants’ situated interpretative practices. Variability can thus be viewed as a product of the way actions and beliefs are flexibly characterised in terms of different accounting systems in differing interpretative contexts’ (Potter and Mulkay, 1985, p. 265, in Brenner et al. (eds.)).

Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), examine the co-existence of two interpretative repertoires in the discourse of scientists and ask ‘If scientists regularly draw upon and move between two quite different repertoires, how is it that potential contradictions between these repertoires do not require constant attention?’ (p. 90). Their answer revolves around the ‘truth will out device’ (TWOD), which may be used in discourse where more than one repertoire is used at the same time. In terms of the discourse of scientists, the TWOD is used to imply that gradually ‘the realities of the physical world will be recognised; and idiosyncratic, social, distorting influences will consequently be seen as such’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 94).

The TWOD is extremely effective as a reconciliatory device between the two repertoires as it reiterates that which is self-evident in a particular and appropriate fashion. ‘TWODs enable the speaker to reaffirm the scientific legitimacy of his position where this has been put in question by his own speech. They do this by making the association between contingency and false belief a matter of interpretative fiat, by separating contingent and empiricist elements over time, and by reasserting the eventual dominance of the speaker’s own empiricist formulations.’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 99).

Gilbert and Mulkay go on to discuss the characteristics of interactional scenarios involving the use of TWODs and claim that many of these instances share three characteristics: firstly, that they ‘stress the element of time’; secondly, that they ‘treat ‘proof as something that necessarily emerges over time’; and thirdly, that they ‘are used to reconcile the two interpretative repertoires.’ (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 105). Having said that, it is noted that there may be examples of TWODs which
are not used for the purpose of reconciling two interpretative distinct repertoires, and that certain discursive instances that do not share the above three characteristics may also be used for this specific purpose of reconciliation. In the main however, the TWOD may be considered as 'an interpretative resource which enables speakers to resolve the potential inconsistencies that periodically arise as they generate diverse accounts of their social worlds.' (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984, p. 110).

In attending to the notion of interpretative repertoires, whether within interview or any other kind of data, analysts are not attempting to develop a precise picture of the beliefs, attitudes and actions of the participants within a specific arena of social life. 'Rather, we are using interviews as a technique for generating interpretative work on the part of the participants, with the aim of identifying the kinds of interpretative repertoires and interpretative methods used by participants and with the goal of understanding how their interpretative practices vary in accordance with changes in interactional context. Although we have abandoned the traditional assumption that we can infer from interview talk what actually happens in the social realm under investigation, we are nevertheless continuing to assume that we can, in a more restricted sense, generalise from interviews to naturally occurring situations. For we are assuming that the interactional and interpretative work occurring in interviews resembles to some degree that which takes place outside interviews' (Potter and Mulkay, 1985, pp. 268-269). In this sense, data is used to show the interpretative practices used by participants in constructing their own particular version of the world, and not, as is more traditional, to extract 'a single, coherent analyst's version' (p. 249).

This analytic approach reveals differing groups of terms, interpretative repertoires, used in different ways. 'These differences should, however, also be salient to the participants.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 153), and one means of establishing whether or not those repertoires discovered by the analyst also have relevance for the participants is to 'see if they themselves orientate to them. We use the term 'orientate' rather than, say, 'notice' or 'understand' very deliberately, because
we are not concerned with whether participants are consciously aware of these organizations, just whether they are a feature of their interpretative practices.' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 153). However, those occasions where the inconsistencies between different repertoires do become apparent to the participants whose discourse is under study provide an interesting analytic focus. Such occasions allow the analyst 'to explicate the devices that participants use to resolve inconsistency and reproduce coherent and unproblematic accounts of their social worlds for particular interactional situations, despite the potential wide variety of such situations and despite the variety of available repertoires and accounting systems' (Potter and Mulkay, 1985, p. 267).

The study of interpretative repertoires may be complemented by studies of ideological dilemmas, the latter being expressed through the former. 'The dilemmatic nature of ordinary thought might be said to reveal that people possess contrary linguistic repertoires for talking about their social lives' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, quoted in Billig et al., 1988, p. 143), and the existence of contrary repertoires within particular social arenas may indicate a particular ideological divide. As such we will now turn our attention to the contrary nature of ideology as documented by those concerned with ideological dilemmas.

3.6 Ideological Dilemmas

Theorists such as Mannheim posit that the mental structure of any social epoch contains an 'inner unity' (1953, p. 76), and theorists such as Moscovici (1984a) suggest that social groups achieve and maintain a consensus between members. The notion of ideological dilemmas, however, is generated by a somewhat oppositional perspective. 'Ideology is not seen as a complete, unified system of beliefs which tells the individual how to react, feel and think. Instead ideology, and indeed common sense, are seen to comprise contrary themes' (Billig et al, 1988, p.2), and it is these contrary themes that provoke the emergence of social dilemmas. In this
sense, the notion of ideological dilemmas can be considered as a challenge to both ideological and cognitive theory, which may be said to ignore the social nature of thinking.

The work of Billig et al. (1988) may be regarded as one of the most influential texts with regards to the explication of ideological dilemmas, focusing as it does on the contrary nature of ideology within numerous different social arenas. As such, much of the following discussion makes reference to this particular text. 'The persuasive point being made by Billig and his colleagues is that systems of ideas or beliefs cannot be translated into practice without contradictions becoming apparent. These contradictions emerge as dilemmas facing people in everyday life, as they apply what they 'know' to what they do. There are always at least two competing and contrasting versions about how the world could be interpreted or how action should be undertaken. For Billig and his colleagues these dilemmas are related to the contradictions inherent in ideological perspectives. The sociology of knowledge and the theory of ideology do not, however, describe a system of unitary beliefs that present a coherent picture of the world.' (Dant, 1991, p. 163). In discussing ideology, it is possible to make a distinction between 'lived ideology' and 'intellectual ideology': lived ideology 'refers to ideology as a society’s way of life. This sort of ideology includes what passes for common sense within a society'; intellectual ideology may be regarded as 'a system of political, religious or philosophical thinking and, as such, is very much the product of intellectuals or professional thinkers' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 27).

Examining the posited existence of ideological dilemmas attends to the social nature and content of thought, something which has largely been overlooked by cognitive psychologists and ideological theorists alike. This perspective takes exception to those which ignore the thinking of individuals and the idea that individuals are ‘the blinded bearers of a received ideological tradition’ who merely ‘act according to these received constraints’ and ‘pass them on to the next generation’ (Billig et al., p. 2). Instead, individuals are seen as thinking beings, deliberating and
puzzling over their everyday lives. And this is where ideological dilemmas can be seen to exist, 'ideology, and indeed common sense, are seen to comprise contrary themes. Without contrary themes, individuals could neither puzzle over their social worlds nor experience dilemmas. And without this, so much thought would be impossible' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 2).

Billig et al. make the point that considerations of the nature of dilemmas have generally been confined to instances of difficult decision making and argue that 'this narrow focus has prevented social psychologists from appreciating the dilemmatic quality of much everyday thinking, which can be revealed whether or not individuals are actually faced with decisions to be made' (1988, p. 9). Their approach, in contrast, is to examine the social pre-conditions for dilemmas and to reveal how ordinary, everyday life contains dilemmatic qualities. 'In addition, the focus is upon social preconditions, as revealed in common-sense or in ideology. As a consequence, attention is directed not to the individual thinker as such, but to those aspects of socially shared beliefs which give rise to the dilemmatic thinking of individuals' (Dant, 1991, p. 8). One method of doing this is to consider commonly known proverbs and maxims that conflict with each other. Take, for example, the often repeated maxim that 'one can never be too rich or too thin', and then consider the sayings 'money isn't everything' and 'beauty is only skin deep'. There are obvious inconsistencies here, and yet each of these sayings is born from the same society, the same common sense contributed to by all, and as such the notion that everyday social thinking, quite aside from those times of intense conflict over a particular issue, contains contrary elements is illustrated. 'The contrary themes of common sense provide more than just the seeds for arguments: they also provide the seeds for thought itself. The justification for suggesting this is based upon the notion that thinking and arguing are closely connected. When one thinks about a dilemma, wondering whether to pursue one or other course, one arranges the reasons as in an argument, sifting through the balance of justifications and criticisms using the pros as arguments against the cons.
and vice versa... These are the arguments which arise within a particular common sense, as people debate about the common sense which they share' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 17).

Just as the study of interpretative repertoires developed through discourse analysis, so the study of ideological dilemmas lends itself to this approach. It is suggested that in studying everyday discourse the contrary themes inherent in social knowledge will reveal themselves (Billig et al., 1988). However, everyday thinking is not the only concern of those studying ideological dilemmas, intellectual thinking also comes under scrutiny. Both concepts of ideology, lived and intellectual, have traditionally been assumed to provide a basic internal consistency, 'so that the thoughts, beliefs, values and so on fit together into the total mental structure' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 29), although this is perhaps most apparent with regards to intellectual ideology, where it often appears that the ideologist has a closed mind as a result of their ideology explaining away or dismissing any contradiction. Contradictions are, however, also concealed by lived ideology, where individuals are often considered to have a systematically biased mental structure to which they 'helplessly, and unseeingly, conform' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 31). Interestingly, the very existence of two different types of ideology suggests another source of dilemma. 'Ideologues and social theorists may face particular dilemmas because they simultaneously possess both sorts of ideology. Their thinking embraces both the great theory, constructed in the calm of the study and realized in its systematic completeness on paper, and the everyday beliefs which enable the theorist to go about the normal business of society' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 32).

Despite the apparent consistency within both types of ideology, dilemmas are to be found within each. For example, in his work considering the way poverty is discussed, Edelman (1977) claims that individuals hold two disparate myths about the causes of poverty. On the one hand there is the social myth that the poverty stricken are to blame for their own predicament, where notions of weakness of character, laziness and drunkenness feature strongly. On the other
hand, there is the social myth which sympathetically casts the poor as victims of an unfair society. As such, 'there is a tension in the discourse about poverty and inequality between blame and sympathy... Contrary values are asserted, as the same people believe that the state should aid the poor and that state aid is liable to undermine the moral worth of the poor' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 41). Both of these perspectives can be found within intellectual ideology and lived ideology; the notion of ideological dilemmas does not assume that the ideology of intellectuals is somehow more able to form an inner consistency than that of common sense ideology. Indeed, the study of dilemmas 'is not intended merely to document the passage from intellectual to lived ideology. It is also intended to provide a social psychological commentary on the nature of ideology. This is possible because the present conception of ideology, whether lived or intellectual, departs from that of many theorists. The difference resides, above all, in the images of the thinker, or bearer of ideology, to emerge from those views which stress the dilemmatic aspects of ideology, as against those which assume the basic internal consistency of ideology' (Billig et al., 1988, pp. 29-30).

The study of ideological dilemmas, then, serves as a challenge to the traditional notion of ideology as a consistent and internally coherent schema which presents the individual thinker as an 'unthinking bearer of a present programme for thinking' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 29). In fact, this approach contests the idea of a 'present programme' existing at all as it examines the opposing principles evident in common sense which create ambiguities and puzzles for individuals to deliberate and argue over; 'the individual possesses more than one schema, and therefore will be faced by choices, or dilemmas, about categorizing information. Similarly, there will exist a multiplicity of values within any community' (Billig, 1987, p. 241). Of course it is not being suggested that members of a particular group, society or historical time period have nothing in common, rather that 'the content of dilemmas will vary from society to society and from epoch to epoch, and it will do so for a simple reason: varying patterns of cultural norms, beliefs and values will give rise to
varying patterns of dilemmatic concerns' (Billig et al., 1988, p. 25). As such, current social dilemmas may be regarded as reflective of current society.

In acknowledging the dilemmatic or contrary quality of common sense it is not suggested that individuals are left hopelessly confused about their social world, rather it is posited that it is this very quality that allows thinking and arguing to take place and ‘only if there are such dilemmas and deliberation, rather than the smooth and unthinking categorization of all worldly particulars, can our discourse bear a moral quality’ (Billig, 1996, p. 238). The existence of dilemmas and contrary themes within our social world, our common sense, means that individuals operate as reasoning beings, aware of that and those which surround them. Individuals are able to simultaneously express their adherence to conflicting themes, to express the reasonableness of contrary notions within social belief, such as the differential myths concerning poverty, where neither seems fully satisfactory. ‘And without this, so much thought would be impossible’ (Billig et al., 1988. P. 2).

The analyst’s job, then, is to study the means individuals adopt for expressing one theme over another, or for expressing conflicting themes equally. From this the social preconditions that give rise to any dilemma may be better understood and the contrary nature of ideology or common sense be unravelled. ‘The presence of contrary themes in discussions is revealed by the use of qualifications. The unqualified expression of one theme seems to call forth a counter-qualification in the name of the opposing theme. There is a tension in the discourse, which can make even monologue take the form of argumentation and argument occur, even when all participants share similar contrary themes’ (Billig at al., 1988, p. 144). It is worth noting the potential of conjunctions such as ‘still’ or ‘but’ to reveal the existence of opposing themes within the same dialogue. For example, the conjunction ‘but’ in comments such as ‘I have nothing against foreigners, but...’ or ‘all blacks should be expelled... but X is a nice person and should stay’ (Billig, 1985, p. 98) draws attention to the opposing
themes of prejudice and tolerance and their existence, both grammatically and
dilemmatically, within the same sentence.

The study of ideological dilemmas reveals that their nature is not born of either
intellectual debate and confusion or of straightforward choices and alternative
courses of action. Rather, their nature is born of the conflicting values inherent in
any society. 'In this way the characteristics of dilemmas are revealed as fundamentally
born out of a culture which produces more that one possible ideal world, more than one
hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest. In this sense social beings are
confronted by and deal with dilemmatic situations as a condition of their humanity'
(Billig et al., 1988, p. 163).

3.7 A THEORETICAL DIVIDE

Having considered the above theoretical possibilities for our consideration of the
accounts proffered by the participants it seems that the five fairly distinct
approaches can be roughly divided into two types of approach. This division is
based upon the difference between those theories pertaining to social consensus
and those theories pertaining to social dilemma. The first three approaches
presented, Mannheimian sociology of knowledge, Foucauldian discourses and
social representation theory, may be considered in terms of social consensus and
thus offer a particular approach to the analysis of data. The latter two
approaches, interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas, may be
considered in terms of social dilemma and differentiation and therefore offer a
very different approach to the analysis of data.

Mannheimian sociology of knowledge emphasises the difference between
perspectives or versions of the world dependent on social and historical location,
and thus encourages an awareness of the specific social group from within which
the data for this project were collected. In this respect, the five dimensions
should be considered with reference to their emergence from within the contemporary stand up comedy environment and the perspective of that group as a whole. If it is indeed the case that individuals think in the same manner as the social group to which they belong, such as an occupational group, then we ought to be able to uncover a certain amount of consistency in the accounts provided with regards to both the existence and treatment of the dimensions. Of course the data gathered have been produced by participants from a number of separate groups, though connected to stand up comedy in some form or another, and so we might expect to see the development of certain divisions along those lines.

However, it is unclear as to whether those involved with stand up comedy form a separate social group or organisation or whether they are a small section of a wider social group. In our assessment of the relevance of the discursive dimensions in a consideration of performers and performances in a wider context this may become apparent. Indeed, Mannheim suggested that the mental structure of a particular epoch contains an inner unity, and so we might expect to find the knowledge as displayed in the discourse of these particular participants to be comparable to those in the wider social setting.

Foucault’s approach to discourse is also concerned with the contingencies of both social and historical location, suggesting that it is these factors that control what can and cannot be said at any one time or in any one environment. In this sense, we might look to the discourses of the participants with an interest in the ‘situatedness’ aspects of what is being said, rather with any concern to assess the validity or truthfulness of the speakers’ accounts. Foucault’s approach to discourse may also prompt an awareness of disagreement within the accounts offered by participants, in that he implies there should be consensus between members of the same social group. Again, it is unclear at this point whether those connected to stand up comedy are an exclusive social organisation, or part
of a wider social group. In our assessment of the contingent factors influencing the discourse of the participants this may become more clear. Bearing this approach in mind, we may also look to the discourse in terms of social power, in terms of what it can tell us with regards to the influential perspectives or norms of this time.

Social Representation Theory suggests that different social groups have different ways of representing the world in their discourse, indeed that it is these differences that distinguish groups from one another. This perspective, therefore, encourages a consideration of whether the accounts offered by participants are exclusively consensual, whether the participants use similar social representations in their talk, thereby rendering the speakers a specific group, or representative of a wider consensus, thereby rendering them a sub-section within a larger social grouping. As such, social representation theory can be treated as a candidate solution to the problem of whether those involved with stand up comedy constitute a specific and separate social group. While Moscovici’s notion of consensus is highly contested, his approach encourages us to consider the data with regards to what it can tell us about the particular way of understanding adopted by those connected to stand up comedy, although care should be taken that this concern with similarity between speakers does not conceal differentiability. The approach proffered by social representation theorists also informs our attempts to understand the dyadic nature of the dimensions of performing. Representations are regarded as providing a model of the causal processes speakers use in their explanations or accounts and thus differing, and even oppositional, explanations can be explored with regards to what prompted their production.

The study of Interpretative Repertoires focuses on the repeatedly used collections of terms for characterising events, actions and other phenomena. It is suggested that different accounts of the same phenomenon may be given, by
different speakers or by the same speaker at different times, and that none of these accounts should be considered as a literal description, that there is no one reality or truth to which these accounts are referring. In this sense, the repertoires used by speakers can be regarded as constructions developed to serve a particular purpose at a particular time and the job of the analyst is to consider the nature of this purpose. The study of interpretative repertoires may thus be considered the study of situated interpretative practises. This perspective, with its inclusion of the ‘truth will out device’, is particularly useful for a consideration of the dyadic nature of the thematic dimensions pertaining to our discussion of performers and performance practices. It provides a means of assessing participants orientation to one ‘side’ of a dimension, or the other, and encourages us to develop a situated understanding of the particular orientation at any one time. In that it encourages an awareness of the limited nature of lexical, grammatical and stylistic constructions, this perspective also allows an understanding of why there might exist a relatively small number of dimensions (five) along which the participants have chosen to construct their versions of understanding the nature of performers and performances.

The study of Ideological Dilemmas considers the contrary debates inherent in both lived and intellectual ideology, although this project is far more concerned with that which is referred to as lived ideology or ‘everyday common sense’. This approach, then, focuses on the apparent contradictions or inconsistencies with regards to interpretations of the world and how these contradictions are made visible during the activity of putting reality into words. It is suggested that a discussion of any topic can subsequently lead into a discussion of its ‘counter-topic’, and this is particularly significant for our understanding of the dyadic nature of the five dimensions pertaining to performing. This perspective, like that concerned with interpretative repertoires, is less caught up with notions of social consensus than with the idea that any individual has a whole range of choices available to them with regards to categorising information. Indeed, it is
suggested that there exists a multiplicity of values within any one social group. The import of this approach lies in an examination of the general social preconditions which give rise to these dilemmatic aspects of thinking. In that particular dilemmas are seen to presuppose far wider dilemmatic aspects of thinking, so our examination of the five discursive dyads constructed in the discourse of those connected to stand up comedy can be seen to presuppose general dilemmas in wider thinking. This approach, then, encourages us to consider the particular ideological traditions of contemporary society with respect to performers and performance, and to develop an understanding of the values participants wish to be seen to respect.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYTIC METHODS

4.1 RECAPITULATION AND DIMENSIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

This chapter serves to take stock of the research process to date, and to establish an approach from this point forward. In doing so, the significance of the five thematic dimensions in a consideration of performing will be debated with regards to both the stand up comedy arena and the wider social environment. The second stage in grounded theory methodology will be presented with respect to the approach it offers for data analysis, and the attention paid to discursive concerns as part of this analysis acknowledged. The theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter Three are considered in terms of the approach to conceptualising, or developing an understanding of, the five dimensions they offer. Finally, the ensuing analytical chapters will be introduced by means of a foreword.

The research process to this point has generated a number of things, some of which will form the backbone of the thesis, and around which the essence of this work will revolve. Most importantly we have a methodological approach, grounded theory; a collection of prevalent data-based concerns, which appear to be interconnected via their association with the social phenomenon of performing; and we have a collection of pre-existing treatments of certain other social entities which may be considered somewhat similar, as found in the literature. Each of these elements may be used to inform the direction the project takes.

One further significant matter is that the research environment in which this research took place may not be the only social location in which the dimensional
concerns exist. It could be suggested that these concerns are relevant not only for those connected to the stand up comedy environment, but also for those who are not. This potential with regards to the significance of the dimensions evolves from their nature as relevant to performing, to performers and performance practices, and these we are all engaged in, at least some of the time. The first recognition of this came from my own thoughts concerning some of the issues the data presented during the process of transcription. It was possible to think about these issues from my own perspective, and they were not alien thoughts, these were not things that I had never previously considered. In mentioning some of these things to friends and colleagues further debates and comments were elicited. None of us are stand up comics, or in any way connected to the business of stand up comedy, and yet we all had something to say about the issues drawn from the discourse of those who are. The point, then, is that these issues, concerns, dimensions, cannot be considered in isolation, they must be approached from a wider perspective than that of the stand up comedy environment. Indeed, the perspectives offered in Chapter Three provide examples of how this approach has been carried out in previous instances, and henceforth make a useful contribution to the approach adopted herein.

At this point, what we have is page after page after page of transcribed data, and the first stage in the grounded theory process of data analysis has been completed: 'The researcher works through the text line by line, or paragraph by paragraph, labelling the key concepts that appear' (Potter, 1998, p. 125). The dimensional concerns have been developed to some extent and the transcripts have been roughly divided up into overlapping groups based on tentative thoughts concerning the different categories of dimension. Each of these categories is augmented by a collection of notes, memos, and annotations pertaining to the scope and significance of each dimension, and the relationships between them.
In their seminal work on the procedures and techniques of grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990) provide an extensively detailed chronological recipe for researchers to follow. However, there is no need to be overly directed by these authors and individual researchers should take that which they feel is necessary for their project and not feel obliged to carry out every procedure or technique if they fail to add anything to the study in hand. Indeed, Silverman (1993) offers a simplified model in three steps: firstly the researcher should 'attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data'; secondly they should 'saturate these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance'; and thirdly they should concentrate on 'developing these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting' (p. 46). As Silverman’s synopsis suggests, the development and refinement of categories derived from the research data form the key tasks for grounded theorists. This business is attended to during the process of ‘coding’, and Strauss and Corbin suggest that the data should be subjected to three different types of coding. ‘After data is collected and stored the intensive process that is most characteristic of grounded theory is performed. This involves coding the data, refining the coding and identifying links between categories, and writing “memos” which start to capture theoretical concepts and relationships’ (Potter, 1998, p. 125).

The first type of coding, ‘open coding’, refers to the sort of organisational activity that took place as the data for this project was being transcribed. During this time emergent concepts and categories were noted and subject to some basic and preliminary annotational development. This stage initiates the first steps towards shaping and firming up the direction for the project as a whole, although it is tentative and subject to change and further development. During the process of coding and comparing it is recommended that researchers undertake memo writing. These memos should endeavour to further explicate
the coding practices. 'Memo writing is central to the process of building theoretical understandings from the categories, as it provides a bridge between the categorization of data and the writing up of the research' (Potter, 1998, p. 126). The memos, or notes, that were developed while transcribing the data, and the subsequent re-readings of it, served to draw attention to those areas that seemed most interesting and it was thus that the early development of the five dimensions began. Of course, there were many false starts, and the categories, or dimensions, that stand as the result of this work did not appear quite as neatly as they are presented here. Indeed, the final decision about categories was not made until well into the secondary stage of coding the data.

Once the first stage of coding has been completed, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest a period of ‘theoretical sensitivity’. At this point the developing categories begin to take shape as decisions are made regarding which concerns are pertinent and which are not. Theorists are encouraged to pick out interesting, significant and important parts of the data. With regards to this project, it was at this time that the decision was made to concentrate on the five overwhelmingly prevalent dimensions as the main categories in a consideration of performers and performance, and each was named in such a way that they were immediately recognisable. Certain other categories, the concept of ‘voice’ for example, were made relevant to one or more of these core categories. In this instance the issues surrounding the off stage voice and the on stage voice of a stand up comic were easily incorporated into the ‘Self and Persona’ category or dimension. Once all the data based instances of any particular category have been picked out ‘the researcher can focus on the differences in the use of this category according to the setting or the actors involved. This is what grounded theorists refer to as the “method of constant comparison.” In the course of such comparisons the category system may be reworked; some categories may be merged together and others will be broken up, as the close reading of the data allows an increasingly refined understanding’ (Potter, 1998, p. 125).
The second type of coding, 'axial coding', attends to the treatment of the key categories by the participants. It is suggested that the strategies employed in handling or managing these concerns are considered, alongside the consequences of these strategies. For the purposes of this research attention is directed towards the way the interviewees and the interviewer talk about the dimensional concepts and what can be said with regards to the way this is accomplished.

'Selective coding', the third type of coding as determined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), encourages the selection of a core category which can be systematically related to the other categories in a series of observable and valid relationships. In doing so, commitment to one particular analytic story line is developed and the overall portent of the research recognised. The researcher should attempt to link their categories together, to see how they fit as part of some overall pattern. 'The goal here is to start to model relationships between categories' (Potter, 1998, p. 125).

Selecting a core category from the collection of pre-developed categories is only achievable if one exists in an abstract enough form to encompass these others, and this may not be the case. Indeed, with regards to the five dimensional categories developed from this particular corpus of data, no one category stood out as an obvious core category. In this situation it is necessary to find a central phenomenon to which the categories can be seen to relate. The grounded theory of this research postulates 'performing' as that central phenomenon. Performing is thus the cornerstone of this work, the phenomenon which the five categories, or dimensions, collectively construct and are constructed by, or, as Glaser and Strauss put it, the 'essential cement in putting together all the components of the theory' (1967).

The advantages of a grounded theory approach to data analysis is that the data is allowed to inform the development of concepts and categories as opposed to the researcher using the data to reinforce previously conceived ideas. If executed
thoroughly, the emergent theory can be considered well and truly grounded. It has, however, been suggested that the emphasis on 'theory' may be a little misleading in that the outcome of a grounded theory research project need not be a theory in any grand sense, but rather an understanding of the pattern of relationships between a particular set of categories. In this project the aim is to consider the relationship between various prevalent discursive categories which repeatedly arise as concerns for the participants in their consideration of a particular social phenomenon.

4.3 DISCURSIVE CONCERNS

'The object of empirical study is to describe the way that... texts are constructed, and to explore the functions served by specific constructions at both the interpersonal and societal level' (Wooffitt, 1993, p. 289).

One of the advantages of a grounded theory approach to research is that it is 'flexible with respect to forms of data' (Potter, 1998, p. 127). However, this research project is based almost exclusively, with the exception of a relatively small collection of ethnographic notes, on the discourse generated by a series of conversational interviews. As such, analysis of the five dimensions is focused on the way they are developed and discursively treated by the participants. This thesis recognises interview data, and talk of any other nature, as something constructed by an individual at a particular time for a particular purpose. As such, talk of any kind cannot be considered as somehow reflective of the world 'out there', of 'reality', of 'truth'. If this is taken to be the case, then in looking at the talk produced within the interviews, one of the primary concerns has to be a consideration of what it is that the participants are actually doing when they choose to say things in the way they do, and this is one of the main concerns of discourse analysis. This is not to suggest that this project should be considered as
a piece of discourse analysis, rather that the grounded theory approach to analysis is augmented by an attention to discursive concerns.

In the same way that discourse analysts would, this thesis treats discourse as the means through which the social world is constructed by individual members. It is acknowledged that all words and delivery styles are chosen, consciously or unconsciously, from a whole range of other possibilities, and the particular choices made, in the face of this potential variety, are telling with regards to the negotiations entered into by social actors. 'The point is that any description or reference is produced from a potentially inexhaustible list of possible utterances, each of which is 'logically' correct or true. So when we pose the analytic question 'why this specific description?' we need also to ask 'what tacit practical reasoning informs the design of this description?'' (Wooffitt, 1993, p. 297). To quote from Charmaz's 'Methodological Appendix' (1991) 'Particular interest will be paid to examining how contrary themes of social knowledge are revealed in everyday discourse. This will include analysing the meaning of pieces of discourse in order to interpret themes and counter-themes. This sort of interpretative task will involve what are conventionally called qualitative, rather than quantitative, analyses. In this respect, the analyses will be consistent with the broad outlines of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) recommendation that social psychologists should give special attention to the study of discourse.' (p. 21).

In their paper 'Unequal egalitarianism: A preliminary study of discourses concerning gender and employment opportunities' (1987), Wetherell, Stiven and Potter state that they are 'not concerned with the fine-grain examination of discourse, with describing and comparing, for instance, the rhetorical devices, metaphors or tropes developed in the construction of each version of events', rather that their concern is to focus 'on the broad types of versions accessible to our respondents, the themes and theories they use to structure and formulate a world view for these interview topics or the set of inter-subjectively shared resources available to them in this case' (pp. 60-61). The attention to discursive concerns in this thesis may be considered comparable to
this approach and serves to add a depth to the analysis of the five dimensions as they are manifest in the data which, without this approach, would otherwise be lacking.

4.4 Theoretical Orientation

The grounded theory and discursive approaches to data analysis in this project are augmented by the perspectives presented in Chapter Three. It cannot be said that any of these perspectives offers a detailed methodology for attending to data, indeed none offer anything like as comprehensive a guide as that proffered by Strauss and Corbin (1990). However, as argued at the end of Chapter Three, it is useful to divide these different approaches towards an understanding of how the social world is perceived by its members into two roughly distinct categories and progress with the analysis with this division in mind. The first three perspectives presented, Mannheimian sociology of knowledge, Foucauldian discourses and social representation theory, may be regarded as contributing an overwhelming concern with social consensus and cohesion, examining the way members in similar social environments account for their world in a similar fashion; the latter two perspectives, those concerning interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas, may be regarded as having their focus angled towards an examination of how different individuals and different social contingencies produce differing accounts.

