CENTRE FOR MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

"THEORIES OF LAUGHTER AND THE PRODUCTION OF TELEVISION COMEDY"

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Paul Alan Taylor
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In order to examine the context of entertainment (through studying the particular form of television situation comedy) it was felt necessary to review the literature referring to humour in general. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 look at contributions from the fields of psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Psychology has little to offer if an understanding of the mass media is sought; philosophy places man in society but concentrates on the individual perception of humour; 'sociology' confirms the useful concept of comedy as dealing with values and conventions. The audience may be asked to laugh at what is determined to be unacceptable behaviour in society, just as it may applaud correct ways of acting.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of approaches to the mass media and concludes that studies of production may be more relevant than studies of effects. Chapter 6 offers a perspective of the development of situation comedies, from music hall sketches through radio to television.

The views of producers and writers of comedy are reported in Chapter 7; the major conclusion is that they are not free agents but work to provide entertainment as demanded by the television companies. Chapter 8 gives two approaches to the audience. An analysis of information about programmes suggests that major themes may be identified. An examination of the 'studio audience' brings the thesis back to its main drift - that laughter is social communication of an order above mere response to joking and comedy.
There are many people to thank for their help and advice. First and foremost is my wife for her extreme patience as well as practical assistance and support.

Graham Murdock, my supervisor at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, deserves special mention. His encouragement and perseverance went well beyond the bounds of my expectation; his criticisms were kind, timely, and justified. All the staff at the CMCR made valuable suggestions, some unwittingly, but it would be invidious to 'name names' bar those of Peter Golding and Phil Harris. Thanks are also due to the staff of the University of Leicester, especially those librarians who helped to track down some of the more obscure references.

Staff at both the BBC and the independent companies freely gave time and assistance. Special thanks are due to Brian Emmett of the BBC Audience Research Department, as they are to academics and 'entertainers' alike who answered personal and written queries generously and without hesitation. Finally, the producers and writers, whose responses form the backbone of this research, offered every kind of help and hospitality, interest and concern. Without them, this thesis could not have been written.

Without sentimentality, my parents, brother, and children have all contributed in a variety of ways; the thanks given here are but a small reward.

The following text has many faults; the only involvement of those people mentioned above is that they tried to warn against them.
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The communication of socially relevant messages permeates this approach to the study of comedy and humour, particularly with reference to situation comedies on television. One purpose is a mapping exercise for television comedy as a somewhat imperfect form of communication through an implicit comparison with humour in an interpersonal setting and an examination of the process of the creation of such programmes.

Why Study Humour and Laughter?

Primarily, because they are there; indisputable facts of life and common phenomena which have often been ignored by social scientists. Laughter and humour might appear to be so inherently woven into the social fabric, and so much a part of individual personality, as to defy sociological analysis. Alternatively, they have been dismissed as trite, unserious, and not really being worth the attention. However, it would seem wise to agree with Berger who suggests that

"...everything that human beings are or do, no matter how common-place, can become significant for sociological research." (1966:138)

and even more so with Alexander Pope

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,  
The proper study of mankind is man."  
(An Essay on Man)

Subjects which have often been seen as falling within the disciplines of literary criticism, psychology, or philosophy need not be exempt from a broader discussion. In fact, if one looks hard enough, it is possible to discover some degree of interest in the subjects from social scientists but by and large this interest has only been passing.

There is, in effect, a sliding scale of comic interaction whereby the degree of accessibility to social analyses rises from the individual
joke told between friends to the transmission of television comedy
to mass publics but certain strands run throughout the continuum. For
example, if joking is instrumental and expressive in gaining consensus
on potentially contentious issues then it may be possible to comment
in a new way on areas of tension in society. With the probable
exception of 'nonsense' or children's riddles, all humour carries
explicit and implicit statements about how people behave in society
in relation to codes of action and belief. When joking relies on
stereotype and caricature, whole classes and categories can be dis-
paraged or esteemed with ease; the stereotypes do not need, of course,
to be accurate in order to be effective and stigmatic. Topical subjects
for joking might include the feminist movement, militant miners or lazy
dockers, and the Government of the day; hardy perennials include jokes
about sexual relations, kinship categories resulting from marriage,
intergenerational conflicts and rebellious youth, the state of the
economy, the ineptitude of politicians, the hypocrisy of the church,
and a variety of others. Humour reflects both established and ephemeral
areas of concern in society.

Sex and aggression are sometimes put forward as the two basic drives
of humanity and though their frequent appearance in all forms of
humour may tell us something about the human psychological condition
(especially its seemingly endless fascination with bowel movements)
the ultimate concern of this thesis must lie with the superstructure
of the joke or comedy. Superstructure here can be taken to mean that
aspect of the joke which gives relevance to the humour by reference
to social groups, beliefs, norms and attitudes, and ideologies; perhaps,
the 'social axis' is a clearer phrase.

A major obstacle to a study such as this is the common reaction that
joking and laughter should be left well alone — to try and analyse
humour is to dissect and destroy it. Thus, Armstrong writes:

""
"The learned and philosophic have given laughter their most serious consideration, and as they pore over the spritely and elusive thing, tearing it with the dry and colourless terms of science and philosophy, the tables are frequently turned on them and the Ariel which they are anatomising so absorbedly shakes himself free, straps them upon the operating table and sets about anatomizing them in turn, and the earnest analysts of laughter become themselves laughable." (1928:28)

This may well be and some support is given to Armstrong in the next Chapter — the study of laughter, per se, has produced a wealth of apparently ridiculous (sic) data which bear little or no resemblance to any common sensical interpretation of the phenomenon. Further, it is only by studying laughter in situ, within social discourse, that some relevance to social life can be grasped and the detached or dehumanising elements found in many 'scientific' studies made more palatable.

A central theme of this study is that of the role of the audience for comedy as generators of feedback through their laughter; some understanding of laughter is essential (especially as the supposed infectiousness of laughter informs on the process). While it may not be logically sound to assume that where X is the result from two different stimuli then the stimuli have something in common, it would appear justifiable to simplistically take for granted that there is a root connection between the multiple causes of laughter. It would be perfectly feasible to study television situation comedy without much reference to laughter but this might be inadvisable when the particular circumstances of such comedy are examined.

It may be stating the obvious but the laughter elicited by a remark in Till Death Us Do Part is of the same order as that heard in a theatre running a farce or, with some qualification, that found in a joke-telling circle. Most writers on the subject of laughter have taken this as given but have either lacked the opportunity or the 1. Brief details of situation comedies are given in Appendix 1.
pursuasion to apply what theories they may have drafted to the mass media. It seems reasonable, then, to indulge in a somewhat lengthy review of such theories in order that a dual approach may be undertaken — a study of television comedy in the light of theories of laughter (and of comedy) and research within a rough framework drawn from the body of work on the organisation and effects of the mass media.

Why Study Television Comedy?

There appears to have been a tendency in media research to concentrate on issues which are 'serious'. Thus, an overwhelming concern of researchers has been to determine what effects, if any, the growth and extent of, for example, television have on the lives of people. Of particular interest has been the study of whether or not dramatised and newswrep violence can be seen as a causal factor in increasing violent tendencies among audience members (or desensitising them). Similarly, the use of vulgarity or the showing of sexually explicit material has been a proper area of research and has largely been couched in terms of effects though, as with studies of violence, there are many subtleties involved.

A parallel, and sometimes complementary, area of enquiry has been into the organisation of mass media production with questions geared towards examining the ideology and occupational setting which, it is presumed, inform upon the selection and presentation of mass media content. It is the serious side of television (news programmes, documentaries, current affairs, and so on) and of the press which has attracted the greatest attention. With both studies of effects and of production there has been an intentional bias based partly on the assumption that serious output is somehow more important and influential than the lighter side.

Some writers have realised that the less serious programmes may
carry serious messages all the same. Tunstall (1970), for example, writes that

"...political humour in cartoons has for over a century been regarded as an important political weapon, but it seems at least possible that political jokes — for instance in 'comedy' programmes on television — are no less important. That Was The Week That Was was surely not the only 'comedy' programme to carry political values." (27)

There is, in fact, a fair amount of work which suggests that drama on television may perform various functions for the viewer; the majority of this work has been couched as a linear 'producer' to 'consumer' dimension which attempts to answer the questions of 'what does drama do with people' or 'what do people do with drama'. Research into the production side of mass media drama and light entertainment is relatively rare.

It is all very well to demonstrate that 'light' programmes may carry 'heavy' messages, and to prove or speculate how such messages may be influential. Equally, it may be necessary to examine the production of serious programmes to determine how and why issues of power and current affairs, in the broadest sense, are presented. It may be interesting to mix the content of the former and the approach of the latter and see what happens (if anything). At first sight, one might assume that the results of enquiry into the production of serious television would be applicable to the lighter side but it is a fallacy to treat all television production as necessarily running under the same colours. Murdock has some useful comments on this:

"Unlike those involved in news and current affairs production, drama personnel are not constrained by requirements of objectivity, balance, and impartiality. Consequently, their personal enthusiasm, interests, and experiences are much more likely to play a part in shaping the productions they are involved in. The most obvious instances are the numerous single plays which are rooted in the author's autobiography...The writers' experiences and commitments also insert themselves less obviously in the evocation of lived-in localities, in the precise observation of familiar life styles and social milieux, and in their recurring preoccupation with particular themes.
and images of the world. Nor is self expression the prerogative solely of writers. Often, the experiences and enthusiasms of producers, script editors, and directors also play an important part in determining the choice of material and the way it is handled." (1976:16)

While Murdock is writing specifically of television plays, it is suggested that his comments are applicable to dramatised fiction on the whole which includes television situation comedies.

The material is complicated by the perspective of tragedy & comedy running through dramatic production (even though the distinction is not clear cut). At the opposite ends of a dramatic continuum there are quite different conventions, methods, and objectives — it may be as much of a fallacy to group together dramatic personnel without qualification as it is to subsume all television production staff under one explanatory framework. It is certainly possible, noting the results of research into, say, the production of news programmes, to try and delineate those factors which are common throughout television and those factors which may be unique and specifically geared to a type of output; television production might be seen as a blend of the general and the particular. This has, of course, been made explicit by some writers but in the virtual absence of data on light entertainment it is understandable why the conclusions drawn from 'serious' studies may prevail. Perhaps a basic ideology permeates the production of serious programmes but until shown otherwise there is no satisfactory reason for including the whole of broadcasting within that framework.

A brief glance at any system of ratings for any week will reveal the dominance, in terms of popularity, of entertainment programmes over and above news and current affairs. Both the BBC and IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) present tables in their annual reports which give a breakdown of their respective outputs in terms
of what percentage is given over to news and current affairs, what percentage to comedy, to drama, and so forth. While the accuracy of these figures is not questioned here they are a little hard to reconcile, on a qualitative basis, with claims made for shares of the audience. On the one hand, the companies present figures which demonstrate that a very large part of their output is serious, informative, or educational while on the other they are proud to claim very large percentages of the audience for programmes with the sole purpose of entertainment. It may be right that both the television companies and the media researchers have seen the serious side of television as being an area of which to be proud and one that demands concerted academic enquiry and attention but it does seem slightly unfortunate that those programmes attracting the biggest audiences, spending the most money and resources, and providing most of the messages to a significant part of the population have been largely ignored by students of mass communication.

Perhaps this needs some clarification: the studies of the effects of drama (and light entertainment to some extent) are legion and have greatly contributed to an understanding of the influence of the whole of broadcasting. However, there appears to have been a marked reluctance to ask why such programmes are as they are rather than the overwhelming concentration on how such programmes function in relation with the audience. There are certain reasons why this should be so - money is likelier to be readily available for research with a given demonstrable end and some supposed practical application; access to television personnel has often been difficult and/or limited to a public relations exercise; statistical audience research and questionnaire surveys have a long tradition in sociology with established methodology and proven benefits; and, finally, such research more easily fits into
a debate about culture and the masses and the relationship between the producers and consumers of cultural artefacts.

A very general conclusion from much of the research into the effects of television can be stated as television acting to reinforce beliefs and attitudes whilst erring on the side of the status quo and conservatism. A further dimension to this effect is achieved with television comedy in that laughter tends to signify positive acceptance of the material thus presented - and it is instructive to examine the role of the decision maker in determining what subjects or actions will be presented to be held up to ridicule or to be defined as ludicrous. This should not be taken as an implication that the audience is an insensate mass, incapable of reasoned reaction to material but it will be suggested that there are certain factors which inform upon the reception of comedy and which tend to enhance acceptance of the ideology, whether manifest or latent, in the programme content. It is likely that messages about society and social conventions (because, after all, comedy takes rules and manners as its staple diet) will have greater impact when delivered with a sugar-coating of comedy.

Further, comedy tends to shy away from distasteful areas which are more in the province of tragedy and thus helps to define those subjects which one may laugh about - when serious areas of concern are depicted (race relations, politics, education, and so on) there is usually a proviso that all will be all right in the end, especially for next week's episode. It is very rare for television situation comedies to deal with a contentious situation without offering a stop-gap solution or a long term acceptance. *Endicott* was a remarkable exception in that it dealt with the absolute disillusionment of middle-age and took the format of an extended play over a number of weeks with a definite beginning.
middle, and end. No solutions were offered, no easy punchlines were used to resolve the conflicts of the preceding script, no discoveries or turns in the plot could really alleviate the characters' predicament. The last programme in the series had to be the end; a conclusion, that the situation was irremedial, had been reached. All could not be well for the next programme, let alone the next series. Such exceptions apart, then, it may be possible to speak of situation comedies as probably acting to enhance the acceptance of either the status quo (when represented as non-contentious) or a picture of a serious topic deflated and simplified by comic treatment. As far as this work is concerned, the important questions to ask are what factors exist which impinge and inform upon those decisions as to choice and treatment of material; who takes decisions and why; what form does the interaction between 'creative' writers and institutional professionalism take. This thesis, simply, rests on the assumption that if messages transmitted by the mass media have an effect, whether direct or indirect, transitory or permanent, on the audience then the how, what, and why of such broadcasting should be investigated. More to the point, if comedy programmes supply a conservative interpretation of society and if that interpretation is made more acceptable by comic treatment then the considerable popularity and dissemination of such programmes warrant research just as much, if not more so, than news, current affairs, and documentaries.

Aims and Methods

It must be stressed that this work is largely exploratory (the review chapters excepted) - there was no possibility of an approach along the lines of 'what happens when A does B to C' as a verification.

1. The writer, Jack Rosenthal, has had notable critical success as a playwright.
because nobody had really defined the terms of the equation as applicable to situation comedies. The aim of this thesis is not to present a complete and accurate picture of what goes on in the creation and production of such comedies but rather to try and outline the process, partly by reference to how the people actually involved saw their professional roles. Of course, some analytic framework should be in operation but with little published work by way of a comparison it is hard to definitely rely on the veracity of interview data or to effectively 'read between the lines' of responses to what may be leading questions. Thus, exploration without the aid of a safety net is the basic approach.

A subsidiary aim, though playing a large part, is the categorisation and clarification of the numerous theories of laughter, comedy, humour, and joking with rather less attention being paid to theories of mass communication. The two groups of theories are somewhat at odds with one another, the former having a concern with interpersonal communication and the latter with institutions and mass publics. However, comedy is predominantly social in outlook and its expression really requires some sort of an institutional setting, whether this be a music hall, theatre or television studio. A comic telling jokes does not make a comedy which requires most of the Aristotelian elements of drama; a comedy generally needs plot, diction, thought, and character and may use music and spectacle. Comedy requires performance beyond the act of narration.

A final aim may be suggested. Television personnel are not mere automatons who transmit the ethics and practices of the dominant elite to unthinking, homogenous masses. Their own articulation of their professional enthusiasms may give rise to the cliche of the caring, responsible, impartial and creative servant of the public but one would be mistaken to completely dismiss the role of person-
-alities, idiosyncracies, and of truly creative writers and imaginative producers. To fail to recognise that there is a difference between Romany Jones and Fortridge or between Bless This House and Sadie, It's Cold Outside is to blatantly ignore the fact that those involved are talents subject to, but not necessarily overcome by, a type of broadcasting.

It may, then, be possible to forge justifiable links between predominantly psychological, philosophical, or literary theories of laughter and humour and theories of mass communication through the agency of comedy as an institutional dramatic form.

Definitions and Etymology

Some of the words which must continually crop up in the following pages have quite precise definitions and instructive etymologies. However, different writers have given certain key words a variety of meanings and simple comparison of their works is effectively denied; the definitions given here do not supersede the need for further elaboration in later chapters. Further, context modifies usage and where there is any doubt as to the meaning of any word or phrase then context rather than the literal meaning (as given immediately below) should determine the intended use. All definitions and etymologies are from the Oxford English Dictionary, 1933 edition.

Laugh:

"To manifest the combination of bodily phenomena...which forms the instinctive expression of mirth or of sense of something ludicrous, and which can also be occasioned by certain physical sensations, esp. that produced by tickling."

The stimuli given provide a basis for most theories of laughter in that it is allied to a happy expression in response to an external provocation - differences start to occur as to whether such joy is of the triumphal victor laughing at his defeated opponent or as a result of a playful mood created or magnified by something humorous.
Etymology is of some help: 'laughter' is derived from the Old English 'hlaehhan' with a direct connection to the German 'lachen' and 'lacheln' (to smile). Presumably this root has an onomatopoeic base which cannot be said for the Latin 'ridere' (which usefully happens to lead to 'derision' and 'risible'). French and Italian for laughter maintain the root with 'to smile' being 'sourire' and 'sorridente' respectively. The connection of laughter and derision, and of laughter and smiling, might appear to be obvious though some writers have disagreed (Eastman (1921, 1937) questioning the first link and McDougall (1903, 1922, 1923) the second).

Joke:

By a combination of etymology and definition jokes can be related to laughter and play. The word comes from the Latin 'jocus' meaning a jest, a sport, and, naturally enough, a joke:

"Something said or done to excite laughter or amusement; a witticism, a jest; jesting, raillery; also something that causes amusement, a ridiculous circumstance...an object or matter for joking; a laughing-stock...something not earnest or serious; a jesting matter."

'Joke' seems to have taken on a further and more precise meaning in that it is now often used and understood to be a definite type of communication with a recognisable structure and format including a punchline. Two broad types may be proposed - those relying on a degree of narrative and those structured as a riddle with a question and answer. A third type would include such things as puns, 'shaggy dog stories', and howlers. Examples may clarify the suggested, though greatly simplified, categories. The only apology for what follows will be found at the end of this chapter.

In the first group would fall something like:

"A Polish war hero was giving a lecture at a girls school about his flying experiences. "I took off one morning," he said, "and was coming out of a cloud when these three Fokkers suddenly appeared on the horizon..."" As the girls started tittering, the mistress intervened: "I think I better explain that a Fokker was a type of German aircraft." "Well," the Pole..."
continued, "these three Fokkers in their Messerschmids
suddenly appeared..."

In the second group would fall such jokes as:

"What do you call a nun with a wooden leg? Hop-along-chastity."
"What lies on the floor and doesn't give a hoot? A dead owl."

Examples of the third, excluding shaggy dog stories because of their
length, could be:

"Elizabeth was known as the Virgin Queen. She was a good Queen."
"Oscar Wilde at the New York Customs 'I have nothing to declare
but my genius."
"The Surrey Coroner, Colonel George HoEwan, issued burial
certificates for the remaining 29 of the 50, who died after
refusing to do so at a previous hearing." (from Private Eye)

As may be apparent from the above, the first and second types may
be modified. Thus, the 'joke' could be reduced to a riddle, losing
some of its already limited humour on the way, as:

"What is the difference between a Fokker and a Messerschmidt?
A Messerschmidt can't pilot a Fokker."

Riddles can be expanded to jokes though the original must be potent
or funny enough to support a narrative superstructure; there is an
alternative, however, whereby a weak riddle gains currency and strength
by a narrative which leads the audience away from the twist and thus
makes the jump to the punchline that much greater.

Comedy:

Possible derivations of the word are from the Greek ('komoe') for a
revel or a village where, presumably, such revels took place. There
would appear to be a connection with revelry and general merry-making
through the institution of a specific dramatic form:

"A stage-play of a light and amusing character with a happy
conclusion to its plot...that branch of the drama which adopts
a humorous or familiar style, and depicts laughable characters
and incidents...a humorous or burlesque composition."

That comedy is for amusement and that there will be a happy ending
are essential features; that comedy deals with the representation of
society in a light manner for an audience can be implied as can the
notion that as society changes, so does comedy. Writers have disagreed
as to whether the function of comedy should be to amuse and entertain or to subtly instruct the audience on the right and proper ways of social action and behaviour; it has certainly been suggested that the correct end of comedy is not to excite laughter but to offer the audience a mode of acceptance of their duties and obligations in society. In this thesis comedy will be taken to incorporate amusement and instruction; far from being incompatible, these features may readily complement one another.

**Situation Comedy:**

Alternative titles are 'domestic comedy' and 'character comedy'; the first may be dismissed as although a large number of shows centre on some aspect of marriage and the home there are more than enough which do not to make the phrase obsolete. Broadcasting personnel have sometimes expressed a preference for 'character' (as against 'situation') in describing the programmes; this has some accuracy as the comedies often rely on the assumed character of the leading performers to the extent that catchphrases and mannerisms become common currency. Some comedy characters have attained classic status, such as Anthony Alcysius Hancock and Alf Garnett, but there are many programmes without such guiding lights which rely heavily (for the generation of comedy) on a specific relationship within the framework of a continued set of circumstances. Thus, *Love Thy Neighbour* was determined by a fourway relationship between 'white man and white wife' and 'black man and black wife' giving a variety of permutations for any number of storylines which could be set within the boundaries of domestic conflict compounded by a racial dimension — a proper situation comedy if there ever was one.

The main objection to 'situation' comedy as a title appears to coincide with the common use of the term as implying something automatically trite or predictable, especially in the abbreviated term 'sitcom'.
However, characters are not mere puppets with predestined behaviour even though the humour, more often than not, arises from the reaction of a character to an established situation which provides the statement and resolution of a problem. It is decided, then, to retain the term 'situation comedy' with a hope that the implied value judgement is lost.

As a rough framework only, the following factors are likely to be found:

(a) Any programme will be one of a series (singular) or series (plural) though see (j);
(b) The intention should be to amuse and entertain;
(c) Programmes will be shown during peak hours (say, 7pm to 9pm) unless the content is seen as potentially offensive or the programme is being repeated;
(d) Programme success will usually be judged by the television company in terms of audience size;
(e) There will be a core of regular characters and scenery;
(f) The programme will be about 30 minutes long (with minor variations);
(g) The content will be in the form of a dramatic plot proceeding by dialogue and action;
(h) The programme will usually be accompanied by a laughter soundtrack recorded from a studio audience;
(i) Each programme will have a self-contained plot in character with the rest of the series;
(j) Single programmes may be shown with the intention of future development into a series;
(k) Programmes will be made for the home market with overseas sales a secondary consideration;
(l) A happy ending is common though not essential;
(m) Action is limited to a small number of sets sometimes expanded by filmed location work;
(n) Producers and writers of such programmes are often involved in similar programmes;
(o) The likelihood of programmes being repeated is high;
(p) Structured jokes are rarely found in the script;
(q) Action is likely to take place within the British Isles and be set in the present or recent past;
(r) Plots will pose a problem and offer a partial or complete resolution.

Humour:

Deriving from the Latin for moist or damp (as witness 'humid') the meaning was taken up, specifically by Hippocrates and his followers,

1. Actual transmission times are about 24 and 23 minutes for the commercial companies and the BBC respectively; variations include Christmas 'specials' and the occasional show of 35 minutes.
2. The only exception that is well-known is an episode of Hancock's
(footnote continued to previous page) Half Hour which comprised a monologue from the star and was set entirely within his bed-sitting room; Hancock's Half Hour is discussed in Chapter 6 rather than Appendix I.

to describe the four bodily fluids which, in varying degrees and combinations, made up the temperament - blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy (black choler). These correspond to Aristotle's four elements (respectively air, water, fire, and earth) and gave rise to the following dispositions - confident and hopeful, sluggish, passionate, and depressed. The connotation with moisture was gradually lost in the Middle Ages and the word came to mean temperament or disposition with a change in emphasis from the bodily to the mental condition; by the time of Jonson ('Every Man Out of His Humour,' for example) and Shakespeare the word was largely concerned with a state of mind with no reference to present day usage connected with amusement and laughter.

The first reference to humour as:

"That quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement; oddity, jocularity, facetiousness, comicality, fun...the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing..."
ocurs in 1682 with a comparable use of 'humorous' in 1705. The Oxford English Dictionary is not forthcoming on how the change in usage actually occurred but does usefully add that 'humour' may be distinguished from 'wit' as being less intellectual and as having a quality allied to sympathy and pathos.

Wit:
The connection of 'wit' with knowledge, perception, understanding, and science is indisputable; the origin of the word may be traced back through the Old English 'witan' to the Latin 'videre' and the Sanskrit 'veda', all being concerned with knowledge. The German 'witz' means both a joke and acumen from the verb 'wissen' (to know)

1. Onions (1919) gives six Shakespearean uses of 'humour' - general moisture, physiological fluid, mental disposition, temporary mood, whim, and a facility for doing something specific.
with 'Wissenschaft' (science) and 'Aberwitz' (jest) obvious relations. In French, 'spirituel' may mean either witty or profound and 'amuser' links, as a verb, to 'muse' in English.

The connection between wit and understanding is to be found in 'wisdom', 'quick-witted', or 'to have one's wits about one'. From the 17th Century on, 'wit' has come to mean:

"Quickness of intellect or liveliness of fancy, with capacity of apt expression; talent for saying brilliant or sparkling things, esp. in an amusing way."

To place 'wit' in the intellect seems acceptable and the majority of writers on the subject use the word to mean, for example, the turn of phrase epitomized by Oscar Wilde - bringing two otherwise disparate subjects together in a ludicrous but apt manner. Pope, again, neatly summarises the viewpoint:

"True wit is nature to advance a dressed, / What oft was thought, but never so well expressed"  
('An Essay on Criticism')

Further Considerations on Definitions and Etymology

It is sensible to add to the brief definitions given above some comments on three other words which occur throughout this thesis - ludicrous, incongruous, and funny. Ludicrous has come from sportive ('ludere' to play from Latin) through humorous to laughable while retaining a suggestion of playful amusement; the ludicrous is unworthy of serious attention to such an extent that the word may be used in derogatory sense, condemning something to be laughed at. Incongruity is that aspect of a relationship which is disjointed and does not fit; an unsuitable link between two or more objects. Something which is incongruous need not be ludicrous (a daffodil in winter) though the possibility of a witty connection is enhanced; something which is ludicrous need not involve incongruity - a far-fetched scheme deserving censure - unless one stretches
the latter term beyond the bounds of usefulness.

While 'funny' has connotations of oddness and, sometimes, lunacy the word will be solely used to mean 'mirth-provoking' with 'fun' meaning a source of amusement. Anything that is meant to provoke laughter and does so could be called funny, though it could also be comic, witty, humorous, ludicrous, incongruous, or even gelastic. The armoury of the laughter theorist contains enough descriptive weapons to increase confusion through the different meanings allotted by different writers; precision of meaning may be desirable but is unlikely to be completely achieved.

A Note on the Review Chapters

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are attempts to review in a critical manner some of the published work on laughter and comedy; chapter 5 less critically looks at theories of mass communication. In all the subjects there are certain books and articles which have had a seminal influence and the omission of those that are directly relevant cannot be countenanced. These chapters also contain reviews, though, of less well-known works which are included for any one of a number of reasons such as their summary of a common point of view, their intrinsic interest or oddness, and to deflect some criticism of plagiarism. Much of the work on laughter obviously covers common ground which may, unfortunately, lead to a fair amount of repetition as these studies are reviewed.

Apology

Jokes that are normally heard in a certain atmosphere may appear insipid and flat when nailed to a page and examples are kept to a minimum. Further, the pressure to try and be funny when writing about humour has, one hopes, been resisted.
This chapter reviews some of the extensive literature of a psychological nature on the general topic of laughter. Studies undertaken from this perspective are mostly concerned with the workings of the mind and tend to seek answers to such questions as: are there any differences between the sexes; do favourite jokes give clues to various traits; how does laughter develop in children; does audible laughter increase appreciation of the material, and so on. Such studies may also be concerned with biological aspects of laughter and joking.

While opinions and assertions are abundant, the raison d'etre of the majority of this psychological work is the generation of statistically significant facts and their application to an understanding of humour by experimental subjects or of the subjects by their use of humour.

Eysenck, in taking the opportunity to stress personality as a major determinant of responses to humour, invites the reader to consider

"...the almost universal functional approach of the experimental psychologist. He seeks for equations of the kind $g = (f)h$, where $g$ is the dependent variable and $h$ is the independent variable. Thus what he is trying to find is a universal law, covering all subjects (humans, or rats, or dogs) with whom his experiment is concerned. This approach would make sense if only all humans, or rats, or dogs were as alike as uniovular twins; unfortunately they are not." (1972:xiii)

Obviously, it is both impractical and misleading to view psychology as a unified field where common techniques are happily accepted by all the exponents; in fact, there is an enormous diversity of approach ranging from strict experimentation to intuitive psychoanalysis.

One may as well start with Freud. It is almost inconceivable that any discussion involving psychology and humour should fail to recognise the seminal importance of his specific contributions to the subject. The major work is undoubtedly 'Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious' and, like many other reviewers, due attention must be paid to this
book\(^1\). There are frequent references to jokes in a number of other works\(^2\) and Freud did return to the subject with a short paper entitled 'Humour' (1928) which is an expansion of what is almost an aside in the earlier book.

Freud's interest in jokes appears to stem from his father's fondness for telling them and expertise as a raconteur. When Jakob Freud died in 1896, Freud started to collect Jewish jokes with some intensity. According to Spoor (1972), Freud was also interested in all kinds of jokes and a letter to a friend states that he 'regularly enjoys' reading 'Simplicissimus', a Munich comic paper; the friend was Wilhelm Fliess who had complained to Freud that the proofs of 'The Interpretation of Dreams' contained too many jokes (Freud 1900: 297-9n). A second source for Freud's interest in jokes can also be seen in this work where the often amusing nature of dreams led him to speculate about joking, particularly in relation to verbal and visual puns (1900: 171). Grotjahn adds a third factor, that Theodor Reik has often been credited with stimulating Freud's interest in wit (1966: 21). Further, it is apparent from just a glance through 'Jokes...' that Freud was greatly influenced by the work of Lipps and even uses the joke 'millionaire' (see below) quoted by Lipps (1898). While Freud was aware of the directly relevant work of Bergson (1911: 208-9, 222-3) any influence that the latter may have

1. In the first translation (by A. A. Brill in 1916) the title is given as 'Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious'. The change to 'Jokes...' rests on a complicated etymological argument, summarised here but given in full in the introduction by James Strachey to the Standard Edition (6-8). Strachey rejects the translation of 'Der Wits' as 'Wit' because of the connotations of refinement and intellectuality found in English; in many contexts this would be misleading and too restrictive. While Strachey's argument is accepted (and all quotes and references in the following are taken from the Standard Edition) it may be noted that 'Wits' translates as a number of things including wit, joke, pleasantries, pun, and gag (Lancenscheidt's Concise German Dictionary; Freud published in German).

2. See especially (1900), (1913), (1916-17), and (1910: 234)
exercised would appear to be minimal.

'Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious'

Freud begins his work with a brief (even scanty) review of theories of humour and concludes that the disparity evident in different approaches rests in the 'eye of the beholder' rather than the subject matter. He proposes to outline a theory which will be capable of application to all levels and experiences of humorous phenomena. The primary approach is that of reduction - taking a joke and seeing which elements can be removed without destroying its funniness. This leads to an examination of joke construction rather than of joke understanding. Freud then outlines eight techniques, though these are not mutually exclusive, which all revolve around some sort of economy of psychic energy. Very briefly, the eight types are:

a. Condensation - a linguistic process which involves the formation of a substitute by means of a composite word. The example given, *inter alia*, is 'famillionaire'.

b. Multiple use e.g. homonyms, puns, double meanings, usually operating in one word.

c. Displacement - where a train of thought is diverted from one meaning to another. "Two Jews met in the neighbourhood of the bath-house. "Have you taken a bath?" asked one of them. "What?" asked the other in return, "is there one missing?".

d. Absurdity - the presentation of something which is stupid and nonsensical.

e. Faulty reasoning. An example should suffice by way of explanation: "In the temple at Cracow the great Rabbi suddenly cries out" Rabbi L. has just died in Lemberg!" It is later learnt that Rabbi L. is in fact still in the best of health. However, a disciple in Cracow maintains "Never mind, to look from Cracow to Lemberg was a
miraculous feat, anyhow":

f. Unification - the setting up of new and unexpected unities by reference to a common third element.

g. Representation by the opposite, as in a comparison of a woman to the Venus de Milo - incredibly old, no teeth, and a yellow body.

h. Representation by the similar, an allusion - 'Now spas cure well' correlates with 'New brooms sweep clean'.

The major conclusion which Freud draws from the above (to be found on pages 16 to 89 of 'Jokes...') is that all of these techniques have a direct counterpart in dreams; this central theme can pass here without extensive comment.

Jokes are divided into two distinct categories - the innocent and the tendentious (or purposeful) though Freud expresses some doubts as to whether any joke can exist without some teleological end. His prime example of an innocent joke is 'Why do cats have two holes out in their skin precisely where their eyes are?' but even here there may be some implied hostility (though where and to what is never made clear). Most jokes are tendentious and involve obscenity or hostility and sometimes both. It is at this point when Freud introduces a practical context to his work - by moving jokes from analysis in vacuo to a social setting (the actual telling of a joke) - that the whole picture begins to clear and firm up.

Three people are involved in the joke-telling process - the teller exposes, for example, a woman who has refused his libidinal advances, in front of a listener who allies with the joke-teller, through

1. Freud does suggest that the "...stupidity that is praised here is only apparent. In fact, behind this simple remark lies the great problem of teleology in the structure of animals. It was by no means so completely a matter of course that the palpebral fissure should open at the point at which the cornea is exposed, until the theory of evolution had thrown light on the coincidence". (93-94)
laughter, against the object of the joke. The purpose of such joking is to circumvent the repression which prevents us from enjoying undisguised hostility or obscenity by using a 'joking envelope' which cloaks the attack. We laugh, then, because the joke has opened up previously inaccessible sources of pleasure.

Freud maintains that there is a certain amount of psychic energy needed to maintain an inhibition; when we laugh the yield of pleasure corresponds to the energy that is saved. It is in the nature of a joke to both liberate pleasure and also protect it from criticism. Whereas in an argument there is an attempt made to draw the listener's criticism over to one side or another, a joke merely pushes the criticism aside and effectively states that as no argument has been made then no criticism can be possible. As Freud points out, there can be little doubt as to the psychological efficacy of the joke over the argument. Unfortunately, he does not continue this theme, nor does he examine the possible ramifications of this 'side-stepping' element in joking though this aspect has been taken up by others, notably Emerson (1973), as determining a theory of humour which relies on the premise that one can say 'serious' things in humour without fear of contradiction or reprisal.

Chapter Five of Freud's work expands his concept of the operation of the pleasure principle with the added dimension that the notion of relief is introduced as being more important than the economy of psychic energy. He adopts, though modifies, Spencer's theory (1891) of laughter as descending incongruity and suggests that

"...laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge." (147)

When the person who hears the joke or, more importantly, hears the proscribed words and tabooed subjects being mentioned, the cathetic
energy which was being used to maintain the inhibition becomes
surplus and is literally laughed off as a form of relief. This
process assumes three conditions — that the participants in the
joke-telling share the same inhibitions; that the liberated energy
finds expression in laughter and not, for example, anger; and that
the person who hears the joke has his interest stimulated so that
the cathexis is intensified prior to discharge.

In Chapter six Freud draws the distinction (iter alia) between jokes
and dreams — the nature of the former is social, that of the latter
asocial. Further, dreams can transgress the limits respected by jokes.
However, he continually shies away from the consequences of the social
nature of joking and seems content only to recognise it.

In the final chapter, Freud broadens his horizon to discuss the
relationship between jokes, comedy, and humour. His understanding
of the comic does not easily match with views from literary criticism:

"We have had no difficulty in discovering that socially the comic
behaves differently from jokes. It can be content with two persons:
a first who finds what is comic and a second in whom it is found.
The third person, to whom the comic thing is told, intensifies
the comic process but adds nothing new to it. In a joke this third
person is indispensable for the completion of the pleasure-produ-
ing process; but on the other hand the second person may be
absent, except where a tendentious, aggressive joke is concerned.
A joke is made, the comic is found..." (181)

The comic, unlike the joke, needs no raconteur; it merely involves
us in a comparison of ourselves against the object which we designate
comic. For example, a strange and exaggerated walk will make us laugh
because we compare the style of walking to the way we would normally
walk — the energy that we would need to copy the odd walk is called
into being and immediately becomes superfluous:

"The comic effect apparently depends...on the difference between
the two cathetic expenditures — one's own and the other person's
as estimated by 'empathy'." (195)

Although Freud starts to pick up a theme of the comic as that thing
or person which makes too great an expenditure on bodily functions
and too little on mental ones, he does not pursue this line of reasoning into the social field of action. In his view, the comic recaptures the lost laughter of childhood. To pursue the example already given, a comic walk expends more energy than a normal one because that is how a child would do it; what is comic is invariably on the infantile side.

The comic is to be found in the preconscious, joking in the unconscious:

"The pleasure in jokes has seemed to us to arise from an economy in expenditure upon inhibition, the pleasure in the comic from an economy upon ideation upon cathexis and the pleasure in humour from an economy of expenditure upon feeling. In all three modes of working of our mental apparatus the pleasure is derived from an economy." (236)

Although Freud ends his book with humour it appears he was not satisfied with the sparse treatment. 'Jokes' was written prior to the 'discovery' of the superego and while Freud did not update his theory of jokes and the comic in the light of this finding, he did return to the subject of humour. In a short paper (1928) he suggests that there are two ways in which the humour process may take place:

"Either one person may himself adopt a humorous attitude, while a second person acts as spectator, and derives enjoyment from the attitude of the first; or there may be two people concerned, one of whom does not himself take any active share in producing the humorous effect, but is regarded by the other in a humorous light." (1928:1)

As an example of the first, he quotes (as in 'Jokes') the flippant remark of the criminal going to the gallows on a Monday morning ('Well, this is a good beginning to the week') where the humour is created by him and affords us a sort of vicarious pleasure. Of the second type, Freud suggests a writer who depicts people humorously - the people may not display any humour themselves and the humorous attitude only concerns the creator of the piece and any potential audience. If we concentrate on the humorist, the creator of the humour, it should be possible to outline the dynamic process underlying the humorous attitude - a process which is, presumably, echoed...
in the listener. For Freud, the process is one of

"...the ego's victorious assertion of its own invulnerability. It refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists that it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, that these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure. This last trait is a fundamental characteristic of humour."

(1928;2)

Humour, then, involves two processes - the denial of reality and the triumph of the pleasure principle. From this point on the argument becomes somewhat involved and technical; Freud concludes that humour consists of the normally stern superego comforting the intimidated ego. With the superego speaking:

"The principal thing is the intention which humour fulfils, whether it concerns the subject's self or other people. Its meaning is: 'Look here! This is all that this seemingly dangerous world amounts to. Child's play - the very thing to jest about!'"

(1928;5)

Here the concern to review Freud ends, as does the passing interest in the superego and the ego; excellent, and more probing, reviews exist (Grotjahn (1966), Victoroff (1953), Bergler (1956)). The interest in Freud must continue, however, since his influence has dominated much of the work still to be reviewed.

There is always the possibility that Freud was absolutely right. The location of the mechanism of wit in the unconscious is a natural corollary from his general theory and if one accepts the latter the former cannot easily be denied. In fact, as a partial justification of his study, Freud appeals to the fact that

"...there is an intimate connection between all mental happenings - a fact which guarantees that a psychological discovery even in a remote field will be of an unpredictable value in other fields."

(1905;15)

A rejection of his theory of joking cannot easily or lightly be undertaken without a general renunciation of the whole corpus of his work. However, with a change of emphasis and a development of certain themes, it may be possible to extract and expand some social elements.

1. For example, Wolfenstein writes: "In interpreting jokes I have taken as basic the theory Freud developed." (1954;14)
to conveniently bypass a general critique of psychanalysis.

The Joking individual in society

A crucial lead can be taken from the section in 'Jokes' entitled 'The Motives of Jokes - Jokes as a Social Process' (140-151). Whereas the comic can be enjoyed by oneself

"...a joke, on the contrary, must be told to someone else. The psychical process of constructing a joke seems not to be completed when the joke occurs to one: something remains over which seeks, by communicating the idea, to bring the unknown process of constructing the joke to a conclusion.

...I myself cannot laugh at a joke that has occurred to me, that I have made, in spite of the unmistakable enjoyment that the joke gives me. It is possible that my need to communicate the joke to someone else is in some way connected with the laughter produced by it, which is denied to me but is manifest in the other person." (143)

Freud's distinction between the comic and jokes will be discussed later but for the moment it is accepted that an essential element in the joke-telling process is the compatibility of moods between teller and audience. A degree of benevolence or neutrality in the audience is a prerequisite for the successful completion of the joke-telling sequence. Similarly, there must be an absence of any factors which could provoke feeling opposed to the purpose of the joke and thus militate against collaboration. In brief, a joke requires consensus (and may operate as a short cut thereto (Burns (1953))).

Freud especially notes that as soon as a person is required to make some intellectual effort in understanding a joke then the process is immediately endangered - instead of economy one now has expenditure and there can be no laughter, as laughter, following Spencer (1891), is excess psychic energy made available for liberation. If an intellectual expenditure is necessitated then the chance of an overflow of energy to be discharged as laughter is reduced. Perhaps, what Freud could have said is that jokes are really about the communication of relevant themes in a relaxed setting. For Freud, though, the relevance is to
be found in individual inhibition:

"...every joke calls for a public of its own and laughting at the
same joke is evidence of far-reaching psychical conformity... (the listener) must be able as a matter of habit to erect in
himself the same inhibition which the first person’s joke has
overcome, so that, as soon as he hears the joke, the readiness
for this inhibition will compulsively or automatically awaken." (151)

The approach adopted in this thesis is that 'psychical conformity'
can be equated with what could be called the 'structural axis' of
joking. In the vast majority of jokes there is a structural (or social)
axis and a humorous one — the latter giving the joke its funniness,
usually by some incongruous mixing or juxtaposition of the elements
of the structural axis, these elements being symbolically loaded by
their reference to social groups and categories. Jokes which lack the
humorous axis will tend to be of a derisory nature; those that lack
the structural axis will tend to be nonsensical or judged as childish.

The abundance of humorous material on marriage and sex, for example,
depends not only on psychoanalytical perspectives but also on the
presence of socially determined conflicts. Since marriage is seen
as essential to the continuation of society by the establishment of
a kinship network and the legitimisation of the transfer of property,
it automatically creates certain strains and stresses concomitant
with the changes of status and the creation of new categories. It
is certainly conceivable that mother-in-law jokes are somehow
expressive of Oedipal desires and originate in response to an incest
taboo; however, one misses an enormous part of the picture if the
socially ambivalent position of the mother-in-law is ignored. Freud
recognises the ambivalence but places it in an individual paradigm
of hostility:affection as in Totem and Taboo where he argues that

"...the fact that in civilised societies mothers-in-law are
such a favourite subject for jokes seems to me to suggest that

1. See chapter 1 of the 'structural axis, see Taylor (1977)
the emotional relationship involved includes sharply contracted components. I believe, that is, that this relation is in fact an 'ambivalent' one, composed of conflicting affectionate and hostile impulses." (1913;14)

From a social perspective, however, it could be maintained that while such passions determine an individual course of action it is, in fact, the mother-in-law's ambiguous position as a member of both (a) the 'mother class' of sexually prohibited women, and (b) the class of potential affines, that places a considerable strain on the relationship between her and the prospective son-in-law. The important thing to note here is that there are three possible stages of interaction and not just two (potential mother-in-law/mother-in-law) as might first appear. The common assumption is that the son will meet the mother-in-law after he has met the daughter and that, therefore, she will immediately be classed by age and kinship with the daughter as 'potential mother-in-law'. However, whether it be a common occurrence or not, there is the definite possibility that young men will meet older women outside the confines of an incest taboo. The possibility of this stage occurring, and being followed by either of the stages mentioned above, is important because it clearly demonstrates that every mother-in-law has been, at one time, a potential affine or sexual partner. While disputing the use of the words 'not uncommon' and 'openly' in the following quote, it is certainly within the terms of this analysis to agree with Freud that such ambivalence

"...is confirmed by the not uncommon event of a man openly falling in love with the woman who is later to be his mother-in-law before transferring his love to her daughter." (1913;16)

There is one area where Freud does begin to consider the social aspects of humour and that is in his discussion of Jewish joking.

Freud and Jewish Joking

Of Jewish jokes, Freud remarks

1. Spector notes that while Freud gives many examples of sexual jokes, none of these are Jewish because, he suggests, of Freud's respect for his father (1972;114).
"They are stories created by Jews and directed against Jewish characteristics. The jokes made about Jews by foreigners are for the most part brutal comic stories in which a joke is made unnecessary by the fact that the Jews are regarded by foreigners as comic figures." (1905;111)

A common technique of the jokes quoted by Freud centres around inherent contradictions between the theory and practice of the Jewish faith; for example, the joke given above of the Rabbi's telepathy from Cracow to Lemberg is a cynical assault on both miracles and miracle-workers. Similarly, the conflicts arising from the ambivalence of 'Jew' as religious category and as social group often finds expression in jokes. Freud gives many jokes which revolve around the relationship between a 'schnorrer' (beggar) and a supposedly charitable housekeeper; in religious terms, the beggar's rights and the housekeeper's obligations should coincide in charity but the gist of the humour stresses that middle-class bourgeois attitudes and values have overtaken those of the common faith. Of course, with Freud, the emphasis is continually laid upon the foundation of 'Jewish characteristics' as a psychological response to anti-Semitism and to the conditions of ghetto existence.

The obvious question to be asked is why should Jews tell jokes which apparently disparage themselves.

One answer comes from Freud. Confronted by pressures and anti-Semitism in daily life and having these pressures compounded by the stress of keeping faith and maintaining group cohesion, Jewish humour has developed as a cathartic response. Freud goes further and, while admitting the absence of supporting documentary evidence, suggests that it is likely that the process of joke-construction can be linked to a disunited personality which is disposed to neurotic disorder. Bergler agrees, and claims that Jewish humour requires 'a good dose of psycho-masochism' (1956;111) as the aggression is directed inwards instead of outwards; the range of aggression varies from gentle mockery to bitter cynicism and outright hostility.
Grotjahn suggests that the Jewish joke constitutes victory by defeat.

In the situation when a Jewish joke is told by a Jew

"...one can almost see how a witty Jewish man carefully and cautiously takes a sharp dagger out of his enemy's hands, sharpens it so that it can split a hair in mid-air, polishes it so that it shines brightly, stabs himself with it, then returns it gallantly to the anti-Semite with the silent reproach: Now see whether you can do it half so well." (1966:22-23)

While Grotjahn may have intuitively discovered that the Jewish joke is a masochistic mask rather than a masochistic perversion, he does not really tell us much more. By suggesting that aggression turned against the self is effectively the same as 'we know our weakness and in a way are proud of it', he ignores the clue given by Freud: joking can serve to soften real criticism and can be used as a substitute which acknowledges and diffuses hostility against both valid and imagined shortcomings. Altman (1971), for example, gives a solid historical perspective to Jewish wit and suggests that joking was frowned upon by Jews — and thus disputes the common assumption that there is a long tradition of such joking — until the end of the 19th Century in Eastern and Central Europe when wit was adopted as a weapon to compensate for an ever-increasing marginal status.

Any discussion of Freud's work on humour, specifically Jewish, should mention the work of Theodor Reik. Reik was influenced by Freud, both as pupil and friend, and wrote at some length on Jewish wit (1962).

In an earlier paper, he sets the tenor of his review of Freud:

"It was that readiness to remain in splendid isolation and to stand alone against an army of antagonists which made it possible to carry his research forward, unperturbed and unafraid — a Jewish knight in the shining armour of the integrity and of the courage of his deep-rooted convictions." (1954:12-13)

It would be foolhardy to expect a critical review but the paper as a whole cannot be dismissed, stressing as it does the fact that Freud the psychoanalyst was also very much Freud the Jew and Freudian theories of Jewish humour should be seen in relation to this. This
also leads Reik, albeit accidentally, to suggest that 'Jokes' is not quite as scientifically detached as one might wish:

"In his analytic investigations Freud often follows the development of Jewish wit back from mirth to misery, from the fanciful to the fateful. He shows us the unbroken spirit, the pride and dignity of his people." (1954;20)

Reik's book (1962), while lengthy, is really only an expansion of his paper - both are concerned to describe Jewish humour as gentle, mocking, self-irony when told by Jews or bitter hostility when told by anti-Semites.

Freud and the Reception of the Comic

There is a remarkably strong parallel between the 'conditions' which Freud stipulates, as being necessary for the successful completion of the comic process, and the ambience generated by the production of television situation comedies in the presence of a studio audience. Freud distinguishes six conditions which should operate beneficially, either by their absence or presence:

(a) The audience should have an inclination to laugh, be in a cheerful mood;

(b) An expectation of the comic is a great help for, in the case of a theatre-goer at a farce,

"...it is in the recollection of having laughed and in the expectation of laughing that he laughs when he sees the comic actor come on to the stage, before the latter can have made any attempt at making him laugh." (1905;219);

(c) An unfavourable condition arises if there is any interference with (a) above by way of intellectual processes - in brief, don't think, laugh;

(d) As a corollary to (c), Freud remarks that

"The comic process will not bear being hyper aesthetised by attention; it must be able to take its course quite unobserved." (220)

The comparison of expenditures, which Freud suggests is the basis of the comic, must be automatic;
(e) Feelings and interests should not be strongly involved. This is not to say that the audience should have no affectation for the comedian or for the comic subject but a degree of general emotional detachment is both desirable and effective;

(f) The generation of comic pleasure can be encouraged and enhanced by any other pleasurable accompanying circumstance through contagion. As will later be proposed, all of these conditions relate directly to the experience of both the studio audience and the home audience for situation comedies. The 'comic' has no existence outside of human communication and the process thereof; the context of situation is paramount in the definition of the comic. Similarly, jokes lose the perspective of relevance when they are quoted in vacuo—many works on the subject contain examples of 'ethnic' jokes, 'sexist' jokes and the like while ignoring that the potency of joking depends on its communication. Even in a very simplistic model of communication as 'transmitter-message-receiver' it is impossible to extract the message and offer analyses thereof without a recognition and understanding of the other components of the communication process. As Freud suggests above, the message is informed upon by a number of incidental factors which can only be located in the joke-telling process and the context of situation—a very common criticism of academic literature on the subject is that, while it often contains jokes, it is dry and unfunny. Obviously, part of the reason lies in the negation of all of Freud's conditions relating to the reception of the comic. It would be naive, for example, to expect the reader of a book of cartoons to react to the humour in the same way as would a first-year undergraduate in a psychology department taking part in a controlled experiment.

Criticisms of Freud

There are at least two interlinked defects in Freud's methodology:
the sample used and the general approach. His model of joking is based on a collection of jokes with very specific temporal and spatial referents. Apart from a large number of Jewish jokes, Freud tends to rely on the wit of Heine and Lichtenberg; there is an air of refined 19th Century drawing-room repartee in much of the humour. An example, used by Freud, of Heine’s wit is that of a character saying ‘I sat beside Salomon Rothschild and he treated me as his equal—quite famillionairely’; Lichtenberg is responsible for the ‘eyes of the cat’ joke. Although Freud recognised the character and value of laughter it is hard to imagine a laughing response to these examples, or to ‘This girl reminds me of Dreyfus—the army doesn’t believe in her innocence’ (1905;40) and ‘It is almost impossible to carry the torch of truth through a crowd without singeing someone’s beard’ (1905;82). Even were Freud’s six conditions to be enforced and the reception of humorous material facilitated, it is difficult to account for such material in a model of humour which stresses the communicative aspect with a strong emphasis on audience response.

Freud certainly cites what would normally be understood as straightforward jokes — “Doctor to husband: ‘I don’t like the look of your wife’, to which the husband replies…” (1905;37) — but his book relies very heavily on aphorisms, apopthegms, and adages which Freud treats as jokes. There are passages in ‘Jokes’ where the haphazardness of the strict application of definitions becomes apparent:

"We are engaged in investigating the technique of jokes as shown in examples; and we should therefore be certain that the examples we have chosen are really genuine jokes. It is the case, however, that in a number of instances we are in doubt whether the particular example ought to be called a joke or not. We have no criterion at our disposal before our investigation has given us one. Linguistic usage is untrustworthy and itself needs to have its justification examined. In coming to our decision we can base ourselves on nothing but a certain feeling... In the case of our last example* we must feel a doubt whether it should be represented as a joke, or perhaps a ‘sophistical’ joke, or simply as a piece of sophistry.” (1905;61)

* (a man walks into a shop, orders a coke, brings it back and
orders a liqueur instead; drinks it and starts to leave. Owner says 'You haven't paid for the drink'; man replies 'I gave you the cake for it'; 'But you didn't pay for the cake, either'; 'But I didn't eat it'.)

Freud does attempt to resolve the problem of a definition of 'joke' (especially 9-14 and 128-129) by reviewing other theories, from which he draws a distinction between jokes and play. In a sense, the whole book is a definition of wit, j king, the comic, and humour but it appears to fall into the trap of over-classification on the basis of limited examples. His examples tend to come from literature and poetry; music halls and the theatre get scant attention. By treating the comic solely at a microanalytic level, he has limited the possibilities of applying his theory to the stage (and, of course, to the modern day mass media).

Lysenok (1976) has given a fairly practical criticism of Freud's work on jokes — the theories are not falsifiable and therefore cannot be called strictly scientific. One is tempted to say 'so what' but Lysenok has substantially criticised Freud by opposing items (specifically, Eysenck (1942), (1943)) to a 'trait' theory of behaviour. To put it bluntly, 'sexy and aggressive' jokes will best be received by 'sexy and aggressive' people. Koestler's criticisms of Freud's theory (1949; 1970) are, perhaps, more useful. For example, his main objection appears to be valid:

"The most significant gap in the theory regards the conditions under which an 'economized' (redundant) amount of energy becomes free for discharge in laughter instead of being turned to other purposes... practically all the patterns of wit and humour treated by Freud can be turned into tragic or poetic patterns by altering the emotional charge." (1949:429)

This is a subtle attack at the very heart of Freudian theory with the implication that humour is not amenable to the process of reduction, being stripped down to its base components, proposed by Freud.

Naturally enough, Freud's defenders are legion but too often the

1. Particularly Jones (1953); recent defenders include O'Connell (1976) and Kline (1977).
case rests on specific rather than general issues; some of the more general issues can now be discussed.

Firstly, the adequacy of the Freudian model for dealing with mass media humour must be queried. While it would be crass to blame Freud for not foreseeing the likely development of mass communication, it is perfectly justifiable to complain of a lack of understanding on the degree to which the communication of a joke informs upon reception of that joke. Similarly, while Freud investigates the humorist, the terms of his investigation do not fully encompass the professional comedian or joke-writer; these roles cannot have been totally unknown to Freud and it is unfortunate that he gives no account of them (save a cursory mention of Heine). It would be a fair defence to say that Freud did not intend to examine social aspects of joking but it must be the contention of this thesis that any psychoanalytical or psychological work on joking is doomed to failure, even in its own terms, unless it recognises that joking activity involves the communication of an idea to other people. It is, then, Freud's emphasis on mental processes (bypassing communication) that is questioned — the very fact that he demonstrates an awareness of wider issues but subsumes them under the supposed predominance of psychological factors effectively denies the applicability of the Freudian model to anything more complicated than interpersonal joking.

Secondly, it is important to place 'Jokes' in context. The dominant theme is the return to a state of childhood playfulness and progenital sexuality which can easily be traced to 'The Interpretation of Dreams' (1900). The two gratifyingly matching discoveries of the Oedipus complex and the division of the mind into ego, superego, and id were still to be made when 'Jokes' was written (though the paper on humour takes some account of them). It would be interesting to speculate how Freud, rather than some of his successors, might have
incorporated such discoveries into the analysis of joking, especially when dealing with mothers-in-law as a common butt for humour. The context of fin de siècle Vienna has already been suggested as a limited and limiting sphere of experience.

Thirdly, as the comedian Ken Dodd has often noted, the trouble with Freud is that he never played second house Friday night at the Glasgow Empire. His analysis is somewhat sterile and fails to realise that studying jokes in vacuo can only lead to partial understanding.

Post-Freudians, notably Grotjahn (1945, 1949, 1966) and Bergler (1956), have recognised that Freudian theory is best suited to a microanalytic level although Grotjahn (1966) has tried to widen the area of investigation by looking at, for example, the paraphernalia used by comedians (albeit in terms of phallic symbols).

If, as the last pages of 'Jokes' suggest, joking and wit can be seen as part and parcel of the phenomenon of laughter together with humour and comedy then any model should be able to generate hypotheses throughout the whole spectrum (with varying degrees of success). The nearest, and it is still quite far away, that Freud comes to this is the commentary on Jewish humour; here, social factors are accorded some weight and the distinction drawn between laughing at and laughing with though the choral aspect of laughter, expressing a certain unity in the audience with potential for positive or negative sanctions, is ignored. Jokes are not individual property; their referents need not be specific for any single member of the audience. The content of the successful joke invariably involves something which a large number of the audience can relate to, whether by derision or applause. Consequently, whether it is examined in terms of its creation, content, communication, or reception the joke can only be successfully analysed as a *social* phenomenon.
Further Contributions to the Psychology of Humour

There are, literally, thousands of books, articles, and papers which fall under this heading. A certain amount of 'gatekeeping' is essential and omissions will be, as far as is possible, purposeful. The principles of selection involve four factors: a diversity of approach exists and should be represented; some material is more important than other, whether judged by influence or innovation; some is more relevant to current debates (Goldstein and McGhee (1972); Chapman and Foot (1976, 1977)); in the very nature of things it is impossible to be exhaustive, even so, the scope must be extended beyond strict definitions of psychology and psychoanalysis since many writers have adopted a multi-disciplinary approach...

Inevitably, writers have devoted a chapter or two to summaries of previous theories (and this thesis is no exception) which encompass more than the writer's particular predilections. The subject area is broad with many cross references and duplications though some topics can be picked out for separate review.

Much of this work has concentrated on laughter (in itself, as linked to tickling or smiling, and as an appreciation of something comic) and a great number of writers have posed the question 'why does man laugh' as a prerequisite to further investigation. It is not a bad starting point.

Spencer and Darwin

The nub of Spencer's understanding of laughter is a descending incongruity. If the incongruity is perceived as ascending then the result would be wonder and amazement. Thus

"...laughter naturally results only when consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small - only when there is...a descending incongruity." (1891:463)

1. Lorenz (1954) suggests that dogs 'laugh'; see also Meerloo (1966)
There are two types of provocation which result in laughter —
a general feeling of pleasure (or pain), and incongruity. Laughter
itself has no purpose save for the release of 'nerve-force' or
'nervous excitation' which begets muscular action whenever the
excitation is of a sufficient intensity. In the case of incongruity
the descent is all important — our nervous energy is built up to
expect something and when it does not materialise this energy is
literally laughed off. Bain, however, has given examples of
incongruities which do not arouse laughter as a response — a wolf in
sheep's clothing, snow in May, five loaves and two fishes among a
multitude (1868). For Spencer

"...in these cases, where the totally unlike state of consciousness
suddenly produced, is not inferior in mass to the preceding one,
the conditions to laughter are not fulfilled." (1891:463)

As one might expect, there is some agreement between Spencer and
Darwin with specific accord on laughter as 'superfluous energy'.

Darwin's approach is mainly physiological and much of his discussion
centres on the visibility of the smile or laugh couched in evolutionary
terms (for example, chimpanzees exhibit signs of laughter when tickled
or pleased (1890:139-140)). The stimulus for human laughter is
summarised as

"Something incongruous or unaccountable, exciting surprise and
some sense of superiority in the laughor, who must be in a
happy frame of mind, seems to be the commonest cause. The
circumstances must not be of a momentous nature..." (18.0:209)

Darwin experimented using photographs taken by Duchenne of both a

1. D in (1888; especially chapters 10 and 11) gives two elements to
laughter — a feeling of triumph or superiority and a sudden release
from constraint. The triumphal aspect comes straight from Hobbes
(see the following chapter) and Bain acknowledges this; however,
Hobbes' 'sudden glory' cannot explain why nonsense and word-play
may excite laughter, or that general humour may give the same
result. For Bain, the key concept is that of 'degradation' without
invoking, for example, pity. The answer lies not in incongruity;
even puns must degrade something if they are to be funny. If Bain's
theory suffers from a fault, it is that of giving almost a single
word answer to cover all the questions that the causes of laughter
may raise.
natural and an unnatural smile – the former 'was instantly recognised by everyone to whom it was shown as true to nature' (212) while with the latter

"...I showed this photograph to twenty four persons, of whom three could not in the least tell what was meant, whilst the others, though they perceived that the expression was in the nature of a smile, answered in such words as 'a wicked joke', 'trying to laugh'..." (213)

A great deal of emphasis is also laid on whether or not the smile precedes the laugh or vice versa (with Darwin quoting the first appearance of smile and laugh at approximately 45 and 113 days in children) and his conclusion is that

"Whether we look at laughter as the full development of a smile or, as is more probable, at a gentle smile as the last trace of a habit...of laughing whenever we are joyful..." (220)

the two are definitely linked.

The actual sound of laughter has its origins in time – as far as possible the sound must be different from a distress call – but why the laughter of man (and monkeys) is a rapidly repeated sound cannot be explained. While never disputing Spencer's analysis, for Darwin the major element is that laughter reflects a happy frame of mind, a relaxed state of joy and contentment. A similar theme was taken up by Hayworth (1923) who rigorously pursued an evolutionary line; laughter was originally a vocal signal to other members of the group that they might relax in safety (though how this may be proved is not clear). Hayworth suggests that cavemen, before the development of language, might come across a sabre-tooth tiger; they inhale by way of preparation for action. On realising the tiger is only a rotting tree stump, the brightest caveman lets his companions know by using his lungful of air in a staccato blast of relief and information. When we laugh or smile at friends we are, supposedly, saying 'Have no fear of me...the situation is safe' (1928;371). The

1. For the connection between laughter and smiling support can be found in Sully (1902), Beerbohm (1920), Kallen (1911), Greig (1923), Gregory (1924), and Rapp (1951). McDougall disagrees (1903,1922,1923).
smile is a development from the laugh (which is necessarily audible) as the lips are drawn back to make the laugh louder; when the laugh is deemed inappropriate, a smile will still play around the lips. Hayworth also disputes any original connection between laughter and joy save that they both express safety and indicate a time to relax; however dubious his analysis is, the point that laughter announces the onset of a play mood has been taken up, perhaps unwittingly, by several writers (Bateson (1953, 1956), Fry (1963), and, pre-dating Hayworth, Dugas (1902)). According to Hayworth, and it is really a fairly sensible comment, no-one laughs unless they feel safe; of more relevance to this thesis is his idea that people laugh louder when in a group (though his reason – that there are more people to be told 'it's safe' – is not too helpful).

**Contributions from Physiology and Biology**

Many writers have stressed that laughter is actually beneficial and promotes physical and psychological well-being (for example Darwin (1890), Spencer (1891), Dearborn (1900), Walsh (1928), and Menon (1931)). McDougall argues that we laugh at the unpleasant in order to avoid the need for constant sympathy regarding the numerous minor mishaps that continuously beset and befall mankind. Laughter has a biological function – it acts as an antidote to sympathy by inducing euphoria (1903, 1922, 1923).

Much interest has also been shown in the actual physiological process of smiling and laughing (Langevin and Day (1972) fully review the subject and provide a useful bibliography) though much of the work is of such a technical nature that it is not relevant here (for example, Sveback (1977), Kirkland (1977, 1977a), and Kirkland, Mair and Couzens (1977)). Similarly, the body of work on tickling need not be fully reviewed though as a passing aside it may be noted that
Sully (1902), after devoting more than thirty pages to the subject, concludes that laughter produced by tickling (or the 'nervous' laugh at a solemn occasion) should be bracketed off from the main forms of laughter which arise from a perception of the ludicrous. An excellent review of the physical aspects of laughter is given in Boston (1974, chapter 1).

The contagiousness of laughter is treated by Meerloo (1966) who gives examples of an 'epidemic' in the Middle Ages and one in Uganda which apparently lasted over 10 months and affected more than a thousand people, In a similar vein, Hall and Allin relate the story of a frontiersman who came home

"...to find his dearly beloved wife and children all lying dead, scalped, and mutilated by Indians. He burst out into a fit of laughter, exclaiming repeatedly, 'It is the funniest thing I ever heard of', and laughed on convulsively and uncontrollably till he died from a ruptured blood-vessel." (1897;38)

They also sent out questionnaires regarding the date of a child's first laugh and the areas most tickled (though they omitted genitalia from their list). Sir Thomas Urquhart, translator of Rabelais, is said to have died from a fit of laughter upon hearing that the throne had been restored to Charles the Second.

A potentially more fruitful line of enquiry is offered by Darwin's use of photographs to stress the recognisibility of laughter and smiling. However, not everybody who has written on the topic is helpful. Andrews, for example, suggests that

"The smile of pleasure remains difficult to understand. Possibly the twitters and peeps of young chickens may shed some light on the subject." (1965;91)

Allport's introduction to the matter seems about as useful:

"The human face is as mute in its expression of pleasurable emotions as it is eloquent in the language of displeasure. Hedonic states, beyond varying degrees of the smile and laugh, have little to distinguish them. Whether the mouth is closed, as in smiling, or open, as in laughing, its corners are drawn backward and upward. In the grin and the laugh the upper lip is raised and drawn tense, exposing the upper teeth. In violent
laughing the lower jaw drops far down and trembles spasmodically. In smiling the well marked naso-labial furrow is almost horizontal. The cheek muscles are raised with the upper lip, thus pushing up the lower lid into a nearly horizontal position. The orbicularis muscles also contract partially closing the eyes. Characteristic wrinkles ('crow's feet') are thus produced below and at the outer corners of the eyes." (1924:207)

However, some of the concrete research in this area does lead somewhere. Langfeld (1918) experimented by showing 5 or 6 people 105 pictures of distinct groups of facial expression; 'laughter' was easily the most recognisable (64%). Allport repeated the same experiment in a slightly modified form — by ruling out the chance that people might recognise but be unable to name the expression — with a larger sample. The results were confirmed (as were those of Peleky (1914) and Ruckmick (1921)) with an average recognition rate of only 33% for other categories; 'laughter' maintained its position as the most 'visible' expression. Further support can be found in the experimental works of Buzby (1924), Frois—Wittman (1930), Hill (1955), and Plutchik (1962).

Nicholson, taking as paramount the intuitive recognition of smiling, stresses that there are cross-cultural differences and questions the argument of Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1970) that smiling is innate — it is, rather, innate but distorted by cultural filters (1976). Babies, blind from birth, will smile when tickled or pleased.

The Freudians

The influence of the Freudian approach has been far-reaching and the amount of literature generated is enormous; almost everybody has some sort of a debt to Freud (though many do not repay the interest shown). Reik has already been mentioned but his expansion of the Freudian theme of Jewish joking is worth detailing:

"Those jokes, made by Gentiles who ridicule the Jews 'are nearly all brutal buffooneries in which the wit is spoiled by the fact that the Jew appears as a comic figure to a stranger'. The Jewish jokes which originate with Jews, know and acknowledge the weakness

1. For example, O'Connell's paper on Freudian humour (16 pages) works in 20 references to separate articles (1976); they are by O'Connell.
of their people 'but they know their merits as well as their shortcomings'. In a conversation, Freud agreed with me that the self-ironical and sometimes even self-degrading character of Jewish humour was psychologically made possible only under the premise of an unconscious or preconscious awareness of the high value and worth of one's people, of a concealed national pride. Only a person who stands on an elevated plane can jump down. Only a proud man can stoop to ridiculing himself." (1954:16)

For Reik, two elements are essential—a concept of surprise and 'victory by defeat' (1962) and the latter has been a principle of Grotjahn's work on Jewish wit. Grotjahn has, as a Freudian, several other useful comments to make; for example, the rarity of laughter in dreams is explained by the asocial, individualistic nature of dreaming compared to the sociable nature of laughter (1945). The operation of laughter may be based firmly on a psychoanalytic level but its performance requires communication in a social setting. For Grotjahn, the distinction Freud drew between tendentious and innocent wit is mistaken— all wit contains aggression and as the joke-teller is too close to the source of the aggression he needs another's laughter as reassurance that the target is correctly hit. On differences between the sexes, Grotjahn argues fairly convincingly that they have been over-emphasised; while wit may be male-orientated through its reliance on aggression, it is social conditioning that demands a sense of humour in the male and the incapability to tell jokes in the female. Social processes are also at work in the development of smiling and laughter—while a baby will smile when pleased it needs the stimulation of another human being to provoke the first laughter (which, by the way, 'coincides with the anal phase' (1966:74)). For a sense of the comic one must wait for a mastery of action and words; a sense of humour comes later still.

Comedy, according to Grotjahn, allows the Oedipus myth to be constantly rehearsed. The audience are allowed to enjoy themselves by identifying with the triumphal son against the guilty father; the same process is at work in the circus where clowns can be seen as depreciated father figures, with all the accoutrements to suggest impotence—the rubber
walking stick or the toy saxophone. With both comedy and clowns it is the father who suffers — it is a delicate task to ridicule any mother figure, which may, for Grotjahn at least, explain the relative absence of comediennees (1966;98). In contrast, Bouissac suggests a rather different approach to clowns; their artefacts are concerned with

"...those rules which govern the semanticity of our cultural environment and the normality of our social behaviour." (1977;117)

If Bouissac's difficult paper could be summarised it might be saying that humour is used to define, and is defined by, desirable or undesirable cultural attributes.

According to Kris (1938), Freud recognised the relationship between the comic and the pleasures and pains of childhood but did not develop this theme; Kris attempts to fill the gap

"If we consider its frequency in psychic life, the most important or rather the clearest relation of the comic to childhood is what we might call the regressive character of the comic. Under the influence of the comic, we return to the happiness of childhood. We can throw off the fetters of logical thought and revel in a long forgotten freedom. The perfect example of this type of behaviour is pleasure in talking nonsense; here we handle the words as we did when children." (79)

As a child begins to master the complexities of language a whole new source of pleasure is made available — the child's delight in using newly acquired words, rhythmically repeating them, experimenting with sound and meaning — and it is this pleasure, Kris maintains, from such mastery that lives on in the adult appreciation of puns, wit, and joking. The pleasure derived from an enjoyment of the comic does not rest solely on a feeling of superiority or with an economy of expenditure (as Hobbes and Freud respectively suggest) but rather

"Comic pleasure...refers to a past achievement of the ego which has required long practice to bring it about. We experience not only the success of the achievement itself but the whole process by which we gradually attained this mastery." (1938;85)

1. On comedy, Jekels (1964) gives: "...the feeling of guilt which, in tragedy, rests upon the son, appears in comedy displaced on the father; it is the father who is guilty." (425)
In exactly the same way that comic pleasure is a re-enactment of childhood pleasure so the appreciation of tendentious jokes is linked to the child's notion of fun. Both are founded on the approval of those in authority; for Kris, fun (as opposed to play) is the frame within which aggressive or libidinal drives are indulged. If an audience does not laugh at a daring joke the situation recalls some definite features of childhood - the joke-teller feels like the naughty child whose parents have told him off for going 'too far'. The comic, then, can be double-edged - under certain conditions pain may be the result rather than pleasure. If we identify with the person laughed at or reject the implication in a joke the pleasurable experience which should have been effected remains unrealised. In summary, Kris is benign

"(The comic) cannot bring permanent relief for...the victory of the ego is transitory, the pleasure-pain of short duration. But this is not necessarily the case; in a particular form the comic relief is permanent, for here it is not an often repeated attempt of the ego to find a solution, but a permanent transformation of the ego...The precious gift of humour makes men wise; they are sublime and safe, remote from all conflict." (1938:90)

For Kris, humour is the ideal to which comedy should aspire.

Wolfenstein (1954) follows Freud absolutely. Her basic premise is that all children's jokes have a wealth of subsurface meaning. Also, the act of joking can only bring temporary relief; she gloomily notes that

"Joking is a gallant attempt to ward off the oppressive difficulties of life, a bit of humble heroism, which for the moment that it succeeds provides elation, but only for the moment. The human situation still confronts us after this brief respite." (11)

For children (and Wolfenstein), all joking is about the human capacity to transform suffering into an occasion for mirth; the brief respite from anxiety is an attack on the adult world which is envied for its size and power. If a child can catch an adult out with a riddle a deeper victory is gained than the child realises (or the adult, if that matter). As more persistent inhibitions need to be overcome, so the riddles turn into jokes which, because of a punchline, still retain
the basic character of the former. Her data (collected from 90 children at a private New York school, between the ages of 4 and 12) reveals an almost total preoccupation with sex and sexual curiosity. As riddles allow these sentiments to be expressed in disguise they are safe; blatant jokes develop later. A few examples may make things clearer; the bracketed notes do not do justice to Wolfenstein's elaborate and complicated reasoning but may catch the essence of her argument.

"Why did the moron tiptoe past the medicine cabinet? Because he didn't want to wake the sleeping pills." (Sleeping pills = parents; a sensible child will not walk round the house at night in case his parents are copulating.)

"What has four legs but can't walk? A table." (A copulating couple has four legs and only walks with the greatest of difficulty.)

The tensions and anxieties revealed are not only confined to children.

The riddle of the Sphinx, as solved by Oedipus (and that is not just coincidental) comes under analysis:

"What walks on four legs in the morning, on two at midday, and on three legs in the evening? men, who crawls as an infant, walks upright as an adult, and uses a staff in old age." (There are two possibilities here: the father on all four, the mother with her two legs outstretched, the penis between them as a third leg; the mother with two legs outstretched approached by the father with three legs and the copulating couple having four legs.)

This sort of analysis is fairly turgid going and there is always that chance of it being completely wrong. It is easy enough to relate anything to anxiety about sex but by defining all riddles as automatically based on sex Wolfenstein ignores the cleverness or play involved with riddles. There is, of course, a good reason why 'sleeping pills' are the answer to the first riddle based purely on the duality of 'sleeping' as both adjective and adverb in this context. Further, there are many riddles which can only be linked to childhood sexuality by the most tortuous of arguments; the following are taken from 'The Demaundes Joyous', originally published in 1511 (de Worde 1971).

"Why do men make an oven in the town? Because they cannot make
the town in the oven." (Oven as a symbol for pregnancy?)

"What is it that freezes never? That is hot water." (Pass)

"How many calves' tails behoveth to reach from the earth to the sky? No more but one and if it be long enough." (Penis envy?)

There are certainly riddles from the same source which more readily lay themselves open to an analysis based on sexual anxiety but they form a fairly small percentage of the total:

"What beast is it that hath her tail between her eyes? It is a cat when she licketh her arse."

"Which is the most cleanliest leaf among all other leaves? It is holly leaves for nobody will not wipe his arse with them."

Finally, and as an aside, The Lemonden Joyous' does provide an answer to probably the most common riddle of all, though the basis for the reply says more about the original date of publication than anything else:

"Which was first, the hen or the egg? The hen, when God made her."

The solution may not be satisfactory with regard to the riddle as a logical problem but at least it is novel.

Brill (1940) is not so much interested in riddles as in the relationship between any particular joke and the psychopathic (or normal) state of the teller or audience. Brill starts with an example best described as a 'slip of the tongue': prescribing 20 pills for one of his patients, Brill recounts that she answered 'Please don't give me big bills. I cannot swallow them'. The 'p' was changed to 'b' unconsciously in order to express a thought which the patient was too sensitive to tell openly; she had to resort to a disguise. A reasonably lengthy quote from Brill will make his argument clearer:

"Recently the writer asked a well-known scientist for the best joke he had ever heard, to which the latter replied: 'Did you ever hear the one about the absent-minded professor who unbuttoned his waistcoat, pulled out his necktie, and urinated in his trousers?'. As we all know, the absent-minded professor is used world over as a theme for wit, and the very idea of his distraction is provocative of laughter...but why did the person mentioned select just this joke as the best he had heard? It was not accidental as
we shall see. He was a man of 40 still dominated by a strong father, who persistently exerted his paternal prerogatives on him. Considerable rivalry continued to exist between father and son for the mother's favours. The father was markedly aggressive, while the son was more or less passive, dominated by a 'small penis complex'. In the joke the necktie symbolised his greatest desideratum, the long penis. Repression of the father, as well as identification with him, was expressed by having him act like a child (urinate in his clothes), a habit for which he had often been punished by his father - all these elements appealed to this individual."

(1940;734-735)

What we actually learn from this, apart from not telling one's favourite joke to a psychoanalyst, is that there are inherent dangers in restricting analysis to a very particular and precise level. It may be possible to accurately draw conclusions from a joke-teller's favourite story and also suggest that certain types of people prefer certain types of humour but one can go no further than an examination of an individual in unique circumstances. A model which could deal with humour in the mass media, or joking in a social setting, needs to develop two themes.

Firstly, it is simply not enough to say that the joke quoted above is 'funny' because of a 'small penis' complex or a desire to attack the father figure. For a joke to gain popular currency and be re-told time and time again by different people to different audiences there must be something more than a specific psychological motive. The joke is not 'funny' because of a small penis complex. There are other elements to be considered.

Secondly, it is not just pure chance that the character of an 'absent-minded professor' is invoked by the 'well-known' scientist. As Brill points out, though without further elaboration, the theme is used all over the world as a subject for wit. The presence of comic types, of established characters with wide application, suggests there is more to the joke and points to the need for an explicitly social analysis. A further example can be given here, while reserving the general argument for later (specifically chapter 4).
Eastman (1937) continually argues for a biological or instinctive approach, as opposed to that offered by psychology (or even sociology). He quotes Thurber’s reply to him, when asked what was the funniest line he had ever heard:

"...the answer of the coloured maid in Frank Craven’s comedy, The First Year, when asked ‘Did you seed the grapefruit?’. ‘Yes ma’am, I seed ‘em’. For conveying the hopeless situation of a young wife trying to prepare a dinner with an ignorant servant, Thurber said, ‘I thought that line was about perfect’." (1937:137)

Both Eastman and Thurber seem to ignore the essential element in the joke — the ambiguity of the word ‘seed’ can only exist with a ‘coloured maid’ who is ignorant enough to cause the young white wife a spot of trouble. Although the ambiguity of ‘seed’ can exist in vacuo the joke depends on the introduction of a social dimension.

One or two more examples from Brill may serve to emphasise why the Freudian approach is not particularly useful in addressing the central concerns of this thesis. No criticism, other than that already made, is intended of Freud. His disciples’ concentration on the purely psychoanalytic aspects of humour and joking limit the appeal and applicability of his model of humour. Direct quotes from Brill, without comment, should suffice to make the point:

"In fact, old gentlemen of the cultured stratum of society frequently show a tendency to obscene joking, simply because their sex life is often more or less passe either for somatic or psychic reasons. Moreover, because of their standing in the community it is often difficult for them to obtain sexual gratification. If a young man shows the same tendency, one may suspect that he is suffering from relative or absolute impotence." (1940:741)

"...Toral, the assassin of President Obregon of Mexico, shortly before he was to be shot drew a cartoon of an old man sitting in a barber (sic) chair entirely bald except for one white hair, but heavily bearded. The barber was shown asking ‘How shall I trim your beard, Sir?’ And the old man replying ‘Not my beard, I came to have my hair cut’. Toral unconsciously recalled his earlier fear of hair-cutting, for which so many children show a phobia, but laugh at when they are grown-ups. That only one hair was to be cut was undoubtedly a wish that his execution should be painless." (1940:745)
Since sex and aggression are widely seen as the major psychological drives, it is understandable that much work has been devoted to explaining their relation to humour. The work of Levine is typical; he introduces his paper thus:

"Sex and aggression are the main themes of humour because they are the primary sources of most human conflicts and tensions. It follows that a basic element in all humour is anxiety. The anxiety arises from inner conflicts over the inhibition of strong drives or impulses. A joke seems funny only if it arouses anxiety and at the same time relieves it." (1956:3)

Levine's approach was to show cartoons which were rated in terms of the subject's responses on a 'mirth-spectrum'; this was then analysed with regard to each individual. For example, the famous Thurber cartoon showing a small, worried man coming home to a house in the form of a large, angry woman was shown to a female subject who was supposedly hostile to men; she totally failed to 'see' the cartoon face of the woman because, Levine suggests, she was distressed by the conflicts that her hostility was causing. In life we are told she could not control her feelings towards men and often expressed them by explosive bursts of anger. Here again though an adequate analysis of the relations between aggression and sex roles need to go beyond individual life histories.

Strickland (1959) argues that subjects placed in hostile surroundings will prefer hostile cartoons. Subjects who are titillated responded better to cartoons with a sexual theme. Byrne (1956) suggests that

"Those subjects who frequently express hostility either overtly or covertly find hostile cartoons significantly more amusing than do those subjects who fail to express hostility" (83)

1. Or, as Tarachow puts it: "There is a sudden resolution of tensions which the storyteller has built to a peak, and the laughter represents the abrupt release from tension; however, release from instinctual tension alone does not account for the laughter. No joke can be developed about a subject which is not laden with anxiety or guilt." Tarachow (1949:221)
Cattell and Luborsky (1947) suggest that those who express hostility also have a strong underlying and unexpressed aggressive tendency - it is this latter emotion that responds to the cartoon. The approach of Zippin (1966) follows Freud by emphasising the role of cathexis and the superego. It seems likely that men and women laugh at the same joke but for different reasons, which can only be discovered by a study of the unconscious (which reveals that the difference between a penis and a vagina is the root cause).

Comediennes are not only rare - when they do appear they must pretend to have lost their vaginas and have penes instead. Levine (1976), thankfully, has more pertinent points to make. Her analysis, mainly with regard to the comedienne Phyllis Diller, recognises that

"Joking is a serious matter. It is often by witty remarks that a taboo subject is broached." (173)

As hostility is a large part of wit there has been an indirect (though some would say direct) process of socialisation whereby women are restrained from engaging in funny communications - they must not be seen to be hostile. Rather, examination (of comic long-playing records) shows that self-satire can be expected to be the female niche in comedy. Almost two thirds of the 'female' records were self-deprecatory ('My Living Bra died of starvation') while only 11% of the 'male' counterparts ran themselves down.

Without going too far into this whole subject area it is pertinent to note what Wilde (1973) has to add. He quotes Phyllis Diller as saying

"..being a woman, right away you walk out to almost total rejection. Almost nobody wants you to be a female comic and they give you a lot of static just because of your sex" (213)

1. It has been demonstrated that in humour, the sex of the target of ridicule is an important determinant of the humour response, and that it is still funnier to see a woman than a man disparaged" Cantor (1976a:172)
Wilde suggests that while comic actresses are plentiful, stand-up comedienne are a rarity. To explain this, the performer's psychological make-up has to be seen in the context of show business as an industry, its historical background and development, its relation to the structure of the mass media and the day to day process of making people laugh. The social relation between comedians and their audiences and between audience members are crucial.

Doris and Piersman (1956) found that subjects rated jokes differently when tested alone or in a group while Perl (1933), using jokes previously judged for a funniness rating, demonstrated that jokes read in private are not rated as funny as jokes read out loud to a group which in turn are not as funny as jokes shown on a screen to a group.

The resolutely psychological approach to the study of humour sometimes has its own unintended comedy. Shurcliff (1968) for example, told his subjects that they would either have to pick up a rat, take a blood sample from it, or take a large blood sample from a vicious rat that bites. It was, in fact, a toy rat. He reports that those who were most anxious about the experiment rated the 'surprise' of finding the rat a mere toy more humorous than the others. It is not recorded how funny the experimenter himself found the whole operation.

Kambouropoulou (1930) requested a group of Vassar students to keep 'laughter diaries' over a set period of time and devised personality ratings for each individual. The extroverts among the girls tended to record 'funny incidents' involving the inferiority of other people rather than those connected to mere incongruity.

The more socially aware experimenters have produced some useful insights. Sears (1934) found that a distinction could be drawn between 'cruel glee' and 'triumph' and that subjects would prefer
jokes within a particular cluster. 'Why did you hit your husband with a chair? I couldn't lift the table' falls under the cruel glee category; 'I didn't accept Bob the first time he proposed. You weren't there, dearie!' comes under triumph. This pluralistic approach is supported by Heim (1936). Her experiment involved asking people to tell her what they found funny about a joke that they liked and the subjects answers could be classified into three groups – explanation of any particular convention the breaking of which produced the joke, reference to something already taken by the subjects to be funny, and a level of analysis which involved a concept of the ludicrous or incongruity. For Heim there is no magic formula or way to reduce humour to a single definition and she suggests that her experiment tends to disprove

"...that there is at least one common element in all things called humour, and that there is one experience common to all laughter situations...The impossibility of translating jokes is based on something more than the numerous meanings and associations connected with the words of the original joke: it is part of the essence of humour" (148, 155)

Davis and Farina (1970) also argue for a pluralistic approach to the use of humour in social communication. When two people meet neither knows the limits which the other considers acceptable;— Jokes may be used to broach potentially taboo subjects and laughter can serve to indicate approval or disapproval where direct communication would be socially awkward. They conclude

"What is referred to as 'humor' appears to be a whole composite of different behaviours rather than a single one, and any explanation which attempts to explain them equally would appear doomed to do so by explaining them marginally" (175)

A Return to Theory

Recounting experimental results lacks a certain amount of readability and as a brief respite certain influential overviews of the subject
can now be reviewed. These works are not all 'psychological' and many could equally well be found in the following chapter. As has been noted before the subject matter does not fall easily into neat categories and while certain trends may be identified a large amount of dipping into and wandering about the field is unavoidable. The clearest attempt by far to bring some order into the maze of interlocking and contradictory theories can be found in Keith-Spiegel (1972). Greig (1923) wishes all manifestations of humour and laughter to be subsumed under the instinct of love:

"Examination of the earliest laughter of infants leads to the conclusion that the essential element in situations provoking (laughter) is personal. This in turn suggests that the laugh is a response within the uncertain and ill-coordinated behaviour of the instinct of love. It appears to arise within such behaviour when an obstruction of some kind is first encountered, and then, no matter how, suddenly overcome; it marks the escape of psycho-physical energy mobilised to meet the obstruction, but not actually required for that purpose, and therefore for the moment surplus" (222)

The connection with love may not be immediately apparent but by including 'hate' as a derivation of love (as Greig does) then the concept becomes clearer. It is the ambivalence of love behaviour modified by hate or vice versa, when our affection for a subject is interrupted by the punchline or our hate towards it is restrained. In a Punch and Judy show the hideous features of the dolls act to break the affection which children normally have for puppets; we momentarily build up hate towards the dolls and laugh off the energy when the hate is overcome - a combination of the physiology of Spencer and the psychology of Freud. For Greig, the greatest ambivalence is found in the prevailing attitude between men and women and is particularly exemplified in the relationship between a son and his mother-in-law; he hates her intrusion and competition for his wife's affections but also transfers his maternal incestuous desires onto her. However, as Monro (1963) points out, one need not look to the Oedipus complex for an explanation. Since the mother-in-law is both a stranger and someone who commands respect, the
ambivalence arises from "...a natural dislike inhibited by the
demands of convention" (215).