Importantly, it is this divide that adds most to the analysis of the data gathered for this work in terms of establishing whether the accounts proffered by the participants are the result of a specific social location, a specific group identity, or whether these accounts are shaped by other contingent factors which may or may not be specific to the participants involved. The fact that neither ‘social consensus theory’ or ‘dilemmatic theory’ alone, nor a simple combination of the
two, provide an adequate approach to the data under analysis within this project renders this thesis eclectic in terms of its theoretical underpinnings.

4.5 THE ANALYTIC CHAPTERS: A FOREWORD

The labels 'Art and Occupation', 'Self and Persona', 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed', 'Talent and Effort', and 'Truth and Believability' have been applied as a result of the different discursive trends put into practice by the participants in their consideration of performing. Each label makes reference to certain themes which reoccur many times in the talk of the participants, and these dimensions all have resonance for the consideration of performing.

While each dimension makes a different kind of contribution to our understanding of performing, of performers and performance, it would be misleading to suggest that they are unconnected to each other. Indeed, we will see from the data that in many instances the discussion of one of the dimensions, or the reliance on one particular repertoire, necessitates an inclusion of one or more of the others. This issue of 'interconnectedness' will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Ten.

While the data presented here was generated in talking to those connected to the specific practice of stand up comedy this does not mean that the issues discussed do not have significance for the wider social arena. It is certainly likely to be the case that the specific research environment contributed to the emergence of these particular five dimensions as prevalent concerns. Indeed, the interviews were developed to find out about this specific type of performer and performance. It is therefore not surprising that the main discursive dimensions are connected to these phenomena. However, although the majority of us do not perform as stand up comics, or work in an environment in any way connected to this activity, we are all performers engaged in performance activities for much of the time. These
activities may not be used to define what we do on a daily basis but they will certainly be a considerable part of it. As such, the dimensions connected to the practice of performers and performance may have a certain relevance in wider society.

Indeed, the five pertinent dimensions dominating the discourse produced by those involved with stand up comedy may not be considered as novel, they are not new discoveries. In fact, these concerns frequently permeate and focus the thinking and action of us all, whether we stop to actively consider them or not. It is thus hoped that the reader will feel some sort of commonality between themselves and the participants, including the author, and feel able to add their own references and ideas to the consideration of performers and performance herein.

Each of the following five chapters is constructed in a similar way. Firstly, an introductory extract from the data is presented to give the reader an immediate insight into the sorts of concerns we are interested in. The particular dimension under study is then briefly discussed with regards to its relation to performers and performance in general. The dimension is then considered with regard to stand up comedy as a specific type of performance using some of the literature specifically catering to this type of entertainment practice. The next section presents a number of extracts from the corpus of data and the issues arising from this discourse are discussed with regards to the dyadic nature of the dimension and with reference to the theoretical perspectives presented in Chapter Three. Connections between the dimension under study and the other dimensions are made note of as and where applicable. Following this, the issues and concerns generated by the data extracts are considered in relation to the specific social environment of stand up comedy. Finally, these issues are considered with regards to the wider social environment and the phenomenon of performing in general.
The key points of focus for the following analytical chapters are, generally speaking, why have these themes emerged as such a concern, for the participants and more widely; why they emerge as dyadic concepts; and what do these things tell us about the nature of performers and performance? The presentation and analyses of the data chosen to illustrate these concerns are not simply engaged in pointing out those issues that seem most prevalently concerned with performers and performance, but endeavour to see how these things are dealt with by the participants. This approach serves to further our understanding of performers and performance, to uncover some of the reasons that these things are talked about in a particular way, and to make suggestions as to why we feel about these things as we apparently do.
I. I haven’t actually spoken to many of them ((agents/managers)) yet ‘cos this is my first sort of trip down to London so-

TA. Yeah... well... you’ll er you’ll find out about them as you meet them

I. I take it you don’t approve too much

TA. Not at all no it’s just that er... I’m in to er... I’m in to the stand up comedy as an art form... they’re in to stand-up comedy as a... a commercial venture

5.1 INTRODUCING ART AND OCCUPATION

The dimension entitled ‘Art and Occupation’ adds to our examination of performing a concern with the very nature of this social phenomenon. On a basic level, this dimension is generated by a consideration of whether the practice of performing is conceptualised as an artistic or an occupational activity, and thus whether performers are regarded as artists or wage earners. Of course, these two potential conceptualisations are not necessarily exclusive to each other in that it is possible for performers and performance to be considered in both an artistic and an occupational light. However, for the purposes of this analysis let ‘art’ stand for the artistic, creative, expressive, personal side of performing, and ‘occupation’ stand for the money making, logistical, career and business oriented side of performing.

Stand up comedy as a specific type of performance can be regarded as both an artistic practice and an occupational practice, and Double (1997), a stand up comic himself, expresses the ambiguity of this duality thus: ‘For me, that’s what being a comedian is all about: refereeing a three-way wrestling match between artistic ambition, ego and the need to get paid at the end of the evening. If I’m so new and different that nobody laughs, my ego and my need-for-money will gang up on my artistic ambition and crush its testicles. Stick too rigidly to tried and tested material and my artistic ambition will start thumping my ego and telling me I’ll never think up another
Munro (1957) claimed that a product need not be beautiful or otherwise meritorious to be identified as art. For him, artistic practice includes one or more of three skills: Firstly, "making or doing something used or intended for use as a stimulus for a satisfactory aesthetic experience. Aspects of this experience may include beauty, pleasantness, interest, and emotion"; secondly, "expressing and communicating past emotional and other experience, both individual and social"; and thirdly, "designing, composing, and performing through personal interpretation, as distinguished from routine execution or mechanical reproduction" (p. 45). The artistic part of stand up comedy is in making people laugh, and in doing so, this type of performance meets Munro’s three criteria. ‘It takes skill to write comic lines that are pleasant, interesting, emotional, or a combination of all three. It takes skill to communicate through humour one’s past experiences, whether emotional or not. Finally, it takes skill to perform lines in such a way that the audience laughs’ (Stebbins, 1990, p. 46).

Stand up comedy may be regarded as an occupation, or a business, in that it is a practice that has the potential to generate great wealth for those involved. Furthermore, stand up comics as a specific type of performer are managed by those whose main concern is the production of revenue, the making of profit. ‘The comic is dependant on business people, who from a sociological standpoint are classed as mediators between the comic as creator and the audience as consumer. While it is true that in no art are mediators indispensable, these people do make a difference... In short, business mediators help ensure a full-time livelihood for professional entertainers’ (Stebbins, 1990, p. 124).

It could, therefore, be suggested that an individual's particular association with stand up comedy, as a comic or as a manager for example, would determine the
way in which the practice of being funny for entertainment purposes is regarded, as an art or as an occupation. However, this does not seem to be the case in that both comics and those on the management side of stand up comedy are equally aware of the importance of both aspects of this type of performance and, indeed, without an appreciation of both sets of concerns both parties will fail in their chosen endeavour. Stebbins (1990) comments that 'agents and managers are not the only business people in stand-up comedy. Comics themselves are very much in business as well. Like agents and managers they are entrepreneurs, entertainment entrepreneurs' (p. 132). Indeed, comics stand to make a considerable amount of money if they work regularly. Double (1997) suggests that 'some door-split gigs in London can still yield as little as forty to fifty pounds, but bigger clubs can pay over a hundred... Outside of London, the comedy clubs pay a guaranteed fee instead of a door split, and this can be as much as a couple of hundred pounds. With fees like these, a comic working an average of five gigs a week would have no problem clearing twenty to thirty thousand pounds a year' (p. 223).

Stand up comedy has been presented in the literature as both an artistic endeavour and an occupational practice. With this in mind we shall now turn to the data and see how those more directly involved choose to conceptualise the social practice of stand up comedy.

5.2 TALKING ART AND OCCUPATION

The following selection of data extracts illustrate a number of the issues which have generated an awareness of the dimension 'Art and Occupation' with regards to the social phenomenon of performing. Most importantly is the evident differentiation between creative and financial reward, and a lack of unanimity over which prevails as the desired outcome of any given performance. At different times this tension is resolved as a matter of personal choice or as a matter of straightforward perception, and it is interesting to see what situational
contingencies prompt these differing treatments. Also depicted in these extracts is the change in status of financial reward over artistic success as a comic career develops; the significance of audience members as consumers of comedy as a product, as in extract two; and the desirability of producing comedy that satisfies the comic or the audience, or simultaneously satisfies the demands of both parties, as in extract one.

In the first extract, DT, a white, male stand up comic in his late thirties, discusses the nature of the performances he gives in comparison to another comic, GB, with whom he shared a stage the night before this interview took place.

Extract One

DT. The trouble is that I what I fi- I'm quite different from the audience (. ) I I and what I find funny (. ) most people certainly in that audience last night I don't think they would

L. Mmm

DT. And what they find funny (. ) I cringe at (. ) and so that's (. ) not so easy whereas for example GB (. ) who's a very different sort of comedian to me (. ) I think he's like he was like most of the audience

L. Right

DT. An- an- an- so he's actually drawing con- common (. ) experience [an-] an-

L. [Yeah]

DT. actual attitudes between him and the audience [he's] one of them (. ) umm

L. [Yeah]

DT. and they recognise what he was saying and they recognise the impressions and they applaud [it] and they- and they loved it an- I he's

L. [Mmm]

DT. more marketable and more commercial I think and he was more suited to that room

L. Right

DT. Whereas my erm approach is I do what I find funny and what's true to me

L. Right

DT. And like I o- i- i- it's (. ) like I mean (. ) if I do it totally then I'd be a- indulgent and I wouldn't actually make that audience laugh

L. Yeah

DT. So I have to come (. ) towards them and meet them [half]

L. [Yeah]

DT. way

L. Going back to the idea of being marketable

DT. Yeah and compromise because ob- there's there's no one wants a
comedian who no one laughs at [you] know or only a-five people

[Yes]

[laugh at] because the other several hundred people will boo them off so

[Yeah yeah]

the five people who do like him won't be [able] to watch

[Yeah]

anyway

Yeah

So I- so I do have to compromise to an extent () umm but a-I try to do

that as little as possible

In claiming that I’m quite different from the audience () I I and what I find
funny () most people certainly in that audience last night I don't think they
would (lines 1-3), DT initiates a consideration of the dyadic nature of the ‘Art
and Occupation’ dimension. He also implies that his performance last night (line
2) was not particularly well received by the audience, which may be treated as a
factor having some impact on the following dialogue. Here we have a comic
claiming that his own personal preferences with regards to comedy are different
from those he endeavours to entertain. Of course there is no law which enforces
comics to tailor their performances to the perceived perceptions of an audience,
comics may perform, as artists, exactly as they choose to. However, to be
successful in occupational or money making terms, comics must appeal to their
audiences and therefore, if this kind of success is the desired end, their own
comedy style must be adapted to suit the needs of their audience if it does not
already do so. In this sense, audience members are treated as consumers of the
comic product, which is a blatantly occupational concern.

DT implies that performers like GB, who's a very different sort of comedian (line
6), are in the fortunate position of having a comedy style suited to the particular
types of audiences which he himself differs from, and are therefore more
occupationally successful, more marketable and more commercial (line 16). Of
course it is impossible to say whether GB’s style has been adapted for precisely
this purpose or whether he performs exactly as he would choose to regardless of
any occupational concerns. What is of particular interest is the juxtaposition of a comment about the audience what they find funny (.) I cringe at (line 5), and a comment about GB, I think he's like he was like most of the audience (line 7). Although GB had a far more positive reception from the previous night's audience, DT does not treat this as a purely positive outcome. He goes on to state Whereas my erm approach is I do what I find funny and what's true to me (line 19), implying that he has not allowed occupational concerns to prevent his own form of artistic expression. Accounted for in this manner, with DT contrasting his approach with that of GB, it is subtly implied that GB has in some sense 'sold out', has become more marketable and more commercial (line 16) at the expense of being true to himself, of doing what he himself finds funny. From this perspective, occupational concerns are downgraded as artistic concerns are elevated, and a link is made between the dimensions of 'Art and Occupation' and 'Truth and Believability'. A concern with 'truth', in terms of being true to oneself, is most definitely an artistic concern (occupationally the comic would attempt to be true to the audience and do what they find funny) and one which, if taken to extremes, may result in not actually making an audience laugh (line 22). It seems, then, that certain notions of truth, if used as a basis for the creation of comic material, whilst asserting the comedy as art standpoint, may have profoundly negative consequences for stand up comedy as an occupational concern, as a commercial venture, to use TA’s words (see introductory extract). However, DT goes on to say that he is not indulgent (line 22) to the extent of completely disregarding the audiences preferences. He claims he has to come (.) towards them and meet them [half] way (lines 24-26), he has to compromise (line 28), because no one wants a comedian who who no one laughs at (lines 28-29).

Despite this almost begrudging acceptance of the need to entertain commercialism and marketability, DT does not appear to fully accept the merits of this approach and finally claims that while I do have to compromise to an extent (line 37) I try to do that as little as possible (lines 37-38). It seems then that
comics must tread a line between that which they would like to do on stage and that which will be an on stage success, and in this particular case the comic merits performance as an artistic endeavour rather more highly than performance as an occupational pursuit. This extract serves to illustrate the coexistence of artistic and occupational concerns within the consideration of a stand up comedy performance. It suggests that while a comic may feel inclined towards one particular set of concerns, in this instance those of a more artistic nature, the existence of both may be acknowledged and attended to in varying degrees. In this respect, DT formulates his personal opinions within a ‘stand up comedy as art’ repertoire, while simultaneously attending to the existence of a ‘stand up comedy as occupation’ repertoire. Individually, comics may assess the desired end of performing as a stand up comic very differently. At one extreme there is a concern purely to make money, at the other, the desire to perform exactly as the comics themselves wish.

In the second extract KA, a male stand up comedy teacher who runs a comedy club, also discusses the dual-edged nature of stand up comedy performance.

Extract Two

KA. Because of the way that comedy’s going nowadays (.) in terms of the audience and in terms of breweries (.) I m- this is this is r- so important for comics and they don’t realise it (.) that comedy’s become a r- a big business where people are paying between five and ten pounds on a Saturday night to go in to a club
I. °Yeah°
KA. The comedians have got to got to understand that they’ve they’ve got to (.) tailor their acts nowadays (.) towards the audience
I. Yeah
KA. Which which might sound completely wrong but liev- believe me it works and they make a lot of money (.) doing it
I. So they have to tailor it to a specific audience, do you mean there’ll be a different audience in a different club or-
KA. No because nowadays the: majority (.) especially in London, the majority of (.) comedy club goers er: r you’re talking about sort of err (.) you’re quite middle class, quite affluent, you know? [they’re] making a bit of
I. [Mhum]
KA. money, they're all in the sort of twenty five to thirty five age group (0.5)
err (.) so straight away you know- you know let's let's write material that
they can relate to
I. °Right°
KA. Err more and more women (.) are going to comedy (.) clubs on their own
you know groups of women
I. Yeah
KA. Therefore (.) you know you can't you can't do anyth- obviously you're not
going to do anything sexist but err straight away people's people have got
to start pulling their acts down a little bit and they can't go on about you
know I'm really sort of sad and depressed an- my last girlfriend left me
you know er er err I've got a pet nickname for her (.) bitch you can't do
stuff like [that] nowadays because it's it it's becoming even more offensive
I. [Yeah]
KA. (0.5) and it's i: it's just being a little bit contrived about your comedy (.)
the person who thinks he's he's totally unique and totally r- irridg-
original (.) err the chances are he's not going to make it
I. Right
KA. If you know what I mean, if you catch my drift?

KA states that comedy's become a r- a big business (lines 3-4), which
immediately indicates his concern with the occupational features of stand up
comedy performance. Having provided information as to the type of money
being paid by comedy audience members, between five and ten pounds on a
Saturday night (lines 4-5) he insists that comedians have got to got to understand
that they've they've got to (.) tailor their acts nowadays (.) towards the audience
(lines 7-8). It is implied that because audiences pay to see a comic, because in this
sense they are consumers of a performance product, they ought to be provided
with a performance that somehow suits their needs. Interestingly, KA goes on to
say that this might sound completely wrong (line 10). In making this comment
he acknowledges the existence of those who would be opposed to comics
tailoring their performance to the audience, perhaps those who see comic
performances as an artistic endeavour in which the comics should express that
which they want rather than putting the needs of their potential audience first.
In this comment, then, there is an acknowledgement of the tensions inherent
between ‘art’ and ‘occupation’, and the validity of regarding either as the desired end of any given performance.

The justification KA offers for suggesting this approach to performance is that it works and they make a lot of money (, ) doing it (lines 10-11). Here, then, it seems that the financial reward is regarded as the desired end, over and above any creative reward that the comic may feel if they perform to their own personal standards. It is also suggested that comics should be a little bit contrived (line 32) about their comedy, that they should manipulate the situation of being able to provide an audience with the type of performance that suits them in order to reap financial reward. KA also goes on to suggest that those comics who perform in an unique (line 33) or original (line 34) manner are less likely to make it (line 34), and, in line with his earlier comments about making money, we might suggest that making it is a euphemism for making money.

The above extract serves to set up an opposition between stand up comedy as an occupational practice, which leads to financial reward, and stand up comedy as a form of original or artistic expression, which rarely leads to financial reward, as perceived by this particular individual. Importantly, financial reward is presented as the superior outcome of a performance. KA’s position as the manager of a comedy club may serve as the influence behind his particular standpoint. Theorists concerned with group consensus and identity may well endeavour to posit KA’s social standing as the cause of his concern with the occupational or financial aspects of stand up comedy, suggesting that those involved with the managerial side of stand up comedy would share a collective interest in making money from the performances of stand up comics.

This extract also alerts us to what may be considered as a fairly common ideological dilemma. A concern with making money over and above any other concerns is generally considered negatively. Putting financial considerations in
front of any other, particularly within an artistic or creative arena, may be viewed as a mercenary or avaricious approach. Such a standpoint is more usually couched in less blatant terms, hidden behind ostensibly less money oriented concerns; considered thus, KA’s blatant financial preoccupation is perhaps a little out of the ordinary even despite his acknowledgement that this might sound completely wrong (line 10).

In extract three AD, a successful and well-known stand up comic in his early thirties, discusses his approach to performing today as compared with his approach as a comic at the beginning of his career.

Extract Three

I. Do you have complete say over where you play
AD. Yeah
I. "Yeah"
AD. I don’t have to- (.) got to the stage now where I don’t have to do any gig I don’t (.) wanna do [I mean] I have to work to earn a living but I don’t
I. [Right]
AD. have to (.) if I don’t want to do something then I don’t
I. Yeah
AD. There i- there’s enough work (.) around
I. Presumably it wasn’t like that (.) at the beginning
AD. No when I started I’d go anywhere
I. Yeah
AD. I drove to Swansea once for seventy quid (0.5) turned up and I was in a
(0.5) student union bar (0.5) and they’d never had comedy there before
I. Yeah
AD. Guy got up in the middle of my set took the microphone from me and
demanded that all his friends shut up ‘cos he was enjoying it (0.5) and
none of the err rules of a successful (.) [co]medy evening appl[ied]
I. [No] [no] w- you
had one on your side he was obviously quite keen
AD. He was keen
I. Yeah
AD. But no- you’d go anywhere you’d take anything
I. Mmm
AD. Stood on a chair in a bar once
In telling the interviewer that he is in a position to decide which gigs he wants to do, AD states that [I mean] I have to work to earn a living but I don't have to (.) if I don't want to do something then I don't (lines 5-7). Interestingly he chooses to describe these gigs as work (also line 9), rather than something like 'perform', which may simply be a turn of phrase although it could indicate that for him the business of performing is indeed work. However, the luxury of choice over when and where he 'works' is likely to be far removed from most people's experience of working life, many are given no choice in such matters. If you are a plumber you will plumb where plumbing needs to be done regardless of the type of work you prefer doing, and of course many workers' choice about whether to accept work or not is removed because of the need to bring home a wage. Artistic integrity in working life is a luxury many cannot afford to indulge. However, this luxury was not available to AD when he began his career as a comic and can therefore be regarded as something that has developed as he has climbed higher on the ladder of success. He says when I started I'd go anywhere (line 11) and goes on to describe one particularly non-luxurious performance in Swansea (lines 13-14).

While these ideas can be seen to reinforce the work-like or occupational nature of stand up comedy, in terms of it being a career, something that one can get better at and move up the ladder with, to a point where choices can be made about which work opportunities to take and which to turn down, just as strong a case can be made for an argument that this piece of the data reflects the art-like nature of this comic's relationship with what he does. Starting from lowly beginnings, driving to Swansea for seventy quid (line 13), standing on a chair in a bar (line 26), and ending up in a position to turn work down for reasons of personal preference can almost be regarded as a traditional route for those that succeed in the artistic world. In this respect, it seems that occupational concerns prevail at the beginning of a comic career, while as the levels of success increase there is more freedom to allow concerns with artistic expression to surface.
This extract, then, is illustrative of the way that stand up comedy as an entertainment practice can be talked about in both occupational terms and artistic terms, simultaneously, and thus it is not always possible to ascertain how those involved regard that which they do. Indeed, it may be true to say that these performers do not have a specific categorisation for their performance practice, or that they regard it differently at different times dependent upon a whole range of factors.

In extract four, taken from earlier in the same interview that generated the previous extract, AD discusses a recent performance which he regards as having been rather unsatisfactory.

**Extract Four**

1. What about urm (0.5) say a bad performance that you’ve had recently (0.5) if you’ve had such a thing
2. AD. Erm (4.0) "I can’t thi-"
3. I. Perhaps you don’t have them anymore ((laughs))
4. AD. Don’t have them anymore no ((laughs)) I’m very choosy about the gigs that I do
5. I. Right
6. AD. I don’t do that many live performances anymore and I’m very fussy about (.) where I go I suppose actually recently I did have one (.) pretty difficult one (0.5) which was a c- we call ‘em corporate gigs (0.5) where
7. you get booked through a- a lot of agencies (1.0) supply entertainment for companies
8. I. Yep (1.5) and what was wrong with it (1.0)
9. AD. "About" eighty people in a room with dinner jackets (0.5) and er (.) clearly some sort of private party (.) for one guy who was leaving the firm
10. I. Yeah
11. AD. And they’d all had dinner and err the guy who was leaving didn’t seen particularly interested in having a comic on and he was sitting right in front of the stage with his back to me, so everybody could see him and then me
12. I. Yeah
13. AD. And he was not going to laugh at anything that I did (.) so the whole thing was set up wrong
14. I. Yeah
15. AD. The sound wasn’t right, the lights weren’t right, he was (.) there were tw:0
I. Yeah yeah () so what did you do
AD. Well I just ploughed on and err () tried to play to the people beyond him
(0.5) and err made the best of it but they didn’t get the best out of me
[they] wasted their money and they wasted a a lot
I. [No]
AD. of money
I. Oh well
AD. You know they did that I I don’t care it’s their it’s their loss
I. Yeah yeah
AD. There are cer- some things tha-
(1.0)
AD. If something’s out of balance like that it throws the () show off
I. Mmm
AD. I’ve done enough shows now to kind of know how to deal with it

The interviewer asks AD about any bad performance (lines 1-2) he has had recently, and we can see by the way both the question and the ensuing answer are formulated that this is not necessarily an unproblematic topic. The interviewer and interviewee carefully, and skilfully, negotiate their way around what could potentially be an awkward moment. In looking at the transcription it seems that this question was awkward to ask, as evidenced by an urm (line 1), two pauses and a mitigating if you’ve had such a thing (lines 1-2). It also appears that AD found it a difficult question to answer, a four second pause (line 4) is a long time to take out of a conversation, and something which almost prompted the interviewer to answer her own question, although laughingly so in case an answer from AD was forthcoming.

Competence is the issue here and, in occupational terms, it is not enormously acceptable to make what could be construed as a negative comment about someone else’s competence without doing it in a ‘non-serious’ fashion. It is not acceptable to suggest that someone is bad at their job, particularly if you are an ‘outsider’ and have no real claim on understanding what it is they do, as could perceivably be thought of the interviewer by the comic.
The next part of AD’s response could be considered as work on his part to redefine the question. He does not go on to talk of a bad performance, such as the interviewer enquired about (line 1), rather he talks of a pretty difficult one (lines 9-10). ‘Difficult’ cannot be considered the same as, or another word for, ‘bad’. In fact talking about his own performances using the word ‘difficult’ has the effect of distancing the source of any problems away from him, out of his sphere of responsibility, in a way that using the word ‘bad’ does not. To talk of a ‘bad performance’ implies that he was somehow at fault, or responsible for the negative outcome of the performance. The interviewer compounds this approach by asking what was wrong with it (line 13) as opposed to something along the lines of what did you do wrong? However, the 1.5 second pause before this question (line 13), which could be regarded as a potential transition-relevance place, during which time AD had opportunity to supply details, and the one second pause (line 14) after the interviewer did ask the question, suggests that AD was not necessarily eager to discuss this particular performance.

There appear to be two distinct parts to this section of the data: a description and an evaluation. The description of this ‘difficult’ performance (lines 15-27) promotes the existence of elements over which AD had little or no control, whether they be structural or people based: the guy who was leaving didn’t seem particularly interested in having a comic on (lines 18-19), the whole thing was set up wrong (lines 23-24). The sound wasn’t right, the lights weren’t right (line 26), there were two (0.5) figures (lines 26-27). The evaluation (lines 29-35) of this difficult performance establishes AD’s response to these problems, both physical and mental: I just ploughed on (line 29), they didn’t get the best out of me (line 30), [they] wasted their money (line 31), I don’t care (line 35), it’s their loss (line 35). The juxtaposition of this description and this evaluation serves, firstly, to put AD in the clear as far as fault or responsibility for the difficult performance goes, and, secondly, to illustrate ostensibly how little the event affected him.
The tone AD takes during his evaluation seems very workmanlike, promoting the business of doing a stand up comedy performance as occupational in nature. He talks of the payment he received being a waste of a lot of money (lines 31-33). What is interesting is the implied idea that for a performance to be successful certain elements of its set up have to be dealt with in a particular way by people other than the comic. The performance does not necessarily have the power in itself to be successful, and if it is not recognised by those organising it that certain things have to be arranged in a certain way it may not be a success.

AD's assertion that I've done enough shows now to kind of know how to deal with it (line 42) suggests that he is able to deal with such problematics without them damaging his psyche, although in fact he said that he just ploughed on (line 29) and made the best of it (line 30), which does not sound a particularly positive outcome, and indeed resulted in the audience not getting the best out of me (line 30).

Having made sure that the lack of artistic success with regards to this particular performance is understood to have been out of the realm of his control, the whole thing was set up wrong (lines 23-24), AD brings in the issue of payment. Direct references to the money paid for performances were made infrequently by the participants in their discussions although, when such references were made, talk of payment tended to occur alongside the recounting of a performance which was not considered to be successful in its own right. In this sense it seems that there are potentially two different kinds of positive outcome from any one performance, artistic success and financial success. As such, if artistic success is lacking then the mention of financial reward can be brought in to ensure that at least one type of success is seen to have been achieved. In this sense, the dyadic nature of the discursive dimension of 'Art and Occupation' serves to ensure that the complete failure of any given performance is unlikely. Whether a comic is primarily interested in artistic expression or reaping financial reward, most
performances can be conceptualised as a success on some level.

In extract five KS, a mature female stand up comic in the early stages of her entertainment career, also ends a discussion of an unsuccessful performance by bringing in the issue of payment.

**Extract Five**

1 KS. Erm (. ) well I I got a sort of a polite round of applause and everything but
2 I. But that's not what really what (. ) you want [is it]
3 KS. [No] it's not (. ) well
4 afterwards people came up and said ooh I'm sorry I didn't clap b- I did
5 think you were good and I said well why didn't [you clap] well no one
6 I. 
7 KS. else wa::s hahaha
8 I. °Oh God°
9 KS. [°I didn't like to°]
10 I. [((Laughs))]
11 KS. °Jus-° but after that gig I just thought o- fuck 'em and took me money and
12 went home an- [thought]
13 I. [Yeah]
14 KS. bollocks
15 I. Yeah
16 KS. I'm going to spend this tomorrow

While AD ensured that it was understood that the downfall of his performance was not his fault, KS makes it known that, although she was disappointed at the lack of applause, this was not a reflection on her performance, that there were other reasons for the lack of response, and that people did in fact perceive her performance as good (line 5). Despite these damage-limiting explanations for the lack of overt audience appreciation, KS mentions the financial rewards generated by her performance as a final counter to the ostensible lack of artistic success. In doing so a positive outcome of her performance is established that is not entirely dependent upon her account of events.

Again it seems that, in the absence of any substantiated creative or artistic reward, the notion of financial gain is used as a means of rendering a
performance a success in at least one respect. The discussion of financial remuneration serves as a means of ensuring that any performance, however artistically unsuccessful, generates some sort of positive outcome. KS’s response to the audience that largely failed to appreciate her performance is fuck ‘em (line 11), which implies that there is something wrong with them rather than her or her performance and that she is certainly not concerned with their impression of her. While this is merely implied, the practice of disparaging an audience who have not overtly enjoyed a performance is, firstly, a common one and, secondly, a means of elaborating the potential supposition that the performance failed not because it was artistically lacking, but because the audience were not able to recognise this form of artistry.

As AD created the impression of a large financial reward, a lot of money (lines 31-33, extract one) from an artistically unsuccessful performance, KS creates the impression of a fairly immediate reward in claiming that she took her money with the intention of spending it tomorrow (line 16). In both cases the potential disappointment over the performance is, at least to some extent, negated by the generation of financial reward, either great in size or immediate in ownership.