Greig also relies heavily on a tickling-smiling-laughter equation
developed from a study of children which is then applied wholesale
to adult laughter. What we laugh at as adults is predetermined by
our childhood responses to love behaviour. Consequently, the book
puts the cart before the horse. If everything is explained by pre-
sexual sexuality then all adult joking should be placed within
this framework. There may be any number of reasons why we laugh when
the wind blows a man's hat off but Greig sees the action simply as
one of symbolic exposure, and as that is why we laugh.

Gregory (1924) is no less adamant in pursuing a single theory (this
one with an evolutionary basis) to the exclusion of others 1. His
examples are very much linked to 'classical' instances which suggests
an all-pervading and eternal base for laughter. That base is 'relief'.
when, in the midst of seriousness the tension is temporarily relaxed,
when we are no longer in suspense or ignorance about a punchline,
when "laughter, physiologically, releases the body from a necessity
for exertion and relieves it of secretions" (29) - these are the
occasions when laughter as relief may be seen. From an early age
the relief can be identified in tickling - once the child realises
that it is all in play, fear vanishes and laughter ensues. Moreover,
since the most effective shape to tickle with is that of a tooth
(or so Gregory maintains), the child's response is a relic of trying
to escape from the carnivores that his forebears were prey to.
Through a process of socialisation (which is never really explained)
this initial relief has been expanded to the many varieties of laughter.

As civilisation spreads so laughter becomes more 'human' and

1. Some writers have adopted such a broad stance as to include all
others. Andrews (1943), for example, gives causes of laughter as
derision-superiority, reaction to debauchery, subtlety-intellectual,
sexual themes, and the ridiculous.
becomes more 'human' and sympathetic. Gregory also uses the notion of 'relief' to accommodate the idea that laughter arises from a perception of the incongruous. We laugh because we have been prepared for some shock or other reaction; this expectation is deceived by the incongruity and from the sense of relief, laughter results.

Similarly, our response to wit may or may not be laughter — if we somehow feel relieved, we laugh. This is Gregory at his weakest but having posited a universal principle he is determined that it shall encompass all occasions when laughter is the response.

Bergler has been mentioned before. For him, everything comes down to the battle within the individual; he proposes to demonstrate (somewhat emphatically) that

"...laughter is a necessary and healthy INTERNAL debunking process and therefore a fear-reducing process, and that it is not directed at external powers as more than fourscore investigators have claimed for centuries, but at internal powers...it is a method of attacking one sector of the inner conscience (ego ideal)..."

(1956:viii)

The ego battles the superego by proving that the standards the latter imposes are fallacies — that the great are not so great after all.1 There is no need to question whether the laughter is at or with any particular subject — the butts of jokes, for example, are just artificial victims and alibis to enable the battle to be joined.2 An individual will rate a joke as funny or poor depending on his ability to use it as a weapon against the superego. A person who rates all jokes as unfunny will be stigmatised as not having a 'sense of humour' because if one does not rebel against the superego then one must be a hyper-masochist. Writers of comedy are, therefore, possessed of a strong and aggressive outlook which is not necessarily found in other

1. Dooley (1941), another Freudian, disagrees. He suggests that the ego concedes defeat and then 'mangles' satisfaction by claiming the love of the superego (parental authority).
2. This is relatively clear; Bergler's suggestion that comedy is not aggression against the 'chidipal father but against the pre-Cedipal mother is relatively confusing.
writers. Their works are literary alibis negating the superego's claims to power.

For Bergier, all is subsumed under militaristic prose describing the battle within the brain; he brushes aside the contextual features of joking thus

"Nothing new under the sun - not even in the joke department. And especially not in the core of the joke; the time, the place, the wrapping, the local color and the names all change, but the essence remains unvarying. The reason seems to be the uniformity of the repressed material used." (257)

Why the 'wrapping' changes does not concern Bergier though it should. It is all very well to locate the whole field of laughter and joking within the unconscious and to explain the success or otherwise of a joke in terms of conflict between the ego and superego. Why, then, does the wrapping rely on predominantly social subjects, national characteristics, stereotypes, and the like? The essence of a joke may, of course, be found over a period of time (as witness the 16th Century riddles quoted above); whether or not one takes the 'core' of the joke to be more accessible to psychoanalysis than philosophy or sociology is a matter for debate but surely no comprehensive study can safely ignore the fact that a joke is flavoured by its particular relevance to the social life of the audience. The superstructure of the joke relies on the communication of readily identifiable short-hands and symbols. Douglas has argued the point before; she suggests that

"...a joke is seen and allowed when it offers a symbolic pattern of a social pattern occurring at the same time...all jokes are expressive of the social situations in which they occur...if there is no joke in the social system, no other joking can appear." (1968;366)

Berger usefully adds

"In some cultures mothers-in-law or old people or certain animals are not considered suitable for humorous treatment, so that American jokes about subjects sacred in other lands fall flat. Because humour is intimately connected to culture-codes, it is useful in providing insights into a society's values." (1976;114)
From the battlefield of Bergler it should be possible to move towards a more peaceable approach.

Mindess takes the concept of 'liberation' as his key and emphasises the beneficial effects of having and using a sense of humour

"...because it is indispensable to our welfare. Like love, courage, and understanding, it is one of the attributes that can sustain us through the worst. In its lesser manifestations it can lighten the load of our daily cares; at its peaks it can enable us to live joyous lives in the midst of all our suffering...a flourishing sense of humour is fundamental to mental health." (1971:15)

For Mindess, every instance of laughter is an instance of liberation from the things that control us - especially from conformity which is socially induced and sanctioned. When we laugh at, for example, the Marx Brothers, we feel a vicarious sense of freedom from convention and the pressures of life. It is the sense of the unpredictable that forms the basis for most jokes - we are led to expect one ending which conforms with the first part of the joke and when the unexpected resolution takes place, we are liberated. The process is continuous as our conventional view of life is constantly repeated so that we can enjoy the release from it again and again. The surprise ending of a joke should take us into new and un stereotyped ways of thinking; this can be represented diagrammatically:

```
      PAUSE
BEGINNING          END
```

(1971:150)

For Mindess, the procedure of humour is, in short

"...the procedure of creativity, for, in its construction as well as in its content, the ludicrous continually provides us with new compositions formed out of old raw materials". (153)

It is by taking the 'god's-eye' view (Monro 1963) of an indifferent perspective on life that a sense of humour is developed and reality endured. Humour is, for example, effective in attacking both superiors and the very idea of superiority itself. Whereas tragedy deals with
power relationships in terms of control by immutable and fateful destinies, comedy has the ability to change gears and reverse the direction (or side-step the issue altogether). While Hinde stresses the creative and subversive elements in humour it is equally possible to see it as controlled rebellion rather than revolution. As a tool with which one may endure hardship and deprivation humour is double-edged. It may well lead to acceptance of the conventions while attacking individual characters; to finding ways of 'living with' a system rather than making efforts to change it; to distancing oneself from reality by treating the symptoms and not the root cause. Letachmont may be the end result rather than liberated awareness.

However, Hinde is ready to counter this sort of argument by opposing humour to sarcasm and jokes based on degradation and disparagement.

The latter may degenerate

"...too easily into trading cheap wisecracks and (depend) too heavily on evoking responsive laughter. The kind of humorous outlook that deserves to be called therapeutic, in contrast, must extend beyond wit, beyond laughter to a clear awareness of our common absurdities. It must constitute a dimension of experience that lets us see nothing is exactly as it seems..." (1976;338)

This is, of course, the kind of approach characterised by 'laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone'; we can be liberated from our common absurdities if we treat them with humour.

It is a fairly small step from humour as liberation to laughter as announcing a 'play mood'. Sully takes as basic that humorous activity is "...the impulse to turn the significant into enjoyable nonsense"(1902;151), and that the "...deep kinship between laughter and play discloses itself as soon as we begin to carefully compare them"(145). The primary function of both is to amuse and give pleasure. Sully usefully brackets off subsidiary causes of laughter (such as tickling, nervous giggles at solemn occasions) from the
main sources which tend to be perceptions of the ludicrous:

"Much, at least, of our laughter...may undoubtedly be regarded as directed to something which fails to comply with a social requirement, yet it is so trifling that we do not feel called upon to judge the shortcoming severely." (139)

Laughter, Sully suggests, has a self-protective function — we laugh at what we are unlikely to adopt or endorse. Although couched in an evolutionary framework (which places, for example, the laughter of 'savages' midway between that of children and adults) the concept of laughter as a social sanction is thoroughly rehearsed albeit in a somewhat circular manner. We laugh when in the play mood because of pleasure. The play mood is brought on by seeing the socially ridiculous; we laugh because it is only a trifling matter. Laughter is choral and acts to unite the laughing group against the object of ridicule; if the laughter is 'strong' enough there may be social correction. As novelty or acting beyond normal expectations are frequent sources of laughter then laughter may have a conservative function — you disparage others in order that they might conform and your laughter is strengthened through the pleasure afforded by it. As may be expected, it all comes down to children in the end through a mixture of tickling, play, and pleasure and Sully's intention to 'bracket off' is never really fulfilled. The promising line of argument that laughter regulates moral and social behaviour is cut short and returned rapidly to the relief and pleasure experienced by the child.

For Kimmins, also, no theory of laughter can be complete unless it refers back to the child. As far as he is concerned

"...the appreciation of humorous material is largely...the extent to which we have retained the spirit of the child." (1928:70)

There is an inbuilt disadvantage in trying to disprove a statement of this sort (as there is with all monistic theories). Cast a wide enough net and everything will eventually be caught. It does, though,
seem preferable to state categorically that there is a difference between a tickled child and, say, the reaction of a television audience for a comedy programme. A broad explanation in terms of 'relief', 'the love instinct', or 'the play mood' does little to identify what this difference may be.

Safer ground can be reached when the question 'Why is a certain thing funny?' is posed. Both Flugel and Lysenok look for an answer in the adult mind and there is a fair degree of agreement between them (with the former acknowledging his debt to the latter). Flugel rejects a one dimensional approach:

"Here so many eminent minds have failed to agree, it would be presumptuous to suppose that any satisfactory explanation or classification of the causes and nature of humour can be easily achieved." (1954:709)

Instead, Flugel suggests a mixed approach and identifies three key strands - a lack of seriousness, condensation (from Freud), and incongruity. A strong emotional feeling must prohibit the suspension of reality needed for a humorous reaction and this aura of unreality may allow greater permissiveness. Condensation is an essential element in wit and it is only a step to incongruity where the disparate items do not need to rely on a verbal link to establish a humorous relationship. According to Flugel, then, humour involves a combination of feeling and thinking, of the affective and cognitive.

Lysenok (1942,1943) sought to experimentally prove a connection between personality types and the sort of humorous material that was preferred by subjects or at least best understood by them. Later, he extrapolated the experimental into the theoretical and provided a model for understanding laughter-provoking material based on a triangle of affection, conation, and cognition. He classifies previous writers by their emphasis on any one of these three corners: Descartes and McDougall for affection (pure joy or contrast of feeling); Cicero, Dryden, Kant,
and Scopenhauer for cognition; Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Bain, and Bergson for conation (the will, action, goal-orientated behaviour). Eysenck's diagram may make things clearer:

![Diagram](https://example.com/diagram.png)

By taking elements from each corner, with 'play' represented by the 'erotic' dimension, the model allows for a system of joke-classification and humour analysis. If Eysenck is right, then the model can justifiably be called an elaboration of the Freudian distinction between wit, the comic, and humour though Eysenck himself is keen to distance his theory from Freud:

"The sort of Freudian notion... which attributes the finding of humour to the (mild) revival of a (repressed) tendency to aggression, sexual behaviour, or what not; we dare not indulge in the behaviour and hence find humour in the cartoon or joke depicting others as taking part in such acts. This vicarious theory of humour is opposed to the trait theory for which I found much evidence..." (1976:2)\(^1\)

Eysenck also wishes to extend the model by stressing the cognitive section. Incongruity is not enough to form a joke (a cartoon showing an apple and a screw is not funny) - some kind of resolution is required (the screw must be in the place of a stalk). Presumably this example would be placed on the right side of the triangle since it does not appeal to feeling but to thinking and comprehension. The

1. Eysenck (1947) refers to Williams (1945) - her work with children matched introversion/impersonal jokes and extroversion/personal.
model looks fairly sound but how it can be applied to laughter
pr voking material on television (or radio, or even the stage) is
difficult to see. When one is dealing with millions of people (or
thousands, or even hundreds), especially from the creator's side,
the model loses its appeal.

A Return to Brief Reviews (with Cognition in Mind)

Proceeding from _yscon', and carrying the importance attatched to
cognition, it is possible to give several examples from other
work which illustrate the shift from early writers' concentration
on the tickled child and their search for all-embracing theories
to adult appreciation of joking cast in variable models.

Suls (1972), for example, suggests a two stage basis in which
humour derives from experiencing a sudden incongruity which is
then resolved; a joke must be a logical unit. Thus, 'Two prostitutes
meet, and one asks 'Can you lend me some money till I get back on
my back' - the incongruity arises because the hearer expects the
words 'back on my feet'. However, the joke is perfectly congruous
because prostitutes, for the joke at least, work on their backs. If
the phrase 'till I get back on my hands' had been substituted then
only one element (incongruity) would have been present and there
would be no joke. Though Suls does not use it, the following joke
exactly fits his argument - the one word denouement totally
resolves the situation:

"Three mercenaries, an Englishman, American, and Irishman were
captured by Government forces in a small -uth American republic
and sent before a firing squad. As the Generalissimo raised his
sword and gave the orders 'Present arms, take aim...' the
Englishman had a brainwave and shouted 'Tornado!' whereupon
the soldiers dropped their rifles in panic and the Englishman
escaped. Having recalled his men, the Generalissimo raised his
sword again: 'Present arms, take aim...' when the American
shouted 'Earthquake!' and escaped in the ensuing debacle.
Having gathered his men together again, the Generalissimo
raised his sword: 'Present arms, take aim...' and the Irishman
shouted 'Fire!'"
The topic of ethnic humour is discussed in Chapter 4.

The pleasure in jokes comes from not getting the solution until the very end and Suls identifies four factors which bear on the process:

1. The degree of incongruity - how much the punchline violates the hearer's expectations;
2. The complexity of the problem-solving - if too easy the joke will be trivial, if too hard the joke may not be understood;
3. The time taken - Goldstein (1970a) found that appreciation decreases as the time till the punchline increases;
4. The relevance to the individual.

Willman says very much the same - "Humour always results from the union of two ideas which involve some sort of contradiction or incongruity" (1940;72) - and gives three conditions for the incongruous elements: they must be common to one another, or one is inferred from the other, or they occur together in objective reality. McGhee (1972) suggests that, referring to children, the process is

"...to assimilate the source of inconsistency or expectancy disconfirmation into existing relevant cognitive structures without attempting to accommodate those structures to fit the discrepant stimulus input." (65)

If this means that you have to understand the real world to perceive deviations from it then it is merely truistic. The important point, emphasised in the original, is that the joke is accepted as a joke and not as an attack on reality. Supportive 'cues' - the smiling joke-teller, 'Have you heard this one?', hearing other people laugh - all tend to leave the listener in no doubt that the situation is predetermined as a humorous one. McGhee (1971) also proposes that while mere incongruity may raise a smile or be mildly amusing an additional component of sex or aggression is necessary to provoke vigorous laughter.

Shultz follows Suls more closely:

"The mechanism of resolution is apparently necessary to distinguish humour from nonsense. Whereas nonsense can be characterised as pure or unresolvable incongruity, humour can be characterised as resolvable or meaningful incongruity." (1976;13)

Rothbart (1976), perhaps, has closer affinities with McGhee. She
stresses that there must be an additional feature to incongruity for there to be a joke. Incongruity alone may provoke fear or curiosity rather than the smile or the laugh. Further, the resolution may not be complete as with the following riddle:

"Why did the elephant sit on the marshmallow? Because he didn't want to fall into the hot chocolate."

The answer links two pieces of knowledge—marshmallows may be floated on chocolate, drowning creatures may use rafts—but still leaves the concept of an elephant on a marshmallow. For Rothbart, then:

"...although we may resolve one or more incongruities in a joke in order to understand or 'get' the joke, additional incongruities or discrepancies with reality may remain. For laughter to occur, the communication that this is a joke, or this is for fun, thus becomes extremely important."(1976:41-42)

Berleyne also agrees with the concept of incongruity(1960,1969) but has developed this in conjunction with the feeling of pleasure associated with joking. The incongruity ('collative variables') should be seen in terms of 'arousal boost' and 'arousal jag'—arousal gives pleasure, whether leading up to a joke (the boost) or the solution (the jag). He also agrees with the other writers that

"Humour is accompanied by discriminative cues, which indicate that what is happening, or is going to happen, should be taken as a joke"(1972:56)

and that many things would bewilder or shock us if the appropriate cues did not tell us that the experience is intended to be humorous.

Nerhardt (1976), like most of the authors in this section, sets out a proposition "The greater the divergence of a stimulus from expectation in one or many dimensions, the funnier the stimulus" (59) and then attempts an experiment to demonstrate it. Suffice it to say that the results tend to be positive. The main point to note here is that many of these studies are trying to prove what
has been intuitively discovered by early philosophers such as Beattie (1776), Kant (1790) and Schopenhauer (1819). Experimental data may prove or disprove according to one's point of view and even the experimenters will acknowledge that they are only effectively placing one piece in a much larger jigsaw. Nevertheless, there is one area where experimentation has proved useful within the terms of this thesis. As shall be argued more fully later, the communication of laughter has a large part to play in the production of television comedy where the use of laughter soundtracks, through recording before live audiences is almost universal. Experimental work on 'contagious' laughter can help to throw some light on the processes involved.

**'Canned Laughter' and Contagious Aspects**

Chapman's work is particularly relevant. His main concern is with the social aspects of humorous laughter in young children (1972). His studies (1974a and 1974b) set out to prove that the sight or sound of companions smiling or laughing tends to increase judgments of funniness, and that subjects laugh louder and more frequently. He stresses the

"...vital importance of social aspects of situations as determinants of so-called 'humorous laughter' and 'mirthful smiling', and (the results) indicate that mirth will never be fully understood until social dimensions are explored in a systematic way" (1975a:16-17)

The social dimensions refer, of course, to the presence of laughing companions (or even just the presence of companions (1975b) and the overwhelming conclusion is that the lone child will react differently to humorous material than will the group. Of more direct relevance is an experiment involving adults; here, the subjects were presented

1. Both Andrus (1946) and Morrison (1940) suggest that frequency of laughter tends to increase as does the size of an adult theatre audience. Even if this is related to 'social conformity' the result is still effective.
with tape-recorded jokes with or without a canned laughter back-
ground. It was found that:

"...canned laughter increased mirth but it had no significant
effect on the ratings which were provided subsequently. This
could be because taped laughter promotes social conformity
or disinhibits mirth, but it seems more likely that the
laughter background itself was a stimulus for mirth" (1973:575)

The work of Chapman can be supported by others (Young and Frye
1966) but has limited applicability to the mass media.

Smyth and Fuller (1972) argue that:

"...the addition of group laughter to humorous material would both
increase the probability with which that material would elicit
laughter from others and increase the evaluation of that material
by the audience." (132)

They successfully demonstrate the truth of the conventional wisdom
which assumes that dubbed or canned laughter has some effect. A
later experiment (Fuller and Sheehy-Skeffington (1974)) confirmed
this and showed that material with a low comic content would be rated
as funnier by those subjects who had the 'benefit' of a laughter
soundtrack. They suggest

"...an appropriate but tentative recommendation would be to add
dubbed laughter specifically to material in which the humour
content was latent rather than explicit, thereby directing the
audience to 'see the joke'..." (534)

Nosanchuk and Lightstone found that frequency of laughter increased
with the addition of canned laughter and suggest that it increases
the mirth ratings of the audience in conformity with their implicit
tested the difference between canned and naturally occurring laughter
at an I Love Lucy show. Their main finding is that the canned variety
encourages a quicker response to a punchline, the idea being that the
audience are immediately prompted into the requisite response.

Fuller (1977) reviewed over a dozen experiments concerned with canned
laughter and revealed a great deal of variety in the findings. However,
certain trends can be distinguished. Material with a low humour content
is rated higher with a laughter soundtrack. There are differences in reaction between male and female. Canned laughter is but one of many 'cues' which facilitate a fantasy rather than a reality mode of assimilation; it can accurately focus audience attention at the point where a laugh is deemed to be necessary. Since all of these conclusions are drawn from experimental situations involving adults rather than children though the results may not apply to the television audience watching at home. Whether or not this is the case is somewhat irrelevant. The fact is that the television programme creators use canned laughter (usually very sparingly) and record shows in front of a studio audience to provide a 'natural' soundtrack of people laughing. The reasons for this and its implications are fully discussed in Chapter 8.

The 1976 Cardiff Conference

In July 1976 an international conference, organised by the Welsh branch of the British Psychological Society, was held in Cardiff under the generic heading 'Humour and Laughter'. The proceedings have been published (Chapman and Foot 1977) and it is not proposed to review the 90 or so papers here though some have already been referred to where relevant; the book's bibliography runs to over 30 pages with a very rough average of 30 entries a page. A brief glance at the papers confirms the directions of research noted before - the strong emphasis on children's humour, on cognitive/incongruity models, on sex differences, and on Freudian theory. Further, they show an overwhelming concern with responses to humour with much reliance on and discussion of techniques for measuring smiles or laughter or for rating mirth. The creation of humour is largely ignored and (with notable exceptions) the overall impression is that recent research remains firmly tied to
the laboratory and the structured experiment. This is so even in the field of ethnic humour where one might expect a broader, more sociological approach. For example, a paper ironically entitled 'Ethnic Humour is no Joke' concludes that: "Since all three hypotheses were strongly substantiated, the cultural relativity of multi-dimensional social normative value incongruity humour seems evident. Experiments now in progress hope to establish whether fewer than three dimensions of value normative anticonformity suffice to generate incongruity humour, and whether the minimum number of required dimensions anticonformed to depends upon if the norms violated represent ego-involving values or non-ego involving beliefs" (Nutuma et al 1977:279)

This sort of obscurantist approach is regrettably all too common and examples can be multiplied into the tens if not the hundreds.

The study of laughter and humour, joking and comedy falls broadly into two camps. One has been examined in this chapter and ranges from intuitive theorising to the approach typified by the above quote where uncommon sense is dressed in jargon. Of greater relevance to the main concern of this thesis is the second which moves away from the individual to consider man in society. This literature is reviewed in the next two chapters.

Concluding Remarks

It is easy to be over-critical of 'psychological' contributions to the study of humour. It is, perhaps, more fruitful to see what insights might be employed, especially for a wider analysis of comedy:

1. If the structure of joking can be correctly subsumed under a model of incongruity then it is possible to examine what subjects or objects are considered socially incongruous;
2. If humour is tendentious then the 'victims' may be identified at a level beyond that of the individual; for example, racial groups may be laughed at or laughed with;
3. Cues are important in defining the material and creating a set of expectations; the work on canned laughter is of particular relevance;
4. Humour may be compared to play and involve a suspension of reality. It is not meant to be taken seriously and things may be said through humour that would otherwise be considered threatening, outrageous, or doctrinaire.
5. The comic is readily recognisable. Even if something is found unfunny, its humorous intentions will be obvious.

6. If joke-understanding involves problem-solving then jokes will not be so funny the second time around. Television comedy exhausts a prodigious amount of material and there is a premium on new or prolific writers. The music hall audience of a few hundred allowed for the repetition of a joke at a different venue - the television audience, numbering millions, affords no such possibility.

7. There are various differences between the sexes, particularly regarding joke appreciation. Common knowledge indicates the relative rarity of female script-writers and comedienne (rather than comic actresses).

So much for psychology and related disciplines. The philosophers, literary critics, anthropologists, and sociologists who have considered humour and comedy take different approaches but they all study man as a social being governed by, and reacting to, certain rules and codes of behaviour.
CHAPTER THREE

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HUMOUR

It is highly unlikely that anything written by Plato will influence either the creation or appreciation of television situation comedy and this must remain as a general criticism of the review chapters in this thesis. There are, however, defences which may be put forward. Firstly, if there is a function of comedy it may be instructive to see if it has been thought to exist in perpetuity or subject to change by examining a broad historical set of opinions. Secondly, it seems both arrogant and misleading to take irrelevance as read unless some sort of proof is offered. Finally, traditions are traditions. Few writers on the subject have ignored the early theorists and this work is no exception.

The Greeks and the Romans

As far as can be established the earliest writings we have on comedy are those of Plato, though the origins of comedy itself appear to predate him by a number of centuries.

The common approach to Plato is to quote the variant of the pleasure-pain principle he gives in 'Philebus' and to tie this in with a degradation theory of laughter; we are supposed to laugh at the ridiculous and thus deride it. It is summarised by Piddington (1933) as the ridiculous being a negation of 'know thyself'. Those who exhibit this lack of self-knowledge will be either strong or weak. If the person is strong then such ignorance is hateful; if the person is weak then it is ridiculous. The act of laughing is pleasurable in itself but as it involves laughing at someone and rejoicing in their misfortunes an element of pain is introduced.

Keith-Spiegel (1972) places Plato under her sub-heading of 'Ambivalence' and suggests that his theory relates to the simultaneous
experience of incompatible emotions. Koestler (1949) writes that Plato can be subsumed under a general theory of degradation though this is absent in a later work (1970). For detailed discussion, few writers are more thorough than Gregory (1924). It is instructive to see exactly what Plato had his protagonists say and no apologies are made for the length of the quote:

"Socrates: And are you aware that even at a comedy the soul experiences a mixed feeling of pain and pleasure?
Protarchus: I do not understand you.

... S: I have just mentioned envy; would you not call that a pain of the soul?
P: Yes
S: And yet the envious man finds something in the misfortunes of his neighbours at which he is pleased?
P: Certainly
S: And ignorance, and what is termed clownishness, are surely an evil?
P: To be sure
S: From these considerations learn to know the nature of the ridiculous
P: Explain
S: The ridiculous may be described generally as the name of a state; and is that part of vice in general which is the opposite to the state of which the inscription at Delphi speaks
P: You mean, Socrates, 'Know thyself'
S: I do, and the opposite would be, 'Know not thyself'

... S: All who are silly enough to entertain this lying conceit of themselves may be divided, like the rest of mankind, into two classes - one having power and might; and the other the reverse.
P: Certainly
S: Let this then be the principle of division: those of them who are weak and are unable to revenge themselves, when they are laughed at, may be truly called ridiculous, but those who can defend themselves may be more truly described as strong and formidable, for ignorance in the powerful is hateful and horrible, because hurtful to others both in reality and in fiction, but powerless ignorance may be reckoned, and in truth is, ridiculous

...
S: And do we not acknowledge this ignorance of theirs to be a misfortune?
P: Certainly
S: And do we feel pain or pleasure in laughing at it?
P: Clearly we feel pleasure
S: And was not envy the source of this pleasure which we feel at the misfortunes of friends?
P: Certainly
S: Then the argument shows that when we laugh at the folly of our friends, pleasure, mingling with envy, mingles with pain, for envy has been acknowledged by us to be mental pain, and laughter is pleasant, and we envy and laugh at the same instant" (Jowett 1875:94)

Olson has usefully commented with regard to 'Philebus' that

"...it is obvious that manifest self-ignorance, especially when coupled with weakness, may produce contempt, disappointment, annoyance, and a whole variety of responses other than laughter, depending upon the person responding; a rival might feel contempt, a parent disappointment, a stranger annoyance; indeed, most of us are far more frequently annoyed than amused by people of the sort described." (1968:8)

This is more an argument against 'universal's' than against Plato; it would appear clear from 'Philebus' that while the ridiculous exhibit a lack of self-knowledge there is no logical corollary that those exhibiting such a deficiency are therefore ridiculous. In a great many other commentaries on Plato's view of laughter there is a marked absence of any indication that it might best be seen as part and parcel of his general philosophy. It has been, perhaps, more convenient to quote his remarks in vacuo and bolster the claims for a degradation theory of laughter. Thus, Bergler writes

"Of importance is the fact that recognition of the aggressive connotation of laughter dates back twenty-three hundred centuries." (1956:3)

Why this should be important is not made clear and Bergler just seems to relish the academic anchorage afforded by such a time span.

1. References to works may seem rather haphazard in the early part of this chapter; however, original dates of 'publication' are not really necessary and the chronology followed is for convenience rather than absolute accuracy.

2. For example, Sully (1902), Greig (1923), and Monro (1963).
Once Plato's remarks are seen in context, the overall tone of 'Philebus' may be interpreted as supporting reason against excess; as with other emotions, excess will excite the opposite reaction and excessive laughter will eventually lead to grief. This censorious tone is also evident in his recommendation that the iambic poets should not expose any citizen to laughter ('Laws'). Gregory suggests that Plato

"...feared immoderate laughter in the guardians of his State and would suffer no Horatian description of laughter among the blessed gods as they watched the bustling Hephaestus." (1924:12)

This ascetic attitude of Plato has been too often overlooked by writers.

The only extant contribution from Aristotle seems to be in parts of 'Poetics', in the section on tragedy, though it is likely that a section on comedy was planned or written and never completed or lost. Lucas, for example, argues that

"The definition of tragedy comes after the history of its development and at the beginning of the section of which it is the subject; there must have been a further definition of comedy in the corresponding position." (1968:87)

Cornford (1914), citing 'Poetics', follows Aristotle's statement that the early stages of comedy had left no record because it was, for a long time, an amateur performance and not officially recognised.

The comments on comedy in 'Poetics' should be seen in the light of the commentary on tragedy. The difference between the two is that comedy presents its subjects as worse than men of the 'present' day while tragedy portrays them as better. From the Eywater translation, we discover that comedy is particularly:

"...an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain." (Eywater 1920)

For Aristotle, the beautiful has certain attributes - symmetry, order,

1. Aristotle refers to this treatise and the various kinds of jokes it contained in 'Rhetoric'. 
rhythm, and harmony; in such an ordered universe the incongruous will automatically appear ugly and ridiculous.

Both tragedy and comedy have their origins in poetry which split into two, with one group of poets producing panegyrics and the other invectives in the iambic metre. According to Aristotle, comedy originated in the improvisations of Phallic songs and it may be supposed that the flavour of Old Comedy is derived from the combination of an invocation of fertility and invective against malign influence (see Elliott (1960; 4-6)). Cornford quotes Aristotle as stating

"Comedy originated with the leaders of the Phallic songs, which survive to this day as institutions in many of our states." (1914;36)

Cornford maintains that this refers only to the element of personal invective because

"...phallic rites...have another side of equal importance, of which Aristotle says nothing, because it does not happen to be relevant to his theme at the moment...It has never been doubted that the phallic procession...belongs to a well-known class of rites, to be found all over Europe and in many other regions, and intended to secure the fertility of the earth and of man and beast." (47-48)

The point that Cornford is making is that for the Phallic rites to be developed into comedy some element of drama must be present - this is to be found in the fertility rite; in this rite

"...we find the necessary germ from which could arise a form of drama strongly marked by the obscenity into which positive sexual magic must degenerate, and the invective which perpetuates the old negative element of magical aversion." (52)

The ritual origin of tragedy and comedy seems very well documented (Harrison (1912), Pickard-Cambridge (1927)); of more importance here is the development of the dramatic forms. The old ritual drama

"...provided Tragedy with the abstract conception of movement of its plot, and the philosophy of 'Hubris'. It provided Comedy with the stock masks which could serve as a basis for its ever subtler classification of all that is ridiculous in human character." (Cornford 1914;211)

A general conclusion can be drawn with regards to origins of comedy - the two base elements are an enactment of ritual and an invective
against determined objects or subjects; if ritual is concerned with ordering society and regulation the participation of individuals then the dramatisation of ritual may retain this aspect.

'Antique' comedy is based on ritual and expressed in specific poetic metre; the connection between laughter and comedy can only be conjectured at this point though it is worth noting two strands of laughter - that it is pleasurable and may imply censure - which seem to be linked to comedy. If laughter has a strong element of malice, as Plato suggested, then one can trace in 'Poetics' a tendency for Aristotle to stress the humanization of laughter as evidenced by Homer's substitution of a dramatic picture of the ridiculous for dramatic invective. The shift in emphasis from personal satiric invective to an impersonal censure of mores and ethics is parallel to comedy becoming social in its outlook and avoiding direct offence against individuals by leaving personalities aside. As such, in an impersonal display of the ridiculous the 'bitterest enemies walk off good friends at the end' ('Poetics').

Frye (1965) suggests that New Comedy has the blessing of Aristotle and that it exhibits the general pattern of Aristotelian causation, the final cause being the audience who, through their applause, take part in the comic resolution. In all good New Comedy

"...there is a social as well as an individual theme which must be sought in the general atmosphere of reconciliation that makes the final marriage possible. As the hero gets closer to the heroine and opposition is overcome, all the right-thinking people come over to his side. Thus a new social unit is formed on the

1. Elliott (1960) usefully has: "Satire is notoriously a slippery term, designating, as it does, a form of art and a spirit, a purpose and a tone - to say nothing of works of art whose resemblances may be highly remote." (viii)

2. "It was the privilege of the comedian to make it clear that there were no barriers and no imaginary curtain between stage and audience. Citizens they were on both sides, united and linked together in space and spirit. Comedy is seen to be a social phenomenon, and so to demonstrate most plainly the social character of the Greek theatre." (Ehrenberg (1951; 26)).
Olson (1968) attempts to construct a wide theory of comedy by extrapolation from 'Poetics'. He models his conception of comedy on the Aristotelian definition of tragedy and offers parallel definitions of the six constituents (plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle). He also notes that Aristotle's remarks on the nature of the ridiculous have invariably been treated as a definition; Olson comments:

"...it is not a definition; Aristotle would never have permitted a definition with a negative differentia, for a negative term is always ambiguous and hence can state the nature of nothing." (51)

The alternative is to follow Coleridge:

"...Aristotle has...excellently defined the laughable as consisting of, or depending on, what is out of its proper time and place, yet without danger or pain." (1995;122)

This brief recital of the idea has its merits.

Plato and Aristotle have been discussed at some length because it is the first time that comedy emerges as a specific institutionalised and dramatic form. Similarly, the concept of the 'happy ending' can be traced directly to the almost inevitable marriage at the end of New Comedies and the break from the Old inveotive and personalised abuse. Their greatest single contribution, however, is the separation of drama into tragedy and comedy. The distinction, though, should not be seen as synonymous with 'serious' and 'light-hearted' - Hoglund (1973), for example, remarks that 'serious' has come to mean profound and important instead of earnest and solemn while 'non-serious' means frivolous and light-hearted. He argues that comedy can deal with serious themes; the difference lies in treatment rather than subject matter. The approach of comedy is certainly different to tragedy but as Olson states:

"I have opposed comedy to the serious, and thus, it may be thought,

1. See particularly Sanbach (1977) for a detailed account.

2. Obviously, the two forms may be intermingled, though as Kerr suggests it is much easier to introduce tragedy into comedy than it is to have a comic interlude in a tragedy (1967;33)
have left no room for it in comedy. I do not think that this is the case; except for sheer slapstick and buffoonery, there is always a serious element in comedy. The comic action does not consist wholly in comic incidents; it is comic not in virtue of each and every part being comic but in virtue of its being comic as a whole...every comedy proper, in short, requires us to take certain things seriously so that we may see something close as not to be taken so." (1968:40-41)

This, perhaps, is the most suggestive contribution from commentaries on the Greeks: that although comedy is seen as inferior to tragedy it is not to be dismissed simply as a lighthearted view of life. Few critics would argue against such a statement as applied to Aristophanes, Euripides, Jonson and Shakespeare, Voliere, Wilde, and Shaw. The argument here, however, is that such a statement is also applicable to modern mass media comedies from Chaplin's films to Steptoe and Son and Bless This House; this last programme may be used to add a further dimension to the statement's applicability in that it may include those programmes which most closely parallel Old Comedy in being brash, with little characterisation, predictable, and popular.

What New Comedy takes from Old Comedy to a high degree is a concept of character which is largely predetermined. It may be assumed that for Plato a comic character will exhibit a lack of self-knowledge in a specific area - the 'ignorant' may fancy himself richer, wiser, or more handsome than he is (Jowett 1875:95). Old Comedy used a stock of masks (loosely interpreted here as character) ranging from an Old Man (testy, morose), a Learned Loctor or Pedant (remote from the world) to a Swaggering Soldier and a Comic Slave. New Comedy contains an expansion of such characters and introduces new figures (Cornford 1914:176-177). Character becomes set and predictable. Comedy starts to take on the attributes which Bergson (see later) gives to both comedy and laughter - an inelasticity of thought or action, a lack of adjustment to circumstances, an idee fixe. While the tragic hero is anti-social through his very individuality, the comic butt is anti-social because he is subject to an overruling characteristic which prohibits
him from acting in a socially condoned manner.

What may be roughly termed the 'Roman contribution' will receive much shorter consideration for the simple reason that writers tend to be descriptive rather than theoretical, and that Greek influence is very strong. Cicero, for example, clearly echoes the words of Aristotle - he finds the ridiculous (and therefore the laughable) in a certain baseness or deformity ('tupitudo et deformitas') in people of low esteem (1931:2158). However, the circumstances should not be calamitous, nor should they be of such a serious nature as would require punishment instead of ridicule. Fiddington (1933) argues that Cicero comes quite close to pre-dating Freud by suggesting that the ridiculous is something found in disgraceful actions but brought to our attention in an almost graceful manner. It is a way to bring into the open things which one should not normally discuss.

Cicero also repeats the Aristotelian notion of comedy as imitation, as a mirror reflecting social values. Quintilian pursues a different line (though, like Cicero, his work is effectively a training manual for orators) and gives six diverse types of the laughable which all need an element of baseness - urbanity, gracefulness, piquancy, pleasantry, jesting, and raillery. Surprise and deceived expectation are often used to raise laughter. On satire, we have Quintilian's statement that it is 'all our own' ('satura tota nostra est' (1821:10:93)) meaning Roman rather than Greek; while the work of Aristophanes may have satirical content, Quintilian's 'satire' is a specific hexametric form involving an attack on a certain folly or vice with a recommendation to the complementary virtue.

Ionatus treats particularly of comedy rather than laughter. It is

"...a fable involving diverse arrangements of civic and private concerns, in which one learns what is useful in life and what on the contrary is to be avoided." (1964:27)
Horace and Juvenal may be treated as practitioners rather than theorists, and likewise the epigrams of Martial: all are beyond the scope of this chapter.

The Bible

"The total absence of humour from the Bible is one of the most singular things in all literature." Whitehead (in Price 1954:195)

According to Mitchell there are 29 references to laughter in the Old Testament, only two of which are joyful or happy. Sorrow, mockery, and derision are predominant. The first reference appears in Genesis XVII when Abraham laughs at the idea that he is still potent at the age of one hundred and that Sarah, being ninety herself, could bear children. The result of the union was Isaac, 'the laughing one'.

By far the wittiest, and probably the best, account of biblical laughter is to be found in Boston (1974:43-49) who comments that

"Jehovah was a solemn god, little given to gaiety and jollity. We can see the kind of thing that made Him laugh from Milton's account of how He deliberately designed the universe in a complicated manner in order to provide Himself with a source of amusement in the explanations produced by human beings in their attempts to understand it...little things, so to speak, please enormous minds." (45)

Boston also refers to a complicated theological debate as to whether or not Christ laughed; certainly there is no mention of any such laughter although other human emotions (anger, weeping) are mentioned in the New Testament. The debate centres on the essential humanity of Christ and has its counterpart in the assertion of many writers that man is the only animal who laughs. Chesterton suggests that

"There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth." (1909:297)

If the laughter was hidden or simply not recorded by the Evangelists there would seem to be two possible avenues of thought. Firstly, as

1. Koestler (1970:53) cites Mitchell from Gregory (1924). This writer can find no such reference in the latter work.
Boston argues, there is a nearly instinctive feeling that Christ does not laugh. He mentions a painting by Clovis Trouille ("Le Grand Poème d'Amiens") which shows Christ, just descended from the cross, clutching His side and roaring with laughter. One's reaction is to laugh or be shocked - either response is an indication that one is perceiving incongruity. Pseudomathematically, this can be equated as

\[ \text{Christ} + \text{laughter} = \text{incongruity} \]

or

\[ \text{Christ} + \text{laughter} \not\in \text{Son of God} \]

The obvious corollary would be

\[ \text{Christ} + \text{laughter} = \text{God} + \text{man} \]

and while it is freely admitted that the methodology is somewhat dubious it does seem strange that Christ appears to lack a predominantly human attribute. The first equation should not really be incongruous; it only becomes so if one either places it in an emotionally charged setting (the descent from the cross) or one accepts that Biblical laughter is associated only with derision and scorn.

Alternatively, it may be preferable to accept that Christ had what is commonly called a sense of humour. His replies to the Pharisees would fall within a compass of wit and, as Boston notes, many of the parables have a sort of joke structure wherein the allegory is made clear by a 'punchline'. If Christ did laugh, and the matter was not recorded, the argument may well become specious. Sir Thomas Browne noted that there is no mention of wine in the Bible prior to the appearance of Noah; this need not mean that Noah was the first wine-drinker (in Boston 1974; 46). Further, the Scriptures are generally serious (Psalms CXXVI and Job VIII 21, though, recording joyful laughter) and as has been noted treat of laughter as scorn or derision. Ludovici has written that 'no saint, prophet, or apostle is ever spoken of as laughing' (1932;10) and the weight of evidence tends to support a sacred : profane division with laughter absent from the first.
If Christ did not laugh it is, perhaps, instructive to look upon Christ as occupying the structural role of a mediator (part-man, part-God) and just as restraint is exercised in the use of divine attributes so is it for human ones. The Biblical laugh is not the laugh of gentle play or merriment and the laughers is often undesirable. Though Christ does say 'Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh' (Luke VI 21) it is coupled with the malediction 'Woe unto you, ye that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep'. The inference is clear - laughter, in the main, is not an admirable activity. As St. John Chrysostom says, 'Laughter does not seem to be a sin, but it leads to sin' (in Beigler 1956:12).

Hastings has some useful comments on Biblical laughter. He classifies such references into three groups: loud laughter as opposed to demonstrative weeping; wonderment or incredulity; derision. He suggests that "...the most frequent occurrence of laughter is in derision. The feeling ranges from the gentle mocking of Daniel...to the judicial laughter of Him that sitteth in the heavens." (1900:63)

Eadie gives 37 references to the various parts of speech relating to laughter; 6 of these are in the New Testament (1867:272). There is no mention of the Devil laughing. Mercer, then Bishop of Tasmania, writes that laughter can be good

"...I maintain that if the Hebrew psalmist could attribute to God the laugh of conscious superiority, why should we hesitate to see in Him some analogue of the laugh of tender, loving insight." (1911:305)

The Bishop's article is recommended. It contains a lucid argument about whether or not the all-perceiving and omniscient can perceive incongruity.

In conclusion, it appears safest to understand Biblical laughter within the same framework as, for example, the Shakespearian 'our castle's strength will laugh a siege to scorn' (Macbeth v.v.1) or 'the lusty horn is not a thing to laugh to scorn' ('As You Like It' iv.ii.17). The next section swings back to comedy with varying links to laughter.
The concern here is solely with general commentaries on laughter and comedy. To review the literature relating to Shakespeare and other writers of comedy is a daunting task and no attempt is made.

Piddington (1933) gives brief resumes of Muzio, Minturno, and Maggi (who were presumably chosen by coincidence rather than from a dictionary); Bergler (1956) adds Trissino and Scaliger, the former exhorting the comic poet to represent base actions so as to condemn them. Greig (1923) gives many more including Joubert who suggests that we laugh from the heart and not from the brain at something so ugly but deserving of pity. Robortello (in Lauter 1964) discussed the differences between tragedy and comedy, relying on the assumption that comedy is fictitious while tragedy may refer to real people and places. By avoiding real people, comedy starts to depend on the stereotype and conventional character—the trend is towards the social rather than the individual. He also classifies comedy by reference to a turning-point in the play: up until then is complication and confusion, thereafter is the denouement when matters may be resolved and clarified.

1. In this section, and the ones that follow, the works of Greig (1923), Piddington (1933), Bergler (1956), and Lauter (1964) make several appearances. The first three all contain lengthy reviews and where original sources could not be consulted they have been poached. The intention is not to be exhaustive but neither is it to be unnecessarily cursory and authors who have had something to say have been included as far as possible. This does, of course, mean that any errors or prejudices are replicated in the poaching. Where original sources were found the bibliographic date refers to the edition; when found, it was possible to check with the first three books for accuracy and fairness with no adverse results. Lauter contains many reprints without textual annotation and has proved a most valuable storehouse of material.

2. Maggi stresses the element of surprise: "...in ridiculous things wonder cannot be separated from laughter...for those base things which are familiar do not cause laughter". (in Lauter 1964;69,70)
According to Watson (1933), Rabelais

"...constantly reminds us that laughter has great hygienic properties, and although his hint in the 'Gargantua' prologue that the merry outside contains matters of importance within has been responsible for much heated speculation as to his 'hidden purpose', it is to be noted that he concludes this prologue with an exhortation always to frolic." (17-18)

The exhortation, derived from Aristotle, being the often quoted

"One inch of joy surmounts of grief a span,
Because to laugh is proper to the man."

With more regard to comedy rather than laughter we have the words of Sir John Harrington1 and Sir Philip Sidney (both from Greig 1923:230). The former urges 'that comedies may make men see and shame at their own faults'; the latter proposes that

"Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which (the comic poet) representeth in the most ridiculous and scornful sort that may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."

The notion of comedy as a mirror reflecting those human foibles which are worthy of derision now seems well entrenched. Even Jonson's celebrated expansion of the medieval 'humour' has much the same basis - when men become possessed by an overwhelming attribute, they become ridiculous and comedy should free them through inward reflection.

Jonson assigns a low place to laughter in comedy

"Nor is the moving of laughter always the end of comedy; that is rather a fowling for the people's delight, or their foolish. For, as Aristotle says rightly, the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy." (in Rodway 1975:105)

Both 'Everyman in his Humour' and 'Everyman out of his Humour' deal with follies; comedy must restore the balance when one of the humours is exaggerated. This may be opposed by Dryden's view that 'the chief end of (comedy) is divristertainment and delight' (in Lauter 1964:201) and that any instruction as to social behaviour is entirely secondary.

1. Sir John Harrington (or Harington) apparently both amused and annoyed Queen Elizabeth with his satires; the publication of 'The Metamorphosis of Ajax' earned him banishment from Court.
The Seventeenth Century and Beyond

Having quoted some examples from Lauter's useful collection, it is only fair to let the man speak for himself:

"...the English audience, unlike the French, became increasingly bourgeois as the eighteenth century wore on...it did not care about classical 'rules'...comedy drew its subject matter from the lives of contemporaries whose positions in society and politics would not render the consequences of their actions serious."

(1964:191)

Of the French audience at that time no comment is made here; of French writers the following may be added.

Descartes (1649) deals with both laughter and comedy, the former being principally a sign of joy coupled with another emotion such as surprise or hostility (and Descartes supports this by what now appears to be an archaic physiological analysis). We laugh when we are indignant that something dear to us is threatened. When we realise that the threat is non-existent or insufficient to cause harm the sense of hostility against a minor evil breaks out in laughter and joy. This process can be represented on the stage just as in 'real' life; comedy has a moral base.

This is certainly echoed by Moliere in the Preface to Tartuffe:

"If it be the aim of comedy to correct man's vices, then I do not see for what reason there should be a privileged class... Reprehensions are easily suffered but not so ridicule."

(in Lauter 1964:157)

Madame de Stael, politically motivated during her exile from Napoleonic France, is able to discern different types of joking and comedy in the literature of different countries - apparently, nothing will reveal the customs and attitudes of a country better than the character of the writing (from Lauter).

Piddington deals with Rousseau's 'Lettre a D'Alembert' (which argued against the establishment of a theatre in Geneva). Rousseau contended that because public performances reflect the dominating character-
istics of the civilisation in which they are produced only subjects already regarded as immoral will be condemned. As, by implication, the established morals are supported he could not see comedy in the theatre as an agent for change.

Of all the post-classical writers, Hobbes has received the greatest attention. His work, originally published as part of Leviathan in 1651, has inspired numerous theorists of laughter and comedy. Almost all the work on ethnic humour, for example, in recent years owes much to Hobbesian 'superiority' and the idea that we laugh at others. Though this triumphal aspect of laughter had been suggested before there is a certain force and fluency to Hobbes (which may justify the length of the following):

"There is a passion which hath no name, but the sign of it is that distortion of the countenance we call laughter, which is always joy...That it consisteth in wit, or, as they call it, in the jest, this experience confuteth: for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein there lieth no wit or jest at all. And forasmuch as the same thing is no more ridiculous when it groweth stale or usual, whatsoever it be that moveth laughter, it must be new and unexpected. Men laugh often...at their own actions performed never so little beyond their own expectation; as also at their own jests: and in this case it is manifest, that the passion of laughter proceedeth from a sudden conception of some ability in himself that laugheth. Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison of which their own abilities are set off and illustrated. Also men laugh at jests, the wit whereof always consisteth in the elegant discovering and conveying to our minds some absurdity or another. And in this case also the passion of laughter proceedeth from the sudden imagination of our own odds and eminence...I may therefore conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but a sudden glory arising from the sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmities of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour. It is no wonder therefore that men take it heinously to be laughed at or derided, that is, triumped over. Laughter without offence, must be at absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons, and where all the company may laugh together."

(1923:31-32)

The approach of Hobbes places laughter firmly in the realm of the

1. For example, Bain (1888), Leacock (1935), Carus (1897), and Sihis (1913). A case for including most of the psychological work could easily be made.
social. We laugh at others, we do not like to be laughed at ourselves; infirmities and absurdities are found in other people. There is also the laughter 'where all the company' may join in; Freud's distinction between tendentious and harmless wit appears to be pre-dated. How the Hobbesian model has been employed with regard to ethnic humour will be examined in the next chapter.

According to Hazlitt (1819), Locke borrowed extensively from Hobbes though failed to acknowledge the fact. Locke, writing in 1690, concerns himself mainly with wit and draws the following line between it and judgement:

"For WIT lying mostly in the assemblage of ideas and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; JUDGMENT, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another...(on wit) the mind, without looking any further, rests satisfied with the agreeableness of the picture and the gaiety of the fancy." (1947;59-60)

Addison (1711) drew genealogies in the Spectator (number 35) to distinguish wit from laughter. The two lines can be summarised as

Falsehood - Nonsense - Frenzy and Laughter - False Humour

Truth - Good Sense - Wit and Mirth - Humour

In number 47 he follows Hobbes completely: 'Every one laughs at some body that is in an inferior state of folly to himself' (Lauter 1964;242). The elements of surprise and delight should be involved. In number 494 we are told 'If we may believe our logicians, man is distinguished from all other creatures by the faculty of laughter'.

The Earl of Chesterfield has nothing good to say about laughter; according to Boston (1974; chapter 8) the same view was expressed by Pepys, George Herbert, Voltaire, and Swift. From the Earl's letters to his son (written in 1748) the following may be assembled:

"True wit or good sense never excited a laugh since the creation
of the world...having mentioned laughter I must particularly warn you against it and I could heartily wish that you may often be seen to smile, but never to laugh while you may live. Frequent and loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill-manners...in my mind there is nothing so illiberal and so ill-bred, as audible laughter."
(1969; letters 144,146 and 9th. March 1748)
The Reverend Sydney Smith takes much from Locke. For example, the difference between an Irish bull and true wit is that the former is an apparent congruity in an incongruity of ideas while the latter is real congruity in an apparent incongruity of ideas (from Bergler 1956). Smith is, perhaps, better remembered for his comment that 'It requires a surgical operation to get a joke well into a Scotch understanding' (Oxford Dictionary of Quotations).

Doctor Johnson defines comedy as '...such a dramatic representation of human life as may excite mirth' (Lauter 1964:254) and wit as a combination of dissimilar images. Congreve, as a practitioner, defines humour as

"A singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything, peculiar and Natural to one Man only; by which his speech and actions are distinguished from those of other Men."
(Felheim 1962:200)

Echoes of the medieval concept are clearly present though this definition also, to some extent, may be seen as a forerunner to Bergson.

For Beattie, the essence of wit and laughter resides in incongruity:

"Laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them...the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be." (1776:343-349)

Haslitt also keeps a notion of incongruity and develops the principle to cover humour and comedy as well as wit:

"The essence of the laughable, then, is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another." (1819; 1963:7)
He also gives

"Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be...we laugh at what only disappoints our expectations in trifles." (1963;5)

With Hazlitt, the triple alliance of wit and comedy and humour (so central to Freud's work) has now become established and the distinctions between them made well-ordered and precise:

"Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing of it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else. Humour is, as it were, the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy." (15)

Comedy is placed squarely in, and for, society. It works through 'constantly and successfully exposing the follies and excesses of mankind to ridicule', such ridicule being

"...necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims, whether right or wrong. It is, therefore, a fair test, if not of philosophical or abstract truth, at least of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense; for it can only expose to instantaneous contempt that which is condemned by public opinion, and is hostile to the common sense of mankind...it is the test of the quantity of truth that there is in our favourite prejudices." (20)

Hazlitt has supplied, for humour and wit, a philosophical precis for much of the psychological work reviewed in the previous chapter; however, with few exceptions, that work has ignored the leads contained in the last quotation. Indeed, many of the Nineteenth Century writers appear to have pre-figured many of the hypotheses supposedly verified by modern experiment. The difference is that the former rely upon experience and intuition, interpretation and informed commentary rather than on, and this admittedly a very crude summary, the mirth-ratings of first-year psychology students or an eye-witness account of the battle between the ego and superego. It is not even that the two approaches are talking about different things: wit, humour, comedy, and laughter are interrelated; not so much by the fact that the first three may cause the fourth but by
a wider concept of how man relates to society, perceives and understands his obligations and roles, maintains or changes groups and categories, and applauds or derides his fellows. But, for the moment, back to the Nineteenth Century.

Coleridge maintains incongruity as a necessary part of wit:

"Perhaps the most important of our intellectual operations are those of detecting the difference in similar, and the identity in dissimilar, things. Out of the latter operation it is that wit arises..." (1885 edition;121)

While Coleridge's drift is to specific discussion of certain authors he does provide a formula which is exact and potentially far-reaching in its applicability

"I would suggest that whenever a finite is contemplated in reference to the infinite, whether consciously or unconsciously, humour essentially arises." (1885;125)

There is an element of the Johnsonian perspective here - the laughable as that which fails to match up to the ideal expectation. A man controlled by his 'humour' will not reach his full potential and there is an implied lack of adaptation to circumstances which demand freedom from predestined forces.

The concept of degradation follows a fairly straight line from Hobbes to, for example, Bain (1388). Meredith argues for a move from derision and superiority to a more 'civilised' response to humour and the humorous - the test of true comedy is that it 'shall awaken thoughtful laughter' (1895;88). He suggests that the type of comedy found in any society is directly linked to the amount of equality between the sexes. The more equality (and the more civilised a society is) the more the true spirit of comedy can flourish. If there is gross inequality, he suggests that

...the poor voice allowed to women in German domestic life will account for the absence of comic dialogues reflecting upon life in that land...where the veil is over women's faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous
and the Comic spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst." (1895:58-59)

It does seem important to accept that the type of comedy found in any given time or place is certain to reflect the structure of that particular society. Sociologically, this is a truism but it is one that has often been overlooked by those seekers after universal truths in their attempts to relate the laughter of the tickled child to Shakespearean wit or Jonsonian humour. It depends really on how much importance one gives to laughter in the scheme of things. One can either take laughter as a response to any number of stimuli and reason that all those causes have something in common; or one can argue that the relationship goes beyond basic stimulus-response by starting with the premise that 'no man is an island'. If the metaphor may be stretched, it is the channels separating the islands that have been the subject of psychological enquiry and not the ocean of which they are a part.

Finally, brief mention may be made of Ralph Waldo Emerson; his contribution to the debate can be summarised by two extracts (originally from 1843):

"The essence of all jokes, of all comedy, seems to be an honest or well-intended halfness; a non-performance of what is pretended to be performed, at the same time that one is giving loud pledges of performance" (in Lauter 1964:378)
"Comedy is in the intellect's perception of discrepancy." (380)

Here again is the notion of incongruity; there are also echoes of Coleridge if 'halfness' is equated with the gap between the finite and the infinite.

**European Contributions**

Incongruity also forms a large part of the Continental perspective, often coupled with another element. Kant, for example, relies on a pseudo-physiological explanation. Laughter is
"...an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing...bringing about an equilibrium of the vital powers of the body."

(1790; from Fiddington 1933)

The activity may be enjoyed for its own sake; it is fairly harmless and represents a mood of play or lack of serious intention.

For Schopenhauer, incongruity is central. He writes of

"...the abstract conviction of the impossibility of an angle between the circumference of a circle and a tangent; and if now such an angle lies visibly before us on paper, this will easily excite a smile. The ludicrousness in this case is exceedingly weak." (1819;1948;272)

'Exceedingly weak' may be an understatement (especially if one pictures the 'joke') but at least an approach based on incongruity has the advantage of being able to deal with those varieties of humour which superiority analyses must ignore: punning, nonsense, and children's joking (bar that noted in the previous chapter).

Schopenhauer, however, also manages to retain a notion of triumph in that 'this victory of knowledge of perception over thought affords us pleasure' (1948;279). This may explain why laughing is an enjoyable activity. The stimulus, in every case, is

"...the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity. It often occurs in this way: two or more real objects are thought through one concept, and the identity of the concept is transferred to the objects...in the case of the witticism the identity is in the concept, the difference in the reality, but in the case of the pun, the difference is in the concept and the identity in the reality." (1948;76,79)

Schopenhauer is not concerned with social bases or reasons for the incongruous save for a brief reference to relations between the sexes as affording easy material for joking (1948;281). He deals with concepts and realities, identities and categories in the abstract, divorced from social context. Consequently, he would find it difficult to give a convincing answer to Kant's question of why no-one would laugh if a man's hair turned grey through worry
but they would if his wig did. Milner (1972) suggests that Schopenhauer's explanation might be that for most purposes the one concept of 'hair' is sufficient to subsume ordinary and false varieties. When it is implied that emotion can change the colour of false hair we suddenly realise that our understanding of a wig as totally within 'hair' is wrong, and this realisation is manifested in laughter.

Other writers have dealt with comedy as opposed to laughter within a framework of incongruity. Thus, Hegel writes

"...inasmuch as the comic element wholly and from the first depends upon contradictory contrasts, not only of ends themselves on their own account, but also of their content as opposed to the contingency of the personal life and external condition, the action of comedy requires a resolution with even more stringency than the tragic drama. In other words, in the action of comedy the contradiction between that which is essentially true and its specific realisation is more fundamentally asserted."

(1820; from Lauter 1964:353)

This needs some comment. Hegel is not writing about ideals which are highlighted because comic fails to attain them. He is concerned with social realities and the comic interpretation of them by way of contrast. While Hegel is not specifically dealing with joking as such it is possible to see a joke as setting up two versions of the same event of subject (the 'real' and the 'comic') with the contradiction resolved in the punchline. The real is freely asserted (wigs do not turn grey) and the comic is laughable. If comedy proceeds in opposition to the 'real' view of society then it is implicit that its intentions are to instruct and correct, to redraw the line between what is acceptable and what is not.

Baudelaire is closely allied to Hegelian contradiction but introduces further dimensions. He asserts that laughter arises from a comparison between superiority and inferiority. It is diabolical in the literal sense of the word:

"Laughter is satanic and, therefore, profoundly human. It is born of Man's conception of his own superiority. Since it is
essentially human, it is also essentially contradictory, that is to say it is at once a sign of infinite grandeur and of infinite wretchedness." (1855; 1956; 117)

The sense of grandeur is caused by our comparison with animals and lesser men, wretchedness by comparison with God and the absolute. It is the continuous clash between these two perspectives that generates laughter for

"...if Man were absent from creation, there would no longer be any such thing as the comic, for animals do not regard themselves as being superior to vegetables, nor vegetables as superior to minerals." (1956; 118)

Baudelaire anticipates the criticism that his suggestion cannot deal with children's laughter by drawing a distinction between laughter and joy. The former is only applicable to the thinking adults who are aware of something greater than mere incongruity - the sudden meeting of two dimensions of infinite magnitude.

Other nineteenth century writers can be found in Lauter (Richter 1804, von Schlegel 1808, Lippe 1898) and their contributions are not considered here in any depth: Richter places the comic always in the subject, never the object while von Schlegel sees comedy as sharpening our powers of discrimination. Lippe characterises comedy as something acting large but turning out to be insignificant - a mountain labouring to bring forth a mouse.

There is also a particularly French contribution. Dumont (in Fiddington), for example, claims that laughter arises when we are confronted with a proposition that calls for simultaneous denial or affirmation.

Leveque (1863), however, criticises this view, arguing that we either affirm or deny and it is psychologically impossible to do both at the same time. If we are faced with a contradiction we affirm one part of it by laughter. Melinand (1895) notes two distinct acts in the appreciation of the ludicrous: that there is a contradiction, and that the contradiction is not fundamental. For example, a man trying to
open an unlocked door is both absurd and natural at the same time. When something cannot be placed in a familiar mental category, or belongs to two mutually exclusive categories, we are shocked by the absurdity. As we realise that it is also natural (remembering that we, too, have tried to force unlocked doors) we laugh at the pleasure gained from the discovery of the rational in the absurd. Penjon (1893) effectively ignores incongruity and contradiction in taking the essential element to be a feeling of liberty. As human freedom is constantly under threat anything that maintains liberty will induce 'joie de vivre'. Laughter ensues from a release from pressures (which is traced back, through inspired guesswork, to the satisfaction of hunger). In contrast, Dupreel (1928) treats the 'problem' of laughter as a purely sociological one. He distinguishes two forms of laughter: that of exclusion and that of inclusion, the former expressing opposition and the latter solidarity. Laughter acts to express boundaries between social groups and strengthens bonds between members of the same group; when laughter is at another group, solidarity and exclusivity are emphasised.1

Theoretical Varieties: Into the Twentieth Century

A number of writers maintained an evolutionary approach in their discussions of laughter. Crile, for example, uses the principle of an 'adaptive mechanism' (1916); laughter is a relic of struggle and becomes a substitute for the actual assault. The motor activity required to carry out the attack is interrupted and laughter completes the action. Kallen (1911) also takes the idea of a frustrated menace and suggests that we smile and laugh when the 'threat' is realised as non-existent and order is restored. Ludovici (1932) uses the

1. Dupreel properly belongs to the next chapter but has been included here for convenience.
analogy of "superior adaptation" and gives one example as the absence of laughter when an old woman falls over (we do not, apparently, need to show our superiority); the act of smiling, when teeth are shown, is a vestige from our primeval life.

Leacock may also be considered within a sub-evolutionary framework. He maintains (1935) that laughter began as a primitive shout of triumph but has been 'civilised' over a period of time to the stage where the triumph is theoretical rather than practical - even puns are seen as a triumph over words and reason. The most civilised humour is that which deals with the incongruity of life itself.

Sidle employs the idea of Spencerian excess:

"Then we expect the normal and are adjusted to respond to it by an amount of energy, and then the subnormal is discovered, the amount of energy that is left over goes into the overflow, giving rise to laughter...in fact, we may say that any release of reserve energy is the source of all laughter." (1913;68)

oron also asserts that laughter is a demobilisation of instinctive forces which have been brought together in preparation for a reaction though this is not central to his theme. His major point is that laughter is always in the subject rather than the object - because we do not all laugh at the same thing, the cause of laughter can only be determined by introspection. Further,

"...laughter can only result from the action of two processes within ourselves: the impulse to activity or cognition and the check to that activity on re-cognition, the re-cognition operating in the reverse direction. There is, then, a conflict of two opposite impulses; the impulse to proceed and the impulse to draw back." (1931;36-37)

Other writers have used other approaches and moved somewhat away from an evolutionary dimension.

Hoffding deals with humour; great humour springs from a true understanding of both the small and the great tragedies of life

"Only he who neither exults nor fears has won complete victory over himself and the world...In humour we feel great and small at the same time, and sympathy makes laughter humorous, just as it changes fear into reverence" (1891;298)
Man must develop an understanding of the sublime and the ridiculous; humour is essentially a way of looking at life. Lilly draws a distinction between, effectively, humour and wit: "The laugh of the soul and the laugh of the body are distinct. Only a gross superficial analysis will confound them" (1896); Beerbohm suggests that there is a parallel between laugh: smile and young: old (1920). The best laughter arises from, for example, seeing a great man deflated and the old: we get the fewer men we regard as great. He also gives a list (1922) of suitable subjects for jokes headed by mothers-in-law and hen-pecked husbands and the whole tone of this essay is rather derogatory - the 'public' is treated as a large entity of low intelligence.

"Unless a joke be labelled 'Comic. Come! Why don't you laugh?' the public is quite silent. Violence and obviousness are thus the essential factors" (1922:253)

Beerbohm, however, actually makes some valid points; he notes that music-halls and comic papers establish a frame of reference so that anything seen or read in them is already defined as comic, and that for wider audiences the sorts of joke gravitate towards a lowest common denominator of basic subjects.1

For Eastman (1921, 1937) the central element in all forms of the laughable is play; when something could be taken seriously but is not

"...it is the unpleasant in general which, when taken playfully, is enjoyed as funny... our sense of humour is instinctive" (1937:25,42)

1. Simmel, without referring to humour discusses this matter. A conversation between two people can touch on a wide range of subjects; as a third joins there are alterations; as the group grows there are restrictions on the range of subject matter (1951:112-3). It is obvious but important.
The structure of a joke is two-fold - a sensible and rational line is started and then suddenly switched, but the end result must retain some notion of sensibility. Eastman is not at all impressed by Freud or other theorists (especially those stressing superiority or degradation) as they all ignore the laughter of babies who react in and not to a playful situation. Eastman's consistent emphasis on instinct and play tends to lead up blind alleys; he is persistent in his denial of any derision in joking - in satire, for instance, it is the 'trick', the conjunction of two previously disparate ideas, that makes us laugh rather than the derision. He analyses in depth the headline and joke: 'Mexican general escapes net and flees/' 'Any Mexican who can escape fleas is beyond catching' without any reference to what appears as blatant derision of a particular race. Only in passing are we told that the joke was originally from the time of the United States/Mexican war; this intentional myopia from Eastman is seen most clearly in his attack on Freud as Eastman will not countenance the tendentious content of many jokes. A joke is only funny because of the trick it performs while we are in a play mood; derision has no place whatsoever.

Alternative approaches:

(1) The Writers

Those who have written humorous books often have something to say on the subject as do critics who are better known as writers. Since the amount of literature is enormous a selective scythe has been employed.

Mark Twain (1904) attempts to draw distinctions between material that is witty, humorous or comic and attributes various nationalities to them. Robert Graves does much the same thing in trying to define an English Sense of Humour but undercuts his argument by
claiming that, 'Humour, it must be said at once, is first of all a personal matter...' (1928;9). Chesterton has:

"Nothing can be funnier, properly considered, than the fact that one's own father is a pigmy if he stands far enough off. Perspec-
tive really is the comic element of things" (in Gregory 1924;227)

and the often-quoted

"'other people make the jokes: I see them' 'The Twentieth Century' (1961;7)

Orwell on the other hand, takes a more consistently sociological approach. He identifies with 'a part of western European consciousness' (1941;154), and points to the conventional and recurrent subjects depicted: marriage only benefits women, there is no such thing as a happy marriage, sex appeal vanishes at the age of twenty-
five, and so on. The overall impression is one of obscenity in relation to a fairly strict moral code with the permanence of marriage at the core:

"Codes of law and morals, or religious systems, never have much room in them for a humorous view of life. Whatever is funny is subversive, every joke is ultimately a custard pie, and the reason why so large a proportion of jokes centre round obscenity is simply that all societies...have to insist on a fairly high standard of sexual morality. A dirty joke is not, of course, a serious attack upon morality, but it is a sort of mental rebell-
ion, a momentary wish that things were otherwise" (1941;161)

Joking can best be seen, then, as licensed rebellion, not as revolution; the anthropological evidence (discussed in the next chapter) that this is the case is overwhelming. It also runs true common sensically for a number of reasons. Firstly, the occasions are rare when public joking is seen as a threat to society. Individuals may certainly be attacked, racial groups or other classifications may feel threatened but the joking is sanitised to a large extent by media broadcasting and couched in terms of 'this is not serious, this is play'. Secondly, certain actions, behaviours, and characteristics are held up not for admiration or instruction but for derision and ridicule. In attacking a particular set of actions there is an implicit support for the socially acceptable alternative. Thirdly,
joking works best by quickly, if not immediately, achieving consensus among a group of people. As Burns (1953) puts it: 'In all societies, the joke is the short cut to consensus' (657) - he is referring to the way banter and joking are used to cover status conflicts which would otherwise interrupt or hamper social interaction. The point, however, can be extended to suggest that an audience's acceptance of a joke's content also implies acceptance of the latent statement that the joke is making about society.

George Mikes, as a self-stated humorous writer, deplores the decline of true humour as it has been overtaken by professional laughter-makers in hot pursuit of money but with no concern for the human condition (which true humour should reflect and comment upon):

"...it does make a difference in the intellectual climate of the world whether James Thurber or Harry Worth is the representative of its lighter moods; whether its favourite reading is Evelyn Waugh or the comic strip." (1970:4)

For Mikes, the two essential ingredients of humour are wisdom and self-mockery; an ability to understand life while retaining a sense of proportion. The proper reaction to humour is the reflective smile. The response to, for example, Thurber may also produce audible laughter if the humour is good enough though this should be distinguished from the laughter of the masses:

"...the television companies who mix laughter into their tapes are no fools. People do laugh at good humour and noise is audible and measurable, smiles and inner enjoyment are not. The loudness of laughter is misleading as a measure of value, but not as a measure of successful entertainment." (1970:37)

An audience laughing, then, indicates that the point has been made, that the communication has been satisfactorily completed. A joke received in total silence has failed to achieve consensus; the laugh completes the cycle and the audience is united by a common reaction.
Anthologies of favourite jokes, witticisms, and puns are thick on the ground; treasuries of limericks, howlers, and anecdotes are regularly published. A small proportion of these deal briefly with theoretical aspects. Ianinos (1952), for example, collected cartoons, jokes, and stories from different countries in an attempt to systematically codify humour in a cross-cultural grid. No precise correlations were made but overall the book strongly suggests that such differences as exist may be attributed to nationality—the English preferring discreet humour, the Germans that which is dour and heavy, and the French (including the author) that of an intellectual nature. While this sort of analysis may be disputed it does, unintentionally, strengthen the suggestion that jokes reflect the social system.

A more persuasive approach is taken by Pearesall (1975). He examined Victorian humour across a wide spectrum which included jokes, comic songs, sketches and cartoons and attempted to establish links between the material and the structure of Victorian society. Typical subjects set up to be laughed at were the nouveau riche, the working class 'Arry and 'Arriet, anybody committing a social gaffe while 'the theme of the incompetent and careless servants extends throughout the whole of the period' (33). The greatest distinctions were drawn between the comfortable middle-class (such as the readers of Punch) and the working-class, and the humour consumed by the former constantly expressed their superiority over the latter. The indigenous working-class, however, were seen

1 Rover (1967) has attempted the same sort of approach in trying to trace and record the women's rights movements through cartoons in Punch. Her collection of jokes and anecdotes has no concept whatsoever of the movement's history outside the pages of Punch; neither does she consider the readership, the editorial process or the cartoonists.
as superior to negroes. For Pearsall, the humorous material of the period (much of it undercover and vulgar) sheds a good deal of light on the way the creators and consumers saw their society ordered and regulated.

Onyeama, writing of black humour, suggests that

"...no ghetto has been able to keep the wretched black from laughing or from exercising the only weapon he has - his wit"

(1975;3)

While this echoes the Freudian concept of Jewish humour (especially as expanded by Reik and Grotjahn) it also introduces, perhaps unintentionally, the point that wit as a form of defence may obviate the need for more positive action. A witty response or a joke may alleviate repression but it may also divert attention from the root causes of discrimination or encourage reluctant acceptance of the situation. Further, Onyeama's collection (which is largely an uneasy mix of self-disparagement jokes and witty quips) is divorced from social usage; he fails to recognise that printed jokes become public currency and the element of self-disparagement may easily become derision through a variety of contexts and joke-tellers.

Legman stresses the social aggression that may underlie joke-telling:

"...our society allows infinite aggressions, by everyone and against everyone. In the culminating laugh by the listener or observer - whose position is often really that of victim or butt - the teller of the joke betrays his hidden hostility and signals his victory by being, theoretically at least, the one person present who does not laugh." (1969;9)

The word 'theoretically' is crucial here because in practice the joke-teller invariably laughs or smiles to signify that the intention is humorous. Of course, if jokes are seen as puzzle-solving then the laugh of the joke-teller may demonstrate that this is a humorous solution; further, if the joke-teller does feel superior (and shows it by not laughing) then could not this feeling arise from being 'in the know' rather than hostility? Legman, however, pursues the theme of hostility through nearly 2000 'dirty' jokes (and the theme is
continued in a later work (1975)).

For Asimov (1971) the operation of humour relies on esteem and disparagement though his 'Treasury' really is little more than a haphazard collection. In a more systematic exercise Winick (1976) attempted to define

"...the nature of the communication represented by jokes in American life and...the subjects of jokes" (124)

He organised a panel of associates over a 20 year period; they regularly reported jokes they had heard together with various details (age and sex of teller, nature of the audience, and so on). Between 1970 and 1975 nearly 3000 jokes were categorised; the top three groups were 'other' 27%, 'sexual' 15%, and 'ethnic/racial' 12%.

Having noted the restrictions that public broadcasting imposes on the transmission of certain types of material, he concludes that

"A joke reflects social attitudes and provides a vehicle through which people can voice feelings for which there is no socially acceptable or easily accessible outlet...by its very brevity, a joke cannot fully reflect the complexities of social life but only deals with one dimension of a situation." (1976:125,126)

If humour is a way of bringing significant problems down to manageable size, as Winick suggests, then joking may be seen as a response to problematic areas of social interaction.

Further Contributions: New Theories

It is proposed to deal with four writers in this section, all of whom have written books with different approaches; they have had something new to express or at the very least have re-worked previous analyses with fresh insight.

Bergson seems to be the most widely read and quoted author after Freud. Most other writers on the subject refer to him and a number

1. Cross-cultural research has been usefully reviewed by Goldstein (1977) and by Shulitz (1977); each gives examples of joke and riddle collections ranging from Turkey to Greenland and China to Mexico.
have undertaken full reviews (for example, Lloyd (1922), Edwards (1926), and Victoroff (1953)). It should be noted at this stage that the Bergsonian theory of laughter is a reflection of his general philosophy that intuition rather than logic and reasoned argument is the key to any attempt to understand man. Consequently, for him any analysis that breaks down jokes and then examines their constituent parts in order to comprehend the whole is unlikely to be fruitful. Rather, one should accept, prima facie, that some things are intuitively seen as funny or comic and then examine what they have in common.

Bergson's central argument is that the laughable is 'something mechanical encrusted on the living' (1911:37)¹ and that the comic effect is one of 'automatism and...inelasticity' (18). Society is suspicious of rigidity in thought or action as it suggests an inability or unwillingness to adapt and adjust. Laughter is the corrective measure which derides those who exhibit these asocial traits. Laughter has social significance, it is a social gesture in response to an intuitively felt attack on society. Laughter at a deformity or a caricature is laughter at that which is fixed and permanent; laughing at impressionists, for example, relies on their capture of features which are mechanical and repetitive. Leaving nonsense and children's humour aside (as Bergson for the most part does) it is hard to think of comic examples which cannot be placed within his framework. For Bergson, 'we laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing' (58) unless a sympathetic involvement or angry reaction intervenes. Rigidity alone will not suffice, contrast is all important.

¹ Bergson's work first appeared in instalments in the Revue de Paris in 1900 and published as a book in the same year by Alcan. All references are to the authorised English translation (1911).
impression of a mechanical arrangement." (69)

It therefore follows that the laughable is always animate. Bergson, in fact, narrows it down to the human as even when we laugh at animals it is because we discover a degree of mechanical humanity in them.

According to Bergson, it is possible to place most experiences of the comic into one of three categories. 'Repetition' or 'transposition' whereby predictability runs its natural course or is artificially changed to a new sort of predictability. 'Inversion' as when the robber is robbed or the child lectures its parents. The 'reciprocal interference of series' when a situation belongs simultaneously to two independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in either of them (and here, stage-made coincidences are called to mind). The three categories may appear to have little to do with mechanisation but were chosen by Bergeon to oppose (as mechanisation does) the three defining elements of developing life; respectively, continuous evolution, irreversibility of the order of phenomena, and the individuality of self-contained series. So far ground, perhaps, can be reached by returning to the original proposition that

"...the comic expresses, above all else, a special lack of adaptability to society...in laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate, and consequently to correct our neighbour, if not in his will, at least in his deed...it is rigidity that society eyes with suspicion." (133,136,138)

Comedy will tend towards the general, tragedy and art towards the individual. For the social corrective of laughter to work best as many people as possible should be reached; therefore the generality of the comic exists at a level of maximum understanding.

If Bergson is correct, then a great many other writers must have totally missed the point. However, the equations 'mechanism = asocial behavior' and 'laughter = correction' may be too simplistic for a number of reasons. Laughter is not always derivative and may
signify acceptance, agreement, and approval. Comic 'butts' may be laughed at or laughed with as Chaplin and Keaton have demonstrated. Certainly, with television situation comedies in the recording studios, the audience is urged into pleasureable laughter which acts not to condemn the characters but to side with them in the face of adversity. This is not to deny the existence of derisive laughter (which would totally undermine much of this work's leaning) but merely to allow for a wider basis of interpretation. The distinction between laughing at and laughing with remains valid and the two types may happily co-exist. While attending a recording of an episode of *Minder* at a BBC studio the writer, along with the rest of the audience was encouraged to actually like the leading characters, to laugh long and loud when they made witty (scripted) remarks, and to be generally supportive. At the same recording, a particularly fat actor in a relatively minor role was shown on film in a pair of ill-fitting swimming trunks. Laughter that was plainly derisive broke out and the actor, present in the studio for the 'live' part of the script was somewhat disconcerted.

In addition, the equation between mechanism and asocial behaviour is not completely convincing. A large degree of conformity and acting in accordance with expectations are prerequisites of social interaction. A term such as 'pillar of society' implies not only rigidity and solid dependability but also invites admiration. The concept of mechanism is, though, too useful to ignore just as humour in the medieval sense still has a part to play. Both are, of course, really concerned with the same human attributes whether they be an overwhelming trait, a vice carried to extremes, ignorance of social conventions, or the general feeling that one is not in control of one's destiny. While tragedy may purport to show Man as subject to Fate there is always the element of
choice in which the central character willingly takes a certain step which will eventually lead to his downfall. Tragedy concerns itself with individual action and Man as a free agent subjected to various forces, and the reaction to those forces determines the outcome. Comedy deals with man subject to their own particular persuasions and caught up in a society which demands from them traits which they do not possess (such as honour, obedience, compassion or whatever) but should strive to do so. The weight of their own particular burden, their humour which stamps them as gluttons or cowards, their lack of positive action to new situations will militate against individuality and stress the social context.

Exceptions, naturally enough, exist. Creations ranging from Falstaff to Alf Garnett all suggest a sense of individuality and of uniqueness. In defence of the general argument, however, it may be suggested that the more a comic character takes on a 'life' of his own the greater will be the possibility for pathos rather than bathos, the likelier the introduction of serious scenes, and the potential for an unhappy ending or one that is left hanging and unresolved is introduced. Tragi-comedy is a fairly useless and ugly conglomerate but is sufficient to describe this middle ground. There is a difference between Till Death Us Do Part and The Liver Birds which ultimately derives from the creation of characters who are allowed to think and act in more than one dimension. One can, of course, still see Garnett's prejudices as something mechanical encrusted on the living; for many other characters in situation comedies the phrase may read something mechanical encrusted on the undead.

For Bergson, the sole purpose of laughter is correction; it may be preferable, rather, to take correction as a major element. Statements are made about people, events, and relationships in society and are
held up for public comment within a pattern of cues which determine
that laughter would be an appropriate response if the way the subject
matter has been handled is agreed. Exactly how 'correct' is
carried out is difficult to discover, if it is carried out at all.
Obviously, a social gaffe which draws laughter onto the perpetrator
may reduce the likelihood of the same mistake being made again but
this line does not translate easily to, for example, television. The
most appealing explanation appears to be that laughter acts to
reinforce previously held views, to concretise opinions, and to
achieve the short cut to consensus that Burns (1953) mentions. That
laughter is pleasurable seems beyond doubt save for the odd medical
or physical condition. That messages received in such an atmosphere
are readily acceptable seems likely\(^1\). Whether laughter acts as a
conservative agent in its reinforcement is debatable. Certainly, jokes
or sketches may innovate, new matters may be thrown open for public
debate or private consideration, and changes in attitude may be
reflected or initiated.

1. Experimental studies include Lull (1940), Priest (1966), and
Priest and Abrahams (1970). Lull used a prepared speech on 'state
medicine' and presented it to his subjects (students of Purdue
and Wisconsin Universities) with or without humorous padding.
Persuasiveness was measured by changes in attitude to the subject
of state medicine with the conclusion that 'Humorous and non-
humorous approaches were judged about equally interesting and equally
convincing... '(39). The conclusion goes against that which appears
to be intrinsically true - that messages taken enjoyably will also
be received favourably. It is not so much a question of the pill
being sugar-coated as the pill being made of sugar itself. Priest
and Priest and Abraham discovered that political affiliation could
predict accurately how political jokes would be received.
Gruner (1976) has usefully reviewed the literature on this aspect
of humour and has the following:
"It certainly appears that the addition of humorous material
to otherwise straightforward persuasive message material does
not result in an increase in persuasiveness" (306)
The concentration of experimental studies on persuasion rather than
reinforcement reduces their relevance here.
The work on ethnic humour, shortly to be reviewed, tends to
suggest that reinforcement aspects may be strong in maintaining,
for example, barriers between groups and strengthening solidarity
of group members.
Koestler has criticised Bergson's analysis for not being able to account for experiences of the mechanical which do not cause laughter:

"...if rigidity contrasting with organic suppleness were laughable per se, Egyptian statues and bas-reliefs would be the best jokes ever invented. If automatic repetitiveness in human behaviour were a necessary and sufficient condition of the comic, there would be no more amusing spectacle than an epileptic fit, and if we wanted a good laugh, we would merely have to feel a person's pulse or listen to his heartbeat, with its monotonous tick-tack." (1949; 419-420)

To be fair to Bergson, he does realise the shortcomings in his theory though Koestler is correct in identifying this major flaw in his argument. A theory purporting to explain why laughter occurs should also be able to explain why it does not. Two points are relevant—one has been made before, the other is almost new.

Firstly, the pursuit of a single theory is probably misguided and this has been compounded by continued reliance on a simple cause and effect framework; further, the range of humorous material may be too broad and varied for reduction to a single element. Common elements which 'cause' laughter may be identified but it may be just as useful to stress the differences as it is to compare the similarities. Most of the works already reviewed have made criticisms of previous theories as being too single-minded but have then gone on to give definitive models of their own.

Secondly, and this stands as a general criticism, the comic process has been divorced from comic practice. To some extent, this is unavoidable in any written analysis, but it is simply not good enough to reduce a joke or script extract and then examine it without any understanding of the social backing and performance involved. A script extract from Hancock's Half Hour cannot be fully appreciated unless a mental picture of the performer can be drawn or his voice heard saying the lines. As a lump of comic material it can be compared with any other lump of comedy and theories.
may be developed along the lines of what the two may have in common as laughter-producing agents. In reality, either lump is invested with a wealth of additional contextualisation ranging from memories of the perform in past appearances to what programmes are on the other channels. The same principle applies to jokes and cartoons—when they are removed from context they are altered. While the punchline may still act as a resolution and the 'funniness' still be present, there is no life or vitality. Joking between individuals is only one aspect of the overall communication and this totality informs on the humour in a multitude of ways. One worthwhile attempt to restore the joke to context is that of Sacks (1974). He examines a joke, too lengthy to reproduce here, told by a teenage boy about fellatio and honeymoons which ends with the line 'It's rude to speak with your mouth full'. The joke could easily be transformed into a question and answer riddle but, as Sacks notes

"For the organisation of the joke and also of its telling we find that there is a single most decisive feature: the joke is built in the form of a story." (337)

The teller introduces the joke with the information that it is a joke, that he heard it from his sister, and that she told it 'last night' (and therefore the joke is 'new'). Throughout the whole of the narrative there are potential terminations. As the joke is introduced guesses are made ('It's not the one about...') and disassociations reserved ('I don't want to hear it, but if you must...'). As the narrative progresses there are interruptions, further guesses, clarifications, and checks that understanding is complete thus far. The teller laughs with the punchline and, with the joke as a test, the listeners laugh to confirm that the point has been made and understood.