Whilst at no time did any comic interviewed suggest that they had become a stand up comic primarily to make money, indeed the subject of money was not mentioned as any kind of reason, primary or otherwise, for their choice of activity, the issue of payment did come into the interview conversation from time to time. By far and away the most frequent location for talk of monetary matters was during a discussion of performances that had not gone well in one of a whole range of possible ways. Also included in the discussion of occasions when a performance hadn’t been particularly successful, for whatever reason, were frequent references to stand up comedy in work-like, or more conventionally occupational, terms, such as I just ploughed on (line 29, extract four).
It seems then that the practice of being a stand up comic may be regarded, separately or simultaneously, as an occupation or as an art form. On occasion these two concepts are set against each other ('art' good, 'occupation' bad), and yet they also work well together in terms of ensuring that, whether a performance is perceived as a success or not by the comic, there is always a positive outcome to focus on. Thus, it can be said that there are times when comics, or their non-performing associates, affiliate more closely with one conceptualisation of stand up comedy or the other, and that these affiliations are prone to change dependent upon a whole range of variables, not least the perceived success of any particular performance. As such, 'art' and 'occupation' may be regarded as the opposite ends of a continuum along which those involved in the business of stand up comedy are able to position themselves according to that they wish to convey at the time. The notion of 'art' and 'occupation' being at opposite ends of a continuum is upheld if we consider the beneficiary of this performance medium. If the comedy is created, not only by the comic, but for the comic, then we might consider artistic concerns to prevail. If, on the other hand, the comedy is created for the consumer, the audience, then occupational concerns are surely the more prevalent. This ambiguity remains unresolved in the discourse of the comics. However, what can be said is that there exist two distinct repertoires which may be drawn upon depending on the situational demands of any particular discursive occasion.

BV, agent and manager of AD amongst many other well known comic entertainers, whom we might imagine to be primarily interested with the money making aspect of stand up comedy, appears concerned, ostensibly at least, to distance himself from an overtly occupational standpoint.

Extract Six

1 BV. I saw lots of managers that I didn't think were very good
2 I. Right (.) in what sense not very good
3 BV. Erm because
4 (1.0)
BV. They were short sighted in my view they looked in the short term they looked as long as they could book an artist in and earn a shilling from it that's all they really cared about.

I. Right.

BV. And I've always taken the view that if you actually forget money for one second I don't know might be odd [coming] from a managers point of view but if you actually think about building the career then everybody's going to get rich.

I. Right.

BV. And I've never met an artist yet who truly won't own up to the fact erm that he doesn't want to be rich.

I. Yeah.

BV. We all want to be rich.

I. Absolutely.

BV. And I've asked most of the people I represent over the years that very simple question what do you want to do in show business for, what do you want to do it for and they all want to do it for fame and fortune.

I. Yes.

BV. And that's the reason I'm here.

What is interesting here is the almost circular line of argument taken by BV which, although at first seems to distance him from money-making concerns, has the effect of ultimately undermining his anti-monetary stance. He makes the claim that an overriding concern with making money is a sign of a short sighted manager, one that he would class as not very good. However, his reason for suggesting that one ought to forget money for one second, and think about building the career is that then everybody's going to get rich. This argument is based on a consideration of both short and long term endeavours. It is suggested that if the money making side of stand up comedy is forgotten in the short term, in the long term it will flourish.

BV also makes the claim that most of the people I represent are in the stand up comedy business for fame and fortune. Linked together like this, 'fame' and 'fortune' seem occupational concerns rather than artistic ones,
Despite his efforts to assert that making money should not be a primary focus. As such, it could be said that the position negotiated, between 'art' and 'occupation', is not necessarily straightforward.

This extract reflects an ostensible concern to be regarded as having interests in stand up comedy other than financial ones, although this may be considered largely a matter of self-presentation. BV states that I've never met an artist yet who (.) truly won't own up to the fact erm (.) that he doesn't want to be rich...

We all want to be rich (lines 15-18), thus establishing his own position with regards to the so-called 'art/occupation continuum', despite earlier comments concerning short sighted (line 5), money oriented goals. His verbalisation of the idea that everyone wants to be rich places his own desire to make money within the arena of normal or usual. His use of the word truly (line 15), however, is telling in terms of the commonplace practice of disguising an overriding preoccupation with making money. It is implied that while the artists he associates with are similarly implicated in the desire to become rich, this desire may be hidden unless there is pressure to be truthful, to own up (line 15). This particular formulation engages the previously mentioned social more of camouflaging entirely financially oriented concerns for fear of being regarded as having unacceptable priorities or being of mercenary character, and tips the moral scales once again. By making the, otherwise 'bad' desire for riches a matter of 'owning up', the desire is rehabilitated by recruiting the 'good' of truth-telling on to its side.

The above six extracts, as they alternatively present stand up comedy as an art-form or an occupational endeavour, may be regarded as evidence of two separate repertoires available for use in the discussion of performance. An individual may choose to use one or the other to suit their purposes, or may use one and refer to the other, or use both at different times in their discussions. The existence of these two seemingly disparate, yet intricately connected, repertoires
suggests that stand up comedy as an entertainment practice is, in a number of ways, and for a number of reasons, far from simplistic in terms of conceptualisation. In this sense the notions of group consensus proposed by either Mannheim or Foucault are not upheld by the data extracts presented here, and while social representation theorists may argue that group membership will determine the way in which stand up comedy is conceptualised, or represented, again, this does not seem to be the case in any exact fashion.

The extracts also illustrate the existence of a contemporary ideological dilemma involving, on the one hand, a desire to make money and, on the other hand, a desire to be seen to be engaged in a practice for less financially motivated reasons, for the pleasure of the practice itself. Of course this dilemma is complicated by the fact that oftentimes it is those who enjoy performing as a stand up comic that become accomplished in that practice and consequently go on to reap great financial reward. The socially acceptable means of dealing with this situation, then, seems to be making it clear that motivation is derived from the practice itself and not the monetary benefits it may render.

It seems impossible, and therefore unnecessary, to draw any definite conclusions as to the status of stand up comedy, whether it should be regarded as an art-form or as an occupational practice. It remains a pursuit caught on the cusp between the two, as are many other performance pursuits (acting, pop music, dancing), and as such can be subjected to analysis, separately and simultaneously, as both an occupation and an art form.

5.3 DISCUSSING ART AND OCCUPATION

The dimension 'Art and Occupation' has evolved from the difficulties inherent in classifying the practice of stand up comedy, and in the discussions of the participants is a product of the tensions inherent between these two crudely
labelled aspects of our society: 'Art' and 'Occupation'. For those interviewed this tension appears to come from the difference in being perceived as performing for the purpose of performing, and in being perceived as performing to make money:

Stand up comedy is neither a traditional form of occupation, nor a traditional art-form, although it certainly encompasses elements of both. As an artistic practice, stand up comedy conforms in that it relies on creativity, personal expression and audience appreciation. Stand up comics are also often referred to as artists. As an occupational practice, stand up comedy conforms in that it has the capacity to generate an income, has a fairly structured path of career development for those involved, involves business and career management, and can be undertaken as a full-time pursuit.

Outside the stand up comedy arena the tension between the concepts of Art and Occupation may also make itself felt. There are a whole range of other performance practices which may be classified in this dualistic fashion: pop music, acting and dancing, for example. Each type of performing, however, may have its own particular relationship with the 'Art and Occupation' dimension, the connection between the status of the 'Art' and the perceived strength of the art/occupation dilemma being differentially noticeable. 'High' arts, such as Shakespearean acting and symphony playing, are traditionally regarded as Art and thus the dilemmas is less noticeable than in a consideration of pop music, for example, where there is no formalised connection with Art. However, it is not only performance practices that are subject to this duality. Many kinds of other creative practices, such as painting, sculpture or pottery, may prove similarly difficult to define as either an art-form or an occupational endeavour.

While those practices which may be defined as artistic in some manner are perhaps most likely to enter our consciousness as we consider these issues, the
question “would you rather have a really boring, incredibly well paid job, or a
job you love which pays very little?” exists to be asked in our present social
interactions and invokes a dilemma familiar to most of us. Even those who are
not in any position to make changes based on the answer to this question are not
unfamiliar with it and the issues that surround it. As such, stand up comedy as a
practice is not unique in its dyadic, or difficult to define, nature. However, for
those that perform as stand up comics, this dilemma has certain specific
repercussions. Being regarded as a performer who performs for the financial
reward of doing so has certain negative effects on that performance. Conversely,
being regarded as a performer who performs for the love of performing has
certain positive effects.

The dyadic nature of the dimension ‘Art and Occupation’ is complex in that the
two title components are not levelled against each other as straightforward
oppositional alternatives, either within the stand up comedy environment or
outside it. Of course most people are required to make money in what they do
for a living, of course most people would prefer to be engaged in an activity they
enjoy and reap a sense of personal satisfaction from. In this sense the dyadic
nature of this dimension can be considered as a continuum with Art at one end,
Occupation at the other. The location individuals find themselves in along this
continuum is largely a matter of choice, dependent upon personal values and
desires.

As far as stand up comedy is concerned, it would be easy to assume that the
position an individual occupies along the Art/Occupation continuum would be
determined by their relation to this particular practice. For example, we might
expect the agents and managers of stand up comics to be concerned with the
occupational or moneymaking aspects of the practice, while the comics
themselves are concerned with the creative or artistic aspects. However, an
examination of the data does not reveal any such straightforward divide. The
discursive line a participant chooses to take seems dependent upon range of non-
job specific factors, and thus it seems that the Art/Occupation dyad is resolvable
in terms of contingency only, rather than in terms of group consensus or social
cohesion. For example, stand up comics can be seen to switch between an
occupational repertoire and an artistic repertoire dependent upon the outcome of
any given performance. A poorly received performance may be discussed in
terms of the finance it generated, whereas descriptions of a successful
performance tend not to involve monetary consideration, focusing instead on
audience appreciation. In this sense, the dyadic nature of the 'Art and
Occupation' dimension allows any performance to be presented as having a
positive outcome, either artistic or occupational. The fact that successful
performances are not discussed in terms of financial reward does, however,
suggest that artistic concerns are essentially the desired end of a performance,
for these particular performers at least.

Those participants on the business and management side of stand up comedy,
while seemingly far more ready to discuss the financial aspects of the business,
do not neglect the existence of artistic concerns. These accounts appear to contain
an awareness of the cultural aversion to a purely monetary interest in any
activity. As such, the importance of financial success tends to be downplayed by
a continued reference to less directly mercenary pre-occupations such as fame
and adulation, and thus the social more that 'money isn't everything' is
ostensibly maintained.

As such, while the participants may have, and do express, a preference for the
way stand up comedy is perceived, as an artistic creation or an occupational
endeavour, these considerations do not affect the actual practice of what they do.
This dimension may be regarded as the result of two factors connected to the
social phenomena of performers and performance. Firstly, the fact that some
performance practices do not easily lend themselves to categorisation as either
an art-form or an occupational practice, but lie caught on the cusp between the two; and secondly, the fact that our society regards the engagement in performance pursuits for purely monetary reasons in a negative fashion. As a result two different repertoires exist, one promoting the artistic nature of stand up comedy, and one attending to the financial aspects of this practice. Each can be used separately, although the use of one tends to imply the existence of the other, and the two can be mentioned together within the same discourse.

This dimension also has relevance for those individuals who do not perform for entertainment purposes in that there is a certain amount of social pressure to undertake certain kinds of activities, particularly jobs or occupations, for the personal satisfaction the activity itself brings quite aside from the business of making money. However, there does exist a certain cachet in making vast amounts of money which, in a consumer society like ours, is not unexpected. This dimension may therefore be considered the result of a contemporary ideological dilemma: it is not generally considered appropriate to have an overwhelming concern with making money, although everyone needs a certain amount of money to survive, and those that are seen to undertake an activity for the personal pleasure that activity itself creates are generally considered to be leading a valuable life.

Performance practices as a group, however, are further complicated with regards to classification in that they require an audience, someone to perform to, in order to exist. Stand up comedy performances in particular have no meaning without an audience. Stand up comedy audiences sometimes pay, and sometimes do not pay, to see a performance. If a performance generates income it fulfils an obvious occupational criterion, but the same performance, presented in a different venue or at a different time, may not generate income and thus would not fulfil this criterion. If a comic, or any other type of performer, is somehow perceived as performing purely to make money then their performance is downgraded by the
audience in terms of its artistic nature. For some reason real Art is not supposed to be closely connected to moneymaking concerns.

Each of the five dimensions make a contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon of performing, and as such they can be considered as different parts of the same thing. The full extent of this mutual association and interconnectedness will be deliberated in Chapter Ten, however at this point it is useful to look at some of the connections between the dimensions invoked by the data presented in this chapter.

In extract one a connection is made between the dimensions ‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Truth and Believability’. As the comic in question attempts to locate himself close to the Art end of the Art/Occupation continuum he brings in the notion of being true to one’s self, my erm approach is I do what I find funny and what’s true to me (extract one, line 19). In doing so this comic links together Art and Truth, distancing Truth from the Occupational aspects of performing. Indeed, Truth is a concept that has traditionally had some connection to Art, in so far as Art is often considered to be some kind of expression of the artist’s own truth, which perhaps explains why Art is also generally distanced from the business of making money.

In extract two, a connection is made between ‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’. The participant, a stand up comedy teacher who runs a comedy club, discusses the way comics can make money and claims that it is necessary to be a little bit contrived about your comedy (.) the person who thinks he’s he’s totally unique and totally r- irridg- original (.) err the chances are he’s not going to make it (extract two, lines 32-34). Here it is being suggested that comics should prepare or rehearse material that is going to suit the audience, which is quite a different standpoint from that of being concerned with one’s own truth. In this sense Rehearsal is closely linked to Occupation.
In extract three a connection is made between ‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Talent and Effort’. The comic being interviewed here discusses the differences between his activities at the start of his career and how he operates now as a successful comic. He states that when I started I’d go anywhere (extract three, line 11), that he drove to Swansea once for seventy quid (line 13) and that at the beginning you’d go anywhere you’d take anything (line 23). These particular activities are presented as indicative of the amount of Effort that is required to get a career as a stand up comic up and running, although this Effort is not specifically linked to either stand up comedy as Art or as Occupation.

In extract six, a connection is made between the dimensions of ‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Truth and Believability’. Here the practice of telling the truth, of owning up, is portrayed as a means of uncovering an essential and widespread concern with moneymaking. As such the scale and significance of occupation, over and above artistic concerns, is increased.
CHAPTER SIX: SELF AND PERSONA

I. Have you always called yourself "Alan Davies"?
AD. That's my name
I. Yep (.) you haven't ever thought of (0.5) changing it

6.1 INTRODUCING SELF AND PERSONA

The thematic dimension 'Self and Persona' adds to our interest in performing a concern with the way in which performers are perceived. This dimension is dyadic in that it makes a distinction between those who perform as themselves, those whose performance is somehow an extension of themselves, and those who adopt a persona for their performance, those who differ on stage from how they are off stage.

For the purposes of differentiating between the states of self and persona, let 'self' stand for that which the comics are in their everyday lives, their off stage lives, and let 'persona' stand for that which a comic is whilst on stage. It is not, however, being suggested that 'on stage comic' is the only persona that these performers have at their disposal, merely that this particular persona is of most relevance within this study. The two components of the 'Self and Persona' dimension may be treated as if the persona is a sub-set of the self: 'self' referring to an individuals' entirety, 'persona' to certain aspects of that self. An individual may have many personas, but only one self. In part, the self may be considered the accumulation of all the existent personas, past present and future. This means of looking at an individual really only considers their presentation to the wider society, it does not take into account less tangible aspects of their being, such as soul or psyche, spirit or essence, which we may equally believe contribute to the whole of any person. However, for the purposes of developing
the dimension of 'Self and Persona', the reader may find this organisation of concepts useful.

While comics from the Music Hall era tended to have a very definite visual on stage persona, demarcated by outlandish costumes and makeup, 'today, there is an idea that the stand-up should present him or herself to the audience undisguised by theatrical artifice, wearing everyday clothes instead of a stage costume' (Double, 1997, p. 31). This notion is also relevant in terms of the material presented by contemporary comics, in that the topics covered in comedy routines tend to be the stuff of ordinary life, albeit given a comic twist. Cook (1987) comments that 'No esoteric agonising is required as to how a comedian's background relates to their art because the evidence is all there, upfront in the kiss-and-tell material that comics share with their audience from the Punk pulpit of the stage' (Cook, 1987, p. 4).

Double (1997) also comments that being a stand-up comedian is 'about making the audience believe that you're funny... if a comic shuffles onto the stage cringing under the glare of audience attention, fiddles with the microphone, and reels out the first joke in a terrified, wavering voice, the chances are that it will be greeted with an embarrassed silence. If on the other hand, the same comic swaggers onto the stage, grabs the microphone as if it is his or her own private property and tells the same joke without apparently caring what the audience thinks of it, it will probably get a healthy laugh' (p. 132). Therefore, despite the apparent trend for comics to present themselves to the audience as they are in their off stage lives, it seems that a particular attitude is best suited to on stage performance. Thus, even if a comic is a timid or 'wavering' character in their off stage life, a more confident persona must be adopted for the purposes of performance.

Double (1997) discusses the commonly held myth that 'behind every clown's happy mask is a sad face', and suggests that 'this tragic tale survives more because it appeals to people's romantic instincts than because it rings true... What's enticing about
the myth of the tragic comedian is the idea that behind the outward show is a reality
which is the very opposite, but people from all walks of life commit suicide’ (p. 254). The
widely acknowledged and often quoted myth of the ‘sad clown’ serves as an
indication of the common understanding of the difference between persona and
self. This notion is particularly prevalent in the consideration of performers who
are understood to repeatedly present a particular image of themselves,
regardless of how they may be feeling or what goes on in their lives aside from
performing.

Helitzer, who has produced a number of instructional texts for budding comics,
suggests that ‘Without a shtick (an individual style, a hook), the performer is just a
reciter of jokes. With it, a comic can get laughs even with mistakes, because, in a way, the
performer is the joke’ (1987, p. 179). Here the significance of persona is highlighted,
although it should not be considered necessary for the performer’s ‘shtick’ or
persona to be vastly different from the off stage self. Indeed, Heltitzer goes on to
state that ‘The performer must be honest as well as comfortable with the character.
Makeup and lights can change looks. Props and costumes can emphasize ethnic
classifications. But many things are almost impossible to change: age, color, height,
and whether you’re male, female, or both. Therefore, over the long haul, personality must
cosmote with character’ (Helitzer, 1987, p. 199).

The literature attends to the idea of comics performing as themselves, both in
terms of appearance and material, and to the idea that comics ought to develop a
particular persona for on stage activity in order to provoke a desirable reaction
from an audience. We shall now turn to the data to see how these ideas are
accounted for by the participants of this study.
The discussions contributing to the discursive dimension of performing entitled 'Self and Persona' appear divided in their explication of the nature of a persona. Certain accounts are oriented to the idea that the persona is a small, specifically selected, part of the larger self deemed suitable for on stage performance. Other accounts suggest that the persona is a rather more organic response to the situational demands of actually being on stage. Interestingly, those participants who perform as stand up comics present a shared desire for parity between the off stage self and the on stage persona. The non-performing participants (extracts five and six) appear less concerned with this cohesion and expand the discussions to include an occasion where a certain facet of the persona can no longer be said to be reflective of the self, and the notion of the persona being a development prompted by the situational demands of being on stage.

In the first extract AD, whom we met in the last chapter, answers a rather convoluted question posed by the interviewer regarding the aspects of himself present on stage as he performs. The confused structure and sense of this question does not seem to affect the response, and thus we might assume that the idea of a performer using only certain aspects of their self for the purposes of performing is one that AD is familiar with.

Extract One

1  I. Right so is it it is you on stage
2  AD. Umm
3  I. And which which bits have you lost of you which which aren't going to work on stage (0.5) or which is you know which is the central bit of you that you take on stage with you (0.5)
4  AD. It's erm
5  (2.0)
6  AD. It's the bit that-
7  (1.0)
8  AD. "Very difficult" it's very hard um- (.) question erm
AD develops the idea that stand up comics, including himself, are individuals whose being may be divided into parts that are used to entertain, and parts that are not. He does this, after a considerable degree of initial difficulty in formulating an answer (lines 7-13), in terms of two divisions: firstly, the division between the on stage persona and the off stage self; and, secondly, between the presentation and the content of his material. The elements on either side of these divisions appear to be interconnected; the on stage persona and the presentation of the material working in tandem, the off stage self being responsible for the production of that material. As detailed in this extract, the on stage persona should be irreverent, confident, assertive, and cheeky, and have something of a sense of fun about it. These aspects of the persona may also inform the style of presentation, which should not be done in a vulnerable, feeble, aggressive or stupid manner. However, timidity, vulnerability, feebleness, aggressiveness and stupidity may be aspects of the comic’s off stage self, and may therefore be used in the development of material.
AD also talks about lying, he suggests that you can talk about being a liar (line 28) but, as with the other percievably weak or in some sense objectionable aspects of an individual's self, you can't be those (. ) things (lines 29-30) on stage. AD claims that while talking about lying is acceptable as part of a stand up comedy performance, lying itself is not. It seems then that, for the purposes of stand up comedy, what is talked about on stage is subject to a less stringent set of criteria than how it is talked about. This extract, then, treats the persona as a collection of certain aspects of the self, as if the persona is a small, carefully selected, part of the larger entity that is the self.

In response to a similar question to the one previously posed to AD, GB, a stand up comic who is beginning to break out of the London-based comedy circuit into television work, provides a far more succinct answer, although not necessarily a more straightforward one.

Extract Two

1. So when you're on stage is it you on stage or is it (. ) sort of (. ) somebody else or a different part of you or: (0.5)
2. GB. : that's err that's a good question (. ) it is me obviously an- I a- (. ) put it this way I have two brains (. ) in there when I'm performing okay there's the comic brain (. ) that's going (. ) you know that's making the whole thing up
3. I. Umhum
4. GB. That's going time this time that (. ) this bit next bla bla bla bla bla then there's another half of me that's me that's actually thinking about something completely different
5. I. Really
6. GB. I could be thinking about (. ) oh the football the other night how God how did we how did we miss that penalty do you know what I [mean]
7. I. [Yeah] yeah
8. GB. You know it's it's a strange so- (. ) i- i- it isn't me but it is me
9. I. Right
10. GB. Kind of blends

To the question of whether it is him on stage or sort of (. ) somebody else or a different part of you or: (lines 1-2), GB responds in part by saying it is me
obviously (line 4). In contrast to AD's idea that the on stage persona is an extension of certain parts of the whole self, GB suggests that he has two brains (.) in there (line 5). The implication here is that the comic persona is separate from the off stage self, and the additional when I'm performing (line 5) suggests that this particular entity is only in existence during on stage time.

Interestingly, GB talks about his two brains quite differently. He discusses his comic brain (line 6) as though it is distinct from the rest of him (lines 6-9), while he states that there's another half of me that's me (line 10), as if this non-comic brain is the real GB. Accounted for in this manner it seems that the comic brain, the part of GB utilised for performance purposes, is a very separate, goal specific, aspect of the wider self.

This piece of data also contributes to the theme Spontaneous and Rehearsed. GB talks of the part of his brain that's going (.) you know that's making the whole thing up (lines 6-7). Putting it this way implies that he ambles on to stage without any preparation and makes up the whole performance as he goes along. However, his next comment, That's going time this time that (.) this bit next bla bla bla bla bla (line 9), suggests that he has prepared a routine and, if anything, it is the delivery that has a spontaneous element to it.

There is no reason to suggest that all stand up comics will share either the same distinction between self and persona, or the same means of expressing this distinction. However, it is interesting to note that none of the comics interviewed failed to differentiate between on stage persona and off stage self which suggests that comic performers are comfortable with the idea that they are somehow 'other' to their everyday selves during the course of their performances.

In extract three, LW, a female comic in her late twenties, discusses the notion of comic persona in terms of who she perceives herself to be in her off stage life.
Extract Three

I. So how has your act changed over time in the time that you have been doing this

LW. Err I started off totally rude

I. Right

LW. Only and now I'm getting less and less rude

I. Why

LW. Well because I don't think that's my personality anyway

I. Okay

LW. I me- I quite like doing shocking things but I don't think I'm totally like that

I. Yeah

LW. But that's an easy way to be on stage

I. Right

LW. It's an easy very safe persona just come on and go a: rgh you know sex bla bla bla bla

I. Because it's quite hard is [it]

LW. [It's] hard an- it's safe an- [it's] going fuck off

I. [Yeah]

LW. fuck off fuck [off]

I. [Yeah] and if you don't laugh a- urr [who cares]

LW. [Yeah that's right] you

I. kn- you can just (. ) prance round the rude bit

LW. Increasingly that felt felt artificial it didn't I didn't feel that was me 'cos I'm not like that all the time (0.5) and err (. ) so now I don't know I'm trying to write all sorts of different stuff I'm writing some surreal stuff some observational (0.5) trying to experiment more

The first point of interest in this extract is the implied desire for the on stage persona to have some similarity to the off stage self. LW claims that her act is getting less and less rude (line 6), and that the reason for this is because I don't think that's my personality anyway (line 9). The desirability of homogeneity between persona and self is a recurrent theme within the corpus of data, although the reasons for this being the case remain inconclusive and attendant only to a general feeling that this is the way it ought to be.
LW claims that the totally rude (line 4) persona she adopted at the beginning of her comic career was an easy way to be on stage (line 14), an easy very safe persona (line 16). In this particular case, then, the choice of persona was informed by a protective need, as a means of coping with the demands of potential on stage failure. This is an approach to the business of performing that permeates at all levels in society, not just in the stand up comedy business. Adopting the ‘fuck off fuck off fuck [off] (lines 19-21) attitude’ is one that most of us are familiar with as a coping mechanism for those times when we feel under pressure of the judgement of others, and stand up comedy is a practice which instigates immediate judgement from an audience. This particular persona can therefore be regarded as one developed by the self-preservational aspects of the self.

However, LW goes on to say that Increasingly that felt felt artificial it didn’t I didn’t feel that was me ‘cos I’m not like that all the time (lines 26-27), thus maintaining the common stance of desiring the on stage persona to have a sympathy with the off stage self. She is currently working on a persona she is comfortable with on stage, a less rude persona, which is comparable to her off stage self. This extract suggests that the demands of the situation and the individual’s response to those demands are responsible for the type of persona created for performance purposes.

In extract four, DT discusses the difficulty of differentiating between the self and the persona and expands this into a concern with on stage appearance.

Extract Four

1 DT. Any comedian (. ) when they’re on stage they’re even if it’s like it’s sort of a general (. ) genial sort of comedian they’r- they’re like (. ) making a more extreme version of them[elves] (. ) and they’re going to be like bigger and
2 I. [Yeah]
3 DT. more animated
4 I. “Yeah”
DT. Umm and so that's their persona (...) and umm and (...) I until recently I
was- I did actually used to wear a suit I had a suit made
I. Right
DT. That umm is is too small
I. (0.5)
DT. And err and it meant that when I walked on (...) I straight away got a
reaction of laughter
I. Yeah
DT. And they straight away knew that this was the geek you know this was
like (...) the guy who:
I. Yeah
DT. Who looks fucking (...) mad you [know] who looks
I. [Yeah]
DT. stupid
I. Yeah
DT. Err and so (...) they knew where I was coming from (...) right before I
opened my mouth
I. Right
DT. And that's obviously very (...) you know that's what you need if [you're]
I. [Yes]
DT. a comic you need (...) people to understand what you are
I. [Yes]
DT. [Umm] and then I f- I di- I finished this tour of army camps and then I
(... was doing the Comedy Café in London which is (...) a sort of a circuit
venue but again i- it's business people in suits
I. Umhum
DT. An- an- it's- it's mainstream and I thought well (...) carry on wearing the
suit [it's] mainstream (...) and I carried on wearing it and I I felt that (...) the
reason I did that was because i- it did make my persona clear (...) a- as soon
as I walked on it was obvious what I was (...) umm (...) but sometimes (...) I I
've felt that people it actually alienated people because people maybe
thought well this is not really (...) [him he's] obviously put this on (...) you
I. [Yeah yeah]
DT. know
I. °Yeah°
DT. An- and sometimes people would say I'd of liked you more if you didn't
have the suit on
I. Mmm
DT. And so just recently (...) I- I've actually not bothered with it and I've just
gone on wearing what I wear
As DT tells it, a comic's persona is a more extreme version of themselves and they're going to be like bigger and more animated (lines 2-5). He does not make a distinction between aspects of the self that are suitable for on stage exaggeration and those that are not, and thus we might conclude that DT's on stage persona is a larger than life version of his off stage self in its entirety. However, the reasoning behind wearing a suit That umm is too small (line 10) is that it meant that when I walked on I straight away got a reaction of laughter... And they straight away knew that this was the geek you know this was like the guy who:... Who looks fucking mad you [know] who looks stupid (lines 13-21). Judging from the complete corpus of interview material provided by DT it would be inconceivable to say that he actually considers himself to be a geek, or mad, or stupid. Therefore, despite suggesting that the on stage persona is a bigger and more animated version of his off stage self, it seems that his comic persona is carefully crafted to be something designed to get immediate laughs from a visual joke.

Interestingly, DT claims that the wearing of an ill-fitting suit resulted in the audience knowing where I was coming from right before I opened my mouth (lines 23-24) and that that's what you need if you're a comic you need people to understand what you are (lines 26-28). Adopting a particular look for these reasons almost implies that DT has difficulty convincing an audience of his comic status through his presentation of material alone, and that a mad or stupid look was necessary to encourage humorous interpretation of his on stage activity. However, having a specific type of appearance may restrict the kinds of material that a comic can perform in that it immediately conjures up a particular impression of the type of person the comic is. Looking fucking mad may prevent the success of material based on the mundane triviality of many aspects of life.
DT no longer wears this outfit and states the reason for this is that I've felt that people it actually alienated people because people maybe thought well this is not really (.) [him he's] obviously put this on (lines 39-40). Having initially made a conscious effort to create a persona obviously different from his off stage self, latterly DT has conformed to the widespread notion that the on stage comic should be recognisable as their off stage self. His comments also suggest that, in his experience at least, audiences have a preference for on stage personas that appear to be recognisable as the comic's off stage self. While certain visual effects are used by stand up comics, this form of entertainment comedy is largely an aural medium, as evidenced by the proliferation of audio cassettes and radio time devoted to this form of comedy, and this, coupled with the widespread contemporary preference for a comic to appear as an ordinary person with an extensive line in funny tales, has rendered the 'performance costume' largely a relic from the past.