Freudian analysis would stress the sexual aspects of the joke. It seems likely that Bergson would have found a link with a 'reciprocal
interference of series' and any admixture or combination of superiority and incongruity theories would produce an explanation within their own terms of why the joke raises laughter. In this case, a specific analysis of American adolescent joke-telling, they would all be wide of the mark. Their explanations may be sufficient to increase an understanding of the 'funniness' of the joke but will be stagnant without the smutty laughter of teenagers signalling comprehension.

The second writer to be reviewed is Piddington (1933); his useful summaries and criticisms of other theories have already been noted. As a social anthropologist, however, he has his own contribution to make based on the premise that laughter has the function of preventing a disturbance of social values. Piddington agrees with Bergson to a large extent but notes that rigidity may be too narrow a concept (ignoring, for example, the laugh of pleasure) and too wide as everything has some element of the mechanical. He concedesthat laughter may act as a social corrective for deviant behaviour but suggests that there must be something more (otherwise we could express our disapproval in a variety of alternative ways—by ignoring, punishing, ostracising deviants depending on the seriousness of the threat to society).

For Piddington, to understand laughter we must understand the ludicrous. He is rightly critical of the theorists who fall into the circular trap of saying that we laugh at the ludicrous, the ludicrous contains incongruous elements which make us laugh (though he only just escapes the same circularity). He argues that one can always distinguish two contradictory propositions in the ludicrous, these 'conflicting evaluations' being social in character. One is the ideal, the social norm, and the other is the real (the breach of that norm). At the same time, the ludicrous should not involve deep feelings which would prohibit laughter. Piddington gives the example of a pompous man
falling on a banana skin. We are allowed to laugh because he is pompous and also because he does not hurt himself seriously; the norm which is broken is that one should walk without falling over.

To explain the laughter occasioned by puns, Piddington relies on 'the context of situation' (Malinowski; reprinted 1966), taking 'when is a door not a door, when it's ajar' as his example. The explanation runs that the two contexts of 'ajar' and 'a jar' have conflicting social evaluations which are combined in the joke. The joke is, however, exceedingly weak because the two evaluations are not seriously in conflict with one another (or to put it differently, though Piddington does not, there is only a slight degree of social reference involved). The meaning of meaning, for example, relies on context and not on intrinsic qualities.

As may be expected, Piddington converts the Bergsonian notion of 'correction' into the anthropological 'sanction'. The function of laughter is to reintroduce balance when it has been temporarily upset. If our reaction is to weep or to become angry then we admit that an adjustment in our attitude was necessary - by laughing we affirm that our understanding of social evaluations is correct and that the interruption is not worthy of serious attention.

The distinction he draws between 'correction' and 'sanction' may appear contrived at first sight, especially as the intended result in both cases is to restore equilibrium by ridiculing those who confuse contrasting evaluations. The difference seems to be one of emphasis. The former attacks the individual offender, the latter affirms the order of society (though the element of physiology that Piddington invokes through the pleasure principle puts some distance between them).

One would have hoped for more from Piddington, despite his insights.
British anthropology had just entered an exciting period with Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Radcliffe-Brown all reporting on their fieldwork. It was a time of great theoretical leaps forward away from the 'armchair' studies of Frazer and Tylor. The principles of Durkheim were being analysed on a practical level and structuralism of a particularly British school was being put forward to circumvent the dominant notions of functional causality. All that Piddington seems to have done is to take an incongruity theory ('contrasting evaluations') and stress that the frame of reference should be social rather than personal.

At first sight, Monro (1963; originally 1951) does not promise much more with his truistic assertion that

"The laughable is what we laugh at. We laugh because we have seen something laughable. That seems all we can say." (5)

As one might expect, however, Monro has a good deal more to say. His key word is 'inappropriateness' and his key concept 'attitude mixing'. His approach is philosophical, involving an understanding of universes of discourse. Basically, a universe (a range of ideas subsumed under one category) will contain contrary parts or items: the subject 'animal' contains both 'man' and 'beast' or the subject 'gardening' both 'flowers' and 'weeds'. Specific examples can easily be invented and those where homonyms are found are full of comic potential as two universes overlap - going to a rock concert to see the Rolling Stones, for example. There must be a strand of congruity within the incongruity (snow in May is not funny) and the base of much humour stems from making connections (or finding links) between previously unconnected things. Laughter is mainly pleasure being expressed at finding something new and the aptness and suddenness of

1. Radcliffe-Brown has usefully written on the concept of a sanction (1952; chapter 11) as Piddington uses the term; the importance of the sanction is its effect on society (re-expressing common sentiments) and not on the individual.
of the link between two universes or the opposition of elements
within one universe:

"The most distinctive thing about humour is that it involves a
change of standpoints or attitudes. The humorous mind must be
capable of viewing an object first in one light and then in
another...there must be a direct and violent opposition...the
linking of disparates, the collision of different mental spheres,
the obtrusion into one context of what belongs in another."

(225,235)

If all this sounds vaguely familiar, it is because it is really a
reworking of any incongruity theory with the added advantage that
it may usefully form a bridge between psychological and sociological
theories. For something to be humorous it is sufficient for a mental
operation to take place without resorting to economies of energy
or circumventions of repressed tendencies about sex and aggression.
Further, while the humorous is often invested with social dimensions
this is not a precondition. It is, rather, a way of juggling with
categories and classifications in an original manner. The possible
leads that this affords into linguistics and semiology look
attractive as does an entry into the structural study of myth. These
must, of necessity, be sidestepped here though the anthropological
contribution by way of joking relationships has clear echoes and
will be discussed in the next chapter.

Finally in this section the works of Koestler (1949, 1970 (originally
1964)) may be examined. Koestler relies on the phrases 'bisociation
of contexts' and 'intersection of fields' and these correspond to
Piddington's 'contrasting evaluations' and Monro's 'attitude mixing'.
His two books contain almost identical passages and there are not
enough differences between them to warrant separate treatment.
His brief in 1949 was to investigate the common foundations of
science, art and social ethics. His interest in beginning his enquiry
with the comic and laughter arose from the 'creative' thinking and
comprehension that they involve. Without reproducing the many
diagrams in Koestler's books any precis is likely to be stodgy
though the following examples will have to suffice:

(1)  

(1949;31)

(11)  

(1949;96)

If the line in (i) is taken as the narration of a joke (or as the
question part of a riddle) an association train has been developed
up until 'a'; the joke-teller suddenly transfers to 'b' while the
association train is still moving from 'a' to 'J'. A new and unexpected
association, coupled with the previous train of thought, explodes
at 'J' to give the punchline. An alternative way of looking at the
matter is given in diagram (ii). The continuous line is once again
the narration and the lightning flash is the punchline. The narration
has been proceeding in one operative field (F1) and the point where
this intersects with another field (F2) is where the joke is made
through a bisociation:

"The junction is a hinge or pivot with two independent thought
extensions attached to it. Under normal circumstances the
stream of consciousness would follow either one branch or the
other...but the junctional concept behaves in an abnormal way;
it is not merely associated to the ideational context; it
serves two masters at the same time; it is 'bi-associated'
with two independent and mutually exclusive mental fields."
(1949;36)

So far, Koestler has done little other than renaming incongruity.
However, apart from doing scant justice to his lengthy and integrated
reasoning, there are good reasons for staying with his analysis. For
example, while Koestler takes bisociation as central it is really
the padding around that concept that is of interest. Thus, he quotes
the joke of

"A convict playing cards with his jailers. On finding out that
he cheated, they got furious and kicked him out of prison."
Two self-contained logical chains (prisoners are punished by being looked up, cheats are punished by being kicked out) intersect and the joke is made. The intersection of two other logical chains may lead to the discovery of gravity or the invention of the telephone. What makes the example given humorous is the emotional charge in the narrative and in the listener which has aggression at its base. Koestler distinguishes between 'self-transcendence' and 'self-assertion', the former sentiment being necessary for appreciation of the comic and the latter for tragedy.

No conclusive answer can be given as to why laughter, rather than any other reaction, is associated with humour though the suggestion is made that it is linked with infantile pleasure at the maternal breast. Koestler dismisses the audibility of laughter as a possible answer:

"Social infection or unconscious imitation is a phenomenon which laughter shares with many other emotional manifestations: yawning, clearing of the throat, panic, hysteria, and so forth, and requires no specific explanation within the theoretical framework of the comic." (1949:71)

This goes against much of the work already reviewed (and does not accord with the tenor of this thesis) but Koestler is concerned to establish a pattern of comic appreciation which does not, for him, require the consideration of comic communication. However, if statements are being made about society and put up for approval or disapproval then laughter is not only an appropriate response but is also an integral part of the whole process. If the sum range of the comic experience was looking at cartoons or reading jokes, then laughter may be of little importance. The fact that the range is not so limited but permeates most aspects of social interaction in one way or another should allow for the inclusion of laughter as an audible, recognisable, and contagious signal in any model of the comic. Rightly or wrongly, the humorous requires a response, from face-to-face joke-telling to mass media productions. Even Koestler admits that
"A philosopher, misunderstood by his contemporaries, is still a philosopher; a humorist who doesn't make his audience laugh isn't a humorist." (1949;29)

and it is maintained here that the fact that it is laughter, rather than waving one's arms or wiggling one's toes, which forms the response is crucial to any study of the comic.

Koestler discusses techniques of the comic at some length and proposes three basic criteria: the originality or freshness of the bisociation, the relevance of the material to the audience, and the economy (not to be equated with brevity) employed which forces the audience to a creative effort to fill in narrative gaps, expand from hints and so on. As a framework for analysis this says little more than that comedy should be new, understandable, and imaginative enough to require some attention. However, there are clear links with television's search for fresh material in the first two criteria and the attempts, such as Comedy Playhouse, which try out new ideas reflects the desire for original situations which are still relevant to the audience. Once the basic 'husband, wife, children' plot has been exhausted (and writers are still trying) it appears to be the fresh idea that stands the greatest chance of success in being broadcast.

Emphases are changed in Koestler's later work and jokes are updated but the core remains the same. The only comment here is with regard to the following:

"The difficulty (of the subject) lies evidently in the enormous range of laughter-producing situations - from physical tickling to mental titillation of the most varied kinds. I shall try to show that there is unity in this variety; that the common denominator is of a specific and specifiable pattern..." (1970;32)

The common denominator is, of course, bisociation. The quote demonstrates the monistic approach and also states the model to be unilateral - response A is caused by B, C, and D and therefore B, C,
and D have something in common. The principle of reduction is applied and the causes are analysed purely with regard to the laughter-producing element (though with added comments on the difference in operation between, say, satire and riddles) with the result that material is once again removed from the social setting in which it is usually found. The actual process of the comic, its very enactment, the occasions on which it is used, the whole paraphernalia surrounding the communication of ideas and beliefs are sidestepped. It may be necessary to discover why something is funny but it is equally important, if not more so, to see what statements are being made through comedy about society and through joking about relationships. Before moving on to look at these sociological approaches, however, there are some further contributions to be considered which rely on an understanding of mental processes for an entry into the subject matter.

Creativity and Mental Processes

A Gestalt theory of humour has been suggested by Maier (1932). He gives six parts which are necessary to the thought-configuration required for the creation and appreciation of humour. The experience must (a) be unprepared for, (b) be made up of parts which are experienced objectively, (c) appear suddenly, (d) have its own internal logic, (e) contain a change in one of the constituent parts, and (f) be received without sympathy or great emotional participation. The running criticism, that these conditions apply to matters other than the comic or the humorous, is still valid though a Gestalt theory would also argue that the whole (humour) is greater than the sum of its parts. The holistic approach is, perhaps, just a way of saying that there is something in humour which escapes analysis by reduction and if such is the case it is hard to disagree.

1. Ferris (1972) has usefully summarised Koestler's theory; Ferris and Bewsey (1972) give a limited bibliography of 'creative' theories.
Bateson bases his analysis on the key concept of 'paradox' and proposes that there are two elements to a joke – the 'ground' and the 'figure'.

His example, discussed at length, is the joke of the man who takes a wheelbarrow of manure daily through customs; each day the contents are searched for contraband; the man, however, is smuggling wheelbarrows. For most of the joke, wheelbarrows are the ground, an implicit part of the information, but they are suddenly transformed into the figure by the punchline:

"When the point of a joke is reached, suddenly this background material (the implicit contents of the message) is brought into attention and a paradox, or something like it, is touched off."

(1953:3)

In a nutshell, many jokes result from the paradox of the class of classes which are not members of themselves. For example, there is a class titled 'objects falling down a cliff; avalanche and fifty Irishmen may both be members of that class though not of one another. The recent joke 'What do fifty Irishmen falling down a cliff?' 'Navvylanche' completes the circuit of contradictory notions. Bateson's theory may sound like 'bisociation' dressed up as 'paradox' (just as bisociation is, effectively, another way of saying 'incongruity') and he largely ignores social loading (the nationality of the wheelbarrow smuggler, for example). However, it is the sudden awareness that $X$ equals both $Y$ and non-$Y$, the linking of two previously separated classes of things which are restructured to demonstrate their common aspects, that has the suggestion of analytical originality. One

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1. The idea that there is a way of thinking and comprehension peculiar to humour has been suggested by Escarpit in writing of the humorist "...whose fundamental trait is precisely his calculated eccentricity, his faculty of seeing things in a different manner than that which the collectivity tries to impose, and of integrating this vision into a rational, but not petrified, system of thought. For the humorist must be able to look eccentrically at his very own thoughts, otherwise he himself would become a closed system with which no communication is possible."

(1969:257)
does not laugh at an old joke because you are able to carry out the re-structuring before the end (wheelbarrows are known to be in the class of things which may be smuggled); why some first time re-structurings are not humorous is never really answered by Bateson apart from references to the degree of surprise and amount of self-reference or identification which is involved. A further paper, like the first a discussion chaired by Bateson, adds a more significant factor. Joking is subsumed under the message 'this is play' and this communication about communication not only informs on the message but also becomes part of it:

"We have been talking about a class of messages which are intended to produce a hypothesis, in terms of which succeeding messages will be received...the message 'this is play' says that what follows is going to be of that and not of some other class."

(Bavelas in Bateson 1956)

The idea that the message 'this is play' is itself a paradox through its potential extensions ('the message this is play is play' and so on) is of little concern here. What is of more relevance, whether one calls the phenomena 'cues' or 'metalanguage', is that one knows by common sense or experience that when Max Bygrave walks onto a stage, spreads his hands, and says 'I wanna tell you a story...' that a certain kind of communication will follow.

Before discussing the work of a sometime devotee of Bateson's approach, it may be instructive to briefly examine what Huizinga has to say on play and laughter. Play has been treated as that which is not serious by a number of writers (and Eastman (1921, 1937) takes this as central) but not so Huizinga:

"The comic comes under the category of non-seriousness and has certain affinities with laughter - it provokes laughter. But its relation to play is subsidiary. In itself, play is not comical either for player or public." (1970:24)

That play may be 'serious' raises certain links with joking: both, for example, are regulated and neither are purely spontaneous. The
similarities between them revolve around the pre-definition of subsequent communication and action. The existence of this pre-definition may seem too obvious to state but it really is quite amazing how many psychological experiments have generated 'statistically verifiable' hypotheses about humour by asking people to rate cartoons but failing totally to recognise the importance of cues in the social process of joking. There is a substantial difference between reading a cartoon in The New Yorker and reading that cartoon in a classroom while on a first year psychology course.

Fry (1968; originally 1963) has taken the ideas of paradoxes and classes straight from Bateson but is careful to separate humour from play (though they may overlap). They both involve manipulation, mentally speaking, of levels of abstraction with humour having access to more levels than play. Taking the line 'You're fine, how am I?' (spoken by a psychoanalyst meeting a colleague), Fry examines the number of unfunny alternatives which could have been used as a greeting. Joking must '...carry all those messages which are implied by its unhumourous variants' (1968:20). With this, the idea of paradigmatic chains, though not called as such by Fry, is introduced.

His argument takes as its base the paradox of Epimenides as discussed by Whitehead and Russell (1910) - 'All Cretans are liars' is an acceptable statement unless made by a Cretan. If the statement is made by a Cretan then the paradoxes must be placed on a different level of abstraction (the theory of logical types).

If we have a 'class of matchboxes' and a 'class of non-matchboxes' then it is possible to find in the latter individual matchboxes (which, when taken in totality, will make up the class of matchboxes); the class of non-matchboxes does not, though, include the class of matchboxes. Gardner, writing of the White Knight's song from 'Through
The Looking Glass...', adds some clarification

"The song is "A-Sitting on a Gate"; it is called "Ways and Means"; the name of the song is "The Aged Aged Man"; and the name is called "Haddock's Eyes"." (1970:306)

These kinds of logical contortion do have, according to Frye, some relevance - the class of matchboxes is a different thing altogether from 'matchboxes'. In communication there are also different orders - the message, the message about the message and so on - and paradoxes will be generated when two orders are taken in one thought. The central paradox in humour is that the phrase 'This is a joke' should be taken seriously as a statement but also non-seriously as a part of the joking process. Accepting for one moment that all this is correct, the question still remains as to why should paradoxes be humorous? The answer is never really given.

Wilner is also concerned with the mental process of humour appreciation though an earlier work sets the framework (1969) of intuitive understanding without reference to humour. Wilner (1972) relies on Saussurean concepts of paradigmatic series and syntagmatic chains together with the 'universes of discourse' as discussed by Monro (1963).

1. The African tribe, the Huer, equated twins with birds and a number of anthropologists sought an explanation in native logic. Milner suggested that the metaphor had been discovered intuitively (it just seemed to fit); intuitive data makes aesthetic sense before any answer is found by the intellect and rationally thought out (for example, the way the structure of DNA was discovered by Crick and Watson as a double helix). There is a wealth of, mainly, anthropological literature on this subject and though most of it is tangential to this thesis, very brief reference should be made to the work of Levi-Strauss (especially 1966). He suggests that all thought (primitive and modern) operates by constructing categories and segmenting natural continuums into cultural artefacts. Milner, and to some extent Horton (1967), does not dispute this but argues that the act of understanding may be intuitive while the creation of categories and their academic analysis is intellectual. This argument is, of course, applicable to humour and joking.

2. The sentence 'Graham will read the book' is a syntagmatic chain; the aggregate of alternative substitutes ('Liane will...' 'Colin will...') constitute a paradigmatic series (see de Saussure (1959)). There does seem enormous scope for an analysis of humour on a large scale incorporating structural anthropology and linguistics in much the same way as Leach (1975) has analysed, inter alia, wedding invitations, ordnance survey maps, and church services.
with both of these underpinned by intuitive appreciation of the humorous. Such appreciation need not, however, exempt humour from dissection:

"...we do not laugh, but 'something laughs in us' when through the juxtaposition of two universes, and owing to the reversal of familiar syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures, we suddenly see hidden patterns and relations made plain and manifest." (1972:27)

A pun, for example, may be seen as a paradigmatic reversal of two items. Given the line 'His sins were scarlet, but his books were...' one paradigmatic series invites us to complete the sentence with descriptions of books, such as 'boring', 'paperback', or 'burnt'. There is another series, expanded from 'scarlet', containing such items as 'blue', 'green', or 'yellow'. The one word that can be found in both series is 'red/read' (Milner, in fact, maintains that the two series are one and the same but it is rather easier to separate them). It will be seen, then, that puns are relatively simple to invent – the mind effectively runs through two paradigmatic series until an item common to both is found. Spoonerisms, on the other hand, are bound to be syntagmatic – while the 'dear old Queen' reverses to the 'queer old Dean' there is no alternative to the 'dear old King'.

Milner then takes up where Baudelaire left off. If laughter is a sign of the contradictory nature of man (jostling infinite greatness against infinite wretchedness) then the parallel may match that of a culture:nature distinction. Any excess which disturbs the rough equilibrium may be derided by the safety device of laughter

"...that warns man automatically, and, it must be stressed, without any necessity for the intervention of thought or emotion, when he stretches beyond the safety limit in the direction of either culture or nature...something about himself, or others, will strike him as being ludicrous." (1972:27)

This perception, that jokes carry implicit messages about the constitution of a culture and its legitimate limits may be coupled
with the notion that social consensus is reached and reinforced through the agreement of laughter. It should be possible, at last, to move from psychology and philosophy to joking and comedy as expressions of man in, and about, society; to move to a sociology of joking.
This chapter falls into four sections interlinked by the common theme of joking and comedy as having social dimensions which may be more influential than any personal characteristic on the purpose, 'effects', and reception of humorous material. Just as much of the work already reviewed is unsatisfactory because of its intentional side-stepping of these dimensions, so is much of the following through its refusal to acknowledge the impact of individual performers in the process. This criticism need not invalidate sociological models but it does signify that acceptance of them will be generally qualified (as implicitly elaborated in Chapter 7 where the contributions of television producers and scriptwriters are examined).

The Structure and Function of Joking and Humour

Some of the theories discussed in this section may be applicable to a study of ethnic humour but as authors' intentions are not always clear those works dealing specifically with that topic are put back to the next section.

According to Martineau, a sociology of humour must involve a study of group structures and group processes (1967, 1972); the presence of a butt or victim in the joke (or at least a subject which may be judged as esteemed or disparaged) is central to his argument. Accepting this, for the moment, it is then possible to create a model of humour based on 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' with the subject matter of the

1. Zijderveld (1968) has succinctly made the point before:
"Jokes share with other parts of the social structure, like institutions or linguistic forms, the peculiar characteristic of being essentially holders of meaning...the joke told by the adult and the joke told by the child...are qua form exactly the same, whereas the meaning content appears to be different. The same joke, one could say, with the same words, the same logic, and eventually the same gestures, contains different loads of meaning, depending on two different situations of meanings."
joke being made to perform in a variety of ways. Martinesau represents his argument diagrammatically but the principles can be adequately explained in writing. If two groups of people (A and B) are identified, then jokes told by a member of A to his peers may either esteem the aims and beliefs of group A or those disparage those of group B. Or, they may seek to emphasise undesirable traits within one's own group to foster disintegration; or, if A's joke favours B, the idea may be to promote interaction and reach consensus. Joke-telling may be seen as defining and re-defining relationships within and between groups depending on how the subject matter of the joke is judged (and who does the telling and judging). The number of permutations is quite large, ranging from a member of A telling a joke disparaging his group to a member of B, to a member of B telling a joke esteeming his group to a member of A, each situation having its own function for those involved.

This type of schema has been used by several writers with special reference to ethnic humour but one or two immediate criticisms may be noted here. Firstly, there is no discussion (at least by Martinesau) as to why humour rather than, say, diatribe should be used; nor is there reference to the choral aspects of laughter. Martinesau does note (1967:51) that humour, because it may conceal malice, is useful in expressing what cannot be said seriously without causing offence but he neglects to mention that such humour is intended to give offence. An in-group can be as offensive as anyone likes about the out-group - the message 'this is play' may affect the funniness of the joke though need not cloak the victim with 'we don't really mean it' - and the fact that the joke may be told to the out-group does not lessen its blatant offensiveness. The problem seems to arise from taking the general and unwieldy concept of 'groups' and
investing them with too much social weight as regards joking.

Secondly, the model cannot really generate hypotheses about joking on a personal level (where individual preferences need not be subsumed under group allegiance or identification) nor can it deal adequately with humour in the mass media beyond the truism of any particular joke told by any particular comedian having particular relevance for certain members of the audience. Humour does not respond easily to an analysis which seeks only to identify functions. Of course, humour and joking do something more than make people laugh but as Martineau himself writes:

"...it can be concluded that humour does serve as one of the social mechanisms operating within and influencing group structure and group processes. Humour, however, falls within the vast range of man's socio-economic behaviour and constitutes but a small element...The model suggests a means whereby (the social functions of humour) can be integrated on a conceptual level. It now demands a return to empirical research in order to specify under what conditions do certain types of humour lead to certain, definite, observable consequences." (1967:62)

If this has been correctly understood then (a) there are a large number of other factors which will impinge upon the joke-telling process and cannot be accounted for by the model and (b) the exact conditions of that process remain to be examined.

Martineau did not, however, merely construct a model and then call for empirical data to validate it; he does note the findings of published research and much of this is deserving of consideration here. Cbrdlik (1942), for example, recounts the 'gallows humour' response of the Czechs to the German invasion as somehow suitable in the face of a precarious situation. Freud has discussed this type of phenomenon at length (1905; 229ff; 1928) with regard to the condemned man's remarks on his way to be hung on a Monday morning - 'What a way to start the week!'. Cbrdlik usefully comments that:

"Gallows humour, full of invectives and irony, is (the Czechs) psychological escape, and it is in this sense...a psychological
compensation. Its social influence is enormous...pessimists changed into optimists...thus humour proved to be a socially significant element, constructive for the oppressed and destructive for the oppressors." (1942;712-713)

Gallows humour, in this specific example, will be intentional and the intent determines its function - to boost morale and the spirit of resistance and to mock the oppressors (who prove its effectiveness by trying to suppress it). Subject to any doubts about the material as wartime propaganda (which seems churlish) the article is extremely useful in identifying how humour may be made to function in a specific situation. No attempt is made to expand the data into a general theory. The example of military occupation may be extreme but the principle remains valid - every joke may have a multitude of functions (for teller and audience) and caution is necessary if the aim of any study is to isolate the function of humour.

While jokes may serve to underline differences and express conflict there is, according to Stephenson, another side to the matter:

"...an analysis of jokes concerning social and economic differences as revealed by anthologies of wit and humour demonstrate that their primary function is not conflict. On the contrary, such jokes function as control mechanisms expressing the common value system and minimising the notion of class or status conflict and consciousness." (1951;569)

The jokes studied by Stephenson apparently emphasised the expression of American values - equality, ambition, initiative, opportunity, and enterprise. Hard work will bring benefits and the extremes of poverty and wealth when inherited are mocked because both are ascribed rather than achieved statuses. Money is good but its misuse by misers and spendthrifts is ridiculed; the middle way is best. The nouveau riche are to be derided: if they have achieved their status then they have lost sight of the value of money, if their status derives from chance then they have undermined the principle that hard work and diligence deserve reward. The ideal
American can be guessed at — honest, witty, Anglo-Saxon, and protestant. The poor are likely to be lazy blacks and the financiers, just as predictably, Jewish.

Whether control or conflict is stressed is really a personal preference with Stephenson opting for the former. Any statement that says 'this is worthy of ridicule' has an implied counterpart of an ideal and vice versa. Further, though Stephenson gives his sources, there is no examination of the production of the jokes or, more importantly, of the editorial process in selecting jokes for the anthologies. These points apart, the article tends to suggest that humour functions conservatively with one of the reasons being an appeal to the majority view. Innovations, immigrants, changes in fashion and so on are easy subjects for ridicule — they are drawn immediately to the public eye and their very difference allows for contrast with established opinions.

Many studies proceed from the basis that the presence of a victim or butt affords an entry into a sociological approach. It is really the other side of the coin to the work of, for example, Kris and Brill. If

"...every joke must have a point; it must be directed against someone or something; otherwise there is nothing at which we may laugh." (Carus (1897:265))

then the victims, once identified, should assist in the creation of a social strain-gauge whereby points of conflict and controversy in society are rehearsed. This type of model implies a collective consciousness, laughing with the crowd at outsiders, and Jerson has gone so far as to suggest that any other type of laughter is absurd to the extent that it signifies maladaptation (1950:152).

If one does not laugh with the crowd (or laughs when they do not) then one is not fully participating in society as individual
preferences override social conformity. Cameron seems to agree, though from a different angle:

"...as both the psychoanalysts and anthropologists already know, studying humour can give a great many insights into other phases of the life of any people. If you know what people joke about, you can guess what worries them." (1963:94)

and, more originally, on the use of stereotypes which

"...must be plausible if they are to be used in jokes, because part of the effect of a joke comes from the speed of its development. If some concept is used which requires study or invites critical examination, the development of the joke is slowed down. (1963;84)

The point seems obvious but has rarely been made. The joke, as a unit of speech, is invariably short (with few exceptions) and, as a puzzle-solving exercise, must be speedily told to preempt discovery or remembrance. Convenient shorthands are used by way of stereotypes to introduce characters and situations with the minimum effort on the part of the audience.

The use of stereotypes in comedy rather than joking has a long history if one makes the justified link with Old Comedy masks. If critical distinctions between comedies need to be made then the frequency of stereotypes seems as good a place to start as any. Where they rely on generalised images of ignorant Irishmen, scatterbrained wives, and henpecked husbands such comedies are closer to joking than those where developed characters appear which are nearer to narrative. This is not to deny that these characters are subject to their own particular shortcomings which may take on an air of predictability. However, their uniqueness seems to place them apart from (and possibly above) the instantly recognisable stereotypes with only a unilateral role. Comedy may rely on shorthand but does require it. A crowd of Hancock's may lead to stereotyping; one does not.
But to return to the joke as a social strain-gauge. Klapp (1950) has examined one aspect of the 'joke as having a butt' syndrome by concentrating on the fool as

"...a social type having certain definable roles and a special status and function in a group. Fools represent departures from group norms of propriety which are subject to the sanction of ridicule. Fool-making is a continuous social process and operates to enforce propriety and to adjust status." (157)

A fool will be tolerated because there is little likelihood of serious evil intent - deficiency or exaggeration of some trait which is undesirable rather than proscribed acts to define the fool.

Certain functions may be identified (Klapp gives six) which can be summed under the blanket expression 'social control': the fear of ridicule is an effective sanction, an example is set to others, and incompetents may literally be laughed out of positions of influence.

An alternative view of the role of the fool, though with some similarities, is suggested by Syme r-Ure in a discussion of the magazine Private Eye. He takes the fool to represent rebellion rather than revolution, to be exempt from the mal rule of society and 'in it but not of it' (1974:242) and these dimensions can be applied to the magazine. Its very appearance is unorthodox - a 'Colour Sup lenset' in black and white, 'continued on page 94' in an issue of under 40 pages, punned or misspelt names, a mixture of rumour and fact - in contradiction to the norms (whether kept or not) of professional journalism. Its political role is to maintain the mythology of the system while attacking constituent parts. By showing, for example, the bribery and corruption that

1. 'Social strain-gauge' has been borrowed from "arwick (1964) who uses it specifically in relation to accusations of witchcraft. He suggests that the relationship between accuser and accused is likely to reveal tension and has a social basis rather than one formed from belief in witchcraft and methods of witch-finding. An accusation may be a useful fabrication to attack an enemy.
may co-exist with power and influence no attempt is made to damn the system but rather those personalities who have abused it. The frequent attacks on hypocrisy and lapses in private life of public figures (Members of Parliament being 'tired and over-emotional' after long lunches) all carry the basis of a standard of behaviour from which the departures have been made. Further, the system demonstrates its strength through its tolerance of the fool. While 'underground' magazines such as *Oz* and *International Times* became the subjects of legal action and confiscation of issues, *Private Eye* is not seen as a threat except by the individuals who are attacked. The conservative nature of tendentious humour would appear to be underlined.

That things may be said in humour which would otherwise be taken as a threat or as blatant offensiveness has already been noted. Blau, in writing of a State Employment exchange, sees humour functioning to relieve guilt

"...the practice of joking about clients immunised interviewers against being upset by conflicts with them, which improved their performance but also gave rise to less considerate treatment of clients." (1963:263)

Rather than complain about clients to fellow interviewers it was usual to joke instead. Jokes have the advantage of being funny and are easily re-told; a complaint carries the necessity for action through remedy while jokes conveniently bypass such a need (and make inconsiderate treatment acceptable). An interviewer, as a civil servant, should be polite and helpful – if he is rude and bureaucratic his 'guilt' can be joked away by making the clients seem inadequate. Myrdal (1944) argues much the same line

"When people are up against inconsistencies in their creed and behaviour which they cannot, or do not want to, account for rationally, humour is a way out. It gives a symbolic excuse for imperfections, a point to what would otherwise be ambiguous ...a collective surreptitious approbation for something which cannot be approved explicitly because of moral inhibitions." (38–39)
Emerson has developed this concept by reference to 'negotiation', meaning that joking provides a useful channel for covert communication on taboo topics. The parties to a joke may negotiate a private agreement to suspend guidelines of accepted behaviour. Her examples are taken from hospital humour but appear to be capable of wider application. A patient may joke about some aspect of death with the intention of seriously discussing the matter with his doctor; whatever the doctor's reaction, the patient has the escape route of 'I was only joking'. If the doctor replies seriously then the guideline (one does not discuss death with an ill person) is suspended and the subject may be talked about openly. If the reply is another joke then the matter is closed to serious debate. Joking may afford a means of raising subjects which, if broached openly, may lead to disruption or a suspension of communication (1973).

The escape clause implicit in introducing a joke has been noted by Lewis Coser (1956) who suggests that wit may function covertly between people occupying different status positions.

"Wit may not bring about a change in the relations between one person and another, especially if the target of the aggressive wit is not aware of the source and intention of the witticism ... (wit) may afford expression to the weaker member without changing the terms of the relationship." (48,43)

Where an overt attack is impossible for any reason, a covert 'dig' by joking may provide a satisfactory outlet for aggression.

Rose Coser has written at greater length on the subject (1959, 1960, 1962); her contributions are all concerned with humour as

"...an expression of the collective experience of the participants, and (it) receives response only from those who share common concerns." (1959; 173)

Agreeing with Blau, she notes that joking may be used to give collective expression to an individual complaint - you joke in a crowd but complain to one person - in the way that 'I can't sleep'
is an egocentric moan while 'A hospital is no place to rest' is a social joke uniting the group by allowing it to reinterpret individual experiences in a communal fashion. Humour is a means of socialisation by reconciliation, affirmation of common values and the bridging of differences. In dealing with the staff of a mental hospital, the greatest number of witticisms were directed towards the patients (once again, on a par with Blau) and Coser suggests a hierarchy of joking with aggression released downwards. While 40% of the senior staff jokes were directed against juniors, only about 6% of the juniors' joking went upward (and here she is writing of jokes told in the presence of seniors). This may seem painfully obvious; it is.

Coser is also concerned with ambiguity – not in the sense of the incongruous structure of a joke but with regard to the problems of maintaining the division between private and professional life on the wards. Where there are 'role contradictions' and 'value ambiguities' (1960:39) humour is one way of reaffirming the correct elements through the laughter of the group. Among the patients the process is not quite the same. The potential ambiguity is not so important. Rather:

"...jocular talk and jocular griping on the ward allow the patients to reinterpret for each other with concision and economy their experiences, and at the same time to entertain, reassure, convey mutual interest, and pull the group together by transforming individual experience into collective experience." (1962:89)

We seem to be back in the realm of 'laugh and the world laughs with you' though it is not easy to offer alternative approaches to humour if the balance between a level of abstraction and fieldwork is to be maintained. One possible line of argument could, of course, be that such fieldwork is only likely to dress up in jargon what is known common sensically. An interactionist analysis may identify any number

1. Harlow (1969) suggests the hierarchy flows the other way from low to high; we boost the anxious ego by debasing someone in a higher position or elevating ourselves. It seems apparent that humour may equally operate from high to low or vice versa; any distinction is peculiar to specific situations.
of functions for humour as they relate to the situation studied and it seems close to futility to list them over and over again, each time with the caveat that in this situation these people joke and their humour may perform such and such a function.

The move from psychological analyses, with the apparently solid base of why does the individual laugh, to the joke as communication is not particularly comfortable. Giles and Oxford (1970a and 1970b in response to Boyle's criticism 1970) have attempted an uneasy combination of the two, based on a division between field dependence and field independence. Subjects in the former group prefer short-span humour (such as slapstick), and are likely to be extroverts and may be working class. Those in the latter employ a more thoughtful approach to perceived materials, prefer satire, and are middle class introverts.

From this rather dubious hypothesis, coupled with a breakdown of 7 mutually exclusive conditions under which laughter may occur, the authors draw the conclusion that

"...while humorous laughter can be considered as overt 'rebellion' against social pressures, social laughter itself can be viewed rather as an act towards social conformity." (1970a:103)

The principle of classify and conquer need not always produce the best results; extrapolation from individual usage to social function is a poor starting point as far as humour is concerned.

The 'other way round' may be represented by Pitchford (1960) who, after lengthy reviews of previous theories, suggests certain functions for humour ranging from 'social catharsis' and 'expressions of doubt and disrespect' to 'a mode of interaction for achieving consensus' and that which 'resolves role conflicts'. These functions are then tested in, for example, the courtroom, political ridicule, and ethnic humour with fairly satisfactory results but one is still left feeling rather sceptical about a conclusion which suggests that humour may
have a multitude of functions depending upon circumstances. If there is something intrinsic in humour it is, perhaps, to social structure rather than social function that attention should be directed.

A different level of abstraction is suggested by Victoroff (1953). While the search is still on for functions, there is something in humour which

"...transforms reality without any efficacious material intervention and even makes such intervention unnecessary. In this respect the social function of laughter is comparable to that of magic in pre-literate societies." (166)

Victoroff tries to demonstrate that humorous stereotypes differ from other stereotypes in that they do not require action. Without violence or changes of direction they allow us to demolish the social realities to which they refer. Humour may, unless ridicule is effective, leave the situation unchanged and operate dysfunctionally but it does allow some degree of control — by merely laughing, or by casting the cowrie shells with the correct incantation, the performers' understanding of reality has been altered. The fact that reality itself may continue as before is not important: in that moment of laughter a new construction of reality is made and a framework established for future understanding.

One further writer needs to be considered in this section. While Mary Douglas has written widely on matters which could be relevant (her work on the sacred and the profane, ritual pollution, and rules and meanings may all be used to embellish a theory of humour which takes jokes as statements about categories in society) she has made more specific contributions. In a collection of essays (1975) she has something to say about the nature of laughter itself as a

1. Victoroff (1969) suggests that 'no attempt seems to have been made to analyse television humour, despite the new possibilities it opens up. The comedian-viewer relationship is particularly intimate ...precisely what significance this has we do not yet know'(295).
physical action

"Laughter, though not controlled any more than any other upper/front eruptions such as coughing or breaking wind, is not screened off and ignored. Laughter is a unique bodily eruption which is always taken to be a communication." (36)

A correlation may be discovered, if laughter is taken as bodily relaxation, between social tensions and physical control. The more the pressure on the individual from society, the less open and manifest the laughter. The suggestion is even made that forest chimpanzees (loosely structured) would laugh more than savannah chimps (rigid hierarchy). Taking laughter as 'body language' does not seem particularly helpful in this case and there may also be confusion because of the mixture of a physical reaction with a social dimension. Laughter relaxes social tensions may be a useful guideline but not, as Douglas suggests, because of the semantic links. Certainly, laughter as visible and audible communication may act as a cornerstone for any theory but the relation of physiological occurrences to social actions will only flourish within a solidly Darwinian framework. Douglas is here taking us back to those writers previously reviewed - the tooth-shaped tickle of Gregory and the rolling tree-stump/tiger of Hayworth - rather than forward to a social understanding of laughter. Given that it relevant that laughter, rather than belching, is used in ridicule there are two alternatives: to return to notions of excess energy and toothy cavemen or to accept the fact as it stands without further comment other than that it is a socially recognised form of communication. The one line of analysis which may be fruitful from the physical approach is whether or not the relaxed state of the audience facilitates the perception and acceptance of the statements made about society in joking and comedy. It should be possible to take laughter, in the majority of cases, as tacit
approval of the treatment of the subject matter.

Douglas's other contribution (1968) is a discussion of joking and laughter. She treats of the jokes as symbolic patterns of social patterns with the necessary consequence that no joking can appear unless there is a 'joke' in the social structure. Taking material collected by Richards (1937) on the Bemba, she gives the example of a joke told between members of different clans about their own totemic animals - the crocodile and the fish. The joke does not easily translate but the gist is that the crocodile (clan) is superior because it eats fish to which the reply is that therefore the crocodile is dependent on fish (clan) which are thus better. This joking sequence allegorizes the political interdependence of the clans and is subversive to the extent that the ideal of unity and a smoothly functioning clan system is undermined by the apparent competition between them.

Joking such as this affords the opportunity for realizing that an accepted pattern, the dominant ideology, has no necessary or intrinsic value but as no alternative is offered within the joke the pattern is still accepted. The only real result is an 'exhilarating sense of freedom from form in general' (1958:365). While the status of the mother-in-law is not specifically discussed, her ambiguous role would appear to fit the sort of patterns that Douglas refers to. A joke about mothers-in-law suggests that the ambiguity is somehow escapable and that there is an alternative to the structure of kinship. In this connection, Douglas argues that jokes are therefore unlike rites which stress the permanence of structure.

Here, a potential sociology of humour has been reached. The function

1. In Douglas (1975) she admits to some errors of interpretation on the Bemba material. Anthropologists who write of someone else's tribe do so at their own peril.
of jokes is to escape form and structure, to give a sense of freedom, to deal with categories and groups, relationships and hierarchies. There are, of course, jokes which fall outside this type of analysis and from now on they will also fall outside the scope of this thesis. This is not pure defeatism but rather part and parcel of the general argument that a search for universal all-encompassing theories is a misguided one. Explanations of children's riddles and tangents on circles have been briefly discussed, as have the varieties of nonsense. However, the majority of jokes (and almost all of comedy) is about society and social experience. Jokes may perform numerous functions and take many forms but the structural axis, the social element which gives the joke bite, relevance, and meaning will tell anyone who bothers to look something about the society in which the jokes exist.

'Heard about the Spanish queer who never let a dago by?'. The Spanish, as such, are not a ready target for British ridicule and are, of course, only introduced to line up the pun for 'day go'. The Irish and blacks have come under rather more attention.

_Ethnic Humour_

It is possible to identify a certain group of jokes or comic sketches whose structural axes derive from the race of the characters or participants. The concern here is not with folklore or popular sayings which the term ethnic might imply but with jokes such as the schoolmistress asking

"'here is Africa, Colin?" "I don't know, Miss, but it can't be far because 'ɪnston goes home for lunch"

and such television programmes as _Love Thy Neighbour_ and _Till Leath_

1. An exemplary analysis irretrievably linking the subjects of laughter with a social dimension can be found in Thomas (1977). He discusses laughter in Tudor and Stuart England and convincingly demonstrates social context as the all-important factor.
The subject matter is emotional and involves value judgements especially when the consequences of ethnic humour may be a reinforcement of racist beliefs and attitudes. While no attempt is made to divorce this thesis from such consequences a fair degree of distancing is undertaken under the umbrella of 'joking has many functions'. The self-irony of Jewish humour has already been noted and it seems reasonable to assume that the context of situation plays an important part. There are no racist jokes as such but racist jokes in the context of what audience and teller are gathered for the joke.

However, the problem arises when this sort of escape clause is applied to humour in the mass media. While the teller is automatically identified very little is known about the audience and therefore how any particular joke functions for them. Different writers have failed to agree and the lack of a clear answer reflects partly on the use of a functionalist approach. There are, broadly, two opposing academic camps - the one suggesting that there are parallels between humour and humanity, laughter and liberation, the other that ethnic humour may fire and sustain prejudice. Both, however, recognise an element of social control - there are alternative ways of behaving (the acceptable way and the minority group way) and through the ridicule of laughter the normative system is supported and the latter controlled.

Only the former camp adds the dimension, under certain circumstances, of 'laugh and the world laughs with you'.

A useful model of ethnic joking has been proposed by Goldstein (1976) who argues that

"The response to any such joke will depend both upon one's familiarity with the group in question as well as upon one's attitudes towards that group" (106)

He also provides diagrams (which clarify the sort of model proposed
by Martineau) where '+' and '-' can be interpreted as approval and disparagement respectively:

(A) Person
\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Group} \\
- \\
\text{Joke} \\
+ \\
\end{array} \]

(B) Person
\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Group} \\
+ \\
\text{Joke} \\
+ \\
\end{array} \]

(C) Person
\[ \begin{array}{c}
\text{Group} \\
+ \\
\text{Joke} \\
+ \\
\end{array} \]

The diagrams need a little explanation. Type A shows a person liking a joke which attacks a group he does not like. B gives a person liking a joke which favourably refers to a group he supports. C covers the self-irony and mockery of, for example, much Jewish humour.

It is but a small step from this model to a suggestion that jokes are merely vehicles and that it is how they are symbolically loaded that determines their acceptance or rebuttal. Burma (1972) provides the following example; the choice of the words in brackets is arbitrary in this case though not, of course, in real life.

(White) teacher to (Negro) schoolboy who has just failed a geometry exam: 'When Washington was your age, he was a surveyor'; (Negro) schoolboy: 'When he was your age, he was President' (282)

The above model and example could afford ammunition to either opposing camp; the model, certainly, is sufficient to generate hypotheses about any number of possible situations and humour may operate with different functions in each of them.

There are, however, matters of emphasis to be noted. Further, one may look to structure rather than function. If stereotypes are constantly being used in jokery, irrespective of any immediate function for any particular group/audience which 'uses' the joke, then surely something rubs off through the crystallation of an idea. That idea is that a race may be classed by supposedly unchanging and deeply ingrained characteristics; there is little philosophic difference between, say, the intrepid Englishman and the miserly Scot. The immediate effect may be momentary - a quick laugh and onto a new joke -
but there also seems to be a cumulative process at work. A stereotype is a convenient shorthand. There is no need to say 'a person who is bound by family ties and tradition (particularly his religion) who finds himself in a contradictory position through the need for financial success by sharp practice in business and is therefore noted for meanness rather than the generosity which his religion demands' if one can say 'Jew' and be instantly understood.

"Have you heard about the sequel to 'Jaws'? It's called 'Jews' - about loan sharks"

is over and told very quickly. Any amusement is transitory and it is hard to argue that its effect is momentous. However, it can only operate as a joke because 'Jews' carries with it a whole conglomeration of ideas and beliefs (to which the joke adds) enabling the audience to automatically make the necessary link with 'loan sharks'. The word has to be 'Jews' to resonate with 'Jaws' just as it has to be 'loan sharks' rather than 'usurers' but the joke itself does not have to exist. No matter what is gained from the joke, whether amusement or silence and disapproval, its existence is solely dependent on the equation 'Jew = usurer'. It is suggested here that the constant rehearsal of this theme has led the creation of an unbreakable stereotype, just as 'hat's black with red wheels - a whipped nigger' reinforces the connection with slavery and inferiority. It seems facile to argue, as does La Fave, that

"There are at least nine reasons a 'joke' at an ethnic group member's expense may apparently amuse that ethnic group member although many ethnic 'jokes' exist at the expense of the group, a surprising number of arguments exist for humanitarian functions of ethnic humour." (1976,120,122)

without taking cognisance of the joke as public property relying on shorthands for immediate identification.

Barron (1972) has attempted to quantify the degree of stereotyping found in published jokes. His analysis has a sadly predictable outcome.
The dominant themes in jokes about blacks are deviancy, stupidity and an obsession with sex. Those in Jewish jokes concern money and business while the Irish are inevitably linked with ignorance. Over 97% of the black jokes are told in dialect of the 'sho nuff, massa' variety, Jews are known as Cohen and Abie, the Irish are usually labourers called Pat and Mike. Aronowitz and Anthony (1968) have traced three stages of 'cultural' humour which parallel the social and economic status of the American black over the years. The first stage is totally in-group and is represented by jokes told among slaves. The second is when such humour passes into the public domain with the caricature of a 'black buffoon, singing and dancing' (340). The third, with comedians like Dick Gregory, moves into a self-conscious phase where the humour is sharper to match the growth of black militancy. It seems pertinent to suggest here that much of the ethnic humour at present heard and told would fit into the second stage rather than the third though this would not be supported by the work of Greenberg and Kahn (1970). They studied Playboy cartoons over 13 years to test the hypothesis that as tolerance increases, stereotypes of blacks will weaken. They maintain that such is the case, though this may say more about the editorial policy of the magazine rather than any wider trend.

Myrdal has the following useful comments on how stereotypes may operate with regard to ethnic humour:

"The main 'function' of the joke is...to create a collective surreptitious approbation for something which cannot be approved explicitly because of moral inhibitions" (1944:38)

which is interpreted here as meaning that 'a whip ed nigger' allows expression of such sentiments as are deemed impolite or undesirable because it is offered in the wrapping of a 'joke'. Rose, in a condensation of Myrdal's book, attempts to demonstrate the irony
implicit in

"Master says to slave - You ate my best turkey - slave replies
- Yes, massa, you got less turkey but more nigger."
(slightly modified from Rose (1944:302))

by suggesting that the concept of 'dumb nigger' is shown to be only a pretence. The slave effectively outwits his master by feigning stupidity. There is surely, however, more to the joke than the apparent victory of the slave. While many writers would argue that the joke is morally acceptable, they ignore the effect that may be obtained by constantly presenting black:white relations in terms of inferiority:superiority. The victory for the slave appears to be temporary, a small skirmish in a somewhat larger battle which underlines the inequality of his position. The slave to master relationship is ruffled but never threatened.

This may all sound something like puritanism which is not the intention. It is merely argued that any 'victory' for a minority group is transitory, and that the continual use of a certain framework, whether it be Irish labourer going for a job, slave talking to master or Jews discussing money, will move towards maintaining fictional stereotypes rather than stressing individual features.

As such, joking will concern itself with categories - vicars, Irishmen, mothers-in-law - to a greater extent than with individual personalities.

The world-view offered by ethnic jokes has no consistent counter in humour. If the jokes are making statements about society then the absence of alternative jokes may be a more important factor than the presence of serious argument against bigotry. A sense of proportion,

1. For example, Allport (1971) writes of 'good' ethnic humour that '...it seems likely that ridicule and humour help to prick the pomposity and irrational appeal of rabble-rousers. Laughter is a weapon against bigotry' (633). Middleton and Noland, however, suggest that anti-black jokes told by blacks may reflect the adoption of values of a white reference group (1953).
However, should be encouraged. The reaction aroused in America in response to the joke told by the then campaigning Reagan (February 1930) seemed to veer to one extreme, with protests from ethnic groups, resignations from campaign committees, and extensive press and television discussion. The joke in question was:

"How do you tell the Pole at a cockfight? He's the one with the duck. How do you tell the Italian? He's the one who bets on the duck. How do you tell the Mafia is there? The duck wins."

The other extreme was equally an over-reaction - to view ethnic humour as just a 'joke' with no potential or actual consequences for race relations. It appears, here, preferable to agree with Jints:

"Ethnic humour, with specific, hostile purposes, directed in circumstances where the connections with social anomalies are obvious, is common enough to force us to dismiss the idea that we are dealing with mere word-play, or image manipulation for its own sake." (1977:237)

It is now possible to turn to a particular area of enquiry which has attracted a fair amount of academic and 'lay' attention - the possible effects of portraying racism in a humorous way on television. It must be said here that one definite notion underlies this research: if the effects are to promote racism then the causes are to be opposed.

It may also be noted that the subject is treated further in a later chapter where the views of television producers and scriptwriters are discussed.

Ethnic Humour and Television Situation Comedies

While George Inns, producer of The Black and White Minstrel Show, may have said 'It's pure entertainment...it is a show you can watch without having to make any efforts' (quoted in Dyer (1973:20)) few writers would agree without some caveat that 'pure entertainment' may carry 'impure' suggestions. Good intentions abound from writers, actors, and television personnel along the lines of 'laughter as a weapon against bigotry'; good intentions simply may not be enough.
The following extract from a policy statement issued by the Community Relations Commission raises the central issue:

"...such programmes as 'Till Leath 'Us To Last' and 'Love Thy Neighbour' have deliberately introduced race as a subject of importance. However well intentioned such programmes are, there is bound to be a substantial risk that instead of breaking down stereotypes and ridiculing the expression of racial prejudice, such programmes reinforce and legitimize negative attitudes. It is not sufficient to claim that such programmes do no more than provide some reinforcement of existing views, both liberal and illiberal...the effects of such programmes must be most carefully researched" (CBS 1975i6)

How 'careful' the research has been is a moot point and direct comparisons and cross-references to different works are impossible because of the diversity of theoretical assumptions that underlie them. Most of the work seems to have been undertaken with regard to All in the Family, (the American situation comedy which freely acknowledges its origins in Till Leath Us Do Part, whose central character, Archie Bunker, is bigoted, racist and generally illiberal in his beliefs and views. It is, however, a specifically American programme with characters largely drawn or re-written from the writer's own experiences (Lear 1978). The programme was piloted twice by ABC in 1967 and eventually taken up by CBS in 1970 with Norman Lear as writer and producer. The first academic interest shown would appear to be Klapper (1971) who stressed the importance of context to the majority of the audience, ethnicity was not a central issue whereas it was for the minority.

Stein (1974) attempts to maintain the importance of context. His intention was to see how far All in the Family is a 'mirror of contemporary American culture' at the time of Robert Kennedy's assassination, Vietnam, and the white backlash

"A moment's listening identifies Archie as trapped and outraged, afraid and embittered, confused and resolute. The world is no longer his world, and America, land of the free and home of the brave, is teeming with pinkos, fags, meatheads and intellectuals. Everything he sees and hears reminds him of what he has lost or is in danger of losing" (1974;232)
More important, however, is that the family is stressed. It is not Archie in isolation but the permutations of husband, wife, daughter, and son-in-law which, through the 'dialectic of polarisation', most closely resemble the situation in American society. It is the definition of roles by opposition and their articulation within the family framework. Having noted that those who condemn the series (including the B'nai B'rith and the Polish-American Historical Society) have a common reaction of outrage, Stein suggests that Archie represents, and in some respects, speaks for the American Everyman:

"He addresses himself most poignantly to the situation and dilemma of the working middle-class American of moderate income, modest educational attainments, and threatened mobility aspirations who see their future and their children's future as limited, constricting, and bleak ... through Archie, ethnic-Americans identify with the American dream and the possibility, of realizing it. The experience of shame at being 'foreigners' has served to accelerate the process of acculturation" (310-311)

Though Stein does not support his argument with any research data, his assumption that Archie is a spokesman seems valid. But if this is the case, then he is surely wrong in writing off the outrage of protesters. If Archie speaks for middle America, and in such a way as to rehearse prejudices and air bigotry, then we must assume that many members of the audience do not see the programme as ridiculing racist attitudes but as expressing morally acceptable beliefs. Further, while there appears to be no evidence to suggest that a comic treatment necessarily increases the effectiveness of a message, there is, of course, Myrdal's suggestion of 'surreptitious approbation'.

Surlin has contributed to the debate by using data generated from specific research. The question he seeks to answer is whether or not, for certain members of the audience, the programme will reinforce or reduce racist beliefs. One study (1974) suggested that audience members who rated high on a 'determatism scale' supported and agreed with the character of Archie to a significantly greater extent than

1. See footnote to page 109 supra.
did those with less 'dogmatism'. Further, there was a congruence between supporting the character and agreeing with what he said. A later study (Lockenby and Lurin 1976) of audience members concludes that

"There is clearly a relationship between frequency of watching daily programming and finding the programming to be entertaining, revealing of actual behaviour of the groups portrayed in the programming, and the acceptance of the views of major characters...it is possible that once the viewer establishes a cognitive similarity with a character the problem-solving approaches of the character could be generalised by the viewer to his or her own real-world problems. When this problem-solving approach is highly authoritarian/egalitarian in nature, the incidental social learning by the viewer becomes dysfunctional. One potential outcome is the reinforcement of racist attitudes and behaviour." (492-493)

This is supported in another piece of research (1976, with Tate) which compared Canadian and American reactions to the programme. As may be expected, the strongest identification with Archie was found among highly authoritarian American males.

Wilhoit and de Bock placed their study within a structure of selective perception: their 'subjects' were the television audience (or at least, members thereof) for the Luton version of All in the Family. Their most important conclusion would appear to be that those people who score highly on an authoritarian scale purposefully avoid watching the programme though the reasons given for avoidance did not fall into any particular cluster. They also suggest that

"...All in the Family is not likely to have a reinforcement effect on persons who are high on parental authoritarianism, lifestyle intolerance, or ethnocentrism. The observed selective perception processes do not seem to prevent the basic satirical message from getting through..." (1976:84)

1. Cooper and Jahoda (1947) and Rosen (1948) both suggest that the message in films attempting to combat prejudice ('Mr. Bigott' and 'Gentleman's Agreement' respectively) may misfire as they are selectively perceived by prejudiced viewers. Cooper and Fineman (1951) found a similar effect, though the majority got the 'correct' message. Kastorff and Cantril (1954) noted that student supporters of opposing American football teams effectively saw different versions of the same game.
An alternative conclusion is given, however, by Vidmar and Rokeach (1974). Having noted that the show's popularity is far-reaching and involves both prejudiced and non-prejudiced viewers alike, they also employ a framework of selective perception (and exposure). Basically, they suggest that not only will different people have different reasons for finding the show funny but also that people tend to watch what they expect to appeal to their own outlook:

"We found that many persons did not see the programme as a satire on bigotry and that these persons were more likely to be viewers who scored high on measures of prejudice. Even more important is the finding that high prejudiced persons were likely to watch All in the Family more often than low prejudiced persons, to identify more often with Archie Bunker, and to see him winning in the end. All such findings seem to suggest that the programme is more likely reinforcing prejudice and racism than combating it."

(46)

That two opposite conclusions can be drawn from very similar pieces of work has a number of interpretations, not the least of which is that academic enquiry has not only got hold of the wrong end of the stick but is waving it in a theoretical vacuum. In this case, it is surely relevant to expand analysis into these wider areas:

(a) that it is light entertainment and not 'serious';
(b) that it is television and not interpersonal communication;
(c) if the programmes are dysfunctional, should they be censored;
(d) the actual production and writing of such programmes.

Light Entertainment versus 'serious' Television

Limits of space require that duplication be avoided as far as possible but it is thought here that it is important to deal with laughter and joking, comedy and humour, as central to television situation comedies rather than incidental. Brevity, then, is of the essence; fortuitously, Wilner (1975) says almost all that needs to be said about the portrayal of racist characters, especially where their 'comic' offensiveness is supposedly offset by the presence of black actors in the same show.
His effective summary reads persuasively:

"The effects of programmes in which British blacks feature in some way, like Curry and Chips, Love Thy Neighbour and more indirectly, Till Death Us Do Part, are extremely difficult to gauge. In general, the effects of showing black people in everyday situations as opposed to their former stereotypical exposure may well be beneficial, but each of these programmes also gives a platform to at least one bigoted white character. Although their ludicrously extreme prejudices are played up for humorous effect, this is a two-edged sword, for it is the humorous atmosphere itself which allows the expression of these views by making them more acceptable. This effect reverberates off the screen, too, for it becomes permissible to use Alf Garnett's language in ordinary conversation, because we know it's all a joke, don't we? The philosophy of this approach seems to be that we should air prejudices, and perhaps laugh them away. A peculiar extension of this is the anti-black black comedian. This strange phenomenon allows the expression of the most racist sentiments, cushioned both by humour and by the fact that the raconteur is black. There is no need to feel guilty laughing at his jokes about blacks, for he's one of them - so neither he nor his jokes can be prejudiced, can they? Again, it's a way of making the sentiments acceptable - if they say those things against themselves, why shouldn't I? And the very popularity of these shows makes it possible for the jokes - and the sentiments - to be passed on socially" (76-77) (D. Milner)

It is precisely because the programmes are comic that they demand attention. A serious television discussion involving, for example, the National Front will ensure that there is also a liberal spokesman to deny and contradict any racist assertions made. When prejudices are seriously aired (whether it be a play or a documentary) the other side will be put, invariably by someone who is assumed to be an expert. Comedy puts no pressure on the audience to make judgements about any values which are transmitted. Any contradictory arguments to racist beliefs are, ipso facto, also subsumed under the umbrella of comedy. In circumventing the balanced treatment of prejudice all that the well-intentioned writer of comedy can do is to put one set of statements into the mouth of an offensive character and another into that of a reasonable one with the hope that the audience will (a) laugh at

1. See particularly Elliott (1972, chapter 5) who shows how studio guests for a documentary about the nature of prejudice were chosen and treated. One might assume that his comments would be applicable to documentaries on class or whatever other subject was discussed.
the first and with the second, and (b) laugh at the views of the first and applaud the views of the reasonable man. That this need not be the case appears to be obvious. Comedies are, especially on television, funny first and thought-provoking second. They are inextricably bound up with the creation of laughter as a suitable response and it seems ridiculously simplistic to expect that laughter to oscillate between derision and applause as each character speaks their lines. No matter what the intentions of the writers, it seems safe to assume that the viewers watch the programmes to be amused rather than to be educated. It has, of course, already been suggested that laughter, instead of acting as a weapon against bigotry, may facilitate the acceptance of the status quo through the constant rehearsal of assumptions underlining such bigotry.

While comedy may, as most literary critics suggest, operate to ridicule social faults through the agency of derisive laughter at vices and follies, it can only succeed when the audience agree that the vices depicted are faults. There is ample evidence demonstrating the widespread existence of racial prejudice in Britain and it would be naive to expect that a programme such as Till Death Us Do Part obtains from its audience a universal agreement that racism is only worthy of derision. Whether or not members of the audience identify favourably with Alf Garnett is not directly relevant - because it is 'only' comedy (and, in this case, therefore fiction) the audience may choose to support his views while laughing at the character. This is, to some extent, a multiple defence offering that people may watch to be amused and are so partly because the humour arises from prejudice as an established fact, or that people may watch and interpret the humour as explicitly supporting their own bigotry. The crucial aspect is, however, that bigotry is given a

1. See particularly Smith (1976) and Dummett (1973).
comic treatment with the expected outcome that the audience need
react in no other way than laughter. Whether this is laughter with
or laughter at is largely a matter for conjecture.

Similarly, with the character of Alf Garnett, it may be difficult
for members of the audience to totally dismiss him because his
bigotry also carries notions of patriotism, loyalty to the monarchy,
and a yearning for the 'good old days'. The audience may be invited
to loathe the character and all that he stands for but loathing is
not the normal response to comedy nor is it likely where any trace
of sympathy can be found. Further, even those who may strongly oppose
prejudice may be morally absolved from commenting because the comic
ravings of a comic figure should require no serious response.

Television versus Interpersonal Communication

A joke told among friends may function in any number of ways but it
will inevitably carry a notion of consensus and deal with common
concerns. Reaction is immediate and forms an integral part of the
sequence of communication. Television situation comedies, on the
other hand, do not rely to any great extent on jokes as such; the
comedy is generated by character and plot. However, both joking and
television comedies involve statements about society, about individuals
as social beings, in such a way as to imply standards of behaviour,
codes of action, and norms of morality. The relevance of a comparison
between the two types needs some further clarification.

Firstly, the sequence of communication found in joking is matched in
television but only in a bastardised form with the studio audience
acting as a mediator between the comedy and the home audience. Their
laughter (and other information) defines the programme as comedy

1. This information would include, inter alia, previous experience,
general knowledge, press announcements, programme advertisements,
billings, the actors and actresses, theme music and so on.
and may add a sense of legitimacy. While it cannot be argued that
the home audience do not have the choice of whether to laugh or not,
it is suggested here that the pre-definition as comedy supplied by
the laughter soundtrack (continually stressing that the show is
funny) does not allow for a reasoned interpretation. The programme
may certainly be judged unfunny but, in this context, the opposite
to funny is not serious in the way that an offensive joke may be
to the immediate listener when told the same\textsuperscript{1}. The obvious consequence
is that communication is imperfect and only statistical audience
research, with its acknowledged limitations, or comments from peers
can really inform the communicators about the reception of the
television message. For all concerned, the process is effectively
the transmission of something defined as comic and, while any effect
may be minimal, the fact that statements are being made through
television may lead to an understanding within a framework of comedy
and thus absolve the audience from any guilt about favourably
responding.

Secondly, joking will seldom have the authority or professionalism
of television. However funny or unfunny one finds a programme it is
impossible to deny that the production staff, writers, and cast all
have a certain level of skill allied to their training, artistry,
experience or whatever. The programmes go through several days of
rehearsal, scripts invariably take much longer to write and polish.
There are substantial rewards for success in terms of finance, future
working career and, of course, self-satisfaction. The total product
primarily reflects the effort and professionalism of those concerned
with it. A poor script, flubbed lines, or speaking characters heard

\textsuperscript{1}. Many comedy series, especially \textit{Till Death Us Do Part}, have come
under attack from certain organisations protesting about 'bad'
language, blasphemy, and general offensiveness. That they find
the material serious and not just unfunny is beyond the scope
of this thesis to explain.
'out of shot' would detract from that authority. The programme would be less funny and it may be assumed (without any evidence) that messages carried would not be as well received as those broadcast efficiently and professionally. The package of television situation comedies comes well-wrapped and no obstacles to easy digestion can be discerned. However one may judge them in terms of art or culture, highbrow or lowbrow, it is impossible not to judge them as good televisual products. It is argued here that the very authority they possess informs on their reception. If racist assumptions are being rehearsed then the actual medium of television itself does much to validate them.

The Logic of Censorship

The case as summarised by, for example, Vidmar and Rokeach may still be unsubstantiated. However, if it is taken as proven, for the moment, the awkward question arises as to what should be done about the programmes; if they are dysfunctional and harmful in exacerbating racial tension, what action should be taken? The logical answer would appear to be that they are taken off the air or heavily censored in much the same way as the 'Noddy' series of books has found ill-favour in public libraries because of the Golliwog character. It is not proposed to go into this problem here (other than to note its existence); rather, it may be more fruitful to look at the other side of the coin to audience research and 'effects', namely the production and writing of such comedies.

The Social Production of Television Comedy

In response to the question 'Would you now put on Alf Garnett and

1. This section is necessarily brief. The dynamics involved are dealt with at length in a later chapter.
Till Death Us Do Part, in its prime?’, the then Managing Director of the BBC replied

“Well, it’s a fair question, but, as you know, the research on that at the time – and we kept fairly continuous research on this – was that it didn’t change attitudes either way. There is some evidence that it might have firmed up attitudes. Whether we would put it on now, I don’t know” (Trethowan 1976)

There is no doubt that the BBC were concerned as to the possible effects of the programme; it was not revived after it had finished its run.

When the Community Relations Commission submitted their evidence to the Annan Committee in 1975, the writer of the programmes had the following to say (according to The Sun newspaper 2/12/75):

“They have completely missed the show’s point. Most coloured people love it and understand what we are trying to do. We make a joke out of all kinds of prejudices. When a coloured person is involved with Garnett, it’s Alf who ends up looking stupid and the coloured person who appears clever. There is still deep-seated racial prejudice in this country based on ignorance and fear. But my show brings it all out in the open and tries to make people realise how silly it is. Before Till Death, you wouldn’t have known it existed as far as TV was concerned. At least people are laughing at it now.”

The intentions are clear – to attack bigotry by making the bigot (and his statements) literally ridiculous. Speight has outlined his East End of London origins, his grass-roots socialism (‘to me the only obscenity is poverty’ 1973; 35) and his careers as insurance salesman, joke-writer, playwright, and television scriptwriter.

1. The audience research (BBC 1973, 1975) has been criticised by Hartsann (1975) in that it sets out to answer the question ‘will prejudice be increased’ rather than ‘will prejudice be reinforced’. Husband (1977) has analysed the BBC findings in depth within a framework of Britain as a racist society with a supposedly tolerant tradition; it is this tolerance which enables the continued rehearsal of racist assumptions to pass unchallenged. Further, “since Garnett is a harmless buffoon then the audience need feel no embarrassment...they may suspend moral monitoring and in this way they are able to reject the man and accept his views” (271). Husband does not, of course, argue that the character is a harmless buffoon; the audience research figures do show, though, that this is how many people regarded Garnett.
Unfortunately, his autobiography barely touches on his working relationship with the BBC or the IBA (though there is a scathing reference to the dropping of *Curry and Chips* as sweeping the problem under the carpet); an early interview (Mara 1962), pre-dating *Till Death Us Do Part*, does not touch on ethnic humour.

A programme which drew a fair amount of heated fire was *The Melting Pot*, written by Spike Milligan and Neil Shand and produced by Ian MacNaughton of *Monty Python* fame. The setting was an Irishman's boarding house and occupants included two Pakistani illegal immigrants, a Chinese Cockney, and an Australian bigot. According to *The Sun* 21/8/76, Shand was optimistic about any effects:

"In this series we're not out to get laughs by exploiting racism. We're not inciting people to racism. We're inciting them to laughs"

though the opposite view was given by an embittered Milligan

"We have deliberately written a comedy series like all the other hit television comedy series. It's all there. References to niggers, wops, and wogs. That's what gets the laughs today. I'm hating every minute of it. I'm contemptuous of myself. But that's what people want...This series won't do a thing to improve race relations or make people more tolerant"

The 'pilot' for the series (shown under the *Comedy Playhouse* banner) was attacked by Roger and Catherine Ballard in letters to *The Listener* and the *Radio Times*. In the former, they noted that

"...the emphasis degenerated to showing the absurdity of any set of cultural values, and to presenting Asian cultural values - or a stereotype of them - as particularly absurd. Even an Asian accent - when imitated by Milligan - is to be taken as a joke" (26/6/75)

and in the latter that

"Spike Milligan...invited his audience to regard stereotyped Asian ethnicity as intrinsically comic, so both reinforcing the stereotype and devaluing Asian ethnicity" (5/7/75)

This drew what must be regarded as the official BBC response from James Gilbert, then Head of Comedy, and Billy Cotton:

"We are getting a little over-sensitive if we feel we cannot poke fun at our fellow countryman. Is it not better for Asians
to allow themselves to be mocked in the same way that we have always mocked ourselves? Is this not true integration?" (5/7/75)

It seems quite clear, then, that the official view of televised ethnic humour supports the 'laughter as catharsis' school. As long as something is funny the effects are likely to be beneficial. By missing the point (that The Talling Pot effectively stated that Asians are, ipso facto, something to laugh at) the BBC seems to have retreated from a position of responsibility - a suggestion that was made time and time again at the Edinburgh International Television Festival in 1978. The failure to treat racial characters in realistic terms (say, in the context of Northern Ireland) has allowed political issues to be reduced to the level of a quick joke which 'controls' the troublesome factor. There is, for example, no need to give serious consideration to racial disadvantage when the problem can be dealt with by caricature. By taking a 'short cut to consensus' a comic image may easily carry more weight and permanence for the audience than a serious documentary discussion, and allow for their experiences to be interpreted in the light of stereotypes. A programme like Mind Your Language, set in an evening class for immigrants wishing to learn English, relied totally on one-dimensional characters - the saucy French girl, the inscrutable Oriental, the wheedling Indian - whose failure to use the English language marks them down as lovable but inferior. Of course, any comedy must rely to some extent on caricature but the difference here is that 'race' has been equated with the medieval 'humour'.

It Ain't Half Hot, Mum, involving a concert party of the British Army in India during the Second World War, makes much of the characters of an effete Bombardier and a 'spit and polish' Sergeant Major. They act in well-defined and predictable ways which greatly aids the generation of comedy. However, their 'humours' arise from personality unlike the
main Indian character whose humour derives from the fact that he is
an Indian (albeit played by a blacked-up Englishman). Husband (1979)
has accurately described the stereotype as 'a hybrid mixture of Mowgli
and Gunga Lin' (202). The implication, naturally enough, is that if
race determines a person's humour then every member of that race will
act in the same way. All Jews will imitate Shylock and all Irishmen
will bet on the duck at a cockfight 1.

While it may be assumed that no writer or producer would willingly
admit that their intention was to reinforce prejudice, Norman Lear
has readily admitted the inherent dangers by stressing the limitations
in the situation comedy format. To critics who bemoaned the slight
treatment given to social problems he has replied in terms of network
censorship 2 and the difficulties of doing much in under half an hour
when your first job is to amuse people. Putting it succinctly

"If anybody thought he was going to erase prejudice with a
situation comedy, he'd have to be an asshole" (1976:69)

or

"I find myself accused of reinforcing bigotry and prejudice. By
the same token there are people who will praise us for liberalising
people's attitudes. I don't think either is correct. I have by
now thousands of letters from the people who think Archie Pucker
is right...I would be foolish if I thought a half-hour sitcom
could change what the entire Judaeo-Christian ethic couldn't
change in 2,000 years" (1978)

The point is, perhaps, obvious but appears to have been overlooked
by many academic writers on the subject. Calls for programmes with

1. The specific political, economic, and social context of ethnic
humour has been noted by many writers, particularly Goldstein
(1976). That Poles may replace the Irish in American jokes, or
East Friesians in Germany should need no further explanation here.
2. Lear has denied that he accepted 'cuts' in any of his shows (1976)
but he is obviously aware that some material would not be included
if left to the censors and such material would be excised at the
writing stage. Brown (1971) suggests, however, that cuts were made
(137-138) and cites the successful network demands for the dropping
of 'Goddam' and a scene showing a young man doing up his trouser
zip (which would have followed a scene showing Archie and his wife
leaving church).
'real' black characters have been answered by Good Times and Sanford and Son in America and The Fosters in England; this is all very well but subject to the same criticism. There are limits to what can be done in a situation comedy when the first job of the writer is to raise laughs.

Love Thy Neighbour, about a white couple living next door to a black couple, was often cited as being progressive in that the blacks were 'real' people on an equal footing with their neighbours. However, any serious treatment of prejudice in the show was automatically submerged by the need to make the programme funny first and socially responsible second. The series Mixed Blessings (white husband, black wife) appeared to have a promising start but, according to the TV Times (12/4/80), the writer claimed that the show 'is now more concerned with the prejudices we all have about age, class and nationality rather than just a black v. white confrontation'; one of the cast was quoted as announcing 'I'm delighted with the new scripts I've read - I think they have become a lot funnier'. One may assume that there is only a limited amount of humour or pathos that can be wrung from the situation of a mixed marriage; the need to raise laughs will ensure the programme's dimensions are widened.

Before leaving ethnic humour in this chapter it is as well to conclude with two quotes which summarise the opinion of this thesis. The first is from Hartmann and Husband:

"It would be naive to pretend that there is some simple criterion for distinguishing between 'harmful' and 'harmless' ethnic humour" (1974:201)

and the second from Husband alone

"There is a widespread acceptance that racial jokes are potentially beneficial for their cathartic, tension-releasing effects, and that they are harmless...the trouble with racial jokes is that they are only funny if you know the assumption upon which the joke is based, and, all too often, that assumption is racist...the point is that in sharing a racial joke people rehearse..."
the racist beliefs which are the necessary shared assumptions for the joke to work" (1975:33)

The only possible danger in this sort of approach, when applied to television comedy, is that it may seem unduly arrogant; it may imply that the home audience cannot distinguish between Garnett's bigotry as ideology and rhetoric, and as comedy, worthy of derision. However, the BBC research tends to indicate that this may very well be the case. Certainly, personal experience of seeing Warren Mitchell in character as Garnett at the Theatre Royal, Stratford in East London underlines the difficulty of appropriate distinctions. No matter how much one may disagree with the views of the character, the sight of an old man croaking the National Anthem as a life-line to the sort of past he hoped existed elicited sympathy; there were not jeers of derisive laughter but almost hushed respect. It was obvious that a chord of agreement had been struck with many members of the audience.

Ethnic humour has been discussed at a reasonable length which partly reflects the academic interest in the subject. Parallel topics could have been sexist humour, class humour or any other sub-division (though it might be possible to argue that all humour contains such elements) but space and the desire to represent published opinions limited the approach taken here. What should be apparent, though, is that the subject matter of comedy need not and should not be seen as existing in some sort of a social vacuum; this is emphasised in the next section where the relatively discrete anthropological contribution is reviewed.

Joking Relationships and the Anthropology of Humour

The phenomenon whereby two people stand in a relationship of licensed familiarity has been found in many cultures. In Africa, especially, it exists between the mother's brother and the sister's son — uncle
and nephew - or between those who are potential affines. The relationship is usually framed within kinship and, understandably, may be more pronounced in pre-literate societies.

The theoretical foundation was laid by Radcliffe-Brown; it will immediately be seen that the qualifier 'joking' carries a lot under its referents:

"...the behaviour is such that in any other social context it would express and arouse hostility...the relationship is one of permitted disrespect...it is not meant seriously and must not be taken seriously...(they) are modes of organising a definite and stable system of social behaviour in which conjunctive and dis-junctive components...are maintained and combined" (1940:196,200)

Where there may be a conflict of interests, for example, between a husband and his wife's family, he argues joking relationships may act to regulate and defuse the situation (just as a mother-in-law avoidance taboo may operate by mutual respect rather than mutual disrespect):

"...a relationship in which insults are exchanged and there is an obligation not to take them seriously, is one which, by means of sham conflicts, avoids real ones" (1949:134)

Radcliffe-Brown has also suggested (1952; chapter 1) that the avuncular relationship has developed by a process of extension. In the patrilineal societies of South Africa the son's feelings for his mother (love) and father (respect) are extended throughout the kinship network with the result that his father's sister is the most respected relative and his mother's brother the most loved. Such love is reciprocated by indulgence.

Among the matrilineal Crow Indians, Lowie has suggested (1935), those who can joke with one another are those who would be of the same clan if descent was patrilineal. As matrilineal descent involves membership of a group traced through one's mother and her sisters, and patrilineal descent through one's father and his brothers, then the joking relationship will exist between, for example, Prince Charles and the Mountbattens rather than Prince Charles and the Bowes-Lyons
or the Armstrong-Joneses. Lowie also suggests that joking relationships represent '...licensed familiarity (which) generally obtains between potential mates' (1949:97) and claims that when a man has committed a reprehensible act it is the job of his joking relative, rather than a fellow clan member, to make fun of him (1917:52). It should now be clear that there are two basic types of joking relationship: those qualified by age will be avuncular or between grandparents and grandchildren, those qualified by sex are likely to be found between potential affines and it is this latter group that has more relevance here.

Brant (1943) suggests, as Lowie does, that

"...the joking relationship tends to obtain between relatives standing in a potential sexual relationship to each other" (161)

which is supported by Murdock:

"...both joking and license nearly always include a degree of physical contact and or coarse or sexual humour which would be considered highly indecent with any other relative of opposite sex. The relative with whom one jokes...is not merely a potential future spouse but usually also a currently available sex partner." (1949:282)

This brings the analysis here, by way of corollary, to the subject of incest. Relations between brother and sister are invariably free from obscenity; they are characterised by respect in many prositrate societies. Certainly, for Levi-Strauss the incest taboo is the cornerstone of culture and humanity (1969). The taboo differentiates between

1. Sykes (1966), however, suggests that '...gross obscenity and horse-play (were) found only between those men and women who were not potential sexual partners' (192) among employees in a Glasgow printing works. Hammond (1964) notes that joking may take place with potential affines but suggests that the reasons are not sexual; rather, a man may joke with his wife's sisters as a way of 'getting at' his wife without directly breaching the etiquette demanded (among a certain west African tribe). Writers who have stressed the 'age gap' type of joking include Isserly (1958), Richy (1968), and Ulan (1976) who gives a function of joking as introducing new information and coping with change. It seems sensible to agree with Homans that '...joking occurs in many different situations, and the situations must not be confused because they arouse similar responses' (1951:263)
women who are permitted and those who are not. The categories of wife and sister are generated and man becomes human through the necessity of exchanging women with other groups. According to Levi-Strauss, once this distinction has been made there must be a class of women who are potential affines (as well, of course, as those who are not) and according to other writers, it is this first group who enjoy joking relationships with any individual in society (Christensen (1963), Fine (1976), Hoebel (1960), Firth (1957)).

It is as well though, to note here the criticism raised by Fox

"...the distinction between incest and exogamy...is really only the difference between sex and marriage, and while every teenager knows the difference many anthropologists get them confused" (1967;54)

A marriage partner must always be of the class of permitted women. A permitted woman need not be married (and the same may be said with the genders reversed).

There are now two directions which may be followed from the anthropological literature: exploring the 'humour' in joking relationships, and examining what new lines might arise from a discussion of incest for a wider understanding of jokes. Unfortunately, apart from Douglas (1968), few anthropologists have concerned themselves with the joke in the joking relationship. Vilner's contributions as noted above may be cited as an exception but generally

"The study of humour as such had no place originally in the study of 'joking relationships' in African societies. The term 'joking' was deceptive since the abuse and insults exchanged were frequently far from amusing...almost any behaviour can be humorous in certain situations, and humour can have numerous different effects, not necessarily of sociological significance. Making clear why behaviour is amusing, relating the formal structure of the joke to the individual's experience of it, does not tell us how it affects the situation in which it occurs" (Sharman 1969;114)

1. Leach (1970) has noted that the argument appears vulnerable because it is so male-centred but also agrees that the ethnography of preliterate societies tends to support Levi-Strauss (101-102). Certainly, talk of 'permitted women' being exchanged might appear unpalatable in the 1980's.
It is difficult to disagree with much of this because the category of 'joking' has been used with a fair degree of liberality which has diminished its use and worth as an analytical concept. However, if one accepts that teasing, banter, and 'permitted disrespect' occur with much regularity between people occupying certain structural positions with regard to one another, then it may be important to understand why 'joking' is deemed the appropriate type of interaction. Certainly, when a joking relationship is defined in terms of 'potential affines' there is an identifiable link with Emerson's 'negotiation' (1973). Firth, for example, has written of the way Polynesian boys will jokingly

"...portion out the women among them. This is purely by way of conversation and causes great amusement. If the girls hear, they laugh...both boys and girls mention the genitals of the opposite sex for the purposes of raising a laugh...all this talk and play does not necessarily lead to sex (sic) intercourse between the parties; much of it is unproductive, and is indeed meant only to cause amusement by suggestion. But on the other hand it is very useful to pave the way for more intimate approaches" (1957:511-512)

That it is joking rather than another form of communication would seem to be crucial. It is even possible, though not necessary, to refer back to Freudian theory and the suggestion that taboo subjects may be broached through humour. A 'dirty' joke told in the presence of a woman is often a thinly disguised ploy at seduction just as hostile joking pinpoints real areas of hostility.

Bradney (1957), in an examination of a modern department store, discovered that joking between members of staff arose through potential conflict. Because the staff were in competition for sales, and therefore commission, but had to work together it was essential that the situation be defused

"...by means of a tradition of joking behaviour...This store is able to avoid considerable tension and disagreement that would be likely to occur as a result of the difficulties inherent in its formal structure" (136)
Miller (1967) has also reported on this aspect of joking (with regard to a North Amerindian tribe). One of the effects of joking rather than serious discussion is that comments may be made to sanction behaviour and express disapproval with little chance of repercussions though good chances of actually being understood. Also, while turning to psychoanalysis for his answers, Skeels (1954) has discussed Nez Perce Indian mythology by reference to the importance of humour. Coyote 'trickster' myths outline anti-social actions which are punished but, because of their humour, they are effective in releasing tensions. The freedom that identification with the trickster allows may only be short-lived but it may act to release tension in an acceptable way rather than through more positive but socially undesirable action.

To return to incest:

"Potato clan people I respect and never marry, Wolf clan people I can joke with but can't marry, Deer and Paint people I can tease and marry" (A male Cherokee Indian cited in Gilbert 1955:296)

This apparent muddle may be resolved with the following information.

From the speaker's point of view, the Potato clan are his father's clan, the Wolf his mother's, and the Deer and the Paint clans are his father's father and his mother's mother. The last two are, therefore, beyond the range of incest prohibitions.

The possible origins of incest taboos have been discussed at length by Fox (1967:54-76) who suggests an evolutionary approach - natural selection will operate against inbreeding - and a demographic explanation in that by the time the son reaches puberty his cavewoman mother would be too old to breed (or dead) and his elder sister already taken by someone else. It is never entirely clear what happens to the younger sister. Freud (1913) suggested that sons kill fathers (authority) in order to seduce mothers and sisters but the result is extreme guilt which, somehow, is 'inherited' by the universal mind. In contrast,
Levi-Strauss argues that sisters must be exchanged for society to be established (1969). Jokes about incest are relatively, no pun intended, rare. It is rather that obscenity may be defined in terms of incest regulations. Obscene jokes will not normally be told to one's mother or sister or daughter but are often acceptable between spouses and potential spouses. Certainly, when viewed from the other side, that of 'avoidance', the anthropological evidence overwhelmingly supports the argument with data from many tribes of extreme mother-in-law taboos. Among the Cheyenne, for instance, a man should avoid seeing his mother-in-law and under no circumstances should he speak directly to her; after puberty, the relationship with his sister is marked by formal respect (Hoebel 1960:22-30). The fact that so many jokes exist about mothers-in-law in modern Western society need not be taken as a negation. Rather, they may be seen as one way of dealing with a potentially difficult situation since both avoidance and joking recognise that the area is subject to conflict.

It seems unlikely that a reliance on the notion of incest will greatly assist in any analysis of joking beyond that briefly given above. It is obviously helpful, when taken with marriage conventions, in studying kinship in preliterate societies though loses its appeal when applied to, for example, those societies where marriage partners are usually unrelated prior to the marriage (such as modern Britain with the possible exception of the aristocracy). Other factors, notably geography, may play a more important part in determining choice of spouse than the

1. The definition of 'Incest as the game all the family can play' would serve as one example. Those with more structure would include:
   'Father to son, on discovering him in bed with his grandmother:
   "Don't you know it's wrong to make love to my mother" "What the hell, you screw mine"'; and
   'Mother to son, making love to her: "You're not as good as your father" "That's what Granny always says"'.
   Milner (1975: personal communication) has suggested that while incest may provide the fuse, the detonator (in the last example) is the sudden realisation of the sexual symmetry.
limitations imposed by only marrying into the Deer or Paint clans.
All that may be said, in summary, is that if one follows Levi-Strauss
then the incest prohibition is central and must be at the root of any
kinship framework. Without wishing to confuse what every teenager knows,
marriage and its concomitant creation of categories is a plentiful
supply of jokes and comedies. The psychological approach may refer
back to sex and aggression but it seems more fruitful to argue for
a socially-determined aspect to joking derived from kinship (or power,
race and class) relationships. Thus, it is not necessarily the supposed
sexual attractiveness of one’s mother-in-law combined with her unavail-
ability that lies at the bottom of the joke, but the fact that there
is a class of mothers-in-law who were once a class of potential affines.
To agree with Freud demands that a peculiarly individual desire in a
specific case may generate a social phenomenon. It seems ludicrous
to argue that every individual (whether married or not) perceives an
archetypal mother-in-law with prohibited lust; it may well be preferable
to look at social dimensions free from sexual connotations (in so far
as they may be artificially excluded). In fact, it is suggested that
the move be made from incest and sex to exogamy and marriage.

1. The links between, for example, incest and marriage have been
clarified (or confused) in law and religion. The Church of England’s
‘Tables of Affinity’ specifically prohibits a man from marrying
his mother-in-law; Deuteronomy 27:23 gives ‘Cursed be he who lies
with his mother-in-law’ and Leviticus 20:14 has ‘If a man take a wife
and her mother also, it is wickedness’. English law has no such
prohibition, the Punishment of Incest Act 1908 giving ‘grand-daughter,
daughter, sister or mother’ with half-sisters included in the 1930’s.
The law is still exercised as witness the recent (1980) special
Enabling Act which gave dispensation to the marriage of one man
and his half-sister. The degrees of affinity which would prohibit
marriage are set out in the Marriage Act (1949).
Comedy and Laughter

"No theory of comedy will help us read it more adequately"
(L.C. Knights in Olson 1968:4)

Knights may, of course, be absolutely correct. It may be possible
to take each comedy on its own and there is no real need to try and
discover what it has in common with other comedies. The problem is
really one of definition. Either one can describe particular plays
as comedies and then see what they have in common, or one can define
a comic quality and then classify plays by reference to its absence
or presence.

The most immediately appealing net with which to trap comedy appears
to be that it is whatever makes us laugh or at least causes some
amusement. However, Potts suggests that it is '...very doubtful
whether the end of comedy is to produce laughter' (1949:10), and
Knights adds:

"Once an invariable connection between comedy and laughter is
assumed we are not likely to make any observations that will
be useful as criticism" (in Lauter 1964:432; originally 1933)

These views may be opposed by Wimsatt who argues that

"Comedy...combines the accent of laughter and the accent of
sympathy in a union of the laughter and his audience with the
targets of laughter...laughter is not a stern way of dealing
with deviation. It is always somewhat too much like its object
undignified, frivolous, inferior" (1955:13-14)

and Kronenberger:

"Comedy ap...eals to the laughter, which is in part at least the
malice in us; for comedy is concerned with human imperfection,
with people's failure to measure up either to the world's or
to their own conception of excellence" (1962:195)

Before battle is joined, it is as well to say that in this section

1. Durgnat (1969) makes the link between laughter and comedy central
in his study of American film comedy. He also supports the 'art as
a mirror' school with the proposition that the mirror held up
by comedy may well distort through exaggeration and other devices
but is a mirror nonetheless.
the word 'comedy' is taken as referring to a dramatic form (which may or may not contain structured jokes) with narrative and plot. Here, comedians and joke-tellers lie outside its scope, as do writers and comic actors; further, the emphasis follows the balance of published criticism towards the stage at the expense of the cinema. The main purpose is to see whether or not comedy and laughter may be fruitfully linked.

The influential view of the connection between comedy and laughter, following Bergson (1911), centres on laughter as ridicule, as something which implies that a value judgment has been made. The clearest statement comes from Ben Jonson which has been neatly summarised by Thayer:

"Jonson makes it perfectly clear in his prologue (to Everyman in His Humour) that he has a specifically didactic intention, which is to prevent or ameliorate crimes in or against society by presenting them on stage as follies, that is, as actions which are absurd and laughable and hence not to be imitated in real life" (1963:19)

Jonson's explanation of his purpose is, perhaps, worth quoting:

"And persons, such as Comedie would chuse,  
When she would shew an Image of the times,  
And sport with humane follies, not with crimes.  
Except, we make 'hem such by loving still  
Our popular errors, when we know th'are ill.  
I mean such errors, as you'll confess  
By laughing at them, they deserve no lesse;  
Which when you heartily doe, there's hope left, then,  
You, that have so grac'd monsters, may like men" (22-30 1616 Folio)

As Merchant (1972), among others, has noted, this quote also implies that comedy is somehow less than tragedy in that the former is concerned with foolish aberrations while the latter deals with serious crimes. The more important point here, however, is that comedy and tragedy require different responses from their audiences - the one derision, the other studied reflection and pity, the one social and the other individual.

Menon has usefully commented on the idea of comedy as 'social'
discipline:

"The 'comic muse' may be able to carry out this noble measure, but...if we subject ourselves to her lashing we do so of our own accord, and the discipline is obtained through our selves, through our enriched sense of humour which grows stronger with increased exercise, with increased experience...where we are willing to see and understand, comedy is capable of social discipline" (1931;117-118)

The point may be, though, that comedy is (for the most part) a pleasureable experience and this is something which is largely overlooked by Meron. Comedy teaches its lessons by amusement rather than by prompting serious discussion and it is argued here that the popularity of comedy is, in some sense, its own justification. While the content of comedy and tragedy may overlap, the form is different. Both may make the same point about the inevitability of, say, daughters leaving home or sons replacing fathers, but they will do so in different ways. It is impossible to say which operates in the most efficient manner though at least one is supposed to feel happier and better after watching a comedy; the very act of laughing is a pleasureable experience.

If, for a study of comedy, it is important that form rather than content should be taken as central then it may be advisable to follow Duncan who relies on the idea of laughter as social control:

"The social role of great comic art is to correct whatever threatens the social order, and, since the social order is dependent on the possibilities for communication between those in various status positions, whenever communication is threatened or where it is made intolerably difficult, laughter must serve as a solvent" (1961;55)

As may be apparent, Duncan keeps close to the concept of Bergsonian 'inelasticity'. If communication (in the widest possible sense) is used to order experience and uphold the social order then those who

1. Goodlad (1976) has some confirmatory figures for television (232); a brief glance at audience ratings, however calculated, supports the same. For the popularity of comedy plays in the theatre, see Goodlad (1969).
act to diminish full communication, whether through ignorance or mistake, will literally be laughed away. The laughter here may perform two functions — to punish the offender and re-affirm that all is well, and to engender a sense of euphoria and satisfaction. There is, then, a process of defining order through disorder. It may not be necessary to applaud those who act correctly if their actions are implicitly applauded through the derision of those who act 'rigidly'.

Another work by Duncan (1962) concentrates on this theme. Comedy is seen as 'sanctioned disrespect' which operates to resolve the disparity between order and disorder by making the latter laughable. Whereas a tragic treatment of a theme may demonstrate the terrible result of upsetting the social order by death, exile, or other finalities, a comic delivery will aim for reconciliation and resolution:

"Comedy, like tragedy, is very serious, but it is a different kind of seriousness, which resolves struggle through appeals to reason in society, not through some belief in some kind of supernatural fate" (1962;223n)

As such, it will also fall within the compass of Gluckman's rebellion rather than revolution (1955):

"...our sudden reassurance that while some aspect of authority is threatened, the principles of authority are not. The individual priest may be venal, the soldier cowardly, the scholar pedantic, but the church is still holy, the army still brave, the school a community of scholars searching for wisdom. Indeed, only to the degree that the institution is idealised can there be sufficient incongruity between the ideal and the real to excite laughter" (1962;387)

A comedy will therefore contain characters who have strayed from the path of reasonable behaviour. Instead, however, of killing the tragic protagonist, the clown is laughed back into society. He has erred, not sinned, and has been shown the error of his ways. This opens up two central and related fields of enquiry.

Firstly, and taking communication as the key, Duncan's theory requires that there is an audience who respond to the symbols laid
before them in an appropriate manner. In comedy that manner is the laughter of both joy and derision, applauding order and mocking disorder. The choral element is essential. Further, though it may be too obvious to require mention, it is not the actors that feel the weight of the derision and determine to mend their ways but the audience who respond to a representation of rigidity that reaffirms their beliefs as they recognise correct and incorrect ways of behaving.

Secondly, and more importantly as far as this work is concerned, there must be a discussion of why comedy takes such a form and how the reaction from the audience is prompted. Duncan is content to treat comedy as somehow already existing and monolithic, as if it had a life of its own and possessed a constant concern to educate towards the reasonable view. This rather rests on the assumption that writers of comedy are all of the same persuasion as Ben Jonson; that there is a definable intention to defeat intransigence by laughter. How far this is actually the case is discussed more fully in a later chapter and it must suffice to say here that the definition of what is, and what is not, a proper folly for comic treatment (and, by extension, a definition of normal behaviour) is undertaken by a large and heterogeneous group of people. That so much of television situation-comedy seems to have come from the desk of one overworked writer needs a different level of explanation from 'comedy says...' or 'comedy means...'; the level should account for the discernible facts and fancies of television ideology, organisation and production. It is really a question of where the emphasis needs to be placed. Are the programmes as they are because they fall into a tradition of comedy or because of television itself and the particular history of radio comedy? The answer, if there is one, is likely to fall
somewhere in the middle.

There still remains much, though, to be learnt from other writers on comedy before moving to a specific look at television in later chapters. Cook (1949), for example, is concerned to define comedy in two ways—by its opposition to tragedy (the probable: the wonderful, the Golden Mean: the Lark Voyage) and in terms of a wider duality of sex: death. For him, comedy will always be about social man:

"In comedy social man's position is determined by his relation to generation and to family...the ideas of the father versus the son, the older generation versus the younger generation, are at the core of the family in comedy from Aristophanes to Finnegans Wake" (1949;36)

To deal with sex means that one must deal with the family, with marriage, and with manners and conventions. Sex must have social dimensions while death is primarily an individual experience. Comedy will present deviations from a norm in order to emphasise that norm. Its function is to adjust the manners of people to the healthy norms of nature and society by avoiding the excesses shown on the stage. Cook is not really interested in a 'laughter as correction' model; rather, he sees it as a ritual expulsion of foibles as the theatre audience reach a unified point of agreement on what is acceptable behaviour.

Styan has elaborated on this last point. For him, the theatrical setting is paramount and analysis should address the total experience of the audience rather than dissecting the play in Aristotelian terms. Because there must be a dramatic dialectic between actors and audience for any play to succeed there can be little worth in discussing a comedy without including a dimension of performance. Falstaff, for example, is not a static character. The style in which he is played, the tenor of the production, and all the 'alchemical changes that occur during the reception of theatrical signals' (1975;26) will determine whether he is laughed at or laughed with. Here, then, is a timely warning
which most commentators have ignored. Just as Warren Mitchell
playing Alf Garnett can arouse audience sympathy as well as derision,
so any comedy can be interpreted through the total theatrical
experience. The performance, not the play, is the thing. Emphasis,
style, skilled actors and actresses, even costume and set design
will all determine how a play is received. It is difficult to
disagree with Styan but there is, however, something about comedy
which allows for generalisations based purely on the text. Although
such generalisations are diminished without reference to performance
they do, at least, help to give more comprehensive orders of explanation.

One such explanation is given by Hoglund (1973) in a discussion of
the plays of Ionesco1. Having made the link between laughter and
incongruity, he is concerned to demonstrate that this equation may
be applied to comedy:

"From daily experience, each of us comes to expect certain actions
and responses from other persons...when we laugh at something,
we do so because we have an idea, however vague and indistinct,
of how someone should have acted in the situation observed, as
distinct from how that person actually did act...if a play does
not counter-balance incongruous actions with those actions which
do conform to the viewer's expectations - does not, in effect,
reinforce his own attitudes - the very basis for the initial
perception of incongruity is removed" (317,318)

And if this basis is removed, we are likely to end up with a tragedy.
Unless a reconciliation takes place at the end of comedy - unless, in
effect, it has a happy ending - then the deviant actions of the
characters, the follies shown on stage, may lead to tragic consequences
or, which is worse, be misinterpreted as normative behaviour itself.

As Kronenberger usefully suggests:

"Comedy is not just a happy as opposed to an unhappy ending, but
a way of surveying life so that happy endings must prevail...a

1. According to Styan (1975:84), Ionesco has said 'Take a tragedy,
speed up the movement, and you will have a comedy. Empty the
characters of psychological content, and again you will have a
comedy: make the characters exclusively 'social beings' - captives
of the social machinery - and once again you will have a comedy.'
As a formula, this actually seems to work.
belief in the smallness that survives as against the greatness
that is scarred or destroyed. In mortal affairs it is tragedy,
like forgiveness, that seems divine; and comedy, like error,
that is human” (1962:194)

While many may disagree, a happy ending in stage comedy is often
achieved by marriage. Frye (1948, in Robertson 1963) suggests that
the essential comic resolution arises from the son defeating the
father to win the hand of a girl. There is an individual release
which is also a social reconciliation whereby the previously forbidden
marriage is made possible (and see also Levi-Strauss (1955,1967) for
directly comparable situations in mythology). It is, of course, not
necessary to have a 'real' son and father but this relationship
should be represented (by, say, nephew and uncle, employee and employer
and so on).

Potts (1949) does not link laughter with comedy, nor does he insist
that there should be a happy ending: 'In comedy we must feel that man
is free, not fated' (129) because its purpose is to oppose the ideal
with reality, the idea of a happy marriage is a very common target
for comedy. Kerr (1967) tends to agree as the comic marriage may often
be contrived and fraudulent with happiness tacked on as a footnote.
As such, comedy does not reach an end but is merely interrupted by a
pleasantry which often takes the form of a marriage. For Kerr, nothing
is really changed:

"Compromises, resignation, doubt, frank disbelief on all sides,
the denial of dignity, the reminder that victory changes nothing
and that the bumbler will go on bumbling - these are the indispensable
ingredients of a comic 'happy' ending" (78)

Kerr takes examples, as many others do, from a wide field of drama.
He argues for a Bergsonian concept of comedy with man imprisoned by
his bodily functions - sex, hunger, the need for clothing and shelter,
ailments and so forth - which can only be circumvented by introducing
the clever clown figure who succeeds through his wit and astuteness.
Even here, though, the clown is only clever by comparison with the
dullards who also inhabit the stage.

Olson (1968) stresses the connection between laughter and comedy. After dismissing other theories of laughter (because they are not exclusive to the laughable) he comes up with three conditions which must concur in comedy – a certain kind of object, a certain frame of mind in the audience, and the grounds on which we feel (1968:12). His book is an elaboration of how these three conditions are fulfilled in a number of comedies and may pre-empt the otherwise justified claim that his theory is also non-exclusive. At the hub of his argument lies the proposition that laughter arises from lack of concern. We, as audience, are led to believe that something portrayed on stage is important and worthy of our attention or sympathy until the absurdity presents itself and our freedom from concern breaks out in laughter. As may be noted, this has elements of Spencer's laughing off excess energy (and, of course, of Freudian cathetic energy) and takes us further in only one respect – the theory is applied to comedy rather than joking, and the same underlying principle may be seen for both (if Olson is correct). Just as the common sensical definition of farce as something abnormal happening to normal people rings true, so the logical extension of Olson's suggestion is that comedy is something normal happening to normal people. Our laughter erupts when we realise that the pomposity of Captain Mainwaring in Dad's Army is an excess rather than a norm or that Hancock's air of self importance when giving blood deserves to be deflated. Taking a cue from Olson, it appears likely that much of comedy will rely on excess and over-reaction. The 'normal' situation of trying to avoid hearing a football result in order to enjoy the televised recording (Whatever Happened to The Likely Lads) need have no tragic or comic consequences; the comic potential is certainly there, however, if characters react excessively. Our concern is there at the start; when the action reaches towards
(believable) absurdity the gap left by our lost concern is filled with laughter. That this also has an element of Hobbesian superiority is undeniable. No matter how much we may identify with a character there must be some distancing and, almost inevitably, this will be taken from a standpoint of superiority. However much we like a character, he or she must be fallible and be seen to make mistakes which we (presumably) would not. The extreme version of this has been put by the cartoonist Al Capp:

"The more secure a man feels, the more ready he is to laugh. So Chaplin - the instant he appeared - gave us all a feeling of security. Certainly none of us, no matter how badly off we were, were as badly off as this bundle of rags" (1963:272)

Feibleman stands almost alone in dismissing the commonly held theory that comedy is effectively a mirror wherein the audience sees a definition of what is normal and acceptable through a presentation of folly and mistake. The very fact that this implies 'normality is what is good for mankind' lies at the base of Feibleman's disagreement. For him, the function of comedy is

"...the indirect affirmation of the ideal logical order by means of the derogation of the limited orders of actuality...both understatement and exaggeration point the moral that by exceeding the ordinary limits of actual things and events, the arbitrary and non-final nature of these limits can be demonstrated...thus indirectly comedy voices the demand for more logical programmes...by exhibiting current evaluations in the light of their shortcomings. The corrosive effect of humour eats away the solemnity of accepted evaluation, and thus calls for a revaluation of values."

(originally 1949; in Lauter 1964:462,464)

The distinction between tragedy and comedy is drawn in an earlier work (1939). Feibleman takes all drama to be the world as it is contrasted with the world as it ought to be. In tragedy we admire how close to the ideal man can reach (though failing, for example, through hubris) while in comedy we criticise man for falling short

1. Chaplin himself does not appear to agree, though. See McCaffery (1971) for Chaplin's own views on comedy as '...an idea, going in one direction, meets an opposite idea suddenly'(29).
(through, perhaps, an excess). To contrast Feibleman with other writers may not be strictly accurate as the difference revolves on which way one looks at comic man - either applauding his reconciliation and return to normality or criticising his failure to innovate and remain above conventions.

There is a further thread to the argument as a consequence of Feibleman's suggestion. Since Plato declared comedy inferior to tragedy (see Hoglund 1973) there has been a tendency to take the former as somehow frivolous and less important. Many have argued against this (Guthrie (1903) and Chapman (1910) both give spirited defences) but such arguments usually rely on drawing supportive examples from the giants of the field - Moliere, Shakespeare, and Jonson; thus, Chapman writes of one 'giant'

"...when Aristophanes has had his way, there is nothing left over; there is no frame nor shell; there is no theatre nor world. Everything is exploded and scattered into sifting, oscillating, shimmering, slowly-sinking fragments of meaning and allusion" (864)

Now this may work well enough for high art, the classics, the great Comedies or whatever one calls them, but it hardly applies to the modern television situation comedy. The distinction seems to carry something more than a 'high/low art' dimension and it is, perhaps, this: all drama has the potential for two aspects which may be called briefly 'the eternal' and 'the transitory'. Some plays may say something about the human condition which is just as true or relevant to modern man as it apparently was to the ancient Greeks or to the Elizabethans. Other plays have a certain temporal anchor tying them to a particular age; this aspect of limited relevance need not diminish their qualifications to be included as a 'great play' but

1. Dobree, amongst others, opposes this point of view. He writes that "...(critical) comedy is not a phosphorescent gleam upon the surface of a decaying society, but a conservative reaction against change. It is...a social corrective" (in Felheim (1962;204)).
later generations may not be attracted to the themes or plots. It is suggested here that situation comedies may fall into either category, but those which are 'transitory' will be more likely to comment, through stereotypes, on manners and conventions which are directly relevant to the present age. A 'character' may last beyond a lifetime, a stereotype will forever be tied to a specific time and place; as those things which were seen as important become less so through the passage of time then the conventions which were necessary for the very existence of the stereotype will fade. The idea of 'sex before marriage' was the basis for many twists of plot in radio and early television comedies but it remained an idea. There are now, in the 1980's, a number of television comedies which explicitly acknowledge the frequency of sex before marriage though it must be admitted there is still plenty of comic mileage in just the mere idea. For some reason, adultery is recognised in theory but seldom in practice unlike Wycherley's The Country Wife (1670's) of which Rodway has written

"...the supposed eunuch gets most women, the jealous husbands are easiest cuckolded, prudish ladies the most lecherous, and open aversion a sure sign of secret desire" (1975;136)

The fact that Restoration comedies are played today is suggestive.

Adultery per se is not forbidden in modern comedy, whether on stage or television, but only in the peculiar breed of situation comedies. While there is the odd exception, there still seems to be something about the very nature of situation comedies that prevents them from dealing with subjects that have been taken as proper and justified in 'normal' comedies. It cannot just be the time of broadcast (usually between 1. Kronenberger has: 'To what extent sex itself is a comic theme must naturally vary with the morality of a particular age; there are times when it seems shocking for a man ever to have a mistress; there are times when it seems even more shocking for a man never to have one' (1962;197)

2. For example, the following programmes all take pre-marital intercourse as a regular occurrence: Agony, Shelley, Rins on Their Fingers, The Other 'Arf, and so on.
7pm and 9pm with some afternoon repeats) because the more contentious programmes are simply rescheduled to later times. The reason would appear to be some kind of censorship operating mainly at the level of the individual scriptwriter who has a concept of what is expected from him and what subjects may or may not be treated.

To return, though, to literary theories. Bentley (1966) draws valuable distinctions between tragedy and comedy:

"...in the tragic tradition, the characters can be different every time, because the story remains the same. In comedy, it was the characters who remained constant, while the changes were rung on plots. If tragedy makes use of narrative myths, comedy makes use of character myths" (53)

Further, comedy is separated from farce. Farce may be characterised by pure aggression and hostility while comedy has the anger of farce backed by conscience and a concept of right and justice. The end of both may leave the world much as it was before (with perhaps the mere coma of a marriage) but comedy, unlike farce, has at least looked in the right direction and obtained some sort of a resolution in an ironical happy ending; matters of morality may be examined and follies exposed through laughter. Bentley acknowledges a debt to Freud (and Grothjahn); fairly bizarre unions between psychology and literary theories can be found in McWhinney (1968) who attempts to link 'sex, time, and laughter' and Tuttle (1963) who matches the stages of Greek comedy with sexual developments in childhood.

1. This topic is dealt with in a later chapter; however, before leaving sex and marriage it is worth noting two contributions. Wolfenstein and Leites have discussed the comic onlooker in American films as an important device in developing a style of comedy relying on false appearances. We, as audience, know that the young couple are really married and can laughingly repudiate the mistaken onlooker. We can supposedly enjoy the promise of viewing illicit sex through the agency of the onlooker without feeling guilt because the sex is within marriage (1950, 244-258). Secondly, in a discussion of the erotic revue 'Pyjama Tops', Hunt has noted that when nudity is set in a comic context the audience can react to the sex and the fun at the same time; the funniness makes the nudity somehow less seedy (1969, 524).
That comedy may encompass a treatment of ideals has been taken up by Hoy (1964); plot and action revolve around

"...aiming so high, falling so low, and regularly failing to profit from experience — (this) might be said to define the attitude which comedy takes in depicting the disparity between the ideal of human rationality and the violence done it in the reality of the everyday performance...All that is required is the perception of the incongruous distance that separates human purpose and action." (203, 204)

As may be obvious, Hoy and Bentley see the link between comedy and ideals from a similar standpoint; Hoy elaborates his argument by reference to the different ways in which ideals are examined. — they can be held up as a worthy (though unreachable) goal, or derided as lofty examples of impracticality and otherworldliness.

Concluding Remarks

The overlapping interests of sections in this chapter serve, perhaps, to underline the difficulty of pursuing a single-minded line in search of a theory of comedy and laughter, humour and joking. It is hoped, however, that it has been shown possible (if not necessary) to link laughter through joking and comedy to society rather than the individual; this aspect remains of concern through the remaining chapters and will be specifically coupled with the writing and production of television situation comedies.

Much has been left unwritten, particularly in the last section, and only three further points will be made before changing direction to the context of the mass media. Firstly, the subject of 'humour', unless used in an updated Jonsonian sense, will virtually disappear. It has received scant treatment here anyway, having been employed by most writers with regard to defining a sense of humour as something peculiar to the English (or the Americans, or the French and so on). Thus, Nicolson writes that 'when faced with the menacing, the English take instinctive
refuge in their sense of humour' (1956:42) and Potter that 'English humour is a product of the close observation of character' (1954:7). Certainly, much has been written on the supposed characteristics of Jewish humour (and wit) and as such works tend to proceed by examples it is difficult to dispute their findings. Things may be taken to extremes though — if memory serves correctly, it was Legman (1975) who suggested that the Germans' dour sense of humour derives directly from their rigorous childhood toilet training. The level of arguments which treat of national or racial characteristics is often in danger of being superficial; because a sense of humour has been seen as a desirable attribute, it is hardly surprising that examples have been found to denigrate or elevate any particular race by reference to its humorous predilections.

Secondly, little has been said about performance (which forms an integral part of the model of the studio audience proposed in a later chapter). It may, however, be convenient here to record the comments of certain writers who have dealt with solely theatrical settings; for the views of comedians themselves, the excellent book by Fisher (1976) is recommended.

Guibranson (1972) writes of tempo and rhythm as important in maximising the most favourable audience response; the type of response to the first third of a comedy will tend to determine the response for the remainder. Martin (1905) stressed, among other things, that a smiling face on stage will enhance perceived funniness; Lange (1927) suggested that costumes and 'business' increased the funniness of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas by 100% and 400% respectively. Gabbard (1954) conducted a most elaborate experiment which involved hooking up audience members to a machine on which they could record their reactions. The most effective comic devices were, in ascending order, impropriety,
reversal, and overstatement. In a series of letters from a practitioner
to an aspirant, Seyler and Haggard (1946) outlines certain essentials
of comedy as 'lack of balance, distortion, over-emphasis or under-
emphasis, and surprise' (15); they also suggest that the comic actor
should stand outside the character and effectively share the joke
with the audience. This last observation would certainly run true
for television comedy recordings where the cast are usually introduced
as themselves to the audience before getting into character.

Finally, Nevo has suggested that

"...while the theory of comedy is separate from the theory of
laughter, the two cannot but touch at many points" (1963;327)

In case the point needs underlining, a fairly lengthy quote from

Dryden (originally 1671) may be given:

"The business of the poet is to make you laugh: when he writes
humour, he makes folly ridiculous; when wit he moves you, if
not always to laughter, yet to a pleasure that is more noble.
And if he works a cure on folly, and the small imperfections
in mankind, by exposing them to public view, that cure is not
performed by an immediate operation. For it works first on the
ill nature of the audience; they are moved to laugh by the
representation of deformity; and the shame of that laughter
teaches us to amend what is ridiculous in our manners"
(in Rodway 1975;135)

The distinction between humour and wit matches, to a great extent,
the differences between the worst and the best of television comedy;
and if 'deformity' is struck out and 'inelasticity' (with all that
that implies) substituted then a reasonable precis of the gist of
this chapter has been obtained.
CHAPTER FIVE  THE STUDY OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

There have been many attempts, by researchers, critics, and practitioners, to develop frameworks for understanding the mass media; statements have been made and suggestions offered on, for example, the effects that the mass media may have, how production is organised, and what content is transmitted. Specific forms of the mass media as well as particular programmes have been subjected to analysis and well-informed opinion. Just as previous chapters in this thesis have drawn material from a variety of sources, so will this one consider both 'philosophical' and social scientific works; the concern is still largely with theory rather than practice.

Two Models - de Fleur and Riley

De Fleur (1966) delineates three areas for enquiry in any examination of the mass media:

(1) What impact has society on the organisation, form, and structure?
(2) "How does mass communication take place? Is mass communication a separate phenomenon from other types of communication? Does it differ in principle or only in detail from more direct interpersonal communication?" (1966)
(3) What effects has mass communication on society?

He suggests that most academic enquiry has concentrated on (3); however, of greater interest here is the passage (87-96) where the differences between mass and face-to-face communication are discussed. Both are human systems for achieving isomorphism in meaning (90) though communication is not a mere transfer of meaning but a process for establishing a similarity of meaning between sender and receiver by reference to significant symbols. There is almost a process of negotiation as the originator of the message is, to some extent, aware of the reception his communication is likely to get; the basic

1. De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1975) is an updated version of this work, containing an additional Chapter entitled 'Towards an Integrated Theory' where it is argued that the influence of the media is a function of the dependence on the audience.
premise of this particular model is that the presence of influential responses supply the creators and producers of messages with new and dynamic information.

"Nearly always, when one individual engages in the communicative act with another, there is some sort of perceptible feedback originating in the communicates which the communicator uses as data for modifying his message...the fact that the channel has become considerably elaborated does not change the fundamental characteristics of the communicative act" (94-95)

For de Fleur, communication is strongly identified with influential feedback in both face-to-face situations and in the mass media. He also stresses that the presence of feedback is essentially continuous; the perspective of 'stimulus-response' has, therefore, led to a simplistic effects model.

The alternative model was developed through a realisation that a mechanistic stimulus-response framework was inapplicable to a study of mass communication. Apart from a great degree of selectivity in the audience, there are other spheres of interaction which may exert a greater influence in determining perception and acceptance or rebuttal of mass media output. The hypothesis that there is a two-step flow in the diffusion and understanding of such output allows for a wider social perspective and supports the proposition that primary ties, those of work, family, and friends, will inform on individual appreciation (see particularly Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). Katz (1957)).

De Fleur is quite explicit in emphasising the impracticality of versing 'effects upon the audience' in a unilineal frame of reference:

"...it must be recognised that the behaviour patterns of a given individual can seldom be accurately interpreted on the basis of individual psychological variables alone, particularly when the individual is acting within a social context...reference must be made to the social norms, roles, social controls and culturally defined or shared values, expectations and beliefs, which surround action" (134)

Further, the mass media organisations should not be seen in isolation.

The function of the provision of what de Fleur calls 'low-taste content'
is the maintenance of a deeply institutionalised social system which is firmly integrated with the macro-economic structure. Basically, the prevalence of the concept of mass consumerism, sponsored by advertising, has implications for the mass media; technological and consumer products become equated with cultural artefacts through the presence of a mass audience which is, supposedly, homogenised and incapable of differentiation between the limited choice of programmes offered.

A similar model of communication, using the concept of feedback, was developed by John and Matilda Riley (1959). Once again, the larger social structure within which communication takes place is emphasised (577). The Rileys suggest that little academic attention has been paid to the element of feedback in mass communication but

"...even here, a degree of feedback clearly tends to exist - scant, indirect, and obscure though it may be. Some kind of reciprocal channel is needed if the communicator is to learn whether and how his message was received, if he is to have any basis for sending further messages" (566)

Following Mead (1934), they suggest that the sender of any message assumes the attitude of the other - the generalised other, in this case, being the audience. It is through taking the role of the other that the communicator can direct his own cut ut and 'come back' on himself by a sort of vicarious feedback.

Further, they agree with Lazarsfeld (1940) that there is a large element of selection prior to any effect that a programme may have - a person will tend to listen to (or view) what he wants to hear and will be attracted by those messages which support his beliefs. Dissonant cognitions are reduced by avoiding certain types of programme and

1. The subject of cognitive dissonance is wide. Festinger (1959, 1964) gives definitive explanations; Abelson et al (1960) provide useful summaries. The basic principle is succinctly found in Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955): 'Changes in evaluation are always in the direction of increased congruity with the existing frame of reference'(43)
by selecting those, whether consciously or not, which bolster attitudes and values held by a particular audience. Where there is strong identification it is likely that the message will be both more persuasive and effective. As to 'directions for future research', the Rileys suggest that it would be fruitful to concentrate on small groups and interpersonal communication then use any findings to tackle the more complicated structures of mass communication by way of comparison. The implication is that the restrictions on feedback which make it 'scant, indirect, and obscure' are likely to be dysfunctional for the system; the clearer the feedback, the more that communication should be free from misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

**A Third Perspective - Gerbner's 'Cultural Indicators'**

As with de Fleur and the Rileys (and Schramm (1960), and Westley and Maclean (1957)), a central part of Gerbner's work is the situation of mass communications in a paradigm of the communicators organisational setting (1956). There is a triad of relationship between the communicator (in his organisation), the audience or public, and the socio-cultural milieu. Basically, Gerbner's major interest is to determine how the public is acculturated through the output of the mass media by explaining what factors generate, or discriminate against, certain messages. For Gerbner, direct effects on the public are acceptable assumptions as a logical extension from the proposition that communication is at the core of human consciousness and social behaviour. Thus, a change in the system of communication cannot fail to have repercussions in transforming the nature of human affairs. If communication, the exchange of messages in the symbolic environment, can be regarded as the prime mover in the cultivation, and regulation, of relations between people then a change in its nature and style, from interpersonal to mass exposition, will both alter the types of message and how those messages are perceived.
For Gerbner, in sum

"...the fabric of popular culture that relates the elements of existence to one another and shapes the common consciousness of what is, what is important, what is right and what is related to what else, is now largely a manufactured product" (1972b:4)

The important question to answer, then, is what sort of factors are influential in the manufacture of mass media output; what pressures, codes of practice, sanctions and so on, affect the decision-taker in the communications industry. In a study of how the French press handled the story of a teacher killing a schoolboy, Gerbner suggests ways of accounting for the different slants in the published stories:

"The basic editorial function is not performed through 'editorials' but through the selection and treatment of all that is published ...that, in fact, all news are views; that all editorial choice patterns in what and what not to make public...have an ideological basis and a political dimension rooted in the structural characteristics of the medium...the analysis tends to support the proposition that there is no fundamentally non-ideological, apolitical, non-partisan news gathering and reporting system" (1964:495,503)

This theme is developed as the revolutionary significance of the mass media being their 'public-making' ability; the formation of new bases for collective thought and action, quickly, continuously, and pervasively across previous boundaries of time, space, and status. It is the transformation of private to public consciousness through a mediating framework of political ideology and macro-economic process (1972a). There has been a change from handcrafted public communication for diverse publics to

"...commodities manufactured by powerful agencies of the industrial society for sale to heterogenous audiences (and) the perspective of the communications reflects institutional organization and control...the media are the cultural arms of the industrial order from which they spring...they bring into existence and then cultivate a new form of common consciousness: modern mass publics" (1972b:5)

The creation of mass publics is effectively the enjoyment of the right to acculturate a nation and to shape the public agenda; to not only

1. Information for this article refers to Scientific American Offprint 679 and not to the original article in the same magazine.
order and classify the subjects for public attention but also to create or modify the relationship between those subjects.

Such power is obviously restricted and controlled to some extent. Gerbner suggests that while statutory and legal restraints are important and constitute a useful area of academic enquiry, it is better to concentrate on the institutional processes which both generate, and are generated by, systems of inhibitions and pressures. Such systems will determine the patterns of selection, the decisions whether to promote or suppress certain messages. While this may, at first sight, appear to be a reworking of the 'gatekeeping' model of communication there is a shift of emphasis from a perspective of news editors making this or that decision to a framework of predominantly external factors which influence the communicator. Some of these factors might be

"...the authorities who issue licences and administer the laws; the patrons who invest in or subsidise the operation; organisations, institutions and loose aggregations of publics that require attention and cultivation; the managements that set policies and supervise operations; the auxiliary groups that provide services, raw materials and protection; the creative talent, experts and technicians who actually form the symbolic content and transmit the signals, and the colleagues and competitors whose solidarity or innovation helps to set standards and maintain vigilance" (1972b:6-8)

The above factors apply widely and are not restricted to the serious side of communications. In fact, the fictional output of television demonstrates the culmination of various pressures just as convincingly as does the factual side (1970). In the main, the social consequences of the message systems will be to support, maintain, and reinforce the dominant values and norms of the social system in accordance with the pressures and inhibitions placed on the agencies of communication.

It has been customary, when detailing mass media output, to draw distinctions between types of programmes and types of presentation

1. White (1950) studied journalists and the selection of news items; his main point is that channels of information may be opened or closed by a 'gate-keeper' exercising an editorial role. Golding (1970) notes that the total environment should be studied.
(between high and low culture, fact and fiction, serious and lighthearted styles). Such distinctions become largely irrelevant if Gerbner's suggestion (1969a; 1970) to look for 'cultural indicators' is followed. It should be possible to trace various themes, roles, values and goals which are represented in mass-produced culture and measure the 'cultural winds and tides' (1972b) and take the pulse of that change (1969a). Specific messages may be useful to pinpoint a particular theme but it is likely that clearer pictures will emerge from a study of broad patterns rather than single utterances.

For Gerbner, it is what is said rather than how that provides the cultural indicators:

"Regardless of verisimilitude, credibility, or what is actually 'believed' in a presentation, message systems cultivate the terms on which they present subjects or aspects of life. There is no reason for assuming that the cultivation of these terms depends, in any significant way, on the mode of presentation, on agreement or disagreement with or belief or disbelief in the presentations involved, or on whether these presentations are presumably factual or imaginary" (1969a; 127)

However, he does suggest that fiction has more potential as it tends to show situations and processes and not just fragments of facts:

"The requirements that make the treatment of specific subjects secondary to the requirements of 'telling a good story' might make the treatment of those subjects more revealing of the underlying assumptions cultivated in the story-telling process" (1969a; 128)

The approach adopted in this thesis agrees with the latter but not the former statement. As will be argued, the mode of presentation is crucial in determining what messages are emphasised, promoted, suppressed or excised; it may also be important in terms of effects, if any, on the audience. A basic example may suffice here - it would unlikely for the sentiments expressed by the character of Alf Garnett to be publicised in a documentary without an attempt to provide a balanced alternative or at least with a disclaimer being issued to the effect that 'the views expressed are not those of the broadcasting
authority'. Some sort of explicit opposition to prejudice would be expected; a moral stance would have to be taken. Sir Hugh Greene discusses (1965) this sort of area of television and maintains that impartiality does have its limits in the fields of, for example, racism and extremist politics. The actual mode of presentation has definite repercussions for the type of message permissible and the two axes of fact:fiction and serious:lighthearted represent major areas of distinction. This is particularly evident with joking and humour as it is possible, following Freud (1905), Burns (1953), and Coser (1962), to see jokes as 'short cuts to consensus' which defy argument and reasoned debate. 'Socialist with knife and fork wishes to meet Capitalist with meat pie' precludes, on the assumption that it is taken as lighthearted, further comment on class structure and political ideology.

One more mention may be made of Gerbner's work before taking a different tack. A clear statement of his approach (1969b) takes the hypothesis that 'every decision to communicate something is, at the same time, a decision to suppress everything else' (205). Through a study of the reporting of educational issues, this is expanded into a detailed model of what sources of power exist and operate this executive function. Gerbner does not dismiss personality and psychological factors but places them beneath sanctions (whether political, economic, or editorial) and thus minimises their importance. However, it is suggested here that both types of power (through personality and through status/organisational) co-exist and their interplay forms a fruitful area of enquiry. In a power relationship of writer-actor-producer all have recourse to sanctions (ultimately, withdrawal or expulsion of labour) and while it would be crass to diminish the importance of such sanctions it is equally foolish to ignore
that part of the process, where personality is involved, which determines if and when sanctions will be activated. In comedy on television, it is impossible to deny the instrumental importance of such characteristics as willingness and ability to negotiate, stubbornness, artistic background and development, conception of comedy, self-esteem, and moral outlook - all of these depend on the personalities of the participants in the production process.

A final point here on sanctions - it should be noted that both positive and negative sanctions exist (Radcliffe-Brown 1952) as well as personal and institutional and that effectiveness (and thus power) will be partially determined by the choice of the most suitable form. With an apparent scarcity of marketable talent in the writing of television comedy (and fierce competition between the BBC and the ITV for that which is available) there is a tendency for positive and personal sanctions to flourish with the back-up of negative and usually institutional sanctions should negotiations break down. This whole area of pressures and controls will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

Production Studies

Mass communication research has often had a dual concern. One approach has been to examine effects, or potential effects, of mass media content on the audience; the other has concentrated on the production of that content. A third area, encompassing the other two though somewhat tangential in this section, has centred its debate around the concept of 'mass'. With the exception of the following two paragraphs the first approach will be largely ignored while the third is discussed in some depth later in this chapter.

There are two possible entries to any study of effects - the empirical and the not so empirical. Given that all mass media content is
designed to have an effect (from making people buy, laugh, think or whatever) then it is reasonable to assume that

"Some kinds of communication, on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects" (Berelson 1948:172)

The empirical studies have attempted to pinpoint specifics in this rightfully vague equation, usually by content analysis and audience research. The search has been for precise answers to questions varying in their degree of exactness from 'what is the impact of television on children?' (Maccoby 1951, Himmelweit et al 1958), 'what are the effects of portrayals of violence?' (Larsen 1968, Berkowitz 1963) to 'Why did the American advertising campaign advising the use of car seat belts flop?' (Robertson 1976). Effects need not, of course, refer only to the audience - certain programmes have been iconoclastic to say the least - but also to changes in corporate policy, political activity, and redefinitions of good taste and permissible subjects. The majority of the work, though, has been with regard to the audience and if several hundred conclusions may be briefly summarised the consensus of opinion tends toward agreeing with Berelson as quoted above. The most exciting step forward has been the realisation that it is simplistic to couch the influence of the mass media in terms of cause and effect (or stimulus and response) and that the scientific method will invariably fail to yield a simple formula in the face of so many immeasurable and imponderables. Empirical studies of effects seem to have an inbuilt bias to self-destruction with a priori assumptions that effects can be 'proved' and a posteriori conclusions littered with 'ifs' and directions for future research.

Thankfully, it is usually preferable to suggest rather than prove and safer ground can be reached by resorting, validly, to generalisations.

1. Lin (1973) contains several examples of specific studies (149-158) as does Klapper (1960).
Thus, discussions of the function of the mass media carry an implicit acceptance of effects but need not specify them. For example, a useful summary of effects can be found in Lareen (1964) based on the equation that the flow and volume of communication is so heavily weighted on the side of the communicators rather than the audience; it would be naive to expect the sheer bulk of communicated material to have no effect at all. The matter of effects is particularly hard to shake off or dismiss (and has permeated every level of academic enquiry) but here they are left, only to resurface briefly under the discussion of the concept of Mass Culture.

It is intended to examine in some depth three particular works concerned with studying the production of television programmes — Tracey (1975), Elliott (1972) and Cantor (1971) before skipping through a number of other contributions. It may be possible to supply some answers to the question 'what factors impinge and inform upon the creation of a television programme?' rather than try and answer 'why is television like it is?'.

Cantor's question seems straightforward. She wishes to know why such intelligent people (as American television producers apparently are) should be responsible for turning out a product which is often drivel. Part of the answer lies with which section of the population is felt by the producer to be important to him — the network bosses (and the businessmen paying for the commercials behind them), the audience who determine, for the businessmen, the 'worth' of a programme by the numbers who watch it, or the producer's own peers and associates with their critical appraisal of his work. From extensive interviews and non-participant observation the answer is further honed down to:

1. Masuail (1960a) repeats the suggestion that research funds are more readily available to those pursuing 'practical' problems (37-38). Effects on the audience may, supposedly, be quantified.
"The basic philosophy expressed by those in the (television) industry is giving the public what it wants; if one particular type of show seems to be popular one season, that type of programming will be in demand the next season" (27)

"Most producers rely either on their own tastes or the perceived desires of the network officials as guidelines for the selection of stories, and both producers and network officials rely on established themes apparently already accepted by the audience" (177)

It is not possible to entirely apply Cantor's work to the British situation for two reasons. Firstly, she deals solely with commercial television; part of her argument is that audience size, as measured by the Nielsen ratings, is used by advertisers on a cost per thousand basis when deciding whether or not to continue sponsorship. These ratings are purely quantitative (how many sets are tuned to a channel) and give no indication of who is actually watching and with what kind of response. Secondly, the American producer appears to have a greater degree of control than his counterpart in Britain. However, the similarities between the American and the British production systems are bigger than the differences. For instance, she objects to the popular theory that advertisers, through the agency of the network bosses, determine the product by selecting the material. The truth appears to be more subtle - the producer's role is the decisive one in selection and story development (subject, of course, to network approval) and what sources he calls upon in making those decisions have their direct parallels in British television. The network's decision to support or drop the programme is likewise determined by reference to both the audience ratings and the individual producer. Producers with established track records will be allowed greater risks and innovations even though the network's main objective is to avoid offending the buying public (116).

Cantor splits producers into three broad categories. The 'film-makers' (generally young with some professional training), the 'old-line' (older and with experience of the heyday of Hollywood as a film centre),
and the 'hyphenates', so-called from their designation as 'writer-producer', who tend to have reached production through a career in writing. Accepting Cantor's suggestion that

"...most producers, regardless of their views of the actual or potential audience, think that their taste is superior and that the television series are both artistically and intellectually too 'low level' for them" (183)

then the amount of 'conflict' can be identified for each type of producer. The film-makers see their present function as co-ordinators instead of creators and are holding their talent in abeyance until they have gained the necessary experience to move into cinema. Television is accepted just as entertainment; ideas about the human condition, and expressed as social comment, are voluntarily suppressed with the intention that they come to fruition later in their careers. The old-liners experience a great deal of conflict with the networks as they see themselves as equal, if not more knowledgeable, in terms of understanding exactly what the audience wants. Their track records of success are put forward to argue that their intuition and experience are acceptable substitutes for ratings and market research. The hyphenates are often in direct conflict with the networks (and their own artistic consciences); having a belief in one's own material as truthful, valid, worthwhile or whatever has the necessary consequence that changes will be resisted and editorial executive decisions opposed. The hyphenates also believe in the (potential) intelligence of the audience - their intention of passing messages to this audience may be contradicted by the network chiefs whose perception of audience desires is geared to audience ratings. How far British situation comedy producers match up to Cantor's types is a matter for conjecture; how they experience and articulate conflicts is discussed in a later chapter.

Elliott outlines his brief as

"...how is it that (those broadcast) are the programmes made available, how is the material selected and created, how do the television
organisations and the 'new priesthood' working within them perform their functions, indeed how do they see their function and does their view agree with that of their audience" (1972:6)

Having rightly criticised de Fleur's model because of its idealistic assertion that mass and interpersonal communication differ only in degree, Elliott discusses the actual workings of the process by which the end product is reached. In this case, the end product is a series of programmes on the nature of prejudice. Much of his analysis is specific (how and why certain guest speakers are chosen, what sort of prejudices were to be included) and repetition of the facts and figures will do little to advance this chapter; rather, a brief summary of the points arising from his particular investigation will be given on the basis that they are understood to come from practical research.

The major conclusion is that television is a reflective medium. Conventional wisdom about any topic tends to provide the source material which is worked into the programme form by the production team and research staff. This circular process requires a distinction

"...between communication, attempts to transmit particular meanings to an audience, and attention, judging the level of audience satisfaction, keeping the viewer interested, and above all, making sure they do not switch off. Various factors in television production seem to support an implicit philosophy that so long as the audience attends, communication can be left to take care of itself" (84)

A crucial aspect, then, of selecting material is its aptness for broadcasting when seen in terms of audience appeal — examples abound from the 'visibility' of a strike (rather than conditions which may have provoked it) to a cult of personality where it matters less what is actually said but more who says it. The intention of televising a debate about prejudice is compromised by the felt need to present it in such a way as to make it attractive to the audience — the clash of two extremes is more exciting than the whispering of the middle ground — and the pressure is maintained to make all sorts of television entertaining.
Taking the two strands of common beliefs and entertainment together,

"...it is inevitable that if the main focus in programme production is on audience attention and satisfaction, the main dimension of possible audience reaction will be emotional response to familiar symbols" (164)

Other factors work towards making the programme what it is. Budget constrains the producer to use the cheapest and the best with the emphasis on the former; time is limited and the conclusions of arguments may have to stand in for the reasoning behind them; the supposed ideal of balance may become equal time rather than equal impact and so on. The sheer practicality of the availability of studio guests or film clips works against innovation and experiment - the proven performer who is punctual and sober may add little to the debate but may be preferred to the unreliable newcomer, a film clip from the network's own library might not make the desired point but is acceptable by comparison with the cost and time of tracing the preferred alternative.

These are the sorts of factors which move mass communication away from interpersonal communication and allow for a model which highlights the differences rather than the similarities. Further, the points that Elliott makes are applicable to situation comedies though this discussion is deferred to chapter 7 and, to a lesser extent, chapter 8.

In writing of mass communication, Elliott suggests four areas where communication is inhibited (in his specific example) - relationships with sources of information, with the audience, the division of labour throughout production, and organisational control. These last two require some elaboration. Organisational or communicator control really means what it says - the information any particular group or individual wishes to broadcast as his own opinion has to undergo a process of selection, modification, editing, and polishing before it is deemed by the producers or network as acceptable for broadcasting. Further, while notions of balance and impartiality may seem to be a television
myth, it is a myth frequently practised and resorted to as a justification for editorial decisions. Although Elliott does not refer to it (as his producer was a 'hyphenate') this situation exists anywhere in television where the division of labour calls for scriptwriters as a separate job; whatever is written is subject to another person's approval and the need to make effective programmes within certain limitations. The division of labour operates to obfuscate clear communication through the producer's having to work with others who stand between himself and society as the source of the information. Put simply, the producer cannot undertake every job and any gatekeeping process is automatically magnified by the greater the number of people involved:

"The producer had to work through others not only to collect ideas and material, but also to realise those ideas on the screen. Each separate specialist involved in this process had his own set of standards for judging and selecting material. These were based on his own particular skills and so might vary from those of the producer" (151)

The end result of all of the above is basically to inhibit novelty and to ensure cultural repetition and continuity. There is no conspiracy to maintain the status quo or support established views; rather, the acceptance of predetermined production routines within organisational guidelines and strictures lends itself to holding up a conservative mirror of society.

Tracey's subject area is the production of political television. His analysis is framed in terms of ideology and organisation:

"Not defining issues is the tradition of the fourth estate... but rather providing limited and partial views of reality that result from the technological and ideological structures that underpin the process of image formation. (In what way) are the criteria employed for decision-making within the production setting articulated to wider organisational and social meaning systems" (1975:7:31)

Here again, in political television, are found the taken for granted

1. Garnham (1972), for example, argues that the BBC play 'Cathy Come Home' was about one poor family and not about the real issue (the ownership of land); revolutionary drama becomes rebellious instead.
practices of programme making, especially the concern to keep the audience entertained. This concern has been brought about, to some extent, by the arrival of commercial television which has engendered a logic of commercialism in the BBC. This has had the further consequence (though it is not the sole cause) of promoting the 'magazine' format of news programmes where studio discussions, personalities and human interest stories predominate.

Tracey notes, from MoQuail (1969b;77), that the communicator usually forms a mental image of the anticipated or desired audience; further, and as MoQuail also suggests, in mass communication this picture is necessarily weak or absent altogether. It is simply not possible, even with relatively sophisticated methods of audience research, to understand the needs and desires of several million people. Producers of political television rarely bother to examine audience data - the ideas of their co-workers and seniors are more important in gauging the nature and style of programme content. Any thoughts about the audience tend to be vague and there is little comprehension of the type of viewer, only of the approximate number of the watching public:

"I can find no evidence from my study that the fruits of the scientific evaluation of audience tastes, standards and needs 'plays any important part in the occupational life of the producers of political television" (322)

It should be noted here that this 'not knowing' does not conflict with the views of the organisation. The emphasis placed by the networks is on having an audience and not on understanding them.

From interviews with producers, Tracey discovered what he terms the 'absent framework' (376):

1. The audience has neither an objective nor subjective presence for the producer;
2. Any concept of the audience is extremely vague;
3. Audiences are quantified, not qualified;
4. The overall effect is to stress the inner world of the programme and grant credence to the views of peers.
Any programme, then, is produced within intellectual and institutional frameworks; giving the public what they want becomes giving the public what we, the network and the producers, think they want (and deserve). This is not to imply a sense of pomposity or arrogance but rather to underline the crucial difference between mass and interpersonal communication in terms of organisations and lack of knowledge about the audience. This may, in turn, lead back to a reliance on tried and tested formulas and established connections thus completing the vicious circle where vague knowledge is abstracted into precise myth. As will shortly be argued, the same process is at work with situation comedies with the additional factor that a specific response (audible laughter) is not only anticipated but also cajoled and engineered.

Other Studies Related to Production

A few 'views from the top' may set a suitable perspective for what follows. They are, of course, public statements and need not fully represent the private views of the writers. Nevertheless, as official statements made by people then in high executive employment they are informative for that reason let alone any other. For example, Hugh Greene, as Director-General of the BBC, addressed a conference thus

"...we have (and believe strongly in) editorial control. Producers of individual programmes are not simply allowed to do whatever they like. Lines must be drawn somewhere... Programme plans must, to my mind, be made on the assumption that the audience is capable of reasonable behaviour, and of the exercise of intelligence - and of choice... (Producers' and directors') judgements must spring, since they have to be exercised at such speed, from some ingrained code, which in its turn is derived from some basic standards" (1965:7,9,13)

Exactly what are these basic standards? According to Greene, some of them may be summarised as the personal attitude of producers, a general code of practice established by experience (but flexible), and a proper sensitivity of staff to the world and audience around them. The realm entered here has a direct parallel in the legal concept
of the 'reasonable man' (the 'man on the Clapham omnibus' syndrome)
which can be used by the Courts to pronounce on the grey areas of
taste and standards by reference to how a reasonable man would act.
There are many advantages in such a concept, not least of which is that
case law can escape from the rigidity of statute law. Each potential
breach of, say, the BBC code of practice can be dealt with on its
own merits or demerits with the added dimension that each 'case' goes
to form, by precedent, an ill-defined corporate ideology.

The process appears on the ground through

"...encouraging the programme staff immediately responsible to
apply their judgement to particular problems, within a framework
of general guidance arising from the continuing discussion of
individual programmes by themselves, by their seniors - and, when
necessary, by the Board of Governors" (Greene 1965:7)

That decisions do go up as far as the Board is well documented (for
example, Tracey (1975; chapter 6)) and the following example is
sufficient here to indicate the internal relationships. The author
was then the BBC Chairman and the subject was whether or not to invite
Ian Smith of Rhodesia to appear on a programme:

"I am not here concerned to argue whether that decision was right
or wrong. I am concerned only with my right to make it...no
producer enjoys an absolute and unlimited right of editorial
control. Though he is allowed a considerable latitude, he is
subject to directions from above; and on matters of the highest
importance these directions may come from the highest level
within the Corporation" (Normanbrook 1965)

This is, perhaps, an extreme example of upward reference (but the
existence of such extremes may forewarn those considering whether or
not to take a risk) though it serves to make the point. Huw Wheldon
(reprinted 1967), writing as Controller of Programmes, apparently
unintentionally reveals that 'reference' involves a certain duality:
the Departmental Head must get his project agreed from above (say, the
Channel Controller) and appoints a producer. Then, if any matters are
thought to be risky, the chain of command reverses back up to the
Channel Controller (and beyond). Naturally enough, as prior approval
is required to start projects then possibilities exist along the line by way of prevention — not only will producers be chosen on the basis that they are responsible but also those chosen by them (writers and directors) will be responsible. 'Responsibility' may, in certain circumstances, carry less weight than a proven track record, a rare talent and so on but in terms of organisation it is crucial. Whatever may be said about artistic freedom and creative liberty, the BBC and the commercial channels are businesses and must operate efficiently, properly, and bureaucratically. Profit motives apart, the television companies must all be organised with such chains of command and consequent responsibility as are needed to ensure credible activity in the marketplace.

It may be simplistically suggested that the commercial companies will seek to avoid offending the viewing public because they are the buying public. It is less simplistic to say of the BBC that such offence will be avoided where possible because the mantle of the 'Nation's Voice' has been assumed. Under the terms of its Charter, the BBC has a definite responsibility to inform, educate, and entertain all those people (and their families and friends) owning and licensing television sets. The service they provide is for the nation as a whole who, indirectly, through the Government finance the broadcasting operation (supplemented by profit-making enterprises in publishing and the like). There is an extra proviso which relates to the IBA — nothing should be included in their programmes which 'offends against good taste or decency, or is likely to encourage or incite to crime, or lead to disorder, or be offensive to public feeling' (Quicke 1976: 13). A tentative agreement may be given to Miliband:

1. Keith (1924; 31-39) clearly sets out the responsibilities of the BBC as he saw them; whether or not there have been changes of degree rather than kind since he wrote is open to argument.
"...observed though it may be, the fact remains that the mass media in advanced capitalist societies are mainly intended to perform a highly 'functional' role; they too are both the expression of a system of domination, and a means of reinforcing it...given the economic and political context in which they function, they cannot fail to be predominantly agencies for the dissemination of ideas and values which affirm rather than challenge existing patterns of power and privilege" (1973:198,211)

Miliband offers, however, little data to support his claim.

Other public statements from executives may be considered; Curran et al (1977) and Curran (1979) offer broad perspectives while Soupham, formerly Controller of Educational Broadcasting, is more precise:

"(Programmes) must appeal to those interests that men have, or can be persuaded to have, in common. Since a succession of royal weddings and heavyweight boxing championships cannot be contrived there grows up an industry devoted single-mindedly to the popularisation of existing but as yet unregarded 'occasions' and the mass production of synthetic new ones. Their general character will inevitably be determined by the marginal audience at the bottom of the educational scale, which outnumbers by far the marginal audience at the top of the educational scale" (1967:38)

The argument may not be new but it is persuasive - that of the lowest common denominator - though of greater interest is Soupham's assertion that broadcasting serves a threefold purpose in

"...the maintenance, extension, and transmission of a culture. It must concern itself with emergent values, but it must concern itself even more with those transmitted values without which no society can achieve continuity and stability" (77-78)

Broadcast material, then, is not just seen as statements about society but for society. The underlying assumption must be that someone somewhere decides what is 'good' for the audience; as Soupham suggests, this may well be someone relying on instinct and the views of his colleagues rather than on research data or any understanding of the audience itself.1

1. Or, as the editor Cecil King put it: "An inspired editor knows what his public wants. An uninspired editor sends out little people to enquire of his readers...I think that is true of the editors in history and other producers of popular entertainment, which popular journalism is. They just know" (1960:272)
But there is more; there simply must be. As a starting point, the image of media producers (in the widest sense) working in accidental harmony towards common goals is not really more than a starting point. The creation of house styles, corporate images and public ideologies may, to some extent, be unconscious but the organisational framework in which they prosper and flourish is not.

Arkell, then BBC Director of Administration, paints a fairly rosy picture of a 'two-way flow of trust and confidence extending downwards from the chief executive to his staff' (1965:9); he also points to such benefits as medical facilities, pension schemes, house journals and so on. He comes very close to admitting that there is a deliberate policy to create a specific BBC ethos and a definable BBC Man. The situation would appear to be similar with regard to the commercial channels if the then Managing Director of Grampian TV is anything to go by

"Both the BBC and ITA are still, for the most part, organised on orthodox bureaucratic lines - that is, centralised control by those who do not themselves do the job...it is imperative to adhere to lines laid down by the organisation" (Windlesham 1969, 134,130)

Windlesham also suggests that television producers have less autonomy and control over what they produce than their counterparts in journalism and publishing. This comparative loss of independence is exacerbated by the sheer size of the organisations of which they are a part.

There is also bound to be conflict because the concern of the individual producer is for his own programme (in terms of the best time slot, the largest budget and so on) while the concern of the Department Head or Channel Controller is for unified planning, programme scheduling, and output not for half an hour but for the day, week, month and year. As Windlesham points out, there is a major source of deep friction between the users and providers of programme production facilities,

1. There may well be an ITV Man; however, BBC staff such as Curran and Sopham have published more than ITV staff.
between creativity and control, with each group seeking objectives
for any programme which are not entirely complementary. One researcher,
Epstein, has concluded that

"The main finding of this study is that the pictures of society
that are shown on television as national news are largely —
though not entirely — performed and shaped by organisational
considerations" (1973:258)

and it is suggested here that the production of news is not unique
in this respect. The idea that, for example, a comedy scriptwriter
sees the ideal fruition of his work in the final broadcast product
is given little currency. Between the writer and his public lie
fields of overlapping frameworks which are constructed to ensure
that the programme meets with corporate approval. Burns has fully
documented this process (though with regard to producers), and refers
to the '...almost deliberate and certainly perpetual effort made to
domesticate the world (the BBC) inhabits...considerations are reduced
to a common Gestalt" (1970:157).

Other researchers have examined the system of organisational pressures
and commitments, particularly with regard to newspapers (see, for
example, Gieber (1956,1964) and Breed (1955)). Conclusions are varied
but tend towards seeing the day-to-day practicalities involved as
impinging on creative expression. The artist becomes an artisan and
individual creations are taken in and tailored to suit another's taste.
There are qualifications to this line of argument. Firstly, there is
likely to be a great deal of 'pre-selection' as producers and writers
bear in mind what may or may not be acceptable. Outrageous suggestions
may not have to be controlled simply because they are not put forward
in the first place through awareness of the editorial role of the
executive. Secondly, one of the peculiarities of situation comedies
is the relative dearth of writers who are in demand for their previous
successes. There are likely to be under a dozen at any given time whose
work is sought by the television companies (though the number seeking such employment probably runs into the hundreds at the very least). Market conditions of supply and demand operate and the degree of freedom afforded from editorial control will increase when success becomes equated with scarcity.

A similar view of the producer is given by Rosten (1970) in his analysis of Hollywood and the film-making community. The role of the producer is to "...conciliate the inevitable conflict between the artists and the businessmen of Hollywood, between the art and the business of movie-making" (247). Although the American film producer and the British television producer are poles apart in the jobs they perform, the concept of an arbitrator is a useful one. The producer occupies a position of co-ordination in finding the path of least resistance to keep writers, executives, and the technical staff all reasonably happy. It is small wonder that the audience, with their undefined and multifarious needs, slip from the picture to be replaced by working colleagues who better understand the problems and practices of programme-making.

Wedell (1968) devotes a large part of his work to the question of exactly how 'the institutional ethos' filters through to each individual producer (163-171). The framework is one where

"...tension between the administrator and the creative worker is nothing new, nor is it confined to broadcasting. It becomes acute whenever creative people are geared to an institution which both gives them shelter in the form of employment and an element of security, and requires them to subserve a purpose beyond that over which the individual has control" (160)

In a later work (1969), Wedell argues persuasively that there is an assumption that the BBC's Governors' view is also the Nation's view.

1. Hollywood, naturally enough, has been the focus for a number of studies; Ross (1962) gives a thorough account of the making of the film 'The Red Badge of Courage' while Miller and Rhodes (1964) show, with humour, how Hollywood renders bland a television series.
From the tenuous analogy of the feudal pyramid, one might assume that the 'ethos' which filters down will be tinged with conservatism and responsibility. Some writers have argued, more extremely, that the upper class, by controlling every major opinion moulding institution in the country, play a dominant and disproportionate role in determining the framework within which decisions on important issues are reached (Domhoff (1967) writing of America); others have argued that those groups which occupy positions of the greatest power and privilege will have the greatest access to the means of legitimation of that power and promotion (Parkin 1972).

Obviously, the process of dominance and power is not clear-cut, and neither does it appear to be conspiratorial in any organised sense, though it is hard to disagree with the intention of any study which places the mass media in a wider political and economic context. For that matter, it is relatively easy to agree with studies supplying unequivocal data to demonstrate that the links between the mass media and the wider context are central rather than peripheral. Murdock and Golding (1974), for example, outline the commercial web of ties which involve a wealth of leisure interests (from bingo halls to motorway restaurants) under the umbrella of any one of a number of commercial companies. Their thesis may not be strictly applicable to the BBC but the BBC is commercial to the extent that it needs to maximise audiences.

Similarities between the BBC and the commercial channels may be noted. Both tend to link programme budget to audience size (Hood 1967:33) and this, coupled with the producer's own desire for his programme to do well, leads to internal pressure towards success measured in audience size. The commercial channels need large audiences to attract advertisers (though some revenue thus attracted may be ploughed into prestige programmes which are likely to gain critical appreciation rather than
large audiences). The BBC, as a public service, has a duty to supply as much of the public with as much of what the public enjoys or desires - it is simply false to separate the channels in terms of commerce alone - so that successful shows will lead to further series of the same or similar and those programmes that have flopped are dropped. Both the BBC and the ITV look optimistically forward to the prestige programme which also enjoys high audience ratings. There are, of course, differences between the channels but let them not be overstated; such differences are very likely to be of degree rather than type.

Enough, though, for the moment with regard to television production; how theory and practice match up is discussed in chapter 7. Of more immediate interest is that area of 'mass culture' which has occupied many writers and has a direct bearing on any analysis of television entertainment.

Brief Notes on the Mass Culture Debate

Very, very basically there are three camps of opinion - those that say popular culture is a bad thing, those who take the line that it is either good (or not as bad as others make out), and those who would agree, for example, with MoQuail (1969a:35) who offers a number of reasons as to why the sociology of mass communications has not prospered under the shadow of debates about mass culture. Before outlining the various opinions it would be useful here to note MoQuail's reasons: the lack of empirical data to support the views that mass media consumption is either beneficial or harmful, the lack of a framework for studying individual action and behaviour, and the presumption that there is a single criterion for differentiating between good and bad cultural artefacts. MoQuail (1972) has collected a number of useful essays on the subject.
Perhaps because the masses are harmful? Ortega y Gasset (1961) distinguishes between 'Noble' and 'Common' life and writes, admittedly during the era of the rise of Fascism and Stalinism, thus:

"The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select...the mass-man is he whose life lacks any purpose, and simply goes drifting along...
As one advances in life, one realises more and more that the majority of men - and of women - are incapable of any other effort than that strictly imposed on them as a reaction to external compulsion" (14,38,49)

The prospect of a large, unthinking and homogenous mass is a threatening one; arguments are likely to be emotional or philosophical, with appeals for the spirit of freedom, for the individual and the vitality of life itself. The concept of mass denies the possibility of purposeful actors in the social process; in brief, the mass of people should be saved from their ignorance by the attraction of high culture rather than be condemned to it by the preponderance of low (mass media) culture.

Throughout this thesis, the case is made for comedy as somehow supporting prevailing ideologies. By its very nature it is concerned with the social and not the individual, the existing against the innovative.

It is to be hoped, however, that this proposition is not confused with the idea of 'mass'. Those who argue on the 'badness' of popular culture often find refuge (and solace) in conspiratorial explanations. While they may not actually name a Captain of Industry actively working to keep his buying consumers in thrall the implication behind, for example, the following quote is that conscious decisions are made behind the backs of the public:

"The media are in fact failing to relate to the needs of society. They are not reflecting the wide diversity of interests, but are confining themselves to the narrow middle ground of what their controllers consider acceptable and uncontroversial"

(The Labour Party 1974:6)
"The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole" (Marcuse 1965;26)

This may be taking the level of implication too far. However, more direct examples can be found in Shils (1961) who labels the producers of mass culture as 'the brutal intelligensia' or in Packard (1962) who provides specific instances, in the sphere of American advertising, of conspiracy, manipulation, and persuasion.

Most writers, though, have discarded conspiracy and manipulation in favour of something approaching this argument:

"...tendencies to trivialisation are rampant in British broadcasting ...not because broadcasters are irresponsible people, but because the technical and social character of the situation in which these media communicate makes trivialisation almost unavoidable...the process of trivialisation...is to a large extent integral to the technical nature of the media and not something that needs to be explained in terms of the wickedness, bad taste, or financial greed of particular men who happen to be in charge of the media" (Abrams 1973;105)

This seems more sensible but still rests on the assumption that the mass audience are presented with a diet and are grateful to be force-fed. It does not deny the possibility that there may be 'good' popular culture but distances itself from the debate by taking on a mantle of both 'this is bad for you' and 'this is better, you can understand it if you try'. Others have gone further - Wilensky (1964) calls for a 'heavy investment in institutions which aggressively uphold cultural standards'. Once again, the idea of comedy as conservative should be kept away from the upholding of cultural standards.

An excellent collection of articles exists (Rosenberg and White 1964) which may supply further strands of opinion. They are all concerned with the situation in America and give an idea of the intensity of academic involvement on the potentially disturbing effects of the mass
media. Lazarsfeld and Verdon (originally 1948) set the field with their impulsively acceptable phrase about the 'narcotizing dysfunction', the occurrence of which can 'scarcely be doubted' (1964:465). This does, of course, mean more than television simply sending people to sleep. A great deal more, in fact, if their suggestion is followed as it asserts that the economic pressure on the mass media translates into pressure on programme content to be conformist, safe, unadventurous, and supportive of the social structure. Meyersohn argues that all forms of mass communication '...are quite correctly charged with appealing to the lowest common denominator' (1964:352) while Macdonald proposes a Crecham's Law of culture whereby the good is driven out by the bad because the bad is more easily understood and enjoyed (so that 'good' culture becomes though of as obscure and boring)(1964:59-73).

A number of writers have dealt with the mass media in relation to folk art under the umbrella of the latter as being automatically superior to the former. Kalraux (1951) bemoans the passing of folk art and labels the mass media as the 'appeasing arts' which bind man only to sensations and not to values. Kress (1976) draws comparisons between South American Indians and urban man - the former have the power to transform their own culture while the latter is just presented with media comestibles on which his only choice is to partake or abstain. Once again, the picture of the unquestioning consumer rears itself.

McCormack has a much better analysis. She realises that a genuine working-class culture is unlikely:

"Popular culture, for all its claims to universality, is the distinctive artefact of the bourgeoisie. In style, content, method of production, and transmission, it carries the stamp of capitalism and modern technology" (1961:482)

The main function of the mass media is to integrate experience in a secular and fragmented society, to afford an awareness of the whole, to give a coherence to the confusion endemic to modern society. She
wrongly, it is suggested here, opposes this to primitive folk art as the latter does not evade reality. It matters rather more to take both forms of communication as statements about society from those in a position of influence and rather less as to which may be the most effective or the most desirable.

(b) Mass Culture is Not (So) Harmful

The most provocative statement comes from Brown:

"...it has frequently been argued that popular culture is bound to be of inferior quality because of the manner in which it is characteristically produced...but the real question to be asked is the extent to which individual techniques are applied to the actual creative process" (1968:614)

The search is on for something of the reality which must exist between the creator as garret-bound, hungry but artistic, and the creator as a production line worker controlled by committees and pandering to an undefined mass market. It is really the question posed by Cantor (1971) - why do intelligent men make unintelligent programmes - cast in a new light by a change of emphasis. While accepting that the voracious appetite of the mass media puts pressure on staff in terms of speed and a reliance on tried and tested formulas, Brown feels that the role of creative personnel has been drastically underplayed; also, the high arts are not immune from similar pressures - Dickens working to deadlines, the patronage of Baroque music - or organisational considerations. The distinction between high and low art may exist but Brown rightly blurs it. In a similar vein, Seldes (1962) seeks to minimise the difference between high and lowbrow culture but by opposing them to the middle (and reclassifying 'good' lowbrow as 'lively'):

"There is no opposition between the great and the lively arts... both are opposed in the spirit to the middle or bogus arts...the battle is only against solemnity which is not high, against ill-rendered profundity, against the shoddy and the dull" (294)

White (1964) provides, as does Seldes, examples of 'good' low culture and argues that while much is drivel the situation is far better than
in the days before the advent of the mass media.

The game is quite popular – either hunt the bad in the good or the good in the bad – and has often been played. The process is usually one of reclassification. Hoggart, who incidentally refers to humour and the working class (1958), gives the clearest example:

"The crucial distinctions today are not those between 'The News of the World' and 'The Observer', between the Third Programme and the Light Programme, between sex-and-violence paperbacks and 'egghead' paperbacks, between 'Bootsie and Snudge' and the Alan Taylor lectures, between the 'Billy Cotton Bandaloo' and the 'Brain's Trust', between the Top Ten and a celebrity concert, or between 'skiffle' and chamber music. The distinctions we should be making are those between 'The News of the World' and 'The Sunday Pictorial', between 'skiffle' and the Top Ten; and for 'highbrow', between 'The Observer' and 'The Sunday Times'; or, in 'egghead' paperbacks, between Peter Townsend and Vance Packard...perhaps we should speak about 'synthetic culture' or 'processed culture' – and then remind ourselves that our job is to separate the processed from the living at (to use the old grading) all 'levels'" (1970:131-132)

This is a very basic, but possibly essential, step to take for it allows discussion of any particular item within its own terms and those of its peers. Automatic condemnation of, for example, a television soap opera may be sidestepped because the comparison with high art is withdrawn. The whole highbrow versus lowbrow debate evaporates but another debate is thrust in its place which still revolves around the basic principle that one lump of culture is somehow better or worse than another lump of culture. Replacing the categories of high and low, shuffling them together and then relabelling the components as living or processed does not really proceed much further for all its interest and novelty.

The nub is really this – literary criticism demands that value judgements be made, set against a concept of 'art' however loosely defined; it must be able to say both, for example, that Shakespeare is better than Barbara Cartland and that Shakespeare is better than Marlowe.

For the purposes of this thesis, it does not really matter too much if Much Ado About Nothing is better than Till Death Us Do Part (though
there is some relevance in comparing *Till Death Us Do Part* to *Love Thy Neighbour* or worse; they are both likely, as comedies, to comment on the social nature of man through different styles and forms.

Williams (1958, 1961, 1968) pursues a line close to that of Hoggart in tracing the rise of a common culture which requires a certain type of analysis to understand it. He argues that it is wrong to treat of majority culture as necessarily low and inferior but that one should isolate the 'routine' in both high and low. The cultural revolution should be welcomed as part of a great process of human liberation through the expansion of communication (as long as the potential is not wasted on trivia). The genuinely popular culture should not be engulfed by the worst excesses of the mass media (and practical advice is offered on how to bring this about); it exists in its own right and need not be seen in opposition to 'art':

"(The) distinction between art and entertainment may be much more difficult to maintain than it looks. At its extremes, of course, it is obvious. But over the whole range, is there any easy and absolute distinction? Great art can give us deep and lasting experiences, but the experience we get from many things that we rightly call art is quite often light and temporary. The excitement of the circus, the procession, the variety sketch, can be quite easily forgotten, but at the time it is often intense... there may be a difference between such things and the minor decorative arts, the passing comedies, the fashionable artistic performers, but can it really be seen as a difference between 'high' and 'low'?" (Williams 1968:98–99)

And, as may be expected, the answer is 'no'.

Hall and Whannel (1964) offer practical advice, for teachers and students, on a critical perception of the surrounding culture. Once again, the distinction should not be between high and low but between 'popular art' (having its roots in 'folk art') and 'mass art'. The authors draw examples from an extremely wide variety of fields; whatever it is that classifies one thing as 'popular' and another as 'mass' is never succinctly defined but elaborated with respect to each item as it is discussed.
Concluding Remarks

Much of the research into mass communications reviewed above suggests that there is something inherent in the structures involved which favours a corporate ethos over individual expression. The processes are not simple or one-dimensional and neither are hypotheses based upon them likely to be provable. What should, however, be apparent is that it is permissible to offer a holistic analysis which takes, for example, the BBC as somehow greater than the sum of the individuals concerned; it would remain questionable as to how far this could be carried without serious misinterpretation of the 'facts' on the ground.

It must be stressed that the actors in the social process are not mere ciphers (as neither are the members of the audience) following predictable patterns of conformity to an ideology. The study of the mass media should be an area where personalities and characters must not be glibly subsumed under general idioms. On a very basic level, it may be instructive to discover that two different producers, given the same brief, would turn out two different programmes just as two writers would create different versions from the same bare storyline. Of course, why this producer or writer is preferred to that adds a complicating layer but all that is asked is that an awareness is held of the role of personality in the mass media. The living something encrusted on the mechanical need not be ignored.

Commentators on the mass media are largely split between those who see mass produced culture as capable of expressing popular concerns in a genuine way and those who see it as imposed from above, inauthentic, and impure. Similarly, mass media researchers have emphasised the process of mass communication as one of relatively equal exchange between producers and audiences or one where the exchange is highly unequal; the first sees the mass media as characterised by extensive feedback.
and constant adjustment, the second presents production activity as a self-enclosed activity in which the audience is unknown and decisions are based on the judgements of peers and superiors. Situation comedy is interesting because neither pattern is really applicable in its entirety. As has been argued in earlier chapters, a concept of feedback may be useful with regard to interpersonal joke-telling and the performance of comedy; the importance of laughter as an audible response has been stressed and its communicative aspect noted. Nothing approaching the immediacy or concentration of this kind of feedback is available to mass media producers but situation comedy specifically (and light entertainment generally) has taken a strange bedfellow, the studio audience. Its role as a surrogate, sitting uncomfortably in the places of an individual theatre-goer and an audience of millions deserves further attention and is discussed later.
An approach through history might provide information as to how and why comic experiences emerge from the framework of the mass media as they do. It is outside the scope of this work to go back beyond the late 1800's though earlier chapters contain references to those writers who do; for earlier English comedy, Rodway (1975) is most useful. Rather, the focus here is on radio and television; a brief consideration of the music hall might appear superfluous but in the early days of radio comedy the choice of performers was largely determined by the availability of the then extant performers (and competition with the 'live' entertainment establishment had certain consequences).

The Music Hall

The music hall, with its antecedents in ballad-sheets, taverns, music clubs and so on, provides the first structured examples of comic sketches professionally presented to an audience in a theatrical setting. There had, of course, always been what one might loosely term 'speciality' acts and performances as part of a thriving subculture distinct from established theatres. The effective monopoly of the two theatres in Drury Lane and Covent Garden was broken by an Act of Parliament in 1843 which provided for a variety of establishments to become theatres and music halls by licence. The early boom was by way of conversion of existing public houses and the emphasis was very much on music and concerts; entrepreneurial landlords and builders were quick to recognise the potential of attracting paying customers in large numbers. As the boom continued new premises were acquired and renovated, subject to the grant of the necessary licence. By the last decades of the nineteenth century the balance had shifted

1. See Macquen-Pope (1961), especially chapter 29, for an anecdotal but useful account.
entertainment as an added bonus to drinking to entertainment as
the central attraction. The most popular performers, such as George
Leybourne and The Great Vance, were singers of both serious (some
might say melodramatic) and comic songs. The stand-up comedian role
was still in its infancy but, for example, C.H. Macdermott ('We don't
want to fight, but by Jingo if we do')

"...was a comedian who joked like any other about mothers-in-law,
lodgers, twins, the Salvation Army, curates, the sea-serpent,
tight lacing and shapely ankles. Like any other, he also joked
about politics..." (Disher 1938:24)

Again, a change of emphasis can be noted with the emergence of performers
who were comedians first and singers, dancers or whatever second – Dan
Leno and Little Tich were not joke-tellers as such but character comics
along with Sir Harry Lauder, George Robey, and Harry Tate. These per-
formers played variety theatres like the Tivoli, the Alhambra, and the
London Hippodrome rather than extended pubs and converted taverns.

This is not the place to discuss the subject material used by the
comics¹ or how their audiences reacted (save to note the presence of
live laughter. Rather, music hall may be seen as a contributory strand
to the early days of radio; that music hall continued, gradually
becoming 'variety' is well documented but of concern here is the
immediate interaction with the mass media². There has, of course, been

1. See Pearsall (1975), Beerbohm (1920,1922), and Sutton (1964) who
argues that rigidity in etiquette and social relations, limitations of
prudery, and an insistence on the nobility of human nature all
characterised Victorian comic and humorous material.

2. For the life stories of comedians see Fisher (1976). His namesake
has written a full length biography of Sid Field (Fisher 1975). East
(1977) gives an account of Max Miller. Bud Flanagan's autobiography
(1962) vividly recounts the pre-television days of variety and also
suggests reasons for the relative absence of the Crazy Gang from
television:

"We have done one or two TV shows but were uncomfortable...the
Crazy Gang was never meant to be shut into a box. We need a happy
laughing crowd out front and not the clinical atmosphere of a
studio and a specially invited audience" (1962:157)

The BBC (1972b) gives a full list of works related to light entertainment.
a great deal of crossing from one medium to another by any number of performers but as far as possible the concentration will be on, for example, Hancock in radio and television rather than in films and on stage. It is important, however, not to take radio and television as somehow segregated from the other entertainment media (nor to view them in a historical vacuum). The fact that a number of television executives came from a background of variety production is just as likely to have consequences as is the fact that the 'satire explosion' took place in the 1960's rather than the 1950's.

Cheshire's (1974) survey of the British music hall ends in 1923; the rising popularity of films no doubt played a part but there was another source of competition.

The Start of Radio

The BBC (then the British Broadcasting Company) first broadcast on the 14th of November 1922 as a commercial operation; American radio stations had been in existence for some time and the Marconi Company had been broadcasting, in 1921, a weekly half-hour programme under the direct control of Peter Ekersley. The first years of radio are thoroughly covered by Briggs (1961) (and subsequent periods by volumes published in 1965, 1970 and 1979) with the great advantage that the popular side of broadcasting is covered in conjunction with historical and organisational developments rather than being somehow sidestepped in favour of the serious and 'worthwhile' side.

It cannot be argued that early radio developed or converted forms of entertainment in such a way as to set hard and fast precedents for the subsequent history of broadcasting; individual characters

1. A comparable review of American vaudeville gives its 'death' as 1932 when the New York Palace ceased giving 'two-a-day' shows (Gilbert 1940).
and important events, not least in the technical dimension, have informed upon the creation of the situation comedy as it now exists. However, the early years are of interest for setting techniques, trends and patterns, and for defining how entertainment was to be seen as a broadcasting ethos (which has largely survived).

In his officially commissioned history of the B.B.C., Briggs (1961) identifies the first radio comic character as Helena Millais in her role as 'Our Lizzie' (broadcast on the 22nd of November 1922). Music hall performers could enjoy national prestige by playing the same material to any number of audiences in any number of theatres. With radio, and the rise in licences from 35,000 in 1922 to over 2 million in 1927 (Took 1976), performers could quickly come to national prominence but with a consequent pressure for new material. That the flavour of the music hall was present from the start is confirmed by Briggs (1961) who gives Miss Millais' opening words as "Ullo me ducks, 'ere I am again with me old string bag" and sang the song 'Ours is a nice 'ome, ours is'.

Rather a different sort of national celebrity was created by L.H. Lambert, known to his audience as A.J. Alan. First broadcasting in early 1924, he told carefully rehearsed, though seemingly casual, stories with a humorous slant about the middle and upper classes. More in line with a music hall tradition came John Henry, a Yorkshireman, who related comic incidents from his 'life' with his wife Blossom and friend Joe Murcatroyd, also broadcasting in 1924 and thereafter. His background was not the music hall of the large London theatres but more the end-of-the-pier variety. He became a national success without, it may be mentioned, the supposed benefit of a studio.

1. "There is in the nightly audience every order of social class, every grade of educational and intellectual attainment, every variety of like and dislike, taste and distaste, on every conceivable subject. To the same audience, every night, a different programme has to be transmitted. A theatre has the same perform— and a different audience night after night" Reith (1924:123)
audience. Even so, without a comic outfit, a red nose, or facial expression the cues defining the material as comic (apart, obviously, from the material itself) could only be audible— the reliance on accents, catchwords and phrases, and character voices all reflect this. The early radio performers were not joke-tellers but comic characters acting out comic sketches much as their counterparts continued to do on the stage.

The idea of an audience for the performers certainly seems to come directly from the music hall format where singers, serious and otherwise, would appear along with comics and speciality acts. The first instances of such broadcasts appeared in 1924 when, according to Briggs, seaside concerts were relayed to the wider audience by placing a microphone in the auditorium or concert hall (1961:288). The first revue organised by the BBC itself was 'The 7.30 Revue' from Manchester in 1925; one of the first from London was 'Radio Radiance' which included, among others, Tommy Handley. Handley had turned professional after the First World War (when he had performed in concert parties) with the help of Jack Hylton as co-performer and later organiser of some of his successful tours. He first broadcast on radio in the relay of the Royal Command Variety Show (Briggs gives 1924, Fisher (1976) and Grundy (1976) both give 1923) and auditioned at Savoy Hill in 1924 which turned out to be the major breakthrough (Kavanagh 1949). While he continued to tour, notably with his sketch 'The Disorderly Room', radio demanded more and more of his allegiance with programmes such as 'Handley's Manoeuvres', 'Tommy's Tours', 'Innamin' and 'Hot Pot'. In the early 1930's he joined Ronald Frankau as 'Nurgatroyd and Winterbottom' which was one of the first double patter acts on radio performed in front of an audience. Earlier double acts included Clapham and Dwyer (from 1926) with a gentle, gormless sort of comedy, and Alexander and
Mose (played at first by James Carew and Billy Bennett) from 1930. When Carew was replaced by Albert Whelan in 1931, the act rapidly became popular as the two established music hall performers brought their expertise to bear.

They were not the only established stars vying with newcomers on radio. The critic, St. John Ervine wrote in the Radio Times (1932) of the new breed of performers

"They do not time their stuff well. They have no sense of the unseen audience...But if they are old stagers like Sir Harry Lauder or Wilkie Bard or Bransby Williams, they can time their stuff with absolute precision. These old boys know how to catch the laughter of the unseen and can plant their jokes effectively every time" (in Tock 1976:10)

Certainly, the presence or not of a studio audience was not governed by any sort of official policy but rather by individual producers taking into account the style of their performers (and the limitations on space). One solution was to broadcast live as with 'Tommy Handley's Half Hour' which was on stage at the Criterion Theatre every Tuesday at 1pm in the mid-1930's. There appears to be little idea of the studio audience as supplying the home audience with cues. Rather, the performers who had been used to an audience, and whose material demanded the punctuation of laughter, would usually ask for and get an audience all other things being equal. This theme will be returned to but it is appropriate here to mention certain keypoints in the early development of the BBC.

Organisation and Variety

For many, the appointment of J.C.W. Reith as General Manager (14th of December 1922) and his rapid promotion to Managing Director made the most significant steps ever taken in the history of broadcasting. That his was the guiding light in developing the character of the BBC and that his influence persisted well after his resignation (in 1938) seems beyond reasonable doubt. His views on entertainment are discussed
later and only the following need be noted here.

Firstly, he conceived of the BBC as a responsible organisation (1924: 31-39). Its duty would not be to commercial interests but to the public and the country - this was legitimised when, in 1926, the Company became the Corporation under Royal Charter with Reith leading into 1927 in the post of the newly titled Director-General.

Secondly, Reith was in the forefront of the disputes over Variety which dogged the early years. In 1923 a committee of theatre managers, copyright owners, music publishers and artists was formed with the intention of preserving live theatre (at the expense of the BBC if need be). The early BBC staff were not from a show business background and came up against agents and managers who fought, by withholding their artists, what they considered to be too dangerous a competitor. Clauses were inserted in some contracts expressly forbidding the artist to perform for the BBC. While Reith was unlikely to have been an admirer of the Variety that was being withheld it was obviously a situation that could not be tolerated if the BBC were to be a credible national body. In 1925 some agreement was reached but the Variety Artists' Federation held back, demanding excessive fees for their performers. Some artistes naturally felt wary of the new medium especially as live broadcasts from theatres (where they were presumably at ease with an audience) were either barred or subject to complicated and private arrangements.

Radio either had to create new stars or somehow entice existing ones in the face of hostility from the entertainment establishment. Even when radio had entered its Golden Age in the 1930's it could be treated with suspicion: Sid Field, for example, believed radio humour detracted from the art of the comedian by (necessarily) ignoring gesture and facial expression (Fisher 1975:20-21). Others, like C.H.Elliott,
the 'Chocolate Coloured Coon', made a successful transition from stage comedian/singer/dancer to national radio star.