However, this is not to say that on stage clothing is an issue that is necessarily ignored. Indeed, backstage before a show begins, comics of both sexes often take a considerable amount of time worrying about how they look. This generally tends to be done in rather the same way that a group of friends preparing for a big night out worry about the way they look. Having said that, in extract five, VC, manager of, amongst others, the popular female comic Victoria Wood, discusses how her famous client has a different set of clothing concerns.

Extract Five

1 VC. Victoria has a uniform on stage which is quite interesting because her uniform on stage hides the fact that actually she's very thin (.) she- (.) purposely because she's sort of lost a lot of [weight and in people's] heads
2 I. [Oh I see:]
3 VC. [and] minds they still think she's
4 I. [ye:ah]
5 VC. fat
6 I. Yes
7 VC. She purposely wears stuff which is quite baggy and then (.)
8 [it makes her look quite large] urm well it's it's part of the perception of
9
10 118
I. [Oh how curious]
VC. what Victoria Wood is
I. Yeah
VC. And the public don't want her to be a [skinny] little thing because that's
I. [No:]
VC. not how [they see her]
I. [And she's a] heroine for- for bigger-
VC. Exactly
I. Yeah
VC. And you know people don't want to suddenly see this this really bird like
person (.) umm
I. Mmm
VC. You know so: it's it's what's your stage persona and what you are in real
life (.) are you creating when you're being yourself on stage (.) are you
actually being a character that you have created it at some stage or are you
being the real you?
I. Mmm
VC. Er- Mel and Sue a double act I look after (.) urm you know I said to them
you have to create (.) Mel and Sue on stage (0.5) always know who's who
(.) and I said it doesn't matter whether you create characters that are
called Mel and Sue (.) you know
I. Yeah
VC. Or whether it's really you but you have to- (.) you know you have that
relationship on stage
I. Right
VC. "So er"o
I. I can't believe that about Victoria Wood I'm really disappointed
VC. ((Laughs)) sorry

This extract serves as an interesting addition to our concern with the self and
persona of stand up comics. Victoria Wood has a well-established comic persona,
one that has propelled her to the heights of fame. However, it seems that her off
stage self has been transformed, from being large sized to being smaller sized,
and physical size tends to be one aspect that is shared by the persona and the
self. Having made a name for herself as a larger performer, Wood, possibly in
consultation with her management team, has decided to maintain this image
despite it no longer reflecting her off stage self. In this particular case, great
importance is placed on the appearance of the persona, as if to alter it would
result in diminished levels of success. Interestingly, VC states that Wood wears
clothing that maintains an appearance of substantial girth because it's part of the perception of what Victoria Wood is (lines 10-12). Phrased in this manner, it seems that 'Victoria Wood' has become a label for the on stage performer, over and above that which it referred to long before this particular comic career began. As such, it seems that 'Victoria Wood' the persona is, in at least one sense, more dominant that 'Victoria Wood' the off stage self. This is surely quite a rare phenomenon, and one produced by the high levels of success this particular performer has reached.

In discussing a comic double act she manages, VC claims that it doesn't matter whether you create characters that are called Mel and Sue (...) you know... Or whether it's really you but you have to- (...) you know you have that relationship on stage (lines 30-34). As such it is implied that the means of developing the persona is less important than the end result, if the persona created works well on stage it is not significant whether it was developed from the self or not.

Interestingly, the interviewer's final comment, I can't believe that about Victoria Wood I'm really disappointed (line 37), reinforces the decision made by Wood to maintain the status quo of her persona despite it no longer accurately reflecting her off stage self. This particular extract, then, attends to a concern with occupational factors, the perception of the audience, people don't want to suddenly see this this really bird like person (lines 20-21), over and above an artistic concern with being somehow true to one's self.

Inherent in the concern with an individual's on stage persona and off stage self is the question of whether it is the actual business of going on to a stage, the change in location, which prompts the emergence of a persona that is in some way different to the off stage self. Indeed, in extract six TA suggests that a 'minority personality', something akin to that which I am choosing to call 'persona', will naturally develop if you put an individual on a stage.
TA. Most of the time (.) we’re fairly diplomatic, fairly conservative (.) fairly amiable, pretty reasonable because we’ve got to deal with the world [and] [Yeah] I.

TA. all the people in it (.) and at certain times when we get a bit pissed or we’re under pressure (.) we might actually be leery or (0.5) horny or (.) wild or (.) modest or (.) melancholy or whatever and an- in those situations a minority personality takes over and an- has a run so when you’re on stage you can ac- some of those minority personalities’ll actually come to the fore and err and take over and look after you

I. Right

TA. And an- the new dominant personality won’t be so diplomatic (.) he’ll be a bit more lairy and [bit] more s- of (.) risk taking and a- (.) so an- a- I [Yeah]

I.

TA. That happens when they stand on the stage with the lights up (.) with an audience there (.) and (.) it’ll happen

I. Right

TA. It has got no: alternative °it’ll° happen

I. Right

TA. Or they- or they’ll get so embarrassed they’ll run off the stage but if they stay there we’re going to see something (.) [and] everybody else will say [Right]

I. [Yeah]

TA. well you were (.) you l- I’ve never seen you like that before [you] were really bright and chi:ry [and] a- it was a sort of (.) Cockney sparrow [yeah]

I.

TA. coming out [there] or there was a (.) actually you were quite wild and y-

I. [Yeah]

TA. you were very angry and you got very (. ) annoyed and you really didn’t like women did you notice all the things you said about s-

I. Right

Here it is being suggested that the creation of an on stage persona is less something that can, or should, be worked at, and more something that develops from the self as an organic process. It has got no: alternative °it’ll° happen (line 7), the catalyst for which is the very process of getting on to a stage. In this sense the on stage persona of a comic can be regarded as an unforced, natural development which occurs in response to the situational demands of being on
stage, and as such the development of a comic persona is less a considered occupational tactic and more an event that occurs as part and parcel of being an individual subject to changing environmental pressures.

This account of the development of an on stage performance implies that the resultant persona, while obviously an entity produced by the self of the performer, is something that the self has little control over. While LW, in extract three, discussed her on stage persona in terms of environmental pressures, she appeared to have more control over her creation. TA, on the other hand, regards the development of a persona as less of an active creation and more as an emotional response. This idea has repercussions for all four of the other dimensions: for ‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Talent and Effort’ in that if something occurs quite naturally then it cannot be considered borne either of effort or a desire for occupational success; for ‘Truth and Believability’ in that a naturally occurring phenomenon must surely contain some element of Truth, in so far as it is not ‘made up’, and, consequentially, is likely to be ‘believable’; and for ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ in that TA is suggesting that the creation of these on stage minority personalities (lines 1-2) occurs spontaneously, and is therefore not something that can benefit from any kind of rehearsal.

Further to a consideration of the self and persona of the off and on stage comics, this dimension must also attend to the question of personas and/or selves that are in evidence in the interview data itself, and whether the occasion of taking part in an interview generates anything which can be considered as an addition to this dimension (there exists a general notion that to interview someone who is ‘quite well known’ anyway, can provide a somehow ‘real’ insight into the somehow ‘real’ person, into the self if you like, as opposed to the persona that they present to their public). These ideas must also be taken into account when considering the contribution the interviewer makes to the generation of the data used herein. Although there is no discussion of this matter, it could be assumed
that the interviewer is attempting to do 'being an interviewer' and that the parts of her self considered most befitting of an interview environment are being allowed to dominate, or be creative of a particular persona. Alternatively, we might take on TA's idea and suggest that the persona evident in the interviewer's self-presentation is an involuntary response to the research environment, and therefore not the result of intentional consideration at all.

If we do consider the interviewer to have adopted some sort of 'interviewer persona', it must not be assumed that this persona will remain constant throughout all the interviews, or even throughout the duration of one interview. Indeed, Denzin (1970) suggests that 'Interview schedules rest on multiple conflicting roles, selves, and rules. The self established in the early phase of the encounter, when names are exchanged, is considerably different from the self that asks about a woman's belief in a higher being, or about her sexual relationships. These selves may be in conflict, and the attendant data must be analysed in that light' (p. 134). Interestingly, the discussion of the interview data in these analytical chapters could be read as though the interviewer and the author are two separate individuals. this is common practice in academic texts, and provides another example of the multiple personas that all individuals, including myself as both interviewer and author, juggle during the course of what we do.

The discussions contributing to the dimension 'Self and Persona' do not set the two title components against each other in any kind of oppositional relationship, as occurs in the discussions contributing to the dimension 'Art and Occupation', for example. In this case, the two components are accounted for as constructs that are inextricably intertwined, neither one existing without the other. On the comics' part, there appears to be a collective desire to negotiate the impression of parity between the on stage persona and the off stage self. The persona is discussed as a considered creation developed from those aspects of the self perceived to be suitable for the business of on stage performance. Creating the
impression of parity between the persona and the self seems less of a concern for the non-comic participants, and therefore we might suggest that this particular issue is attended to differentially dependent upon particular group membership. In this sense, the work of theorists concerned with group consensus and cohesion may be considered to be upheld.

6.3 Discussing Self and Persona

The dimension ‘Self and Persona’ emerged in the discussions of the participants concerning how an individual performing on stage is different from the way they are off stage. While this dimension could be considered as a product of the interviewer’s particular line of questioning, the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘persona’ appears to be something those involved with stand up comedy are familiar with as at no time did any participant ask for clarification on the matter. Neither did any individual have difficulty in verbalising their thoughts concerning this issue. This familiarity is perhaps to be expected with regards to those engaged in some sort of performance practice, as the existence of an audience renders the impression a performer gives off a crucial aspect of their activity.

However, this does not exclude others from having concerns of this nature. Indeed, if we consider the many roles that individuals outside the stand up comedy environment are required to play during the course of their life, it would seem that the adoption of different types of persona, each with their own particular connection to the ‘real self’, is something we are all familiar with.

The personas of stand up comics, however, have a specific remit in that they must endeavour to make an audience laugh. This particular requirement renders the comic persona fairly unique. Aside from this essential facet of a stand up comic’s persona, there does exist one other unavoidable distinction between the
self and the persona of a stand up comic, however closely they are negotiated in the accounts given. The on stage persona exists on stage, and the off stage self exists off stage, and these are two extremely different environments. In fact, some of those interviewed suggested that the persona develops naturally as a response to the on stage environment, as some sort of coping mechanism for those particular situational demands.

With regards to the discussions of stand up comics, there seems to be a collective desire to present the on stage persona as having developed quite directly from the off stage self, and this is generally achieved by listing those aspects of the self which are deemed suitable for, and therefore adopted in the construction of, an on stage persona. Even those comics who claim to have adopted a persona that does not reflect their off stage self at some stage in their performance career suggest that they ultimately abandoned this project in favour of a persona more closely derivative of that which they perceive to be their 'real' self.

This particular dimension creates a distinction between the creation of comic material aspect of performing and the on stage presentation aspect. The persona is discussed as a presentation medium which need have no concern with the off stage business of developing material, while the self and all that this contains may be used as fodder for comedy material.

Interestingly, those participants who do not themselves perform as stand up comics appear to have less of a concern with presenting the persona as a specific aspect of the self. The crucial point for these individuals is whether the persona is successful on stage, regardless of how it is created. As such, it is possible to distinguish a certain amount of differential group consensus, comics having one set of concerns, while their non-performing associates have another. Of course it would be impossible to say that the data gathered for the purposes of examining
this particular dimension are indicative of group-based consensus or representations, although this as a possibility can not be entirely ruled out.

The dyadic nature of the dimension 'Self and Persona' is a result of the comics operating in an obviously different manner on and off stage, although the relationship between the title components of this dimension is based upon mutual reinforcement. There is no indication, on the comics' part at least, that the persona is anything other than an extension of, a development of, an emergence from, the self. As such, that which constitutes the self necessarily constitutes the persona.

Having said that, the myth of the 'sad clown' is something that has permeated down from the realms of entertainment into common usage, and performing under the aegis of one emotion while feeling differently inside is a state of being that we are all familiar with. Smiling when we feel like crying, being outwardly angry when we feel like laughing, feigning energy when we're exhausted, acting confidently when secretly we’re frightened, these are the things that constitute the daily performance of our lives, albeit usually in less intense circumstances than those a stand up comic has to perform in.

One cannot perform without performing, one cannot present without presenting, and performing and presenting are distinct from 'being'. As such the self, in any situation where there are other individuals to observe it, is necessarily altered as attempts are made to present oneself in a particular fashion, whether as a stand up comic, a teacher, a driving instructor, a policewoman, and so on. The audience for any type of performance, stand up comedy or otherwise, is a crucial consideration with regards to this dimension as they are the party that has the ability to determine whether a particular performance persona is acceptable or not.
The dimension ‘Self and Persona’ is connected to the other dimensions and we can see examples of this in the data extracts presented in this chapter. In extract six a connection is made with the ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ dimension, as the participants discuss the development of an on stage persona. The interviewee, a teacher of stand up comedy, suggests that a comics on stage persona will automatically emerge as a result of standing on stage in front of an audience. It has got no alternative “it’ll” happen (line extract six, line 21). As such, the development of a comic persona is presented as a spontaneous occurrence, and therefore not something that can be rehearsed.

This part of extract six can also be seen to make a connection between ‘Self and Persona’ and the dimension ‘Truth and Believability’. As it is being suggested that the evolution of an on stage persona is a natural response to the situation of being on stage in front of an audience, it is difficult to see how the persona could be anything but believable, because it is an honest, or spontaneous, response to the environment.

In extract five a connection is made between the dimensions of ‘Self and Persona’ and ‘Art and Occupation’. The speaker, a manager of stand up comics, describes the way in which one particular comic alters her physical appearance before going on stage, her uniform on stage hides the fact that actually she's very thin (extract five, lines 1-2). This is regarded as necessary by the comic as she has lost so much weight that her current on stage persona is visually different to the persona she presented during the earlier part of her illustrious career. As such the decision to present a persona that reflects a previous self, but not her current self, reflects a concern with continuity for the sake of the audience. This is particularly interesting in that it draws our attention to the fact that stand up comics as performers, particularly well known ones, tend to have a fairly consistent audience base while those who perform in more everyday personas may have a continually changing audience. Teachers, for example, tend to teach
the same class, their audience, for one year before moving on to another class. The occupational concerns regarding the persona of this type of performer are therefore very different to those performers whose audience is far less fluid.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SPONTANEOUS AND REHEARSED

I. What about just before you go on stage (. ) what do you do
   (0.5)
LW. Usually I just panic a lot drink a lot of Coca-Cola
I. Yeah
LW. ( ) [((Laughs))]
I. [((Laughs))]
LW. And err (. ) s- a- an- practice the first s- couple of lines so I look incredibly natural when I come on
I. Yeah [((laughs))]
LW. [((Laughs))] practice my naturalness for about a minute or two (. )

7.1 INTRODUCING SPONTANEOUS AND REHEARSED

The dimension of ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ in the grand deliberation of performing considers the immediacy of performances, whether they are spur-of-the-moment, off-the-cuff, instinctual, impulsive entities issuing forth as a result of the particular circumstances the performer finds themselves in, or whether they are meticulously prepared, repeated and practised entities designed to suit more than one moment in time. Of course any performance can contain both of these aspects, can be partly rehearsed and partly spontaneous, and those things that appear to be rehearsed may be planned to look that way. Indeed, most individuals would admit to at least one occasion on which they had prepared for something in order to create exactly the opposite impression.

With regards to stand up comedy, possibly more so than any other type of performance practice aside from those developed around improvisation, the significance of spontaneity is vital, although the relationship between rehearsal and spontaneity is rather complex. Helitzer (1987) notes that the humour in
stand up comedy 'only appears to be free form. Most often it is carefully structured and predictable' (p. 151). Cook, comedy critic of the Guardian, comments that 'The purest comedy is ephemeral, of the moment, and cannot be captured either in print or even in rehearsed performance' (1987, p. 89), and reiterates this idea as he compares stand up comedy with acting: 'Since stand-up hinges on the interaction between an individual and an audience rather than other individuals on stage, there's absolutely no proper preparation apart from the real thing (a stand-up script is the haziest of blueprints)' (p. 123).

However, a few pages on in the same text, Cook states 'Stand-up comedy is built on an illusion - that what is actually painstakingly prepared is inspired banter, and at a great gig this cerebral conjuring trick comes alive' (p. 181). While this latter comment appears in contradiction to the former, and indeed it may be, it must be remembered that performance is not the only element in stand up comedy, there is also the matter of material. Material is necessarily considered prior to any performance, and many have referred to going on stage without having their heads filled with things to say as one of biggest mistakes a comic can make. 'Whether you tell packaged gags or unfolding comic routines, part of what makes it work for you is looking relaxed and natural onstage. So rehearsing is a bit of a problem. You need to know what you’re going to say, you need to know your punchlines, but if you over-rehearse you’ll look stiff and wooden and nobody will laugh' (Double, 1997, p. 244).

Perhaps then the complex relationship between spontaneity and rehearsal can be explained in assigning rehearsal to material and spontaneity to presentation. However, Stebbins (1990) states that 'Good comedy also has rhythm, which requires extensive practice' (p. 52), and rhythm, while possibly aided by a particular type of material, is something inextricably linked to presentation, to the performance of that material. It seems that while rehearsal is required on some level this practice must remain invisible and the performance be carried out as if it is a
spontaneous event. Stebbins (1990) comments on the dangers of the impression of spontaneity being disturbed. 'Young [comics] sometimes rely on a brief outline of their act to aid their memory. Even a furtive glance at a “cheat sheet” is considered unprofessional. Certainly cheat sheets alter the impression that a comic’s presentation is spontaneous' (p. 79).

Double (1997) discusses the first alternative comedians and the benefits of freedom from a rehearsed regimen: 'sometimes the material feels forced and rehearsed, lacking the spontaneous free-flowing quality which characterises the best stand-up. On the other hand, the learning-as-you-go-along approach also brought exciting new discoveries. It was a time of hectic creativity, packed with audacious experiments in ways of making people laugh. Comedians felt free to take risks as a matter of course. For a while, it seemed that anything was possible, and stand-up comedy wandered into the realms of performance art' (p. 188).

The literature concerning the issues of spontaneity and rehearsal seems rather inconclusive and ambiguous as it presents first one and then the other as the vital component of a stand up comedy performance. We shall now look at data extracts concerning these very phenomena and see how those closely linked to the practice of stand up comedy account for their existence.

7.2 TALKING SPONTANEOUS AND REHEARSED

The discussions of participants that generated a concern with the dimension of performing entitled ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ included issues of definition; the prevalence of presenting spontaneity as a valued element of performance; the difference between actual spontaneity and the impression of spontaneity; the perception of the audience; and the notion of ‘suspended disbelief’.
In extract one, GB, whom we encountered in the previous chapter, discusses certain means of ensuring that a performance appears, to an audience, as a spontaneous event.

Extract One

I. And do you try and make it seem natural, seem as though
   [you're improvising]

GB. [Oh absolutely you] must you [must] yes you must I always- again there's
   [Yeah]

I. There's little tricks like laughing at your own joke

GB. That is such a classic little trick because the audience see you
     having a good time so they think wow the guy's making this up

I. Yeah

GB. You know I mean I- I do it you- if you watch my performance again you'll
     notice that- is that there are certain bits that I actually do think are
     genuinely really [funny] and err and I laugh you know and I'll bend
     [Yeah]

I. down I'll step away and I'll actually (. . .) actually laugh an- come back an-

GB. and enjoy it as well [an-] and err that's a classic wee trick

I. [Right]

Initially, GB emphasises his concern with the appearance of spontaneity, naturalness or improvisation. In response to the question of whether he attempts to make his performance appear spontaneous he says [Oh absolutely you] must you [must] yes you must (line 3), from which we can emphatically conclude that this particular appearance is indeed important to him. He goes on to describe certain ways in which the appearance of spontaneity can be aided, like laughing at your own joke (line 5).

The result of this classic wee trick (line 15) is that the audience think wow the guy's making this up (line 8). His use of the word wow implies that the ability to make stuff up on stage is something that the audience admires and appreciates, and is therefore something for comics to aspire to. This concern for providing the audience with what it is claimed they want, treating an audience as a collection of consumers, may reflect a concern with the occupational aspects of stand up
comedy, the money making aspects of the business.

The interesting feature in this extract is the apparent ambiguity about whether GB is being genuinely spontaneous or merely creating an illusion of spontaneity. The idea that the improvisational appearance of his performance can be demonstrated using a trick implies that the illusion is more significant than the reality, but his comment there are certain bits that I actually do think are genuinely really [funny] (lines 11-12), while not necessarily diminishing the perceptual quality of what he does, may be regarded as an implication that some of this illusion is created by the ‘real’ state of affairs. It must be noted, then, that discussions of spontaneity cannot necessarily be taken to involve any dictionary definition of spontaneity (such as, ‘Arising, proceeding, or acting entirely from natural impulse, without any external stimulus or constraint’ - The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1983, Oxford University Press), rather that the appearance of spontaneity may be the primary concern.

In the following extract DM, a comic who has recently been enjoying success with a cameo role on a popular late night television show, discusses the difficulty of performing in a spontaneous looking fashion when in reality the same act is being presented night after night.

Extract Two

DM. I went through like several phases with that where I started off really enjoying it and coming off every night and analysing it [and] then I got bored as hell and I was like °oh for God’s sake you know° what more can I get out of this and then the challenge was to actually keep what it originally had

I. Right

DM. And to (.) you go through this thing of like you have to reproduce exactly what would have come spontaneously before

I. Right

DM. And so you become (.) a- u- sort of artificial and at the same time that becomes enjoyable y- and you become engrossed in it again

I. Right
DM. And it becomes it becomes it's own challenge really [you] know and so
I. [Yeah]
DM. what happens is it's not the fact that you were getting the laugh at the
same thing it's l- how big the laugh was, when they got the laugh
I. Yeah
DM. Did you did you farm the laugh right did you say it in the right tone of
voice bla bla bla (. ) I mean umm
(1.0)
DM. And I think that's it

In this extract a case is made for the potential mutual reinforcement of
spontaneity and rehearsal in the suggestion that it is possible to work at, or
practise, a spontaneous looking performance. In claiming that you have to
reproduce exactly what would have come spontaneously before (lines 8-9), DM
implies that spontaneity can be reproduced, and even improved upon, so that
what would once have been created naturally or spontaneously is manufactured
to look that way, or even better. While this extract openly asserts that on stage
performance can be manufactured to appear spontaneous, DM implies that the
original performance, the performance that is now being reproduced, was
initially born of real spontaneity (line 9). This is a rather complex issue as it is
almost impossible to believe that any comic, DM included, relies entirely on their
ability for spontaneous on stage work for the creation of a complete
performance.

While spontaneity and rehearsal might generally be considered as oppositional
concepts, from this extract it is possible to see how they may be presented as
counterparts, rehearsal aiding the impression of spontaneity. Of course it is the
fact that we are discussing the impression of spontaneity, as opposed to the real
thing, that allows this to be the case. Interestingly, here the creation of an
appearance of spontaneity is not suggested as a means of ensuring occupational
success, rather it is suggested as a means of preventing the comic himself from
suffering some sort of repetition fatigue.
In extract three, DC, a young male comic relatively new to the practice of stand up comedy, begins by completing the question for the interviewer. This preemptive occurrence suggests that the importance of appearing Natural (line 4) is something present in the concerns of comics, even those at a very early stage of their career.

Extract Three

1. You’ve done this stuff ex amount of times the same thing so how do you make it appear
2. ()
3. DC. Natural
4. I. Natural and fresh and as though you’re just (.) almost improvising even though (.) you’re obviously not
5. DC. I think that’s why (. ) I don’t write it down
6. I. Right
7. DC. That’s that’s one of (. ) decisions is that if I don’t write it down it may come out slightly different and I may use (. ) different words and [may] (. ) so
8. I. [Right]
9. DC. I’m thinking so it looks like when you look like you’re thinking (.) then people think oh: it’s coming s- it’s coming straight out he’s actually th- he’s not just reeling it off
10. I. Right
11. DC. He’s- actually thinking about when it comes out
12. I. Right
13. DC. So then: (. ) when people see that (. ) then they’re thinking blimey (. ) cor he mus- is- is he coming up with this right [there and] you’re I’m thinking no
14. I. [Yeah yeah]
15. DC. I’m not [but] I’m just ( ) up for different ways to make it
16. I. [Yeah]
17. DC. look like that
18. I. Right
19. DC. It’s very cynical but umm [yeah it is] but you are you jus- if you keep it
20. I. [Yeah yeah]
21. DC. like that then (. ) you have to think your s- I think if you switch off then (. ) that’s when it doesn’t go well
22. I. Right
23. DC. You’ve got- if you can remain sort of on on the ball all the time try and think
24. I. Yeah
25. DC. Then it w- works
DC suggests that not writing down his performance is a means of encouraging a spontaneous looking performance, if I don’t write it down it may come out slightly different and I may use (. ) different words and [may] (. ) so I’m thinking so it looks like when you look like you’re thinking (. ) then people think oh: it’s coming s- it’s coming straight out he’s actually th- he’s not just reeling it off... He’s- actually thinking about when it comes out (lines 9-16). Of course this is not to suggest that there is a complete lack of pre-performance presentation, rather that the planned material is not honed down to exact words and phrases which are learnt and then repeated on stage. It is suggested that if a comic is actually having to think of how to word their material, the impression of generating the material in the here and now may be created. Interestingly, DC’s comment that when people see that (. ) then they’re thinking blimey (. ) cor he mus- is- is he coming up with this right [there (lines 18-19) is reminiscent of GB’s wow the guy’s making this up (line 8, extract one). This shared perception of audiences being impressed by apparent spontaneity provides a clear reason for the comics’ desire to be perceived as spontaneous performers.

It is interesting that these extracts of data deal with the notion of spontaneity, or naturalness, or improvisation, directly, while the practice of preparation is only indirectly alluded to. This, as a common occurrence, lends to the impression of rehearsal not being a part of stand up comics’ preparation routine, although there is never any suggestion that these performers do in fact just amble on to stage and entertain without any prior consideration.

In extract four, AG, a comedy critic for one of the London newspapers and an individual who served as a judge on the 1996 Perrier Award panel, discusses the significance of actually knowing whether a performance has spontaneous elements or whether those aspects which appear to be so are merely constructed to create that impression.
Extract Four

AG. I think the especially in comedy you’re (.) you’re never umm (.) there’s
never such an important (.) you never have such an important viewing (.)
s- of- leap in terms of (.) accumulation of knowledge as that between (.)
ought and one

I. °Right°

AG. You know it’s really really in- it’s really informative (.) to see somebody
for the first time it’s a slightly less so (.) to see them umm for the [second]

I. [Mmm]

AG. time (0.5) and it’s interesting how p- how people (0.5) s- umm (.)
how peoples’ verdicts on performance differed between sort of seeing
them for the first time and the second time and say the second time and
the third [time]

I. [Right] (.) what kind of thing changes

(1.0)

AG. You you work out where there’s bits where they’re err being spontaneous
(2.0)

AG. You work out whether they’re working with the audience

I. Umhum

AG. You work out whether they’re (.) thinking on their feet

(1.0)

I. And d- do those things (.) matter

AG. Yeeaum well that’s a very good question I mean (1.0) if a performer
gives the the audience the impression that they’re doing something
specially for them and the audience laughs does the fact that the
performer isn’t doing it specially for them have any (.) err I think that’s I
think that’s a very good question (.) I think we as judges got rather
frustrated when somebody obviously was doing the same show every
night

I. Mmm

While the previous extracts in this chapter have focused on the importance of a
spontaneous appearing performance, AG makes a case for actual spontaneity
being a crucial factor. He implies that, in terms of judging criteria, a performer
who incorporates the same spontaneous-appearing elements in their act on more
than one occasion will be marked down for their lack of actual spontaneity.
Interestingly he is not able to answer the question of whether this lack of true
spontaneity actually matters (line 21) with any real clarity, rather he states that
we as judges got rather frustrated when somebody obviously was doing the same show every night (lines 26-28).

Perhaps, then, stand up comedy performances are designed to be effective only once in terms of audience appreciation. On a personal level I have witnessed a number of comics perform the same act more than once and I have to agree with AG that you never have such an important viewing s- of- leap in terms of accumulation of knowledge as that between nought and one (lines 2-4). Despite logically accepting that much, if not all, of what a comic presents an audience with has been prepared beforehand, the state of being an audience member somehow removes this logic and encourages the idea that what you are seeing is an entirely spontaneous presentation. Thus to see a 'spontaneous' aside, comment or gesture appear for a second time, in exactly the same place as it appeared in a previous performance is, albeit nonsensically, utterly disappointing and can quite thoroughly alter the perception of that particular comic.

What this extract makes clear is that a spontaneous performance, perceptually spontaneous or otherwise, is highly desirable in terms of satisfying an audience. Spontaneity is valued over and above preparation or, more exactly, apparent spontaneity is valued over and above visible signs of preparation.

The issues of perceived spontaneity and actual spontaneity are also discussed in extract five, where the interviewer voices some of her feelings regarding these elements of an on stage performance.

Extract Five

1 I. I saw Eddie Izzard urm when he'd the first time I saw him do a really big place a De Montford
2 DM. Umm
3 I. Urm and I'd only ever seen him in quite small places before that and an- he got notes out of his pocket a- just once because he he was struggling and that really ruined it for me

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DM. Right [right]
I. [I thought] no: you’re just a funny guy: [you know you’re] just s-
DM. [Yeah it’s true]
I. an- [I mean obviously I know:]
DM. [Well I mean I think I think that’s-] (. ) I think that’s because umm (. ) people love (. ) to have an illusion and as as far as-
I. Umm
DM. As far as the rules are set out (0.5) so if I set out the rules at the top an- say look (. ) I’m crap I’ve nothing in my head this is my piece of paper
I. Yeah
DM. People will live with [that]
I. [Yeah] ex[actly]
DM. [That’s] part of your act
I. Yeah
DM. But if if you (. ) if you come on an- say ye^ah I- Eddie Izzard and you know I’m just- I’m just (. ) wow
I. I’m just ve_ry funny
DM. I’m just a crazy guy [this] stuff’s coming out of my head whatever (. ) then
I. [Yeah]
DM. you realise that he’s got a set list
I. Yeah
DM. And he’s improvising around ideas [and] he does improvise but he’s got a
I. [Yeah]
DM. set list [like] everybody [else] then you go
I. [Yes] [yeah]
DM. aaoow:
I. I know [and that re:ally-]
DM. [An- tha- I was] even though I (. ) didn’t believe for a minute that this guy was just [jamming with nothing]
I. [But I was en]joying believing [that an- an- that] ruined
DM. [Exa- exactly]
I. it [for me]
DM. [and it’s] a suspension of disbelief
I. Yeah
DM. Again that’s the actorly thing you [know] it’s much more theatrical (. )
I. [Yes]
DM. these days and the theatre involved is that you suspend your disbelief it’s-
I. [Yes:]
DM. (. ) disbelief because (. ) th- this is an act
I. Yes
DM. You want to enjoy it as a kind of virtual reality (. ) that- you’ve met this very entertaining lunatic [stranger]
I. [Yeah]
From the perspective of an audience member, the interviewer discusses the effect an obvious lack of spontaneity on the part of a stand up comedian can have. Being seen to take notes from his pocket, a favourite comic really ruined (line 6) his performance in terms of her perception of it. What is interesting, and a notion shared between the interviewer and DM, is that while the audience and comic alike are aware that some sort of preparation or rehearsal has gone into a performance, to provide any evidence of this is to tempt devastating effects. This rather odd set of circumstances is created by that which DM refers to as a suspension of disbelief (line 39), or the state of belief. In the case of being a stand up comedy audience member the suspension of disbelief refers to an acceptance of the comic as a very entertaining lunatic [stranger] (line 49), rather than someone who has prepared for the encounter and is merely reeling out memorised lines. The suspension of disbelief, a concept used by many comics in their discussions concerning the desired perception of their on stage personas, is therefore a phenomenon very much concerned with the complexities inherent in the dimension of ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’.

Interestingly, this extract implies that a lack of spontaneity will not necessarily damage a stand up comedy performance unless the comic specifically presents an appearance of spontaneity which is then rumbled by the audience. DM states that if I set out the rules at the top an- say look (. ) I’m crap I’ve nothing in my head this is my piece of paper... People will live with [that] (lines 14-17). As such, it seems that comic performances must contain an element of integrity and this can be achieved either by successfully giving off the impression of spontaneity, or by being honest and admitting to, or providing obvious evidence of, pre-performance preparation. What is far less acceptable is presenting a particular version of events and failing to maintain this version throughout. To do this is to leave oneself open to disappointing the audience through deceit, in shattering the virtual reality (. ) that- you’ve met this very entertaining lunatic [stranger] (lines 48-49) that has been created and enjoyed up to a point.
Having seen from previous extracts that the definition of spontaneity, as intended by the comics, may not be confined to that which we understand from the dictionary, in extract six, AD complicates the meaning of ‘rehearsal’.

Extract Six

1. So what about rehearsal (.) kind of (.) in a a week or a two week period before (.) something I mean I don’t know how long you have between things but w- how do you rehearse stuff (0.5) from:
(0.5)

AD. I never do erm
(1.0)
AD. I- I- lots every comedian works in a different way and they- (0.5) you may if you interview a lot of comedians pick out different (.) patterns but err (.)
most stand ups will tell you rehearsing stand up comedy is a waste of time
I. Right
AD. And the only thing you can really do is learn your lines
I. But that’s rehearsal really I suppose isn’t [it] memorising what you’re
AD. [Er]
I. going to say
AD. Yeah that’d be it
I. Mmm
AD. And err (0.5) even that’s hard
I. Mmm↑
AD. Because i- err nothing I do is scripted
I. You don’t i- you don’t have it written
AD. I don’t have a script
I. So how do you?
AD. You () you memorise it through repetition
I. Right
AD. And that comes in () in () gigs

AD responds to the question regarding rehearsal (lines 1-3) with I never do (line 5). This strong assertion, which he then goes on to reinforce by bringing in the opinions of most other comics who think, similarly, that rehearsing stand up comedy is a waste of time (lines 9-10), is an unambiguous assertion of his standpoint with regards to rehearsal. As such, his following remark, And the only thing you can really do is learn your lines (line 12), is quite unexpected.
The interviewer attempts to make sense of this apparent contradiction, but that’s rehearsal really I suppose isn’t [it] memorising what you’re going to say (lines 13-15), although AD’s reply, Yeah that’d be it (line 16), is noncommittal in that it neither confirms nor rejects the categorisation of learning lines as rehearsal. Patently the interviewer considers the learning of lines to be a form of rehearsal and, though AD does not overtly disagree with this assessment, he does not allow her categorisation to coerce him into a reassessment of his own ideas as to where the boundaries of what he considers to be rehearsal lie.

The notion of learning lines invokes the assumption that there are in fact lines to be learnt, and, not unreasonably, we might suppose that these lines are written down in some form or another. However, AD states that nothing I do is scripted (line 20), to which the interviewer responds You don’t i- you don’t have it written (line 21). Despite the interviewer bringing the idea of ‘writing’ to the discursive table, AD reiterates I don’t have a script (line 22). Generally speaking, ‘written down lines’ and ‘scripts’ would not be considered dissimilar, and yet there does seem to be a certain reluctance on AD’s part to engage verbally with the concept of ‘written down’, and a concern to talk of ‘scripts’.

Earlier in this interview AD talked about pre-performance preparation and one of the practices he mentioned, twice, was that of ‘looking at notes’, which may be considered somewhat discordant with his I don’t have a script assertion. In order to make sense of this apparent inconsistency, it is necessary to be specific about definition, in this case about the definition of scripted. The existence of a script would imply that all on stage dialogue has been prepared prior to a performance, and that the entire routine can therefore be learnt. The idea of notes, on the other hand, may refer to anything from a complete script to a few key words. Notes do not necessarily, or even usually, equate with script. In this sense AD may not have been willing to entertain the interviewer’s notion of written out of a concern that this may suggest he does script his performances.
Despite a subtle lack of clarity over this issue, what may be noted is the apparent concern on AD’s part that he is not thought of as someone who memorises his material, word for word, before a performance. Indeed, he goes on to say that You (.) you memorise it through repetition... And that comes in (.) in (.) gigs (lines 24-26), the implication here being that any rehearsal, or learning of lines, is done on stage, in front of an audience. Of course this does not explain how the first airing of comic material is managed.

Stand up comedy could be perceived as the presentation of a comic monologue, by a performer, to an audience. However, this form of entertainment is generally considered to be a form of interaction in which a comic initiates a dialogue, to which the audience responds. If this interpretation is acknowledged it is perhaps judicious to suggest that rehearsal, in terms of preparing the act as it will be performed, cannot realistically take place. And if we consider AD’s comment that the only thing you can really do is learn your lines (line 12) his juxtaposition of the only thing and really do does imply that there are certain other aspects of performing which cannot be pre-prepared.

If, in discussing rehearsal (line 1), which is where this discussion began, AD is contemplating performances in their entirety, as opposed to merely the words he says, then there certainly are considerations other than the lines. Gestures, movement, tone of voice, hecklers, room shape, audience, and any number of potential occurrences, some of which evidently cannot be rehearsed for or pre-planned, may all have a part to play in any given stand up comedy performance.

The relationship between the two title components of this dimension, ‘spontaneous’ and ‘rehearsed’, appear to have a rather paradoxical relationship, at times straightforward, at others convoluted and complex, involving shifting meanings and definitions.
7.3 Discussing Spontaneous and Rehearsed

The dimension 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed' is generated in discussions concerning the methods that are used to create a stand up comedy performance and in discussions focusing on the appearance of an on stage performance. This dimension therefore involves a consideration of both practice and perception. While, essentially only the comic can know whether their on stage performance is spontaneous or rehearsed, it is the impression given off that is significant, in the talk of the participants. Interestingly, spontaneity is presented as a highly desirable element within a stand up comedy performance, whereas rehearsal is accounted for in such a manner that it seems a rather negative and potentially detrimental practice to engage in.

This is an aspect of performance which seems peculiar to the particular social group under study, as in many other performance practices rehearsal is regarded as both necessary and desirable. The desire to conceal any evidence of rehearsal, on the other hand, is relatively common in that if an individual appears to be able to perform in a particular manner, apparently without any sort of practice their status as a performer is elevated.

While other types of performers and performance necessarily involve considerations of both spontaneity and rehearsal, the definition of these concepts presented by stand up comics are slightly different from those we might find in other arenas. In talking about spontaneity, the participants generally refer to the impression of spontaneity, and in talking about rehearsal the participants generally refer to learning their comic routine word for word and subsequently remaining true to this while on stage. These specific interpretations may also be affected by the perceived significance of an ability to memorise. The evaluation of these matters by stand up comics and their counterparts may be similar to the
evaluation of the ability to memorise parts in acting circles, or the extra kudos awarded to the star classical musician who plays a piece from memory.

In considering this particular dimension, the business of stand up comedy is again divided into two distinct components, the development of material and the on stage presentation. Discussions of spontaneity, in the main, are linked to the performance aspect, although comics maintain that they are always keen to engage in spontaneous on stage development of that material, or even the production of new material should they discover they have something new to say whilst on stage. Discussions concerning pre-performance preparation, if not specifically rehearsal, revolve around the construction and running order of material and some even mention writing brief notes in order to jog their memory should they forget how they intended to present their material.

In a consideration of this dimension, the dyadic relationship between the two title components may be considered as an 'either-or' construct, in which the significance of spontaneity is diminished by a speaker's admission of rehearsal, and the significance of rehearsal is diminished proportionally by a discursive concern with spontaneity. However, in consistently adopting their own specific interpretation of these two concepts it may be said that the social group constituted by those connected to stand up comedy have developed their own consensual repertoire, and thus the notion of small scale, group based, social cohesion is maintained.

This dimension does however have relevance for those performers outside the stand up comedy arena, although the definition of the two concepts here may be more straightforward. An individual giving a presentation to work colleagues, for example, is less likely than the comics to consider spontaneity a crucial aspect of the presentation or performance, and more likely to consider pre-performance rehearsal and preparation as essential. However, in any arena there is still a
concern with the response of the audience, and with the 'flow' of the presentation, and most performers or presenters are better thought of if they can perform without (the appearance of) a script.

The 'suspension of disbelief' is a concept that is attended to by many of the comics in their accounts and this idea develops the idea of a stand up comedy performance being an interaction between comic and audience. While the audience are aware that they are being entertained by an individual who has probably spent hours and hours creating material, it is claimed that they suspend their disbelief in order to enjoy the performance as if the comic were someone who just happens to be a particularly amusing person to spend the evening with. In this, then, the audience is just as responsible for maintaining the impression of spontaneity as the comic. This feature of stand up comedy goes a long way in explaining the importance of a spontaneous looking performance. If an audience is tacitly commandeered into upholding the spontaneity of a performance then the comic ought at least do the same. This mutual reinforcement of the appearance of spontaneity is not dissimilar to that engaged in by actors and magicians and their audiences. Should an actor require an audible prompt, or a magician inadvertently reveal the mechanism or method behind the appearance of his or her magic, then the demands placed on the audience become less likely to be successfully fulfilled.

The dimension 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed' is linked to the dimension 'Truth and Believability' in extract five as the participants discuss the importance of spontaneity in creating a believable performance. It is suggested that for an audience to perceive a stand up comic as a believably funny performer their performance must be delivered as if it is a spontaneous creation.
CHAPTER EIGHT: TALENT AND EFFORT

TT. I have this theory that err (.) for a lot of stand up c- comedians it's erm (2.0)
TT. Talent minus effort

8.1 INTRODUCING TALENT AND EFFORT

The dimension of 'Talent and Effort' concerns what may be considered a generic
dilemmatic for skilled activity, particularly activity involving some sort of
presentation or performance. This dimension attends to that which makes it
possible for, or prompts, certain individuals to become a particular sort of
performer. One way of putting this, in simple terms, would be to say that this
dimension is concerned with whether there is something special in these people
that allows them to perform, or whether they are simply ordinary individuals
who have consistently applied themselves until they develop the required skills.

Although this dimension is referred to as 'Talent and Effort' it could equally
exist under the label 'Nature and Nurture', or 'Innate and Learned', or 'Natural
and Manufactured', or perhaps 'Inherent and Developed'. These other ways of
conceptualising the dimension indicate some of the issues and concerns that
collectively inform its existence, and are dyadic concepts informed by the
commonly held assumption that talent is something that one is born with. Of
course talent and effort are not necessarily mutually exclusive entities, obviously
one can be talented and apply effort to the development and productivity of that
talent. Conversely, one can work at becoming good at something and, in doing
so, can develop a talent for it (of course one may also have a talent and never use
it, or work at something for a prolonged period without ever becoming good at
it).
Helitzer (1987) answers the question of whether there is such a thing as a natural comedy writer by claiming 'Yes! Like natural ability in athletics, singing, art, and dance, there are many who just seem to be fast learners and have an instinctive talent. As the saying goes, "We're all born equal. After that, we're on our own." Talent must be developed, or it won't go very far. Writing humor professionally is an all-consuming occupation. Your mind is your office and your office hours are every waking hour' (p. 294). Here it is suggested that talent in itself is not enough and effort must be applied in order for any talent to be utilised. Stebbins (1990) suggests that, even for those comics who have 'day jobs', 'ten hours per week (performing, writing, observing live shows, rehearsing, and "hanging out" after an evening show) was a reasonable estimation of commitment at the participant level' (p. 73). He also states that 'it is through trying out jokes, monologues, anecdotes, and one-liners that comics learn what draws laughs from an audience and what does not. By analyzing audio and video recordings of their performances, reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of those performances, and experimenting... they gradually shape and expand a repertoire that can be sorted into shorter and longer acts appropriate to the audience at hand. For most [comics], experience is one of the best teachers' (1990, p. 77).

Specifically, Stebbins comments that 'Learning the ropes in stand-up means, in general, picking up two things: conventions and tricks of the trade' (Stebbins, 1990, p. 78). He suggests that there are many different types of conventions that a comic may come to be aware of, including certain physical movements, such as simulating a telephone call using a fist with the thumb and little finger extended; certain vocal conventions, such as 'the low moan emitted after the punchline in an apparent attempt to emphasize the humour'; certain working conventions, such as that to steal lines is nothing short of a crime, unless in the face of heckling where 'any line, stolen or stock, may be ethically used for extrication' (p. 78); and the convention that 'anything, no matter how sacred, can become a subject so long as it produces the desired result - laughter' (p. 78); the convention of adherence to the time allotted by management for a performance, and that it is only the headline
act that is entitled to the privilege of ignoring this convention and even then ‘only if he or she and the audience are clearly enjoying the show at the point where it is supposed to end’ (p. 78).

There are also numerous tricks of the trade, which develop over time through application and commitment to the environment of stand up comics, rather than as the result of talent. Stebbins suggests that these include: ‘knowing stock heckler lines, employing set-ups, using good timing and rhythm, entering and exiting on a high note... knowing how to handle a punchline that falls flat... developing new material in the company of comics after the show... not bringing personal problems to the stage’ (pp. 78-81).

The existence of books, such as Melvin Helitzer’s ‘Comedy Writing Secrets: How to Think Funny, Write Funny, Act Funny and Get Paid For It’ (1987), and courses, such as those run by City University and Jackson’s Lane Community Centre in London, suggests that there are those who wholeheartedly believe that stand up comedy can be taught, or at least some aspects of it, and thus the idea that if an aspiring comic is prepared to put in the effort some measure of success will be achieved is maintained.

8.2 TALKING TALENT AND EFFORT

The issues pertaining to our concern with performers and performance regarding the dimension ‘Talent and Effort’ include the peculiar difficulty that appears as a feature in the discussion of talent, particularly one’s own; the consequence of discussing one’s own talent and the verbal tactics employed to achieve this; the links between talent and the performance element of stand up comedy, and the connection between effort and the material creation element of this practice; the notion of talent having longevity, or being an everlasting aspect
of an individual's make up; and the rather contrary idea that exceptional comics can afford to present very weak material.

In the first extract it is noticeable that the discussion of talent in relation to one's self is not necessarily an easily managed verbal activity.

Extract One

1. Do you think the ability to put together this comic material is sort of a talent or is there something you could learn
   (5.0)

2. BM. I don't know "honestly"
3. I. Well do you feel () gifted?
4. BM. I-di- yea- uh- h- yeah () I do in that way I- I- I don't know if it's a big gift
   5. I've always jus- () that ability I have (0.5) that not everyone has
   6. (2.0)

7. BM. Mmm () whether it's a good one I don't know
   (1.0)

8. BM. You know I I couldn't sit down and write a novel I couldn't sit down and write a funny book
9. I. °Mmm°
10. (1.0)

11. BM. Just things occur to you and I then write them down in a certain way I used to write my sketches for this review thing
12. I. Light
13. BM. And they were very () very well received () an- a- at that time you know obviously this is going back a long time I was quite a young fella () I thought God I'm good at this
14. I. Mmm
15. BM. And everybody told me I was and it jus- it's just always something I've known I can do
16. (1.0)

17. I. An- [have you] learnt as you've gone along () so do you think somebody
18. BM. [I woul-]
19. I. [else]
20. BM. [No] 'cos there was a big break
21. I. Right
22. BM. Between doing that and doing this
23. I. °Right°
24. BM. But I always knew that I hadn't lost it
25. I. °Yeah°
26. BM. I always thought I could I can still write a funny line because it's i-
I. It's still part of you
BM. Yeah
I. So do you think someone could learn (.) how (0.5) or do you think you need some [spark of something]
BM. [I don't think every]one could learn
I. Right
BM. I don't because I've seen
(1.0)
BM. I don't beli- in the course of what you're doing you may talk to people that have been to (. ) schools of comedy
I. Are there such things
BM. Yeah there are I was listening to Radio Four a couple of weeks back and they were interviewing a couple of people that had been to one
I. Yeah
BM. I- I don't think they've got (. ) what it takes I think it's something you (.) you've either got or you haven't got an- maybe you can teach some people but I don't know
I. Mmm
BM. You can't teach everyone 'cos some people are really naff

Initially the most striking feature of this data is the five second pause (line 3) following the question of whether this particular stand up comic, in his early forties, regards what he does as the result of talent or whether it is something that one could learn. The delay in response may well be the result of his consideration of the question, which sets talent and learning against each other, although it perhaps serves as an indication of one of the fundamental concerns within this dimension, that it is problematic to discuss one's own talent. Indeed, even after this lengthy pause, his response is that he doesn't know, "honestly" (line 4).

It seems that the introduction of the concept of gifted (line 5) helps alleviate some of these problems in that an answer is forthcoming. The idea of being gifted suggests a talent that can't be helped, a talent that simply exists as a matter of fact, like having the gift of good skin, and it seems to be the case that to acknowledge you have a gift, as opposed to a talent, circumnavigates the potential awkwardness that our society often rewards us with should we dare to
suggest that we are good at something. The consequences of being seen to 'blow one’s own trumpet', of 'BOOTing', will be considered in greater detail as we progress. Even the admission of 'giftedness', however, is tempered, firstly by a considerable amount of stuttering, and secondly by I don't know if it's a big gift (line 6).

Having moved from talking about talent to talking about being gifted, the interviewee then moves to talk about ability (line 7), and again the existence of this is tempered: whether it's a good one I don't know (line 9), I I couldn't sit down and write a novel I couldn't sit down and write a funny book (lines 11-12). This prompts the question of whether ability may be regarded in the same way as talent and on the face of it the two concepts do seem similar. However, there is a fundamental difference in the social assumptions that these actual words ('ability' and 'talent') conjure up: 'ability' seems a much more under-stated concept than 'talent', which prompts images of specialness and rarity.

While it may be considered ill-advised to be seen to be BOOTing, we must not make the assumption that because on the whole people shy away from acknowledging their own skills, talents and accomplishments, they do not want to talk about them. Rather, they endeavour to talk about them in a particular way, and here we are party to some of the most widely used tactics for doing this: pushing examples of one's own accomplishment way back into the past, as if doing so literally distances them from the speaker (line 19); talking of the self that did these things as if of a different person, obviously this is going back a long time I was quite a young fella (line 19); bringing in other peoples' opinions on the matter rather than commenting on it yourself, everybody told me (line 22); and, a tactic which works particularly well in terms of discussing talent, discussing the skill as if it were something similar to having double-jointed fingers, it's just always something I've known I can do (lines 22-23).
Note BM’s obvious downplaying of how he has used his ability in the past. BM does not talk of a ‘comic review’, or even just a ‘review’, but a review thing (line 16), which makes it’s occurrence seem rather less impressive. Also, the word just is used three times in the first half of this data (lines 7, 15 and 22), again downplaying the importance of this ability the speaker ‘just’ has. Using just in this manner has implications for the nature of the ability that is being discussed in that it avoids the issue of effort, instead implying that this ability just exists.

If we follow the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee closely over the first part of this data, not only do we see many ways in which the concept of ability is discussed, it is also possible to see a pattern emerge with regards to a response/take-up formation: having awkwardly stated that he does regard himself to have a gift or talent, BM is faced with very little interviewer response (line 8); at this transition relevant place3 (TRP) it is BM that continues; four more TRPs follow, each indicated by a lack of, or slight, interviewer response; and each time it is BM that continues. The interesting thing here is not that it is repeatedly BM that continues the discussion, but that each time he downgrades his verbal assessment of his perceived ability.

From acknowledging that ability I have (0.5) that not everyone has (line 7), after a two second pause, he comments Mmm (.) whether it's a good one I don't know (line 9); after a further seconds pause he mentions two things that this gift does not allow him to do, You know I I couldn't sit down and write a novel I couldn't sit down and write a funny book (lines 11-12); after a very quiet °Mmm° from 3 Transition relevant places are those instances during conversations where the current speaker’s turn may come to an end. As in this piece of data, they are often marked by a pause. At the point of a TRP, the conversation may be continued by another speaker, or the current speaker may choose to continue, particularly if there is no forthcoming uptake from someone else. An awareness of TRPs is a feature of conversation analysis (see Sacks et al, 1974), although they have been referred to here as they provide analytic interest with regards to the way in which the current speaker, BM, is repeatedly allowed to continue the conversation, each time downgrading his assessment of his own talent.
the interviewer and a further one second pause (lines 13-14) he continues with
Just things occur to you and I then write them down in a certain way I used to
write my sketches for this review thing (lines 15-16), not only using Just and
review thing but also the generic you as if this is not something that should be
considered specifically as his gift but rather a gift that anyone may have; the
interviewer responds with a Right (line 17) which BM follows with And they
were very (. ) very well received (. ) an- a- at that time you know obviously this is
going back a long time I was quite a young fella (. ) I thought God I'm good at
this (lines 18-20). Here BM implies that he was as surprised as anyone by his
ability, which, again, deals with the potential difficulties associated with
admitting to having a talent for something, he didn’t ask for this ability, it just
seems to exist. The interviewer’s response here is a mere Mmm (line 21), which
BM follows with And everybody told me I was and it jus- it's just always
something I've known I can do (lines 22-23). At this point BM uses the device of
incorporating other peoples' opinions into his talk, thus ensuring that any claims
he makes are not based solely on his own which avoids being held accountable
for 'BOOTing'. He also voices the idea that this ability is a somehow natural or
intrinsic entity, which he reiterates later, I think it's something you (. ) you've
either got or you haven't got (lines 50-51), implying that the achievements of this
talent are effortless. This, coupled with the fact that throughout this part of the
conversation there is no mention of effort at all, perhaps suggests that effort is
somehow the antithesis of talent, that if a talent for something exists then effort is
not required.

The notion of talent as something that naturally exists in some individuals is
jointly construed by the interviewer and interviewee and they reach agreement
over the issue of it being something that does not get lost over time (lines 32-37).
The idea of an individual either having a talent for stand up comedy or not has
repercussions for the issues of teaching and learning. It is suggested that not
everyone is able to be taught, that there has to be something in that person
already for them to be teachable. As such, the importance of talent is increased over and above that of effort, as if to say that all the effort in the world will not overcome an essential lack of talent. In this instance then, talent overrides effort.

In asking whether someone could learn (.) how (0.5) or do you think you need some [spark of something] (lines 38-39) the interviewer acknowledges that BM regards his ability not as the product of learning but as an innate quality, and offers a further way of talking about talent, giftedness, or ability. Interestingly, BM begins his response before the interviewer has actually articulated this thing that is outside the realm of learning, which suggests that specific conceptualisations are unnecessary, partly as a result of this being impossible to achieve, and partly as the concept is both shared and understood despite this. Indeed, from this section of the data it would be difficult to formulate specifically what the notions of talent, giftedness, and ability refer to. This is not a feature peculiar to this data, rather it reflects the inherent difficulties associated with these concepts. They are seen to be problematic for even the most articulate individuals, relying on a shared, common-sense understanding of meaning. From the corpus of data the most that can be derived is a collection of difficult to measure and uniformly vague conceptualisations. ‘Talent’, then, may be regarded as an ambiguous concept, defying reasoned articulation, existing as an ethereal concept. It is something that is perceived as being an innate quality, something that cannot necessarily be learned, and something that is difficult to admit to having, although it is not seen as a bad thing, rather as something special and rare.

In this extract the relationship between talent and effort is presented as one in which the existence of talent decreases the need for effort, which may or may not be beneficial even where there is no talent. These ideas are not alien to those outside the sphere of stand up comedy, indeed, it is often thought that those who are good at something have to try less hard, and there are always those that try
enormously hard to do something and yet never really manage it, or certainly never rise above being merely competent.

In talking about his first manager, AD remarked on a comment made rather ill-advisedly.

Extract Two

AD. He said to one or two people well we’ll just wait and see (0.5) with Alan you know what happens with the Perrier Award (0.5) so that rapidly changed into err (.) Alan Davies thinks he’s going to win the Perrier Award this [year] I. [Right] (0.5)

AD. And it did my (.) reputation no end of damage

The perceived damage to AD’s reputation as a result of his manager’s comments, and the ensuing implication that Alan Davies thinks he’s going to win the Perrier Award this [year] (lines 3-4), is illustrative of the difficulties associated with verbal negotiations of one’s own talent. The problems caused for AD by the retrospectively ill-conceived comments of his first manager and the repercussions of that concern, not the fact that he may have thought he might win the award, but the fact that this thought was articulated. It is made clear however that the perceived boast was the result of interpretation rather than a direct translation of what this manager actually said. As such, we may consider AD to have acted, in the interview situation at least, in a culturally appropriate way as he makes no claims to this line of thought being one that he necessarily concurred with.

It is unlikely to be the case that the inappropriate nature of such an expression is a feature specific to a stand up comedy environment. Indeed, it is almost a cultural tradition of ours to downplay the extent of any ability we may have. However, in competition scenarios it could be posited that there is more licence with regards to verbalising a belief in one’s own talent. Indeed, the very act of
entering a competition suggests some degree of belief in one’s own ability.

In extract three, AD discusses the peculiarity of having a natural ability for stand up comedy performance.

**Extract Three**

1. AD. When I used to start doing gigs I used to get laughs and not really know why
2. I. Right
3. AD. Some material would work one night and not another night
4. (1.0)
5. AD. Sometimes I’d go on and say something it didn’t make me mean it to be funny (0.5) but everyone is primed to laugh anyway and they’d laugh
6. I. Yeah
7. AD. And I’d go well what is that all about (.) but gradually you get control of what it is about you that’s funny [if] you’re a naturally funny person
8. [Right]
9. I. [Right]
10. AD. if you’re (0.5) an Eddie Izzard or a Lee Evans or somebody who’s naturally (0.5) funny there’s something about their voice and the way that they use words (.) that makes people smile [I mean] Eddie has enormous difficulty being serious [in] conversation ‘cos people s- just
11. [Yeah]
12. I. start smiling
13. [Right]
14. AD. ‘Co- i- (.) something about his voice (0.5) it’s very hard to define and then if you add to that (0.5) a a really bright mind (.) searching out for observations that are going to make people laugh [then] you’re going to [Umhum]
15. I. get a very very (0.5) very good act

The above data establishes the notion of naturally being good at something and brings some of the most obvious tactics for discussing a natural ability to our attention. Natural ability is discussed as if it is an unstoppable force. It is not discussed straightforwardly in that others are used as examples rather than the speaker directly attributing this ability to himself, although this is achieved indirectly.
These few lines of data, When I used to start doing gigs I used to get laughs and not really know why... Sometimes I'd go on and say something it didn't mean it to be funny but everyone is primed to laugh anyway and they'd laugh, serve two different purposes simultaneously. The idea that, in the early stages of his stand up comedy career, AD would make the audience laugh almost unintentionally implies that he is indeed a naturally funny person, that he can make people laugh without even trying. In whatever way he refers to intention, in saying I didn’t mean it to be funny he implies that these things he said were funny. However, his account of an audience laughing because the situation demanded it, or primed them for it, rather undermines any notion of innate funniness in that it suggests that they would have laughed at pretty much anything.

AD’s competent movement from talking about himself, I’d go on and say something, to talking of generically funny people, [if] you’re a naturally funny person, to giving specific examples, an Eddie Izzard or a Lee Evans, whilst essentially talking about himself throughout, is an effective device for enabling him to discuss his own inherent ability, or talent, without risking sounding arrogant. Also note how the an and a work to make Izzard and Evans into types rather than individuals. In mentioning the enormous difficulty Eddie Izzard has in being serious ‘cos people just start smiling, AD reinforces the notion of there being some people who are essentially ‘just’ very funny people, and in doing so alludes to the notion of himself as one.