While the music hall acts could never be termed crude, there was a certain vulgarity about them - this further drove the wedge between the BBC and Variety. As early as January 1923, only a matter of weeks after the start of broadcasting, complaints were received about vulgarity. In 1925 specific instructions were laid down concerning suitable material with a caveat on jokes about Sootemen, Welahmen, and Clergymen. Entertainers were ordered not to dwell on drink or allude to politics, subjects which were common enough on the stage. The main battle, however, was fought in the arena of control over performers and had a financial basis. The entertainment establishment had enjoyed an effective monopoly of provision for the paying audience - the growing popularity of the BBC was seen as a threat to their livelihood. Representations were made to the Crawford Committee, set up in 1925 to clarify the role of the BBC and leading to the grant of the Charter, with a list of specific complaints such as a drop in the sales of sheet music and that the BBC had led to artificiality in wage values; the bottom line was a general suspicion of broadcasting. Reith was at a loss to explain their attitude (1924; 93-97) in the early days of radio and their united front in 1925 and 1926 was, ho him, equally inexplicable. His background was far from that of variety and his aims for entertainment somewhat different from those of the professional entrepreneurs.

The organisation of the BBC contained, from the outset, a clear division between creative and administrative functions. Neither group, at first, contained representatives from what may be loosely termed a show business background. From 1923 to 1926 entertainment came under the Music Controller with a direct line of control upwards through the Director of Programmes (and his Deputy) to the General Manager.
By 1926 the terminology had changed and responsibility for variety and revue came under a Productions Director with the upward line consisting of the Assistant Controller (Programmes), the Assistant Controller, the Controller, and the Managing Director. In 1927 Variety and Revue could be said to exist as a separate department under the Productions Director (who was also responsible for Drama). The main musical output, the orchestral works and 'serious' recitals, were now the province of a distinct department under the Music Director.

The 1930's

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War there were over 9 million wireless licence holders. The fears of the entertainment establishment had been justified in theory if not in practice as stage shows still flourished and would continue to do so with such crowd-pullers as the Crazy Gang, Max Miller, and Sid Field. There is no doubt, however, that radio was now the major medium of the two (with the growing film industry a threat to both).

During the 1930's several important changes took place, not least of which was the move from Savoy Hill in 1932 to the new Broadcasting House, set in the context of the two co-existing patterns of creative/administrative separation, and radio's relationship with live entertainment.

While arguments about control of artists broadcasting from theatres, copyright and so on continued throughout the decade (notably with George Black, owner of the London Palladium and other theatres) radio was rising above the need for forced co-operation. The crucial step was the formation, in 1933, of a new and separate Variety Department. Three reasons may be given for this development.

Firstly, it rectified an organisational weakness in that no one
individual could be held responsible for the output of popular entertainment. Variety came under the aegis of the Productions Director, aided by 'entertainment advisers', but the same person who organised the relay of concerts from theatres might be expected to organise the broadcast of the Grand National and the Boat Race. Because radio variety was so intricately linked with the need to negotiate with theatre owners it had seemed natural that it should fall into the same domain as outside broadcasts in general. Hence the ability to organise took precedence over any experience in entertainment (with odd exceptions like John Sharman, an adviser, who had been on the stage himself).

Secondly, a recognisable body was needed to not only negotiate with theatre owners but also to provide programmes when and if those negotiations broke down. The situation was often impossible with artists being withdrawn at such short notice that billings had been published in Radio Times and changes had to be announced on the air. If the BBC were to be credible and efficient it had to be independent.

Thirdly, foreign competition was attracting listeners. In 1931 the newly constituted International Broadcasting Company began broadcasting from Radio Formandie (and Radio Luxembourg began in 1933) with a large percentage of popular music and English commentary. If the BBC was to be seen, or rather heard, as the national British station the only option was to produce home-grown material in a professional way. The continental stations were commercially sponsored and could afford to attract star names like George Formby and Tommy Handley with relative ease. It needed the formation of a new BBC department to compete and develop indigenous talent in something more than the previous haphazard manner. In addition, there was an increasing pressure to move away from the existing traditions of the music hall, relying on a strong visual element, into programmes
which radio, as a unique medium, could successfully organise. The development of radio drama, from its hybrid origins to a distinct form, has been fully documented by Gielgud (1957). A similar sort of process was under way in the field of variety.

**Variety and Organisation**

The creation of the Variety Department was part of an almost total general reorganisation (Briggs 1965:439-446) which took the shape of a feudal pyramid of power, responsibility and obligation, characterised by an absolute distinction between creativity and administration.

The section of the pyramid of concern here was headed by the Controller of Programmes, then the Director of Entertainment with five departments under him - Children's Hour, Music, Outside Broadcasts, Drama, and Variety. Variety was split into Revuee, Vaudeville, Musical Comedy, Studio Lance Music, and the Theatre Orchestra. The head of Variety was to be Eric Maschwitz, former editor of the Radio Times and a song-writer of some note and popularity. Maschwitz himself thought the creation of his new department

"...had resulted from the growing attraction of the 'commercial' programmes broadcast from Luxembourg, Radio Normandie, etc. which were beginning to take the audience away from the BBC" (1957:64)

He was instrumental in obtaining Charles Brewer and Stanford Robinson as his two assistants, with producers beneath them of the calibre of Harry S. Pepper and John Sharman, both of whom had considerable experience of the theatre and the music hall.

From his appointment until he left, tempted by Hollywood and £350 per week, in 1937, Maschwitz led the Variety Department into romantic and easily digestible musical comedies at the expense of comedy itself. Some of the titles of his era might indicate the flavour of the period: there were broadcasts of 'Bitter Sweet', 'Good Night Vienna', 'The
Student Prince', 'The Vagabond King', 'Honeymoon in Paris' and 'The Story of the Waltz'. There was also Henry Hall who seemed to epitomise radio entertainment at that time.

"...carnations in the button-hole, double-breasted tuxedos, and trips on the Queen Mary. He appeared so reassuring, tempering the inevitable glamour of a dance-band leader with those homely glasses that he always wore. And there was that signature tune - 'Here's to the Next Time' - which presupposed that there would be a next time, that everything would carry on as before" (Nobbs 1972:46)

While there were notable appearances from, among others, Tommy Handley and George Burns and Gracie Allen, the four years under Maschwitz's control pushed comedy into the background and brought light music to the fore. Radio was no longer competing against the entertainment establishment; it had taken one aspect of variety and made it its own. The emphasis on music did, however, have certain consequences for the later evolution of radio comedy.

The Variety Department flourished from providing 29 hours a month in 1933 to 59 hours a month in 1936 (Briggs 1965:116). Programme lengths tended to approximate to half an hour or three quarters of an hour, schedules became regular, and programmes often took on a weekly basis ('Saturday Magazine', 'Monday Night at Eight') with the result that listeners could expect certain types of shows at certain times on particular days. Also, provisions were made for programmes to take place in front of invited audiences as a natural part of the proceedings rather than relying on chance or the outcome of negotiations with theatre owners in the relay of live shows.  

1. American radio had taken a studio audience for granted from the start. Originally, it sat behind a glass screen and heard through microphones. Ed Wynn, the comedian, is credited with demanding that the audience be 'out front' so he could react to their laughter (Wilde 1973). Certainly, by the late 1920s a studio audience was common in America. The later acceptance in Britain was connected to extreme pressure on studio space (to the extent of not having room for an audience) which was eased by the move to Broadcasting House and the later acquisition, in November 1933, of a recently empty theatre, St. George's Hall, in Langham Place.
Maschwitz was replaced by John Watt (from 1937) but there was little, if any, change in the bias towards music and light operetta. The growth of situation comedy, with quite promising early varieties, was stunted from 1933. For Maschwitz, whose ideas continued to dominate policy:

"The mainstay of radio entertainment was then, and always will be, the popular song and tune; few listeners remember the jokes of the comedian, millions whistle the hit-song of the month" (1957:75)

It would take the departure of Reith from the BBC, increasing awareness and acceptance of American radio, and the Second World War to see comedy develop into recognisable forms. However, as this chapter is roughly chronological, brief reference must be made to the start of television broadcasting.

**Television 1936-1939**

While there had been irregular television transmissions since 1929 the official opening of the television service did not take place until the second of November 1936. The delay was largely due to technical considerations and proving the claims of rival applicants, notably Baird and EMI, to service the new venture. That entertainment was to be a mainstay of the medium is beyond doubt. Indeed, the first two broadcast hours (3-4pm and 9-10pm) featured musical comedy with Adele Dixon and Buck and Bubbles (black American comedy dancers) (Davis 1976). Tommy Handley, Tommy Trinder and Lupino Lane were among the first televised comedians at later dates.

The first announcer, Leslie Mitchell had been a member of Variety under Maschwitz. Cecil Madden, as programme planner, had extensive theatrical experience and Gerald Cook, Director of Television, had worked since 1925 in Outside Broadcasts with responsibility for, inter alia, relaying a Royal Command Variety Performance and the Promenade Concerts. Cook had also gained much experience in negotiating with the entertainment establishment; not enough, however,
to persuade George Black to release artists for appearance. Television would have to forge its own variety styles as radio had done before it.

Providing more studio space was critical for the success of television and the planners were quick to realise the benefits of an invited audience (Briggs 1965:161) from early 1937 onwards. Those studio audiences for certain programmes did not, however, exist to supply the home audience with a laughter soundtrack (after all, only 2,000 sets had been sold by the end of 1937) but rather for the benefit of the performers in a parallel with the world of live entertainment. What seems to be absent from the first three years of broadcasting is anything more than a germ of what was later to be the fully developed form of situation comedy, though there were any number of appearances by joke-tellers and comedians in comic sketches.

Television closed down, for the duration of the War, on the first of September 1939; the last programme was a Mickey Mouse cartoon. Briggs is uncharacteristically uninformative on the reasons for the closure though he does mention the fear of enemy aircraft homing in on the transmitters. Ross (1961) suggests the main reason was to release engineers for the war effort from what was an occupation of little apparent value when seen in terms of the small size of the audience. With theatres closing down (depending on the strength and location of air raids) it was left largely to radio to provide the entertainment for the next six years.

Radio in the late 1930's and the Start of War

It is almost conventional for writers on this period of the BBC's history to have a subsection headed 'The Day War Broke Out...' to invoke the Robb Wilton sketch of the same name. Wilton had appeared in numerous sketches before and after 1922 and had been an early radio
performer. In 1937 he starred, with Max Kester, in a series of 15 minute programmes under the title 'Mr. Mucklecombe JP' which seems to be the first real example of a situation comedy. The performers existed as characters acting out a plot, the comedy was generated by the exaggerated bureaucracy of minor officialdom rather than structured jokes, and the programmes were a series rather than a serial. It may even be added that his friendly parodies of the Home Guard pre-dated, and set the scene for, Dad's Army (just as Gillie Potter had in some sense anticipated Wilton's mythical village of Kether Backwash by, in the early 1930's, chronicling the experiences of Hoganorton).

The most important development, however, in the creation of a distinct comedy form came with the departure of Reith. This removed the major opposition to an acceptance of American ideas and programmes. While Maschwitz had visited America on several occasions it was as an individual talent-spotter rather than as a 'researcher'. America was broadcasting in the series format throughout the 1930's but no attempt had been made to transfer, or even Anglicise, such programmes as Amos 'n Andy or those of Jack Benny or George Burns and Gracie Allen. All of these programmes had made the step from joke-telling to character comedy series. It would be naive to suggest that after Reith's departure in June 1938 some sort of floodgate was

1. Dunbar usefully draws the distinction between the two. A serial requires a developing theme (rarely found in situation comedies) whereas in a series 

"...the central character, and a number of other characters, are established in the beginning episode. They appear in every episode, and the viewer comes to know them...to keep the series going, every episode is a fresh story involving the regular characters, who may or may not appear in future instalments. The viewer is assured of a new story every week" (1965:64)

2. For example, Fibber McGee and Molly had started in 1935 as a domestic comedy series (Martin 1970:333-335).
opened (somewhat more important events in 1939 and 1941 were to have a greater effect). There can, though, be little doubt that the appointment of F.W. Ogilvie signalled the end of the old era and pointed to the new.

Under the direction of John Watt, who had replaced Maschwitz as Head of Variety, and with the guiding hands of Harry S. Pepper and Ronnie Waldman, Band Waggon was first broadcast in January 1938 as a conscious effort to rival the attraction of American-style programmes being transmitted by, for example, Radio Luxembourg. It was a new approach and a new departure taking little, if anything, from previous links with the music hall (though the leads, Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch, were experienced on the stage). For the first time, extensive use was made of the techniques that radio had to offer but which had been largely unexploited - the catchphrase, the regular programme slot, the use of extravagant sound effects, the applauding and laughing studio audience, an appeal to the imagination of the listener through almost surrealist sketches, and an American-style quickfire patter. The programme continued until March 1939 (with summer breaks to allow the artists to appear on stage) and returned in September of that year as, perhaps, the most popular radio show ever (Briggs 1970:108). There were frequent transmissions throughout the War. Its success may be gauged by the fact that it was one of the programmes which had its slot switched to counter the German broadcasts from Hamburg which were attracting what the BBC believed to be an unhealthy interest.

Band Waggon cannot really be seen as a direct antecedent of the situation comedy form (though its reliance on character and sketches

1. The fact that Band Waggon first appeared before Reith's departure is not of immediate consequence. American influence had been felt during the 1930's but had been largely restrained.
tends to push it in that direction). Nevertheless, it did emphasise that radio could provide a unique form of entertainment divorced from a stage-based tradition. Apart from the happy consequence that its success led to the search for similar shows and thus ensured the creation of ITMA, the series was the first to fully reflect the nature of the medium with comedy of character and plot (albeit usually far-fetched) rather than adapting existing traditions such as Wilton and Gillie Potter had done. Williams (1974) discusses the antecedents of the situation comedy form as being staged variety sketches; he does, though, recognise that something else has occurred to define the form without actually identifying what. It may well be that the missing element is radio (and television) itself.

ITMA

The original brief was to fill the gap left by Band Waggon. Certain dimensions would be retained - the comic support characters to Askey and Murdoch like Mrs. Bagwash, the catchphrases like 'Aythangyew' - but mere duplication was unlikely to achieve the same level of popularity. The pattern favoured by the planners was a Burns and Allen type of show with Tommy Handley, already a popular radio star, as an English Burns, but the idea proved abortive and never really resurfaced once the script conferences started (Fisher 1976:127). The series proper started on the twelfth of July 1939 with Handley as the star, Francis Worsley as producer and Ted Kavanagh as writer. The original pilot run was for four shows (all set on a mythical ship) under the title It's That Man Again. The new series, of half-hour programmes, started on the nineteenth of September 1939 with the first episode 45 minutes long to 'introduce' the characters.

Nobbs has suggested that ITMA was

"...not a programme with a message or 'something to say' - it
was pure fun and those who treat its memory too reverently and intellectually do it a disservice" (1972:23)

His comment may have been inspired by the wealth of literature on the programme. A fairly full list would have to include: Handley (undated), Kavanagh (1949), Kavanagh (1974), Grundy (1976), Train (1956), Worsley (1948,1946), and Weir (1976) together with the relevant sections from Briggs (1965,1970,1979), Fisher (1976) and Took (1976). The extensive interest stems from the overwhelming popularity of the programme and its innovative style and content (existing more as a forerunner to The Goon Show than to domestic comedies). It is difficult to assess the reasons for the show's popularity but there is little doubt that the concurrence of the War aided the appeal which was to last until Handley's death in 1949 (though Briggs notes the popularity was waning post-War (1979:545)). Grundy (1976) gives a figure of 16 million listeners at the height of its success (though audience research at this time made no great claims to accuracy) and attributes the success to the War and the reunion of Handley, Worsley and Kavanagh who had all worked together before though not on a regular basis.

The programme was broadcast from Bristol whence Variety had moved during the first weeks of the War; the shows were performed before a studio audience. The first series ended in February 1940 and was followed by a theatrical tour which, according to most commentators, never managed to recreate the atmosphere and success of the radio show (which relied heavily on appeals to the imagination of the listener). When Bristol started to be subject to enemy bombing, the Variety Department moved to Bangor (February 1941) and returned to London in 1943. JIM moved to the Criterion Theatre when the worst of the air offensive was over. All the broadcasts were 'live' and the great majority took place in front of an audience. Ronnie Waldman,
who stood in as producer when Worsley was ill, suggested

"You could do it at the theatre in Bangor or at a cinema in Llandudno with an audience of 2,000; you could do it with an audience of 200 in the studio at Bangor; or you could do it with no audience at all. (Worsley) tried all three. The audience of 2,000 had the effect of slowing the show down. No audience at all somehow gave a sense of emptiness. 200 people turned out to be just right" (quoted in Took 1976:25)

The tickets for the programme were in great demand and allocated weeks in advance; queues formed at least an hour before the start as people hoped to get the best seats.

The series were broadcast on the Home Service (and, during the War, on the General Forces Programme, the North American Service, and the Pacific Service) indicating that Variety would keep a foothold there even after the division of the service into Home and Light immediately after the War (with the Third Programme starting in 1946). Indeed, it was to be the Home Service which would carry many of radio's later successes as the Light Programme became more and more allied to music after the advent of a flourishing television service.

There were plans at one stage to televise LMA (1946). These were dropped for the announced reason that Equity demanded higher fees for members appearing on television though it is likelier that the cost of sets, costumes, and special effects needed to visually translate the bizarre plots was prohibitive. It was felt that LMA was, above all a radio programme.

As Fisher (1976) has noted, one of the essential elements of LMA was that it took the form of a narrative, single-theme show (albeit with outlandish plots and mythical locations like Foaming-at-the-Mouth and Tountopia with punning names such as Bowing and Scraping or Luke Smart the tailor). There is no current equivalent to the programme, which once again places it firmly as Wartime radio. Even

the abbreviation to ITMA reflected the growing importance of initials such as LDV and ARI. Its importance, for this thesis, however stems from four bases. Firstly, it confirmed the felt necessity of a studio audience for the cast. While the transmitted laughter may have supplied cues to the home audience, the presence of a studio audience reflected the absolute need for comedy to raise laughs as a performing art. Secondly, the concept of a series, broadcast at a regular time and on regular days (usually 8.30-9pm on Thursdays), became fixed without any direct translation of American ideas. Variety had moved from Band Waggon with different guests each week to the comedy series with a single star and semi-permanent characters facing new plots within a linked framework. Thirdly, the programmes were devoted to a single theme. Plots may have been far-fetched but were still dramatic (in the widest sense of the word); they were no more dramatically far-fetched than some of the coincidences and mistaken identities that the audience is called upon to suspend belief for in some modern situation comedies. Fourthly, the success of ITMA led directly to a search for other comedy series. It may be suggested that the relative decline in the popularity of ITMA after the war owed much to flourishing rivals as well as any other reason; certainly, the programme had established that experiment could be a part of Variety and that comedy shows could exist in their own right.

1. Weir writes of performing ITMA in front of a studio audience:

"...there was no time to think of anything but cues and words and waiting for laughs. For quite the worst thing anyone can do in such a show is 'tread' on laughs, and thus silence the audience into stopping laughing for fear of missing anything spoken over their reactions. Timing is all-important. Sensing that split-second's waiting to see if they're going to see the joke, and riding smoothly on if the laugh doesn't come, so the show keeps buoyant" (1976:19)

The fact that the broadcasts were live, even after the war when Weir was a member of the cast, meant that there was no safety net of subsequent editing to make the programme the 'correct' length. There was no dubbed laughter either.
rather than as fragments of a general variety package. The very
fact that stage tours of radio shows appear rarely to have captured
the same level of success indicates that radio, in the 1940's at
least, had its own peculiar comic art form.

Entertainment 1939–1945 and Beyond

In terms of organisation, the great distinction during the War was
between the Home Service and the Forces Programme which started in
February 1940; the latter was the forerunner of the Light Programme
which would begin in July 1945. In terms of entertainment the
distinction was less marked as the Variety Department, under John
Watt throughout the War, had a duty to supply radio in general rather
than to specific masters. Of some immediate consequence was the
decision, taken in 1938 as a contingency in the event of war, to
limit programmes to half an hour duration. The American stations
had already fixed on this period as the most satisfactory from the
point of view of advertisers.

The 1938 Committee also determined that while the percentage of
entertainment would drop as news output increased, the principle of
entertainment as a potential morale-booster should be upheld (Briggs
1970:94-96). The Variety Department might have felt fortunate with
the closing of theatres on the outbreak of war but any prospects for
attracting artiestes previously denied to them faded in a welter of
Ministry of Information formalities. There was, however, an under-
standable easing of hostilities throughout the War.

How 'vulgar' the Department was allowed to be (which was 'not at all!')
and whether or not entertainment programmes were to carry direct
1. For the appearance of many radio performers in films see Robinson
(1969) who discusses, for example, the film of 'Band Wagon' (1940)
and Handley's 'Time Flies' (1944) in terms of adaptability to
different media.
propaganda were points of controversy for the duration. Indirect forms of propaganda, say in the form of 'Funf' (a character in *Ithik*) or the show 'Adolf in Blunderland', were certainly permissible and needed no official encouragement. If the public complaints and the Press criticism of the time (Briggs 1970:96-99) are to be believed, it would appear that during the early part of the War the standard and amount of entertainment did not reflect the public need in terms of boosting morale; Took (1976) suggests that strict censorship and a ban on ad-libbing were largely to blame for much of the dull variety. Even accepting that the increase in news output could hardly be criticised, there was a public demand for more entertainment.

By 1940 more home listeners tuned into the Forces Programme than the Home Service; the former had begun to reflect requests from servicemen for more variety. Questions were raised in Parliament on the frivolous content of broadcasting and the response, perhaps directly linked, was to more firmly separate news transmissions from the lighter elements of variety, by silent interludes if need be. Nobody wanted to treat of Dunkirk in the spirit of 'Garrison Theatre' or 'The White Coons' nor to mix the two approaches. The principle was to be one of 'gaiety in grimness'.

The output of the Variety Department was monitored and, in 1943, the Governors appointed Percy Edgar, Midland Regional Director, to report to them on the state of entertainment. His report, fully discussed by Briggs (1970:573-577), was critical of vulgarity, lowbrow programmes, and the appeal only to the largest audiences. Watt made several practical defences - low budgets, trying to attract performers to Bangor and so on - but the charge of underrating audience intelligence could only be denied, not disproved. The tenor of the relationship between Variety and the BBC executives was very much one of grudging acceptance.

1. The title of a chapter on Variety in the 1941 BBC Handbook.
The original split of Drama and Variety before the War helped to ensure that the development of the situation comedy form would be restricted. It had no place in Features and Drama (as the Department was now called) whose comic output was high Comedy, and its natural home in Variety was crowded out with revues, vaudeville, and, above all else, light music. There were, however, a number of programmes during the war which suggest a sort of evolution, among them Band Waggon and ITMA, with some influence from American broadcasting.

The Programmes 1939–1945

Brief mention has already been made of Robb Wilton. The character of Mr. Muddlecombe and the various happenings in the village of Nether Backwash were heard throughout the War years, usually on Wednesday nights at 8pm. The music hall tradition of the comic monologue had already been turned into dialogue by Wilton and, from 1939 on, the comic sketches of Mr. Muddlecombe were becoming comic plots. It was not joke-telling but character comedy some distance removed from the punning style of ITMA or the extravagant surrealism of Danger–Men At Work.

In a similar vein to Wilton, Arthur Lucan as Mother Riley with her 'daughter' Kitty made radio appearances with an act that had been formed and successful on stage. Here again, structured jokes were rare and the style of humour was narrative; one reason, of course, for the narrative was the unsuitability, for radio, of the team's usual slapstick and visual comedy as performed on stage or film. It may be noted here, though not with particular reference to Lucan, that the War led to more recordings with a studio audience of shows that were to be transmitted later. ITMA, as far as can be established, continued 'live' but other shows, when their principals were engaged elsewhere (in fund-raising, for example) were recorded well in advance.
to avoid clashes in appointments.

The first American breakthrough was with *Hi Gang* starring Ben Lyon, Bebe Daniels and Vic Oliver, all of whom were known in Britain from stage appearances since 1936; Lyons and Daniels had, in fact, appeared on television on the second day of official broadcasting (Allgood 1975). *Hi Gang* was largely American in content but was produced by the BBC (with a studio/stage audience). The style was one of fast patter, comic sketches, 'wisecracks', and lots of music and songs performed by the regulars and guests. The show, in essence, was no different to *Music Hall* or *The Kentucky Minstrels* though it did have a greater emphasis on comic material. Its appeal was in presentation rather than content; its successor, *Bebe, Vic and Ben*, was listened to by an even larger audience (Briggs 1970:567).

By 1942 British audiences could also hear *Broadway Calling* which was a compilation series featuring such performers as Bob Hope and Jack Benny. In 1943 the American Forces Network was broadcasting from London studios, with the co-operation of the BBC, a selection of BBC output and American variety shows. Watt had sent his assistant, in 1942, to the United States with the intention of bringing back writers and performers to enable BBC production of American style programmes (such as *Yankee-Doodle-Do*). As British shows took on a number of Atlantic attributes certain worries were expressed by Haley (appointed Editor-in-Chief in 1943 with overall responsibility for output). The response of the Variety Department, with the assistance of the Overseas Entertainment Unit, was a series of programmes which owed less to American speed and format and more to British performers and tradition.

The generic title was *Mediterranean Merry Go Round* and it started in 1944. All three branches of the Forces contributed to individual
series which ran under the banner in rotation - Eric Barker in the Navy's *HMS Waterlogged*, Charlie Chester in the Army's *Stand Easy*, and Richard Murdoch and Kenneth Horne in *Leuchter Command* for the RAF. *Stand Easy*, eventually becoming *The CIVvy Street Rag*, was a sort of working-class *ITMA*; it retained the punning style but not the gentility. The other series are of more interest here if only for their later development. Just as *Hi Gang* would lead to the recognisable situation comedy of *Life With The Lyons* so the Navy and RAF contributions also had a post-War history of some consequence. *HMS Waterlogged* emerged in peacetime as *Waterlogged Spa*, a series about a cockney socialist First Lord of the Admiralty, Baron Waterlogged, and his daughter Phoebe; the presence of the Spa Symphony Orchestra makes one hesitate in calling the series a fully fledged situation comedy. One of the character actors, Jon Pertwee, would resurface in the late 1950s in *The Navy Lark*.

The RAF contribution became *Much Binding in the Marsh*, the original name of the mythical RAF station where episodes of *Leuchter Command* took place. In peacetime, the characters merely transferred to civilian activities such as running a country club from a Nissen hut and so on.

1. *Mediterranean Merry Go Round* had its forerunner in *Middle East Merry Go Round*, first broadcast in 1943. Apart from the setting of the individual Service series, the branch flavour was accentuated by using performers who had been in that particular branch - Barker, for example, had served in the Navy for 5 years, both Murdoch and Horne were ex-RAF, and Chester was contacted while with the Royal Irish Fusiliers to write for the BBC.

2. Briggs has a rare mistake giving Richard Gray as the actor playing Baron Waterlogged (1979;56) which is unconsciously rectified to Barker (713); Barker (1956) has details about the series. Barker, coincidentally, has also the following useful remarks on the subject of writing comedy for radio:

"Mass-appeal dominates the entire radio scene in England. The planners of the BBC may pretend not to agree; the tycoons, pundits, and shoguns may profess implacable reactionary tendencies, but at the bottom they must, by the very nature of the peculiar mandate which they hold, be hyper-sensitive to the interests of the greatest number" (1951;148)
The first series started in January 1947 with scripts by the two leading actors and while elements may still have been far-fetched, a grounding in some sort of reality was reached. The narrative form had been established by previous series but with great demands on the imagination of the listeners - in Danger - Men at Work, for example, the characters could float like gas-filled balloons or bounce back from a ten storey drop - though now some sort of credibility had arrived. Comedy has usually relied on a degree of exaggeration to make its point but there is a line beyond which social criticism becomes outrageous farce and incredible esotericism; such is not the way of situation comedies.

Certainly, dramatic serials which were good-humoured rather than comic were broadcast during the War - At the Armstrons, Front Line Family - but it was not until 1948 and 1950/51 respectively that the form was fully developed with Mrs. Dale's Diary and The Archers. Situation comedies appear to have come from some sort of a mixture between the narrative comedy of the War years, American series, and the forerunners of soap operas.

In July 1945 Michael Standing replaced Watt as Director of Variety. He had come from Outside Broadcasts and would be instrumental in later setting up the Scripts Section under which radio comedy flourished.

Reconstruction

The Light Programme was launched, as the obvious successor to the General Forces Programme, in July 1945 with Maurice Gorham at its Head. The new service was to carry a great percentage of the Variety Department's output fitted in between the preponderance of light music (though ITW, for example, stayed with the Home Service). Gorham left for television and was replaced in November 1945 by Norman Collins.

1. Hackforth (1976) gives the show as being on the air in 1945.
who would be instrumental in the later start of independent television. Although the return of television (BBC) in June 1946 provided a new dimension, the cross-fertilisation with radio will mean that here, in the hopes of greater clarity, the outline of entertainment will still follow a rough chronology rather than be split into two distinct strands.

At first, television was little more than radio with pictures and a number of executive BBC staff were disappointed with what appeared as a waste of an excellent opportunity (Briggs 1979:214–218). New impetus was needed to escape from the stamp of Wartime thinking. It came, in 1947, with the appointments of Cecil McGivern as Television Programme Director, Collins in place of Gorham as Head of the Television Service, and the transfer of overall responsibility for light entertainment from the Presentations Director to a new department (Light Entertainment) under Pat Hillyard. All three men had a great of entertainment experience both inside and outside the BBC. Their understandable concern with the new techniques that television offered initially lead to a stress on the achievement of technical competence. Programme contents would be suitably modified in the wake of such expertise.

Once the break had been made from radio the artistic side would be

1. It is difficult, relatively unrewarding, and unnecessarily complicating to try and map out who produced, wrote, and acted in what particular programme in order to demonstrate that any number of series had a core of personnel. One or two examples may suffice here to indicate some of the links that were, at first, restricted to radio. The major example of linking the two media is Tony Hancock who deserves and receives greater attention later in this chapter. Charles Maxwell produced Navy Mixture (during and after the War), Take It From Here, and Two’s a Crowd with the ventriloquist Peter Brough; Muir had written for Peter Waring and Kenneth Horne in Heigh Ho and for Jimmy Edwards; with Norden, Muir wrote In All Directions, Bedtime with Braden, and the television series Whacko with Jimmy Edwards. The Goons were produced at different times by Pat Dixon (also producing In All Directions), Tom Ronald (Life With The Lyons), Roy Speer (Happy Go Lucky, Educating Archie), and Leslie Bridgmont (Much Ending in the Marsh, A Life of Bliss).
forced to catch up to the technical advances if any sort of professional standard was to be reached. It simply could not be regarded as good enough to put the cast of a comedy series round a microphone in a studio while they read the scripts in character voices. Not only would television bring to an end the type of programme that had relied extensively on appeals to the imagination, it would also have a profound on the nature of the programmes that now had to be created. Action, in the stage sense, would replace the verbal punning and sound effects, with all the necessary limitations that studio productions entail.

**TEMA** could still succeed on radio but the prospect of transferring to television never came to fruition. Television could not afford the expensive visual re-creation of what could be adequately described by a sound effect (a herd of cattle or explosions, for example); neither could it create the changes of location which required no more than an announcement and some new background music. Until the artistic side of the new medium evolved - there was, after all, a certain suspicion of it not least from the acting profession and radio or stage comedians - the situation comedy form only really existed on radio under the umbrella of Variety.

Perhaps the most notable of the early post-War radio shows was *Take It From Here*, first broadcast in March 1948, written by Muir and Norden, and containing 'The Clums'. It had overtaken *Much Binding in the Marsh* in terms of popularity by 1949 and helped to fill the gap left by the end of **TEMA**. Nathan (1971) identifies it as the first completely peacetime situation comedy (or, at least, 'The Clums' section of it) and suggests that it was one of four major influences on future comedy along with *The Goons*, *Beyond The Fringe*, and the continued music hall or variety tradition found, for example, in the *Carry On...* films. Briggs also notes that while programmes such as
Much Binding in the Marsh and Waterlogged Spa were very much rooted in tradition and personnel to the War years, Take It From Here was completely post-War in its attitudes (1979:713). Fisher (1976) sees its style as one of polished literacy and verbalism.

"The puns with which the programme became identifiable were completely divorced from any suggestion of that throwaway contempt for language which hallmarked the ITMA style... One recalls the Roman soldiers numbering off from left to right: 'Eye, Eye-eye, Eye-eye-eye, Eye-vee!'" (193)

The show was more than a chance encounter of diverse talents which somehow jelled; the BBC were the prime mover, in the person of Charles Maxwell, in bringing the personnel together and the show's direct origins were in Navy Mixture where Jimmy Edwards and Joy Nichols had appeared. Muir had been writing for Edwards in his days at The Windmill theatre and both Muir and Norden had been members of Kavanagh Associates, the script-writing 'organisation' set up by the writer of ITMA to foster new talent.

The first six programmes had poor audience figures but the programme was continued - Edwards suggests because it was relatively cheap due to the 'unknown' performers (1953) but it is likelier that the BBC realised its potential - and took off when it was switched to Saturday lunchtime to fill the gap left by the end of ITMA repeats. The shows were topical, satirical, and literate and proceeded by announcements, jokes, sketches and music - established elements in themselves but given new impetus by the quality of script and performance - but it was the start of 'The Glums' as a distinct section of the show, in 1953, that ensured a special place for Take It From Here. Joy Nichols left, to return to Australia, and was replaced by June Whitfield who became in the show more of an actress and less of a comedienne. The Glums started with Edwards as the father, Bentley as Ron the son, and Whitfield as the girlfriend, Eth. Mrs. Glum never appeared but made occasional noises off-stage. The cast had appeared together, before the
radio version of 'The Clums', at the Adelphi theatre in 'Take It From Us' and 'London Laughs' in 1950 and 1952. The last radio broadcasts were in 1960 but the Glum family were resurrected, with Edwards and new supporting characters, on television in the late 1970's.

Apart from the fact that 'The Glums' was a section of a programme rather than a programme itself, the recognisable structure of situation comedy had now been reached:

"The emphasis was now upon Jonsonian characterisation as much as flip, fleeting jokes, the sketch developing from a slim storyline restricted to the sofa-dominated frontroom of the Glum household to a stronger situation played against a more extensive Cockney background, the gags illuminating the situation" (Fisher 1976:194)

There was no need to infuse programmes with bizarre events, funny voices, or sound effects unless they were a realistic part of the script; similarly, the appeal to the listeners' imagination was now grounded in the narrative rather than in flights of fancy. It really is a matter of degree how closely situation comedies reflect and parallel real life — Durgnat's phrase 'the crazy mirror' about comedy in Hollywood (1969) seems a reasonable shorthand — and 'The Glums' at least gave an acceptably mirrored view of Britain in the 1950's.

By this time, too, the studio audience had become a regular part of the production process.

The early 1950's saw the conjunction between the new Britain of the Festival, the Social State, a change of Government, the diminished Empire together with the new comedians, writers and personnel, with their Wartime experiences of concert parties, ENSA, The Windmill and the like. The latter groups were finding and seeking peacetime employment; programmes were changing or being changed away from the

1. The Entertainments National Service Association had a mixed and often antagonistic relationship during the War (Hughes 1976) as far as the BBC were concerned. Hughes discusses particularly the lure of radio in drawing people away from live entertainment.
Variety of the War with sketches, songs, and elements of music hall towards the structured situation comedy owing more to American experience and its home-grown counterpart which had taken the form but modified the content.

Radio and Television — New and Old Programmes

Radio remained the senior service well into the 1950's. There was a certain amount of interchanging personnel and ideas but the technical and artistic differences between the two media did not allow for an easy transfer of the programmes themselves. Maschwitz, for example, maintained his contacts with radio and also wrote, for television, a comedy series about a suburban bank manager and his 'scatterbrained' wife and relatives called Family Affairs.

Television was a reasonable prospect for continuing the revue tradition of variety; early performers included Richard Hearne (remembered as Mr. Pastry by some) and Jack and Claude Hulbert in The Hulbert's Follies. Hancock had been seen on television in 1950 in a revue series called Flotsam's Follies and Terry Thomas was a frequent performer during the period (Thomas 1959). A severe shortage of studio space contributed to

1. Frankie Howard made his television debut in January 1952 with a show called The Howard Crowd with the Feverley Sisters, scripted by Eric Sykes; the programme was well within the tradition of variety with songs, patter, and character sketches. Howard has written on the suspicion that television aroused among some performers; his comments also have a bearing on the matter of studio audiences:

"In truth, my performance was not as good as it might have been, for I didn’t have the technique for projecting myself in this new medium. Nor am I making excuses for myself when I refer to the relatively amateur methods of producing and photographing variety shows in those days — a matter of sticking cameras in front of and around the stage and hoping for the best...One show I did was televised from the People's Palace, an enormous theatre that held about 2000 people...for TV not only were the cameras set up yards in front of me — bad enough — but they were so placed that I couldn't see the audience, and they couldn't see me. Modern studios are built with the audience very much in mind; they sit above the cameras and look over them, so they can see the artist without hindrance" (Howard 1977:99-101)

Brian Rix has given a useful inside account of the problems met in televising farces in the 1950's (Rix 1977:116-123,141-146).
the hesitant beginnings of post-War television with the added limitation that successes on radio simply could not, for the most part, be 'fitted' into television until further studios had been bought or built. There was also resistance, as in the early days of radio, from the entertainment establishment which could only slow down the development of television light entertainment as a distinct and healthy exercise.

On radio, things continued much as before but with an increasing split between the narrative comedy series and the traditional variety programme though many shows combined elements of the two. Educating Archie, for example, ran for 11 years from June 1950 with scripts by, among others, Eric Sykes and Marty Feldman and character parts played by Hancock, Harry Secombe, and Max Bygraves. The programmes were largely examples of a situation comedy but still retained songs and music; perhaps they also exceeded the bounds of the 'crazy mirror' by having a ventriloquist's dummy as the eponymous star (see Brough 1955). Similarly, Ted Ray's series, begun in 1949, was mainly a domestic comedy but with feature spots for resident and guest singers. Ray's a Laugh was regularly broadcast until 1961 which seems a long time to keep an audience happy with tales of a marriage beset by unpaid bills, burst pipes, and burnt toast. Ray unconsciously prophesies its longevity by referring to the series very suburban Britishness and its sound foundations in the experience of its leading performers (Ray 1952). Much Binding in the March continued but with a break from 1950 to 1953. It had been dropped amid rumours that the lead performers had contracted to appear on Radio Luxembourg (and appear they did). Arthur Askey reappeared with Hello Playmates in May 1954.

Recognisable situation comedies which had almost or totally dispensed with traces of the old style variety compilations included Meet the Hurrets with Jack Warner, Life with the Ivons (on both radio and
television at various dates between 1951 and 1963), The Clitheroe Kid, which started in 1958 and ran till its star's death in 1972, and A Life of Bliss with David Tomlinson (and later, George Cole) as a daydreaming bachelor. Not only had radio comedy made a style for itself which could happily co-exist with basic variety programmes and the 'intellectual' humour of Peter Ustinov's In All Directions or The Goons, it had also taken as a basic ingredient of situation comedy an ample slice of domesticity.

The Goons and Hancock

The Goons were first broadcast in May 1951 as 'Radio's Own Crazy People, "The Goons"' with a change of title in 1952 to 'The Goon Show' and from 1955 to simply The Goons. The original four performers were Michael Bentine, Harry Secombe, Peter Sellers, and Spike Milligan (who wrote most of the scripts, sometimes with others among them Eric Sykes).

All had had wartime or variety experience but with only varying degrees of success. The origins of the show have been well documented (Secombe 1975 and Bentine 1976 give inside accounts; Draper 1976 and Wilmut and Grafton 1976 have rather more detail) and the series finished officially in 1960 but with repeats and a puppet version The Telegoons thereafter.

There had been a number of series on the radio which may have influenced the start of The Goons. Pat Dixon had produced eight programmes of Listen, My Children (without regular characters or a studio audience).

1. There is no intention, of course, of placing the various 'Goon Shows' in the category of situation comedy. However, they deserve some attention, albeit relatively brief, if only by way of a contrast with what else was happening on radio; as domestic comedy series were becoming more regular, The Goons opened up new directions and would confirm and extend the type of programme pointed to by ITMA and Tanner - Men at Work. A basis for a new tradition was also laid - as many authors have noted, the cast of Beyond The Fringe were members of the young audience that helped to make The Goons so popular.
The series ran from June 1948 on the Home Service and comprised unrelated sketches with a satirical edge. Dixon also produced a follow-up, Third Division - Some Vulgar Fractious, written by Muir and Norden and featuring, among others, Secombe, Sellers, and Bentine; this ran from January 1949 and had a similar content to its predecessor. The pilot of The Goons, called 'Seller's Castle', was at first rejected by the BBC on the grounds that it was too esoteric but the intercession of Dixon and the appointment of Dennis Main Wilson as producer gave a sense of safety. All the subsequent programmes were usually recorded on a Sunday, in front of an audience, and broadcast on a variety of days during the following week.

The style of the Goons needs no description here — Milligan (1973) gives a selection of scripts — and their importance is perhaps judged best by what came after. What their success did prove, however, was that radio could make a unique contribution to comedy with a reliance on sound effects and preposterous plots (much like ITMA but somehow beyond) which would not translate to television. Further, their continued popularity was sufficient witness to the existence of an audience which wanted something as well as, or instead of, revues, light music, and domestic comedy.

The history of the series also points to a new type of BBC producer who could be involved in light entertainment without the usual background of some sort of variety experience. Main Wilson, the first producer, had been in the BBC European Service before the War and later worked in Germany for the Propaganda Service of the Central Commission before rejoining the BBC in 1947. Peter Eton, producer of the third to the sixth series, had studied art and worked as a commercial artist, and

1. The Telegoons, seen on television in 1963 and 1964 (with repeats in 1965), were reworkings of radio scripts, with puppets 'playing' the characters. The scripts were cut down to 15 minutes and the time of transmission, between 5 and 6 pm, was geared to a juvenile audience.
film director. He joined the BBC in 1941 and worked as a features and
drama producer before transferring to Variety in 1951; he is usually
credited with improving the radio technique of the programmes and with
exercising the right amount of control to allow the show to flourish
within professional and artistic standards. John Browell, producer of
the ninth and tenth (also the last) series had worked his way up through
the ranks from studio manager (on the early series of The Goons and other
programmes). He continued the line started by Eton by ensuring that
a dramatic narrative was held no matter how far-fetched the plot.

Con Mahoney, writing as Head of Light Entertainment (BBC Radio) has
commented that

"...the Goons sought to contrive for the special requirements of
radio an approach which has its origins in the richly unconventional
visual teamwork of groups such as the Marx Brothers and our own
Crazy Gang. In style, the writers achieved the most distinctive
form of humour created by BBC radio. Whereas realism was plainly
discernible in the work of Hancock's Half Hour, Take It From Here,
Much Binding and most other brands of thirty-minute comedy shows
the Goon Show alone was pure fantasy" (in Draper 1976:173)

Hancock was, perhaps, the radio example of impure reality, mixing
literary scripts with domestic (but inventive) situations. As with
the Goons, there are a number of published sources dealing with Hancock
Hancock and Nathan (1975)) and no attempt is made here to set down more
than an outline of his career. The history of Hancock is also largely the
history of Galton and Simpson, his writers, and the two cannot but touch
at many points.

Hancock had made several unsuccessful attempts to become a professional
comedy during the early years of the War and, once called up in 1942,
appeared in camp concert parties and Army Gang Shows under the direction
of Ralph Reader. After the War he performed, often as a comic impressionist,
at The Windmill, in pantomime and seaside shows, and with occasional
radio work in shows like Variety Bandbox, Workers' Playtime, and Happy Go
Lucky. He first met Galton and Simpson in October 1951; they had written a sketch for Derek Roy which Hancock liked and he asked them to write something for him to use in Workers' Playtime. They also wrote for Hancock in Forces All Star Bill, produced by Dennis Main Wilson, and the series which followed it as All Star Bill and Star Bill though they were not involved in Hancock's first real success as the tutor in Educating Archie (which was written by Eric Sykes). Galton and Simpson had been writing since 1948 and made the break into radio through Gale Pedrick, then Script Editor at the BBC. He passed their sketch, based loosely on Take It From Here, to Roy Speer who was producing Happy Go Lucky with Derek Roy. When Main Wilson replaced Speer as producer he commissioned three programmes from them which led to their writing for Calling All Forces (the 'original' of Forces All Star Bill and its successors) and an increasing working relationship with Hancock though they did much work for other comedians, notably Frankie Howard and Dick Emery.

The idea for Hancock's Half Hour certainly seems to have come from Galton and Simpson. Their express intention was to break away from the revue with its guest stars and musical interludes for once and for all. They were not the first to see the possibilities of situation comedy (in fact, their influences were such American shows as Am'm A Andy or The Great Gildersleeve according to themselves (1974)) but were, perhaps, the first to fulfil the potential:

"The idea was that we wanted to do a half-hour situation comedy without funny voices and without jokes as such. The humour was to come out of the situation. Tony was in agreement and so was Dennis...The format we were after was a storyline not split up at all by other acts. Just go straight the way through like a half-hour play" (1974:131)

The first edition of Hancock's Half Hour was broadcast in November 1954 and listened to by 12% of the adult population compared to 25% for The Al Read Show which had previously occupied the same slot.
By early 1955 the programme had become established (even after Hancock had temporarily fled to France, and with Secombe stepping in). While the star, writers, and producer were the same as Star Bill, the whole revue pattern had been ditched and the emphasis placed totally on character and plot. The programmes were not whimsical, like Eric Barker's Just Fancy or A Life of Bliss, but followed a tradition of theatrical comedy where the end is predictable though resisted by the character who contributes to his own inevitable downfall. Fisher (1976) has pointed to the cyclical nature of many of the plots—Hancock and Sid James returning by coach to avoid the odious couple they originally met on a train to find the couple have made the same decision, Hancock returning to the lift in which he was imprisoned and once again being trapped—which could deny the supposed necessity of a happy ending.

All might be the same at the end of the programme but Hancock started from a minor disaster and ended the same way. The skill of the writers coupled with Hancock's playing ensured that the audience knew who would eventually be the recipient of Hancock's begrudged blood donation; it is no mere coincidence that Ottoway's article (1966) is entitled 'The Lad Himself—a Master of the Self-Inflicted Wound'. It was written into the character of Hancock to suffer a series of minor failures because of his Bergsonian rigidity and, just as predictably, that the invented coincidences in the plot would work against rather than for him. A typical comedy, if there is such a thing, might start from a desirable situation which is upset before the happy restoration of the status quo; Hancock kept the basic process but went from mishap through 'restoration' to mishap.

Hancock had the opportunity to appear on television before he actually did but refused on the grounds of money (which would have been less),
through a general suspicion of the medium, and worries about how well any transfer would go down with the audience. Hancock, the comedian, first appeared on Independent Television in late 1955 under pressure from the impresario, Jack Hylton; the material was by Galton and Simpson who used false names being already under contract to the BBC. In 1956 suitable rewards were offered by the BBC and the first televised Hancock's Half Hour was broadcast on the 6th of July in that year being transmitted 'live' (both radio and television series had studio audiences but the radio programmes were recorded). The sense of competition which the BBC had felt in relation to commercial radio and the entertainment establishment now had a new and powerful impetus.

**BBC Variety and Light Entertainment: the Start of Independent Television**

It may be useful to briefly set out the relevant organisation and output of the BBC, on both radio and television, on the eve of the start of commercial television. Commercial radio is now of no further concern and radio generally plays an important part in this thesis now that the situation comedy form had been established on television with programmes like Hancock's Half Hour. While radio was

1. Briggs (1979:716) gives Bob Monkhouse's Fast and Loose, shown during 1954, as the earliest example of what one might call a 'real' situation comedy. However, Monkhouse (personal communication), as co-writer with Denis Goodwin and star, suggests that the programme was much closer to the style of variety revue even though it was innovative in many respects:

"I had given some successful solo performances on various shows and Ronnie Waldman invited me to do six 45-minute programmes each Wednesday from 9.30 to 10.15pm live from the BBC TV Theatre ...Denis and I attempted to invent an entirely new kind of structure for the shows, making use of just a little film to link the songs and situation sketches. Each show began with an alarming opening gag (I came down rope ladders, flung through phoney glass windows, riding a camel etc.) and then did an opening monologue and gags which moved logically to the first sketch. The situation aspect lay in the ongoing relationship between myself and Denis who also appeared as an inept but determined character named George Filth...I also portrayed various characters..."

Black (1972:196) may be the source for Briggs' error.
the progenitor of the situation comedy form, the existence of the
television service would need something more than a simple transfer
of staff and ideas. Hoare has a persuasive paragraph on the origins
of television comedy:

"Comforting though it is to lay the blame at someone's door, you
cannot trace the roots of contemporary television comedy to the
Ancient Greeks. Steam radio is the guilty party. Steam radio with
its high-pitched excursions into family life, all puns and pauses,
Dens and Bebes, and dialogue of the 'My wife's Mother...' variety
...for years steam radio flogged the dead horses of bad music hall
whenever it essayed situation comedy. Television does likewise, only
more so" (1961:52)

This does, of course, correspond to the outline suggested here.

In 1955 Ronnie Waldman was BBC Head of Television Light Entertainment,
and had been for five years. He was Oxford educated and had been
prolific as writer, producer and composer of revues until he joined
the BBC in 1938. During the War he worked, through the RAF, on shows
for the Forces until 1946 when he returned to the BBC Variety Department,
becoming senior producer and then Assistant Head before moving to the
television service. Notable successes under his executive direction
included the televised series of Hancock, Dixon of Dock Green, and
What's My Line?. He moved to the post of business manager of BBC TV
Programmes in 1958 and Naschwitz took over as Head of Light Entertainmen.
In 1960, Waldman became General Manager of BBC TV Enterprises.

In radio, Standing as Head of Variety had been replaced by Fat Hillyard
in 1953. Hillyard had served as Assistant Director of Variety during
the War and, from 1947, as Head of Light Entertainment in television.
Both Waldman and Hillyard had enormous experience of executive positions
in the BBC and both had visited the United States with the express
intention of getting new ideas, sifting talent, and making a case
back in London for increasing staff and finance to make entertainment
something more than it was. In terms of entertainment, the BBC would
at least have a head start on Independent Television (hence called ITV).
and had already established, since 1947 for radio, script departments to co-ordinate and evaluate incoming material.

Briggs, understandably, sees the start of ITV as a factor of major importance. He writes authoritatively of the BBC that

"It was only after 1955, with competitive television, that people's right to be entertained came to be treated as seriously as any other right, including the right to be informed" (1979:720)

It is not necessary to give here the background to the start of ITV or the lengthy debate which preceded its introduction. It is, one hopes, enough to say that commercialism was seen by many as a probable danger to the social and cultural life of the nation; the American experience suggested to many that mass tastes would be ITV's target with a consequent pandering to the lowest forms of entertainment to maximise its audience. The appointment of Sir Kenneth Clark as Chairman of the new Independent Television Authority in 1954 went some way towards such fears as his 'qualifications' had included membership of the General Advisory Council of the BBC, Director of the National Gallery, and Chairman of the Arts Council. The first Director-General, Sir Robert Fraser, had, perhaps, a less distinguished career but could be regarded as no less responsible and upright. Some doubts were created by the General Election of 1955 (the Labour Party were unlikely to scrap the current plans but would no doubt have amended them) but the return of the Conservatives with an increased majority ensured that the BBC's monopoly was about to end.

The opening broadcast of ITV, on the 22nd of September 1955, began with a transmission of the ceremony at the London Guildhall and there followed, with commercial breaks, extracts from 'Private Lives', a dramatised Saki story, and a news bulletin (among others). Comparable to the BBC's variety revues were what were called 'gala' programmes with performers like Derek Roy, Secombe, and any number of singing
stars in what had become accepted as an appropriate style. The franchise structure of ITV meant that there was no central department to oversee or co-ordinate entertainment production. Such matters were the responsibility of individual companies and the type of networked output would depend largely on the guiding hands of the company chiefs like Lew Grade (of ATV) and Sidney Bernstein whose Granada was part of a cinema and leisure chain. There was little chance that ITV would face the pressure and animosity from the entertainment establishment that had troubled the BBC.

According to Davis (1976), the imported *I Love Lucy* was broadcast on the opening night of ITV and must therefore be the first situation comedy of the commercial channels. The show had been running on American television since 1951 and the star, Lucille Ball, had come from radio and shows like *My Favorite Husband* (Morella and Epstein 1974). The BBC also realised the ease with which American products could be bought and shown and introduced *I Married Joan* in 1955 along with episodes of *The Jack Benny Show* and, in 1957, *You'll Get Rich* with Phil Silvers in the role of Sergeant Bilko.

That ITV set out to capture large audiences through entertainment seems beyond doubt. The response of the BBC was, according to one commentator, to follow suit:

1. Obviously, not all the ITV chiefs had such strong links with the world of entertainment but the webs of commercial enterprise in that world were, and are, multifaceted (Murdock and Golding 1974).

2. The large amount of entertainment output on ITV has been confirmed by Sir Robert Fraser. Writing of the late 1950's he points out how "...by the end of that period the proportion of programmes in Independent Television that you might label as serious had risen from less than 20% towards 30%" (in Bakevall and Garnham 1970:287). This does not imply a 'lessening' of entertainment nor does Fraser suggest it; rather, he seeks to show that ITV has 'improved' by adding to the entertainment content to make a more comprehensive service. The fact remains that ITV, in the early days '...for most of those working in it or watching it, was an entertainment service' (ibid:238).
"Ever since the arrival of commercial television and the BBC's decision to compete with ITV in showing at peak times amusing and frivolous programmes...the tilt towards a national service primarily dedicated to an entertainment has been dramatic" (Shulman 1973:130)

The strengthening of the relevant BBC department has been indicated by Ross

"In 1950 Light Entertainment scarcely existed on television. There were only four producers and good artists and writers were loth to risk their reputations in a medium where even the producers were feeling their way...By 1958...the number of producers had increased to twenty-one" (1961:210)

The increase was, of course, due to both commercial competition and as a consequence of television becoming a more highly paid medium than radio. While radio situation comedy would decline in terms of staff and resources, a fresh opportunity was given to experiment in an atmosphere largely free from commercial pressure. Mahoney (1976), writing as Head of BBC Radio Light Entertainment, also points out that radio (while only paying about a fifth of what a writer could expect for television work) was able to offer contracts in the early 1960's to people from the Cambridge Footlights and the OUDS. Radio still had plenty of scope for shows such as The Navy Lark which could 'afford' to crash battleships into jetties.

Late 1950's and Early 1960's - The Form Achieved

Among the programmes on television during this period were The Army Game, Hancock, The War Trade, Hugh And I, Drake's Progress, and, from America, Car 54 Where Are You?, My Three Sons, and the inevitable I Love Lucy.

1. Many of the early series had comedians playing 'themselves'. In Hancock Jimmy Edwards as Headmaster was given an RAF background to correspond to his real life; Great Scott - It's Haynaard starred Terry Scott and Bill Haynard; Hugh And I was Hugh Lloyd and Scott; Drake's Progress starred Charlie Drake. Notable exceptions include The Army Game and The War Trade (first shown on EBC in 1960 and later revived for London Weekend Television) which presents, perhaps, a step forward in dramatic terms. The apparent inability of Hancock to fully separate himself from the character has been suggested as a contributory factor to his suicide in 1963 (Hancock and Fathan 1975); Fletcher discusses Hancock in terms of separation - from the audience, from his material, and finally from himself (1974; chapter 8)
Steptoe and Son did not start until 1966 but the writers, Galton and Simpson, were largely responsible for creating the televised version of Hancock's Half Hour which was first broadcast in July 1956. All of these programmes were situation comedies as the term has now come to be used.

The televised Hancock has come, for many, to stand as the epitome of the form; by any measure it was successful, following and reinforcing the radio shows (of which there were 101) with 59 televised episodes. Even after the well-publicised split with Galton and Simpson in 1961, the programmes were fully in the public eye and numerous articles and books have kept them there. Reasons for the success and interest are various.

Certainly, one of the greatest advances was in the matter of technique. Not only was Hancock a perfectionist, he was a powerful one who could demand changes in scripts, arrange for Kenneth Williams, Sid James, and others to be dropped from the series, and threaten to leave the BBC (such threats having greater impact once ITV had started) unless studio techniques were revamped. In this last demand he was fully supported by Duncan Wood, his producer (and later Head of Comedy at Yorkshire Television). To solve the problem of recording in front of a studio audience was paramount to Hancock. Hancock used to be performed live in front of cameras for simultaneous transmission with shots of the school clock covering, for the home audience, the scene and costume changes — such a demanding exercise was too much for Hancock. He resisted the live transmission on artistic grounds (using 'filler' shots — the school clock idea — was not so much cheating but a failure of the medium itself) and because of his nervousness and inability to ad lib to cover mistakes. It would be necessary to split the event into recording and transmission and to further split the recording into several sessions.
It was this last split that was innovative. After every scene the cameras were stopped, moved if necessary, and the break explained to the studio audience in much the same way as a modern warm-up man might operate. The change in technique gave the writers considerably more freedom as they no longer had to pad the script out with dialogue covering a change of scene. The greater range of camera work allowed for close-ups, switching from one talking head to another rather than keeping them both in shot, and making a professional unity out of what had been disjointed. Costs inevitably rose and studio time grew lengthier but the results were impressive with the show eventually attracting figures of 30% of the adult population.

There was, of course, much more than Hancock but the point had been reached in television where a discernible form of programme was popular and acceptable. The form flourished throughout the sixties based on regular characters, a series basis, and a half hour slot (with a few exceptions). The two basic elements of drama and comic intention are capable of any number of interpretations and while many programmes centred round a purely domestic axis the need to offer the public what it seemed to have applauded was matched by some pressure for experiment which brought in diverse situations - the Home Guard in Dad's Army, prison life in Porridge, father and son in Steptoe and Son, and so on - where different aspects of society were the source of the humour.

It would be unbalanced to finish this brief history (at the point where the form had been achieved) without a rapid mention of some developments which may be presumed to have had an influence, often indirect, on the body of situation comedies through the 1960's to the 1970's. For example, the appointment of Hugh Greene as Director-General of the BBC in 1960 is commonly credited with allowing for the explosion
of satire during that decade (Shulman 1973b; Black 1972b; Lewin 1972) following his interpretation of the Pilkington Report as a green light for fresher and more sceptical television. That Was The Week That Was, produced by Ned Sherrin, appeared in November 1962, a month after Beyond The Fringe had opened in New York. The most comprehensive account of 'TW3' from an inside point of view is that of Grace Wyndham Goldie (1977:220–238); that 'TW3' was produced within her department, Talks, and therefore patently not Light Entertainment, reflected the programme's content. The end of 'TW3' has been described by Greene (1969) and its demise blamed variously on political pressure, a loss of control within the BBC of editorial checks over creative freedom, and (by Souphan 1967:75) on the basis that it had become too much like the worst sort of variety.

With leads from Beyond The Fringe (on stage first in 1961) and 'TW3', the later sixties saw television take over 'undergraduate' humour with a vengeance; there is a full account by Wilmot (1980) which details the complexity of personnel changes and links between different shows. How much influence all this humour, or rather style of humour, had on the writers and producers of situation comedies is impossible to judge save to say that a number of the more experimental situation comedies (The Rough With The Smooth, Doctor in the House, Fawlty Towers, The Top Secret Life of Edgar Fringe, and so on) were written or performed by members of that heterogenous group. The impact on television executives and planners was, if anything, to harden the line between light entertainment as something for a mass audience and 'intellectual' humour as something for a minority; the more popular programmes had, obviously, no trouble in crossing this mythical boundary.

Underlying all situation comedy output is a notion of entertainment, sometimes tinged with a writer's personal seal, and the rest of this
chapter will concern itself with working towards a definition of entertainment as articulated by television executives and informed commentators.

**The Concept of Entertainment**

The fact that entertainment defies simple description has been noted by a number of writers (for example, Dyer (1973) and Fischer (1979)) but this need not preclude discussion by reference to those people in television with the power to determine what does, or does not, get shown. They have the authority, whether as Comedy Advisers or Heads of Departments, to encourage or discourage certain types of programmes and it is because of their executive power that how they see the purpose, function, or whatever of entertainment is of some importance.

**Organisation**

The BBC and the commercial companies all have script departments with readers responsible for different types of material. There are no hard and fast figures but unsolicited scripts have very little chance of success; some put the level of rejection at 100% though some will occasionally get through this initial screening. The vast majority are commissioned.

Once an idea has been accepted in principle, or a script agreed, higher executive involvement is necessary for matters of scheduling, networking, budgets, studio allocations and so on. When a producer has been appointed the day-to-day organisation of translating the script into a television half hour is largely out of view of the executives though not out of control. It is simply impossible for a comedy series to be screened without the explicit agreement of a departmental Head (and often that of his superiors).

In terms of published sources, BBC personnel have written somewhat more
than their commercial counterparts; it is hard to say why unless the public status of the former reflects on the imbalance. It may also be worth noting that there is a more structured organisation at the BBC - the overall department is Light Entertainment which is split into Comedy and Variety with their own heads. Variety is concerned with what one might imagine it would be - quizzes, game shows, musical series, star programmes of the Cilla Black or Harry Secombe type.

Situation comedy falls under Comedy and represents the great majority of its output. As Comedy is subject to Light Entertainment, the chain of control must include the Head of the latter; in principle the chain goes through all the steps up to the Board of Governors though in practice only a few programmes - such as 'TW3' and Till Death Us Do Part - reach that far.

Setting the Scene

"Entertainment, in the accepted (but erroneous) sense of the term, may at one time have been considered the sole function of the service. It may still be, in the full sense, the primary function ...to entertain means to occupy agreeably. Would it be urged that this is only to be effected by the broadcasting of jazz bands and popular music, or of sketches by humorists?" (Reith 1924:17-18)

It is clear from this statement that 'entertainment' had unsavoury connotations from the start and this has often led to a defensive tone in public statements. There is a perceived need to justify the output, especially where it appears indefensible on artistic grounds. One of the main lines of defence is also given by Reith:

"It is most important that light and 'entertaining' items be sent out. The broadcaster puts as much energy and care into work of this nature, which shall constitute a pleasing relaxation after a hard day's work, as into items which tend to edification and wider knowledge" (1924:134)

There is a trace of paternalism here. Not only do the tired workers (and no class distinction is intended here) want to be relaxed in the evening, they also somehow deserve it. The duty of the BBC is to make sure they are entertained in a suitable manner and with the correct dosage. No
conspiracy with the social elite need be implied. There is no evidence of boardroom meetings with the avowed intention of ensuring a 'narcotising dysfunction' to keep the powerful in power - but there might be a principle at work whereby non-contentious material comes to the fore and anything that might challenge the existing order is ignored or held back for 'serious' programmes with their framework of supposed balance and evenhandedness. It would be unusual for a media executive to declare this and it has been left to others to make the suggestion, often without recourse to empirical evidence. Thus, Dexter writes

"Partly because people generally treat the mass media as entertainment - and entertainment ceases for most people to be entertaining if it challenges what they already believe - the mass media most of the time reinforce whatever people are already inclined to believe"  
(in Dexter and White 1964:12)

The most visible element of the grey middle ground has been a deliberate policy of not giving offence. As it is in the nature of comedy to deal with sexual relations (both licit and illicit), racial stereotypes, classes, and other areas of controversy, light entertainment (with its early links to the music hall) was seen from the outset as something in need of control. Once again, Reith laid the cornerstone of what would persist and take on the attributes of a firm tradition:

"(Entertainment) must be kept in its place, and the quality of entertainment must be such that no-one can object. We say, for instance, that the alleged humour which depends for its sustenance on drunkenness, mothers-in-law, and so on, can be dispensed with, and other sources tapped"  
(1924:213)

To enforce these strictures, in 1949, the BBC issued the notorious 'Green Book' to variety producers. It was largely written by Michael Standing (as Director of Variety) on the basis of 'when in doubt, take it out' and is fully quoted in Tock (1976:86-91) who notes that the BBC's attitude towards entertainment was (and perhaps is) governed by the fact that broadcasting is a part of the domestic life of the

1. Stereotypes of the pompous bank manager or the ignorant trade unionist have attracted far less attention than racial stereotypes (and this work is no exception); a class division is present in most programmes and deserves attention beyond the scope of this thesis.
nation. Took also remarks that programmes should be free from political bias though one may, of course, understand situation comedies to carry values and be loaded with social significance - the preponderance of middle class suburban settings is in itself indicative of a bias - just like any other programme. However, the 'Green Book' gives an excellent indication of just where the line was once drawn (though not always uncrossed). Examples include an absolute ban on jokes about lavatories, effeminacy in men, suggestive references to honeymoon couples, fig leaves, and so on. While such restrictions are no longer in force it is possible to agree with Jonathan Miller (writing of the Crazy Gang):

"I believe that in fact the sense of release is entirely false (for the audience) and that this performance simply discharges neurotic transformations of much deeper tensions which are themselves studiously left untapped...for when it comes down to it, the items mentioned above - the urinals, the breasts, the brassieres and bed-pots - are no more than the second eleven of sexuality. The first eleven, the central sexual issues, are never allowed to get out to the wicket" (1961:41)

Beyond calling producers 'umpires' or equating the BBC with the MCC his metaphor should not, perhaps, be expanded further but it is at least memorable.

Executives from ITV

Any distinction between BBC personnel and those working for ITV is likely to be artificial not least because there has been a fair amount of transfer of staff. Nevertheless, the ITV system does differ from the BBC in two important aspects - the greater financial pressure for popular success, and the weaker institutional ethos and degree of staff loyalty.

Accounts of rampant commercialism in American television are numerous and some of them vividly illustrate the sort of excess which British television rarely reaches. Miller and Rhodes (1964) have recounted the changes forced upon a drama series by the pressures to give the public

1. Frank Muir has been included here; he had been Assistant Head of Light Entertainment (Comedy) at the BBC but moved to ITV later.
what they are felt to want as measured by large audiences and buoyant advertising revenue; Sopkin, in a largely anecdotal account, suggests that American television is "hamstrung by its own economics (1968:284). Friendly outlines the conflict between serious news presentation and the profit motive almost in terms of Gresham's Law: "...because television can make so much money doing its worst, it often cannot afford to do its best" (1967:xii). Perhaps the fullest account of 'the business behind the box' can be found in Brown (1971) who analyses in detail the operation of the Nielsen rating system which gives the networks the power to charge advertisers more if they achieve high viewing figures; his conclusion is that programmes come into being solely to attract an audience for delivery to the advertisers.

While British television executives certainly recognise the need to attract large audiences (and the successful comedy series is an ideal way) their pronouncements on entertainment tend to lay more stress on their duty to provide viewers with deserved relaxation:

"There is still a shortage of light entertainment programmes of the highest quality. But it would be wrong to exaggerate. Many programmes have given a great deal of pleasure to very many people" (ITV 1970:15)

The idea of pleasure may also be linked to a notion of escapism as an essential part of relaxation. Sir Lew Grade, as Chairman of ATV, has expressed the following opinion

"I think I am the average person in this country. My tastes are the average person's tastes...I don't watch to see an hour documentary every night. I want to see current affairs programmes once or twice a week. And then I want to be entertained by good dramas, by the variety shows, by good escapist adventure series. Because it's all escapism" (in Sakewell and Garnham 1970:276-277)

If the provision of escapist entertainment implies not making people think or worrying them only in terms of excitement at thrilling shows then certain producers (at ATV) would tend to disagree. A number of those interviewed by Murdock and Halloran (1979) often sought to convey serious information within an entertainment format or instil entertaining
aspects into otherwise serious programmes. Joanne Cantor has actually tried to analyse the amount of humour throughout the total output on American television and found, among other things, that over 80% of the sample of 310 programmes contained humour including 70% of news (1976b). Others, notably Elliott (1972) and Tracey (1975), have described the process whereby serious programmes are effectively 'injected' with diverting aspects.

As one would expect, it is relatively rare for executives to speak or write as sociologists. Rather, their level of explanations are usually couched in terms such as the following from Humphrey Barolay, then Head of Comedy at London Weekend Television:

"...there is no substitute for intelligent writing. What I have found gratifying is that having an intelligent script is not beyond the reach of a wide general public; it was very arrogant to think that it might be. When we started No Honestly we had a script that was packed with wit - a commodity that some people are frightened of - and it was enormously rewarding to find that we hadn't got a late night, minority appeal comedy, but a smash hit" (1977)

This ideal - a happy mixture of large audiences with creative satisfaction - is also supplied by Philip Jones, Controller of Entertainment at Thames Television:

"I like to think that the thought of ratings does not stop us doing certain things...they must be done with discretion because...our job in this department is to make programmes that do two things - not necessarily in this order. One is to capture a large audience; the other to make programmes as well of their kind as you can. It's a joint exercise: what will please the public and please light entertainment professionals at the same time" (1977)

And relaxing the audience? Yes, according to Frank Muir:

"Perhaps the importance of comedy these days is simply this: it's a sort of broadcast aspirin tablet; not curing our worries but at least anaesthetising the symptoms for a bliss-like thirty minutes" (1966;10)

Muir's paper also offers a useful distinction between two types of situation comedy (reflecting his links with the BBC) - the 'formula' where the only creative act is getting the original concept and characters right to allow for endless re-writing of the pilot programme.
(as in _The Beverly Hillbillies_), and the 'organic' which needs an original view of life, a specific comic attitude, and owes less to the production line and more to the individual act of creation. However, he recognises that the pressure is bound to be towards the 'formula' from the companies - you do not need good scriptwriters, studio planning is easier without the temperamental performer or writer who fails to work to order, the shows are readily exportable, and can be endlessly reshown as they tend to be devoid of topical dimensions.

**Executives from the BBC**

The structure at the BBC has been briefly noted but to place some of the following material in context it may be helpful to set out a list of people and their offices. Tom Sloan was Head of Light Entertainment throughout most of the 1960's until his death in 1970 with, in that year, Michael Mills as Head of Comedy and Bill Cotton as Head of Variety. Cotton became Head of Light Entertainment in 1970, Mills returned to production work and the post of Head of Comedy was filled by Duncan Wood till 1973, followed by James Gilbert till 1977, and then John Howard Davies. In 1977, Gilbert became Head of Light Entertainment as Bill Cotton moved to Controller of BBC1.

All the above staff had a history of work within the BBC either on the production side, general administration, or both. Cotton's career history is not untypical. An early acquaintance with Variety (his father was the famous bandleader), short spells in the Army and commerce, a partnership in a music publishing business, trainee post in the 1950's with the BBC leading to production (of, for example, _Juke Box Jury_), executive positions in Variety, Assistant Head to Tom Sloan for eight years, and then Head of Light Entertainment. Similarly, Gilbert had been at RADA, wrote and acted on the stage in Glasgow, came to London on a film contract, and joined a producer's course at the BBC. After some
15 years of producing musicals and revues with a gradual switch to comedy, he was offered the post of Head of Comedy on Duncan Wood's move to Yorkshire TV. Wood had produced Hancocok on television and the first Steptoe and Son. Mills produced Wodehouse Playhouse and Some Mothers Do 'ave 'Em (among many others), and Davies is credited with The Good Life, some Steptoe and Son's, All Gas and Gaiters, and the early 'Monty Python's'.

There is a definite tendency for executive posts at the BBC to be filled by those who have spent much of their professional life within the Corporation. Consequently, whatever codes of practice, institutional ethics, departmental policies and so on exist are certainly known to executives and it might be assumed that they have responded to them in securing promotion.

Sloan is forthright about his duty:

"As far as I am concerned, the purpose of television light entertainment is to help people relax, to make them feel that the world is a pleasant place" (1964:22)

or, even more to the point

"...I believe that all television must be entertainment, and although it is reasonable I think that what is known as light entertainment may have a slightly thinner intellectual content than other programmes; I see nothing wrong in this. I am sure the average viewer bought his television set for enjoyment rather than as a means of education or information, and I take the view that if after watching one of my programmes he feels a little more content with his human lot, then I have done my job. Of course, I want to stimulate him and interest him by our work, but if I more often simply relax him I do not consider I have wasted my time" (1965)

He repeats the same themes elsewhere (1970) together with a number of relevant observations. Firstly, light entertainment will tend towards conservatism. As a national network catering for audiences between 10 and 20 million there is no place for experiment. Secondly, output is geared totally to the idea that the majority of the people want television to provide escape and as a public and professional service there is an onus on the department to provide happy relaxation as best as they can. Thirdly, a large part of Sloan's job is to initiate new ideas and find
new talent. As so very much of the unsolicited material is unsuitable, the post requires not only entrepreneurial skills but also powers of motivation and the ability to make fresh contacts. He recounts, for example, his part in the origin of Stenzo and Son. When Hancock tried to find success in film-making, Sloan contacted Galton and Simpson with carte blanche instructions to fill the gap, suggesting Comedy Playhouse as the title for the series. Episode 4 was 'The Offer', about rag-and-bone men, which was thought unrepeatable by the writers. It was not intended by them to be a pilot for a series and was scripted as a self-contained one-off play. Sloan, who obviously had made the initial approach, had the finance and talent to persuade the writers to continue by commissioning a series. Fourthly, on the matter of taste, he clearly indicates that controversial programmes have little chance of being broadcast though those that do, such as Till Death Us Do Part, would only be continued if they maintained the creative spark which got them on the air in the first place — in short, a denial of any political or public pressure to censor or withdraw, such decisions being made on artistic grounds.

A clear statement of this last line can be found in Shulman (1973b) who quotes Sloan on the subject of getting his producers to cut jokes about the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson:

"It was a purely personal decision on my part. There was a rash of jokes about Mr. Wilson, and after sitting through four shows in a row containing them I simply got bored. I told my producers 'Don't do it'. The jokes are frequently repetitious, and they are simply not funny any more" (126)

Whether or not any political pressure was exerted is unknown but it may be worth noting that the BBC's official line (and that of the commercial companies), as voiced by their executives, inevitably links controversy with artistic failure as a reason for caution. Michael Mills echoes Sloan on this point:
"...at one time I thought we'd had enough of Harold Wilson and George Brown jokes — not because anyone said we mustn't do it, but because it was becoming a big fat bore" (in Ferris 1969:36)

There is a high level of consistency in executive views on this topic.

A sort of backlash might also be the result from incautious ventures.

Sloan's disillusionment with Till Death Us Do Part led him to try and rectify what he saw as an imbalance by commissioning Richard Waring to write Marriage Lines and Not in Front of the Children. Both were firmly set in middle class suburbia and were

"...the comedy of reassurance, par excellence. What is so important about Richard Waring's work, as with all great comedy writers, is that his humour involves you. You feel not a bystander but a participant, and this is what makes it work" (Sloan 1970:11)

Comedy as reassurance resurfaces later in this chapter but it is worthwhile noting here that comedy may be emasculated not for any intrinsic reason in the nature of the dramatic form but because the expressed purpose is to amuse, relax, and reassure an audience.

Gilbert, as Head of Comedy, has dealt at some length with the role of organiser and innovator (1976). With the problem of having something

1. Take, for example, the views of Souham (with the BBC from 1946 to 1965):

"The story of the BBC's excursion into...satire is perhaps a cautionary tale. Political satire with a cutting edge calls for a committed political passion...social comment must be urbane and polished to earn the name of satire. Not So Much a Programme... with far too much space to fill the programme had not 'wit enough to keep it sweet'. It was reduced to charades about clergymen, headmasters, and other Aunt Sallys of the Left; to interminable and disorderly conversation pieces; and to increasingly crude attempts to shock the bourgeoisie" (1967:75)

A cynic might be tempted to ask why so many interminable charades, as a number of situation comedies surely are, are continually broadcast. Incidentally, it is perhaps unfair to suggest that light entertainment is conservative on the grounds of its refusal to be involved in satire (as Hood 1976 suggests). Sloan (1970) points out that his department were not given the option at first, tried to get involved later (for example, The Frost Report), and could not very well 'poach' another's success. It is a matter of pure conjecture but if Light Entertainment had been given the brief for 'TF3' one does suspect, though, that the basic conservatism of that department would have led to a drastically different programme.

Of Hood's (1976) sometimes scathing and sometimes justified comments on light entertainment, more in the next section.
like 160 or more slots to fill each year, his job must be to support and encourage writers that he thinks will make the grade; his personal feelings about comedy and entertainment are, presumably, shaped by his period of training, past successes, and present policies. While instantly recognisable stars are an asset, Gilbert places the measure of success or failure largely in the craft of the writer. Sutton, as BBC Head of Drama, has suggested that

"...in Light Entertainment (stars) are the generality – the programmes are constructed around them, and are nothing without them. Marty Feldman, Harry Worth, Wendy Craig, they all have their own personal audiences, they create their own sense of occasion" (1970:9)

but, as Gilbert outlines, the process of bringing a script to broadcast level will depend on availability of actors. Just as new writers are sought to add to the limited pool of established ones, so are new actors given a chance in order to build up an effective repertoxy company. The implication exists that the BBC, as deliberate policy, have tried to move from the star system not because they reject the 'show biz' style of, say, ATV but because there are not enough stars to go round (especially when BBC budgets are limited). They need, perhaps, to create stars rather than buy them.

Curran, as Director-General, has unintentionally indicated how the BBC has to match ITV in playing to large audiences:

"If you look at broadcasting...a great deal of it is bound to be entertaining, whether it is relaxing or the demanding kind. It is that kind of a medium and that is why most people are willing to hand over their money to a public service organisation by way of a licence fee – because they expect to be entertained. So entertainment has to be given in quantity" (in Bakewell and Garnham 1970:22)

What becomes apparent is that entertainment is of crucial importance in the sense that it 'allows' the BBC to do more worthwhile things having satisfied its obligations as a recipient of public money (and these philosophies are expressed at greater length in Curran 1979; chapters 7 and 10).

Alasdair Milne, as Managing Director, has made a similar point to
that of Curran. Commenting on complaints that the BBC had no need to compete since its revenue was guaranteed, he notes

"How long it would be assured if we were broadcasting to virtually nobody, and therefore of no interest to the nation, is hardly worth discussing" (1977:48)

The quote is taken from an argument as to why the BBC must compete and is set within a framework justifying the amount and type of entertainment output. It is essentially an argument of conflicting multiple defences — and the fact that it is phrased as a defence indicates how entertainment is a poor relation to serious output — whereby lower standards may be provided because the audience likes them, we have to provide it because the audience wants it, if we did not provide it then ITV would, and anyway we do it better and our programmes are of a high quality.

Bill Cotton's ideas on entertainment deserve attention because of his career and subsequent level of high authority. Three sources are used here — a long essay (1977) and two interviews appearing in The Radio Times (18/1/75) and The Sunday Times Magazine (26/6/77) which will be identified by publication rather than date. There is also a report in The Stage and Television Today (13/1/77) of a lecture he gave containing his belief that 'any entertainment programme that attracts an audience of around 10 million is more than earning its keep' — a fairly straightforward statement of what it's all about. The sorts of programme that will attract this audience size are

"...good-humoured humour: Dad's Army, Corbett and Barker, Morecambe and Wise. I don't think you can opt out by using comedy to carry a message — particularly if the message is stale. I think comedy has a job now to keep a sense of balance, bringing us back to the fact that life isn't that bad. People aren't awful" (Radio Times)

It must be assumed, then, that the committed writer who wants to choose comedy to make his point has less chance of his work being accepted than the writer who is prepared to re-work the minutiae of domestic life.

Given this, it appears rather odd that the series most held up by the executives themselves as the best examples of the genre are usually
Hancock's Half Hour and Steptoe and Son. Both commented upon an aspect of human relationships in an original way with pathos, understanding, insight and, above all, humour. The happy ending was thrown over and if one had to identify messages (which is bound to sound pompous and pseudish) then themes of alienation, entrapment, loneliness, frailty, and inevitability were all interwoven by a comic thread. The answer seems to lie in the following, taken from an interview personally with a high-ranking executive:

"...if it's beautifully directed, beautifully acted, and beautifully written you'd probably get away with murder. But if you fall down on any one of those three, watch out because you can't defend it. It's only defensible if it is funny and well done and well acted. You can get away with murder if you've got it on those three"

Apart from underlining these bases for withdrawing programmes (artistic failure rather than political pressure (in the widest sense)), this quote may be set within the general comments on entertainment with a particular repercussion - in the relative absence of 'quality' programmes, due in part to the freely acknowledged shortage of top flight writers, the choice between a poor thought-provoking series and a poor trivial one is predetermined in favour of the latter.

Another aspect of conservatism, or at least a leaning to the traditional, is outlined by Cotton:

"Where shows become bland is when you are dealing with people with not enough background, not enough experience, not enough in their Diddy bags to maintain a standard. There is no substitute for experience" (Sunday Times)

Tried and proven performers, particularly in Variety, will not be sacrificed for experiment. This is also apparent in the understandable reluctance to change or drop existing successes:

"The temptations of a hit show are to flog it into the ground... our policy is to try to sustain the series. This entails a form of rationing so that the standards of production can be maintained over as long a period as possible... there is no reason why a series should not last for as long as 10 years if its exposure is handled in the right way. In the past we have been accused of not encouraging enough new talent... I see no reason why the BBC should sack artists just for the sake of change" (1977;11)
There is a slight dig here at ITV - the BBC need not go for all-out immediate success but can take time to build up and spin out the life of a series.

Finally, to end this section, two further quotes from Cotton:

"For me the most attractive part of working in the BBC is the fact that it is dedicated to the proposition that programmes always come first. In terms of light entertainment, although we sell many programmes abroad, our sole obligation is to entertain the British public" (1977:4)

Another dig at the profit-based competition while admitting that the licence-payer is his box-office. And the purpose of all this entertainment?

"...the Oxford Dictionary definition of 'entertain' is a pleasure, a delight, an amusement, and a merrymaking. Nobody could say there is anything wrong in attempting to achieve that" (1977:12)

The Concept of Entertainment - Further Suggestions

Only tentative agreement is given to the following but it does introduce the debate and at least points it in the right direction:

"In the case of broadcasting I would argue that the process of trivialisation, or what we might call the law of 'optimum inoffensiveness', is to a large extent integral to the technical nature of the media and not something that needs to be explained in terms of the wickedness, bad taste, or financial greed of particular men who happen to be in charge of the media" (Abrams 1973:105)

Abrams gives four qualities which radio and television are supposed to possess - they are universal, continuous, domestic, and respectable - though it is preferred here to take another four artificially separated headings and discuss ideology, audience, reassurance, and conservatism.

Ideology

The working practices of television entertainment organisation and production are very easy to imply but exceptionally difficult to pin down. The sort of observational analysis by Elliott (1972) can overcome part of this problem but it must be lengthy enough to trace the major and minor decisions taken while incorporating the ground level into a wider framework. Typical of the alternative approach, expressing common-
sensibly what might be proved empirically, are the comments by Adorno:

"Those who produce the material follow, often grumblingly, innumerable requirements, rules of thumb, set patterns, and mechanisms of controls which by necessity reduce to a minimum the range of any kind of artistic self-expression" (1964:481)

He is writing of American situation comedies and suggests that the stressing of social norms, the presentation of the prevailing ideology, is not a deliberate act in any conspiratorial sense but a necessary consequence of the location of the production within the mass media. When decisions are processed by collective collaboration the weight of expected conformity will bear down on individual decision makers. It is certainly hard to identify specific examples of collaboration (in its invidious sense) and the "balance of power" between writers and producers may be a more fruitful line (and is explored later in this work).

While he is writing specifically of drama production, Murdock's comments are relevant:

"Almost without exception, processual studies concentrate on the decisions involved in making specific programmes or series. As a result they tend to ignore the important decisions taken elsewhere, such as the crucial decisions about budgets, marketing, scheduling, and overall policy which set the parameters for particular productions. An understanding of the dynamics and impact of these prior levels of decision-making is absolutely essential to an adequate account of the forces shaping drama production" (1976:12)

These levels, of course, equally apply to situation comedies. It has already been suggested that the comedies developed through the mixture of two elements - the 'duty' to entertain and a specific history of a formal style - which should be set within an ideological framework.

Dyer (1973) adds a further dimension by suggesting that the distinction between 'art' and 'entertainment' has become the difference between 'edifying, elitist, refined, difficult' and "hedonistic, democratic,

1. The American situation, according to Cantor, sounds worse: "It cannot be emphasised enough that producers operate in a milieu where the final decisions about stories and content are not theirs" (1971:155)
vulgar, easy"(10) and that this division has become established in the
every day thinking of public and programmers alike. In a climate where
there is also a pressure for quantity (the Light Entertainment Depart-
ment at the BBC supply about 500 shows a year (BBC 1977b) to be
delivered promptly in accordance with long-planned schedules there might
well be an understandable tiredness about quality (Brown 1968:617).
One further strand can be noted here; the pervading notion running
through entertainment is that as its intentions are harmless (relaxation,
reassurance and so on ) so must be its effects, 'it's only entertain-
ment after all'. Earlier chapters have examined this type of reasoning
in relation to joking; that the joking style precludes discussion or
reinterpretation is linked to the underlying presumption that as it is
'only in fun' it is not worthy of opposition.Tunstall's remark (1970:27)
about comedy programmes carrying political values (and in whatever
sense he uses 'political', it is used here as widely as possible) has
already been quoted. Hood makes much the same point.¹ Writing from the
experience of holding executive positions for the BBC and ITV (though
not in entertainment) he characterises light entertainment personnel as

"...men who could interpret with the utmost precision the limits of
'taste' and whose guiding principle was (and is) the depoliticisation
of all situations. They are unaware that depoliticising is in
itself a political act and would argue that the goring of working
men and trade unions is permissible and nonpolitical because
their programmes are 'only entertainment'. Yet it is in entertain-
ment programmes and dramatic programmes at the level of straight-
forward narrative - series and serials on radio and television -
that the audience is most frequently and most assiduously invited
to reflect on the nature of society and to approve it. It is here
that the cliches of sexual and familial relationships and of relat-
ingships between communities are reproduced for our approval or
disapproval. It is here that the rewards of our society and the
taboo's it operates are most clearly set out" (1976:207/8)

¹. Hood has also commented on the conservatism of the relevant
departments in television which he suggests stem largely from the
tradition of entertainment in which the novelty came from the new
act or the new comedian rather than the new format or new approach.
(1967:151)
One purpose of entertainment, then, may be to inform the audience about themselves and their society. This is not to suggest that the media professionals are not members of that audience but they do stand in a dominant position, having the power to present images rather than just receive them. That these images are ideological seems beyond dispute, that they are of the prevailing ideology (as Lowenthal (1964) and Miliband (1973) assert) seems likely though difficult to prove. If one tries to work outwards from the script, for example, then the number of personnel, the types of decisions, the strata of referrals and responsibilities, the overall policies, and the wider financial and political contexts all take on a bewildering complexity. There is no simple way of expressing the issue — a comedy script is not like this because of that — but it may suffice to suggest that comedy programmes invite what is hoped to be a majority of the audience to affirm what is felt to be a majority preference.