AD’s reference to other, well known, comics, as a means of talking about his own attributes without seeming preoccupied with his own talent, also enables him to bring concepts like a really bright mind and a very very very good act to the discussion unproblematically.

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At this point in the data, it seems that the business of being a stand up comic, has been divided into a consideration of two factors: the individual, and the material. While this division has not reduced the contributory significance of either one or the other factor, the notion of talent has remained firmly connected to the development of the individual. As such, we might consider talented stand up comics to be those who, whether intentionally or otherwise, have something about their voice and the way that they use words (.) that makes people smile (lines 14-15).

The connection between natural ability and the performance side of stand up comedy, as opposed to pre-performance preparation, is developed in extract four.

Extract Four

1. I. Yeah (.) umm so (0.5) if you could teach anybody (.) then what's the sort of (.) thinking behind talent
2. RH. Talent erm (.) well you get some (.) natural comedians who are just instantly [funny] and urm (0.5) and whether they write material or not it's
3. I. [Mmm]
4. RH. just one thing you've got people urm t- like Tommy Cooper
5. I. Yeah
6. RH. And who's just (.) is a natural comedian (.) though his material was never very [good] f- Ken same with Ken Dodd material wasn't very good
7. I. [No]
8. RH. Freddie Star is a good natural comic his material is awful
9. I. Mmm
10. RH. I almost feel like writing to him and saying get yourself a [decent writer]
11. I. [Yeah yeah]
12. RH. 'cos your (.) I mean like he's so successful that he's got he's so rich and everything he probably (0.5) an- he does what he wants [to] do I
13. I. [Yes]
14. RH. [suppose] but (.) there are other comics who I honestly think a- are there
15. I. [Yeah]
16. RH. due to (.) graft really umm (0.5) certain comics are better co- better writers than performers
17. I. Yeah
18. RH. And other comics are better performers than writers
19. I. Yeah
RH, a stand up comic and comedy teacher in his early thirties, makes the distinction between the writing and the performing aspects of stand up comedy, and here it is suggested that talent can be evident in either aspect, although all four of his examples concern comics who he perceives as talented performers and far less talented (awful even) writers.

The examples he gives are also all well known, successful comics, who, it would seem, have overcome their lack of writing talent by being successful performers. This is generally the angle that has been taken with regards to the conceptualisation of talent and stand up comics. Talent is that which makes, and is evident in, a good performance, a good presentation; the material, that which is being presented, is far less likely to be something that is talked about in terms of talent. Indeed, a ‘talented’ stand up comic does not seem to need particularly good material to be a success.

In extract five, the longevity and significance of talent is discussed in a dialogue between the interviewer and KK, a promoter of stand up comics in his late twenties.

Extract Five

1 KK. If you’re if you’re tal- if you’re a talented actor you don’t become an untalented actor
2 I. Right
3 KK. If you’re a good stand up comic °or a good comedian you don’t actually become a bad stand up°
4 I. Do you think it is talent or (. ) a lot of learning I mean Eddie went to some school didn’t he some
KK. I m- he studied drama u- it’s talent (. ) 'it's always talent°
I. Yeah?
KK. You can't work at being a stand up comic if you're not funny (0.5) you
can't you can't (. ) be uncharismatic (. ) and be a good comic
I. Mmm
KK. So you need to have the charisma an- you need to have um (. ) you need to
be a good actor or actress (. ) get on stage (. ) and act out what- [basically]
I. [Yeah]
KK. to make people believe in you but you have to have extraordinary
charisma (. ) people have to love you at the end of a show (. ) or be terrified
of you which is generally [the] same thing (. ) know Jack Dee used to have
I. [Yeah]
KK. people loving him but slightly scared of [him] at the end [of] a gig and
I. ["yeah"]
KK. that was Jack's power
I. Yeah
KK. Urm (. ) so (. ) once you've got that you don't (. ) lose it people become lazy?
I. Mmm
KK. And (. ) don't write new material or (. ) get think they're going to get away
with (. ) sh- shit jokes (. ) and if they're very very good comics they do get
away with a lot of rubbish because they are so good
I. "Yeah"
KK. That they can carry off nonsense

In response to a question about the nature of stand up comedy with regards to
talent or learning (lines 6-7), KK unequivocally claims the overwhelming
importance of talent. His argument for this You can’t work at being a stand up
comic if you’re not funny (line 11), while having the appearance of a clarificatory
statement, actually clarifies very little and even seems somewhat tautological
given that it is explaining something about the significance of a talent for being
funny. At this point it seems that KK is saying that talented stand up comics are
funny, which is rather like saying that talented musicians can play instruments.
KK is unequivocal in his assertion that talent is the driving force behind stand up
comedy it’s talent (. ) 'it's always talent° (line 7), and states that You can’t work at
being a stand up comic if you’re not funny (line 9). In this case, talent is
perceived as the state of being funny and yet it retains its illusive, indescribable
quality. While KK talks of charisma and of being a good actor or actress (line 13), this is as close as we get to a definition of talent.

The one sided organisation of this talk is particularly interesting in terms of the topic the participants are discussing: talent. Here KK is having no obvious difficulty in discussing some of the finer points of the concept of talent. Of course, KK is not discussing his own talent, rather that of others. Indeed, if you reread the data assuming that he is a successful stand up comic the emphasis of what he is saying changes dramatically. If this were the case, the comments made could be contrived as constituting a major social faux pas with regards to our cultural predisposition for not BOOTing.

Once again a division is made between the performance and the writing aspects of stand up comedy, if they're very very good comics they do get away with a lot of rubbish because they are so good (lines 27-28). It seems then, that the performance element takes precedence over the actual material in a stand up routine, as talent is discussed only in terms of performance. Interestingly, KK claims that If you're a good stand up comic °or a good comedian you don't actually become a bad stand up° (lines 4-5), which is reminiscent of BM's claim that, despite a lengthy period of not performing, I always knew that I hadn't lost it... I always thought I could I can still write a funny line because it's i- because it's still here (lines 32-35, extract one). As such, talent is presented as an aspect of certain individuals that remains constant regardless of usage: once you've got that you don't ( . ) lose it (line 25).

This conceptualisation of talent again links it specifically to the performance aspects of stand up comedy, as opposed to the material development aspect. Indeed, KK goes on to claim that certain comics think they're going to get away with (. ) sh- shit jokes (. ) and if they're very very good comics they do get away with a lot of rubbish because they are so good... That they can carry off nonsense
Despite the paradoxical nature of claiming that the very good comics get away with rubbish, this comment reinforces the association of talent with performance or presentation skills.

This extract also implies a connection between effort and material development, as KK mentions that people become lazy?... And (.) don’t write new material (lines 25-27). Laziness, as the antithesis of effort, is discussed in terms of material rather than performance practices, and thus a division appears to have been established between talent and performance, and effort and material creation. This division is upheld if we consider the previous extracts and the way in which performance only is discussed in relation to notions of talent.

In extract six, LW discusses the creation of material and here the concept of effort is utilised.

Extract Six

I. What are you doing differently now (0.5) as compared to when you started
LW. I’m writing more
I. Right
LW. ‘Cos I used to just think w- you have to be totally inspired an- something [has] to come to you an- now I realise that's not true you can sit down you [((Clicks fingers))] can think (0.5) an- you can technically think about a joke an- you can write a reasonable joke by technically working at it
I. Right

LW discusses the way she used to think about the development of material for her performances, and compares this to the way she currently operates. In stating that she used to just think w- you have to be totally inspired an- something [has] to come to you (lines 3-4) the notion of talent as something innate, as something created from within, something you either have or do not have, is expressed. LW goes on to say, however, that she now believes it is possible to technically think about a joke an- you can write a reasonable joke by
technically working at it (lines 6-7). Here the notion of effort is given a 'technical' gloss, and talent is therefore contrasted with technique and skill. Thus a connection is again made between effort and the material development aspect of stand up comedy. Interestingly, even within this acknowledgement, the results of applying effort are downplayed as the jokes generated through this alternative to inspiration are characterised as reasonable (line 9). This implies that the creation of material in this manner, through effort rather than talent, renders it ordinary rather than outstanding.

Collectively the above extracts promote the significance of talent while simultaneously downgrading the value of effort. Among the stand up comics at least, it appears that talent is highly regarded while effort remains the requirement of those less well equipped.

8.3 DISCUSSING TALENT AND EFFORT

The dimension 'Talent and Effort' emerges from a consideration of that which makes it possible for certain individuals to perform as stand up comics. However, the difficulties associated with verbally presenting one's own ability as a performer as the result of talent have been made quite clear, and yet, perhaps surprisingly then, there has been little in the way of a discussion of effort. The perception of a performance as either the result of talent or effort is largely a consideration for the audience to make, and for comics to admit to effort may have the effect of diminishing the notion of themselves as talented performers.

In their discussions concerning the ability to perform, the non-performing participants also focused heavily on the importance of talent, at the expense of considering effort, thus implying the crucial nature of talent. The only real consideration of effort by any of the participants is found in discussions concerning the development of material. As such it seems that talent is a quality
more readily applied to the business of performing, while effort is a feature of the pre-performance preparation.

The dimension 'Talent and Effort' also has resonance for performers outside the stand up comedy environment. Performance of any nature can be perceived as the result of either talent or effort, or a combination of the two, by those who observe it, and each individual performer will have their own preference regarding what they would like that perception to involve. Gaining top marks in an examination performance, for example, without applying any effort may be highly regarded by an individual's peers, whereas receiving a bravery award through sheer grit and determination may be equally highly regarded.

The difficulties associated with discussing one's own talent in a positive light is as problematic for any other type of performer as it is for stand up comics, and thus this particular feature of social interaction must be considered as a cultural concern or dilemma, rather than being linked to any specific type of performance group. Similarly, the verbal methods adopted by the comics in order to discuss their own comic talent are no different from those that could be adopted in the talk of any other type of talent. As such it seems that there are certain 'modesty repertoires' available to, and understood by, all members of our society for use in discussing one's own talent in any given activity. However, there are certain situations in which these modesty requirements are overridden by the need to promote a talent, such as in interview situations where the verbal display of a talent is necessary in order to be successful.

The relationship between the two title components of this theme, 'talent' and 'effort', can be thought of in the same way as the relationship between 'spontaneous' and 'rehearsed', in many ways. It is, therefore, in part, a relationship in which for one component to flourish the significance of the other is necessarily diminished.
In terms of ideological dilemmas, to comment on one’s own talent is regarded as rather unsavoury, however to talk of effort can downgrade the existence of talent, which is often the more desirable perception of a performance. While effort is a worthy practice and people may be applauded for applying it, talent is something rather more special. Speakers must, therefore, negotiate a line between the two in discussions of their own practice, attending to the social mores of not BOOTing, while avoiding the damage that can be done to the perception of one’s practice if it is presented as the result of nothing but effort. Something that is born of talent has the edge over something born of effort in some subtle, though significant, ways. The concept of an artistic performance given by a talented performer is very different than that of a performance given by someone who has toiled over its production. This is something to do with generating a confidence in the audience. A singer, a storyteller, an actor, a musician, a comic, a dancer, must all convince the audience that they are performing easily, and that therefore there is no prospect of them failing in their endeavour and embarrassing either themselves or their audience. This is not, however, necessarily the case with regards to less artistic presentations, such as business presentations. In these instances the effort that has gone into the performance, if somehow made knowable, may well be applauded.

It is perhaps then something of a peculiarity that talent is also something that people seem to have difficulty in admitting to, preferring to downplay its existence in fear of being regarded as in some way boastful or big headed. This seems to be a cultural concern in that the society we live in takes objection to the self-ascription of talent and why this should be so remains something of a mystery, although talent is a highly valued, subjective concept and, as such, it is perhaps ill advised to claim a talent for one’s self if one is concerned not to be regarded as conceited.
Interestingly, a consideration of effort or learning has resonance for the notion of talent in two particular senses. If the existence of an individual’s talent is coupled with a reference to the effort they have applied in order that they develop that talent the admission of talent becomes less problematic and more acceptable. However, an admission of effort also has the effect of downplaying the existence of talent, as if it is only an incomplete talent that must be nurtured through effort in order to thrive.

The dimension ‘Talent and Effort’ is presenting as having a connection to the dimension ‘Self and Persona’ in extracts one and three. In both these extracts talent is presented as a highly desirable quality, and is discussed as an aspect of the self which simply exists. As such, it is implied that if the self is naturally suited to a particular type of performance activity, if there exists some sort of innate talent, then effort is not really required.

In extract five a connection is made between the dimensions ‘Talent and Effort’ and ‘Truth and Believability’. Here a stand up comedy promoter claims that to perform as a stand up comic an individual has to have a talent as no amount of effort will ever overcome an essential lack of natural ability, (. . . it’s always talent... You can’t work at being a stand up comic if you’re not funny (extract five, lines 9-11). For this participant, talent is that which makes an audience believe in you (line 17) as a performer and thus it is regarded as a crucial aspect of any performer who succeeds.
CHAPTER NINE: TRUTH AND BELIEVABILITY

BV. And as one comedian once said to me rather (. ) cynically I thought (. ) once you can fake sincerity you've got it cracked
I. "Yeah"
BV. I thought that was a terrible thing to say (0.5) but it is true

9.1 INTRODUCING TRUTH AND BELIEVABILITY

The thematic dimension 'Truth and Believability' adds to our understanding of performing a consideration of that which is presented during a performance. In a consideration of the issues and discursive debates that make up this particular dimension it becomes immediately apparent that a single definition of 'truth' is impossible to reach. The notion of truth may be established through a number of different binary constructs: truth and lie, truth and fiction, truth and exaggeration, truth and pretending. It may also be considered in terms of truth telling and being true to oneself. As such, the notion of 'believability' may then be taken to be the actuality or the impression of one, or more, of these things.

With reference to stand up comedy, Helitzer (1987) quotes Larry Gelbart who said 'most good jokes state a bitter truth', and goes on to suggest that 'without some fundamental basis of truth, there's little with which the audience can associate' (p. 37). In this sense, the notion of truth is concerned with the existence of commonly shared ideas and actualities. This idea is one proffered by many concerned with comedy as a performance activity. Cook (1987) states that 'Stand-up comedy is probably the least fictional of all the performing arts - and a comedian's best routines are almost always rooted in real life' (p. 4).
Rather more cynically, George Burns suggested that ‘In show business, the key word is honesty. And once you’ve learned to fake that, you’re in’ (undated). This much parodied (as in the introductory extract above) quotation makes the distinction between truth and believability, emphasising believability as the more significant of the two. This dimension is concerned with both the material presented by comics and the style of presentation. With regards to material, Helitzer (1987) states that ‘Since audience acceptance of comedy encourages them to set aside disbelief, humorists should take advantage of every opportunity to stretch the truth. In other circumstances, unmitigated exaggeration would be castigated. With humour, exaggeration signals folly and harmless hyperbole’ (Helitzer, 1987, p. 155). Here it is being suggested that truth should be used as some sort of starting point from which the comic has licence to expand in any which way he or she pleases.

With regards to the actual performance, the style of presentation, Double (1997) argues that ‘Stand-up comedy is a confidence trick. It’s about making the audience believe that you know what you’re doing. It’s about creating the impression that you are in control of the situation. Your jokes may be old, stale and predictable as hell, but if you can go out there with enough confidence to persuade the audience that you are the funniest thing since the custard pie, the laughs will come thick and fast’ (p. 132). In this respect it is the believability of the comic as a performer that is at issue. It is suggested that a comic must persuade their audience to believe in their ability, believe that they are funny and are deserving of their on stage status. Whether a comic is actually confident or not, the important element in a performance is to ensure that the audience believes that they are.

The literature presents the significance of truth as a fundamental concern for stand up comics and their performances. With regards to the development of material, truth is established as the bedrock upon which a routine should develop. The process of creating material may include exaggeration or the extension of truth into rather less definite areas, but it is suggested that truth
remain as some sort of underlying foundation. With regards to the on stage performance, believability is presented as the key issue, believability as an on stage persona, and it is perhaps the case that this concern is connected to and aided by the utilisation of truth as a starting point for material. If a comic is conveying something developed from the truth they will perhaps appear as a more believable persona to an audience.

9.2 Talking Truth and Believability

The following data extracts illustrate both the significance and the complexity of some of the issues and concerns that collectively inform the dimension ‘Truth and Believability’. While the significance of on stage believability is commonly promoted by the comics, the level at which this overrides the importance of truth is contestable, as indeed is the type of ‘truth’ that is being discussed. For some, as in extract two, actual truth telling is presented as far less of a concern than the appearance of truth, while at other times, such as in extracts four, part one and four, part four, literal truth telling is presented as a crucial element in a performance.

In answer to a question about ‘being true to oneself’ (line 1), DC suggests that this is important in terms of his own beliefs, that what he says on stage should tie in with his off stage beliefs.

Extract One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>What about being sort of true to your self in in your material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC.</td>
<td>Mmm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Is that important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC.</td>
<td>I- I think so 'cos I- (. ) yeah definitely [without] a doubt because (0.5) I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Right]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC.</td>
<td>you've got to look at (. ) think you've got to look back on it and not feel bad about it you know I wouldn't ever talk about things that I don't agree with just to get a- a laugh [out of] it so I never (. ) you know things like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Right]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC.</td>
<td>racism things like that you know jus- go- (. ) I'm really conscious at times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
thinking about things and sexist and things I don't li- (. ) yeah I think you
have to 'cos you've got to live with it at the end of the day

In stating that you've got to look at (. ) think you've got to look back on it and not feel bad about it you know (lines 6-7) and that you've got to live with it at the end of the day (line 12) DC creates a closeness between his on stage persona and his off stage self. As such, he has not created a divide between things said as part of his comedy performance and things said in his off stage life, an accountability for what he says in either environment is implied.

DC also comments that I wouldn't ever talk about things that I don't agree with just to get a- a laugh [out of] it (lines 7-8) which suggests, firstly, that it is possible to do just that and, secondly, that for this performer there are concerns other than merely making an audience laugh inherent in his style of stand up comedy. The type of truth that is under discussion here is that based on beliefs and viewpoints and for DC it is unacceptable to falsify these in order to satisfy an audience.

The importance of on stage truth telling however, is not necessarily something that concerns all comics in the same way. BM, for example, takes a different stance.

Extract Two

BM. If somebody wrote something really funny for me I'd use it I suppose
1 2
I. But would it have to tie in with (. ) you would actually believe in (. ) a- a-
3 BM. Well I- I think what it would have to be is people would have to believe me saying it
4 I. Right
5 (0.5)
6 BM. You know it's no good me saying (. ) well I bought some (. ) Oxy ten today 'cos I'm getting these [zits] you
7 8
I. [Yeah]
9 BM. know
10 I. Yeah ((laughs))
11 BM. S- you- you know it would have [to]
12 I. [Yeah] right
13
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For BM it is believability that is the key issue and, in so far as he is concerned, this may or may not be connected to truth telling. He states that, with regards to material, what it would have to be is people would have to believe me saying it (lines 3-4). Presented in this fashion, believability is not necessarily even based on truth, indeed truth is not mentioned. Believability, in this case, is an issue of presentation and if the material being presented appears believable to an audience then matters of truthfulness need not be a concern. In this sense believability is an occupational concern, whereas truthfulness is a personal choice. As far as BM is concerned, actually telling the truth is neither here nor there, as long as he can create a belief in the audience that this is what he is doing.

In extract three, RH also expresses the importance of being seen to be truthful on stage, and again this may or may not be connected to actually telling the truth.

Extract Three

RH. That’s something else erm () making it personal
I. Yeah
RH. I don’t say I go swimming at my local swimming baths swimming at Wi:mbledon Recreation Centre ‘cos that’s where I go
I. Right
RH. And it’s more like () you know you’re being really () honest about it
I. Is that important () to be [kind of truthful]
RH. [I think so] I like to t- t- make them think that every word is absolutely true () and some of it is erm (0.5) I just gen- this is just a personal thing ye- but I think that things are just so much funnier if the aud- think they’re true
I. Yeah
RH. I’ve got one joke that’s (0.5) bit oh that’s a funny thing to do one off- [thing] sort of a practical joke an- I say this is really true I do this and
I. [Yeah]
RH. sometimes I milk it an- say comics say this is true all the time and it’s not this is
RH claims he tries to make his material personal (line 1) because it's more like (. ) you know you're being really (. ) honest about it (line 6), and that this is important because things are just so much funnier if the aud- think they're true (lines 10-11), although he states that this is just a personal thing (line 10). In this case the concern with being truthful reflects the idea that a true funny story is funnier than a made up funny story. As such this concern is an occupational one, one prompted by the desire to be a more successful stand up comic.

Interestingly, in responding to the interviewer's question, Is that important (. ) to be [kind of truthful] (line 7), RH at no point appears to consider literal truth telling, rather he immediately concerns himself with the importance of the impression of truth telling. Again, believability is key in occupational terms, and there are even a number of on stage devices (lines 14-17), similar to the 'tricks' that GB discussed with reference to creating an illusion of on-stage spontaneity (extract one, chapter seven), which can render material truthful in appearance, regardless of its literal truth status.
RH answers a second question about the significance of believability (line 22) in claiming that it's a trust thing (.) you like to trust the comedian (line 23). However, he then goes on to discuss two different scenarios; either that the joke becomes evident to the audience as having been made up, in which case if the joke's good you forgive them for lying (lines 25-26), or that the audience never find out that the comic has been lying and They walk away thinking I really did [that] (line 32). In the first of these scenarios the trust of an audience is broken as they come to know that they were not in fact being told the truth, a situation rather at odds with RH's assertion that things are just so much funnier if the aud- think they're true (lines 10-11). In the latter scenario the audience's trust remains intact as they never discover that they were not being told the truth.

The existence of these two different potential scenarios provides an explication of how comedy performances appear to an (ignorant) audience. With regards to the comic's position (the truth of the matter), in the first scenario the audience end up in possession of a 'final truth': the comic was lying, but now they know this and the comic is no longer lying, and they are no longer deceived. In the second scenario however, which features a successful, 'unseenthrough' lie, the comic lies consistently and the audience is permanently deceived. So, although the audience's trust remains intact in the latter scenario it is actually more violated than in the first scenario, where the 'real' or 'final' truth was eventually revealed.

The next piece of data is rather longer than those we have looked at before, although it is presented in four separate sections for ease of discussion. This extract is interesting enough to warrant inclusion in its entirety, and it also happens to be the piece of data that prompted a specific interest in issues concerning truth and believability, as referred to in Chapter Two, and may be regarded as the catalyst for the thesis maintaining an overriding concern with the central dyadic dimensions concerning performing.
I. Erm (.) does anybody else write any material for you

AD. °No°

I. °No° would you have any

AD. °No°

I. Why (.) if someone said look I can't use this it (.) you know (.) doesn't fit me (.) but it's very funny

(1.0)

AD. I just wouldn't feel ri- right about it

I. Right

AD. I have a real problem with it if like- it hasn't actually happened to me I have a real problem (.) I've been doing a routine recently about (0.5) being violently ill (.) you- know- (.) and err

(1.0)

AD. Going to India (.) and it's the first material that part of it is just completely fabricated [I've] ki- in- invented this character who I pretend that I was at school with who went to India (0.5) and I've got friends who've been to India and I've got in my head (.) various little things that people have said that've made me laugh or little observations and I've just crammed them all into [this] one (.) story

(1.0)

AD. I've done that in the past I- (.) I used to do a routine about cycling (.) pretending (0.5) that I'd been cycling that summer

I. Yeah

AD. But I'd combined the experiences I'd had when I used to cycle as a kid with experiences I'd had when I used to have a little motorbike

I. Right

AD. Put those together and [then] you get

I. [Yeah]

(1.0)

AD. And so I started to do this thing about this friend and he w- an- err bu- an- I was saying and I'm quite jealous of him I want to go to India I've never been (.) but I'm worried about getting ill 'cos tha- i- you know and that's (.) the amount of people who've come back from (.) India and said I was ill for three days

I. Mmm

AD. And I had a girlfriend once and we went to Egypt and she got dysentery (.) you know and it was pouring out of both ends for about three days it was awful (.) so you cram all of those together and th- I tell the story of this one composite person [who] goes to India and gets ill and another

I. [Yeah]

AD. comedian guy called Tony Allen he said to me you should do that in the
first person it'd be much better if you do it in the first person (0.5) and I
had to say to him (.) b- Tony I- I haven't been to India so I can't (.)
physically can't make myself do it in the first person an- it would be:
L. Why is that so important
AD. It would be a lie well he's in a way he's right it would be funnier
L. Mmm
AD. If (.) I had actually been to India (.) a- for a three week holiday as I
describe in the act and I had been ill for a week and it had been bucketing
about out of both ends
L. Mmm
AD. It would be funnier
L. (1.0)
AD. Because (.) I know that if it had actually happened there would be some
acute observation
L. Yeah
AD. That would make it real, there'd be something the colour of the floor, or
the (. ) weather outside or (. ) the street we were in or something
L. Yeah
AD. Add- some added memory that would say to the audience this is true, this
is true, this is true
L. (1.0)
AD. But because there isn't that (.) because I'm describing (. ) what's happened
to (.) this other person which is a composite of [friends] of mine (. ) I have
L. [Mmm]
AD. to keep it third person
L. But you could put one of those (. ) an extra detail in (. ) if-
AD. A- bu- it's something about (. ) those observations I don't trust them
unless I've they're actually real
L. °Right°

In responding to the interviewer's question does anybody else write any
material for you (line 1), AD says no, and that he just wouldn't feel ri- right
about it (line 8), which renders his answer a matter of personal choice, and he
goes on to say that I have a real problem with it if like- it hasn't actually
happened to me (line 10). The interviewer's question as to why AD would not
use someone else's material if they said look I can't use this it (.) you know (. )
doesn't fit me (. ) but it's very funny (lines 5-6) brings the idea of material 'fitting'
into the discursive arena and makes the assumption that there are people who
write material that would not be suitable for their own performance. While we

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more usually consider clothes fitting, or not, words can be considered in much the same way. Certain words, or strings of words, material, may also suit or not suit an individual, reflect their character or personality accurately or inaccurately, present a desired or an undesired image.

The next part of this dialogue is constructed around a description and discussion of two separate pieces of AD’s material, the ‘India routine’ and the ‘cycling routine’. AD begins by saying that I’ve been doing a routine recently about (0.5) being violently ill (.) you- know- (.) and err... Going to India (.) and it’s the first material that part of it is just completely fabricated (lines 11-15). As such, this material is not based entirely on events that have actually happened (line 10) to him. For the purposes of this routine, he does not take these events and suggest that they have happened to him, instead he invented this character who I pretend that I was at school with (lines 15-17) for the events to have happened to. Having encountered the notion of fabrication, we now meet with the notions of invention and pretending. Parts of the India routine are fabricated, invented and based on pretence.

In explicating the development of the India routine, AD refers to a routine about cycling (line 23), that he used to present, in which he combines the experiences I’d had when I used to cycle as a kid with experiences I’d had when I used to have a little motorbike (lines 26-27) into one story about having been cycling that summer (line 24). In this instance, the events that he refers to have all happened to him, but not all on the particular mode of transport, or at the particular time, the material suggests.

The character AD has invented for the India routine is referred to as a composite person (line 41) developed to make use of various little things that people have said that’ve made me laugh or little observations (lines 18-19), to make use of events that have occurred to other people.
What may be concluded from the discussion of these two comedy routines is that AD has drawn some sort of dividing line between his own experiences and the experiences of others. For the purpose of generating material he is happy to either reorder his own experiences, from any time in the past, in order to tell some sort of 'linear progressional' story about himself, or to reorder experiences that have happened to other people in order to tell a story about someone other than himself, even an invented character. However, he does not feel comfortable in attributing experiences that have happened to others to himself. If we imagine a line dividing these two types of experience it seems that the comic feels justified in doing whatever he likes with material on either side of it, but not in moving material from one side to the other.

AD confides that this refusal to eradicate the division between his own experience and the experiences of others has been commented on by another comedian guy called Tony Allen (lines 41-43) who suggested that the India routine would be much better (line 44) if it was delivered in the first person. AD reports his response to this as I haven’t been to India so I can’t (. ) physically can’t make myself do it in the first person an- it [would be]... It would be a lie (lines 45-48). Despite AD suggesting that in a way he’s right it would be funnier... If (. ) I had actually been to India (. ) a- for a three week holiday as I describe in the act (lines 48-51), it is implied that his reluctance to tell this story as though it is based on his own experiences comes from a concern about lying. At this point there seems, for AD at least, to be a desire to engage in truth telling on stage.

However, he goes on to say that if it had actually happened there would be some acute observation... That would make it real, there’d be something the colour of the floor, or the (. ) weather outside or (. ) the street we were in or something... Add- some added memory that would say to the audience this is true, this is true, this is true (lines 56-63). At this point a concern with truth telling in itself is replaced by the concern that an audience believes that the truth is being told, and
with what would make this appear to be the case. Interestingly, it is the lack of observed detail, the colour of the floor, or the weather outside or the street we were in or something (lines 59-60) that makes AD uncomfortable with passing off the experience of being in India as his own, and he argues that the lack of details such as these may have the effect of rendering his story unbelievable to the audience. As such, in terms of on stage performance, AD seems to strongly equate believability with truth, truth telling is regarded as a means of ensuring that an audience believes his stories.

The interviewer suggests that he could put one of those an extra detail in (line 69), which would reduce any concern that a lack of detail may lead to the audience finding the material something other than true. However, AD counters this suggestion with A- but it’s something about those observations I don’t trust them unless I’ve they’re actually real (lines 70-71), which implies that truthful expressions are unproblematically transparent.