**Audience**

It is the qualities of a certain 'sameness' about situation comedies coupled with a relative absence of alternative views that allow, one hopes, for enquiry to be centred on the providers and not the recipients (and no analysis of audience reaction is undertaken here). However, some comments are in order on the significance of the programmes for the viewer.

Williams has usefully referred to the television audiences:

"...in our rooms, in the similar rooms of our friends and neighbours, and they too are watching: not only for public events, or for distraction, but from a need for images, for representations, of what living is now like, for this kind of person and that, in this situation and place and that" (1975:19)

What one takes away from a cursory examination of the images presented by situation comedies is that the representations are essentially social rather than individual (with notable exceptions). Basic elements — work,
marriage, status, generations - are all located in society as somehow eternal and irrefutable providing an intrusive backdrop to the efforts of the individual to come to satisfactory terms with them. The minor victories tend to be swamped by the inevitability of stock situations - the visit from the old suitor, the missed appointment, the overheard remark which is misunderstood, the "blind" date - which offer endless reworkings of established themes. If the picture of society is one where trivial rebellions are almost encouraged because of the impossibility of revolution then comedies are likely to be instruments of complacency and passive acceptance for the audience. It is not necessary to go as far as Seldes who argues that

"...comedy is so popular in broadcasting because the sponsors insist on it...and they insist on it not only because comedy attracts audiences, but also because it leaves audiences in a most favourable state for persuasion" (1964:177)

to accept the principle that decisions are taken at every level, from the managerial suites to the studio floor, within a framework that sees entertainment as a mild sedative. The communicator's uncertainty about his audience has previously been outlined (and see McQuail 1969b); the whole process is one where images are sent out with the intention that they are shared and enjoyed by as many people as possible.¹

Reassurance and Conservation

Fairly typical professional opinions can be found to support the assertion that the purpose of entertainment is to reassure:

"...through all successful situation comedy, as it has developed in the BBC, there must run this thread of reality. We must be able to identify ourselves with the characters or the situation...we must be involved in something familiar because it is reassuring and we like to be reassured...in situation comedy, our aim is to involve

¹ Dakewell and Garnham usefully note

"The very existence of such a traditional audience indicates how much light entertainment is still reproducing for viewers the traditional shared entertainments of the music-hall, night club or local rep. Television comedy is still shackled to the idea of people on a platform entertaining people in an auditorium...it is in the nature of comedy and variety to be shared pleasures" (1970:53)
you in something you recognise, for thirty minutes, and make you laugh and feel happy" (Sloan 1970:19,12)

Or the following from Barry Took, comedy consultant to ABC from 1967 to 1968 and thence with the BBC:

"I see (comedy) as the great reassurance. I mean all comedy reassures us. It reassures us of our own survival. The whole point of a joke, the whole point of laughter is that it reminds us that we survive" (in Bakewell and Garmham 1970:62)

From the first quote, all that really needs to be underlined is that the desire to be reassuring will tend towards well-worn subjects rather than those whose effect might lead to dissatisfaction (a sort of 'familiarity breeds content') and these subjects need to be recognisable (the vast majority of comedies being set in modern day Britain).

Goodlad (1969) has thoroughly reviewed the literature relating to a concept of reassurance with regard to the social content of popular drama (over a ten year period). The match between relevant literature and his results taken from an analysis of play themes is good. Briefly, he suggests that drama is associated with ritual in a functional parallel - it will inform members about society, deal with everyday conflicts, and tend to function conservatively as a mode of social control - and that content will stress duty and obligation rather than existential independence. As the tendency of the mass media is to reinforce rather than change opinion then the dramatic output is likelier to magnify this trend as it is itself conservative. Popular drama 'is the drama of reassurance' (Goodlad 1971:177) and deals with those areas of social living in which members of a community find it most difficult to behave correctly (say, a compliance with moral requirements). The 'solutions' offered by popular drama suggest that it has both expressive and instrumental functions; it may act to

"...disseminate and probably determine the moral values upon which prevailing social structure depends. Popular drama, therefore, is likely to function not only as an expressive element of culture (monitoring morality) but as an instrumental aspect of culture (determining the prevailing morality" (1969:248)
A later article (Goodlad 1976) discusses television comedy (and, of course, situation comedies are clear examples of popular drama) and usefully points out the difficulties of content analysis. Little is said of reassurance but the comments on ideology may link this section with the previous:

"As expressive culture', television comedy may reveal only the popularity of norms and values which survive the policies of supervisors and controllers, and the obsessions and idiosyncrasies of production and performance personnel" (236)

That comedy may tell us little about the prevailing ideology is suggested but if one accepts that it can inform with regard to the prevailing ideology of the media institutions themselves then it is proposed here that a valid link exists. This link is back to society in general on the basis that the media are not detached transmitters but involved and prejudiced (without connotations of purposeful bias) communicators.
CHAPTER SEVEN  
THE PRODUCTION OF SITUATION COMEDIES

"While the interviewer is the expert at asking the questions (presumably) the respondent is the expert on the answers. This creates a very unusual conversational sequence..."  
(Denzin 1970a:187)

The research reported in this chapter (split into two parts) sets out to explore the dynamics of situation comedy production by discussion of the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of a cross-section of those people professionally involved in programme making. The sample is not exhaustive but it does represent over a quarter of the writers and producers involved in that production during a period of approximately 16 months; there is no reason to suppose that the views of the 'silent majority' would be greatly different.

An aide-memoire was drafted (see appendix 2), owing a great deal to both Cantor (1971) and Rosten (1970) for its general format. Specific questions relating to comedy were included and modifications made to allow for its use with scriptwriters and producers. A circular was sent to all those people appearing in the Radio Times and TV Times (Midlands edition) credited with either writing or producing or directing a situation comedy. 74 people were thus contacted (38 working for ITV, 36 for the BBC); those who had worked for both channels during the 16 months were contacted with regard to their most recent programme. In all, 27 replies were received, though one of these stated

"The trouble is, I have a fairly superstitious objection towards submitting (my work) to analysis. I have an instinct which tells me to nurture whatever small fragments of mystery surround the process of writing comedy"

This attitude was noticeable among many of those interviewed—a combination of a mistrust of academic enquiry and a concept of comedy

1. The meaning of 'producer' and 'director' vary a great deal in television and the issue is often confused by the addition of 'executive', 'film', or 'studio'. The terms used here are in accordance with Davies: "Usually the producer is responsible for the overall planning in a broad sense for a series or group of programmes while the director is responsible for the detailed control of one particular programme" (1960:62)
as instinctive and indefinable. It was also found impractical to follow up some of the respondents — interviews were difficult to arrange because of heavy work commitments in television, holiday arrangements, and the fact that some producers had moved on from the company of contact to go freelance.

The breakdown for the remaining 19 people is:

14 Scriptwriters (4 BBC, 10 ITV) 6 Producers (2 BBC, 4 ITV)

The discrepancy is caused by the presence of a writer-producer (who will be quoted as 'writer' or 'producer' according to context). The show in favour of scriptwriters was also present in the original sample of 74 and is a reflection of the nature of employment in television where several writers may work for one programme under one producer. 

_Bless This House_, for example, used 12 writers and one producer during the period.

Where it was thought practical or the respondent expressed a preference the aide-memoire was modified into a written questionnaire and was sent. While this largely ruled out secondary probing and elaboration, it sometimes produced results of greater length and depth than did the interviews (which were recorded with permission and later transcribed). Answers to interviews and questionnaires were substantially similar.

Differences in the attitudes of writers and producers, where they exist, should be seen in the light of the locale of the interview. The majority of writers were interviewed at their homes, usually in a relaxed atmosphere. All the producers were seen at their offices where they may have felt they were answering on behalf of their employers.

The average length of an interview was about 1½ hours though extra material and information was often provided after the recorder had been switched off. Benney and Nighes (1970:194) suggest that information is the more valid the more freely given, while Cameron (1963:21)
notes that the more informal the interview, the more fully material is expressed -- both of these suggestions seem to have been borne out. All the people interviewed were willing subjects and their motivation to respond was high.

As well as recording the interview, supplementary notes were made immediately afterwards to 'capture' those areas discussed (usually involving personalities and contentious areas) after the recorder had been turned off. The usual promises as to confidentiality were made (and have been kept).

The order of questions on both aide-memoire and questionnaire was slightly altered with increasing experience. It was found that alternating straightforward questions with those asking for attitudes and beliefs seemed to be the best though no attention was paid to Denzin's suggestion that questions which gained the interest of the respondent should come first (1970b:124). Much more attention was paid to Becker's suggestion that

"...the interviewer is typically out to get 'the real story' he conceives to be lying beneath the platitudes of any group and is inclined to discount heavily any expressions of the 'official' ideology" (1970:200)

and that a slightly cynical attitude on behalf of the interviewer is usefully provocative (Rose 1945); Becker (1954) proposes a 'semi-cynical' approach. However, in the main, Becker's advice was followed that it may be more useful to

"...start with the hypothesis that people may entertain each attitude (of cynicism or idealism), at one time or another, and let this notion inform a more flexible interviewing style" (1970:203)

It is possible to divide the data obtained by interview and questionnaire into five main areas: social background and life style, occupational

1. Cannell and Kahn (1968) suggest that motivation to respond relates to accuracy of the data -- the more motivated, the more accurate (545).
career, present occupation, professional ideology, and the work and market situation. The first section (A) deals with the first four of these while (B) covers the last; the areas are, though, not discrete and overlapping is inevitable.

Finally, it is possible to incorporate (with care) some of the published material relevant to these sections though when this material is used it will be made clear that the source is not original to this research.

(A) Outline of a Profession

(1) Social Background and Life Style

Residence

The people interviewed had, to some extent, been successful in a highly paid industry and this was reflected in their choice of residence. The NW postal area of London was a common address and outside London those areas favoured were the smart villages and select suburbs of major towns. The traditional, if apocryphal, portrait of the artist as penurious and garret-bound certainly bears no resemblance to the life style of the established writer\(^1\). These writers were much more professional in the sense of doctors and solicitors as were the producers who had a similar choice of property (described but not seen) with areas partly determined by travelling distance to the studios.

Marital Status

All of the respondents were married or divorced, most with a child or children. As the entire sample was male, of which more later, it may be worth briefly considering the occupations, if any, of their wives. These occupations were often supplementary (and in the cases of actresses, 1. Obviously, only established writers were contacted though a continuum from the old hand to the relative newcomer was encountered.
complementary) to that of the husband. Generally speaking, their employment was rarely as career-orientated and part-time work was common (of the dabbling in small businesses kind rather than as a shop assistant); there were a number of 'housewives'.

Many situation comedies concern themselves with the social relationships between the sexes, usually couched within a marital framework, and often with an intergenerational dimension. Obviously, where such relationships have a basis in the writer's own life (and, to a lesser extent, that of the producer) their fictionalisation has a potential for greater depth and vision denied to pure invention. Of course, it would be ridiculous to suggest that the content of most comedies is a direct reflection of the home and social lives of those who write them but this is to miss the point. Exactly how, when, and why potentially comic material is gathered is not important here, but its availability is. Whereas anyone can write 'domestic' comedy, the married writer with children at least has material ready made and to hand. Further, there is a chance that some subtle pressure will be exerted in favour of marriage and family life. This is confirmed by those writers who saw their wives as especially useful as 'sounding-boards' for ideas and sections of scripts.

The only husband and wife writing partnership, Terence Brady and Charlotte Bingham, credited during the period declined to be interviewed; their work includes Yes - Honestly and No - Honestly.

Are

The oldest person was born in 1922, the youngest in 1945. Between those dates there was a slight bias towards the former which put the majority of writers and producers somewhere between their late thirties and their mid-fifties (paralleling the ages given by Cantor
(1971) for the 'hyphenates' in her study.

The crucial distinction to draw, in terms of age, is between those respondents who had an adult awareness of the Second World War and those who did not. Many older writers and producers first gained some sort of entree into their future careers under the auspices of Wartime concert parties, the Services' magazines, and the flourish of demobbed comedians. Two comedy series in particular owe much to the Wartime experiences of one of their writers firstly as a member of the Home Guard (Dad's Army) and later as organiser of and actor in concert parties in India (It Ain't Half Hot Mum). Equally, Speight's autobiography (1973) clearly demonstrates his own experience of post-War East End London as updated and recreated in Till Death Us Do Part.

Further, a glance at situation comedies suggests that the age of the writer tends to parallel the fictional age of the main characters. The distinction between 'old' and 'young' writers, however, is not absolute and certain writers, often acknowledged by their peers in interview as at the 'top' of their profession, transcend such loose boundaries. Clement and La Frenais, for example, have had notable successes with both The Likely Lads and Porridge, covering a wide range of age groups.

Age in relation to the number of years in the profession is discussed in the section on occupational careers.

Education

Levels of formal education varied enormously from the 13 year old school-leaver to university graduates; the younger the respondent, the greater the likelihood of further education was unsurprisingly found. Apart from an English degree, however, there seems little evidence of academic work being a particular help to a career in writing or production.
Education has played a large part in the establishment of one specific comedy genre. Throughout the 1960's and 1970's the influence of Oxbridge graduates was instrumental in the creation of a certain style of programme, normally termed 'satirical' but sometimes being given the dubious distinction of being called 'sany' or 'madcap'. Several people involved with this loosely-defined group have also been involved with more conventional situation comedies: John Cleese as co-writer and performer (Fawlty Towers), Humphrey Barclay as producer (Yes - Honestly, No - Honestly, Doctor on the Go), and Jonathan Lynn as writer and performer (My Brother's Keeper).

While respondents with the least formal education would have had to create their own opportunities or exploit the minimal available openings to get their work noticed, those with a university education had the opportunity of Drama societies and revues (with the public showcase of, for example, the Edinburgh Festival); there is a privileged channel which has been successfully exploited by the television companies.

Media Consumption

Taken as a whole, the respondents' media consumption reflects a professional interest in the world of entertainment and the arts. Selected magazines and publications were read as much for information as for entertainment or relaxation (such as Time Out, The Stage and Television Today, Plays and Players, The Listener, and trade union journals).

A similar split could be discerned with television viewing - watching for pleasure (Match of the Day was particularly well-liked) and viewing with a professional interest. Several respondents stated that they tried to watch at least one episode of any new comedy series.

1. For example, Cleese and Barclay were signed by the BBC as 'writer-producers' having been spotted in the 1963 Footlights Revue; their work in radio prepared the way for television success.
either to keep an eye on the opposition or to see how episodes compared to their own work. The amount of viewing, however, tended to be remarkably low. While the healthy state of the British television industry was often praised, and its output compared favourably with American or European television, there seemed to be a definite reluctance to actually watch it. With only one or two exceptions, respondents positively declared themselves as 'very selective', and television had to compete for their attention with a number of other interests. No definite channel or company preference was apparent though BBC comedy was usually rated above that of ITV.

The potential for critical and perceptive viewing is naturally enhanced and increased by a professional knowledge and, as might be expected, writers were interested particularly in scripts, producers were looking for technique, budget, and camera movement. Both groups were keenly interested in overall appearance and casting; television certainly acted as a marketplace for actors, along with the theatre and film.

All of the London-based respondents were occasional theatre or cinema goers; once again, they watched for enjoyment and professional interest. Knowing performers either personally or by reputation sometimes added an element of preliminary casting. For example, the series On the Buses was largely cast by the writers from an unrelated stage production at the Theatre Royal, Stratford (with the 'star' qualities of Reg Varney being demanded by the television company).

Active participation was recorded for two of the 'provincial' respondents in local theatre (both writing and directing) but the majority saw few links between their work and leisure. The following comment about the frequency of cinema going was fairly typical:

"Less often than I'd like to. Maybe once a month, what you might define as important new films... plus films involving people I know or have worked with. I also try to catch up on the best of the non-commercial cinema at the local Film Theatre but don't do
it very well. Three kids and a mass of social, personal, family involvements don't leave enough time” (Writer)

Among the respondents were a number of people who had written or produced for the stage, and two had written film scripts (completely unrelated to situation comedy). These aspects, together with the experiences of writers who had been involved in transferring their series from television to film, will be discussed later.

Politics

The question about 'father's usual occupation' produced a range of jobs such as railway foreman, factory worker, doctor, restauranteur, brickmaker, and butcher. However, none of the 'famous' sons had fathers linked with the electronic media which is not particularly surprising since their take off to growth only dates back to the 1920's. While paternal and maternal encouragement, help, and advice were often mentioned no evidence was found of following an artistic father in the way that, for example, Kipling did (Kipling 1937). Many respondents mentioned that their fathers had 'worked' their way up - from shop assistant to shop owner for example - and while class does not necessarily correlate with politics, none of the respondents actually called themselves working class though there were Labour voters among them. Apart from a socialist (and an active trade unionist) and an extreme right-winger the others all described their politics in terms of left or right of centre by only a few degrees. Had it been formed at the time the study was done, one may assume that most of them would have been sympathetic to the Social Democratic Party.

It was stressed time and time again that their personal political outlook did not inform their writing or production. No-one saw themselves as carrying a particular banner or advocating a specific political line. Rather, their job was to write and produce comedy
which was entertaining rather than polemical. However, it seems justified to see an indirect link between their political persuasion and a general view of life which supports the status quo. Given the preponderance of middle-class, middle-of-the-road voters within the profession, one would expect that not only would controversial subjects not figure frequently in scripts but that those that do would be handled within liberal and democratic guidelines. Where there is a treatment of race relations, for example, it is likely to reflect a well-intentioned liberalism. The views of the common man, the reasonable Clapham (or, perhaps, Hampstead) omnibus passenger, will come to the fore. The more complicated question is how this tendency may be fruitfully linked to the structure of the media institutions which, as has been suggested, are part of and reflect the prevailing ideology. The simplest level of explanation is that writers and producers who are centrist in their attitudes create material which is accepted and controlled by conservative organisations.

On the next level, it may be noted that all respondents had a very clear idea of what was expected from them (and this certain included the producers who were often in a position to dictate matters of content as representatives of their employers). The script that was felt not to stand a chance of being accepted was either not written or never submitted. A third level may also be identified - though it coincides with an area where supposition is easy but facts are thin on the ground - the various decision-making stages, rules of thumb, chains of command, institutional ethics rarely exist as sociological facts. All that can be suggested, at this stage, is that non-controversial programmes stand a greater chance of success than controversial ones, partly as a result of the writer's political outlook but largely because they are preferred by the executives as they fit with their concepts of entertainment and the felt need to attract large audiences.
The balance of power between the writer and the organization is not an equal one. With constant awareness and, in the great majority of cases, acceptance of entertainment policies the writer is likely to be a willing recipient of prevailing values rather than an instigator of new ones.

This chapter is now trying to move into more complicated territory but is doing so in a fairly impressionistic exercise. More of what the respondents actually said will be used as the arguments develop but conclusions must still remain at the level of impression rather than of hard and fast facts.

(2) Occupational Career

Producers

Breed (1955) has outlined the process through which a young journalist in America is socialised into esteeming his superiors and respecting organisational policies; it is likely that a similar process is at work in the writing and production of television entertainment programmes. The obvious exceptions are the 'late-starters' or those, for example, who are playwrights first and situation comedy writers second. While

1. Tracey has a timely word of warning on taking professional opinions at face value:

"...the precise interpretation and meaning of the professional codes of practice are actually defined by institutional criteria and that in effect individuality and creativity count for little unless they function in accord with the concerns and ideas of senior personnel. In short, professional descriptions of what they do, how they do it and why, are little more than operational fiction" (1976:9)

This may only be partly agreed. Interviews afford a point of entry into the system with great potential if they are critically understood; further, Tracey is writing with reference to newsmen. Writers' views, especially of those who have worked in other media, cannot be summarily dismissed; producers are usually 'senior personnel'. Both sets of views are useful in explaining elements of situation comedies (especially in the absence of other sources).
there are fairly rigidly defined points of entry for production staff, the writer may break into television in a number of ways.

The background of one commercial producer may be instructive. From an early interest in things technical, he joined the BBC as an engineer in radio, moved to BBC television as a cameraman, achieved promotion to senior cameraman, and later transferred to a commercial company in the same position. The subsequent change from cameraman to director was a 'lucky break' after 10 years with that company; the change to producer involved a move to another company. Hence, the great proportion of his 20 plus years working for the media was on the technical side with well-regulated steps of promotion, salary increases, and added responsibilities. Until he had served as a director and gained programme credits reflecting his technical and creative contribution, the move to producer was unlikely if not impossible.

Another ITV producer had an almost identical career history. He joined the BBC in the mid 1950's as a trainee cameraman, switched to ITV for more money and better prospects, and made the move to director (via senior cameraman) by applying for any vacancy in any department until he was accepted. Again, the move from director to producer came after a period of 'proving' he was able to organise and co-ordinate the numerous elements of production while adding his creative interpretation to the technical perspective.

Only one substantially different method of entry was noted. This involved a history of acting and writing (which started during the War), editing a small magazine, and writing plays for both the BBC and ITV while trying to get a place on a production training course. From his contacts with one of the commercial companies he was invited to direct, under supervision, an advertising magazine programme series. The success of this series gave him enough of a reputation to move to
light entertainment. While the interview sample is relatively small, this producer's own comments certainly suggested that coming from a creative background instead of a technical one was the exception rather than the rule.

More typical was the career of a BBC producer who worked in radio sound effects for 20 years, transferred to television as a floor manager in Variety, and was unexpectedly called for as a stand-in producer halfway through a series due to unforeseen circumstances. The opportunity was fortuitous and the chance to prove himself taken up in an apparent spirit of determination to capitalise. He demonstrated that he could make the transition from the purely technical to the more creative and was given further work in the capacity of a producer.

From respondents' accounts it was clear that the position of producer is not easily come by and required a lengthy career in the media to gain the necessary experience, and this may well have acted as an efficient form of socialisation, even down to the level of 'if you don't succeed on the organisation's terms, then you don't succeed'. However, a further point should be made which has particular relevance to situation comedies. Given that the form did not really appear on television until the mid to late 1950's, and even then often with songs, dances, and sketches continuing to add a touch of Variety, it is hardly surprising that all the situation comedy producers had for some time worked previously in light entertainment. Their expertise centres around the ability to get a programme on the air in a form acceptable to the television companies and their talent is such that they can do this as easily with a series of spectacular song and dance shows as with a situation comedy. Further, two of the producers also had extensive experience beyond light entertainment - in soap operas and in documentaries - which tends to suggest that the job is one of organising a television product first, with concern for the
actual programme content coming second. Just as a solicitor may
deal with probate, conveyancing, and litigation, all within the
framework of the legal system so a producer may organise variety,
situation comedy, and quizzes within the context of television.
The analogy, if it may be stretched, also suggests that while speci-
isation does occur (one may speak of a conveyancing solicitor
whose knowledge of litigation is minimal) it is the ability to work
within and interpret the overall framework that gives many professions
(including that of television producer) their status.

While no evidence was gathered from the interviews it seems likely
that Cantor's (1971) distinction between the old-line producer and
the hyphenates or film-makers is valid for British television. The
younger producers are less likely to have had experience of Variety
and may well have entered the profession through training courses
straight from university. Whether or not it is then possible to talk
in terms of them having undergone less socialisation is a complicated
question as is how much they may represent a new wave reflecting
undergraduate sensibilities; the views of the lone hyphenate among
those interviewed is suggestive. This man, born just before the end
of the last War, was an Oxford graduate with stage experience who
continued acting. When not acting he wrote and directed mainly for
the stage, and made a number of unsuccessful attempts to get television
scripts accepted with, finally, a notable breakthrough. Increased
contact with television executives and personnel coupled with his
experience of stage direction afforded the necessary basis for a
move to production, though he still sees himself much more as a
writer, with his work as a freelance producer adding a useful sub-
siduary occupation.
The most common background for the interviewed writers was that of an unsatisfied employee using as much free time as possible writing scripts, short stories, jokes, novels, sketches, and so on. After National Service, for example, one writer worked as a foundry office manager devoting his weekends and evenings to radio sketches. There came a point when enough were being accepted for him to take the plunge and concentrate on writing full-time with a later switch to television sketches and, ultimately, comedy series (with corresponding increases in salary, status, and satisfaction). Previous occupations for other writers included working for an electricity board, the Civil Service ('so that I could have time for writing'), advertising executive, and tailor. All those interviewed had given up such occupations and were now full-time writers (though scripting situation comedies was not necessarily a sole occupation).

There were alternative methods of entry into writing. Allen (1972) briefly notes the situation 50 years ago when comedians wrote or stole their material; the big change came with radio which created a need for scripted material which could be subject to prior approval. The power of radio to use up sketches and routines opened up opportunities for scriptwriters which had never really previously existed. However, three of the writers in this study came to television, through radio, as comedians who wrote their own lines. One of them had worked in the

1. Fry and Allen (1975) interviewed 7 comedy writers, including Lear of All in the Family and Ruth Flippen of Sexwitched. For those who are susceptible to Californian psychology, the following (about Lear) may well be true:

"In his initial stage...he has clearly described the tension, even forcing it to increase, lest he spends the energy in other ways. The second stage, which he calls 'shit in the head', wherein he is often isolated, confused, and feeling 'mentally and physically terrible' clearly parallels the incubation period described by some of the theorists we have mentioned" (39) This sort of plumbing of the shallows continues for some 200 pages and no review of its findings will be made here.
Northern Clubs, appeared on television in the 1950's, sold some of his jokes, and widened his contacts to include a producer who advised him to try writing comedy scripts. Another had started on the stage as a musician, played on radio in variety shows, and started to write comic lyrics for the radio series. He then participated in the actual script of the show and ended up, with a partner, being fully responsible for all the material. Success in radio gave the partnership an entry to television.

One more example should suffice here. This writer had been a drama student at a redbrick university, 'knocked round Spain for a bit', and worked in England as a nightwatchman which gave him the time to jot down ideas. A film script resulted which was touted around though never taken up. Someone who read the script thought it showed a flair for comedy and the writer got a one-off job rewriting part of another film. The person who got him the job later became involved with a script department at one of the commercial companies during the time when the search was on for literate scripts; the name was remembered and he joined the company as a script associate, contributing to a pool of ideas. Eventually, he was given a brief for his 'own' series (a loose adaptation of comic novels).

The almost total reliance on experience and experiment as opposed to formal training need have no special significance especially if one reads the number of 'primers' put out to tell people how to write.¹

¹ For example, Bulke (undated), the Writers' and Artists' Year Book (1976), and Dumbar (1965) who notes that situation comedies are usually built around stars. The most useful guides are those issued by the EBC (‘EBC Television Script Requirements’ and ‘Guide to Writing for EBC TV Light Entertainment’). Among the remarks on situation comedies are 'the laughs...should arise naturally from the characters and situations. The laughs should not be a deliberate string of gags', 'scripts should have series potential and use the same characters and situations', 'apart from entertaining a nationwide audience at a peak period, these (comedies) must raise laughter from a studio audience'. As the guides come from the relevant department, they must be considered authoritative. This pre-definition of the form - in terms of laughter and entertainment - is designed to attract new ideas for old formats.
However, television writers do seem to be made rather born. No evidence was found of a creative urge or a 'daemon' urgently demanding that the writer express himself. This is not to suggest that the writers are not using a talent but rather to indicate that the ways into the profession favour those men who, by experience, write what is likeliest to be accepted.

Two points arise from this. Firstly, there is a limitation in the research methodology employed which means that unsuccessful writers were not contacted. A small one-off advertisement in a quality paper produced no replies other than a brochure from a writing school. It is hoped that this failing is minor rather than crucial. Secondly, many of the writers expressed a wish to write something less ephemeral (though a number saw some importance in their work for situation comedy) and some had done so in the form of plays, novels, and film scripts (but, apparently, without the pressure of a 'daemon').

There are further areas which should be noted here - previous occupations as a source of material and the respondents age in relation to their time in the profession. The first is not a particularly fruitful field of enquiry though there were some specific matches such as an office-based comedy deriving from the writer's own experience of 20 years work in a similar organisation. Some writers also mentioned that they had undertaken research on a superficial level when dealing with a certain occupation or location in order to get the jargon and 'feel' right. It may be better to think in terms of general experience coupled with inventive flair as providing either the flesh on the bare bones of a known formula or a new twist to a stock situation. Occasionally,

1. The first approach (and certainly the second) has been satirised by Alan Coren in The Listener (19/12/74): 'Wonderful new situation comedy series opens on BBC1, 'That's My First Husband's Mother Upstairs' in which three ex-wives find themselves sharing a flat only to discover that the fourth signatory to the lease is one of their husbands. The other two husbands turn out to live in the flat upstairs with the mothers of two of the wives...'.

of course, new ideas create new situations rather than refurbishing old ones. Such may be the case when Speight called on his background for _Till Death Us Do Part_ or Perry his for _Dad's Army_ and _It Ain't Half Hot, Mum_ (though both explored the line 'wouldn't it be funny if...' and not necessarily 'wasn't it funny when...').

The findings for age in relation to years in the profession yield no recognisable pattern. Among the respondents were 'young' writers under, say, 35 years, who had been writing for up to 10 years but only lately been making a good living. At the other end of the scale the oldest two, in their late fifties, had been working for over 20 years since selling jokes to radio. Most respondents had written from an early age but establishing themselves had usually taken years of building a reputation or, occasionally, striking lucky with a first-time winner.

(3) Present Occupation

Job Description

Davis (1960) and Thomas (1962;100) provide definitions of the jobs of producer, director, and so on which closely respond to the self-definitions given by those interviewed; much elaboration, though, is needed.

What is immediately apparent is that producers are usually appointed

1. The situation is more clear-cut with producers. Four of them started their careers in their early twenties (and thus had between 20 and 30 years experience each): one came to production in his thirties (and was then in the theatre) and has since worked for about 25 years; the remaining one, a graduate, took a training short-cut and became a producer in his late twenties. However, all the producers had continuous experience within organisations built on a pyramid structure of increasing authority and responsibility. Their careers are well mapped out within a rigid framework where routine plays a part as well as regulated leaps forward through ability or coincidence. Writers, on the other hand, tend to be in as much demand as the success of their last series warrants. This is one way that the power relationship between producers and writers is affected.
though there are rare exceptions. The origins of Dad’s Army, for example, have been sketched by the writer, Perry, indicating that the producer (and co-writer) was not so much appointed as instructed to carry on:

"...it suddenly hit me! The Home Guard — what an idea for a television comedy series. I quickly made a few notes, and the next morning started on the first script...I needed someone to work with, but who? A few weeks later fate intervened in the person of David Croft. I was playing a part in a comedy series he was producing at the BBC, and I gave the script to him to read. His reaction was instantaneous. 'What a terrific idea!' said David. 'Then what about writing it with me?,' said I...the rest is history. Within two weeks the BBC had commissioned the show" (Perry and Croft 1975:8)

Normally, however, a producer is effectively selected from those available:

"You are appointed to a specific programme and for that you have to look after, as a producer, the financial and general structure of the programme. Basically, you are usually, but not always, handed a star and a subject" (Producer)

"Once it is decided to do a programme then you are responsible for getting that programme on the air" (Producer)

The word 'responsible' has commonly come to mean 'being in charge' but also carries the notions of accountability and trustworthiness. All of these strands are evident in the way producers explain their job:

"If one is made a producer one of the reasons is that he is held in esteem as a responsible person — and you wouldn’t employ irresponsible people to be producers because it's a very powerful position really" (Producer)

"The way it works (at the BBC) is that Jimmy Gilbert reads all the scripts when they come in and passes comments and hands them over to me. He then sees the show before it goes on the air, usually. He’s never done so, but he might — obviously he’s in a position to do so — say ‘I think that’s awful, take it out’. Therefore, you can say that you are not finally responsible — on the other hand, there’s no guarantee he’s going to see it. The interesting thing is not so much with this series but with ' ' for example. These were fairly potentially troublesome and controversial. Many, many of those shows have gone on the air and nobody has seen them until they’ve gone on the air — so I am responsible for them. I can always go to the bosses and say 'What do you think of this?' but I always think that it’s not really doing my job. I would rather not; I would rather be left on my own. In this department we are given a great deal of freedom — which means responsibility" (Producer)

There are two points arising from this last quote. Firstly, the fact that the organization exists for scripts to be seen at high executive
level before being passed down may obviate the need for subsequent referral back upwards. Scripts which have passed this level may, of course, change or take on innuendos that may not have been apparent at a first reading; here the producer must decide. Secondly, while no one may see the programme until it is transmitted it is certain that someone will at that time—controversial matters smuggled through with the connivance of the producer (or through his irresponsibility allowed to pass) will be noticed and any comeback will fall on the producer’s shoulders.

As a result, producers are unlikely to willingly threaten their reputation for responsibility and may, then, be inclined to err on the side of caution:

"It’s by and large left to my commonsense, and to the writers. If you were doing ‘Till Death’ it goes slightly higher to be decided. We have, in the BBC, this thing ‘If in doubt, refer up’—in practice, of course, there are several snags to that. You begin to lose control, and if there’s any doubt in your mind the tendency is that they will say ‘No!’" (Producer)

The threat of ‘referral’ was mentioned by a number of producers as a means of getting their own way. If a writer argued for inclusion of contentious material there was usually no need for a producer to take the matter up to a higher level. He simply had to say that since there was no chance of a Departmental Head overruling his producer, the problem may as well be sorted out on the ground. Rare exceptions, such as Till Death We Do Part and Curry and Chips, have gone well above the producer’s head and in the former case the producer was as much an antagonist as the writer. These instances are, however, few and far between.

The organisational structure, at least of the BBC, is such that potential trouble can be identified at an early stage. This, coupled with the prevailing definition of what entertainment should be and what purposes it should serve, means that most of the output tends to
steer towards the middle ground. One further point may be mentioned here which emerged from an interview with a high-ranking BBC executive. He described the Comedy Department as like a 'family' where all the staff knew one another. There were frequent meetings on both official and unofficial bases and it may be suggested here that this relatively intense socialisation would tend towards a common philosophy and approach rather than the reverse.

The ITV producers interviewed echoed much of the above; while job definitions and lines of organisation may be less visible in the commercial sector, they exist none the less. The official chain of command goes through the relevant departmental Head to the programme controller and company chiefs with the IBA as the final backstop. Where time is of the essence, as it surely is in television production, the quick decision on the studio floor is preferable to committee deliberations; a producer may use the threat of referral to ensure that that quick decision is upheld.

The process also has spatial dimensions:

"You don't actually get to meet the people who are genuinely in charge of television...there's a pretty enormous chain of command between the Head of the IBA and the people who actually make the programmes, and even between the Managing Director or Chairman of the television company, in most cases, has little or no contact with the people who make the programmes" (Writer)

One of this writer's shows had opened with a fairly innocuous shot of a stripper (largely clothed); this might have passed unnoticed except for the fact that it was transmitted immediately after a religious programme in the slot at 7.25pm on Sunday. There were enough protests to the switchboard for the IBA to be alerted. The writer heard through the grapevine that they met in full, watched a cassette recording, and decided against further action (though at no stage was the writer aware they were meeting at the time).

On the matter of upwards referral, Duncan Wood, as Head of Comedy
at Yorkshire TV, has written

"I believe responsibility should be total where the producer and
director are concerned and if they produced shows which an authority
came down on, then the producer and director would not be doing
their job. My attitude is that the onus of responsibility is on
the people who make the programmes and that they should make
programmes which would always be acceptable to a watchdog body"
(Wood 1976:16)

The job of the producer, then, is not only to organise the finances,
budgets, sets, costumes, cast and writers but also to ensure that what
is eventually seen is in accord with the well understood but rarely
articulated principles on which the system rests. He may well have
a flair for comedy and be a better producer of such series than, say,
documentaries for any number of reasons. He is, though, first and
foremost a television producer involved with comedy rather than a
comedy producer working in television. He is obliged to entertain
viewers and to attract large audiences with programmes which meet the
requirements of 'good' television in terms of technique and standards
of taste.

How much control the producer actually has, however, will vary with
the terms of his appointment. In the commercial companies it is not
unusual for the show to be largely worked out before he is brought
in to co-ordinate the elements. Indeed, the show may already be in
production:

"I tend to be brought in to make bad shows better. In consequence
I tend to get lumbered with writers or a star in it. Now you can
obviously change the supporting cast, which I frequently do, but
it's really rather difficult to change the writers...at least you
can guide them in the right directions which is what my job is"
(Producer)

This situation was remarked upon by another producer whose strong desire
to get away from situation comedies gave him a prejudiced though no
less valid viewpoint. He too had 'stars' given to him with an automatic
restraint on the creative side of production. The shows had to be done
in the style of the star and compromise replaced control when the star
was of sufficient status to demand, for example, script changes. 

Not surprisingly, this gave him an outlook of barely defiant defeatism. 

He felt that he could never change the system and accordingly never invited or suffered interference from above. He thought the programmes he produced were largely rubbish (partly because of the reliance on the studio audience) but saw no opportunities for improving them. 

His solution was to build up his reputation as a producer of drama but he felt trapped. As a freelance his optimum career was curtailed by the increasing sums of money the company offered him to continue with situation comedies and the fact that he was judged by his peers and executives on the strength of his most visible output - 'meaningless rubbish without anything to say'. 

Before passing onto writers, a few comments should be made about the role of the script editor. Three of the writers interviewed had held this position and one had turned an offer down:

"I would never take one of those jobs. No one comedy writer worth his salt can read another man's work without wanting to change it" (Writer) 

The fullest definition of 'script editor' came from the man with the most experience in this field:

"I'm responsible for collating everything. I'm responsible for the ultimate production of the script. I'm there to make sure it comes in on time, that it contains what we want it to and that any rewrites are done and done within the time required. If the writer isn't getting the scene right then I'll have to rewrite it...in the last series I had to rewrite three episodes completely" (Writer) 

On the most basic level, script editing means 'making sure that the characters remain true', as another writer suggested. However, other levels exist as the following shows. It comes from a writer who had joined a team (all scripting episodes of an existing series) but worked his way up by pushing to get the post of editor because there was

"...much more control over what was going on in the series. I felt the series was on the decline...one of the reasons it was
on the decline was because we often used different teams of writers. Usually, if a comedy series has a script editor on it, it means it's in trouble, that it's using weak writers. Somebody has got to be there to hold it together" (Writer)

The series in question had been produced by the same man throughout its lengthy run. The number of writers used was occasioned by two factors: the better ones left as soon as they had established their own series or found more satisfactory openings, and the pressure from the company to keep the series going meant employing whoever they could whenever they could. To maintain simple continuity, the script editor's role was crucial. As might be expected, the series relied heavily on stock formulae.

Muir (1966:9) suggests that good writers have only between 10 and 20 first class scripts a year in them (and this estimate seems high). One may suggest that the corresponding figure for poor writers is very much lower. Hence, keeping series going in the absence of quality writing can only really be achieved through a script editor

The writers interviewed, for the most part, said that they 'wrote' which is not too helpful here. Two of them worked as 'comedy advisers' which involved an initial screening of unsolicited scripts and encouragement for likely prospects. It is thought more profitable to discuss their writing elsewhere - the headings under 'Major/Sole Occupation' and 'Professional Ideology'

Earnings and Status

All the producers interviewed were reticent about how much they earned as were the majority of the writers, but a figure in excess of £15,000 per annum is likely for the former (though unsubstantiated

1. The number of writers working on one programme can be very great. Love Thy Neighbour, for example, originally written by Vince Powell, had script credits for no less than 12 writers on different episodes over a new series of 13 and a repeated one.
press reports give figures as high as £25,000) with varying amounts for the latter; the figures are for the mid-1970's. The commercial companies tend to pay better but there have been exceptions, Tom Sloan 'keeping' Galton and Simpson at the BBC by offering them what were, at the time, record fees. While it is best to only make a passing comment and not make too much of the issue, there seems to be a general tendency for writers in search of financial reward to gravitate towards the commercial companies, while those writing for 'artistic' reasons move towards the BBC.

There are no standard fees for scriptwriters but the average payment per episode grew from £500 to £1000 in the late 1960's and early 1970's to something like £2000 by the late 1970's, with repeat fees a strong possibility and overseas sales a good bonus where the writer had negotiated favourable terms:

"If you get lucky, repeats and overseas sales can bring you a good deal more than twice your original fee. Commercial enterprises like books and records, even with the parent company creaming off about 25% of the loot, can be very profitable obviously, otherwise there wouldn't be so much of it" (Writer)

"You can obviously take a lower fee if you think this is going to be sold in Canada; if you think this is purely 'local' then you have to ask for a bit more" (Writer)

Repeat fees operate on a diminishing scale from 22½% of the original fee, and the decent earning life of a series is about two years.

After that, the returns get smaller:

"I got a cheque last week for the sale of a series to Hong Kong" (Writer)

"...the whimper of something like £1,30 for a whole series repeated in Pakistan" (Writer)

Producers originally got nothing in the way of repeat fees but negotiations in the late 1970's between union and management forced the issue in their favour. The chance of repeat fees tends to be higher with the BBC as ITV series may suffer only partial networking
because of the competition for slots.

The rewards for comedy writers are better than those for working in straight drama; a comedy writer with more than one series running is assured of a substantial income, especially if they are extended beyond their first stint of, say, 13 episodes. Two of the most popular series, at least in terms of length, were *Love Thy Neighbour* and *Bless This House* which were both written by Vince Powell who holds their copyright (along with, among others, *The Hackers*, *Nearest and Dearest*, and *Never Mind the Quality, Feel the Width*). At this level, yearly income can easily top £30,000 but the number who make it to the top are relatively few:

"There aren't more than 5 or 6 comedy writers that you could call consistently rich. Over the last seven or eight years my gross income has been down to £4,500 and up to £12,000 - and that doesn't mean £1,000 a month. It could all have come in the last six months, leaving one pretty hungry from January to June"  
(Writer)

It is difficult to give an 'average' income either for one writer or for writers as a group. Johnny Speight, for example, was earning about £10,000 per annum in the early 1960's largely for *The Arthur Haynes Show* (Mara 1962) and much more for *Till Death Us Do Part* (Speight 1973) but there had been many lean years.

Most of the writers interviewed had had scripts rejected, certainly in their early days, and a number had failed to get scripts accepted even when they were established. Half-finished projects and part-formulated scenarios were constantly referred to, usually with an optimistic eye on the future:

"The object is to get your own comedy series on the box which is successful but that can take an awful long time to achieve and while you're trying to achieve that then of course you've got to pay the rent in the meantime - (so) you are working on other people's series. The idea is to get your own series to get to the top in this business, it takes five years at least because it's such a longwinded business"  
(Writer)

There is usually a background of 'learning the trade' though the
occasional immediate success was mentioned.

There are effectively three levels of status. At the top are those writers who have had successes (critical or in terms of ratings) and hold the ear of television executives. One writer said he had a standing commission from the BBC to do a series at any time that he wanted to (he was waiting for the right subject), and another phrased it as 'easy communication':

"The situation now is, when you've got a track record you don't really need to wait to be phoned. I mean, you can phone somebody and say 'I've got an idea'. They'll always be interested... it's very easy to go in and talk to whoever's in charge" (Writer)

The next level is where a series has been transmitted that has not quite lived up to expectations. The shows may not have attracted the size of audience desired and any repeats consigned to mid-afternoon slots (this mainly with ITV). At least, though, the writer will have demonstrated that he is able to handle a series. With a better idea, more sympathetic casting, and perhaps a more experienced producer his next attempt might be a winner and the BBC and ITV alike are loth to discourage those whose potential remains untapped. The third level contains the jobbing writers who work on other people's series. Here, as so much of the writing must inevitably be done to a formula, it may be difficult to build up sufficient credits to attract attention or provide a platform from which to sell one's own series. A frequent complaint was that not enough was done to promote new and original series. As one half of a writing partnership put it:

"I wish that television companies would do more to encourage new writers - and encourage them to be original instead of steering them towards the 'formula' writing which is the lowest common denominator, sometimes done quite cynically by those who have 'made it'. We went through the mill to become established - it is the only way and quite right, but seeing a bit of light at the end of the tunnel helps"

The idea of the overnight best seller/success has been hammered out of the public consciousness by the routine statement along the lines
of 'The book was rejected by thirty publishers before...' or 'I worked the Northern club circuit for 20 years until...'. The situation in television scriptwriting is not too dissimilar.

Little has been mentioned of the status of producers. That it is accumulated over a lengthy period of time seems beyond doubt, and just as a writer needs to learn not only what he can or can not do but what is expected of him so a producer too learns through experience. There are two sides to this learning process - what one might term the practical side of making a television product and the internalisation of codes of practice. Similarly, a writer needs to discover what may appear to be basic facts about writing a television script (not least of which are the length and budgetary limitations) as well as learning how to pitch the script within the companies' ideas of entertainment. An experienced writer clearly expressed this, and indicated, perhaps unwittingly, how the public cries of the companies for original scripts may be drowned out by the self-generating process of formula writing:

"If a lad wants to write television comedy he sits there and watches Bless This House. When we started it was photographed musical sketches. I used to argue in the early days - they used to have 20 dancers on there and bring the cameras right back and say 'We've got 20 dancers, we're paying 20, you may as well see them'. We said no, you've got to bring it in to see people's faces. In the Hancock shows they suddenly discovered what they called the mid-two shot which was two people talking... you didn't have to show the rest of the room. I don't say it's easier (now) for a young writer but at least he knows what he's doing, he knows what he's aiming for, he knows what the end product is." (Writer)

The development of the situation comedy, as outlined earlier, has led to an easily visible form which lends itself to duplication and imitation. Original ideas are always at a premium but the pressure to fill schedules is such that something has to be put on - it would be a very doleful Head of Comedy who had to ask for a cutback in his department's output. A good idea, once transmitted, attracts any number of similar scripts; The Good Life, for example, 'inspired'
tens of scripts on the theme of self-sufficiency. It is interesting to note that the BBC Guides for intending writers specifically preclude scripts about flat-sharing, among other things, presumably on the basis that *The Liver Birds* had said it all. The aspiring writer is in something of a dilemma - without recognisable status he may turn out to a formula what he sees on television only to be rejected as being unoriginal.

Related very much to earnings and status is the matter of whether or not people are employed on a contract or a freelance basis. The BBC producers were staff as were two of the ITV ones; the other two from ITV were officially freelance but retained that status primarily so that they could take on more serious work as and when it was available. All the writers described themselves as freelance or self-employed. The script editors were salaried employees and some held positions as 'comedy advisers' or 'script associates' by contract. Payment for scripts was usually through a writer being contracted to deliver a certain number of scripts within a certain time limit for a specified amount of money - this when he was working on single episodes - or for a script to be commissioned with a series contracted thereafter. The classic picture of the freelance as independent and owing no allegiance to the organisation does not really hold up here. Despite the continual announcements of how few quality writers there are the companies remain in control, absolutely and completely. It may be possible to make out a case that the public presentation of the gifted writer as a rare and valuable commodity is, in part, a defence against the accusation that programmes are of a poor quality - there simply are

1. The BBC producers were permanent staff members though 'short term' contracts do exist in Light Entertainment (see Burns (1977) 276-278 for a general discussion); Michael Mills, for example, turned freelance on short term contracts.

not enough good writers to go round, they only have a few top class scripts in them and so on - but this is not really the point here.

It is not an open market where the writers are a powerful lobby and the companies play an acquiescent role. Competition exists, certainly, and the good writer may bargain under his threat to join the opposition but the system as a whole is closed. If he is to work he must fall in with the requirements laid down by television executives. The picture painted by Bill Cotton in the following quotation may not be wholly accurate:

"Directly a writer or artist has success on television the pressure put upon him from the film industry, the theatre, clubs, recording companies, radio and of course rival television companies, are such that you often find yourself in a queue to obtain his services. There is a popular misconception that people in our jobs pick up the telephone and everyone comes running. Wrong. When success has rung the bell they make the 'phone calls and we do the running" (BBC 1977a:10)

This does not match the comments from the writers interviewed, among whom were some of the most successful in their profession. Success raised the level on which bargaining took place but he that pays the piper still calls the tune:

"If you're terribly important to the company...they may offer you a deal for a year and bung in a little bit of inducement like guaranteed repeats and then you have to weigh up. But very much you're a wheeler-dealer and you can force your money up if you've got a hit and you'd be wise not to if you've got a flop" (Writer)

Status gave power in two ways - better rewards (which are largely financial but might include, say, jobs as comedy advisers) and more control over material. It is argued, however, that any victories obtained are given by the companies rather than taken by the writers. There is no chance of a writer holding anyone to ransom no matter how 'sought after' he may be.

Finally, a few points be made here about satisfaction. All the producers, with one exception, were fairly content with their lot. Complaints tended to be in the nature of gripes but the causes were accepted as
an integral part of the job - pressures of time, temperamental performers, the odd failure in terms of ratings - rather than something that could or should be changed. The fact that everyday brought new problems and the atmosphere of working in a creative medium with talented people were the two major points made in favour of the occupation of producer set within an overall framework of entertainment as a valuable commodity:

"Messages and all that - you're now getting into the satirical side of life. Situation comedies, at the moment, there are very few messages involved. It's making people laugh and enjoy, and entertaining them and amusing them and relaxing them for half an hour. I'm sure that's our main function" (Producer)

Needless to say, it would be highly unlikely for people to describe their work as useless, inconsequential, or insignificant (which is not necessarily to suggest that entertainment is all of these things) but as far as one could tell their's was a genuine belief, though the possibility of rationalisation, in making their job worthwhile, cannot be denied.

Something the contracted producers had little to worry about was financial security. A series which did not come off may mean a black mark but there was time to learn lessons and not make the same mistakes in the future. Though the freelance producers had no fears about continued employment in practice, they were expressed in theory:

"You do get a status build-up but still, nevertheless, you're as good as your last show. I'm having a band show going out that I know is going to be a success so I shall be a blue-eyed a minute but the next thing might not be..." (Producer)

The one producer who was not happy in the job was the one who wished to concentrate on drama but felt pigeon-holed as a comedy producer and kept there by increased rewards. While he valued the job of producer he did not enjoy situation comedy production:

"I am totally dissatisfied. I find that situation comedies don't allow you to satisfy any creative side of you because you've got to compromise in so many directions all the time" (Producer)
Among the directions he mentioned were the limitations on space (for example, only having 3 sets), finance, shortage of location filming, the studio audience, the old-time variety consciousness of the commercial companies with an emphasis on star names and 'top billing' as a public attraction, and the blandness of scripts which gave him no opportunity to inject bite or realism. In contrast, the other producers saw such 'directions' as part and parcel of their chosen profession; they were quite satisfied that the vitality, excitement, responsibility, and the atmosphere took it well beyond the mundane.

Levels of satisfaction among the writers varied enormously and the fit with level of status was not as close as first expected. While the more successful writers had fewer specific complaints, they were also more likely to see themselves as 'artists' rather than simply as entertainers or technicians:

"I’ve got the best job in all the world. It's hard, highly demanding, constantly challenging, and if you use your head about what jobs to accept and what to turn down, you have a fair chance of working with a wide range of highly talented people. In recent years I’ve managed to span everything from dramatisation to documentary to educational programmes to rough comedy - add that to work in radio, theatre, and films and it’s a great life. Tough as hell, but immensely rewarding" (Writer)

"I'm dissatisfied because I think that anybody that creates should never be satisfied with their work" (Writer)

"I am basically totally dissatisfied because I don't only want to be a comedy writer. I don’t think satisfaction is the natural state of a writer" (Writer)

Thoughts of money were an added consideration:

"My main dissatisfaction can be blamed on myself. The rewards offered by television are generally safer, larger, and more immediate than those in other media but they're also ephemeral. I’m well aware that instead of grafting away on series after series for immediate bread, I should be building a repertory of plays, films, songs, and such which would earn me money over the years to come" (Writer)

There is obviously a difference between being a writer and being a writer of situation comedies. Without exception, all the writers were
expressive about the rewards of writing itself as a profession; such things as lack of security, pressure, blank sheets in the typewriter (and blank minds), were all taken as painful pleasures. If being a writer meant one had to suffer to master the craft then all would gladly suffer. Where dissatisfaction was apparent, though, was in being a comedy writer (for some, not all) from one of two stances. Either the desire to write something memorable, to express fundamental truths, to create lasting characters was noted - in short to be a writer first and a comedy writer second (if at all) - or, on a more basic level, they regretted the loss of control over material as a result of writing what they felt the companies wanted and failing to keep one’s script intact from submission to transmission. This last aspect will be discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Union Affiliation

There are two main organising bodies which are relevant here, The Writers’ Guild of Great Britain (the Guild) and the Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians (ACTT). Other unions or professional associations were noted in some cases and these included the Association of Broadcasting and Allied Staff; British Actors’ Equity Association; National Association of Theatrical, Television and Kine Employees; co-ordinating functions were undertaken by the Federation of Broadcasting Unions and the Federation of Film Unions. Both the Guild and the ACTT are affiliated to the Trades Union Congress; both are recognised by the BBC and ITV (though no discussion of overall policy, negotiations, and disagreements will be entered into here).

The Guild’s stated purpose is to protect writers, individually and collectively, in every area of professional activity. The sort of areas covered are the regulation of minimum fees and going-rates,
copyright licences, scales of payment, pension schemes for freelance members, together with negotiations with employers, the TUC, the Government, and other national bodies. Membership (which numbered approximately 1300 in 1977) may be temporary (requiring proof that a person has sold or licensed written work) or full depending on the number of 'points' a writer has to his credit. The scale of points laid down varies from 2 for a script of under 15 minutes or five 'comedy quickies' to 12 for a feature film script, a 50 minute television script (60 minutes in radio), or a book of 40,000 words or more. 12 points are needed to be eligible for full membership.

While it does have a writers' section, the ACTT is more concerned with staff on the technical and editorial sides. It had a membership of about 20,000 in the mid-1970's of which 8,000 were involved in television, the rest being distributed among films, laboratories, and educational technology. The ACTT operates a closed shop and would certainly seem to carry more clout than the Guild in any negotiating sense.

Taking producers first, the sort of comment received was that talent could not be unionised - this from an ACTT member - and that while the unions may help the lower levels of staff, once one had made it to the position of producer then the less negotiating machinery and fewer committees the better. Another producer referred to the ACTT as 'a necessary evil'. He was a totally inactive member and, as a freelance, would have preferred to operate in the sort of market he imagined in the absence of unions - one where the best succeeded purely on talent. Opinions on unions were, however, fairly evenly split. One producer suggested that without the ACTT exploitation would be rife and that rather than the best getting to the top of the pile the way up would be easier only for the compliant company man. Another listed benefits
ranging from better pension rights and mileage allowances to grading reviews and rate for age scales. It certainly appears that the ACTT, at least from their Annual Reports, are concerned more with working conditions in the broadest sense and less in the political ideology of programme content, except where this was highly visible and controversial.

The Guild was never praised by any of the writers though the comment that it may help beginners in the field was often made. Complaints about it came from all shades of political opinion. It was either a toothless body with no negotiating power or it was seen as an attempt to impose a structure on the creative talent of the individual writer which it neither warranted nor needed. Only five of those interviewed were members and none of these were particularly active in its affairs. The overall feeling was that the good writer would succeed with or without Guild assistance and this was particularly noticeable in the area of control over material. The Guild had tried, with little success, to reach an agreement with the BBC and ITV on the principle of consulting writers over changes in scripts. The Guild's suggested Code of Practice calls for, among other things, the right to be present at every major stage of production, prior approval of substantial cuts, consultation on principal casting, and guarantees of meetings with senior staff where no agreement could be reached with producers.

Unfortunately, for the Guild, the power remains firmly with the television organisations. A member of the Guild's Censorship Appeals Committee, in 'Writers News' (September 1976), pointed out that:

"...we don't pretend that protection under our Agreements is all that solid. The wording of the relevant clauses is vague and indefinite. The Independent Companies may make 'such reasonable alterations' as they 'shall consider necessary in the interests of good television production'. The BBC may, after a script has been accepted, make 'minor alterations' (as opposed to 'structural alterations') and, before accepting a script, may require 'certain alterations... to make it acceptable for television use'"
As may be apparent, whatever power for negotiation over material exists, it resides with the individual writer. The Guild can only offer support and suggestions. Since the Guild is operating in an area where it is thought that 'talent cannot be unionised' (and operating without the support of many established writers) its efforts to act as a union in the full sense are bound to meet with only limited success. While the broadcasting organisations may work within the Agreements it is concrete practice that determines exactly where the balance of power lies.

**Major or Sole Occupation**

The purpose of this section is to examine how far the producers and writers of situation comedy were involved in other fields of activity both inside and outside television (the latter including such things as books, films, and stage shows).

Both the BBC producers were involved almost exclusively with situation comedies though one of them was producing a comedian's show (of jokes, sketches, guest singers) which fell under the Variety Department. His recent credits included a number of similar programmes and his future intentions were to maintain this limited diversity (of working solely in Light Entertainment); the other BBC producer worked only in the Comedy Department. The commercial producers, including the hyphenate, had one who could not break out of situation comedy or variety and another whose main job involved a long-running serial with situation comedies as a side-line (although he had six different series to his credit). The hyphenate concentrated, whenever possible, on directing for the stage or writing and acting in television - television production was undertaken when convenient or necessary. The last producer was responsible for many 'spectaculars' and variety shows of the glamour and glitter type, largely within television though with some stage
experience as well, coupled with over a dozen situation comedies.

It may be suggested, then, that production is by and large a full-time occupation with an emphasis on entertainment encompassing situation comedies and variety. None of the producers had any experience in the journalistic side of television or with anything vaguely on the 'serious' side of the medium though one wished to move to drama and another had produced documentaries of a frivolous nature 'a long time ago'. From the interviews it appears that being a successful comedy producer involves not only general organisational skills but also specific talents related to entertainment production values such as the ability to handle 'stars' as well as supporting casts, to interpret scripts and envisage laugh points, and to do all that is necessary to make the programme comic with or without the assistance of the writer.

The roles of script editor and comedy adviser have already been mentioned as a possible adjunct to a writer's occupation. Understandably, one of the other major fields of employment is as a writer but of things other than comedies. Geoffrey Lancashire, for example, wrote the domestic comedy The Cuckoo Waltz (married couple taking in rich and promiscuous friend as lodger) after television credits which included the drama A Family at War and 150 episodes of Coronation Street. Roy Clarke, originator of Last of the Summer Wine and other comedy series, wrote radio plays (notably thrillers) and serials before moving to television with an episode of The Troubleshooters and a subsequent acceptance of comedy scripts. Dick Sharples wrote In Loving Memory, a comedy about accident-prone undertakers, after hundreds of episodes of the medical soap opera General Hospital and contributions to the similar Dr. Finlay's Casebook. Finally, by way of illustrating this point, Kenneth Cope, perhaps best known as an actor, has writing credits including episodes of The Squirrels (comedy set in an office), sketches
for *That Was the Week That Was*, plays, and a series about a boys’ football team (*Striker*).

Out of the 14 writers interviewed, 6 could be said to have comedy scriptwriting as their sole activity, with most of that for situation comedies and the occasional sketches for comedians and variety shows. Of the remaining 8, 2 were better known as writers for comedians and spectaculars - jokes, sketches, comic announcements and so on - and it is no mere coincidence that the series they wrote were built around comedians rather than character actors. A further 3 appeared to split their time evenly between situation comedies and variety work with a stated preference for the former (because of regularity of income and opportunities for writing something more than a string of jokes). The preference for series writing also reflects the higher status, in professional eyes, than a joke-writer - a certain level of talent was seen as necessary to sustain a 13 episode series and this ranked higher as a craft achievement than contributions to variety shows.

The last 3 writers include the hyphenate who produced, directed, acted, and wrote for the stage and television. He had no involvement in variety though had been active in much of the ‘university’ humour of the 1970’s. Situation comedies had been useful to him as an often unemployed actor - at first ‘assignment’ writing for other people’s series and later with series of his own - but he preferred to think of himself as a media all-rounder with situation comedies a small part of his writing output. Finally, the last 2 writers were first and foremost dramatists for both stage and television, and one of these had 3 major film credits (not, it should be added, for adaptations of comedies). Both saw situation comedies as a very minor part of their work and neither felt stretched by the act of writing them even though they approached their subjects with a degree of research and concentration that others might find unusual. Both of them saw a full length play
as a much greater undertaking:

"I can write a half-hour script in a week but this follows weeks of brooding. I'm writing the current series on a ten-day turn round, that is a script every ten days, but prior to starting this schedule I'd been brooding and making notes, talking and looking at the last series et cetera over a period of months. It's a very difficult thing to measure, because a writer is working all the time, anyway. For example, I'm probably writing a stage show next year. I won't put pen to paper until the Spring but I already know the subject, am reading round it, and thinking about it, so in a way I've already started work on it" (Writer)

Taken as a whole, then, the writers tend to have a wider range of activity within their profession than do the producers. However, although there is a falling away at the edges there is still a tendency to concentrate on writing situation comedies. Apart from the two playwrights and the hyphenate, all the writers interviewed demonstrated a high degree of involvement in entertainment as something intrinsically light-hearted, diverting, and essentially frivolous.

It may be noted that all those interviewed were in full-time occupations in the sense that there were no producers who doubled as insurance salesmen or writers who moonlighted as firemen. Extra sources of income were available, though only really for the writers, through such ancillary outlets as paperbacks, script collections, stage versions, radio adaptations, and films. How much extra income depends on a number of factors centering around whether or not the writer can retain copyright of a successful creation and how skilfully it is exploited.

Dad's Army is, perhaps, one of the most enterprising examples with a feature film, a stage show, annuals, a book, a radio series, a board game, and a spin-off pilot in America called The Rear Guard. The amount of extra work to the writers is likely to be small but any percentage of the profits relatively great. On the Buses gave rise to three films, Till Death Us Do Part and Lovo Thy Neighbour were both turned into a

1. There are exceptions, however. For example, Bryan Issard, whose track record in comedies includes On the Buses and Not On Your Nelly, has produced both drama and Aquarius, an arts programme.
stage show and a film. Examples of books (adapted from 'the popular television series') abound and include: Are You Being Served, Porridge, (Another Stretch of Porridge and A Further Stretch of Porridge continuing the series), The Liver Birds, The Rag Trade, Man About the House, George and Mildred, The Good Life, Robin's Nest, and many more. The successful situation comedy can, then, be promoted in other media (as can, of course, other television output) though the relationship may be intertwined as when the success of the television series based on Richard Gordon's 'Doctor' books led to their re-issue with suitable photographs of the television characters on the cover.

(4) Professional Ideology

Television versus The Rest

The great majority of those interviewed had some experience, often in the past, of working in radio, the stage, and films; this provides a point of reference from which to judge the benefits or otherwise of television as a medium for comedy.

Some originally saw the change from radio as a downward step:

"In the early days of television it was a very poor relation to radio. It was only on a few hours a night. All the successful writers were on radio; I only got on television because I couldn't get on radio. The minute I got onto radio, I thought I'd made a

1. These books are not listed as publications in this work. Many are credited to the original scriptwriters, some appear to be ghosted, and others are by an apparently unconnected author. Just as the 'Doctor' books of Richard Gordon were used as a broad base for the television series, but with the added dimension that the original authors turned scriptwriters, may be cited No - Honestly and The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin. The first series was developed by Charlotte Bingham (with her husband, Terence Brady) from the second volume of her autobiography - 'Coronet Among the Grass' - which was republished with the first volume under the title No - Honestly as 'the basis of the...television series'. Naturally enough, the cover was a photograph of the lead actress from the series.
big improvement" (Writer)

As may be imagined, with the growing importance of television, and the better rewards, the trend was soon reversed. Opinions varied, though only slightly, as to the pressure or otherwise of writing for radio:

"The worst sort of comedy I ever wrote was for radio. For radio you have to turn out half an hour a week and generally you're a week behind. And that week you have to write the half-hour. You tend to fall into patterns of comedy, you know what will get a laugh. You know that if it's not an old joke it fits a certain joke pattern and you stick it in because you know you need so many jokes a minute on radio to make it work. On television I try and work differently. I try and think 'has it been done before' or 'is there a new way of doing this'?" (Writer)

"It was a different set-up because there's no rehearsal time hardly required for sound radio. The actors came in on the Sunday morning, see the script, sometimes do it for the first time, rehearse it 2 or 3 times. They don't have to memorise it, obviously. Go and have lunch, come back, run through it again in the afternoon, in the evening they'd do it and that was it. It was a weekly thing. And on Monday morning we'd start writing another episode that had to be handed in by Thursday to be duplicated on Friday. You used to do 26 a year. In TV you have to be 6 weeks ahead at least to get the sets built, for the actors to memorise it. It's a much more demanding thing altogether" (Writer)

Nobody specifically referred to radio as allowing for flights and fancy and appeals to the imagination though references to the greater organisation of television usually carried the implication of a move to a kind of reality in line with the early domestic comedies on radio rather than those of the ITMA type.

Some contrasts with stage and film came out in response to questions about creativity. With regard to working in television

"...there are obviously more restrictions than in today's theatre and cinema. An occasional flurry over crossing the 'bugger barrier', Johnny Speight having a go at God, and so on - but in general I don't mind restrictions - and I worked in the radio days of the notorious little Green Book. This is not from any Puritan conviction but simply because I believe that a permissive theatre leads only to diminishing returns" (Writer)

"It's a good medium to work in. If you work for the BBC they don't give you any artistic interference. If you work in pictures, forget it, you give them the script and some director gets hold of it. I have worked in Hollywood, strangely enough, and the interference there is quite incredible, but you can't blame it, it's
all commercial orientated. The theatre is nothing but trauma and
a load of trouble. But I like working in television, especially
in the BBC, because of the calm atmosphere -- one can work and
create things" (Writer)

As the first quote immediately above suggests, concepts of creativity
may be counterposed with experiences of censorship and restrictions on
content. Similarly:

"I've never felt unduly constrained by television. The only formal
censorship I've ever experienced was in the early days of working
in the theatre when we still had the Lord Chancellor, whose
contributions to the development ranged from the didactic to the
demented. But in any case, my style and content are not especially
contentious...I've never believed you can change the world by
saying 'shit' on television and the sex act is totally ludicrous
to everybody except the participants: it's the before and after
that are interesting dramatically. I don't want to be sunny about
it. There are always negative elements in high places but I
fancy that they're worse in films than anywhere else and tele-
vision is no better and no worse than radio or theatre. My main
conflicts have been political but mostly I've won in the end...
(it's worth bearing in mind that these situations can change
overnight and the biggest threat is middle-of-the-road censorship
operated by programme heads who fancy a quiet life. Television
is best when it's run by fearless men, worst when it's run by
 spineless men. The latter sometimes achieve high administrative
office, unfortunately the enemy is within..." (Writer)

One point made in favour of television was the direct line of commu-
nication experienced by some, though not all, writers. It was
likely that one man could 'yea' or 'nay' an idea which would have
involved decisions from several people for a film. The core reason
may well come down to finance and the size of the undertaking. While
a television series is a major investment, the budget for a film is
likely to involve millions of pounds with a consequent increase in
due care and attention through an extended decision-making process.

Finally, a word or two may be added about the conversion of a book
into a television series. Recent examples include No...Honestly,
The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin, Wodehouse Playhouse, and
I Didn't Know You Cared. This last example stemmed from three novels
about the Brandon family (A Touch of Daniel', 'I Didn't Know You Cared',
'Cept You're a Bird') all written by Peter Tinniswood who also wrote
the scripts for the series. According to the author, transferring to
television was relatively easy as so much of the writing was already in
dialogue form (Radio Times 23/8/73); all that was really required was
a drop in the level of fantasy and finding the right cast. However,
a perceptive article (Hunt 1976) points to substantial differences
between the two forms. The novels have a distinct sense of period,
the very early 1960's, which has been ignored in the series; the
continuous plots of the novels have been truncated to fit television
timing; the elements of death and sex have been watered down in a
major fashion (a character dies in the book but not on the screen, the
hero loses his virginity on a works outing in print but remains intact
on television) and so on. It does not matter whether the writer
suggested the changes or wrote the series with an idea of what was
expected nor whether the BBC, the company in this case, laid down
some sort of guidelines. What is more than apparent is that changes,
willing or not, had to be made; these changes might well be called
constraints on creativity.

Such constraints, though, are more likely to stem from a combination
of three elements - time, cost, and space - as usefully summarised
in the following:

"Television has technical limitations of the fact that you can only
get 4 or 5 sets in the studio and an average of 3 minutes on film.
The budget for situation comedies is always idiotically low when
you consider that they're watched by many more people than plays
but a play budget is always twice, three times, four times, the
amount. I mean, they're on a shoestring, television situation
comedies in this country. There's a lot of technical limitations.
I do feel constrained by 24½ minutes which it has to be" (Producer)

"You go down to the readthrough on maybe Monday or Tuesday morning,
and you sit down - it's the first time you've all read the script,
and they're recording it on the Friday night. You're Tuesday morning, Wednesday morning, Thursday morning, you're in the studio
Friday and recording it. The next day, you're sitting down to
next week's episode and so it goes on in a very rapid way.
Obviously if far more time was given you'd get a much better
product" (Writer)
The television half hour is about 24 and 28 minutes respectively on ITV and the BBC; while this imposes obvious limitations, there are no plans to change, at least according to a Head of Comedy who commented:

"You don't want to go over 30 minutes because it often outstays its welcome. You look at some of the Christmas shows that we do and see whether they are any funnier than the 30 minute ones. Some of them are a lot less funny and would have been funnier if they had been cut. It's the old thing: 'Brevity is the soul of wit'. It seems about the right length."

Or, in a like manner:

"Slots on radio had to be either an hour or half an hour, and half an hour seemed to be about right. They tried it for 45 minutes but half an hour is about the right time."

In the case of the filmed material 'allowable' for any one show, questions of time are also questions of cost. While location segments vary a great deal (one producer gave a figure as low as 30 seconds in one show he remembered), the cost of filming a whole show is likely to be between £60,000 and £100,000 compared to a rough average of £30,000 for programmes with a minimum of filmed sections. As one producer said:

"There are a lot of things to be taken into consideration. We may have what we think is a good subject but there's no spot to put it in. Cost factors - we may find there's a lovely subject on boats, but it would mean filming so much."

A further dimension of cost is that 'stars', who will hopefully

1. Dad's Army cost £9,000 per episode in 1968 which had risen to £18,000 in 1975 (BBC 1976b). The Liver Birds went from £8,000 in 1970 to £26,000 in 1977 (BBC 1977b). Inflation and staff increases are often blamed. On ITV, the cost of On the Buses went from £8,000 to £22,000 in about 6 years (The Stage and Television Today 13/10/77).

Another factor, relating to the amount of location work, should be mentioned here. More experienced producers tend to get longer filmed sections. There are two reasons: their better status means they are trusted and rewarded, and their expertise may mean getting, say, 5 minutes from a day's filming rather than 3 or 4 minutes because they are confident enough to dispense with 'safety shots'."
attract larger audiences are more expensive than less famous actors and actresses. Payments to artists normally account for 25% of total costs at the BBC and slightly more at ITV where some of the companies tend to follow the old variety idea of getting someone to top the bill:

"At ATV they are very star conscious, being an old variety group. Bill Ward was an old variety producer, Francis Essex an old variety producer, Lew Grade an old agent. They tend to still go by the billboard" (Producer)

This may mean that employing a star will lead to cuts elsewhere in the programme budget. Even if this budget is increased, the fact that the artists' bill may be above 50% requires that such things as sets, film work, and overall design may all be trimmed. The complete presentation may suffer where the fees of the leading characters are very high.

Cost, naturally enough, also places a limit on the number of sets (which is further restricted by placing the whole thing in a studio).

One writer commented that the 'ideal' comedy would be one man spending half an hour in a telephone kiosk. Another noted that

...all the work in this area is ultimately conditioned by the finance available. Also, in television, you have the extra element of space. A recorded television show - you can have, say, five sets - two major sets and three small sets, so you have to confine yourself to that" (Writer)

Nobody could pretend that other forms of artistic expression are not limited in some way or another but the peculiar form of situation comedy, located within a studio and performed before an audience to set up a laughter environment, means that only certain types of plot, material, and locations really stand a chance of getting to the broadcasting stage.

Judgement of Success and Failure

Certain sources of judgement on the worth of a programme are taken by the professionals to be unreliable. Critics on the national papers were, by and large, distrusted; feedback from the audience almost
non-existent comments from colleagues sometimes helpful but not always available; audience ratings a rough guide to popularity but not necessarily 'artistic' success; and the reaction of the studio audience highly suspect and distrusted. How, then, was output to be judged?

From the point of view of higher executives, ratings are undoubtedly important in determining whether or not a series will be extended (as opposed to repeated). For the commercial companies particularly, the decision to commission another series very much depends on audience figures (as linked to the fees they charge advertisers for certain spots). An unpopular show in a popular spot simply cannot be allowed to continue for long if revenue is to be maintained or increased. The situation at the BBC is broadly similar but may be more flexible:

"If we love something and the audience hate it we're not likely to ask for a second series but if we have something that we have faith in and, say, 2 or 3 of the episodes worked out of 7..."

(producer)

All of the writers and producers were very much aware that one measure of success was whether or not a series came back for a new run. A series which was not extended need not be a failure - the reasons might be, sometimes justifiably, a change in company policy, unavailability of cast, and so on.

Other comments may throw some light on the general question:

"Ratings are suspect, critics are human, my own judgement prejudiced...colleagues are good and constructive - the ones who, by experience, you know are worth listening to - but there is no scientific way of assessing these things. You just get a whiff of something in the air that says yes-no-maybe. If it's a positive yes or no you're generally in no doubt about it. Mostly and inevitably it's 'maybe' at which point you try to do better. I've watched all the first series of ' ' on cassette, and made notes on what scenes in which episodes worked best - then analysed why - and am building this into the next series"

(writer)

This approach, of consciously reviewing material, seemed rare. Far more common was a reliance on 'gut' reaction. People just somehow 'knew' when things went well (or not):
"You know whether you've got a winner or not, you know if you've got a stunner. You don't need (colleagues) to tell you." Producer

"I think you know yourself, if you're involved in a show, and it goes well and looks good on the screen. I think you know if it's good or not." (Writer)

Exactly how people 'knew' was never made clear (and there is no real reason why it should have been) but one writer was more forthcoming:

"All I know is that the first series of [show] was viewed by enough people to put it in the Top Twenty ratings after the first week and Yorkshire TV were happy enough with the results to pick up their option on my services and commission a further series... Who the people are who watch I don't know, outside of individual friends and acquaintances who say nice things, nasty things or evasive things. Comments of professional colleagues I value enormously. But overall I have no clear idea of the audience - as in all my work, I write the kind of play, series, show that I would like to see and assume that I'm enough like other people that they will share my feelings." (Writer)

In short, what he wrote and liked was a sufficient basis for a value judgement. Similarly, others pointed to the funniness of a show as a standard:

"One's always thinking of the audience. There's one basic thing that you're trying to do in comedy as far as I am concerned and that's to make as many people as possible laugh. It's as broad as that - 'Is that going to make people laugh?'. Artistically speaking, we're just trying to be funny". (Producer)

"If it doesn't come off, I know I'm wrong. I'm not arrogant enough to think they're not laughing, that's their fault. They're not laughing because it's not very funny, it's not very good" (Writer)

All in all, the final judgement of a show must be in terms of the size and disposition of the audience who watches it; they are the measure of success for the television organisations. Other departments may produce programmes with specialist appeal but Light Entertainment must have as its major purpose the amusement of as many people as possible during peak hours. Some of those interviewed mentioned 'good failures' and 'bad successes'; the implication is very clear if one takes the adjectives to be the writers' own judgements and the nouns those of the audience as represented to the companies.
It was felt relevant to the aim of this thesis to discover whether or not any of the respondents had read any works on comedy and laughter. The answers were largely a resounding 'no', though biographies of comedians did figure in the replies:

"...like a lot of pro's I lean towards the practitioners rather than the theorists so my reading tends to be geared that way - books about the business written by pro's - biographies, autobiographies of Keaton, Fields, Chaplin, Formby... Seeing great performers in music hall - Jimmy James, Dave Morris, Norman Evans, Max Wall - I don't want to be too anti-academic but all this beats theory into a cocked hat" (Writer)

The experience of the comedian as joke-teller and sketch actor was seen as relevant by several interviewees and a number mentioned books by Orben (1951) and Kilgarriff (1973) (both of which showing how comic material should be used by comedians). However, almost all subscribed to the notion that theorists are useless; comedy was seen as such an elusive illusive quality that it could defy analysis or be murdered in the attempt.

Some of the writers had read Freud and Bergson (though none of the producers). Both were dismissed as either right but irrelevant or simply wrong. One writer even went as far to imply that thinking about comedy was dangerous and cited Hancock's suicide as an example.

The typical response was that no reading on the subject was of value:

"You mean the Theory of Laughter? Quite a few, I think. Wasn't there one by Bergson, and one by Morris Ernst, and one by Freud as I recall. Happily, I've forgotten anything I read about theories of humour and laughter - except for Robert Benchley's axiom: 'Everything beginning with 'F' is funny'. I think that was just after he read Ernst and it's just about as worth following. As P.G. Wodehouse says, the next time some Professor asks 'Why do we laugh?' somebody else should ask 'Why shouldn't we?'. I've noticed that people who deal in theories of humour are usually rotten writers of it" (Writer)

This sort of approach was so common that, on the assumption that comedy has some function beyond entertainment (whether it be reassurance,
reinforcement, social control or whatever), it is difficult to subscribe
to any conspiratorial theory.

The presence of a butt or victim, however, as demanded by much psycho-
logical and some sociological theory, was largely agreed with reservations:

"I think must is too strong but of course an enormous amount of
comedy is at somebody's discomfort" (Producer)

"Failure is funny, success isn't; that's as close as I can get" (Writer)

"Sometimes, not necessarily though. The Marx Brothers were hardly
victims or butts - I suppose they had victims and butts but it
was the Marx Brothers: you laughed at. Was Fletcher in Porridge
a victim? Or the 'Likely Lads'? Or Alf Garnett?" (Writer)

The answer to, at least, the last question would appear to be 'yes'
but the point is taken. More fruitful is the following:

"I wouldn't like to say categorically but I suspect 'yes' in that
laughter is the other side of pain...sometimes the victim and
persecutor is the same person - he's putting his own frailties
through the mangle - but an awful lot of laughter is laughing
at which, as it happens, doesn't see to me as necessarily a
bad thing. Some of our political leaders would benefit from a
good bout of communal laughter, unmercifully at their expense" (Writer)

Tacit acceptance of a distinction between laughing 'with' and laughing
'at' does, of course, open up one line of enquiry best suited to a
full-scale content analysis - what groups, classes, and organisations
are set up as targets rather than the individual victims who may be
taken to represent them. One would suspect that this could be framed
within a concept of rebellion:revolution with the attack on the
individual coupled with support for the group but enough examples that
this may not be the case spring readily to mind.

Whether or not television comedy should just be entertaining or have
a dimension of holding up anti-social behaviour to ridicule brought
a mixed response. Typical comments in favour of the former were:

"If you take Porridge, for example, the bad guy wins all the
time but it's still a very funny script. One looks at it,
comedy, first and doesn't go into the other aspects of it.
One wants to know 'is it funny?'" (Producer)
"I think it should just be entertaining but it is legitimate at
times to make a comment on something as long as you don't make
it in a cruel way. I certainly don't set out with a message in
mind; I think people should just be able to put their feet up,
turn it on, and be entertained." (Writer)

"I feel that the only responsibility comedy has is to entertain. It
may incorporate satire and social comment but this is
incidental." (Writer)

"Entertaining primarily, even entirely. But if you're working
in an area where social attitudes are important, your views
are bound to come out - or they should - just as long as they
continue to be entertaining" (Writer)

Behind these lines of reasoning lies an understanding as entertainment
as somehow 'harmless', or at least 'ineffectual' - encountered in
Chapter 4 as 'It's only a joke, it's not serious'. Once again, the
apparent inability of some producers and writers to see that purposive
statements are being made about society through the lubricating agency
of comedy suggests the absence of any conspiracy. By deliberately
ignoring 'messages' and not making points, the messages carried and
the points made may well tend to the middle ground and a reflection
of society as basically somehow 'all right'. The conflicts inherent
in society are commented upon by diminishing them to a level where
they are controlled and readily resolved through comedy.

Two writers, however, were quite specific in their intentions. One
maintained that his scripts were meant to take sides and make stands
against what he thought he should. He also thought it was possible
to combat ignorance through his work; the examples he gave was that
not all blacks are 'nig-augs' and that not all wives are good-hearted
and muddle-headed. The other writer was more explicit:

"We pre-assume that any writer of quality will have some sort of
social and moral content in his work, because he or she lives in
the real world and, presumably, reacts and responds to the real
world. If the writer has these attitudes, they'll come through
in the script; not necessarily on the nose, as in Johnny Speight's
'Till Death' but perhaps laterally as in Porridge. I suppose it
is possible to have comedy without any moral springboard like
those interminable series about kookie suburban housewives where
the drama stems from forgetting to buy a cucumber or losing a
As an overall summary, it is reasonable to point to producers and writers as regarding entertainment as the primary function of their work (with rare exceptions). Messages were incidental rather than deliberate — which, of course, cuts both ways — and the main concern was to amuse. As a side issue, no evidence was found to support Tomurn's contention (1977:53-56) that producers of light entertainment used 'groundbait' to attract the viewers on behalf of the advertisers (at ITV), and for more informative programmes (at the BBC). While the advertisers, through audience ratings and viewing figures, could never be far from the minds of executive staff at ITV, there was no hint that the BBC producers saw even part of their role as slipping the viewer the Mickey Finn of situation comedy in order to give them a later dose of culture.

Conventional wisdom demands a sense of humour in those whose business is comedy. Indeed, the common complaint against academic enquiry is that it is dry when dealing with a wet subject. Also, a number of people have pointed to a specifically English sense of humour (for example, Orwell (1941) and Nicolson (1956)) as being somewhat distinctive and unique. Professional opinions were sought on both these matters; some of the responses follow.

"There's no mechanical way to write comedy, there's no format or formula where you can sit there without any sense of humour and put in all the ingredients and get people to laugh at it. You've got to have a well-developed sense of humour which is, I suppose, a sense of proportion" (Writer)

"You write a story. If I was Dennis Potter I'd write it one way, but because I'm a comedy writer and I like making people laugh, and writing gags, I write a story another way... You know that's a funny line, in your mind you can hear your comic saying it and you can hear the audience laughing at it. You need a sense of humour yourself to know what's funny" (Writer)
And an English sense of humour?

"Yes, definitely, which is different from the American sense of humour. I don't think it used to be years ago but I think it's grown apart. I think it's basically to do with the class structure of the two countries as much as anything. I think America is a far more classless or accentless society. You can do a lot of things with the American idiom, with the American way of speech, which you can't do with the English way of speech...

You must always be conscious, when you write any English comedy show, not perhaps so much (over) the last few years, of what class every actor was as soon as he opened his mouth" (Writer)

This writer's point may serve to underline the obvious. There is no need to think of an English sense of humour as a racial characteristic (in the same mode as a stiff upper lip or dispassionated sangfroid) but rather as a reflection of the subject matter. If a situation comedy is about, say, an English middle-class couple living next door to another English middle-class couple then it is hardly surprising that the comedy will have a certain Englishness about it (as well as relating middle-class values, aspirations, fears, or whatever).

Finally, it may be worth noting Escarpit (1969) who has written of the professional humorist

"...whose fundamental trait is precisely his calculated eccentricity, his faculty of seeing things in a different manner than that which the collectivity tries to impose, and of integrating this vision into a rational, but not petrified system of thought. For the humorist must be able to look eccentrically at his very own thoughts, otherwise he himself would become a closed system with no communication is possible" (257)

If this description may be interpreted as a light-hearted outlook on life while keeping a sense of perspective, then it seems about right for only one or two of those interviewed. If it is taken as meaning that in his work the humorist needs a sense of humour and proportion then most of the writers and producers would agree.

Frank Muir's published comments on comedy (1966) were known to a number of the respondents, some of whom knew Muir himself from his days as Assistant Head of Light Entertainment at the BBC and his advisory role for London Weekend Television. To all those interviewed, either as a
refresher or an introduction, it was mentioned that Muir had outlined some 'rules' for the production and writing of comedy, such as a strong story-line, conflict, realism, and so on. Predictably, the mention of the word 'rules' brought out a largely negative response from the writers. If theirs was a creative profession, then 'rules' had too much of the mechanical about it:

"Write for yourself first and hope somebody else likes it. There may be some unwritten rules but any writer worth his salt will ignore them if he wants to; the best comedies have generally come because they're different" (Writer)

"There are no set rules, I don't think there are any mechanicals. I don't think, in any way, that we have got to the stage where the whole thing is pigeonholed" (Producer)

However, some common elements were discovered, even allowing for some pre-suggestion by the mention of 'conflict' and 'realism':

"It depends on the material; there must be conflict, I agree with that. That's one of the things that I have done on the series I've just been doing - introduce conflict. Basically, you go for plots and conflict is one of those things" (Producer)

"If I don't believe in something, I don't find it funny. There is a very curious razor's edge on which comedy writers and comedy actors play and it topples into silliness instead of humour if it's totally unreal. If it's unbelievable it becomes silly and if we find it silly, the viewers will find it silly... The audience has to be comfortable to be able to laugh, they've got to accept that something is believable. It's really believable characters, often in unbelievable situations" (Head of Comedy)

"If you make rules, somebody always comes along and breaks them... In my experience, the one rule that always seems to be true is that you must concentrate on amusing your audience and not yourself. If you find it amusing, all the better, but if the audience don't find it amusing then you've failed" (Writer)

"You cannot dig too deep. The main rules are, are the characters real, can you believe in the characters, can you feel for the characters. And is it sad as well as funny - I'm only interested in failures. I can't write a comedy series about a successful, rich, clever man. I like to write about the little man in the raincoat who can't really quite make it with life" (Writer)

One producer maintained that a 'rule of three' usually guided him: three characters, three incidents, three sub-plots, and so on. Exactly how or why this worked he could not explain though one example he gave clarified the point: where two people had been in front of the cameras
for a long time, it needed a third character to open up reactions, add an extra dimension, and somehow complete the picture.