Extract Four - Part Two

70 AD. A- but it’s something about those observations I don’t trust them unless I’ve they’re actually real
71 I. °Right°
72 AD. There’s something about about it what makes you a good performer is picking out what’s actually real (1.0)
73 AD. Aa- if I was writing fiction it would be a totally different thing
74 I. I don’t know why I can’t understand why it’s so important if you can convey it a- as real
75 AD. Yeah (. ) it probably isn’t it’s probably just me
76 I. °Mmm°
77 AD. Probably my preference (. ) it’s probably some-
78 I. °Very moralistic of you
79 AD. Well it’s it’s err (0.5) it’s may it’s might be something in my a- u-
80 psychological make up that says to me don’t lie to these people because they (. ) you know they’re all sitting there loving you and you mustn’t let them down
81 I. Yeah
82 AD. ((Laughs)) do you know what I mean
83 I. °Yeah°
AD. There's something in- that says to me an- don't lie to them don't (.)
pretend that you've done things that you haven't done

I. Yeah [it's a strange one]

AD. [You know tell them] true [stories]

I. [But I] think they would the the people
would accept it more (.) from you than they would from a friend or you
know

AD. Mmm

I. Somebody 'cos it's almost accepted (.) I suppose (0.5) implicitly that you
have free license and you can say (.) anything (.) [and] it's okay because
[Yeah]

101 I. it's entertainment, it's comedy, it's it's [not real]

AD. [I think so] but they (.) they also
know (.) that's true and you can and I could write an act of total fiction (.)
like a novelist (.) may do

I. Mmm

AD. °Which- is-° any observation cold from your (.) life (.) and twisted it
together and moulded together to make a book so that you know the
whole is greater than the sum of all these parts

109 I. Yeah

AD. And my stand-up act is starting to get like that but I mean given that I'm
thirty and I've been writing my own material for a few years (.) I'm a long
way from being (.) a novelist you know

112 I. Yeah

113 AD. And I'm really just a short story teller

115 I. Right

AD. And I'm learning how to (0.5) tell stories that are semi-fiction but based
enough on [truth] to be (.) to [work] and (.) it's part of my err

117 I. [Yeah] [°Yeah°]

119 AD. development as a writer I suppose I have real problem with just making
something up

121 I. Mmm

122 AD. Tell you the truth

123 I. That's curious

AD continues his idea about the importance of using actual circumstances or
events in his next comment that what makes you a good performer is picking out
what's actually real (lines 73-74), thus increasing the importance of telling the
truth, or at least his version of 'the truth'. The interviewer does not dispute the
idea that the audience ought to believe that they are being told the truth, but
implies that this does not mean that they actually have to be told the truth, I can't
understand why it’s so important if you can convey it as real (lines 77-78). There is agreement between AD and the interviewer that a stand up comedy audience ought to believe that they are being presented with the truth, and previously this believability seemed to be AD’s primary concern, but antagonism over whether that state of affairs necessarily has to be produced by actual truth telling. The interviewer suggests an impression of truth is sufficient, while AD insists on truth grounded in reality.

As a means of expressing his verbal conviction with regards to the importance of truth telling AD suggests that it’s may it’s might be something in my psychological make up that says to me don’t lie to these people (lines 83-84) and this is an effective tactic. Using personal psychological make up as a reason for anything is rather irrefutable in that it leaves the unconvinced party with very little to argue against, particularly if the two parties are not well acquainted.

AD also suggests that not to tell the truth would be to let them down (line 86), as if the audience would be somehow disappointed if the material was not truthful. However, there is no evidence to support the idea that an audience has the ability to determine the status of the material being delivered to them and, as such, it seems that this desire to dispense truth only is an artistic or personal concern as opposed to an occupational one.

AD states that he could write an act of total fiction like a novelist may do (lines 103-104), thus suggesting that it is personal preference or psychological make up that prevents him from doing so rather than some sort of inability, and then, conversely, goes on to say that my stand-up act is starting to get like that but I mean given that I’m thirty and I’ve been writing my own material for a few years I’m a long way from being a novelist you know (lines 109-111). The implication here is that he is simply not skilled enough to write pure fiction, but is attempting to become so. If this is the case, then the debate concerning issues
of truth and believability has implications for the dimension of ‘Talent and Effort’.

If believability is the key to a successful stand up comedy performance, and a comic is not proficient in the art of writing, and delivering, fictitious material in a believable fashion, then a reliance on truth, on events that have actually happened, may be imperative. As such, the need for either talent or effort may be reduced if the comic bases stories on actual occurrences. However, it is interesting to note that at no point during this discussion concerning the creation of material for, what is after all, a comedy performance was any mention of funniness made. The interviewer did not ask how this material is intended to make an audience laugh, AD did not proffer any such information. Indeed, the comedy aspect of stand up comedy was rarely attended to directly during any of the contributing interviews, despite them being conducted for the purpose of enquiry into the activity that is stand up comedy.

However, perhaps this is less remarkable than it first seems. It could be said that comedy, funniness, wit, are intrinsically mysterious, enigmatic concepts, their very nature defying explanation or interpretation. Analytical attempts to consolidate their constitution are likely to fail and, simultaneously, risk the destruction of the very essence that renders them so attractive. Indeed, Berger commented ‘Dissecting humour is an interesting operation in which the patient usually dies’ (1976, p. 113).

AD goes on to marry the rather distant concepts of fiction and truth as he comments on his development as a writer, I’m learning how to (0.5) tell stories that are semi-fiction but based enough on [truth] to be (.) to [work] (lines 116-117). His focus here is on the success of his material, on it ‘working’, which once again implies that the audience and their perception of what he does are significant factors in what he does, thus positioning his concerns as a comic
towards the occupation side of the art/occupation’ continuum.

Extract Four - Part Three

AD. Tell you the truth

I. That’s curious

AD. You’re going on if you’re going on as me and I’m saying o- I’ve done this
and that and I’ve been there and here and then I saw this and have you
noticed that bla bla [and] anyway and then this happened to me I went

I. [Yeah]

AD. to°bla de bla° and then I’m °s- a- no no I didn’t° [((Laughs))] °I

I. [((Laughs))]

AD. didn’t°

I. Yeah it’s very curious [‘cos] no one would know and if they did they

AD. [°Yeah˚]

I. wouldn’t mind so it’s obviously: something in you that is saying

AD. But I think [that somehow they they] would know know what I mean (. ) I

I. [Perhaps it’s a (. ) ( )]

AD. feel like it’s s- something indefinable what makes (0.5) a comedian like

Dave Allen for example

(1.0)

AD. You just believe him (. ) [completely] believe that everything that he tells

I. [Mmm]

AD. you that he feels about his life

I. Mmm

AD. And what he’s seen is true

I. °Mmm°

AD. And you know that he’s exaggerating and he’s (. ) as I was s- as I say

combining different observations to make stories (. ) but Billy Connolly

you know that he’s exaggerating

I. Yeah

AD. You know (. ) but you also feel like (. ) th- the sense of th- th- the
description the tone of the place he came from is still truthful [somehow]

I. [Yes] yeah

AD. And you you love him all the more [for]

I. [Yeah]

AD. that

AD’s formulation, You’re going on if you’re going on as me (line 124), initiates a
reconsideration of certain aspects of the ‘Self and Persona’ dimension, in that it is
implies that his on stage persona is similar to his off stage self. On stage he is me,
or rather, himself. As such, a connection is made between the dimensions of ‘Self
and Persona’ and ‘Truth and Believability’.

AD’s overriding concern to tell the truth on stage, whether that be truth in terms of events that actually happened, in terms of not claiming experiences that are not his own, or in terms of grounding any fictional developments in enough truth to make them believable, may be regarded as a result of his off stage affinity with his on stage persona. And whether that is a result of AD’s psychological make up or a general distaste for just making something up (lines 118-119), the strength of his conviction for truth telling is, as he tells it, an undeniable factor in his personal perception of what it means to be a stand up comic.

The interviewer, however, also maintains her argument that if AD’s material was not essentially based on truth no one would know and if they did they... wouldn’t mind (lines 132-134) and it is interesting to see how each speaker is resolutely defiant in the face of this continuing opposition without there ever being any hint of annoyance or antagonism between them. This is possibly a factor of the brevity of acquaintance between AD and the interviewer, although it seems that each is able to accept the others’ opinion as reasonable and valid while, simultaneously, refusing to alter their own. Indeed, AD goes on to disagree with the idea that audience members would neither know nor care whether they were in receipt of truth based-material, But I think [that somehow they they] would know (line 135). Having had it ascertained, by AD, that believability is paramount to the success of a comic performance, this particular thought leads to the implication that potentially his preoccupation with the truth has developed from a fear of not being believable if he does not tell the truth, and that his success would decrease accordingly.

Possibly as a result of the interviewer’s seeming immovability on this issue, and possibly as a result of his general conversational tendencies, AD brings in
support for his standpoint in the form of two well known, established comics. These particular comics, Dave Allen and Billy Connolly, appear to be expedient choices with regards to the function they are to serve: AD obviously rates them highly, and they are notable enough names to potentially influence the interviewer, and any one else for that matter, into accepting this rating on the grounds of visible success, if nothing else, regardless of any personal opinions to the contrary. Interestingly, however, AD does not suggest he has any kind of insider information regarding his comic colleagues and whether they do actually tell the truth on stage, and as such it is probably safe to assume that he doesn’t have any. AD’s relationship with Dave Allen and Billy Connolly, as it stands in the data, is no more telling than the relationship the interviewer has with them, and therefore it could be suggested that their introduction into the discussion served very little persuasive purpose.

AD makes interestingly different use of his two chosen examples of truth telling comics. Both are said to be exaggerating (lines 144 and 148), and thus not engaged in strict truth telling, and this feature of both their performances is a matter of knowledge, at least for AD. However, this does not undermine either comic’s status as purveyors of the truth or their believability. On the contrary, in the case of Allen You just believe him (.) [completely] (line 140). The difference being pointed to seems to be a matter of the self-presentation, perhaps reflexivity, of these two comic’s performances, as represented through a subtle difference in the quality of AD’s knowledge of each of them.

With reference to Allen, AD says And you know that he’s exaggerating and he’s (.) as I was s- as I say combining different observations to make stories (lines 146-147). In describing Connolly, he says you know that he’s exaggerating... You know (.) but you also feel like (.) th- the sense of th- th- the description the tone of the place he came from is still truthful [somehow] (lines 148-151). So, while the believability of Allen’s performance comes from the classic mechanism of
‘suspension of disbelief’ (Allen does not say or even imply that he exaggerates, but one knows it, intellectually, anyway). Connolly’s ‘truthfulness is an effect of his comparative ‘upfront-ness’ (his greater ‘honesty’) in making it known that his material is not an unmediated slice of ‘real life’. Connolly’s greater level of truthfulness about not strictly telling the truth in his material is taken by AD as potentially threatening to his status as truth-teller: note the but (line 147) and the still... [somehow] (line 151). Although in the end, Connolly is redeemed through sense (line 150) and tone (line 151): ‘truth’ as artistic sensibility winning out over mere literalness.

Although we have already assessed the reasons as to why considerations of funniness are prevalent only in their absence from this talk, it is especially noticeable during this specific attention to material and delivery. Generally speaking telling the truth is easy, at least if the ‘what is truth?’ and the ‘whose truth?’ questions are avoided. What is rather less easy is telling the truth funnily. Getting up, going to work, coming home, the mundane stuff of life, does not necessarily lend itself to hilarity, and as such a strict regime of truth, truth, and nothing but the truth could be considered rather limiting.

Extract Four - Part Four

155 AD. A- and you you love him all the more [for]
156 I. [Yeah]
157 AD. that
158 I. I suppose in a way yes ‘cos it’s err it’s sharing
159 AD. °Mmm°
160 I. Something about him th- an- so you kind of feel you know him a bit more
161 which is nice if you
162 AD. Yeah
163 I. If people are telling you about a holiday they had or (.) whatever then
164 that’s nice for the audience apart from the comedy it’s kind of (.) o’h you
165 know and he went to (.) so and so an-
166 AD. Everyone wants it to be a true story
167 I. Mmm
168 AD. It’s h- so hard to describe I was telling a story in here last night to my
friends (. ) about a f- a- a girl I knew at university was from Liverpool an-
she told me a story about a big working men's club in Liverpool where
Shirley Bassey w- had been booked (0.5) and these working men's clubs
used to seat hundreds some of them thousands of people
(1.0)
AD. And the guy who ran this particular place really ran it it was his place he
booked the acts he was the [emcee] and he stood at the side of the stage
[|Mmm |
AD. with a microphone and he could cut (.) off the performers microphone
and come in over the top of it he had that (.) [switch] (.) that's how much
I. [Right]
AD. he ran the place (.) he introduces Shirley Bassey please give her a big
hand (0.5) she's (.) the top star she comes on looking sexy, shimmering
dress, big voice (0.5) all the men go oh great Shirley Basse- (0.5)
‘Diamonds are Forever’ she opens up with (0.5) they’re all whistling and
shouting (.) he cuts her mike off and says (.) come on lads be fair give her
a chance
I. ((Laughs))
AD. And then cuts in and lets her carry on (.) I mean the absurdity of Shirley
Bassey needing a [chance you know] and err
I. [Yeah yeah]
(1.0)
AD. Told everybody this story last night and everybody laughed and y- we all
you know and then somebody else told another one it went on for ab-
(0.5) but if I- (.) if it was made up th- it wouldn't be funny
(1.0)
AD. Do you know what I mean
I. Mmm:
AD. If you'd said (.) can you imagine (0.5) this happening
(1.0)
AD. It would only be
(1.0)
AD. Funny in that circumstance (.) if the character was still real [somehow]
I. [Yeah] but you
could have said you were in a a- working men's club
(2.0)
I. [Remember this guy and] Shirley Bassey came on yeah an- an- he
AD. [And I saw it happen]
I. did this an I- a- I mean it's ki↑nd of truthful
AD. If people can believe (.) the character you've (0.5) created [then] you can
I. [Mmm]
AD. make it do (.) anything I guess (.) perhaps that's what it is
I. But I can see you going to India and being (.) very ill
(1.0)
AD. Yeah (0.5) you could do
I. Perhaps you'll have to go and do all these things when people tell you
great stories
AD. ((Laughs))
I. Go and check 'em out
AD. You just have to believe that
(1.0)
AD. Hu- it's hard to describe
I. Mmm
AD. I mean that guy w- (0.5) that character that announcer at that club he was
a real person
I. Yeah
AD. And (0.5) he said this (0.5) now (. ) we've got established that he's real and
we believe that he's real now I can make up hundred things that he also
said
I. Yes (0.5) yeah
AD. But I couldn't have made him up
I. No
AD. It wouldn't be right
I. Yeah
AD. An-
(2.0)
AD. There's a lot of comics who just make up (. ) anything [but I] think
I. [Yeah]
AD. audiences can just a- just tell (0.5) and that's why the really really best
ones (. ) if you like they don- well Woody Allen used to wri-
(1.0)
AD. He's always been a writer before a (. ) performer (. ) and if his stuff's
coming out of a (0.5) typewriter maybe that's different
I. Mmm
AD. But if it's as with me if it's coming out of your head while you're talking
(1.0)
AD. Then inevitably it's going to be based on truth [because] you couldn't do
I. [Yes]
AD. all that (0.5) creative work (. ) [on] your
I. [No]
AD. feet
I. Yeah
AD. The stories would be really weak
I. Yeah
AD. If you- writing (0.5) good fiction then you have the time perhaps if I sat
down and really made an effort to write
(1.0)
AD. Then I could write material that was based on truth but was fiction (. )
[that] I was happy to present (. ) maybe that's why I
I. [Mmm]
AD. "can't do it"
I. Don't know it was just a curious thing I'd I haven't heard anyone (0.5) be that strong willed about (0.5) it (1.0)
I. Most people will take something that's happened to somebody else and (.) make it happen to them (1.0)
AD. Yeah
I. Or- perhaps they feel more comfortable (0.5) saying (.) it happened to me (.) rather than (.) you know (.) [some]body you knew (.) I don't know (1.0)
AD. [Yeah]
I. maybe that [works for them]
AD. [Well they're not as] they're not as good as me then
I. Obviously [obviously]
AD. [((Laughs))] I c- I obviously
AD. ((Laughs))
I. E'trm (.) okay doke (0.5) so: (1.0)
AD. I've never thought about that before I mean that's just i- (.) if I went home and err
I. "Do you want one of these"
AD. No I'm all right thanks (.) if I went home and (0.5) thought about it I might have erm [thought some]thing else (lines 164-165).
I. "but"
AD. "but"
I. Well it's just a a curious thing to pick up on (.) erm

The interviewer is managing a dualistic persona for much of this interview, that of interviewer and comedy punter, and here the stand up comedy audience member affiliations are expressed over and above her interviewing concerns. She attempts to assess the benefits of truth-based material from the perspective of the audience, and, as a continuation of the discussion of the truth in Billy Connolly's material, she claims that you kind of feel you know him a bit more which is nice (lines 160-161), it's kind of (.) o'hh you know and he went to (.) so and so (lines 164-165).

The idea of coming to know the comic through their material is one which may
well be considered favourably by the audience, but stand up comics, by
definition, are not autobiographers, they are comics, and as such the comedy
element of what they do ought surely to take precedence over an accurate telling
of their history. AD, however, suggests that Everyone wants it to be a true story
(line 166), no one more so than himself.

The interviewer’s concerns about telling the truth or not, and the believability of
what is being said, seem to revolve more around the concept of audience
satisfaction than do AD’s. He seems more focused on a sense of loyalty towards
the audience, a concern with somehow being found out and being held
accountable for not telling the truth, and of course with the success of his own
performance. Perhaps the fact that the interviewer and AD are related to stand
up comedy in such different ways goes some way towards explaining why this
issue seems impossible for them to resolve, other than tacitly agreeing to
disagree.

AD uses a story told to him by a girl I knew at university (line 169) to illustrate
specifically what he means by a true story, and also includes a rare consideration
of funniness. He claims that if this ‘Shirley Bassey story’ was made up th- it
wouldn’t be funny (line 192), and thus forges a link between the dimensions of
‘Art and Occupation’ and ‘Truth and Believability’. He suggests that it is the
truth telling element of this particular story that makes it funny, and that if it
were total fiction (line 102) it would not have the same laugh inducing qualities.
Interestingly, though, AD does not dismiss out of hand the interviewer’s idea
that he could pretend that he had been present at the ‘Shirley Bassey incident’,
rather he comments that If people can believe (.) the character you’ve (0.5)
created [then] you can make it do (.) anything I guess (.) perhaps that’s what it is
(lines 207-209). Again we are confronted with the notion of degrees of truth, if a
character is based on a real person then fictitious material can be created for that
character to feature in. This comment also highlights an element of uncertainty in
AD's standpoint, almost as if he too is finding it slightly problematic to reconcile the multiplicity of different angles with regards to the issue of on stage truth.

AD goes on to explain that because the particular character in the 'Shirley Bassey story' was a real person (lines 221-222) and that now we've got established that he's real and we believe that he's real now I can make up hundred things that he also said... But I couldn't have made him up (lines 224-228). Perhaps, then, characters are more difficult to create fictitiously and therefore require some grounding in reality, and once this is accomplished the less difficult task of creating comic scenarios for them to feature in can be engaged in. If the central character to a fictitious story is real, and the audience accepts it as real, the entire routine may be lent an air of credibility that, if based on a fictitious character, it would lack. As such, developing material around 'real characters' attends to the pressing concern of believability, in terms of audience perception. However, AD explains his assertion that he could not have made this particular character up by saying It wouldn't be right (line 230), which resoundingly directs the discussion back towards a consideration of personal preference, or even one of morality.

The constant and multitudinous shifts in emphasis, or directional turns, may be considered illogical or unreasonable and yet must be taken, as we have previously discussed, as a feature of the way talk develops, particularly if the talk is generated by the consideration of a notion, such as truth, that is effectively only existent within discourse.

Indeed, AD goes on to say that while there are a lot of comics who just make up (.) anything (line 234), he thinks that audiences can just a- just tell (line 236), and this belief implies, once again, that the prominence of his desire to tell the truth, or at least to base his material on a certain aspect of truth telling, is an occupational one, as opposed to a moral or artistic one, generated from a fear of not being believable on stage. He also mentions the practical impossibility of
delivering fictitious material, in that, as he has consistently, though not exclusively, asserted that his material largely evolves on stage, and as with me if it’s coming out of your head while you’re talking (1.0) Then inevitably it’s going to be based on truth [because] you couldn’t do all that (0.5) creative work (,) [on] your feet (lines 242-248). The occupational nature of truth telling is reinforced with this exemplification of what is and is not possible on stage, and also by asserting that dropping the commitment to truth telling results in really weak (line 250) stories. The spontaneous nature of the way in which AD develops material is also compounded at this point, as he alludes to it being produced on stage, on his feet.

Once more AD himself implies that these ideas of his are suppositional, founded on a maybe (line 1556), and from this we may satisfy ourselves that there will never be a definitive conclusion in which these ceaselessly differentiated aspects of this debate will be effectively unified. Therefore we must celebrate, and be contented with, an engaging and elusive collection of observations and reflections which, collectively yet inconspicuously, constitute the nature and import of truth telling for stand up comics in general, and AD specifically.

As a means of reinforcing and explaining her own standpoint, the interviewer uses a similar device to the ‘third party tactic’ that AD has appeared to favour on a number of occasions. She states that I haven’t heard anyone (0.5) be that strong willed about (0.5) it... Most people will take something that’s happened to somebody else and (,) make it happen to them (lines 259-263). AD responds with [Well they’re not as] they’re not as good as me then (line 1270). The interviewer acknowledges this in a humorous fashion and AD laughs. While this could be considered a non-serious exchange, AD has implied that whatever anyone else may think, however anyone else may act, he is steadfast in his refusal to view his own practices and opinions as anything other than valid.
Ironically, as the interviewer attempts to withdraw from this particular topic, E\textsuperscript{rm} (.) okay doke (0.5) so: (line 275), and move on to something else, AD throws out one last morsel to chew on, and his suggestion that if I went home and (0.5) thought about it I might have erm [thought some]thing else (lines 280-281), after such a confoundedly inconclusive debate, could be considered rather exasperating. Did he really mean to suggest that everything he has said is basically just a collection of the first things that popped into his head, and that if he actually went away and thought about it a little more he might completely change his mind?

From the data extracts included in this chapter we can see that the relationship between the title components of the 'Truth and Believability' dimension is a paradoxical one. The importance of on stage believability is largely consensually agreed upon, although the methods of and reasons for achieving this differ between the comics. The issue of truth, a complex concept in any arena, plays many different roles within these extracts and is further complicated by its association with notions such as exaggeration and pretending, and, of course, believability.

9.3 Discussing Truth and Believability

The dimension 'Truth and Believability' has developed from discussions concerning that which is presented during stand up comedy performances, the material and the performers themselves. As such the idea of on stage truth involves both truth telling with regards to the performed material, and the idea of being true to oneself, in terms of being honest about who you are, and not deviating from this in order to get a laugh.

However, in whatever way it is discussed the concept of believability is regularly accounted for as important above and beyond any notion of truth.
Believability may be considered as the impression of truth, both in terms of truth telling and in terms of being true to yourself. The appearance of truth is promoted as an essential element in a stand up comedy performance and, as such, whether the comic is actually being truthful or not could be assumed to be rather irrelevant.

With regards to performers outside the sphere of entertainment believability is equally important, although for these performers the appearance of believability is regarded as an indication of actual truth telling, or actually being true to oneself. To be discovered as a performer who relies entirely on the impression of truth without any actual truth to substantiate it is far less acceptable in non-entertainment environments.

While the motivations for truthfulness can be considered less fundamental in so far as entertainment performers are concerned, there is a practical utility to telling the truth, in that the comic may draw on a stock of potential material. Everything she or he has seen, heard, and experienced may be converted into material for performance. Conversely, however, an insistence on truth telling could be considered rather limiting in terms of funniness, which is surely the fundamental concern with regards to the development of material. Perhaps as a counter to this potentially mundane material, there appears to have been a perceptual and flexible boundary created around the concept of truth, within which the existence of composite characters, exaggeration, embellishment, and so on, are not perceived as detrimental to the status of the material as truthful. It could be considered that it is the treatment of truthful material that renders it funny, that the essentially non-truthful practices of exaggeration and embellishment are the very means through which the ‘truth’ is converted into comic material.
However, there are moral issues at stake, and for some comics telling the truth is paramount in terms of their own ideas as to what a stand up performance ought to be based on. This moralistic approach is somewhat undermined by the suggestion that material not based on truth will fail in any endeavour to be believable, which implies that the decision to be truthful or not is rather more dependent upon a desire to satisfy an audience than the personal code of ethics any comic may hold.

The relationship between the two title components of the 'Truth and Believability' dimension may be considered as more contradictory than the relationship between any of the other descriptive couplings. The discussions concerning this dimension are highly dependent upon the contingencies of the situation at hand. Personal ethics and the unsubstantiated perception of the audience both have a part to play and as such it can be concluded that this dimension is subject to wildly varying interpretation. While social performers of any kind are able to relate to a whole range of differing interpretations of the concepts of truth and believability, the discussions of entertainment performers, particularly those of stand up comics and possibly actors, would appear to be far more convoluted and contrary that those of other performers. This is not especially surprising however, as the nature of performing for entertainment purposes is understood and accepted as a special type of performance.

The dimension 'Truth and Believability' prevails in the perception of comics' material. Truth telling itself is essentially a personal preference, no rational justifications for doing it were offered by the participants, no argument thought necessary to explain an insistence on truth. It is almost as if the concept of truth telling is regarded as a self-evident part of the material stand up comics perform.

The treatment of the audience is particularly interesting in accounts pertaining to the issues of truth and believability in that there appears to be a collective
certainty on the part of the comics that an audience can distinguish between fictional material and material that has its roots in the truth. If this were really the case, and believability indeed an essential part of a performance, then surely all comics would tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. However, this perception is highly contestable, and one which is never really resolved within the data, despite the efforts of the interviewer to come to some sort of conclusion.

The dimension ‘Truth and Believability’ is linked to the dimension ‘Self and Persona’ in extract one as a comic discusses his reasons for telling the truth on stage. He suggests that because his on stage persona and his off stage self are one and the same he has to tell the truth in order to avoid feeling uncomfortable with himself once the performance is over.

In extract two, the ‘Truth and Believability’ dimension is linked to the dimension entitled ‘Art and Occupation’. Here believability is presented as the key aspect in a performance, and the participant, a stand up comic, suggests that he would only use untruthful material if he was certain that he could present it as believable. As such, it is implied that believability is very much an occupational feature of a performance, in that if the audience does not believe the material that is being presented then the comic will fail to be a success.

In extract four, part four, the ‘Truth and Believability’ dimension is connected to that of ‘Talent and Effort’. Here the stand up comic appears to be suggesting that one of the reasons for performing truthful material is that it would actually be impossible to fabricate enough material for a performance, you couldn’t do all that (0.5) creative work (.) [on] your feet (extract four, part four, lines 245-249). As such it is implied that telling the truth on stage is far less effort than the task of making up fictional material.


"All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players: They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts..."

(W. Shakespeare, 1600, As You Like It, Act 2, Scene 7).

10.1 How does this appear?

Having established the existence of five primary discursive dimensions pertaining to the social phenomenon of performing the question remains as to what these dimensions tell us about the nature of this phenomenon. It is not enough to simply state that this phenomenon is inherently paradoxical, although it evidently is. It is certainly not enough to claim that this phenomenon is multi-dimensional and is thus discussed in a multi-dimensional fashion, although it evidently is. The answer to this question lies within that which connects performers and performance of all kinds.

Performers and performances of any variety are connected in that they require an audience if they are to maintain their status. If an audience is not present in the minds of performers, if the perception of an audience is not prevalent in the minds of performers, then the performers become another kind of social actor, the performance another kind of social activity. This overwhelming concern with audience renders the question how does this appear? the primary consideration of performers and the primary consideration in the generation of a performance. Although this thesis revolves around a specific type of performer, stand up comics, and a specific type of performance, stand up comedy, it has been established that the five dimensions have relevance for, and are concerns for, any and all types of performers and performance activities. As such, the dimensions
are full of information about the nature of performance and pose certain questions relevant to all of us with regards to performing.

It is the unique nature of performing, as opposed to any other type of activity, that has generated the five discursive dimensions. Performing is not just being, or doing an activity, it is displaying the being, or displaying the doing of the activity. In popular terms, performing is something that can be 'read into'. Whether it is or not can be irrelevant or it can be crucial, but in whatever way one is performing, be it on stage or in the relative privacy of one's own home, one is always subject to being 'read into'. One cannot present without being presented, one cannot perform without being performed, and thus performers are somehow other than that which they actually are. It is these paradoxical issues that are encapsulated by the dimensions.

Interestingly, these issues are further complicated by their location in discourse. In talking about any activity the activity is presented twice. The activity is what it is and is what we are being told it is. If the activity is performance of some kind, a performed activity, then the activity is presented three times. The activity is what it is and how it is being performed and what we are being told it is. In talking about performance a performer can be considered in terms of the type of performance activity they do, the way they perform that activity and the way they account for these things in their talk. And the five dimensions can also be seen to have resonance for talk itself as, of course, talk is another type of performance activity. These considerations, in the way they undermine and paradoxically affect each other, increasingly complicate the question how does this appear?

In considering the nature of performers and performance it is quite likely that, initially at least, our attention will be hijacked by certain, what we might call, 'obvious performers': Frank Sinatra, Robbie Williams, Eddie Izzard, Freddie
Mercury. Something about the obviousness of what these individuals do impresses them as performers in our minds, and as such it is not difficult to consider the five dimensions in relation to these individuals and their activities. These particular performers also have a clearly demarcated audience in their fans. However, this is not to say that those who do not have a specific and homogenous audience are not performers. We are all surrounded by an audience, the people who enter our lives, the people we speak to, the people who see us, are our audience, just as any place where we can be observed is our stage. Viewed in this light we are all performers engaged in performance for perhaps a higher percentage of our lives than we would like to think.