All in all, though, rules were non-existent or too obvious to be of any worth. Situation comedy is, after all, a dramatic form and as such must contain some conflict; this is likely to be found in a clash between reality and a character displaying a particular humour or predisposition.\textsuperscript{1}

If there is no easy given guide to writing comedy, how then do the writers and producers make something funny? Instinct, gut reaction, natural talent all came up as answers, usually set within an idea of comedy as beyond analysis but intuitive. The happy match between one's own taste and that of the audience was often seen as the key:

"I write what pleases me and I hope it also pleases the audience. I think that if you're in a creative profession you do it to please yourself basically, and if you're talented and creative enough you'll please other people." (Writer)

"I think it impossible to deal with audience 'needs'. Just occasionally, one can sense a mood for a certain style of programme but comedy must be written from one standard - what the writer thinks is funny." (Writer)

"You never think about the home audience, you can't. It's such an amorphous mass of five to ten to twenty million people. You can't say that they're going to like this or they're not going to like that. You have to write what you think is funny and hope that they think it's funny as well." (Writer)

"I do think of the audience but through me. If I write a scene that I find funny I've got to believe that the audience will. In a way, I am the audience and I know if a scene is going to work or not and if it doesn't work for me then it won't work for the audience. You've got to write it for your own satisfaction first and believe that that's right - you'll soon be proved wrong if you are wrong." (Writer)

\textsuperscript{1} Seldes (1950) suggests that a change took place from the radio series ('artificial characters in unbelievable adventures' to those on television where the characters became realistic (188). He was writing of American examples but there does seem to be a British parallel. Certainly, the great majority of current situation comedies take a strand of realism, whether in the characters or the situation, which is then, in most of these shows, intertwined with the extraordinary. One of the producers used the apposite phrase 'heightened reality'.}
All the writers knew, to a certain extent, what was expected of them by the television companies but all were equally sure that they wrote primarily for themselves, with the audience confirming their judgement. Hardly any reference was made to the idea that the medium might intervene between the creator and the crowd. As most, probably all, of the writers had experienced failures in their career (in the sense of not getting their script to production) it can only be assumed that the happy match must include the taste of the television organisations as well. Certainly, in the case of the assignment writers and those brought in to write for a particular star there exists a pre-established pattern of expectations as the following from Woody Allen suggests

"Writing for (stars), you're a paid hack...you go in and ask them 'What do you want?' and then do it. There's nothing to doing that if you can do it. If I was going to write something for Gleason or Carney, it's dictated what is to be done..."  
(quoted in Lex 1975:183)

or, from a writer

"I certainly don't sit down and think, well I'm going to do a situation comedy that will appeal to teenagers; there again, if Thames rang up and asked for a sitcom for children..."

There is, of course, also the matter of earning a living:

"When we were all younger and more enthusiastic we were all going to try and bring a new dimension to television comedy. We were highly sceptical of things like '"', we wouldn't be seen dead near them. As you grow older you see that different people laugh at different things and it's all part of the same trade... In the end, if you're going to earn your living at it as a jobbing writer then you take most jobs that come along"  (Writer)

"I could always get work now assignment writing which is what I did to start with, that is for other people's series, but I don't really want to; that's fine when you're getting into something and you're learning the trade. I learned a lot from writing for series of all sorts of different styles that other people had done. A lot of television comedy, because it's a weekly output, a lot is to do with satisfying expectations...the public knows the characters and what to expect from them. If you come in to write for a series, you have to get inside them"  (Writer)

Two other comments, both from experienced interviewees, may be given here. The first couples learning with instinct in comedy writing:
"After some 40 years in show business I feel that the opinion I heard recently expressed by Neil Simon...is about right - you need a flair for the job and an ability to put it down on paper, not just talk about it. But the thing that is most necessary is experience. Little by little you learn the finer points of your craft and the subtle way in which an audience can be made to laugh" (Writer)

It might be possible to talk of a process of feedback over the years but any such process escapes easy identification. However, the same writer continued:

"It is almost a science and one where, unlike drama, the audience give you an instant show of approval or disapproval, that is, by laughing or not laughing"

Another writer appeared at first to separate comedy from laughter, but only as a matter of degree:

"I'm not obsessed with getting laughs in a show; the main thing with a comedy show is not to make the audience feel 'Oh Christ, it's not very funny'. You've got to make them go along, and they're warm and they chuckle, and they might laugh out loud. The only crime to me is boring an audience. But so many people I work with, so many comics as a matter of fact, are obsessed with getting laughs. A comedy show should get laughs, don't mistake me, but you shouldn't make the audience feel uneasy that they've got to laugh. They should be relaxed" (Writer)

Which still leaves laughter as a sought response but throws very little light on how one writes comedy. This particular writer, for example, just 'knew' how to make a situation come though as his comedy was judged by an audience, this knowledge may be related to the experience of successfully satisfying expectations.

Producers also seemed to rely on a mixture of intuition and experience which involved, for example, getting the most out of a line, supervising camera shots, and firmly suggesting cuts and inserts to engender more comedy. One, though, did not see his job as creating comedy so much as simply organising the available material. He felt 'safe' with the writers he most often worked with and saw no reason to try and change another professional's work. He put his role as 5% production (which he termed 'creative') and 95% direction, of making sure the camera angles were correct,
the sets looking right, and the actors turning up on time. Duncan Vood, producer and Head of Comedy at Yorkshire TV, has usefully commented on how good camerawork can add to a comedy.

"...it's true of situation comedy probably more than in most forms of television that camerawork is the essence. Every close-up you take devalues the currency of the next one, so a delicate balance has to be constantly achieved. In a similar context reaction is just as important as action and so it is useful having a character actor of the ability of, say, Leonard Rosier, who is capable of reacting with precise facial expressions, unless you have a director equally capable of exploiting them. If you reduced the number of camera shots in_Rimmer Down its value as comedy would diminish" (1976:15)

There are, of course, other ways in which a producer can increase a programme's value as comedy, not the least of which is being the knowledgeable final arbiter of the script:

"As far as comedy is concerned I have a good ear for it, a feel for it. There's a right and a wrong way of presenting a script and it's amazing how often people you respect quite often see the wrong way of doing it. Then it's my job to actually put them right. As a producer and director you have the advantage of having studied the script and talked to the writers. When you first get hold of the script, you read it 3 or 4 times probably, and you talk to the writers about it, and if you're directing as well you sort out how you're going to work it. By the time you get to rehearsal you have much more knowledge of the script than the artistes anyway so it's only reasonable you'll see things that they don't" (Producer)

The other producers made such the a point though none were precise and any examples they quoted seemed too specific to have general application. One, however, gave the following useful explanation:

"You get a script in and you read it and you think, basically, not of the jokes but of the plot and the construction of the plot, and where it's weak or where it can be improved, or in some cases you reject it entirely...I suppose you might reject one in thirteen totally. On the other hand, you tend to just make plot changes in those initial moments, perhaps stressing one character - this is before the cast have even seen it - and that will help to strengthen it. I've just been working with (a scriptwriting partnership) who are very good but they're new writers to situation comedy. They're sketch writers, basically, and their plots were poor although their lines were good - once you pointed it out, they saw it and there was no problem" (Producer)

Clearly, there must be an idea of what the final product will look and sound like, a concept of what makes good television comedy.
This may well be explained as a 'feel' for comedy or having a good ear for it but it is equally plausible (and not contradictory) to pitch the level of explanation within television itself rather than the individual and his preferences or tastes. In short, the producer's own ideas (and the writer's, for that matter) may not only reflect a television ideology but ultimately derive from it through the processes of socialisation, experience, perceiving expectations, and accepting as routine the numerous decisions that have to be taken in order to achieve a product which succeeds with both the audience and with the television companies.

Part of a television ideology, certainly noticeable in situation comedies, is that entertainment requires good taste. The chain of thought appears to be circular but runs something like this: large audiences need to be attracted (for advertisers, for public service); entertainment is popular, entertainment is shown during peak hours when most people who watch will be watching (including many children), the responsibility of the providers of entertainment is chiefly to amuse, viewing families should be amiably diverted rather than shocked or offended, the more families shocked the less viewers there are, large audiences need to be attracted. The weak link seems to be the supposed number of people who would be shocked by deviations from good taste (as these may be a vociferous minority rather than a silent majority) but this is a side issue. The central concern, as far as questions of taste go, is that entertainment must have a broad appeal which is taken to be non-contentious and harmless.

There are three interrelated areas where 'taste' may be questionable - sexual innuendo, racial humour, and 'serious' topics - and the guiding line is drawn on offensiveness and not aesthetic standards. Public announcements of why programmes have been withdrawn do, however, tend
to stress the latter factor. Programmes are officially dropped because they do not come up to a standard of good television rather than a level of good taste. The official line can not be given too much credence, especially in view of the arguments that were made public about, for example, *The Wackars, Till Death Us Do Part*, and *Curry and Chips*. Naturally enough, only a small percentage of programmes run into any form of subsequent censorship and it may be more profitable to concentrate on the restraints in operation which prevent the need for ultimate sanctions (while recognising that the threat of top level sanctions is, in itself, one of these restraints) and keep the programmes within certain boundaries.

Sexual references cannot be a part of all except the purest of comedies, and the number of overheard conversations, lip-stick smudged collars, and suspicious husbands bear testimony to marriage as an obvious source of comic material. In situation comedies, though, it is likelier (though not always certain) that the conversation will not only be overheard but also misheard, the lip-stick due to a great aunt's kiss, and any suspicions ill-founded. The sexual references may not even enter Jonathan Miller's second eleven, let alone the first. Once again, those interviewed put forward individual reasons (revolving around writing or producing

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1. The national press carried a number of complaints and rebuttals from writers and executives about interference. See also Speight (1973:237) for another source.

2. Maschwitz, for example, gives: "As Variety Director I had to tackle many problems, including that of censorship. There were no rules or regulations then to tell us what might or might not be permitted in a broadcast programme; we were left to exercise our personal discretion as to whether jokes were too vulgar or topics too controversial. Upon only two occasions in four years can I remember our overstepping the mark – and then the Director-General came down upon us like a ton of the best Scottish bricks!" (1957:79–80)

The Director-General was, of course, Keith. While the remarks refer to Variety, the general principles are easily extended to more modern situation comedies.
to one's own standards) rather than mentioning conformity to perceived requirements, but it is suggested that it is more than coincidental that the two so often match. Further, everyone was very aware that crossing the ill-defined but well understood boundaries would only lead to decisions being made at a higher level - either by referral upwards or by response to the 'jammed switchboard' - with little chance of a verdict in favour of the transgressor.

Fairly typical comments on the subject of censorship included:

"I've never seen any written guidelines. (The producer and I) made our own on 'which included, as a matter of our choice, no swearing or cruder double entendres. I've nothing against either in principle, though I do get fed up of the use of gratuitous swearwords and sex gags as a substitute for wit and invention...

Ultimate censorial power would rest, I imagine with (the Head of Comedy), and if it were an especially contentious issue, would end up on the desk of the Controller of Programmes. Eventually it would be the IBA, I suppose" (Writer)

"You are your own censor - that's the decisions you make as a producer, whether something is going too far. It can be quite difficult but there's people above me if I'm in doubt" (Producer)

Again, specific instances were rare or too specific. One producer mentioned a character seeing a girl (out of camera) getting undressed with the line 'She's not a natural blonde'; he passed the line but only after giving the girl, when in camera shot, an obvious blonde wig 'to take the curse off it'. It would, though, be repetitious to set down the general comments received as without exception it was stated that (a) written guidelines did not exist, (b) people acted as their own censor, and (c) the upward lines of authority were known but rarely used.

According to those interviewed, then, the matter of censorship existed primarily on a personal level but with full knowledge of the process of referral. This latter awareness may well be very influential as the following suggests:
...(Regarding) decisions of taste, censorship, etc. with the BBC, if I didn't agree with the producer, I could take it to the Head of Comedy and if I didn't agree with him, I could go to the Head of Light Entertainment. I suppose it could go further but I think it would be pointless. The only course would be to give in gracefully, withdraw your script, or appeal to the Writers' Guild who, they tell me, have a committee for such matters... personally, I've never gone further than arguing with the producer, sometimes one winning, sometimes the other, but some like Johnny Speight and the Monty Python team have a long history of taking it to a Higher Authority"  (Writer)

It is, therefore, possible to understand self-censorship taking place within a framework of perceived expectations. All the writers and producers knew what entertainment was supposed to be about - one writer phrasing it as 'you can't write a sitcom if you're burning with zeal for a particular cause' - and that chances were slim of exceeding a small quota of vulgarity. If they wanted to make controversial statements or push back the boundaries of taste, they would not be situation comedy writers and producers; even if they wanted to, it is unlikely they would be allowed to; even if they did manage to incite protests and outrage public opinion once, it is extremely unlikely that they would be allowed to do so again.

A fair amount of academic enquiry and public interest has centred on the issue of the comic treatment of race relations and much of this has been noted in an earlier Chapter. Without reviewing the lines of the debate again, it is possible here to set down the opinions gathered from the interviews with a minimum of linking commentary. The opinions are important in that they come from the personnel who are instrumental in providing the source material of the debate.

All agreed that if a comic treatment worsened race relations then it was a bad thing as such (though private suspicions were aroused on more than one occasion as to how truthfully this view was presented). Understandably, though, many were loth to commit themselves:

"On the one hand I feel that nothing ought to be sacrosanct and that everything ought to be made fun of. I don't see why there
should be any subject about which you cannot make jokes. At the same time, it’s a bad thing, a terrible thing, to do anything that makes race relations worse. So the question is, what effect is there? Does it make race relations better or worse? And I don’t know the answer to that” (Writer)

This writer played safe and ignored the subject in his own work. Others had not but were still effectively non-committal through a process of justification involving a value judgement. The comic treatment of the subject was not necessarily bad (or good) – it depended how it was done:

“Obviously, if one race is made to feel inferior or is made fun of in a derogatory way then it must cause offence. If it is treated intelligently and with humour then, possibly, it might help to ease tension” (Writer)

There was certainly some kind of compromise: it was wrong to raise the issue as a source of cheap laughs but if it was naturally funny it might also be cathartic:

"I think it probably does help to deflate (tension). I think if you can get people to laugh about the situation it’s better than fighting about it” (Producer)

And not just funny and well-intentioned, either. For the programme to work, it would also need something extra:

"Alf Garnett was one man talking about nig-nogs. In Love Thy Neighbour the nig-nogs gave back as good as they got because they called the white people pigs and other things... I’m sure that it made people use the words nig-nog and sambo more than they had done but I think before the programme these words were much more insulting than they became afterwards. The words existed before Love Thy Neighbour but if someone said ‘You nig-nog’ they were being really insulting but after Love Thy Neighbour they could say ‘Hello nig-nog’ and it wouldn’t be quite so insulting, would it?” (Writer)

The something extra appears here to mean catharsis coupled with a sense of fair play. As long as the blacks swap insults and occasionally come out on top, then the rehearsed racist assumptions are rendered harmless. That this is probably not the case has been argued earlier, and this view was supported by some of the respondents. One producer suggested that the essentially trivial nature of situation comedies prohibited anything other than the most cursory treatment which was bound to revolve around name-calling and stereotypes. Two writers
gave the following opinions:

"I don't think Love Thy Neighbour has done anything for race relations at all. I don't think it's done anything for comedy. Where I think it fails is that the audience laughs when Jack Saethurst (the lead white character) calls him a nig-nog or a spade. I think probably the best comedy ever written on race relations will be written by a funny black writer and until then it's always going to be the white man's jokey view of the black man".

"It aggravates, because it belittles. Most people are appallingly ignorant about people who aren't in their own sort of milieu. I know some coloured people. I have known coloured people quite well. People don't understand how they feel...I don't like Love Thy Neighbour, you see, because I think it has the wrong approach. It's all very well to say you've got to have a sense of humour, you've got to laugh about being coloured (but) they don't want to laugh. I know coloured people, it's not funny. It's like someone with a wooden leg, saying he should be used to it by now. He's not, he hates having a wooden leg. Unfortunately, the coloured people in England live in a white society but they don't want to keep on having their noses rubbed in it all the time".

This last quote may have some bizarre elements to it, including the apparently unconscious equation of being black with being disabled rather than disadvantaged. But the intentions are clear: you do not necessarily make something better by making it comic and neither does it necessarily appear as comic to the disparaged race. Another writer took up this last point:

"In 'Till Death', when I heard Warren Mitchell making jokes about Pakistanis coming in with their Paki-pots and things like that... If someone said that about Jews, I'd be very, very upset. And I can imagine that Pakistanis must have been very upset. To make lighthearted references is OK but when you get to be terribly insulting about another race, it's not funny, not to people of that race".

1. This writer was Jewish; it may be pointed out that none of those interviewed were black. Indeed, as far as could be established, there were no black or Asian producers at all. While it may be central to some, it is mentioned here as a side-line that none of the sample were women. The most successful female writer, Carla Lane (The Liver Birds, Going, Going, Gone...Frog, No Strings), is very much in a minority, and it is not proposed to seek reasons here apart from to note the following. A number of psychologists, notably Grotjahn (1966), have explained, in their own terms, why there is such a dearth of comedians and female writers; comments from those interviewed gave reasons such as women being afraid to make fools of themselves, lacking a sense of humour, having a full-time job with housework, and so on. One may assume that these are not the 'real' reasons but no alternative can be offered here.
While *Love Thy Neighbour* supposedly gave the right of reply (and was applauded by some for this), * Till Death Us Do Part* was largely condemned for its lack of balance:

"I think that if you listen to some of the lines that are actually getting the laughs, they're the racial jokes about nig-nogs eating Kit-e-Kat. The weird thing (is that) the son-in-law put forward Speight's own personal views but didn't put them over as well as the antagonist. It's because someone who's outrageous is much funnier than the man who's speaking with the voice of reason."

(Writer)

"There was never any reply, this is where the writing was badly balanced. Warren used to get gag after gag, insult after insult ... the son and the daughter never came back with anything. In *Love Thy Neighbour* it's fine, it's equally balanced."

(Writer)

Overall, the majority of opinions on the general subject were concerned less with the issue and more with the specific treatment of it; here, personal tastes were evident with race relations seen as a legitimate area for comedy but ill-represented by the output so far.

On the question of whether or not there were any subjects too serious for comedy it was the treatment that again came to the fore, with a recognition that the situation comedy form may not be the best vehicle to explore such subjects especially where they require a level of commitment from the audience. Tabooed topics included drugs, terminal illness, current conflicts (Angola was mentioned on several occasions), and the specific case of Northern Ireland. While no guidelines were laid down (though one producer remembered Tom Sloan banning references to drugs), everyone interviewed knew that certain topics as above would not be acceptable. Two writers thought that there might be some mileage in Northern Ireland but, coincidentally, both could only see such a series being set elsewhere (one suggested Scotland) with a mild version of a Protestant/Roman Catholic conflict.

Of transmitted programmes, the only real exception was *Agony* which was shown late in the evenings and freely referred to drugs, suicide, and homosexuality. However, the overwhelming reticence of anybody to
introduce serious subjects really came down to the felt inappropriate-ness of situation comedies to do much more than simply entertain. One writer, though, mentioned the following:

"I was asked to do a thing about a probation officer. I packed it up in the end. I went to it and spoke to probation officers and I thought 'No, you can't make a probation officer an idiot, you weaken the whole system'. I packed it in, I didn't do it"

If a writer wants to make a point, there are other dramatic forms:

"In practice, I can't quite see anybody wringing laughs out of terminal disease, physical deformity, or mental illness. Against that, people have got pretty close with MASH and One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Perhaps somebody could write a comedy show about thalidomide but it would need talent and courage of a superhuman kind. I suspect we're crossing boundaries here - a single play for television, or a play in the theatre, could cope with any of these subjects. But in a situation comedy, though we've opened up a lot of new areas in the last ten years, I still fancy that there's a threshold that it would be dangerous and, if I may use the word, tasteless to cross"  (Writer)

When all is said and done, a situation comedy needs laughs if it is to survive, and laughs come easier from well-known targets and characters than from illness or death. There is a link between serious subjects and 'messages' and the two are bracketed off by the greater pressure to provide entertainment:

"I don't think people tune in for messages. The way I see it, they come home from the factory, my audience, they're bloody browned off and tired. If you can make them laugh for half an hour, you feel you've done a marvellous job"  (Writer)

And, presumably, the television companies are quite pleased and being pleased are, perhaps, unlikely to want to change the sort of output. This is, though, too simple a picture of television production; other factors must enter the discussion if any understanding of situation comedies as they now exist is to be achieved.
(2) Producing Comedy

(5) The Work and Market Situation

This final section may be divided into a number of areas: general views on television, the creation of specific programmes, differences between the BBC and ITV, factors affecting decision-making, and the relationship between producers and writers. Matters relating to the studio audience and questions of feedback are largely covered in the next Chapter and will only be touched upon here.

General Opinions

Respondents' views were sought on three topics - which performers and professionals they admired, views on television, and on the arts in general. Only the second topic produced any fruitful remarks but for the sake of completeness the other two may be briefly summarised.

Favourite actors produced a mixed bag but the names of Arthur Lowe and Ronnie Barker were frequently mentioned as being 'true professionals', which partly meant, from the writers' point of view, that they did not meddle with scripts but said the words as they were written. As true professionals, some actors also had another advantage:

"There's a top league of about 4 or 5 - Lowe, Barker, Rossiter - if you turn in a mediocre script you know they're going to make it a bloody sight better" (Writer)

Producers made a similar choice of names; they preferred performers who 'knew what they were doing', were not temperamental, and had a workmanlike attitude to the programme in hand.

Writers named favourite producers and producers named favourite writers. More often than not, the favourites were people with whom the respondents had not worked but whose approach, style, reputation or whatever were admired and noted. Those responsible for Hancock's Half Hour and
Staploe and Son (writers, performers, and production staff) were consistently praised and held up as examples to which many might usefully aspire; the writing team of Clement and La Frenais received many favourable comments, particularly for Porridge and Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads. Of more interest were the stories about the worst performers but as these were usually slanderous, they must regrettably go unrecorded.

As might be expected, those with experience outside television, usually of the stage and cinema, had the most to say on the general state of the arts in Britain. For most, television was included as one of the arts though only one linked this, as 'the arts' sometimes are, to political accountability; this was the hyphenate:

"There is nothing at all on television that makes any topical criticism. 'TW3' has been replaced by Mike Yarwood doing impersonations of Harold Wilson and Edward Heath which are so ineffective that he's invited to their houses for dinner. There's enormous political pressure on the television companies. Because of inflation the BBC has lost its independence - it used to have a licence fee which guaranteed them an income and they could do what they liked. Now they have to ask for the licence fee to go up every two years so they've got to be good boys."

A rosier picture, for television, was given by almost everybody else though specific complaints were made about, for example, the pressure of a quick turnover, restricted budgets, and the rapid consumption of material:

"We devour material in this place, you can't get enough. There's a tremendous shortage of writers" (Producer)

"In the theatre, if you've got a revue or a play, you can try it out on the audience and keep on rewriting. In television, you've got to be right first time" (Producer)

"It's financially very bad. The ITV companies, they're the worst, they don't plough back the money into new shows and experiments. They just flog the formula shows to death" (Producer)

However, even while recognising the pressures, British television was usually held up as generally successful, often by comparison with other countries. A great deal of criticism, most of it seemingly
justified, was levelled at American television. Comments on the
state of television included:

"It seems to me that in Britain we have the best balanced television
service in the world with a wide selection of programmes for all
tastes. The opposition of the BBC and the commercial networks
seems to have achieved this better than anywhere else and the
programmes offered seem to offer a nice balance between giving
the people what they want, as in America, and what someone else
thinks they should have, as in Russia" (Writer)

"I think on the whole, it's very healthy. For shows produced on
a weekly turnover, six days rehearsal and then record, the
standard is amazingly high and the envy of all foreign visitors.
A market that is always open for new writers, artists, ideas,
and experiments is as good as you can get provided the new ones
keep coming up to scratch and the old ones maintain the standard.
And so far, they seem to" (Writer)

Even taking British television as the best in the world may leave some
room for improvement:

"I don't think there's any experiment flowing around. If I go
along to a company with an idea then it's got to be a pretty
good idea with a hook in it, the cast have got to be pretty
good, if they're going to commit themselves to a series for
thousands of pounds which goes out at peak time" (Writer)

On a slightly different tack, though still with an eye to experimentation,
another writer worried about

"...the tendency to stick things in compartments. Tends to be a
BBC method, this - everything must be 'drama' or 'series' or

1. The criticism especially derided American 'executive producers' who
take an idea, bring in teams of writers, and churn out episodes in
batches of 26, 39, and greater blocks. The fact that, for example,
Thames Television were asked in 1979 by Australia's ABC network to
make pilot comedy programmes for them underlines the point, at least
from the proud way the deal was announced: 'It can't be bad for our
reputation and confirms the fact that British TV is regarded as the
best in the world' (Managing Director of Thames' Programme Sales in
TV Times 23/6/79). However, the equation of British innovation and
American (or Australian) formula was challenged by one writer:

"I think it's machine-made now, there aren't the characters.
It's got very much to the position that radio got to when it
declined, after the great days of radio when you had the Barcocks
and Sykes, the 'Goon Show' and Take It From Here; it then got
machine-made formula. This is what always happens when anything
gets commercialised, it becomes a formula show - though we've
not gone as far as America in this respect"

In short, American television may not have improved but British
television has worsened.
"Light entertainment". I take pleasure in trying to adjust these boundaries with things like ' ' where I'm sure one or two people were nervous that 'drama' could also be funny in a very broad and basic way.

Again, one writer implied that the 'best' could be better still.

"I think British television is the best in the world by far but that's not saying too much. The arts, I believe, are constantly stifled by an unwillingness to credit audiences with much intelligence - but when I see the popular Crossroads I wonder."

Two people specifically referred to technical improvements and the state of television. A writer commented sarcastically on the injection of Oxbridge talent as supposedly demonstrating the iconoclastic possibilities inherent in British television. He felt that "Monty Python", for example, had done nothing that the Goons and Spike Milligan had not already done but seen as pushing back the frontiers of comedy only because they had the advantages of improved graphics, cartoons, speeded-up film and so on. The criticism seems unfair (though the Python team readily acknowledge Milligan's influence (The Listener 28/6/79)) but points to a link - which may or may not mean 'better' comedy - between technical innovation and an improved telesvisual product:

"It's improved technically beyond all recognition, all the technical advances have helped to make better television. You can make plays without having to do it continuously and work the area off the actors and performers, you can re-take. The real problem in the early days was to actually keep it going, keep the boom out, and actually keep it all going without snarl-ups. It was a total compromise, you see, you had to shoot continuously as it was live and this imposed restrictions on the director as he couldn't get the best sort of angles and all the reactions because he couldn't get the cameras round there. Now, it's like making films almost" (Producer)

Having briefly noted some of the debits and credits of television, this is perhaps a suitable place to retrace steps and examine how some of the situation comedies actually started. As a base point, it will be taken for granted that the writer has an image of how his script should eventually look (though some writers effectively have this image given to them) and that it is likely that the initial concept
is framed within an awareness of what a television situation comedy should comprise in terms of entertainment.

Creation of the Programme

It may be as well at the outset to dent the impression that there is a pool of writers who submit their work to a pool of television companies. In reality, interaction is the keynote with the companies always holding control and often being the instigators rather than the recipients. The pressure of unfulfilled schedules will always ensure that the companies cannot just sit back and cream off the top percentage of unsolicited scripts, even assuming that these would provide sufficient material of a high enough calibre.

When specific examples are discussed below, the assurances of confidentiality mean rather less details than one would ideally wish but this is difficult to avoid without 'naming names'. There is, though, nothing of a controversial nature and the anonymity of the examples is a minor inconvenience rather than a major hindrance.

There are a number of ways in which a situation comedy gets off the ground and these should, perhaps, be seen within a framework of an obligation or responsibility to provide entertainment according to a principle of returns for investment. Situation comedies are both expensive and show pieces for the television channels and such financial and artistic investment is only taken after due consideration at an executive level well above that of producers. A necessary adjunct to this is that tried and tested personnel may well be called upon at the expense of new talent, though any analytical model which employs this hypothesis must fall down unless it can also explain how the tried and tested became so in the first place. Programmes from established and relatively new writers will be
discussed first, 'relatively' because it is highly unlikely that a person who had not done some groundwork, undertaken an apprenticeship as an assignment writer, or generally found an audience (however limited) would get their script easily accepted.

The origins of Hancock's Half Hour have already been sketchily noted but here it should be noted how crucial was the role of BBC personnel in developing the original spark - Gale Pedrick as Script Editor thinking their work promising and channelling it to the producer, Roy Speer, with Dennis Main Wilson eventually commissioning the scripts. The other important dimension was that Galton and Simpson could write for a specific comic, an established character, within a series format already developed for radio. Both these dimensions can be found in the following (about an adaptation from short stories)

"... was really put together as a package by Jimmy Gilbert. I said I'd like to do some of the stories, he said he couldn't sell them to the planners and potential American backers just on their own but we stood a chance if we could have the box-office appeal of ( )... to my surprise Jimmy was able to swing this... and the whole thing was a great joy" (Writer)

and, naturally, any assignment writer will be faced with a package and an established cast.

Fortunately, there were a number of 'matches' in those interviewed where both producer and writer(s) of a particular series gave information. "... was scripted by a partnership who had never worked together before but had situation comedy credits in their own right. The initial impetus, according to the 'senior' writer, came from the leading actor who he knew socially as well as having written for him before. One may imagine as the writer recounted the sort of conversation in which the actor casually mentioned his availability, his desire to be in a series of a particular kind in which he had found popularity, and the writer's initial responses outlining how he could see the programmes shaping up and what sort of plots would
be in character. At that stage, unknown to the writer though later discovered, the first moves had in fact been made not by the actor but by the television company. The producer wanted to pair the actor with a certain actress and achieved the backing of the Head of Comedy to get the project off the ground. The producer then contacted the 'junior' writer, at the suggestion of the Head of Comedy, who agreed but wanted to work with someone who had already written for the actor to get round the possibility of clashes between his own ideas and those of the star, and this writer nominated the 'senior' writer as the likeliest future partner. Before contacting the senior writer an unofficial approach from the producer to the proposed stars was made and, in turn, the actor approached the writer as noted above. A series of meetings with both writers, the producer, the actor and occasionally the actress, took place at the company's offices where the general format of the series was worked out - the writers suggesting ideas and plots, the star(s) making their presence felt by their right of veto (which appears to be more common than one might suppose and relies, in this case, not merely on their intrinsic power as stars but also on the fact that they were in from the very beginning), and the producer chairing the meetings and supplying details of proposed budgets, location filming, the possible support characters, and practical details about studio availability, likely scheduling, advance publicity, and so on. From these meetings, the writers put forward an official pilot script which was agreed by the Head of Comedy who, according to the producer, felt that there were no risks in going for a full series (his judgement presumably coloured by the level of experience of all concerned). The series was duly commissioned, with the first programme being recorded about seven months after the first of the discussions, and when all the scripts had been written and approved by the actor and producer.
Another example, where the producer and one of the two writers were interviewed, has many of the same elements as the previous outline but without the involvement of the actors who were chosen later to play the leads:

"Most of the parts we wrote with specific people in mind and we actually got the people we wanted because we were fortunate enough that they were available. I don't think that's general, though, it's just the way we did it." (Writer)

The story behind the start of the programme came from the producer. He was producing ' ', a comedy series, when the agent of one of the writers contacted him and asked him to watch a certain episode of another comedy series which his client had written (with his partner). One may assume that this producer was not the only one who was contacted but he seems to be the only one who did anything positive about the opportunity. He remembered the names and the style of writing as the episode they had written on assignment had a particular flavour uncommon to the series. Two years later, the producer contacted the writers. He had been given a brief by his company to find a new series which would get away from a domestic setting and bring some new faces to television. According to the producer, the company had recently fallen out rather badly with one of their stars and felt prepared to try a different approach which, if successful might herald a shift away from their previous policy of big names and top billing. In the end, though, the series under discussion was only a moderate success, which may or may not be due to the course of events leading to its start. The writers had been asked by the producer to come up with some rough ideas, draft scripts, suggestions and the like. Among these was one 'pilot' that the producer liked. It also fitted his brief - it was not domestic, it would have a young leading pair, and it would be slightly unconventional in making serious points in a comic fashion. On this last attribute, however, the writer interviewed
pointed out that most of the 'unconventional' aspect was slowly lost at the suggestions of the company voiced through the producer. At first, the producer had little success in selling the idea to the company and the matter rested for some time until a change of section heads brought an ally as a new Head of Comedy. He argued the case for the producer almost on a point of principle — if he was to run his department, he must be able to do things his way — with the final outcome that the series was commissioned and production started.

A further example was neatly summarised by the writer of the series:

"( ), at my suggestion, was cast in 'A' in 1975 and was apparently impressed by my work in that he took the part. He had already agreed to do a series for Yorkshire TV later in the year based on a pilot written in 1974 by ( ), who was not available to write the series and (the actor) asked for me. I spoke to Duncan Wood, head of Yorkshire TV Light Entertainment, and he was happy to have me. End of story."

'A' was not the series in question but a stage play which had been transferred to television. The additional element of a writer picking up a pilot from someone else does not substantially alter the basic process which may be understood, from the writer's further comments, as the company approaching the actor and commissioning a pilot. In another instance, the writer explained that:

"Both the current series came into being via the idea being talked about to the respective heads of Light Entertainment, then a pilot show and subsequently a series being commissioned"

and other writers talked of ideas being given to them by companies as the most common way of getting a programme started. Here, certainly, the role of Comedy Adviser must play an important part, just as the Heads of Departments are instrumental in appointing producers, inviting actors for lunch, and maintaining contact with writers. The traffic in ideas and suggestions is not, of course, just one way, from the companies outwards, but it may be emphasised here that they are more often than not the instigators. Even where a script outline is submitted without prior enticement or encouragement the
level on which company personnel must be consulted ensures that a
dialogue will ensue. For example, Carla Lane (with Myra Taylor)
submitted an unsolicited script ('a Monty Python type') to the BBC
in 1968. Michael Mills, then Head of Comedy, wrote back suggesting it
was too bizarre and why didn't they try a script about two women
sharing a flat; The Liver Birds was the end result (Radio Times
30/8/75).

Two other ways of 'creating' a series where senior personnel are
necessarily involved may be noted - the resurrection of a series
which has lain dormant, possibly with new writers, and the 'spin-off'
where characters from an existing series are given a new lease of life
by a transfer, say, to a new location. Examples are numerous and
indicate, perhaps, the dearth of original ideas and a reliance on
proven successes. The basic idea of Roman Jones revolved around
James Beck as a caravan-dweller with Arthur Mullard and Queenie Watts
in supporting roles. When Beck died, in 1973, the series was postponed
but then brought back under the original title; the comic axis was
now the disputes between the working-class Mullard and Watts and the
newly introduced upper-class couple who were down on their luck. This
new series failed to achieve the necessary ratings but Mullard and
Watts 'clicked' in their expanded roles. As Roman Jones finished,
a new series, Yus My Dear, began (in 1975) with Mullard and Watts
still in character but now moved to a council house away from the
caravan site.

One other example of the artificial 'creation' of a series should
suffice here. Man About the House, with the basic idea of a man and
two women sharing a flat, ran for 39 episodes before ending in 1976.
From its still-warm ashes arose George and Mildred, based on the
couple who 'lived' in the downstairs flat, and Robin's Nest, which
took the male lead, married him off and gave him a restaurant to run.
Both Men About the House and George and Mildred have since had their
American counterparts, just as Till Death Us Do Part transferred as
All in the Family.
This recycling of material and ideas (and some might argue that the
strength of the originals will not bear so much dilution) is a result
of two pressures: to hang onto success and to create new ones. The
spin-off is a useful half-way stage between these two pressures.
On the subject of pressure, Philip Jones, then Controller of Light
Entertainment at Thames Television, had the following:

"If you have success you must hang onto it. We have been lucky
in having a lot of series that have done well, so we have held
onto them. It would have been foolish to have turned away any
of these series earlier and the Top Twenty ratings prove it.
But the air time available to us is limited and we have a
duty and a desire to create new shows, so we just have to try
and pick the right moment for a change" (TV Times 24/1/76)

The duty to change and innovate seems, then, also to arise from
the rating system.
One final point needs to be made on the creation of programmes.
An interviewed producer complained that his job meant being called
in after his company had chosen the star and commissioned the writers.
He was presented with a set-up, almost as a fait accompli, and played
no part in the early development of the series or, which was crucial
to him, the casting. Being appointed half-way through the process
meant being stuck with a cast of someone else's choosing. Most producers,
though, managed to be in a pivotal position from the very start and
this is particularly noticeable in both the actual casting and in
who has the right to cast.

Casting

Robinson (1964) has usefully written on the spectrum of comedy
writing. He identifies four strands – straight gags, the inspired nonsense of someone like Hilligan, character comedy as played by actors with a comic bent, and those series built around a comic character or a comedian. The last two strands are relevant here and while the distinction between the types tends to fade into a grey middle area, the extremes point to a basic difference in comedy series – those written for workaday actors and those written for, and built around, a star. For writers, the former course is the more satisfying (as it may also be for producers). Certainly, those interviewed for this work expressed a strong preference for creating roles rather than simply notating a well-defined character (even though it is not clear to what extent the comedians are created by the writer or the writer influenced by the comedian).

Casting may take place in two linked areas. If a series is to be built round a star, that star is likelier to be involved in the whole process at a much earlier stage than would be a leading character actor. The star is ‘pre-cast’ and central; it is usual to commission writers who are well versed in his style. Comedians who have appeared in situation comedies, with varying degrees of success, include Hancock, Harry Worth, Norman Wisdom, Les Dawson, and Charlie Drake; it is series similar to these that brought the most complaints from writers about interference, temperamental performers, and inflated egos. Producers also complained but, as company representatives, rather less so. A big name may well help to attract a large audience (as the companies hope) but the consensus of opinion from the respondents was that considerably more is needed if that audience is to be maintained (and thus justify the additional expense of the star). There is another element which may bear on whether or not a star is chosen; this is a hangover from the early days of television when seen as the successor to radio.
"Radio developed a comedy form; films had developed a comedy form, but television in the early days had no comedy form. So there was a great deal of experimenting as to how and to where and to what was the best television comedy. To play safe they used to say 'We've got so-and-so, now write a show round him!' (Writer)

For whatever reason the star has been chosen, he will need sympathetic writers, as Hood has suggested:

"...the essence of situation comedy...is to recognise the essential quality of a comedian and to put him in a series of situations which will allow his gifts to flower, whether they be the gentle ineffectualness of a Harry Worth, the suburban confusions of Eric Sykes, the paranoid impulses of Charlie Drake or the rich neuroses of a Hancock...

The creation of a good situation is a process of considerable complexity. There is a reciprocal relationship between comedian and scriptwriters; the former embellishing the work of the latter; they in turn stretching their partner's comic talent by pushing their invention further and further along a certain path" (1967:153)

The trend, however, existing in the 1960's but flourishing in the 1970's, was towards employing comic actors rather than comedians and this is the second area where casting decisions may be informative about the whole process of making situation comedies.

If the star system means an effective loss of control for the writer (and producer to some extent) then this second form may demonstrate more of a free-for-all where the control to cast is up for grabs. The two areas may, of course, be combined in one programme:

"I sat down with ( ), who produced, and made lists of names. He didn't keep minutes of the meetings but I'm pretty sure two or three of the eventual cast were names I suggested. Because the programme originated from (comedian), it was his idea in the first place, he also took part in these discussions" (Writer)

And availability will play a part:

"There are not really many terribly excellent comedy actors and actresses and most of them are very busy; you may well have written with someone in mind to find that they cannot do it" (Writer)

1. The same writer also indicated the need for more and more writers as television developed:

"At one stage there wasn't this division between writers and performers. The early comedians wrote their own material. Most comedians cannot think or write a funny thing but can perform it when it's written by other people. The vast majority...do think of funny things but cannot do it to the quantity TV requires"
While comedians may be sought as leads for their popularity, experienced actors are sought for their professionalism, range of skills, adaptability, script interpretation, and so on.

"Television companies tend to play safe and they know who's going to give a good performance and who's not. It's very difficult, if you do a sitcom, to cast a whole cast of unknowns" (Writer)

So who actually exercises the power to cast? As may be expected, it depends to a large extent on what sort of power relationship is already existing (and is strengthened or lessened through the right to cast). Four parties are involved - the actors, the writers, the producer, and the company - and the relationship between them may vary from series to series. Sought after actors may easily adopt the stance of a star and demand, for example, that particular actors play supporting roles. They may also have strong preferences as to who plays other lead parts.

The real crux of the matter, however, lies between the writer and the producer (as representative of his company). Here, people from both 'sides' claimed control. In response to the question 'How much say do you have in choosing the cast?', one writer asserted:

"One hundred per cent. I wouldn't be interested in writing otherwise. I wouldn't write for anybody if I didn't have complete say because I write for the cast. I cast from actors when I'm writing. I cast the parts in my mind because I know so many actors. As I'm writing the characters more, I see the characters playing the parts" (Writer)

Another writer had a contractual right to an opinion; he added that

"...on the running characters they should always consult you because if they use someone you just don't like, you can't see them playing your character. You've got to write six more with this man, you can't even see him saying your lines. Then, they're asking for trouble"

The less experienced the writer, the more meetings and 'joint' decisions. One writer praised London Weekend Television because they always invited him to their casting conference (unlike some
other companies) but he realised he was very much a non-voting member. Another writer identified the subtle pressures brought to bear on him even though he was contractually entitled to be consulted. He was forced to accept an actor through the producer's constant references to 'time's running out', 'at least we know so-and-so's available', 'rehearsals really must start' and so on. Certainly, once the stage of imminent rehearsal has been reached there is little a writer can do except withdraw (and the more ungraceful the withdrawal, the less his chances of future work).

Of course, there is no reason why discussions on casting need not be entirely amicable (though this does not undermine the basic dimension of control), and the following writer was satisfied with how things had worked out for him:

"I usually have some say, yes. Certainly, as far as the leads are concerned, agreement is generally reached between the producer/director and me. Clearly, a director would be barmy to cast somebody I hated (or who hated me) in the lead for a series I was writing. Featured players, unless I get a flash of inspiration, I usually leave to the director. He knows more of them than I do and most directors have their own little rep of supports they consider dependable. I have squashed a few beta noires and boosted a few unemployed mates, but on the whole there's hardly any nepotism as far as I'm concerned."

The producers interviewed all reflected this attitude of friendly co-operation but when pressed on the point admitted they had the final say. It was just that discretion was the better part of valour, and it was sensible policy to let a valued writer have his head as far as was practical. One of the less established writers agreed that his producer was absolutely entitled to cast whoever he wished; this choice, according to the writer, might be based on other considerations that went beyond suitability and availability:

"The casting departments at the television companies have a kind of chip on their shoulder. They don't like other people doing their job. Their job, in fact, is just to assist, a casting director is just to help the producer find the right people."

He should submit a short-list of people and make a recommendation, and occasionally say 'I think so-and-so would be perfect for this part'. However, they have an inflated status at the television companies and particularly we found with '...that it was virtually impossible to get anyone that we wanted into the show because they felt that it was the writers infringing on their department. And the producer, he worked at the company, we don't as it were, although we write the show we're not there everyday, we're not part of the politics that any office has. It was politically wise for the producer to keep the casting department happy, we used to feel, to the extent of casting the wrong people" (Writer)

Some producers rise above such politics (or at the very least appear to): The Good Life was cast by the producer, John Howard Davies, from the stage performances of the leading characters in various Alan Ayckbourn plays but with the agreement of the writers, Esmond and Larbey (Radio Times 29/11/75). But all producers must, in the end, be able to insist on casting decisions at the expense of the writers and, if they are worth anything at all, at the discomfort of casting departments. The process is, however, dominated in the great majority of cases by diplomacy and gentle persuasion (attributes of the finer producers).

As a final comment, it must be noted that no writer had the experience of choosing who was to produce his script. The Heads of Comedy have absolute control here (as they might also influence casting) though existing 'partnerships' are encouraged to repeat successes. In the case of Dad's Army, the co-writer Croft was an automatic choice as producer and seems to have elected himself as much as being chosen.

Differences Between the EBC and ITV

Two immediate points must be made. At the time of the interviews, the subject of a fourth channel was being discussed in the industry and while direct references to it were few, there was a general awareness which may have coloured replies. Secondly, approximately two thirds of the respondents were working at that time for ITV and only a third for the EBC (though about two thirds had worked for both). While
there was a rough equality in the level of output between the channels, during the period ITV seemed to be flourishing and attracting more publicity and this may have a bearing; also, of course, personnel were concentrated at the BBC and spread out at the commercial companies. The producers demonstrated the greatest degree of channel loyalty with both the BBC producers having no direct experience of working for ITV and only two of the commercial producers having BBC experience (and that in a relatively junior capacity). The great majority of writers had dual experience and their comments tend to give the fuller information.

As a start, there are several practical differences between the two organisations (which came up time and time again in the interviews). The most relevant was the centrality of the BBC compared to the federal structure of ITV with the consequent matter of networking. A comedy series produced by the BBC will automatically be transmitted throughout the country. A series produced by, say, Thames Television, may only be shown in the London area with the decision to fully network or not being taken by the Programme Controllers Group, subject to the IBA, and comprising in 1976 the Controllers of Thames, London Weekend, Granada, Yorkshire, ATV, the head of IBA Programme Services and chaired by the Director of the Network Programme Secretariat. Full networking is almost guaranteed for an established series but new ventures may be confined to the area in which they were produced (and this applies to other sorts of programmes as Worsley notes of The Frost Show (1970; 218, 223)). Nobody liked the idea that the programme they were putting so much effort into might not be fully networked though fortunately, for them, the possibility of limited transmission was rarely a reality. Situation comedies are good audience pullers (in theory at least) and therefore in
the forefront of the battle for ratings. They are also expensive:

"Anything that you're going to involve a degree of expenditure in, you've got to guarantee that it's going on the network otherwise it becomes uneconomical" (Producer)

And such investment requires returns by way of audience size.

Time was frequently mentioned with the BBC coming well out on top.

Galton and Simpson clearly express the difference:

"In every 30 minute show for ITV we have 22 cold minutes of television. That allows for commercials and the credits at the beginning and the end. On the BBC in every 30 minutes we have 27 cold minutes of air time - allowing for credits. Now the difference doesn't sound much but in fact it means that with a show for ITV we have something like a fifth less time to get our story over and create the situations at which audiences will laugh. That is why if you look at an ITV comedy show it is always rather more frantic than one for the BBC. The effects have to be made more rapidly, there is a sort of jumping about" (in The Daily Mail 19/2/77)

Some of those interviewed gave different figures (30:24 ½, 28:25) but the principle remains, expressed by one writer as 'those five minutes are the difference between a story with a plot and an anecdote without one'. The cause of the shorter ITV programmes, the commercial break, was also pinpointed as a minus for ITV and a plus for the BBC. With an artificial break, the writer needs to carry the audience into the second half. One writer noted:

"The only difference I'm aware of is the commercial break which determines a two act structure for a half hour comedy show. I can stand that (but) in drama ideally I prefer to work without a break of any kind. It's not much fun having a lovely atmosphere shot to pieces by travel ads"

However, the majority opinion saw commercial breaks as part of a larger difference between the BBC and ITV:

"On ITV, things like Stompers and Son would be terribly difficult to do because halfway through you've got to have a commercial break... We write quite deliberately for the commercial break, there's no doubt about it. It's commercial television and we feel it's our job to give the person the best show. The way you do that is to build up to a big punchy bit before the break and afterwards, the reiteration, reminding them what the plot's about. With the BBC you can do a classier show - how can you get some real depth and atmosphere when 'wham', the commercials come in" (Writer)
Before passing to the matter raised here — that there may be a qualitative difference between the BBC and ITV — there are a few more practical points, given in the interviews, that may be noted.

ITV tended to pay more to writers and staff while the BBC usually had higher budgets. The general fear of using trade names affects both channels but ITV tend to enforce the issue more rigorously (and two writers complained of being made to invent fresh dialogue when references to proprietary brands were excised). The facilities were universally praised — studios, canteens, dressing rooms and the like — with the BBC most creditworthy, followed by the London based commercial companies. There was a greater chance of repeats on the BBC; ITV tended to give a smaller percentage of their output a second run, and much of that in the 'dead' afternoon slot. The BBC tended to exploit successes, through books and records, with a better commercial flair. All in all, the BBC were more highly regarded, from a practical point of view, though advantages were of a minor nature.

Dominating qualitative differences — all the respondents had an eye on the end product of their work as somehow poor, good, or better — were two factors which can be termed 'structure' and 'process'. Of immediate consequence is the fact that the BBC Light Entertainment section is under one roof with centralised organisation and while all the commercial companies together have a greater output, they are fragmented, separate, and necessarily smaller in terms of individual network production. The comparison between the two structures cuts both ways:

"(With the commercial companies) you get a quicker decision because they're smaller. You don't have to go through so many people. At one time we could go right in and see the Programme Controller and get a decision. We've never met a Programme Controller at the BBC, never ever in our whole career. At
we could go right in and see the Programme Controller and get a
decision. We've never met a Programme Controller at the BBC, never
ever in our whole career. At London Weekend you can go straight to
the man who's going to buy your show and put it on...the BBC, you
don't see anybody, you just don't meet them" (Writer)

"There are less people who have to be convinced at the BBC. With
a small company like Anglia, with a small output, a whole mob of
people like Script Editors, Associate Producers, Heads of Drama,
Managing Directors, Members of the Board, all feel they should have
a, usually differing, opinion. Try to please them all and you end
up with a mess. And then Anglia have to take the result to the
network chiefs and go through it all again. With the BBC, you
sell an idea to a Head of a Department, he commissions a pilot,
sells the idea of a series to the planners on the basis of the
pilot, commissions the series, gives you a producer, and from
then on you deal with the producer" (Writer)

"There is very little difference; possibly, in the ITV companies,
being smaller than the BBC, one does tend to have more contact
with the Heads of Departments" (Writer)

Related to structure and organisation is the matter of keeping a
team together and building up a large body of committed and exp-
erienced personnel. As David Bell, Controller of Entertainment at
London Weekend, has commented, the freelance basis of much of
commercial television needs to be changed to approach the BBC model

"...you had a producer doing a six-week series, and what he
didn't tell you was that he was still editing at Thames in the
evenings. There cannot be a total commitment to the company.
So I am going to try and find a nucleus of creative talent who
will stay with us for a longer period of time. Maybe a year,
but what matters is we should have the talent with us and with
us alone. We then have offices with producers in them; they
know each other, they go into each other's offices and say
'I liked that, I didn't like that', they communicate...if I
can get together such a team, the talent will want to come
because those people will have worked with major talent before
and the talent will come where the environment is right"
(The Stage and Television Today 13/10/77)

At the BBC the relationships between the producers are built over
a period of time through frequent formal and informal discussions.
For example, when a new script is in, approved in principle by the
Head of Comedy, it is common practice to invite comments from all
the producers who are thought to have a worthwhile opinion. Apart
from the possible consequence of forging a corporate policy, the
interchange of ideas may well be fruitful creatively before the
appointment of the programme producer when responsibility devolves to him. While some of the respondents saw the BBC as a 'monolithic bureaucracy' or 'a pile of memos' the consensus of opinion was that the scale of their operations worked to the good of the programme rather than the detriment, even allowing for the fact that the ultimate decision-making process was possibly less accessible then in the commercial companies.

In relation to 'process' two main areas were identified: the track record of the BBC and the need or otherwise for instant successes.

Of the first, one producer (from a commercial company) said

"The Light Entertainment section at the BBC is very strong, chiefly because of Bill Cotton. He's a first-rate bloke to work for and he's been in variety all his life so he knows what it's about. He knows the problems of his directors and he hasn't forgotten those. The situation comedy strength has been built up over the years, really and truly I suppose, through people like Galton and Simpson who at one time were virtually their only writers. They were so strong that Tom Sloan put them under immediate contract and paid them far more money than anyone in commercial television could pay at that time"

Or, from Duncan Wood on whether or not the BBC were better at comedy:

"I think it was so initially because the people who started doing situation comedy on the BBC came mainly from radio - I was one of them - where you had a vast backlog of experience of doing comedy on radio, and there's not an enormous difference where comedy writing is concerned, and so the BBC had a flying start in this field" (1976:17)

Certainly, one of the writers saw what he felt was a BBC supremacy as stemming from the days of flourishing radio. Further, until the television monopoly was broken 'you had to be so good to get on the air'; many of those who had failed to get their scripts accepted apparently turned to ITV in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

It would be crass to say that BBC standards were higher but there was an established feeling among writers and producers that many shows broadcast by ITV would simply not match the quality requirements, indistinct though they may be, of the former. This may be linked to the supposed need of the commercial companies to achieve instant
success, as the following quotes indicate:

"...despite the JICTAR figures, I think the BBC know how to do comedy better. There is a better atmosphere for comedy and although the pressures are there all right, it is more relaxed. This is probably because the BBC can allow itself the occasional failure or low-figure prestige show." (Writer)

"The attitude of the commercial companies is 'we're paying you all this money and we want a funny script'. The attitude of the BBC is, if they know you have integrity at all, 'you are writing a funny script and you are doing the best you possibly can'" (Writer)

"The difference with the BBC is that they don't wait for instant television; commercial television tends to think that if you get the right mixture, pop it into a cup and pour boiling water over it - unless it's a success, they take it off whereas the BBC will let it go on" (Producer)

"Say a commercial company, you tend to find that they want it cut and dried, they want to know practically for certain that it's going to be a success, heavily viewed, get into the ratings. There are a lot of shows, like 'Till Death', which would never have seen the light of day on commercial television" (Writer)

Or The Good Life, presumably. According to the BBC (1977a) the first show had an audience of 5.5 millions with a 'lukewarm reception' - the Reaction Index was 55 - and the series as a whole averaged no more than 7.5 millions (which is very low for a supposed audience winner). The next series, however, averaged 10 million viewers and the Reaction Index had gone up to 70 which is regarded as 'pretty favourable' for situation comedy. The third series averaged 15.5 millions and the Index averaged out at 76 with a peak of 80. While The Good Life is exceptional, even by BBC standards of a slow build-up, it does indicate the idea of investment for delayed rather than immediate returns. This possibility is largely denied to the commercial companies:

"I am currently working for both channels; the only real difference is that the commercial companies tend to be less willing to experiment and basically go for what they think of as safe comedy - this is due to the advertising pressures on them to get large viewing audiences at peak time" (Writer)

In summary, what differences that there might be come down to pleasing
large audiences at different speeds. One may assume that if *The
Good Life* had not improved from its early showing, and showed no
signs of so doing, then it simply would have been dropped, albeit
at a later stage by the BBC than the commercial companies. In terms
of responsibility it would be too easy to maximise the differences:
the responsibility of, say, Thames Television to its advertisers
and the IBA is different in scale rather than essence to the BBC's
responsibility to the public as required by their renewable licence.
The goods still have to be delivered, whether over short or long
periods.

*Some Factors Affecting Decisions*

This section is not comprehensive but may cover some of the factors
which have 'escaped' other sections. For example, it was thought
prudent to discover how long it took to write a script, draft a
budget, organise production details et cetera to see whether there
was an element of pressure through shortage of time. Producers were
reluctant to give precise details but usually referred to the long
gestation period from initial idea to finished product with a flurry
of activity once the deadline of a place in the schedules had been
determined. The fact that the planners organise so far into the
future is not a consequence of the gestation period but allows
for it. A large board in a Head of Comedy's office was marked for
an eighteen month period with different coloured cards representing
series 'in the can', being recorded, and at various stages of
planning. But as in any business there comes a time when the pre-
sure of meeting a schedule have to be met. The investment on a
series is too great to stand absolute flops in the ratings and
certainly does not allow for a series which failed to be ready in
time because of unreliable writers, experimental producers, and
plots which did not easily translate to the screen via the studio.

One factor which was mentioned many times was availability or max-
imum utilisation of scarce resources. Leading actors had to be con-
tracted for periods of several months, studios had to be allocated well
in advance, technical teams brought and kept together, scripts
delivered on time and of a quality which would not require sub-
stantial rewriting. Mistakes in the process could not only be costly
to the company as wasted money but also wreck the schedules with
repeats or cobbled programmes required to fill the gaps and a
possible loss of future prestige or advertising revenue. The easiest
way to avoid mistakes is to play safe, not take chances, and seek
professionalism in all concerned with the series.

The length of time taken to write a script was given as anything
between 6 days and three weeks with a rough average of a fort-
night. From a purely personal point of view there was no match
whatsoever between the quality of the script and the time taken
to finish it. Some writers thought the time allowed was far too
short - once the idea had been taken up and a series commissioned
they, too, were bound by deadlines and no-one wanted to write a
whole series at their leisure in the hopes of getting it accepted -
and justified the claims of various pundits about the poor stand-
ard of situation comedy. Perhaps, one should not expect minor
masterpieces or well-crafted classics from an industry with such
a rapid turn-over rate although the actual pressure on writing
need not impinge on what many writers saw as the real work which
went into the planning stage, outlining the plots, preparing the
characters and the thought behind the relatively mundane job of
writing it all down. This gestation period can be as long or
short as the individual writer decides, but sooner or later the
full script must be written down:

"...with a single script or the first of a series, I never even think of it consciously until about three weeks before the delivery date. Then comes a week of putting it off but feeling I should be doing something about it. Then a week of pacing about and shaping up to it. Then two or three days struggling with the first couple of pages. It's like whichever French writer it was who said 'Oh, I've finished the book, I just have to write it down'. Mind you, this process can be speeded up by the state of the bank balance. Necessity can be a real mother as far as invention is concerned" (Writer)

A lot depends on the writer's attitude to his work. Speight, for example, provides the following insight:

"Up until Till Death Us Do Part the longest play ever written I think was Eugene O'Neill's 'Long Day's Journey Into Night' which runs approximately four hours, give or take an actor. Till Death Us Do Part, the longest play I have ever written, has gone on for 16 hours so far and is not quite finished" (1973: 233)

While many of the writers interviewed saw some sort of value in their work beyond mere entertainment, none of them saw themselves as dramatists in this fashion. They were not writing 16-hour plays but a series of linked episodes of situation comedies. They may write with conviction but rarely seal, as the finished article is only required to reach a certain standard, it need not be stuck at this level just because of the relatively short time given to write it.

Speight originally wrote on his own but joined with Ray Galton to script a series called Spooner's Patch (about a police station) in 1979; Galton, of course, had written extensively with his partner, Alan Simpson. According to Galton, of this new venture,

"...you've got to like each other and get on well to write together. Comedy writers like to bounce ideas off each other. Even lone wolves usually pop into the office to talk things through" (TV Times 7/7/79)

A question, as yet answered and possibly not here either, is why there are so many writing partnerships for situation comedies. There are no exact figures but many of the more famous series have originated in this way including: Happy Ever After, Porridge, Hancock's Half Hour, Steptoe and Son, The Good Life, Please Sir, Get Some In, On the Buses,
Rosmary Jones, The Rag Trade, Dad's Army, Are You Being Served, and many more, especially those started by Vince Powell and Harry Driver (before the latter contracted polio). It is not just a case of a few partnerships writing lots of comedies (and therefore giving undue importance to the idea of a team) but rather that the partnership is as commonplace as the individual writer. Reasons for writing in tandem were given by the respondents; out of the 14 interviewed, 8 were in partnerships though in only one case were both partners seen:

"The way comedy goes now, probably a team have got a better chance of success than a writer working on his own. It's much harder for a writer on his own, he's got no-one to pick (his) ideas up"

"If you're doing a stint of 13 shows, you can be ill one week, you're off-colour; some weeks you're better, some weeks he's better. The companies prefer it because they have more stability about the whole thing"

"If you're writing on your own it's much easier if you're writing for a producer for who you have respect and then you can use him as a sounding-board"

"It's easier, if you have a bad day, your partner may have a good day. If you can't think of anything, he might. Once you get more than 2 you start creating a committee. I think 2 is the optimum number"

Other comments included the need for both partners to find an item funny, an exchange of ideas being fruitful, 'bouncing' ideas from one to the other, not writing alternate lines but contributing jointly to the whole, and becoming known in the trade as a team. Certainly, those who wrote with partners thought that the end result justified any inconvenience and that the script would benefit from meeting two sets of personal satisfaction. Perhaps the prevalence of partnerships stems from three elements which, when taken together, may be absent from other forms of television writing: the rapid turnover and the amount of material required, the lack of any urge to express an individual viewpoint or the need for it, and the essential quality of making the script laughter-provoking. A partner does at least give
an outside opinion on whether something is funny or not. Finally, one writer quoted, he thought, Denis Norden: 'A partnership has all the disadvantages of marriage and none of the advantages'.

Writers' and producers' past experiences obviously affected their decision-making: whether this is seen as a process of socialisation, learning, adjustment through success and failure or whatever may be left to common sense rather academic analysis. It is a truism to say that experience bears on current activity and a more profitable tack might be taken, on the wider subject of experience, from the following quote. It is from Jack Rosenthal, best known as a playwright but also the writer of the comedy series *The Lovers, The Dustbinmen*, *and Sadie. It's Cold Outside*:

"There have been various breakthroughs in comedy writing that show new ways of doing it. Apart from the Harrocks shows...there have been things like 'Steptoe' in its early days, *Till Death Us Do Part* in its early days, *Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads* and, I would like to think, *The Lovers* in its early days. These, I think, were new approaches that could show new writers new ways of treating comedy. They contained a certain idiosyncrasy that many other comedies don't have but they also had a seriousness of intent. When comedies come along that I don't like, what surprises me is that they seem to have ignored the lessons of these comedies that I think were breakthroughs" 21/7/77

(in *The Stage and Television Today*)

This sort of point was made by many of those interviewed. While it might be argued that television comedy has settled into a comfortable niche, the reasons invariably given were the shortage of writers of quality rather than any tendency to lethargy and contentment.

There is also the need to get as much from a successful series as possible which might involve flogging a horse that is critically ill if not already dead. Sir Huw Wheldon, perhaps unwittingly, has this suggestive comment:

"Situation comedies in this country are written by writers and acted by actors and getting them made is therefore necessarily a slow and laborious process. There is hardly any television executive in this country who wouldn't have *Forridge* running for ever. But it isn't possible. It isn't manufactured - it is written" (1976:265)
Presumably, if the writers could continue delivering scripts of a high quality there would be no need to take the series off or, more importantly, encourage others. There are few other areas of dramatic television which get so much mileage from a limited set of characters and a finite variety of plots.

This is due in no small part to the series format. As one writer said:

"You need a little bit of biography but basically all you do is to create a character who can remain constant and be put in different situations each week".

and another darkly added that the character must remain constant in order not to upset the star or make too many calls on his acting ability. There are certain consequences of the series as the, by now, usual form for television comedy; some have been mentioned elsewhere, some should be noted here. Philip Jones, Controller of Entertainment at Thames Television, points to one advantage:

"We are...in the middle of studio production by Michael Mills of another series of Get Some In. This brings the total up to 26 and I think it is still developing. We started with four totally new faces for the four boys who had to establish themselves as characters in the public's mind. Recording this new series, one senses now the identification with the studio audience: they know the characters and it's becoming all the stronger because of that" (1977)

Subject to other things remaining equal there may be, then, a self-perpetuating dimension to the series - the more the merrier - with rapport being built up and sustained by regular showings. Bill Cotton

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1. Eaton (1978) has discussed at some length how the series format affects a situation comedy, using Going Straight and Come Back Mr. Noah as his examples. Even where there is 'temporal' development (a character getting married, say) it is 'clear that this never occurs at the expense of the rhythms and problematics of the individual half-hour slot and never leads to a revelation of knowledge which would provide for an ultimate narrative closure to those problematics' (69-70). Further, the usual contexts of 'home' and 'work' help to generate comedy from weak to weak - the family being 'stuck' with one another, the worker having to get on with his fellow employees and bosses - so that the series provides a circle from which the characters cannot escape (70-73).
is reported as saying that a series could last for 10 years if its exposure was handled correctly (The Stage and Television Today 11/1/77) and one must assume that after this length of time the audience would have a reasonable idea of who the characters were. Other things are, however, unlikely to remain equal. Lord Willis, speaking specifically of dramatic television plays, series and serials, has some suggestive remarks which are applicable to situation comedies:

"...series writers fall victim to their own success. In the beginning, a series can be fresh and exciting to work on but, after a while, its limits and attitudes are established and routine takes the place of creation. The characters are fixed, and the exploration has been done. It all becomes a little too easy and the irony, the sharpness, and the sting, tend to disappear from the writing. What is more serious is that the writer is scarcely, if ever, aware of what is happening. He continues to turn out good, honest work to the utmost of his ability, but he no longer works under the creative tension which sharpens his vision and pushes him to the frontiers of his talent and even beyond them" (1965:579)

The problem for television executives and planners is how to keep a series as fresh as possible, especially where the writer may not be approaching the frontiers of his talent. While a writer is only as good as his last series, there is a status build-up which works towards placing a guarded faith in the writer, especially if alternative talent is thin on the ground. But there comes a time when the double-edged basis of executive decision in maintaining success and promoting originality veers to the latter. Richard Waring, writer of Marriage Lines, Not in Front of the Children, ...And Mother Makes Five, along with a host of other domestic comedies, has made the point before:

"The alarming thing about television comedy is that once a writer produces something successful, everybody tries it. Presently, the whole thing grinds to a halt, and people say 'We really must think of something new if situation comedy is to survive" (in Ferris 1969b:73)

Sustaining current programmes while encouraging new ventures need not, of course, be incompatible and while the interview data suggested a bias to the former in ITV and the latter at the BBC, a straw poll of
both outputs shows little difference, if any at all.

In one area, though, the BBC have demonstrated a technique of generating new series through the Comedy Playhouse idea. This involves commissioning, say, 7 scripts either from different writers or, more rarely, from the same writer(s) on different subjects. The results are shown in consecutive weeks. Many notable series have started in this way - The Last of the Summer King, for example, was first aired as 'Of Funerals and Fish' in the Comedy Playhouse series in January 1973 and taken up for a full series later in that year (Clarke 1976); Porridge also started in this way. Audience research, the Reaction Index, and experience or instinct determine which, if any, of the 'Playhouse' series are then developed. The idea of 'Playhouse' was, however, dropped by Gilbert after he became Head of Comedy. He authorised one series of 13, apparently to fill the schedules, but nothing resulted from them. He switched the search for new series to adaptations of books, with The Rise and Fall of Reginald Perrin and I Didn't Know You Cared as two of the results.

One common way of keeping series fresh, rather than starting new ones, is to transmit episodes in batches of 13, often split into 6 and 7. One producer gave the international market as a reason for the random:

"If they're selling a series to Australia, they want 13 because they run their schedules on a quarterly basis and so they don't buy the show until you've got 13 made. They put them out on the trot, I suppose. We make 13 but we put them out in 7's and 6's and alternate them with another series" (Producer)

'Some' scheduling is also very important, with the companies planning in terms of Spring and Autumn seasons, usually announced with a fanfare of publicity. Another producer gave his reason for the split:


"Quality. If we are doing "13 on the trot", we normally ask the writer to write 7 at the beginning of the day and record those in the Spring, then let him write 6 in the Summer and record those 6 while the first 7 are going out. Unless you go in for formula writing, in which case you have an executive writer and just split it up. When they get to script 9 or 10, they're getting a bit tired and they haven't had the public reaction. They're not getting feedback from the public of how the situations and the characters are developing and they're having to invent it. They get a second wind somewhere around 11 when they can see the light at the end but in the middle you often get an awful (inaudible). It's a terrible thing to ask one person to write 6½ hours of comedy on the trot, that's 3 West End plays. It's better for them to do it in sixes and sevens" (Producer)

The first producer quoted above thought that '13 on the trot' had the advantage of firmly establishing the characters in the mind of the audience with the anticipation of the mannerisms and catchphrases a valuable part of audience appreciation.

The series format generally suits the planners who can organise schedules far in advance. It may also, from its very nature, increase the comic potential and there seems little doubt that some sort of audience loyalty goes hand in hand with increased recognition and satisfied expectation.

Producers and Writers

In this final part, two aspects will be examined - the relationship between the producer and the writer (seen in terms of control over the script and the whole process of production), and the respondents' own views on what makes a programme successful (in terms of relative contributions rather than, say, ratings or colleagues' comments).

As quotes regarding the first area will demonstrate, the particular role of the respondent as writer or producer has a great bearing on attitudes and perceptions, with a middle ground being occupied by the less experienced writers. There is not, however, a simple continuum of power from the writer in total control, through decision sharing, to the omnipotent producer. Shades of control exist all along the way
but with the producer, always in theory and usually in practice, having the ultimate right to say 'yes' or 'no'.

The balance (or imbalance) of power is most clearly seen by looking at how much of the writer's intentions and script are represented in the final product:

"I've done a script which everybody thought was terrific...when it actually appeared on the screen, it was pretty lousy. I think I got about 30% of the script on the screen, or less, because of everybody else's alterations and interference. This is when I first started, when I didn't have any say at all. If it's bad and it sinks, I'd rather sink on my own ship than on somebody else's" (Writer)

Another writer, after some scathing comments about script editors, referred to the times when he was in some sort of control:

"Now that was a series I devised, wrote all the scripts, and was responsible for from beginning to end. That's how television used to be. You'd get one or two writers and they'd say 'That's your series, get on with it'. Speight still does it, Galton and Simpson still do it, a few other writers still do it. Now that's where the pressure lies - if you get on something like Bless This House it does you no good as far as your reputation is concerned because there are so many writers nobody knows who's written what" (Writer)

He continued, speaking now of a series that he had written without having a script editor, with regard to keeping control:

"It's a wearing down, it's a process of erosion. Speight was absolutely dogmatic - he would say 'That's the way I'm going to do it, if you don't like it, don't have it'. And it paid off because in the end he got over his style of what he wanted to do. I had terrible rows in the early days but with me it didn't pay off so in the end I said 'To Hell with it'. You get what you can, you get as big a percentage as you can, you settle for 60 to 70% in the end. You say 'I know the other 40% is not what I want' but what the Hell can you do?"

There are two specific elements here. The successful writer, as Speight was, has the power to bargain and demand and while the producer can say 'no' (and expect backing from his seniors) no-one in the business would willingly lose a writer whose programmes were attracting record audiences; in the end, however, this is what happened with the BBC and Speight falling out rather badly. Secondly, there are very
few options open to the dissatisfied writer. He can withdraw his
script (unless contractually bound) and labour on a point of principle
but must, as a result, attract the kind of reputation he can ill
afford if he wishes to get future employment. The pressure in televi-
sion is not just for a good script but also for one that comes to
fruition and takes its place in the schedules.

Both elements are covered, as well as others, in the following
lengthy quote. It comes from a writer then enjoying a success, but
with relative failures in the past:

"You take the script along, God willing, some weeks or even months
before the recording. It's rarely totally rejected, sometimes
totally accepted, and usually accepted after some re-writes
have been agreed. The size of those depends on the producer and
often on how much he fancies himself as a creative writer.
Mostly, they're fairly minor and obviously always agreed —
though I must admit that I have sometimes reluctantly agreed
to a re-write and found the producer to be right in the end.
I'm speaking of my own experience here, of course. I know of
cases where the script is put together by a sort of commi-
tee of writer, producer, and star, and then sent under the writer's
name. I know of others where the writers turn up at rehearsal
with a sort of blueprint for a script which is then kicked
around by all present and ad-libbed into a final version. Even
darker things can happen.
The writer is expected to turn up at the read-through on the
first day of rehearsal for what should be only minor cutting
and polishing. I have once had to go home to write a new scene
overnight for length, but only once. I suppose writers could
attend all the rehearsals but it's not encouraged and personally
I find them boring. I don't go back until the final day in the
studio for the run-throughs. Between those two attendances much
may happen. Usually, I find that bits have been cut for time
and sometimes bits have been altered slightly. The alterations
I can frequently change back if I feel strongly enough about
them but sometimes, as with ' "you can arrive to find the
script has been completely re-written by the stars and the
producer has allowed them to do it. On the first show, we had
exactly four straight lines left of the original script. They'd
even changed the number of the house they were living in..."

The writer thought that the Writers' Guild could have been called in
with some chance of putting pressure on the company, but no action
was taken. He continued:

"...when the producer is siding with the stars, it would mean
endless arguments and bad performances from actors who didn’t want to perform the lines. In the circumstances, my co-writer and I decided to leave them to it, take the money and run. The end result was disastrous and the series vanished without trace... I’m not boasting but merely stating a fact when I say that the only successes I’ve had are those in which the actors were prepared to say my lines as written almost to the last comma and the producer was prepared to make them. Actors, and not just stars, are far too prone to tinker about with scripts, and producers are far too prone to let them. Any argument will usually produce only a sulky actor and a rotten performance for which the writer all too often gets the blame”

Physical attendance throughout the process is not easy and is unpaid and the writer cannot expect to attend every meeting, discussion, conversation in corridors and so on. Even if he could, there is no guarantee that his words would carry the day, though success brings its own reward:

"If you’re in the situation of writing your own show which is successful and has been running a long time, you’re then in a position to go down to rehearsals and to influence quite a few things. If you’re contracted to work on somebody else’s series you hand the script over to the producer, in my experience, working it that way, if you get 60% onto the screen of what you intended in the script you’re very lucky because the producer has his ideas of what’s wrong with the script, the star or stars will have other ideas..."

This writer, who coincidentally gave the figure of 60% matching the other writer quoted above, gave several examples of major interference by stars including, changing the script ‘on the night’ with the connivance of other cast members and, one presumes, the producer who had a primary responsibility to keep the stars happy. He had complained to Heads of Departments and executives but got nowhere, being told jokingly but firmly that the producer was right and that such and such star was, of course, an experienced performer who knew the business backwards and if he felt that a line needed changing he only had the best intentions for the show and so on. One of the producers he had worked with felt much the same. On one occasion, a star had prepared in secret some slapstick business which he brought out during the live recording to the amusement of the other actors and the hysteria of the gallery – but as an
employee of the company who obviously valued the star's services above his. He could do little but complain, accept, and be forewarned.

Another writer also felt his work had suffered through him not being at the centre of things (unlike the producer whose physical attendance is guaranteed and whose office serves as a tangible proof of his link with the company). He had some trouble during the early days of writing a particular series, especially in trying to achieve a balance between visual and verbal humour, and his major battles were with the star (present at all script conferences) who wanted to stress the former. Unfortunately for the writer, he was hospitalised for a period of weeks and on his return found that what little control he had, had vanished. The script was now a collection of pratfalls, walking into doors, and spilling drinks interspersed with gag-lines and name-calling, with the producer and star putting up a united front. Obviously, one may detect an element of bitterness in this type of example and all the writers equated 'good' shows with a high level of personal involvement and control, while the 'bad' shows were those where their script had been mutilated. This feeling of impotence was exacerbated by the pressure of time in the whole process which knocked out the possibility of considered re-writes and reasoned debate.

A typical diary of rehearsal would involve the cast seeing the script for the first time on a Monday morning (though the star is likely to have had prior knowledge) followed by four half-day

1. Burns (1977) identifies 3 kinds of authority enjoyed by producers: the possession of skill and information, the attributes of the post itself, and prestige (104-105). All of these are magnified by the producer's presence at the company (where the writer is just a visitor).
rehearsals in what one writer called a 'church hall' before the recording on the Friday night. Even if a writer has got the script he wants accepted before the Monday, it is likely that the stage reading of it will bring out points which may not have been foreseen. If changes are required by the producer, of his own volition or at the request of the cast, the writer cannot call for more time or argue his case at length. Certainly, at rehearsals attended during the course of research for this thesis, the writer was largely absent while his script was being read. It was possible to check from a spare script how many changes were made. There were only a few of any substance with the rest arising from awkward pronunciation, an actor's block with a particular line, and an unintentional innuendo. Those of substance were taken at the discretion of the producer who simply announced which lines would come out and which would go in; it was later established that these changes were made without reference to the writer. Throughout the rehearsals (and the final recording) there was no doubt whatsoever that the producer was totally in control though, it should be noted, there were no 'stars' in this series to challenge that authority. The pressure during rehearsals needs a decisive authority and a sole arbiter; if stars are involved, or the writer has sufficient power to be a voice, it is likely that agreement will be reached beforehand so that a united front is presented to the other cast members and staff.

The more established a writer becomes, the more control he may exercise, especially when the series is successful enough to increase his value to the company. The following quotes indicate the process of negotiation where the producer may adopt a more diplomatic profile in stating his authority. All the quotes are from writers:

"In the best of possible worlds — and this does happen surprisingly often — decisions are a group thing. Once a crunch of any kind
comes, the ultimate decision about a programme comes from the producer."

"One has to work intimately with the producer and he must be able to produce the show in the way that the writers have conceived it. The script has to be produced and directed more or less as it is written."

"They consult you at every stage. What we won't stand for is actors putting in their little jokes, most of them are old jokes. They put in a line that may get a laugh but completely throws the plot line. They think only of themselves. Actors tampering with a script is disastrous."

And this writer was prestigious and wise enough to agree scripts fully with the producer before the cast were ever involved. The problem was common enough, though, as there will always be lines that seem ripe for improvement.1

But to return to the balance of power:

"You do have a sort of control because it doesn't end with just writing it. I go to rehearsals and you are there to suggest, change, alter, put in or take out lines. Although it's not always acknowledged by the producer, the writer does have a certain amount of control. If he didn't like the way things were going he can always use the obvious weapon of saying 'We don't write any more if it's with this producer.' (Writer)

It may well an obvious weapon but its use might provoke a war that the writer is incapable of winning. The preferred ways of working were noted in the following quotes:

"When I write a script, I send it to the producer. He reads it, we meet and talk. He might have a point and I'll do a bit of re-writing so that when we get to the studio or to the rehearsal rooms, we are a united team. We know that what we've got on those pages is what we want." (Writer)

"I've never sent in a script without thinking that's the best I can do. When I send it in, I don't expect them to muck it about. I've seen scripts sent in by other writers and I can see that it's straight off the typewriter and they know they're going to have to re-write it several times. I do my re-writes before anybody sees it." (Writer)

1. As one writer noted: "The biggest difficulty with situation comedy is that you have to have plot and there are moments when you've got to deal with the plot—those are the moments when it isn't necessarily funny". And these are the sort of lines that attract unwelcome attention from, especially the old-time, stars who prefer the laughs to be continuous.
"The companies let you have a lot of authority. In lots of ways were acting as associate producers... we always have a clause in for our own protection that we have some degree of choice as regards the director and our permission will not be unreasonably withheld. That means we can't refuse a director if he's got sufficient credits" (Writer)

The mention of associate producer status is interesting as a number of writers saw the ideal world as one where they could produce as well. One of them, the hyphenate, said:

"In the early series I was also producer - it's not really enjoying executive powers, it's the knowledge that as producer what I really meant in that script in the first place will go on the air and can't be misinterpreted because I'm the one in the end, as producer not writer, who can say 'No, that's wrong'"

and two others claimed a great degree of control, the first through a forceful personality:

"...the writer has to be much more powerful (than in drama), at least in my experience. I go down there and play Hamlet and make a bloody nuisance of myself. I think writers far too often don't assert themselves in this field...they know much better than anyone else how the thing should be done"

and the second had managed to work himself into a position of such prestige that he was a self-declared exception

"I can direct actors. If I write something, I cast it. I know exactly what I want, what do I want some guy to come along and muck it up for me. I'm an exception, I dare say, to the rule. Supposing I do write something and (the producer) casts it wrongly - this can happen - and he's got no idea of what I want? If I lose control, the whole work goes up the spout. I've done hundreds of comedies and farces and this is my strength I feel"

Finally, here, one more writer may be quoted as his comments appear to represent the middle ground into which the majority of the writer/producer relationships can be placed. He was neither a relative beginner nor an exception and while it is not made explicit in this quote, further statements from him in answer to other questions stressed the ultimate control of the producer 'on the floor' (with his chain of command above):

"Before starting the series I had a couple of meetings with (the producer) long talks about the nature of the show, the qualities of the actors, the technical limitations we were
working under, et cetera, et cetera. Similarly, before starting the second series, we had a couple of long talks — again, assessing what happened in the first series, trying to build on strengths, eliminate weaknesses, extend and develop in healthy directions. Now, I'm writing the scripts, pass them to (the producer), he reacts, we'll meet to discuss possible amendments. (The star) and (the Head of Comedy) also see the scripts and have their say. My relationship with (the producer) is very friendly and easy-going. We laugh at the same things" (Writer)

Here is a fairly complete explanation and it may serve to suggest that the 'creative' artist who is dogmatic about the sanctity of his material is rarely found in television comedy. Rather, the artist becomes an artisan.

Having considered writers' perceptions, it is now possible to briefly consider how producers saw the working relationship, once again in terms of power and control. As usual, they were not as verbose as the writers, sometimes to the point of being monosyllabic. They were in control and whether or not they demonstrated this through orders, tact, guile, or veiled threats depended on the circumstances. Only two comments are worth quoting — they are representative of all the producers' views — and they both stress that negotiation from a position of power is the norm:

"I have the power, I suppose, to say 'That line shall not go in' or 'You will say that that way' but my way is to create the atmosphere, to guide and nurture the thing along" (Producer)

"(The producer plays) a very big part but obviously without the script you have nothing. You start with the egg and hatch it out. But as the company always says — any programme is a result of teamwork. The writers originate the idea but the total creation involves a lot of other people, not least the people playing it. A good script can be ruined by miscasting — the casting is very much the producer's and director's responsibility. Together with the writers perhaps, but the producer has the last word in all of that" (Producer)

Ironically, one of the writers had complained that this last producer had ruined a show by miscasting. Another writer, though, had the good
grace to state the producer's part as

"...very important indeed. Once the words have left you, he's in charge of everything. He's got to interpret the script the way the writer intended it" (emphasis added)

Whether or not this writer had always been correctly interpreted remained unanswered.

The producer is bound to serve the company to a greater extent than the writer and this, perhaps, is the basis of many decisions.

Academic and other commentators have examined or referred to the job of the producer in a variety of ways; among those not mentioned elsewhere in this work is Shubik (1973), herself an experienced producer of television drama. She gives a full account of play production where the job of the producer is to find the right scripts, assemble the 'creative and technical people' who

"...will bring the scripts to life, and to so orchestrate them that the end product will be what the author had in mind when the script was originally commissioned" (44)

In her definition the intention is clear - to work for and with the writer whose script, if properly presented, will be ipso facto good television. The situation in comedy appears to be the other way round with producers having rather less concern for the script as such and rather more in exercising their control to ensure that the end product is good television which satisfies their companies. Two

1. A definite part of this is the requirement that the output is televisually as good as can be expected. A not uncommon complaint from writers about producers was that they were too involved with the technical side of matters (and as the usual career course for a producer would include such training the interest is understandable on another level). One writer gave:

"Producers are helpful in casting and getting a new show away. Once it's under way...their main concern is to get the show on. Their job is not to teach the actors how to act, it's to put the camera scripts on. They can't wander around for days trying to get the actor to see the right motivation"

He added, that with the pressure of time, there was little chance to develop scripts and extend the cast; the producer had enough to do in just organising the comparatively mundane aspects.
articles also have some relevance. The first, by Blumler (1969), deals specifically with producers of political television and the coverage of an election campaign. He is rare among academic writers in the field in that he allows the producers more self-determinism than is often granted to them. They may contribute towards policy and shape it rather than being the socialised or unthinking recipients of it. This point of view has been, admittedly, somewhat ignored in this chapter but it is not desirable to rectify this omission since, although Blumler suggests that 'non-political' producers may act in the same way, little evidence was found to support this line among the writers and producers of situation comedy. The producers interviewed certainly did not see themselves as following policy without question but neither did they knowingly contribute towards it apart from in the most truistic sense. They were, rather, willing participants in the whole process of providing entertainment to a recognised standard as a received and agreed target (with the one exception of the producer who awaited his chance to break into more serious fields).

The second article, by Carey and in the same reader, concerns journalists. It has the following observation which more closely fits the situation comedy producer:

"The distinguishing characteristic of the professional communicator is that the message he produces has no necessary relation to his own thoughts and perceptions...his skill is not so much intellectual and critical as a skill at interpretation and communication (or obfuscation)" (1969:28)

It is suggested here that this skill is to interpret and communicate on two levels - the comic view of man as wayward but redeemable, a member of society which offers an affirmation of certain conventions and ideologies, and the television company view of what entertainment should properly comprise.

Mention has already been made of the concept of referral on contentious (or possibly contentious) issues and it is, perhaps, here that the
role of the producer as a responsible person is most apparent.

Garnham has some useful comments:

"This process (of referral) gives to the producer the illusion of freedom while in fact inhibiting the exercise of that freedom. A good producer learns to avoid worrying his over-worked boss by keeping off troublesome areas. If he refers up too often he will be accused of lacking individual initiative. If, on the other hand, he oversteps the mark without having referred up he will be labelled as irresponsible" (1973;28)

It cannot be agreed that this 'illusion of freedom' existed among the producers interviewed. They were all too well aware of the strictures imposed by the process. But this process does place further emphasis on responsibility to the company. In making a programme a certain way, which involves ironing out troublesome creases, they are internalising company policy and obviating the need to refer up, not from a sense of freedom but from surrogate power.

The success of a programme as understood in terms of relative contributions is not so much an indication of the implementation of an entertainment ideal as an example of the respondents' own prejudices. As may be expected, writers saw their own contribution as the crucial element (echoed by producers), though this necessarily leads one to assume, within a framework of control by producers, that the script matches company expectations. Understandably, writers thought that the less interference with a script, the greater the chance of a better programme. This can, of course, be phrased as the more scripts meet the producer's approval (on behalf of the company), the less interference they would suffer. While all of the following quotes refer to scripts as a major element, many give casting and the actors some weight, it may be borne in mind that in this area also the producer is instrumental.