If this is indeed the case, then the question how does this appear? has a greater significance than might at first have been made clear. Whether consciously or unconsciously the existence of this question affects every aspect of our waking lives aside from those times when we are completely alone. And even in our solitary moments we may, consciously or unconsciously, be preparing for future performances or reflecting upon previous ones.

It is not being suggested, however, that every individual will attend to the five dimensions in the same way, or even that these particular dimensions will have the same level of priority within their thoughts and actions as they do for those connected to stand up comedy. In this sense, the specific dimensions that emerged from the discourse of the participants may be regarded as being influenced by a particular group membership or by the particular historical or cultural epoch they are found within. Indeed, it is not possible to know whether a study that took a different group of performers and their associates as its focus would have generated the same five discursive dimensions, although it is suggested that there would be a significant degree of similarity in the existence of the dimensions if not in the treatment of them.
However, just as appears to be the case with this work, those who firmly believe that group differences exist in talk, in discourse, knowledge, ideology even, and that group differences exist in the thinking about and treatment of (any dimensions pertaining to) any phenomenon, may equally firmly acknowledge that the dimensions displayed in this thesis have a certain relevance for us all. While the five dimensions under discussion are not necessarily something that we have deliberated before, although this is extremely unlikely, they are certainly not out of the realm of our understanding. In this sense it is likely that the oftentimes perceived group differences are less the result of group identity and social cohesion and more the result of certain people having thought about them and others not. Of course it could be argued that having thought about and resolved the same issues is the very definition of group members, but this would imply extremely fluid, ever changing, indefinable group structures. Tight, regimented group-specific knowledge and understanding is extremely difficult to sustain in a society with so many channels of communication, with far-reaching, mass observation, with so many active performers and so much active performance. Ideology, if you will, knowledge, discourse, are not somehow separate, rather they work together, pushing and pulling information and understanding into the vast majority of social arenas.

As such, it is the dilemmatic quality of any ideology, lived or intellectual but particularly that of contemporary common sense, that essentially shapes these dimensions. This dilemmatic quality of social life is not bound by social or historical location, it is not dependent upon belonging to a particular social organisation or group, but is part of our collective consciousness, part of our culture, and it is this feature of our interactive lives that renders these dimensional considerations dyadic in nature. *The existence of dilemmatic thinking may well be universal, in that it is to be found in all social arrangements. Nevertheless, the content of dilemmas will vary from society to society and from epoch to epoch, and it
will do so for a simple reason: varying patterns of cultural norms, beliefs and values will give rise to varying patterns of dilemmatic concerns.’ (Billig, 1988, p. 25).

The issues and concerns invoked by the five dimensions can be applied to any kind of performer and any kind of performance, and include questions of the possibility and the motivation for particular kinds of performance: whether there is payment for this type of performance, how would performing in this manner be regarded, what would one have to do to become this type of performer, who would want to see this type of performance and for what reason, does one need certain skills to perform like this, can anyone develop those skills and how would one go about it. All these concerns can be seen as minor, but not necessarily unimportant, deliberations invoked by the major, or fundamental question how does this appear? These are questions that any individual might ask with regards to any kind of performer and performance practice, and certainly should not be considered the sole province of those involved with stand up comedy.

10.2 The Dimensions as a Collection

Having established that the five dimensions are indicative of the particular concerns inherent in a consideration of performers and performance, and that these dimensions reflect the inherently paradoxical nature of performing, we will now consider the dimensions as a collection, a set, a group. Indeed, the grounded theory approach suggests that when the point of saturation has been reached, when no more categories, dimensions in this case, appear to be forthcoming, the researcher should attempt to link their categories together, to see how they fit as part of some overall pattern. ‘The goal here is to start to model relationships between categories’ (Potter, 1998, p. 125).
We have already seen, in the preceding analytical chapters, that discussions along the lines of one particular dimension often invoke the consideration of one or more of the other dimensions. In this sense the dimensions can be considered as inter-linking, as collectively creating a discursive web that shapes discourse concerning performers and performance. In examining the dimensions as a collective, the paradoxical nature of the social phenomenon under study may be more fully understood.

10.3 Dimensional Differences

The five dimensions may be considered as a collection in that they all evolve from a consideration of performing. However, that is not to say that each attends to the same aspect of this phenomenon, rather each attends to a different aspect and, as such, the phenomenon is established as complex and involved. The dimension ‘Art and Occupation’ attends to concerns regarding the status of a performance activity; the dimensions ‘Self and Persona’ and ‘Talent and Effort’ attend to the participation and self-presentation of performers; the dimensions ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’, ‘Talent and Effort’ and ‘Truth and Believability’ attend to the creation and delivery of a performance; and the dimensions ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ and ‘Truth and Believability’ attend to the perception and reception of a performance.

The existence of five dimensions, each indicating and attending to one or more aspect of the phenomenon of performing, serves to dismantle this phenomenon into at least some of its contributory parts thus revealing something of its composition and nature. If we return to the most pressing question regarding performers and performance, how does this appear?, we can see that each dimension contributes towards a different facet of any potential answer. In this sense the concerns of performers regarding their performances are elucidated.
10.4 Dimensional Similarities

Each of the five dimensions has been treated in a range of different ways in the data presented in the previous analytical chapters. Collectively the dimensions, and their title components, have been treated as continua, as ‘either-or’ constructs, or in a contradictory fashion. The specific treatment each dimension received by the participants may be considered as a result of the particular contingencies affecting the particular discourse at the particular time. In a wider social arena, in society at large as opposed to within a stand up comedy environment, each of the dimensions can be treated in any and all of these fashions.

Treating any of the dimensions as a continuum presents the two title components as the poles of a linear scale. As such, increased attention to one component necessarily diminishes the significance of the other. Importance given to one decreases the import of the other. In this sense a speakers’ position can be affiliated more closely with either of the components, while simultaneously paying attention to both. Considered as a continuum, the two components appear as mutually reinforcing constructs, in that one cannot exist without the other, and speakers are able to claim affinity with one particular component, more or less strongly, without invalidating the existence of the other. With regards to the question how does this appear?, treating a dimension in this fashion allows both of the dyadic dimensional concepts to play a part. For example, if the dimension ‘Spontaneous and Rehearsed’ is treated as a continuum, a speaker may present spontaneity as the crucial part of their performance while not denying the need for some sort of pre-performance rehearsal.

Treating a dimension as an ‘either-or’ construct, with the two title components presented as dichotomous or oppositional, allows speakers to overtly affiliate with one of the polar concepts to the exclusion of the other: in doing so, the
validity of one concept is strengthened while its counterpart is negated. This treatment of a dimension appears to attend to the question how does this appear?, in a far less ambiguous fashion than the previous style. If, for example, the dimension of 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed' is treated in this manner, the speaker may advocate that a performance is fully rehearsed before it is presented and that to entertain any thought of adding to, or in some way deviating from, the prepared performance is foolhardy and ill-advised.

Alternatively, speakers may treat any of the dimensions in a somewhat contradictory fashion. In doing so the two former treatments may be found in close proximity to each other in that speakers attend, relatively consciously or unconsciously, to the ways in which each title component of a dimension impacts on and perhaps undermines, the other. As such the answer to the question of how the performance, and thus the performer, appears may be tailored to meet the specific needs of the interactional occasion. If, again, the dimension 'Spontaneous and Rehearsed' is treated in this fashion the speaker may wholeheartedly assert the importance of a spontaneous performance, refer to the importance of rehearsal, and suggest that the former can only be achieved by engaging in the latter.

The potential for such differing treatments of each dimension reinforces the notion of performers and performance as inherently paradoxical phenomena, and illustrates the contingent nature of the five discursive dimensions.

10.5 Dimensional Constellations

The third way in which we can consider the dimensions as a group is to specifically attend to their nature as dyadic constructs. Interestingly, if we look at each side of the dimensions as a group, the 'left side' and the 'right side' for
want of a better description, we can examine the paradoxical nature of performers and performance in even greater depth:

**Table One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left Side</th>
<th>Right Side</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Persona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>Rehearsed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talent</td>
<td>Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>Believability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first thing to note is that the left side seems, at the most general level, to be positively valued, while the participants' attitude to the right side is ambivalent at best. Moreover, participants regularly tend to align themselves with a particular 'constellation of value', as represented by one side, left or right, of the dimensions' dyadic components. For example, an alignment with Spontaneity as a positive value tends to accompany a similar alignment with Art, Self, Talent and Truth, while an uneasiness with Rehearsal tends to accompany a similar ambivalence with respect to Occupation, Persona, Effort and Believability. Looking at the relationship between the dimensions with these constellations in mind, it is possible to add to our understanding of their character.

At this point it is tempting to attempt to develop a single definitive 'heading' which encapsulates, at the meta-level, each side of the grand dimensional dichotomy. However, there are innumerable potential candidates. The collective right side may be considered as the 'vehicle' through which the left side is accomplished. For example, effort may be considered as the vehicle for the expression of talent; rehearsal may be considered as the vehicle for appearing spontaneous on stage. As such, we may choose to give the right side the heading 'Facilitator', and the left side the heading 'Outcome'.

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Alternatively, we may choose to regard the relationship between the dimensional constellations in terms of differential value. The left side may be considered 'sacred' or 'pure' in contrast with the 'profane' or 'impure' nature of the right side. For example, Art may be regarded as the purest mode of Occupation, or Truth regarded as the sacred essence of Believability, which may or may not have a connection to truth. Effort may be treated as a masquerade for talent; the merely believable as a corruption of the purity of truth. As such, we could label the left side 'Unadulterated', the right 'Adulterated'.

Analytically the temptation to provide an all-encompassing label for each constellation of value remains strong, the list of potential labels growing ever longer. A selection of these are presented and arranged into clusters of 'meta-dimensions in Table Two (following page).

The development of this set of meta-dimensions illustrates how the original set of five dyadic dimensions can be mapped on to much 'larger' and more consequential cultural binaries. However, the multiplicity of these dimensions re-emphasises the impracticality of settling for a single definitional label for the collection of dyadic dimensions. The set of meta-dimensions also alerts us to the significance of the dimensions for performers and performance outside the stand up comedy environment; it renders them as wider cultural concerns rather than concerns for a specific social group only.

The essential character of the dimensions as a collection, that which makes them a cohesive set, may not be practically subsumed under a definition, but can however be known in practice. Indeed, the demonstration of this is one of the fundamental concerns of this work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>THE LEFT SIDE</strong></th>
<th><strong>META-DIMENSION</strong></th>
<th><strong>THE RIGHT SIDE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Catalytic Dimension</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>Dimension of Origin and Development</td>
<td>Manufactured Developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherent</td>
<td>The Individual/Societal Dimension</td>
<td>Social Public Mind Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psyche/Soul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invisible</td>
<td>Dimension of Visibility</td>
<td>Visible Shown Manifest Frontstage Out(stage) Tangible Explicit Articulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backstage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In(side)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intangible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tacit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reality</td>
<td>Epistemic/Moral/Theological Dimension</td>
<td>(Mere) Appearance False Negative Bad Profane Adulterated Faustian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unadulterated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In looking at the constellations of value, and their encapsulation in a range of potential meta-dimensions, the significance of the question continually revolving around the social phenomenon of performing, how does this appear?, is extended. It is now clear that this question can be answered from a number of different standpoints: in terms of what prompted or allowed the performer to perform; in terms of how the performer operates and thus how the performance was developed; in terms of who is performing and how that affects the performance; in terms of who the performer's audience is and thus who will receive the performance; in terms of cultural principles or mores; and, of course, in terms of a combination of these considerations.

10.6 High, Medium and Low Performing

The social phenomenon of performing is permeated by discursive dimensions of a dyadic nature as a result of the multitudinous paradoxes associated with this phenomenon. In attempting to come to some understanding of this mass of ambiguity and equivocation, these internal paradoxes have been laid bare for our consideration, the result of which is a far clearer picture of what it means to be a performer, to perform, in contemporary society. As previously stated, the essential determining feature of performers and performance is that they necessarily involve an audience, either real or considered. As such these phenomena are intrinsically linked to the question of how does this appear? The five dimensions, singly and collectively, may be considered as indicative of the range of issues that this question invokes.

This thesis has expanded the notion of performing, particularly in its attention to what we might call 'high performing', 'medium performing' and 'popular or low performing'. The distinction between high performing and low performing may be considered as similar to the traditional distinction made between 'high art' and 'low' or 'popular art'; the idea of medium performing is something that
has been established as a means of attending to, and developing an ability to
distinguish more specifically between, the enormous range of performing types.
A traditional distinction between notions of high and low purports a good/bad
distinction in terms of cultural form; anything engaged with by too many people
(the masses) tends to be discredited. The three types of performing discussed
here, high, medium and low, are not based on any version of this historically
and culturally determined, elitist, distinction, rather they are developed from a
consideration of the degree of investment participants (and their audiences) have
in the description of the activity as a *performance*.

High performing may therefore be regarded as those activities for which
*performance* is the dominant description, as determined by both its practitioners
and its audience. This type of performing included activities that have
traditionally been referred to as high art and activities that have traditionally
been referred to as low art. The essential aspect of this classification is whether
the activity is established as performance, whether its practitioners are
established as performers. As such, high performing includes classical and pop
music, formal and street theatre, ballet and stand up comedy.

Medium performing may be regarded as those activities which are seen and
understood both as performing *and* as something else. Practitioners of these
activities are described both as performers *and* in some other, equally relevant
way. The alternative description may even take precedence on occasion. For
example, the activities of a ‘pub joker’ may be regarded both as performing to an
audience or as relaxing after work with colleagues. Other medium performing
types include business presentations, counselling, karaoke singing, featuring in a
television ‘docu-soap’ and academic writing (see section 10.7).

Low performing includes those activities which may be considered to involve
performance but are generally regarded as something else entirely. The
performance aspect of these activities tends to be revealed infrequently, more often remaining invisible or concealed behind a more dominant alternative perception. Low performing therefore includes such activities as attending informal dinner parties, meeting the parents of friends, dancing in nightclubs, and general everyday interaction.

However, in terms of contemplation and discussion, the differences between all these types of performing are not great, and the five dimensions generated within a stand up comedy environment can be found to have some relevance and resonance for them all. As such, studying social phenomena by taking the approach of examining the discourse that surrounds them for any prevalent discursive dimensions, and attending to those dimensions both singularly and collectively, may be regarded as a pertinent means of developing our understanding of not only those phenomena and the location and status they occupy within our society, but a wide range of other similar, or somehow connected, phenomena.

10.7 AN OBVIOUS EXAMPLE

This thesis itself may be considered a performance (an example of medium performing) and I, the author, may be considered a performer. There is an audience for this performance, if only a very small or even an imagined one, and therefore the question of how does this appear? has relevance for me and the activity of writing this thesis. Indeed, the tensions that exist between the left and the right dimensional constellations of value are prevalent in this work. The relationship between the two title components of each dimension, the relationship between the five dimensions themselves, and the relationship between the left and right side of the dimensions as a collection, are reflective of some of the considerations generated in undertaking the production of a PhD.
Attention to the concerns of the left constellation of value (Art, Self, Spontaneous, Talent and Truth) is battling against subversion from the right constellation (Occupation, Persona, Rehearsed, Effort and Believability). While I want to treat the development of this thesis artistically, allow it to develop creatively, from within, I have to attend to the occupational nature of what I am doing, write in a certain way, attend to certain academic concerns. This is not to say that the two things cannot be accomplished simultaneously, that this work cannot be both artistic and academically occupational, but negotiating a position between the two, that satisfies the concerns of each, is less than easy.

While I want to tell my tale, use my own voice, put something of my self in to this work, I have to adopt an academic persona, speak, or write, with an academic voice. This is not to say that I am only pretending to be academic and that the 'real me' would not attend to these concerns, but the task of doing both, simultaneously is not easy.

While I want to be spontaneous, write whatever comes into my head, allow that which I know, from having been steeped in the data and the stand up comedy environment for almost as long as I can remember to emerge unshackled by anything but the restraint of two finger keyboard skills, I have to ensure that the developing text is planned and organised, structured and logical. Although it is possible to create a text that flows as if written in one attempt, the practical reality is far from this, involving much preparation or rehearsal.

While I want to appear talented in the business of thesis conception, development, conclusion and writing, to appear as if these things come naturally to me, I have to work hard, apply concerted effort, to do this. However, the effort must be largely concealed, the text must not labour over the points it makes, if the illusion of natural ability or talent is to be created or maintained.
While I want to tell an essentially truthful tale, I have to make it believable, firstly, in order that it appears truthful, and, secondly, because an unbelievable thesis would have a negative effect on the perception of the perceived readers, the audience.

10.8 Future Considerations

As this work draws to a close, it is time to consider where the research should progress from this point forward. Having uncovered five dimensions relating to the internal paradoxes of performers and performance through a consideration of stand up comics and stand up comedy as specific examples of these social phenomena, it would seem logical to undertake a similar type of research process using completely different examples of performers and performance. In doing so, the extent and scope of the dimensions could be examined, their relevance for other sorts of performers and performance practices considered, and their treatment studied within different social environments. It would also be interesting to engage in a comparative study by taking examples of performers and performance from each of the three 'performing environments', high, medium and low.

Another worthwhile project would be to consider actual stand up comedy performances, and there are such a vast range captured on video that this would not be a problematic undertaking, and see how, or if, the discursive dimensions manifest themselves in the discourse and interaction that is the performance.

Finally, it is hoped that this work will encourage those social science researchers who do not already do so, to consider whether there appears to be a particular discursive web woven into the fabric of what they study. This thesis maintains that the discovery of an extensive, multi-dimensional set of discursive issues and concerns that repeatedly manifest themselves in the talk surrounding a
particular social phenomenon can only serve to heighten our understanding of that phenomenon, of those that talk the talk that surrounds it and, ultimately, of ourselves.
APPENDIX ONE: INITIAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STAND UP COMICS

Individual Details
Name:
Stage name:
Age:
Sex:
Full time occupation:
Time length as a practising stand up comic:
Promotional material?
Contact details:
Further contacts? (judges, teachers, agents, managers, promoters, other comics):

A) The first step in the process of constructing funniness: choosing the subject matter, or material focus

1) How do you choose your subject areas?

2) Do you really have to work to produce material, or do things occur to you fairly naturally?

3) If things occur to you as and when, how do you record them and subsequently develop them?

4) If you use ordinary things as the basis of your construction, how do you create them as funny, as opposed to just plain ordinary?
5) How do you go about creating funniness that is different to that of other stand-up comics, or is being ‘different’ not important?

6) Are you true to yourself within the creation of your material?

7) How does the self, your self, mediate what you can and can’t use in the construction of your material? (interior and exterior self)

B) The second step in the process of constructing funniness: the writing

1) Where do you write, what hours do you keep in doing this, and what tools do you use? (pen, paper, computer, etc.)


3) Do you create your material in the form of monologues, one-liners, a mixture of the two, or in some other way? - Why? OR - What is this way? - Why do you use it?

4) As you write do you bear in mind to whom the material is ultimately going to be presented, or do you simply create that which you yourself find funny?

5) How often do you aim to get a laugh, and how is this a consideration when putting the material together?

6) Do you test your material out on anyone before it is ‘officially’ presented?
- Why do you consider this individual/these individuals to be a good judge/good judges of whether what you have put together is funny or not?
  OR
- Why not?

7) Do you believe that the ability to construct comic material is an innate talent or something that can be learnt?

8) Are you aware of any theories concerning comedy, or humour in general, and if so, do you bear them in mind whilst in the process of construction?

9) Does anyone else write material for you?
   - Why? - How does that work?
   OR
   - Why not?

C) The third stage in the process of constructing funniness: the presentation of the material

1) How would it be if your material was simply read out to the audience?

2) To what extent is your presentation scripted (words, gesture, movement, etc.) and how is that accomplished?

3) How confident are you about presenting your material, and how does this affect it?

4) Do you attempt to appear natural, as though improvising, during a performance?
- Why? - Does this feel peculiar when done with the same material time after time?
OR
- Why not?

5) How do you remember all your lines?

6) What is ‘comic timing’?
- It is considered an important aspect in the construction of funniness. Do you agree with this evaluation, and how have you developed your timing ability?

7) Are the mannerisms you use on stage (gesture, posture, movement, voice inflection, etc.) natural, or developed for the performance?
- How do you see them adding to your construction of funniness?

8) Is your stage name different to your everyday name?
- Why? - What does this add to your performance?
OR
- Why not?

9) How do you respond to heckling, and does this help or hinder your construction process?

10) Are there any things out of your control that can make your performance easier or more difficult?

11) Do you use props to aid your presentation?
- Why?
OR

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12) How do you decide how to look on stage, and what do you hope to achieve with your appearance?

13) Do you check that the way you intend to present the material you have created will definitely be regarded as funny by your audience?
   - Why? - How?
   OR
   - Why not?

14) As you complete your intended construction of funniness with it's on stage presentation, do you ever spontaneously add more to, or take away from, it, as it occurs to you there and then, and what effect does this have on the overall presentation?

15) Have you had any training, or been taught in any way, to do this sort of work?
   - Details?

16) If judges are present, are you aware of what they are looking for? - Do you cater to this?
   - Why?
   OR
   - Why not?

17) How would you define the type of funniness you create?

18) Who do you feel is a good comic?
   - Why?
19) Who do you feel is a poor comic?
   - Why?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AGENTS, MANAGERS AND PROMOTERS

Individual Details

Name:
Age:
Sex:
Name of agency:
Length of time with agency:

1) What do you look for in a comic as you make decisions concerning who to represent?

2) How are you qualified to make these decisions?

3) Do you have any input into how the comics you represent go about constructing their funniness, or what they use in that construction?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR JUDGES

Individual Details

Name:
Age:
Sex:
Length of time as a judge:
Judging for who:

1) How are you qualified to know what it is that constitutes a good construction of funniness, and how did you get to be so qualified?

2) What is it that you are looking for?

3) How are you able to rank stand up comics in terms of 'bestness'?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COMEDY TEACHERS

Individual Details

Name:
Age:
Sex:
Professional title:
Institution:
Qualifications:
Length of time as a comedy teacher:

1) What constitutes the course you provide and what can a student expect to get out of it?

2) What constitutes the theory (theories) behind the various aspects of the course?

3) Do you believe that funniness and its construction can be taught, or does a student need at least a touch of innate ability to work with?

4) Where do you encourage your students to draw their subject matter from?

5) How do you suggest that your students go about writing their material and subsequently presenting it?

6) Can one course cater to the needs of a variety of fashions in stand-up comedy?

7) How many of your students go on to perform regularly/successfully as stand up comics?
APPENDIX TWO: REVISED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Individual Details

Name:
Age:
Contact details:
Further Contacts:

STAND UP COMICS

- Stage name:
- Time length as a practising comic:
- Full-time occupation:

MANAGERS

- Name of management company:
- Length of time with company:

AGENTS

- Name of agency:
- Length of time with agency:
BOOKERS

- Name of company:
- Length of time with company:

PROMOTERS

- Name and type of venue:
- Length of time with venue:

TEACHERS

- Professional title:
- Name of institution:
- Qualifications:

JUDGES

- Length of time as judge:
- Usual occupation:

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Interview Schedule for Stand Up Comics

A) Introduction

1) How did your last performance go?
   Why?
   - How could you have made it better?
   - Why did it work so well?

2) Did parts of the gig work and other parts not?
   Why?

3) What sort of venues do you perform at?
   Which do you prefer?
   Which do you dislike?
   Why?
   How much say do you have in where you perform?

4) How has your act changed over time?
   What are you doing differently?
   Are you better now than before?
   What is 'better'?
   How has this happened?
   What where you doing wrong?
   Development of comic timing?

B) On Stage

1) Is your stage name different to your everyday name?
   Why did you change it?
Why didn’t you change it?

2) So is it the real you on stage?

Do you try to make it seem natural (as though improvising)?

3) How is your stage-self different to your off-stage self?

In what ways?
- Do you look different on stage (clothes etc.)?
- Do you have your hair different?
  Why?
Are your gestures different?
  Why?
Are you a particular persona on stage (louder, more flamboyant, calmer etc.)?
  Why this particular one?
Do you use characters?
  Why?

C) Presentation

1) Do you use props?

Do they do something different to the material (end of set, used when act dying etc.)?
Do you use the microphone in a particular way?

2) Is your act the same every night?

How does it change?
- Heckling
- Uncontrollable elements (lighting, room shape, P.A. etc.)?
3) Are you ever spontaneous?
   What are the effects of this?

D) Preparation

1) Do you have a particular routine immediately before going on stage?
   (check the audience out, lighting etc.)

2) Do you think that rehearsal is important?
   How do you rehearse your material before going on stage?
   (show it to anyone else - why trust them?)

3) Does your act suit a particular audience?
   Do you deliberately tailor your act to suit this audience?
   If there are judges present do you do something different?

E) Material

1) Is your comedy physical or verbal?
   Is it scripted?
   Is it choreographed (movements, gestures etc.)?
   How do the two work together?

2) Does anyone else write material/choreograph for you?
   Do you think some people are naturally good at this?

3) Is the material you write generally of the same sort?
   (observational, character, one-line gags, monologue etc.)

4) Do you normally write about the same subjects?
Why these?

5) Where do the original ideas come from?
   (media, conversation, thoughts?)

6) How are they developed?
   Is it important to have a certain laugh rate?

7) How are these individual gags developed into a routine?
   How do you cope with gigs of differing time lengths?

8) What makes it *your* material, what makes it original?
   How would you define your comedy?

F) Additional

1) Do you have an agent or a manager?
   Why not?
   OR
   How did you decide what they could do for you?
     - What do they do?
     - input concerning your act
     - input concerning where you perform

2) Have you had any training, or been taught in any way to do stand up comedy? (courses, books etc.)
3) When you watch other comics what do you look for?

4) Who do you feel is a good comic?
5) Who do you feel is a poor comic?
   Why?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR AGENTS AND MANAGERS

A) Introduction

1) How would you label yourself? (manager, agent, combination)

2) What does an ‘agent/manger/specific combination’ do? specifically for stand up comics?

3) Who have you got on your books? How did you get them? Where did they come from? (specific colleges, clubs etc.)

4) How are you qualified to make decisions concerning who to represent? Have you been a comic yourself? If through experience, on what did you base your decisions when you first started?

5) How do you decide what you can do for them?

6) How do they decide what you can do for them?

B) About Comics

1) Why these comics in particular?

2) Had they already achieved a certain amount of success before you took them on? How is this success measured?
OR
Why did you feel they had potential?

3) Have you made mistakes?
   - not taken somebody on who you now feel you should have?
   - taken somebody on you now feel you shouldn’t have?
     Why?

4) How have the comics you represent developed whilst they have been with you?
   In what way?

5) How well do you know the acts of the comics you represent?

6) What input do you have concerning their acts?

C) About Venues

1) How is it decided where the comics perform?
   Through a promoter?
   How much say do the comics have themselves?
   Have mistakes been made in this?
     What kind of mistakes?

2) How do you explain a comic’s particular act to a potential ‘customer’?
   - including things such as length of act, price, specific requirements etc.

3) Do you go to these places and watch the comics perform?
   Is their performance discussed afterwards?
     To what end?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PROMOTERS

A) Introduction

1) What does a promoter do?
   - specifically for stand-up comics

2) How much do you liaise with managers, agents and bookers?
   What kind of discussions take place? (type of act, length of act, price etc.)

B) About Comics

1) How are you qualified to make decisions concerning who to have play at your venue?
   - If through experience, what did you base your decisions on when you first started?
   - What are the decisions you make? (audience perspective?)
   Have mistakes been made?
   - What kinds of mistakes?

2) What sort of relationship do you have with the comics themselves?
   What kinds of things are discussed?
   - pre-performance
   - post-performance
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR JUDGES

1) Where do you judge stand-up comedy?

2) Who asks you to be involved?

3) Have you generally seen the comics perform on a previous occasion?  
   How does this influence the process?

4) What are you looking for when judging stand-up comedy?  
   Do you take the role of potential audiences?

5) Do your own preferences determine you judging, or are you looking for something else?  
   What else?

6) How are you able to rank comics in terms of these criteria?

7) How are you qualified to make these decisions?

8) Is there ever disagreement within a panel of judges?  
   How is this resolved?

9) What value do you think comedy competitions have?  
   - for comics  
   - for others
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COMEDY TEACHERS

A) Personal

1) How long have you been teaching stand-up comedy?

2) How did you get into this sort of teaching?
   How are you qualified to do so (been a comic yourself)?
   Why do you do this kind of work?

B) About the Course

1) Do you believe that any individual can be taught to be a stand-up comic?
   Is a certain amount of innate talent necessary?
   - so do you teach something else, to be added to this innate talent?
     - what is this?

2) What theory/theories lie behind what you teach?

3) What else constitutes the course you provide?

4) What can a student expect to get out of the course?

5) Can one course cater to the needs of a variety of fashions in stand-up comedy?

6) Has your teaching changed or developed over time?
   In what ways?

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C) About the Students

1) Where do your students come from?

2) Where do you encourage your students to draw their subject matter from?

3) How do you suggest they go about writing their material?

4) How is this material developed into a routine?

5) Is it important to keep in mind a potential audience when putting together a routine?

6) Have your students gone on to perform regularly/successfully as stand-up comics?
The Transcription Conventions used in this thesis are those developed by Gail Jefferson (see Jefferson, 1985) and, for the purposes of the data herein, are as follows:

Square [brackets] mark the position of overlapping [speech]

↑Up and ↓own arrows mark rising and falling intonation, respectively

Underlining marks emphatic speech

CAPITALS mark loud speech

°Small circles° enclose quiet speech

Numbers in round (0.5) brackets correspond to pause length in seconds

A full stop in round (.) brackets marks a pause too short to time

((Additional comments may be made by the transcriber in double round brackets))

Colons mark e:::longated sounds, the more colons, the more elongation

Commas mark subtle, rising, intonation, such as that used for listing
Question marks? indicate questioning intonation

Hyphens ma- mark an abrupt cut off

Square brackets containing three full stops [...] mark an omission of data

Empty round brackets () mark indecipherable words
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