Producers were usually modest about their own part in the proceedings, adding, perhaps, to the general belief that comedy writers are valued rarities. Their modesty probably reflects the diplomacy sometimes.
necessary to control the series in the best possible way:

"People say you've got to have ideas doing comedy. Rubbish - the ideas are not the important thing. The important things are the comedy writing and the comedy casting and the direction as such. In that order - scripts first" (Producer)

"Basically, a successful comedy is dependent on script and the artists. If you've got a good script and a bad cast, you've got nothing; if you've got a bad script and a good cast, you've got nothing. You've got to have a good script and a good cast (then) there's nothing much you can do to ruin it" (Producer)

Duncan Wood gives a similar outline:

"...I think there are three things to consider. The first is the script which I suppose is the key; the second is the casting; and the third is the direction. I've seen potentially good shows ruined by faults in each of these areas. Success is built out of all three factors complementing each other and gelling together" (1976:15)

It would have been satisfying for a producer to boldly declare himself as the lynchpin of the whole operation but none did.

Some writers also minimised the producer's contribution or ignored it all together:

"The first thing is to get the right actors, then to get the right script, then to get the parts to fit the actors"

"Above everything, you've got to have a good script, above everything else. A good script will just about carry a show. I've never seen a bad script carried by a good cast"

"I'd put the percentages at: scriptwriter 50%, producer 20%, cast 20%, and sheer luck 10%. I think everybody agrees that you can do nothing without a good script, but even the best script needs the alchemy of the rest. And if that 10% is missing, you haven't got a 90% good show. At best, it'll just be passable"

"There isn't a magic formula that guarantees success, otherwise we'd all just apply it and wait for the praise to swamp us. Working backwards, analysing the great shows...it's a synthesis of high-quality writing and high-quality performance that fit each other"

Four of the writers were rather kinder to producers; the first quote below even gives them central importance:

"You need a producer who understands exactly that what is to come over is what seems to be reality but we all know isn't quite that, without the actors commenting on the humour but letting it emerge"
"First a good script, second a good and sympathetic producer, then a good cast. Last, and hardest to achieve, an empathy between the people involved which results in everybody working for the good of the show and not for their own egos."

"The importance of the producer is enormous but not on a par with the scriptwriter. The original conception of the characters is all important, and the right actors to play the parts. If you've got the right actor and the right words, all he's got to do is shoot it."

"Good producers are very important, are very valuable. Bad producers are a nuisance; shows can succeed in spite of their producers (or) bad programmes can be made to look a lot better. The producer is crucial but if, for instance, the producer has selected the right writers or ideas from writers and cast it well, it may all be a success no matter what else he gets wrong. Equally, if he casts it wrong, you're finished. No script can survive wrong casting in my opinion."

Either the producers' role is minimal or it has been drastically underestimated by producers and scriptwriters alike. The former does not accord with past academic enquiry, television executives' pronouncements, or the findings of this thesis, and there does not appear to be a ready explanation to account for this apparent anomaly. An attempt has been made (Corliss 1975) to put Hollywood screenwriters back as the central element in film successes after any number of opposing 'auteur' theories of film directors but this pales into insignificance compared to the work of Powermaker (1950) who offers, among others, the following comments:

"The problem remains essentially one of knowing how to achieve the best conditions for creative story-telling in a mass-production system. This cannot be done by men whose drive is for domination rather than creativity, who think in formulae and in clichés, and who have no realistic concept of the audience (110)...Writing for the movies becomes the means to wealth or comfort, which eventually becomes the goal. The writers take over the executive and producer's values more successfully than the latter take over the artists' goals (149)...In Hollywood, the writer does not write to be read. Nor do most writers write because they have something to say, or to express a point of view but rather in order to earn large weekly salaries (151)."

Powermaker is equally vitriolic about producers and as both she and Corliss are writing of Hollywood there may be no direct
parallels. However, there does appear to be some sort of a link between the participants' own view of the proceedings (as reported by Corliss) and an outsider's view such as that of Powdermaker.

Conclusion

It is hoped that progress has been made in illuminating some of the factors which impinge upon the creation and production of situation comedies, especially if this chapter is taken in conjunction with the rest of this thesis. However, it is not proposed to use this conclusion to summarise this chapter but rather to point out three omissions in the account presented here.

The first is major. Only one Head of Comedy was actually interviewed though several others were met on a casual basis and the views of other executives were gathered from published material. Similarly, actors' and actresses' opinions have gone unrecorded. These methodological faults, totally the responsibility of the writer, really only came to light as the research progressed more and more in the direction of seeing situation comedies as entertainment defined by others in the business than just writers and producers. By then it was too late to try and complete the picture (though a suspicion remains that the artistes may not have added fruitfully to any discussion). It is trite to say, in this context, 'much research remains to be undertaken' but it is nonetheless true.

Secondly, throughout the chapter, it has been deliberate policy not to identify writers or producers by reference to the company or channel they were working for unless the occasion demanded. While much can be made of the differences between the BBC and ITV, and to a lesser extent between the individual commercial
companies, the similarities seemed to outweigh any such distinctions. Much of the critical work on television entertainment and almost all of the not-so-critical makes great play of the tradition of public service faced with a commercial, audience orientated challenge, but opinions gathered from the interviews so often merged that it appeared proper to speak of a television writer or producer rather than a BBC writer or an ITV producer. Had the respondents been identified by channel, it would have introduced an artificial sense of importance to such attachment for which less evidence was found than might be supposed.

Finally, there appears less data on the subjects of socialisation, organisation, internalisation and so on than might be considered preferable or necessary. The relative absence of reference to these topics need not mean that they are not at work in television but rather that they are so easy to infer but so difficult to identify concretely without a situational analysis of the greatest complexity.
CHAPTER EIGHT

APPROACHES TO THE AUDIENCE

The relationship between those who have access to media production and the audience for that output is not easy to determine but an initial assumption may be that the nature of that relationship helps to determine, amid the many factors outlined in previous chapters, the style and content of situation comedies, the output under discussion.

In this chapter, two aspects of the creator:audience relationship are examined: a content analysis of the billings which announce the programmes in the Radio Times and TV Times, and the context of production which records the programmes in front of a studio audience.

No attempts are made to undertake a content analysis of the programmes themselves, nor to examine the home audience and how they receive and react to the programmes.

(A) Coping the Home Audience

The billings\(^1\) appear in the Radio and TV Times\(^2\); they are actually worded by sub-editors to comply with limitations of space and layout but they are compiled from information supplied by the production staff of the individual programmes. Although the billings are written by employees of the two magazines, they are effectively straight from the desk of the programme producer; it may be instructive to see

1. Typical billings are: "Sally echoes the sentiments of many parents when she asks her teenage brood, 'Why do you never bring your friends to meet us?'" (...And Mother Makes Five); "Jean calmly announces to Sid that the romance has gone out of their marriage, that she's no longer excited by him and that she wants to take a lover" (Bless This House); "The plane carrying the concert party is forced down in the jungle. Are they this side of the enemy lines - or the other side?" (It Ain't Half Hot Mum).

2. These have respective circulations of approximately 3.4 and 3.3 millions (sources: BRAD 1976) with a much greater readership (claimed by the TV Times as 12 million; 19/4/75). While such figures say nothing about reading habits, one must assume that some of the producers' information reaches the audience. However, this is not too relevant - of more concern is what the producers think the audience should know, in a few lines, about their programmes.
what messages are carried.

However, a fair degree of caution is necessary in the interpretation of the data reported in this chapter; the data (or 'the billings', or 'the messages') will not bear extensive extrapolation but they do, on a simple level, serve three main functions. They forestall any other definition of the programme than comic; they outline key moments and elements of plot and prime the audience to expect a certain structure; and they reinforce assumptions about what constitutes a fit subject for comedy on television. This last function will receive the greatest attention in what follows, with the hope that this aspect of the billings, as a communication from the programme makers, will help to give a fuller picture of the whole process of television comedy.

Some brief mention of the methods of content analysis has been made in Chapter 5 and very little needs to be added here. A full review of the literature can be found in Goodlad (1969) and in Barcus (1959, and cited in Goodlad). Certain points, though, may be considered specifically in relation to the material presented here. Firstly, the level of content analysis is very basic - if whole programmes were under consideration then a great deal of refinement and depth would be needed. Programme billings are a minute, though it is suggested an instructive, part of the whole system and will not reveal more information as the analysis designed to extract that information becomes more complex. Secondly, the fact that the material defies profound examination is linked to the material's intimate connection to wider spheres of action (some of which are, therefore, incorporated in the text).

As the above is starting to sound like an argument against studying the billings, some defence may be in order. There is no guarantee that the audience pays any attention to the billings and this readily
is accepted. Rather, the interest is in what the producer sees as a sort of precis of the comic structure of his programme. A direct link exists, for example, between the billings and the programme where a 'star' name is involved - the billings will usually reflect the fact that the programme has been created around that star. Further, it may well be impossible to separate the billings from all the other sources of information about a programme to such an extent as would make their independent analysis worthwhile. Certainly, the billings must be seen in the light of the conventional wisdom existing about programmes. For example, _Love Thy Neighbour_ attained a very high level of popularity and the cast became well enough known to 'guest' on other television programmes on the strength of their character parts. The amount of public awareness mitigates the need for the producer to refer to the central theme of the programme - black neighbours, white neighbours - and allows him to refer to the plot alone with the central theme being implied. Purely quantitative analysis cannot cope with such contingencies.

Similarly, a new comedy series will usually be accompanied and announced by features in the television magazines, and by general publicity on television and in the press. The billings may take into account a degree of audience knowledge. Thus, _My Old Man_ revolved around the character of Sam, played by Clive Dunn; there was both general public knowledge (Dunn playing the role of the Old Contemptible in _Dad's Army_) and specific publicity (of a best-selling record by Dunn called 'Grendad'). It is enough for the billing to read

"Doris and Arthur are giving an important dinner party and it's going to be strictly a la Francaise. But how do you do onion soup without onions? It's old Sam to the rescue - with the usual results"

as 'old Sam' is loaded with connotations. Any series may have such

1. And this author was, one hopes, aware of that conventional wisdom at the time of the research.
connotations and the sort of content analysis which counts words and measures the length of sentences is clearly inappropriate.

It is difficult to agree with Berelson that

"Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication." (1952:18)

and maintain the relevance for the use of the term in this chapter. Similar definitions of content analysis can be found in Holsti (1968) but he suggests that different interpretations can be made from the same data; that is, there is a recognition of influences on the messages which are inaccessible to content analysis as defined above:

"Such data may lend themselves to three different interpretations; that authors write differently for dissimilar audiences, that the literature reflects basic value differences of the audiences, or that such materials shape the values and predispositions of the audience." (625)

Of particular relevance to this chapter is Holsti's suggestion, supported by exemplary evidence, that:

"For many purposes the theme, a single assertion about some subject, is the most useful unit of content analysis. It is almost indispensable in the study of propaganda, values, attitudes, and the like." (647)

Clearly, the problem of content analysis revolves around the need for objectivity in coding and classification to ensure consistency and the need for an awareness that the message is neither conceived nor transmitted in a vacuum. In the results which follow an attempt has been made to strike some sort of a balance between the two extremes, though if any preference exists it is certainly towards placing the messages in a wider context rather than confining them merely to the written word.

Results and Findings

Each of the 37 categories employed will be examined in turn with
some commentary thereon prior to general comments about them as a whole. Methodology is briefly noted in Appendix 3.

(1) Absence or Presence of Billings:

Out of the 310 programmes selected for analysis, 268 had billings (86%). Obviously, those programmes without billings must be excluded from much of the later analyses and only figure in numbers 6, 31, 34, and 35. A brief examination of those 42 programmes may supply some evidence as to why a billing was not used. Without exception, all 42 were broadcast on BBC 1 and covered such programmes as Sykes, The Liver Birds, and Forridge though the principle of 'no billing' did not necessarily run throughout the series. Repeated programmes were relatively unlikely to have billings and it may be assumed that this is partly because the comic resolution or twist in the plot which the billing would suggest but not reveal would be remembered by a substantial number of the audience. The fact that this is unique to BBC 1 suggests a conjunction between editorial policy on the Radio Times and the producers' own wishes, the latter factor probably bearing more weight as a number of repeats carried their original billings. Out of the 42 programmes, 27 had a subtitle which may act as a hook for viewers by either reminding them of the original if the programme is a repeat or by intriguing phrases but it is not really feasible to suggest that a subtitle can be placed on a par with a billing. Out of the total number of BBC 1 programmes 99 had a billing (70%) while ITV had 100% records.

1. While some comedy programmes, such as The Two Ronnies, have achieved higher audiences when they have been repeated, situation comedies, being dramatic and relying on plot, may not sustain a sufficient level of interest to the original viewer. However, there is usually a substantial audience for repeated programmes, though, owing to a lack of research data, it is not possible to say what percentage of this audience comprised of second-time viewers.
(2) Safeguards:

This category was included as a safeguard by way of a blank column and was, unused.

(3-5) Programme Numberings:

These categories contained the number given to the programme to enable easy cross-reference to the actual billings which were transcribed.

(6) Channels:

Out of the total number of programmes (310) 141 were transmitted on BBC 1, and 169 on ITV which gives a split of 45/55%. It is worth noting that in the field of situation comedies there is not a great deal of numerical difference between 'public service' and 'commercial' outputs. It would appear that the BBC tends to rely more heavily on their more popular programmes making a comeback during peak hours while ITV programmes were sometimes repeated in the afternoons (such as The Squirrels and Bless This House) and these repeats fell outside the scope of this survey. In terms of viewing hours, the BBC supplied approximately 70½ hours and ITV 84½ hours, giving a total of well over 6 days, round the clock non-stop viewing, over a period of 9 months. Throughout the period, there were no situation comedies on BBC2.

(7-10) Trouble and Conflict:

As far as possible, the implicit or explicit meaning of the billing was coded in terms of trouble and conflict or benefit and resolution. Out of the 268 billings, only 4 had no such suggestion including:

"This story is set in the Hollywood of 1927, the era of silent movies, prohibition, and instant stardom"

"What does the restless Thespian desire most in the world apart from money? A stage on which to perform and transport his audience to worlds of fantasy and make-believe. Lee demonstrates the many and varied facets of his art"
Obviously, there is a danger that in looking for 'trouble' one is likely to find it, especially as the billings were read as situation comedy billings with an awareness of their subject matter. However, a few further examples of the more typical billings may set the scene:

"Harry becomes rather peeved when the lovely Leonie rejects his romantic advances, but encourages Richard's. He hatches a little plan to get his own back but events take an unexpected turn"  
(The Rough with the Smooth)

"The last episode of the current series finds Waring on the verge of losing his heart to Kate, his job to Gascoigne — and his head, when everything gets on top of him"  
(Doctor on the Go)

"Fed up with not having a holiday and with Eddie hanging around all day, Joan decides to book a coach trip. But she doesn't tell Eddie"  
(Love Thy Neighbour)

"In the past, the staff at Grace Brothers have been allowed to take their annual holiday when and where they like. Suddenly, their freedom of choice is threatened!"  
(Are You Being Served)

The references to characters, usually by name, is discussed in category 32.

Bearing in mind that the codes of trouble and benefit, implied or explicit, are not mutually exclusive, the following breakdown can be given:

A benefit was explicitly given in only one billing
A benefit was implied in 3 billings, but in a further 5 in conjunction with implied trouble
Trouble was implied in 127 programmes
Trouble was explicitly given in 150 programmes

The overwhelming number of programme billings that referred to trouble are to be expected. Things will turn out all right in the end but only after the audience has been led through a plot which demands resolution of a problem which it has itself proposed. Through the wording of the billing, a picture of situation comedies as problem-solving exercises emerges; these problems tend to be social
in nature and involve man as an individual in a compromise with conventions, rules, and values.

(11) Marriage and Sex:

Out of the 264 billings (4, as previously mentioned, being largely free from 'conflict' or 'benefit'), 54 were related to marriage and of these, 52 referred to trouble and 2 linked the trouble to a benefit. It may be useful to take this category together with others, (12) sexual, (17) general family, and (18) intergenerational, which all involve classification of status through kinship:

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<th>(11)</th>
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<td>Total appearances</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
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Out of the 185, 47 of the billings were a mixture of two or more of the 4 categories, with 18 entries for a mixture of (17) and (18), 9 for (11) and (12), 7 for (11), (17), and (18), and smaller numbers for the other composites.

As can be seen, some 70% of the total billings linked trouble and conflict to the family in one way or another; while this may be representative of the actual programmes this can only be implied. What can be said is that the producers, reflecting programme content by precis, give a great deal of emphasis to socially regulated relations between the sexes and age groups as a cause of comic misadventure.

(13) Economics and Finance:

In all, there were 22 billings where money, or usually the lack of it, was seen as the cause of trouble. The ability to correctly handle money, to economise, and make the most of scarce resources are all esteemed characteristics and it is the lack of these abilities coupled with the concept of money as a malicious entity.
which defies management by comic characters that permeates the billings. There is an air of inevitability and submission to both circumstances and character traits about the following:

"After a surprise income tax demand the Redway family face a spell of austerity. Sally, who usually thinks money is for burning holes in pockets, joins in the economy drive with a vengeance, but she reckons without a visit from her mum and a run-in with the bookmaker..." (...And Mother Makes Five)

(14) Violence:
As may be expected, violence as a cause of misfortune was not well represented. Only 8 billings contained such a reference (and 2 of these, from different series, attributed the violence to professional wrestling). Violence does not easily co-exist with a lighthearted approach - it is direct and it violates individuals - and what violence there was tended to be closely linked to slapstick and discomfort rather than brute force. While marriage and money might work to maintain the social order, violence acts to defeat it (unless, of course, it is legitimised violence).

(15) Medical Matters:
As Doctor on the Go was running through part of the sample period it might have been thought that billings relating to illness would have been overrepresented. However, while 19 billings were recorded only one of these came from that series ("A slipped disc puts Waring out of action"); 'trouble' in Doctor on the Go usually stemmed from colleagues at work. As with violence, illness and physical defects are not seen as fit subjects for situation comedy unless they are slight and embarrassing.

(16) Crime:
There were 12 billings which gave criminal, as opposed to immoral or antisocial, actions as a cause of trouble. None of the 'crimes' were serious and they were used to introduce action in plots of
continuing relationships in marriage and at work.

(17) The Family:

A specific reference to family matters gave 37 entries but these may be seen in conjunction with those under (11), (12), and (18). Once again, the social nature of comedy is dominant and a comic drama has much potential for defining and re-defining the structural links of kinship through scripted personalities in a family setting. The family does, of course, have an advantage from the point of view of production in that the household provides a relatively cheap and instantly recognisable 'stage' for drama; Murdock and Halloran (in Fischer 1979) have argued, with regard to 'straight' dramatic production, that pressures of cost may lead towards the naturalistic conventions of the stage and away from cinematic realism through the expedient of studio settings. Certainly, the static scenario of the family context may mean the production can reasonably take place on sets of kitchen and living room, with the nature of family relationships providing much material for plots.

(18) Generations:

40 billings had conflict between generations as a root; the typical dimension was between parents and their children, including their children's friends. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren was characterised by devotion and mutual caring.

In age when the nuclear family in society is common, one could almost understand the predominance of comedies dealing with father, mother, and two or three children. In the 1970's, when household composition throughout Britain had the 'model' family in the minority (and the majority made up of single parent families, unmarried couples, childless couples, the aged and so on), it is more surprising to
find comedy billings, and by extension comedies themselves, dealing with the traditional family set-up. Even when the increasing frequency of divorce is acknowledged, it is likely to be within the framework of the following:

"Friday is divorce day, and Jen would be completely free if it weren't for her ex-husband, her son, her home help, her mother, her brother-in-law etc. etc." (Going, Going, Gone...Free?)

(19) Race:

16 billings gave race as a source of conflict though, as previously indicated, such series as Love Thy Neighbour had no need to refer specifically to race, especially when the main black and white characters were named in the billings:

"Eddie and Bill decide to settle their differences in the old-fashioned way...with a duel at dawn. Nobby starts it all when he shows off his antique pistols at the club..."

Race enters the picture more pointedly in:

"Eddie returns from holiday to find that somebody has taken over his very own seat in the Lion and Lamb! Not only that but the Co-op's been transformed into the Taj Mahal Emporium and last but not least - an ugly rumour that Fortnum and Mason is about to be converted into a Curry Centre"

Clashes of culture on a level of national characteristics were also found in the billings from the series It Ain't Half Hot Mum, with a religious dimension as in:

"The sergeant-major forcibly removes a Holy Man from the Parade Ground and is cursed"

"The monsoon rain catches the concert party without transport miles from Deolali camp. They take refuge in a ruined temple"

(20) Work:

In this broad group, there were 47 entries. Several of the series running at the time were set in a background of work though few were as blatant as:

"So what would you do if you were made redundant by a chimpanzee? That's the situation that faces Jim and rapidly involves his workmates, his boss and his union" (Too Much Monkey Business)
The work situation itself tended to be either the office (several series), a hospital (Doctor on the Go), or a department store (Are You Being Served). Both The Rag Trade and Curry and Chips, each set in more down-market workplaces, were not running during the period.

The sort of conflict associated with work, with the odd exception such as the redundancy noted above, involved petty bureaucracy, flirtations, holiday schedules and so on. The darker side of union/management affairs, unemployment, and liquidation were ignored in favour of office politics and who was taking who to the company dance.

(21) Class:

There were only 8 billings referring to class and social status, of which the following was the most explicit:

"A heavy fall of snow cuts off the caravan site from the outside world. The high-class Jeremy and Susan Crichton-Jones and their working-class neighbours, Wally and Lily Friggs are at the mercy of the elements with dwindling supplies of fuel and food. They form an uneasy liaison to fight the common foe" (Rosmary Jones)

If trends could be established from such a small number, they would be that class barriers are intransigent and that efforts to act above or below one's class are predictably doomed.

The fact that there were so few billings in this category should not be taken to suggest that class does not figure widely throughout any number of programmes themselves. The conclusion, rather, is invited that producers do not see such a conflict as central, or at least as a central concern of the information they wish to impart about their programmes. Certainly, a very large number of shows deal with class in the wider sense — often by dealing within a series with characters drawn exclusively from one class, such as The Good Life — without introducing conflicts because of that feature. In the programmes, comedy is often generated by intrusions from one class into another: the middle-class family disrupted by the arrival of
a workman, the working-class pub regulars being confronted by an occasional Major in a camel-hair coat, the hospital staff having to deal with an aristocrat with gout. It is rare, though, for this sort of occurrence to be of such a level of plot importance to warrant inclusion in the billing.

(22) Change of Status:

This category gave 50 examples, including:

"Eddie, Bill and all the regulars are shocked when Jacko, the confirmed bachelor, announces that he's in love - and fixed the wedding date" *(Love Thy Neighbour)*

"It is rumoured that there is to be a vacancy on the board of directors of Grace Brothers. Everybody is hoping for promotion" *(Are You Being Served)*

Obviously, the change in status may be actual or suggested (and a common device used in the billings is to announce a likely change which does not take place in the programme). If status is separated into structural (for example, man to husband or wife to mother) and non-structural change (promotion or moving house), then the latter is much likelier to be found in the programme than the former. The majority of plots are, in a sense, reversible as expected pregnancies turn out to be phantom, 'stolen' articles are only mislaid, or proposals of marriage as mistaken as Pickwick's to Mrs. Bardell. The billings in these cases are very much used to set up what appears to be a structural change, just as the plot will depend on carrying the audience as far as possible towards the denouement.

(23) Disruption of Routine:

There were 107 entries in the billings (21 of which were also coded with the previous category) involving the unexpected, disruption, and change in the general sense:

"C.D. and Clara's first anniversary comes round and each is determined to surprise the other. But the surprises they get are not exactly the ones they had so carefully planned" *(No - Honestly)*
It may be stating the obvious but something has to happen in a comedy programme as in any other. Just as the billing for a serious play will give a set of circumstances requiring action and resolution, so will the sort of billing under discussion. The major difference is that the problems posed in comedy will be resolved satisfactorily.

A billing like:

"Money talks - and the way to get Sam to do something he doesn't like is to bribe him. Arthur, his son-in-law, is well aware of this, but the best laid plans..." (My Old Man)

can really only imply comedy, and, taken with the wealth of other information available about the programme to the audience, manifestly states a source of trouble in such a way that the trouble is not serious and that all will be well in the end.

(24) Inevitable Action:

Following Bergson's concept of 'inelasticity', it might be expected that entries relating to the inevitable would be fairly common and they occurred in 47 instances:

"From Havana comes a new recruit and Briggs takes him on as a pupil. But when you're learning the ropes from someone like Briggs, what you get is mostly tangles!" (The Top Secret Life of Edgar Briggs)

"You probably know Sadie. After 23 years of marriage, she asks her husband Norman if there is anything else in life apart from cooking and cleaning. You probably know Norman, too. He wasn't even listening to her questions" (Sadie, It's Cold Outside)

It must be assumed that an established series has the potential to impart more information than actually appears in the billings. Given a well-developed character, the nature of the precis may be simplified - placing a certain character in a situation will automatically invoke set responses which range from, depending on the character, bigotry, naivety, and innocence to artfulness and melancholy. Many programmes rely on a pattern of predictable characters reacting to disruption; it is up to the producer to decide which element to
emphasise in the billing.

(25) Friends and Neighbours:

In a fairly wide category, there were 51 entries. In many shows, such as Love Thy Neighbour and The Good Life, a central concern of the script is the relationship between sets of married neighbours; other shows, Last of the Summer Wine and Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads for example, had a pair or group of friends as the lead characters. Examples would include:

"A local election gets under way and Rigby drums up support for his own candidate. But the sitting tenants of the Rigby household have other ideas on who should stand up and be counted" (Rising Damp)

"The Goods' garden is now well under way, and Tom is managing to barter reasonably successfully. When Margo finds out that Tom and Barbara want to keep pigs, she enlists the help of the local residents association" (The Good Life)

The fact that friends or neighbours are usually the cause of aggravation rather than a source of help and solace underlines the social nature of comedy - while relationships may deteriorate from time to time, the plot resolution requires, in a light-hearted way, the restoration of the previous balance (or imbalance). Feuds between neighbours will be at the level of back garden animosity rather than excessive hatred. Long lost friends may, of course, be treated differently if they are not to reappear in the series but the constant and regular relationships need to be continued. The billings reflect this: those with whom we have to maintain contacts in daily existence will be, in comedy, problematic but also indispensable with any conflicts needing to be rehabilitated.

(26) Man and Woman:

This category contained 13 entries which had specifically non-erotic references to women in what might be interpreted as a sexist manner. Female characters had been described as 'scatter-brained' or careerist,
or more generally as in the following:

"Jeremy offers to pay Wally a share in the running expenses of his car - if he can use it to have Susan drive him to the station and pick him up at night throughout the working week. Wally agrees. But then they discover that Susan can't drive. So they decide to teach her..."  (Romany Jones)

"Henry has always looked with indulgence on Jane's 'casual interest' in the Mother of Parliaments. But it's a different matter when that interest threatens to disrupt an important business deal"  (My Honourable Mrs.)

There was no explicit evidence of a general categorisation of women as 'the weaker sex' but the first billing, for example, does carry strong implications of 'women drivers' in a derogatory sense (as did, in fact, the plot itself).

As a side issue, there was only one explicit reference to homosexuality (though others could have been inferred from passing knowledge of the characters). The relevant part of the billing ran:

"George and Gilbert are normally such good friends and have a very gay time, but when Gilbert starts to suffer from nervous exhaustion and his dress designs for the boutique are rejected, George gets very angry"  (Not On Your Nellie)

(27) Power and Authority:

With Dad's Army and It Ain't Half Hot Mum running through the period, it is not surprising that entries numbered as high as 41. Examples of the specifically military billing were:

"Mainwaring's platoon are to signpost the route for a big exercise. They discover a steam engine obstructing the road"  (Dad's Army)

"A bomb drops on the outskirts of Walmington-on-Sea. Mainwaring declares martial law"  (Dad's Army)

Once again, some knowledge of the series must be assumed - in the second example, the billing could easily be read as a synopsis for a serious drama unless one knew the character of Mainwaring (as pompous and power-assuming) and that the series was a comedy. Power relationships in the wider sense were marked by the feel of the 'little man' against bureaucracy; authority could be challenged
but was unlikely to be overthrown.

(28) Delusions:

One might have expected more than 21 entries in a category which included misunderstandings and mistakes identities; there is much critical support, outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 and examined in Chapter 4, for the idea of the mistake, the lack of understanding, as playing a large part in comedy and joking.

'Mistakes' cannot be allowed to continue longer than a brief time. Their existence lies in the character's misinterpretation of the true facts or his continued maintenance of a false premise; they must be discovered or reinterpreted for the programme to begin again the following week. For example, the partial precis of plot stated by this billing demands that the mistake be rectified:

"Tilly's father takes to his bed with a slight chill and his mother calls the doctor. Billy overhears part of their conversation and misunderstands the doctor's remarks" (Billy Liar)

While it is rare to resolve the plot in the billing, one may safely assume that the programme itself will contain elucidation when the truth of the situation is made clear. The 'hook' is in the billing - how will the character cope with the results of his misunderstanding, and how will the truth be made apparent.

(29) Misjudgement:

10 entries were based on a lack of skill or a deficiency of understanding through stupidity or unintentional behaviour. The reason for the comparatively small number may be that while such deficiencies are common in the programmes, the mere reference to a character with those failings, in the billing will be enough to indicate circumstances with a predetermined conclusion. Also, this category may, perhaps, be subsumed under the preceding.
(30) Others:

Unspecified causes of conflict gave 170 entries though the majority of these were in conjunction with other categories. Thus:

"Bootsie and Snudge hire a housekeeper only to find that they prefer Snudge's attempts at cooking and cleaning to the newcomer's houseprood ways" (Bootsie and Snudge)

would come under (23) - disruption of routine - as well as (30). A source of conflict may be given in wide terms of marriage or work, money or race but this would usually be supplemented by reference to a specific aspect of the plot such as would defy categorisation.

(31) New Programmes:

Out of the all the programmes during the period, 23 were either 'one-off' shows or were introductory episodes of a new series. As may be expected with these, the billings tended to give more information than usual and further information was supplied by articles in the television magazines and advertisements on the television itself (usually showing excerpts and stressing the day and time of transmission). For a brand new series, there could be no doubt that the intention was to be comic; 'new' series that were extensions of existing ones were almost inevitably defined as 'popular' and their return 'welcome'.

One oddity during the period was Cilla's Comedy Six - six programmes with Cilla Black playing different characters in a variety of circumstances:

"A new comedy series for singer Cilla Black. In this first episode Cilla, as Linda Pearson, begins to wonder what kind of company her husband is keeping. Is he working late at the office? Or are there two women in his life sharing the same corner"

"This week Cilla is Doris Livesey, the ideal average housewife, who has been chosen by a consumer research organisation as a domestic guinea pig"

The intention of the company was to choose whichever one of the
six episodes received the best response and showed the most promise; this could then be expanded into a full series. However, no more were made.

(32) Named Characters:

As should be apparent, the majority of billings (246, in fact) referred by name to a character in the programme. As well as the obvious reason that it is easier to write a synopsis with such references than without, this also lets the producer rely on what the audience may already know of the character. Occasionally, billings omitted to name a character and were rather vague:

"Trouble stems from a family fund-raising scheme" (Bless This House)

"Stag parties are often a bone of contention. This is no exception" (Second Time Around)

It would appear that the producer here has only supplied a minimum of detail to the writer of the billing.

(33) Esteem and Disparagement:

Those billings which referred to a character, by name or other identification, were coded as to whether the character was esteemed (10 entries) or disparaged (11). However, praise was faint and vilification fainter: there were no heroes or villains, and the programmes as advertised by the billings dealt with the prosaic world.

(34) Actors and Actresses:

Out of 222 programmes where the names of the leading characters appeared above the billings, 186 had more male names than female and 36 vice versa. The high ratio in favour of actors is part represented by the number of programmes with almost totally male casts (Dad's Army, Whatever Happened to the Likely Lad?) and those where actresses were even rarer and did not form part of
the established cast (Porridge, It Ain't Half Hot Mum). Programmes where actresses outnumbered actors, at least when appearing above the billing title, included The Liver Birds and Man About the House. Even where one might expect parity, though, the balance swung in favour of actors either by naming a male star above the title with the female underneath or by, say, naming the husband and wife characters plus a male lead who played a work colleague of the former.

(35) Days of the Week:

The most popular days for transmission were Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday (with between 60 to 70 each); the least popular was Saturday with only 7, a single series. Broadcasting times varied but were usually between 7 and 9pm; the slightly more 'adult' series, such as The Roach with the Smooth, were shown later.

(36) Subtitles:

212 out of the 268 programmes with billings had subtitles; 27 out of the 42 programmes without billings also had them. The subtitles were rarely used to supply any information about the episode and were used more just to identify it and give the writer of the billing the chance to make punning allusions. Working titles of episodes, used during rehearsals and recording, were often used as subtitles (this information from an interviewed producer) but it was not unknown for them to be changed when appearing with the billing.

(37) Is This a Comedy?:

While most of the billings had a strong implication of humour, only 21 actually specified that comedy was intended:

"The return of this popular comedy series featuring the chaotic conflicts of three generations..." (How's Your Father)

"Another laughter-filled adventure on the caravan site which has the oddest assortment of inhabitants" (Romany Jones)

Some billings seem to have been written in complete ignorance of the
The scourges of St. Swithin's, Waring and Co., take up their stethoscopes to tackle another epidemic of medical mayhem"  
(Doctor on the Go)

"Another chance to see some of the madcap adventures of Robin, Chrisay, and Jo who share a flat in London's bed-sitter land"  
(Man About the House)

One can only assume that there was a breakdown in communication between the producer and the writer of the billing.

Concluding Remarks:

Two interconnected themes have been present in the foregoing remarks on billings - the information carried by them is provided by the programme makers about their programmes, and that they rely on partial precis supported by alternative sources of information about the programme. In the absence of a full-scale content analysis of the programmes themselves, some suggestions may be made about the concerns of situation comedies.

Firstly, the plot is unlikely to be far-fetched or unreasonable. The workaday world supplies the core material with the options of usual things happening to unusual people or vice versa as plot devices. A basis in normal everyday life is common and the exceptions tend towards slapstick with a minimum of plot and a maximum of action. Characters must be believable and likeable; nobody is all good or all bad and human weaknesses abound.

Secondly, the outlook is predominantly ethical. Breaking the law is either unintentional or in the nature of a misdemeanour and forgiven; serious crime enters the world through a loophole whereby 'theft' turns out to be misplacement and 'murder plots' are misheard.

Thirdly, the people who got married face a number of problems which, while caused by the state of marriage, are amplified in such a way by human weaknesses to preserve the institution of marriage by
accepting it, and putting the emphasis of blame on the participants. If a couple go as far as divorce, the ties may be legally broken but still in effect, and a comedy of attempted reconciliations will ensue; the ship of marriage is able to weather storms and mutinies.

The new relationships created by marriage are seen as problematic but not irresolvable; their regulation and continuance are described and applauded as principles. Mothers-in-law may interfere and connive with their daughters (or sons) but their intentions are well-meaning; children may rebel against parents but not to the level of open revolt. Sex before marriage is admitted to occur but attempts are invariably foiled by circumstances, mismanaged or lied about. Sex within marriage is loving rather than lustful while extramarital sex tends to be a pretence, a charade to induce jealousy.

Fourthly, to live normally and happily one must maintain relations with other people, especially those with whom contact is regular. When friction occurs, say between neighbours, the conflict will be kept at a level which does not permit intense discomfort or a complete breakdown; sparring neighbours or friends may be united in the face of an 'outside' attack.

All in all, the billings give a picture of the world as full of minor irritations which could be avoided if only the comic characters behaved normally and rationally. There is nothing wrong with the world as such; the faults are with the characters in it.
In past chapters, one of the questions that has been raised is 'What is the connection, if any, between laughter and comedy?'. The answer has been suggested that the connection does exist and that it is a necessary one unless comedy is continually treated in terms of literary analysis. Comic works by playwrights from Aristophanes to Wilde and authors from Rabelais to Thurber have been seen by many as somehow existing in perpetuity, as part of a store of material in the comic domain. A lack of performance does not impinge on their continued existence just as anthologies of jokes may be popular and do not need to be read to an audience. On the other hand, a joke-telling session needs an audience where the laughter of the listeners completes the circuit by signifying agreement, pleasure, understanding or whatever. Television situation comedy occupies a bastardised position (as far as performance and the audience is concerned) and while, according to Potts (1949:10), the end result of comedy may not be to produce laughter, if laughter is not produced then Heads of Comedy will roll.

Almost every situation comedy transmitted on British television is recorded in the presence of an audience ranging in size from about 250 to 350 people. The reason is twofold - the presence of a laughing audience enables the cast of the programme to build up the script and time their lines, and the audience laughter is supposed to give cues to and encourage enjoyment in the television viewing audience at home.

Timing and Performance

It is now conventional wisdom that to play comedy successfully one

1. The American programme MASH is broadcast here without a laughter soundtrack (though 'with' in America (Reiss 1980)). The BBC decided that the subjects of war, death, and hospitals should be shown without what might be thought intrusive laughter.
needs 'timing' though this apparently magical quality defies precise
definition. Fry and Allen do, however, come close in their description
of a Jack Benny joke:

"A robber accosts Benny with 'your money or your life'.
Passaumussssss. Finally the robber demands, 'Well?!'
To which Benny replies, 'I'm thinking! I'm thinking!'" (136)

They then proceed to analyse the performance

"The timing, or rhythm in that exchange is especially crucial.
Even before the spoken punchline, 'I'm thinking! I'm thinking!
is delivered, an initial punchline is presented in the length-
ening pause. As the pause extends longer and longer, under-
lining the miser's conflict of priorities, more and more
people begin laughing. Timing, itself, becomes a joke" (136)

Performers themselves certainly stress timing as a key element in
good comedy playing and this is as true of the stand-up, joke-
telling comedians as it is of the actor or actress playing a role
in a comedy. Quotes supporting this assertion abound in, for
example, the works of Nathan (1971), Wilde (1973) and Fisher (1976).
The art of timing, while improved by experience, can really only
exist with regard to a response. It depends on some sort of re-
saction. A reasonable parallel, is that of the theatre tour in the
'provinces' before opening in the West End of London. Experiments
can be undertaken with whole parts of the script, subtle nuances,
deletions and additions to all aspects of performance and the
end result, apparently honed down in the light of provincial re-
saction, may be presented as a finished product.

As with any writing, a degree of prediction must exist. During
rehearsals for comedies attempts are made by both media pro-
fessionals (the producer and director, assistant floor manager,
prompt and so on) and onlookers (members of the cast, friends,
academic researchers) to give some sort of response which indi-
cates how everything is going to the performing actors. However,
until that programme is actually performed in front of a large
and expectant audience no-one can accurately predict exactly where all the laughs are going to come. The scriptwriter, certainly, has a good idea but is by no means infallible, and will often attend rehearsals to suggest immediate alterations. If, however, his status is such that the script may be changed without his agreement then the responsibility invariably falls to the producer or the director. The whole process is one where the optimum presentation of the programme is sought; not only because television time is expensive and limited but also because the transmission is a showcase for the channel and the team of professionals involved. Comedy programmes are written with supposedly funny lines and if these do not achieve the full laughing support of the studio audience then blame may be apportioned for the failure.

The studio audience is there to help complete the circuit. Performance may be raised to concert pitch and the whole production slips easily into gear as expected laughs materialise and rehearsed actions and pauses bring appropriate response. Without the audience the circuit is never completed and performance falls back on guesswork and experience. Certainly, some comedies are transmitted without the intervening studio audience as a live presence. Some episodes of series have been filmed totally on location (for reasons of plot, for example) and then been shown to an audience to provide a laughter soundtrack. Others have just had a mechanical soundtrack added though in both instances it is obvious that the performers miss out on the benefit of a theatrical occasion to improve their playing. The following quotes, taken from interview data are representative of professional opinion about comedies recorded in vacuo

"...they've put a laughter track on afterwards and it just isn't the same. It's absolutely essential if you're doing comedy for the actors to have something to time against. Timing's
all essential and you've got to have an audience, hopefully
laughing, for the actors to work with" (Writer)

"I think it's nice for the actors to have (laughter) because it
does enable them to time it - the timing is the essence. It
encourages them, so long as they are reacting of course, and
that gives them an extra lift because they know that they're
entertaining immediately" (Producer)

For the cast, certainly, a favourable and definitely audible reaction
improves performance - pace and intensity can be timed and measured,
the response predicted in rehearsal is forthcoming and confidence
boosted accordingly. Laughs can also be milked, and anecdotes are
 legion of how the more experienced actors and actresses can quickly
respond to an unexpected laugh (or, more importantly, an unexpected
silence) without breaking the continuity of the performance. To play
comedy successfully requires an audience who can be cajoled, forced,
or entertained enough to laugh; as the response of the millions of
home viewers cannot be tapped, a surrogate audience is employed to
try and duplicate a theatrical atmosphere. The atmosphere has been
aptly, if effervescently, described by a successful husband and wife
acting partnership (best known for comedy roles):

"You embrace them into your moves and move with them...you
dance with them... (a good audience) move like a sea, they
weave around like corn, and you do dance with them"
(John Alderton and Pauline Collins in the Radio Times 19/4/75)

Both partners agreed that, for them, an audience is indispensable; or
very nearly so, when they are acting comedy; if there is no audience,
the wife relies on the reactions of cameramen, prop assistants or
anyone else who happened to be about. It may, of course, be suggested
that this situation parallels the way that comedy feature films are
made, and this is accepted. It is argued, though, that an element
of live performance will enhance the production to such an extent
that the problems arising from the presence of a studio audience
are outweighed by the advantages. The most important benefit as
seen by television personnel is that the home audience are provided
with a set of cues to magnify their enjoyment and comprehension.

**Cues and Contagion**

As noted in earlier chapters, many commentators on comedy have stressed the desirability or necessity of 'cues' which classify what follows as humorous. At first sight, the presence of such cues in television may appear somewhat paternalistic in that their existence seems to bemoan a lack of discernment in the audience. In fact, however, they represent to some extent the striving for unity in professional work. It is seen as right and proper that a light and inconsequential comedy be preceded by light and inconsequential music, for example, or that programmes have flippant titles. The general publicity surrounding a comedy series need not be seen as gently leading the dull public by the nose to the conclusion that 'this' is comedy and therefore worth laughing at. But it does stress the all important distinction embodied in television's professional ethos that comedy requires no serious reaction or thought from the audience. Actors appearing in the media will often present themselves, in the cause of promotion no doubt, as the characters that they play in a comedy series. A character from *Dad's Army*, say, may be expected to open a fete in a different way from an actor noted for serious roles. An announcement giving details of programmes on television that night may include an excerpt of comedy but only if it demonstrates the fact that it is a comedy by audible laughter.

Two aspects of cues require some attention here. The content of billings has been briefly discussed above; below, the cue of laughter, as an integral part of the studio process, is discussed.

Apart from enhancing live performance, the laughter of the studio audience, as recorded and later transmitted with the programme, is reckoned by producers and writers to have a contagious effect —
whether or not this contagion exists is unimportant, though the belief that it does has certain consequences. The sound of the laughter reinforces the definition of the programme as supposedly funny; irrespective of the reactions to this of the home audience, the supposed desideratum of a laughter soundtrack requires the presence of a studio audience:

"It's on the assumption that laughter is infectious and that if you're watching a comedy programme at home, all by yourself, or just you and the wife, and you hear people laughing, that tells you it's a funny show. Now I'm not saying that that's good reasoning, I think that that is the reasoning" (Writer)

More on the studio audience later.

Canned Laughter

Most practitioners vehemently deny that canned or dubbed laughter is ever used. It is seen as 'cheating' and implies that the real comedy is of insufficient strength to raise the necessary reaction from the studio audience. Where the use of canned laughter has been admitted, the reasons given are technical rather than artistic — if, for example, a laugh has been cut off in mid-vocalisation because of a mechanical breakdown, the producer may well feel justified in using a complete laugh to recreate the original.

The defensive attitude of those working in television is somewhat understandable and the use of canned laughter in situations where

1. The academic literature relating to the matter has been reviewed by Chapman (1976) and Fuller (1977). Chapman, referring to an experiment has: "The findings...vindicated the utilisation of dubbed laughter, showing that when adults are solitary recipients of humour, they laugh more if there is laughter accompanying the presentation" (1976:156). The experiment involved university students and the material was presented in joke cartoon format so there is no direct parallel with comedy on television; however, the implication is there. None of the producers and writers interviewed for this work had any knowledge of the academic findings in this field.
an absence of laughter would create an uncalled for atmosphere of high drama, seems warranted. When it is patently obvious that a certain line or scene is intended to raise a laugh it is quite unnerving for the response to be hushed silence. The bare statement "I could strangle my mother-in-law" needs the cue of laughter to ensure that the more sinister meaning does not surface however briefly. The home viewer knows he is watching a comedy; an unexpected silence may be enough to raise the suggestion of doubt.

That canned laughter is used seems irrefutable. Speaking on television the then Head of Comedy at London Weekend Television gave the following reasons. The quote is lengthy but may be offered as a definitive public statement from an experienced producer and administrator:

"The process of making a half-hour comedy in front of a studio audience is very complex. It doesn't happen in one half-hour as you eventually see it at home. It can take up to an hour and a half, by the end of an hour and a half the studio audience can be very tired and maybe laughing a good deal less than they would if they saw the thing straight through in one half-hour. You also occasionally have to do re-takes of one scene and no amount of good will from the studio audience is going to keep the same laughs coming on the fifth re-take of a piece of business as on the first. And if we have to, for technical reasons, use the fifth re-take it's rather odd when you end up with a funny piece of business in the context of a funny show - getting no reaction at all. It is sometimes necessary for some reasons that I have outlined, to repair the genuine reaction that you got from your what we hope is a typical sort of audience and what happens is that the sound supervisor who was there with the original audience has then to try to re-create the sound of that audience simply to paper over the cracks which have been caused by the complications of recording that show.

What you have to do if you are repairing in any way, you have to try and re-create that laugh. Now you may be lucky that you have a clean laugh from the original take which you may use. If it's got actors' lines over you can't. Otherwise what would you do? I mean you take a laugh from somewhere and have a box of laughs I suppose. I mean to describe the process makes it sound very peculiar indeed and probably puts a wrong emphasis on it but because this is a thing that is necessary to do on occasion in sound dubbing suite has a collection of laughs of different sizes, different kinds of sexes whatever, and you choose from it to match as best you can your original audience."
Because you're not going to make an unfunny programme funnier by plastering it with laughter and saying, 'Look, there's lots of people laughing,' it simply doesn't work and I think that the programmes that try that get egg all over their faces and it's very evident. Of course it's tempting but we make very sure that really is not what we're trying to do."

(Humphrey Barclay, speaking on Look Here 7/1/78 and quoted here with author's permission.)

Understandably, perhaps, writers were more prepared to discuss canned laughter - since they are not 'staff' in the sense that producers are - and they give indications that it is not always used purely for technical reasons.

"It's very hard to do it convincingly, different sorts of lines get different sorts of laughs, there's everything from knowing chuckles to screams of hysterical laughter... I think everybody uses it in an emergency. I think, like, if you've done a show that nobody's laughed at... I think nearly always, though it's commonly denied by everybody, people in fact do stick on a few laughs" (Scriptwriter)

Other responses included phrases like 'tickle it up a bit' and 'you just do a little bit of laughter over it' with the added explanations that not only have the cast rehearsed the pauses for audience laughter but also that the final transmitted product needs to be seen (and heard) at its best. Most people found it easy to justify the use of canned laughter especially if it was edited from that particular recording. Where it was made necessary because of a re-take then it was deemed sensible to use the best laugh they could as they had 'already won it' fairly. Finally, it may be mentioned that responsibility in this area rests, at the time, with the producer though senior executives may intervene between recording and transmission.

The position in America would appear to be much more developed for, according to one scriptwriter

"Another terrible thing that goes on today, which means that there is really no point in fighting in a story conference over whether something is funny or not is that they can easily state it's going to be funny - because they are going to push the laugh machine. We're breeding a whole set of people holding the reins who never worked with an audience in their lives. They simply don't know
what it means to work with an audience. The guy comes in with the machine and he plays it like a piano. As he does it, the producer says, 'No, wait a minute, I want a smaller laugh', or 'I want a bigger laugh'..." (quoted in Fry and Allen 1975:93-94)

In part conclusion, it may be strongly suggested that television comedy and audible laughter are forced hand into hand. From this union, two further points need discussion - the 'feedback' which completes the circuit (and the audience research which should tell the professionals about the process), and the actual situation in the studio itself.

**Some Notes on Feedback**

Feedback is many different things to many people and the purpose of this section is not to seek a clear definition of the term but to comment generally on the subject with particular regard to the implications for the studio audience.

The term feedback appears to originate with the work of Wiener (1948) on central nervous system phenomena. Its entry into the study of communication can be traced to Shannon and Weaver (1963; originally 1949) with the concept becoming central in later works (for example, Edwards 1964). Its beginnings are connected to mathematics and the expression is used in this pure sense by Shannon but applied by Weaver to a general theory of communication. Weaver argues that where there is 'noise' creating uncertainty about the message, feedback is impaired and understanding diminished. Were this to be applied to comedy, the following might apply: in the case of an intended funny line where the audience is silent, the noise would be deafening, so to speak. When there is no audience or a noticeably artificial laughter substitute, similar processes occur. In face-to-face

1. Erstel (1968), according to Berleyne (1972), has actually applied Shannon's formulae to a study of comedy; unfortunately, no translation could be found and this note may merely demonstrate the problem with this thesis of keeping the strands separate.
joke—telling the feedback may be immediate, the noise reduced, and understanding and consensus achieved.

The idea of feedback may operate on two levels with regard to television: between the performers and the studio audience, and between the television administrators and the home audience. While the former is seen as central by those involved in production of the comedies, it has received scant academic attention. Of more interest to researchers is the amount of noise existing between those who create programmes in the media and those who consume them at home, numbered in their millions. Perhaps it is first important to establish that, according to academic enquiry, feedback on the second level is largely inadequate, though not all writers are in agreement.

Gans (1964), for example, writes that:

"The general feedback hypothesis suggests that there is active, although indirect, interaction between the audience and the creators, and that both affect the make-up of the final product" (315)

but this is soon modified by the introduction of a further feedback mechanism — the creator has an image of the audience

"...against which he unconsciously tests his product even while he is creating it. As a result, the creation of any product may be described as a series of steps in which the creator selects one solution out of several possible ones, partly on the basis of the supposed judgement of this audience image" (316)

This idea is developed later (1972): if it is believed that the audience share common values and assumptions then the creator may well gear his output to what he sees as the majority opinion (which is effectively the argument about the mass media appealing to the lowest common denominator).

Bauer also stresses this type of feedback as a 'transactional process in which both the audience and the communicator take important initiatives' (1963;6). He also argues that the existence of an audience image is demonstrated by cases where communicators
purposefully ignore it:

"Communicators committed strongly to the subject matter may 'distort' their image of the prospective audience to bring it more in line with either their own values or the content of incoming information and thereby reduce the 'audience effect.'" (1958; quoted in Cantor 1971:30)

This view has been criticized by Blumler (1969) as it tends to put the creator and the audience on an equal footing, almost as if they were bargaining over the subject matter of the particular programme.

McQuail (1969b) suggests that the situation in the mass media may be highlighted by comparison with personal communication. Three major difficulties may be demonstrated:

1. Broadcasters tend to be cut off from their audience; they are socially distinct, and operate in a different milieu.

2. There is a lack of precision - it may be possible to roughly estimate audience size but the heterogeneity of the audience defies qualitative analysis.

3. There is very limited feedback - a theatre manager has empty seats or a newspaper owner unsold copies. A television producer has no such guide.

The weak or non-existent feedback produced by these difficulties generates an uncertainty about the audience which in itself may lead to adjustments among the broadcasters. McQuail identifies four particular responses. Firstly, the uncertainty has helped to develop a paternalistic attitude - as the desires of the audience are unknown, the broadcaster may see them as merely recipients of his guiding philosophy. Secondly, specialization may arise as producers strive to identify and reach a well-defined minority. Thirdly, professionalisation is amplified where the producer sees himself in a professional-client relationship, knowing what is best for the client but possibly being restrained from pedantry by the 'ethics' of broadcasting. Lastly, routines will grow in importance as a need to attempt past successes is strengthened by a lack of real knowledge about audience desires.
McQuail's first 'major difficulty' is an echo of a point made by Giebert with regard to the selection of news stories. He suggests that the fate of any story is not determined by the real needs of the community, or really even their supposed needs, but by the reference group of which the communicator is a member or employee. The esteem of professional colleagues is sought and value judgements as to the 'worth' or suitability of a story are made in the light of unconscious upward reference or peer support (1962). Brown (1969) argues a very similar line in his discussion of how media managers seek to justify their work by reference to ideology. As they must somehow give the public what it wants, faced with scanty feedback, some reassurance is found in tradition and supposed professional competence.

"...for those working in the media the sales figures or box-office returns, even if they are readily available and known to be accurate, provide only an imperfect yardstick of success... (they) must remain largely ignorant of the full and ramifying effects of what they have produced because of the very nature of the media which they serve" (161)

and through the affirmation of ideology

"...such normative belief systems...assume a considerable degree of objective reality and come to define situations, not only for their originators, but for society at large as well" (166)

Elliott (1972) supports these arguments about imperfect feedback with some practical illustrations. Writing of a particular television series, he notes the definite separation of the production team from the audience by examining their reaction to the specific areas of available information. Firstly, criticisms and comments in the press can be discounted as being, almost certainly, unrepresentative and lacking in detail. Secondly, unsolicited correspondence about the series brought an average of 10 letters per programme (with almost a fifth of the total from 'cranks'); as the production team had disbanded in the time between recording and transmission, even the small number
of letters from concerned parties could have had no effect. Thirdly, the figures for audience size, produced at that time by TAM, were only of use in letting the team know whether or not they had attracted comparable figures to similar programmes shown at similar times. Finally, the production team could watch the programmes with themselves as audience members (and with comments from colleagues and friends) but this can hardly be said to give an approximation of the reaction of the home audience.

There seems little doubt that there exists a grey area of understanding (whether pretended or not) between the communicator and his audience. Although some authors have suggested that material is produced in accordance with a conception of the audience (for example, Pool and Shulman 1959), any model which puts forward a simplistic type of equation is unlikely to have much useful application in wider spheres. It may be preferable to agree with Shaw (1969), then Planning Manager of the BBC, that indeed

"...one of the hardest parts of the broadcaster's work is to discover the real response of the greatest number of his listeners and viewers. Communication between them is fragmentary at best..." (121-122)

Shaw uses the analogy of an animal in a field with an electric fence - broadcasting depends on probing, getting a shock and retreating or moving the fence. It is a useful line of thought, introducing the concept that the creator: audience relationship is not linear and static but dynamic and varied, even if it does not make clear who

1. Williams (1968) quotes an administrator from ITV on viewers' letters: "The overwhelming mass of the letters we get are illiterate, they are ungrammatical, they are deplorably written...and they evince an attitude of mind that I do not think can be regarded as very admirable. All they write for are pictures of film stars, television stars, or asking why there are not more jazz programmes, why there cannot be more programmes of a music hall type" (91) This attitude may be unrepresentative but it does give an insight into how this specific source of feedback is viewed by the addressees.
moves the fence and how.

In part summary, it is possible to distinguish two interrelated lines of thought. The first is that the creator relies, to some extent, on a feeling of 'what the public want' and this may take the form of a mental picture of the audience, however inaccurate. Secondly, other factors will be present such as the opinions of colleagues and mundane aspects of creativity like budgets and availability of performers.

On the first, Canter (1971; especially 183) suggests that Hollywood television producers think that their taste is superior to that of their audience; the producers and writers interviewed for this thesis would not agree. Rather, the home audience may be seen as playing little or no part in shaping programme material, the relationship between the creators and the audience is vague, ill-defined, and arbitrary.

Professional Opinions (1)

While there is no outstanding consensus among those interviewed, it is hoped that the following comments from the professionals will show, perhaps inadvertently, some common movement towards factors other than the audience in determining style and content.

Direct feedback from the audience once a show had been transmitted was relatively rare:

"I get the odd letter I suppose...when I was doing "I suppose I'd got one of the most popular programmes on. I was always getting letters from people who wanted to know how to get into comedy or how to write comedy" (Writer)

Other writers stated that it was rare for any letter to offer useful criticism - the few letters received were either insulting, congratulatory, or requests for advice as above. A more straightforward form of feedback was mentioned by several writers - the adoption by the public and, say, the press, of their catchphrases and characters. Just as
gipsies became, for a time, 'The Romany Jones people' in newspapers or 'Stoptoo' became a generic term for all rag and bone men, so did 'I'll 'ave half' (from a character in _Love Thy Neighbour_) become a well-rehearsed phrase commonly heard around the currency of the show. The phrases 'Don't forget the diver, sir – don't forget the diver' and 'Can I do you now, sir?' still evoke a response from the generation of Wartime listeners to _ITMA_. If a phrase or character is of the right calibre to catch the public imagination it will easily filter back to the writer. It may be a small measure but was mentioned by several writers with an understandable degree of satisfaction – it is conclusive proof that they have made their mark and achieved a degree of permanence in a notoriously ephemeral field.

Secondly, there are the professional critics employed by the daily and weekly newspapers. Almost all those interviewed agreed to reading them but with varying attention. One writer gave the following:

"I write technically with (the audience) in mind but I don't make concessions that they won't understand something. I never write for critics because if you do that you're dead. You must only write for what you think is good... I think it's fine that somebody should get up and say something's a load of rubbish and I think that most TV critics are reasonably sincere."

As to paying heed to critics, this writer was fairly adamant in seeing himself as an accurate judge of his own work. If he knew a programme was good he did not need to be told so by a critic; a bad review he could put down to misguided sincerity unless the show actually was bad when he could easily do without reminding about it. Another writer gave a typical view:

"I'm not impressed by many critics. I think that when you're in a specialised field like comedy, you feel very misunderstood so often. You feel sometimes that you're being criticised by people who are not really playing the game...they're not helpful at all."

A writer who could not be interviewed replied to the questionnaire section on critics with what appears to be some bitterness; even though
his own reviews had been favourable for the most part, this did not

 temper his reply:

 "I read any TV critics I come across - like I read the jokes on
 the backs of match-boxes. There's a saying in the business that
 the three most useless things in the world are a man's nipples,
 the Pope's balls, and a good notice in 'The Stage'. I think
 this applies to most TV critics' notices. I've been wounded
 by them and I've been flattered by them, but I pay no heed
 as far as my work's concerned. I think they're useless as
 guides because they're usually reviewing something that's
 past. I think they have no influence on public taste: they
 can neither make or break a show. In fact, I doubt if they
 change its figures one iota. More of them than even the critics
 in other media are frustrated writers/performers and most of
 them spend or have spent a lot of time jostling to get in.
 I've turned down some of their scripts myself though I haven't
 found that's influenced any of them, I must admit.
 So what it all comes down to is that one reads TV critics for
 simple appreciation (or not) of their style and personality"
 (Writer)

 This dismissal of critics reflects a difference (real or not) between
 the perceived status of a comedy scriptwriter and that of a journalist.
 The former may spend weeks creating what he hopes will be a worthy
 product which the latter may attack in a quick few paragraphs. Even
 when the scriptwriter does not see himself as an artist he may view
 the critics with much the same distrust if only because he knows that
 their criticism is justified. Understandably, though, most writers
 saw themselves as creators rather than production line workers, and
 a lack of comprehension or creativity on the part of the critics
 were frequent complaints:

 "I've always been fairly well treated by them. They know
 nothing of the machinery of bringing something to the screen.
 They blame the writer for something the director or actor did
 and praise the writer when you know the director's put in.
 You can't take a lot of notice of them" (Writer)

 "They're an embittered bunch. If I had to watch television
 every night of the week professionally I might get a bit bored.
 The main thing is, is that they're irrelevant in that they're
 revealing something after the public's seen it, generally
 speaking, by which time most people have made up their mind
 what they think" (Writer)

 This latter writer gave an example of a well-known critic of the time
 who had failed to break into television and was, apparently, pursuing
a personal campaign against what he saw as a conspiracy.

Producers also held critics in little regard. Commenting on the chicken-and-egg situation that then prevailed at the BBC of not allowing previews of light entertainment productions, one said:

"I don't find television critics very interesting, professionally. Frequently, they pick on a small point. Frequently, as happens in all media, the critics are enjoying themselves and like to make their columns entertaining. It's very little use to anybody to have last night's show criticised" (Producer)

A more forceful denunciation came from one who spoke from bitter experience:

"I think they talk a lot of crap. They're a completely useless part of television. You watch a programme and at the end of the half hour or whatever, you know whether you've enjoyed it or not. What good does it do, the following morning, that this fellow thought it was a load of crap. In most cases the critics are the complete opposite to the general public. The awful thing is, is that they can do an awful lot of damage. Like ' ', only two critics liked it but the television companies themselves, the Board of Directors who meet once a month with pink gins, like a show to be a critical success as well as a commercial one" (Producer)

Needless to say, the particular programme did not last long, though it is doubtful whether the blame could be laid entirely at the door of the critics.

In a similar vein, a producer for one of the commercial companies recognised that critical success carries a fair amount of weight. While he neither sought nor expected good reviews (being the producer who described his own shows as 'rubbish'), he was very much aware that critical successes afforded a powerful lever to the commercial companies when vying for advertising revenue and renewed franchises from the IBA. Thus, the commercial companies are just as keen as their BBC rivals to broadcast 'good' television (though perhaps not quite so much of it). Feedback from critics may then, albeit by a circuitous route, have some effect on programme planning in the general sense though not at the immediate level of affecting writers
and producers in their decision making.

One final point should be made with regard to television critics. Without exception, the writers and producers with wide experience of working in other media rated the influence of those critics a great deal higher; examples were given, for example, of stage successes being sustained or flops being condemned to obscurity when the weight of critical opinion was united. On television, it was largely felt that a programme would fail or succeed on its own merits and that the critics could only tell the professionals what they already knew or give jaundiced opinions.

The third source of feedback is the perceived value or otherwise of opinions from colleagues 1. Here, the criticism may be a two-way flow in a situation where continued good working relationships are desirable (though not always essential):

"You've got to be careful that you don't hurt their feelings too much. It's a younger group at the BBC. When I was at the BBC, it was a nice group of friends and mates and one could be highly critical of their work and at the same time be lavish with one's praise. Here, and in commercial television generally, one is working so hard you don't see so many people about to chat to, particularly as a lot of them are freelancers so they come and go" (Producer)

There was an almost even split between the other producers and writers - about half stated that they valued the comments from fellow professionals and respected their judgement on the basis that their own feelings about a programme might be subject to bias. The remainder either did not really meet up with colleagues or followed their own instincts rather than the opinions of others.

The writer's job is, for the most part, a solitary one and on such occasions where an exchange of opinions occur the writer's status is likely to be influential. A respected and successful writer may

1. Taylor (1968) suggests that a hallmark of professional workers is that they feel their work can only be judged by colleagues and not by laymen (413-428).
frighten off criticism (and continual praise soon loses its potency).

Similarly, a producer with a proven track record need not pay much attention to suggestions, and the more experienced he is the fewer people there are who can make constructive statements:

"Everybody judges it in the building — everyone in the building's a critic; the cameramen, the stage hands, everybody. I judge it personally and consider whether I've made a good or a bad show myself. I don't usually get myself involved with something I don't consider to be good in the first place" (Producer)

Other comments on the theme were 'We don't cross-fertilise a great deal here' (BBC Producer) and from a writer that he mistrusted the judgement of directors, never met other writers, and paid some attention to members of the cast.

While the comments of peers and colleagues may be accorded little worth it is, of course, important not to give them any unnecessary ammunition. Programmes are not just a showcase for the channel but also for the staff involved; the comments that had to be heeded were those from Heads of Departments and other senior personnel and it was thought wise for this reason, as well as many others, to do one's very best. Even here, though, judgements from seniors may not be constructive but form part of the relationship between employees and their superiors.

Finally, as a source of feedback, the matter of audience ratings has some bearing. Professional opinions will be discussed first and then followed by some brief notes on the actual systems of rating and audience research.

The overwhelming consensus was that the television companies rely on ratings as the primary indicator of success or failure of a show, though differences were suggested to exist between ITV and the BBC. There was also a large degree of agreement in that most professionals looked at the figures but only for interest — they already knew
how well or badly their programme had come across. Headcounting, anyway, was seen as unsatisfactory:

"Presumably all sorts of people (watch the show), though personal contacts do tend to suggest that such and such a show is appealing particularly to such and such an audience. TV research data only deals with the number of people who watch" (Writer)

Even if audience figures are only a rough guide, they may still be accepted as important:

"The one ultimate sign of the success of that show is the number of people who watch it every week...on top of that, you judge it a great deal by the reaction of people around here and 'civilian' friends at home but the basic thing must be, in terms of popular situation comedy, is how many people are watching it. That can really only be your true standard. We were very high in the JICTAR ratings, which we don't subscribe to here, but one hears about them. I can never understand - there's a difference between the BBC results and the JICTAR ratings and none of us understand that. But we were high in both" (BBC Producer)

The suggestion that the JICTAR ratings were not available at the BBC may be taken lightly; certainly, producers were more in touch with audience research findings than the writers, and the weight of numbers bore heavily upon them. A writer could script a 'numerical' flop and still feel justified in that he written what he thought was a good programme. A producer, bound more to the television organisation, is likelier to appreciate the baggage of memos, telephone calls and office meetings within the hierarchy which determines when a programme should continue or be taken off.

While most of the professionals expressed some ignorance about the actual workings of the rating system and audience research, they were all aware of two interconnected points. Firstly, situation comedies are supposed to be popular and draw large audiences. A documentary producer may well wish to reach a large audience but is no doubt prepared to accept figures of a few million viewers. A top situation comedy is expected to reach in excess of 10 million viewers, and while no hard line can be drawn as a cut-off point for discontinuing the programme one can be sure that quality ultimately
demands quantity for its survival. The 'top ten' has a special appeal:

"It would be nice to know in more detail the sort of people you're attracting and what social levels you're attracting. I just don't get these figures at all. One can assume, I suppose, that if a programme's in the top ten then it's a mass audience. That's all you can say about the top ten and the ratings... the ideal situation is to be in the top ten and get critical acclaim at the same time" (Producer)

Secondly, all the professionals knew of the intricacies of programming - what time slot a programme or series is given and against what opposition from the other channels. At the beginning of the time span that this research covers, *Forecastle and Fleece* and *On the Buses* both occupied the top position for their respective days of transmission. The former, on the BBC, was moved into a time slot directly opposing the latter and both shows dropped into the bottom half of the top twenty. The obvious implication is that there had been a duplication of audiences which was not made apparent until a choice was forced upon them. The professionals realised that an intelligent reading of figures was necessary. Satisfaction at a high rating could only be felt strongly if the figure was obtained at the expense of worthy opposition:

"You're bound to get a programme in the ratings if you put a situation comedy on against *Panorama*. But if you put on a programme which you know is a success against whatever the opposition are doing, you know you stand no chance but what (the executives) hope to do is cut down the amount of ratings that the rivals have got" (Producer)

The battle for ratings must take the form of a well-planned campaign.

The four areas of feedback (direct, critics, colleagues, and ratings) are experienced with varying degrees of effectiveness. Some may be non-existent for one individual, others of crucial importance in mediating his future actions. It is not possible to give a totally typical quote to close this section but the following is a very long way from being a unique statement:
"As a commercial writer, one must accept that success ultimately means a show which is popular with the viewers. Informed opinions about the worth of a show do come from within the business and are valued, but one's own appraisal is likely to be the most accurate. The only other opinions are those of television critics and, with very few exceptions, are worthless."

The fifth area of feedback concerns the studio audience and this will shortly be considered. First, though, a brief diversion on audience research.

**Brief Notes on the Rating System**

Three published sources may be fruitfully discussed here; a thorough review, particularly of audience research techniques, can be found in Nelson (1967; chapter 25).

Croll (1975) compares the ways of estimating audience size used by ITV and the BBC and notes that, naturally enough, the different methods give different results. It is not, however, the main reason which appears to be that each channel wishes to promote its own output in the most favourable light. The BBC estimate comes from interviewing about 2250 people daily about their viewing (and listening) habits; the people are chosen by 'quota sampling' so as to represent the distribution of various groups in the population as a whole. The BBC uses two further sources of information - panels of audience members who complete questionnaires on particular programmes, and specific enquiries which are usually concerned with attitude change and levels of understanding. In contrast, the independent companies subscribe to the Joint Industry Committee for Television Advertising Research (JICTAR) who have a contract with a market research firm, Audits of Great Britain (AGB), for the supply of figures. The figures are obtained by attaching meters to television sets which record when the set is in operation and to which channel it is tuned. Some 2650 sets are monitored and the information supplemented by 'viewing diaries'.

Further information may be gathered from fortnightly surveys of audience appreciation and from specific investigations.

Croll, rightly, has some criticisms of both methods. While the BBC seem to be trying to measure the right thing, their methods have several weaknesses among which may be noted the fact that the selection of interviewees will be biased towards the available and the approachable, and the chance of favouritism being induced by the opening remarks 'I am from the BBC...'. The JICTAR/AGB method may be accurate in producing figures but it but it misses the most important aspect - is the audience present and is it interested? The JICTAR figures are really a 'set' count rather than a head count.

For both methods, however,

"...more fundamental criticisms...can be made. These are to do with the conceptually limited nature of the exercise and its limited ability to tell us anything of interest about the audience. Existing audience research methods tell us almost nothing about the impact of broadcasting on its audiences, or the needs which broadcasting is meeting or failing to meet, or about what the media are, still less could be, contributing to people's lives" (Croll 1975:3)

While Goodlad (1969, 1971), the second source, notes the practical limitations of both systems (though at that time the commercial system was organised by TAM (Television Audience Measurement Limited) rather than JICTAR), he also provides a review of audience research techniques encompassing both television and the theatre among which can be found the work by Allen (1965). Allen's experiment demonstrated, with regard to TAM, that for 40% of the time a television set was on (and would therefore give a meter reading) there was either no audience at all or those that were present were 'inattentive'. Also, Goodlad is able to separate the two systems on the intention behind them - at least the BBC method means to measure audience appreciation rather than the mathematically based alternative.

1. TAM operated between the period covered by Goodlad's study (1955-1965).
The third source is the booklet issued by the BBC (1976a) which is surprisingly fair in its comparison of the two systems and also highlights the defects in both. A very detailed breakdown is given on how the BBC's material is gathered and organised (for example, the number of interviews had grown to 2750). Unfortunately, and the criticism is somewhat unfair as the booklet confines itself to the 'how' not the 'why', no information is given on what use is made of the wealth of data thus supplied.

The majority of producers and writers interviewed paid scant attention to audience ratings. It would appear that it is the planners and executives that readily consume the facts and figures. It may well be possible for a prestige programme to attract a small audience and keep the planners happy but in the field of light entertainment, and specifically situation comedies, a large audience is a necessity if the series is to be continued and renewed. As Hood (1972) points out, the BBC must try and maximise audiences. It must be in a position to show that a large proportion of the audience are attracted (he suggests the hopeful figure of about 50%) especially when it is negotiating for an increase in the licence fee. Direct proof is fairly thin on the ground but the then Head of Audience Research gives

"A number of programmes have been taken off, or not come back for a second run, as a result of adverse audience reaction, but I would find it difficult to catalogue them, or even to produce a few examples...the importance of our findings in making decisions about programme scheduling is every complex area. There are innumerable other factors that have to be taken into account by those responsible. This department is not necessarily involved in the discussions leading to a final decision." (Amott 1976)

The situation for the commercial channels can be easily grasped in the light of the above. Here there is a more direct link with advertisers and the concept of a mass audience. Even so, it would be false to completely dismiss the idea that some programmes may be
successful purely on their own terms without any recourse to audience size and reaction.

Since situation comedies are a form of series it is prudent here to briefly mention two relevant works. Ehrenberg et al (1975) and Goodhardt et al (1975) both concur on the subject matter (which is hardly surprising when one realises that Goodhardt is part of Ehrenberg's et al and vice versa) and give the following

"...extensive work for the IBA has shown that only about 55% of the viewers of one episode of a programme also watch the following episodes (usually a week later...) a consequence of this relatively low level of repeat-viewing is that, for any extended programme series, very few viewers see all or nearly all the episodes" (Ehrenberg et al 1975:263)

The programmes investigated were from all parts of television output and the conclusions are somewhat surprising. It is surely likely that, other commitments apart, an even vaguely interested viewer would follow a dramatic serial from week to week if only to keep in touch with the developing storyline. It is, perhaps, more understandable with regard to situation comedies (and the figure of 56% is given for 'repeat viewers' of Doctor at Large) in that they must give a self-contained half hour of television time every week, and the amount of progress made by the characters towards any of their goals need only be minimal. Comedy is very much about character and as long as that character is faced by different obstacles of a similar nature every week then there is no need for major developments of such things as marriage, birth, death, and the like to be related.

1. On the matter of series it is useful to refer to a BBC investigation (BBC 1972a) which dealt with documentaries. It was found that certain series' titles had a greater audience pulling power than others and while the link is tenuous and unsupported it may be that comedy series follow suit. Individual episodes of, say, Dad's Army may not be remembered by name (and the incidents in a number of episodes jumbled up) but the generic title sticks fast in the mind. It may also be that the series is remembered as a series.
Before closing this section, some mention should be made of the
BBC's Reaction Index (RI) with specific reference to situation comedy;
the commercial channels are left aside here because the BBC method
tends to take more factors into account (such as the possibility of
inherited audiences - from programmes preceding and following the
show in question - on BBC and ITV).

For the year 1974/1973 the average RI in Light Entertainment was
61.6 and 63.9 for BBC1 and BBC2 respectively. This can be compared
with joint figures for documentaries (68.4), outside broadcasts (66),
children's programmes (63.8), and religious programmes (62.4).

Particular situation comedies obtained RI scores of 62.8 (Are You
Being Served), 63.5 (Dad's Army), 64.6 (Fanny Ever After), and 65.7
(It Ain't Half Hot Mum). The lowest score recorded was for Till
Death Us Do Part with an RI of 54, and the highest was 70.8 for
Porridge (which, incidentally, was the best score for any Light
Entertainment programme on BBC1).

Also, BBC Audience Research Reports (which supply the RI) may be
commissioned by the executive by way of a specific request. This
would give rise to a report attempting to answer specially chosen
questions on how a programme or series was received. The increased
depth of investigation is laudable but also time-consuming; it is
much more likely that a producer (or a writer) would see one of the
standard reports. An example of the 'standard' may make things
clearer and show the sort of information supplied.

A particular episode of a well known series was transmitted on
5/12/74. The report gives the estimated audience size as 22.8% of
the United Kingdom population. Viewers for the same time on BBC2 and
ITV were 0.4% and 19.4% respectively. The reaction of the audience
was based on 273 questionnaires completed by 13% of the Viewing
Panel giving a Reaction Index of 59 which apparently was average for the series. A selection of quotes from members of the Viewing Panel highlight areas of praise and dissatisfaction but the comments tend to be on the general side and rather too wide ranging to pinpoint specific likes and dislikes. The whole programme was seen by 89% of the sample with others coming in half way through or switching off or over before the end. Section 5 of the Report relates comments on the series and in this particular example there were not overly favourable ranging from 'some of the former sparkle was missing' to the cast having 'to struggle with material somewhat below standard'. Finally the report gives responses to (a) how many of the series had people watched and (b) whether they would like a further series with the fairly disappointing results of 57% for most or all and 39% for yes, very much, 39% not particularly and 4% definitely not. These last figures can be compared with a seemingly more popular series which gave figures of 81% yes, very much, 19% not particularly, with no-one saying definitely not.

Two points arise from the above. Firstly, as a representative of the majority of reports, it should be apparent that at least an attempt is made to provide more information than mere head-counting and should stand as a part rebuttal to the common complaint of writers or producers. The general comments of the Viewing Panel may be useful for their very generality in identifying what is liked or disliked about episodes. Certainly, with new programmes, and even allowing for the experience of the staff concerned, the production must take place in a predictive vacuum and, apart from artistic or whatever satisfaction, the real justification for the programme's existence must come by way of audience reports. Television companies
may well experiment with one-off plays, documentaries and feature programmes where the audience response may largely be ignored or subsumed under the umbrella of critical success or the company image reflecting its concern with minority subjects. The rationale underlying situation comedies (and Light Entertainment in general), however, is measured in large numbers of people largely enjoying lots of programmes.

Secondly, the specific report was dated 6/1/75. While the planners may be able to use the report, the month gap (which is fairly typical) between transmission and 'results' diminishes any service that the reports might provide for the professionals directly involved. For the writer, the report might come months or years after he had first delivered the script. For the producer, it is likely to be too late to make any changes to future programmes given that programme scheduling is planned well in advance - at least another four episodes will already have been recorded (with three or four of these being transmitted) by the time the report is circulated. A keen producer may, of course, discuss the report with the Audience Research Department prior to publication but from interviews it would seem that few avail themselves of this opportunity. The service provided by research, then, is primarily used by planners and executives rather than producers and writers. The results of audience research play a part in shaping the comedy seen on television but, it is argued, this is fairly minimal compared to other factors. Within the terms of this thesis, the most important of these other factors which remains to be discussed is the apparent necessity of an audible studio audience.

Professional Opinions (2)

Almost all those interviewed had useful comments on the studio audience and many of these were uncomplimentary. The official view is, predictably,
"One specific problem continually bedevilling the producers of comedy and light entertainment shows is what to do about a live studio audience. Audience reaction - laughter and applause - is an essential feature of comedy and variety programmes to create atmosphere and stimulate viewers' reactions and thereby enhance their enjoyment...

Another factor is that most variety artists themselves need an audience to play to; their performance would certainly suffer if the total 'audience' comprised just three dumb cameras... Comedy plays or situation comedies requiring audience reaction are invariably set in a studio floor with the cameras (on behalf of the viewer) placed between the action and the live audience. A compromise is then achieved whereby the studio audience sees most of the action just like in a theatre but can also enjoy the pre-filmed exterior sequences and visual effects by lifting their heads to the monitors hanging above them. They can therefore enjoy the best of both worlds and the viewer is left with the performance and a sound representation of the studio audience's approval, a very happy compromise which is most acceptable in the context of comedy plays and situation comedy" (IBA 1976)

Much of the following (quotes from those interviewed) is repetitive and cited at length; not only is there a high degree of consensus but the topic has obviously been deeply thought about.

First, a comprehensive explanation concerning the apparent necessity of a studio audience:

"One hundred per cent necessary. Lots of people have tried to do comedy without an audience. Now this is the whole point to me, from an actor's point of view. An actor who plays comedy has to time his laughs. He has to time his reaction. He cannot do this in any other way but with people there. In the studio audience at the BBC we have about 400 people. A lot of people say 'I can't stand that canned laughter' - the BBC never put any laughs on a show...

(The studio audience) are sitting there and they see it acted in front of them. The actor must do two things - he must be with the audience but not play to the audience. A television camera, you can look straight into it, and the camera comes in close and they can see your eyes. If your eyes are working, you're thinking...people are listening because you're right in close. You are in the camera but you are, in reality, playing to that audience. The actor, when he's playing situation comedy, must have an ear on the studio audience, he never plays to the studio audience - he's got to remember the camera, but he's timing his laughs through the studio audience. Now the actor, by this way, is making a rapport with the studio audience so there's a sort of umbilical cord between the actor and them. Now if the audience like him, those 400 people will laugh. Therefore the actor is making contact with these people. Now this is recorded on tape and when it goes out there's usually 3 or 4 people; this is your audience. Now when you are watching that tape on the box
the contact with the audience that the actors have made in the studio is then transferred to you. Now this is my theory, and it works" (Writer)

Certainly necessary in this opinion, and also, rather beneficial at least from the actor's point of view; Other people, while admitting the need for 'timing' and interaction (if not an umbilical cord) saw the subject as either a necessary evil or just as an evil which could be discarded:

"For me, the studio audience is the key to the whole problem of situation comedy and what I dislike about it most. If you're doing something that is relatively sophisticated and you're doing that in the theatre, that will find its own audience...the audience that comes is the audience that is ready to ap. react and understand. Now generally speaking the audience that comes to situation comedies in the TV studios is the equivalent of the coach party audience. It's usually, in my experience, 70% women, it's usually elderly, outings from Darby and Joan clubs. Certainly, in very general terms, they're not a very sophisticated audience. In order to make them respond you have to do a not very sophisticated show...the trouble is, is that studio audiences are not selected with care. Whereas an immense time and effort goes into writing the script, rehearsing, designing the sets, choosing film locations, every damn thing, how do they choose the audience? They just send out at random the 350 tickets to the first groups of coach parties that write in regardless of the nature of the show.

Why, then, a studio audience?

It's on the assumption that laughter is infectious and that if you're watching a comedy programme at home, all by yourself or just you and the wife, and you hear people laughing, that tells you it's a funny show. Now I'm not saying that's good reasoning, I think that is the reasoning" (Writer)

The decision to record a programme in front of a studio audience is taken at an executive level beyond that of the production staff though, of course, the producer may be instrumental in suggesting alternatives. The obvious substitute, which has many advantages, is not always seen as successful. The benefits of recording purely in front of the cameras are discussed below but the disadvantage to the cast remains

"(The studio audience) annoy a lot of people but the plus of
having one outweighs the minus of not having one at all. I've done sitcoms without a studio audience and it just isn't the same. It's absolutely essential if you're doing comedy for the actors to have something to time against" (Writer)

"...I've tried with and without studio audiences, and you certainly don't get the successes without them. Prestige successes like MASH, yes, but not big successes. It seems to be necessary for the viewers at home, whatever the purists say about distraction. If a line's written for a yock, it needs a yock, not a smile or even a chuckle from the family. As I said, we shot 'em on film, and the producer and I were quite willing for it to go out without an audience. But they showed the film to an audience, got the laughs without drowning lines, and everybody in authority seems to think it's better that way" (Writer)

Even with a studio audience, the cast may not get the reaction they want through no fault of their own or of the script. A suitably responsive audience is no doubt a great help to them but the audience may not always respond to produce the required laughter soundtrack

"It isn't all that difficult to make a studio audience laugh, by a good warm-up man, by mugging both on and off camera, by allowing the studio audience into technical secrets that the audience at home doesn't see. Again, I've seen shows - supremely unfunny - greeted by what sounds like studio audience reaction from a group of hysterical, drunken, elderly teeny-boppers. Obviously, that doesn't work because you sit at home and think 'What the Hell are they laughing at?!'" (Writer)

The supposed attributes of a studio audience - to benefit the cast and encourage the home audience - are not always present:

"The 'powers', whoever they are, seem to think that the viewer likes to hear studio laughter to prove that he is watching a comedy. In my view, this is not true - studio laughter is often intrusive and the presence of a studio audience sometimes induces a false pace to a show...
The drawbacks are that the studio audience is sometimes more interested in the technicals and the size of the actor's bust or paunch than the show itself. They can also, wrongly, make a show sound better or worse than it is - and they are 300 people - not the millions who watch it on television" (Writer)

Another criticism of the arrangement can be added as it summarises much of the argument so far. It comes from a writer (for television, stage, and film) who also has experience of acting and production:

"The worst thing about television situation comedy, in my opinion, is the studio audience because what's funny to the audience is frequently not funny to the viewer. I know that programmes that
go best in the studio sometimes seem the least funny at home. I think it's, to a small extent, because the viewer resists audience laughter - which they think is canned but in fact it isn't - but also because what makes a live audience laugh is different. It's like the difference between stage acting and film acting and the difference is enormous. On film you act smaller, with greater delicacy and subtlety, because the camera's on your face. In the theatre you have to do it bigger. A studio audience forces a compromise on you which very few people have learned to cope with. Most people find it a problem, striking the balance between acting big for the studio audience to make them react because it's obviously humiliating if you do the programme and there's an audience there and they only laugh once every five minutes. As a writer, the way this presents itself is that I find myself, usually I think mistakenly, putting in lines that I know will make the audience laugh which aren't going to make the viewer laugh. If I can stop myself I do, but as a kind of self-protective thing I feel since the audience is there, I want it to laugh."

Before taking a closer look at the studio audience itself, one further point may be made here. It illustrates the way that the professionals can use the executives' rules to play the game. A writer, of a fairly low-key programme, had the opportunity for the series to be recorded and transmitted without an audience, and therefore no laughter soundtrack. Apparently, the executives felt that the script was humorous and wry rather than belly-laughing comical but the writer held out for an audience on the basis that audible laughter was automatic proof of funniness. As the projected series was to be innovative (and in some danger of being postponed or cancelled) he felt, rightly as it turned out, that the demonstration of comedy by laughter would help convince the executives in his favour.

In the Studio

Once the need for the studio audience is accepted, the immediate problem is how best to fill the seats. Fortunately, for the companies, there are large numbers of applicants and the standard BBC leaflet regrets that 'owing to the enormous demand we are unable to send tickets more
than once for any series'. It should be added that all the tickets are free.

Although there are slight variations between the commercial companies, the tendency is to do what the BBC do - allocate tickets on a first come, first served basis. The number of tickets available for any one programme depends on the size of the particular studio allocated for recording and on how many tickets are requested by the producer, the writer, and any others connected with the show for family, friends, or to give out as compliments. The BBC estimate is that roughly half the available places are taken by 'staff' tickets, which is one way of promoting the chances of a favourable response. The remainder of the tickets will be distributed between parties (a maximum of 54 each) to ensure reasonable attendance, and individuals. Preference may be given to those living some distance away as it is assumed they are travelling to, say, London for a day out and it may be their only chance to see the recording. Both the BBC and the commercial companies operate waiting lists and applicants are offered tickets when their name reaches the top. When writing in for tickets, people are encouraged to give the name or the type of show they wish to see and this may avoid the problems that a drastic mismatch of audience and programme would create.

Official policy is to refuse applicants on two grounds - minimum age and physical handicap. The lower age limits vary between 14 and 16 years and are presumably linked to a potential lack of understanding (and therefore laughter) as well as general considerations of unruliness and misbehaviour. There are practical reasons for refusing the physically handicapped: because of the shortage of space, coupled with the vast amount of technical equipment, the seats for the audience are steeply banked to fully use the area and to afford comprehensive views.
Wheelchairs cannot be accommodated and there are stringent conditions relating to fire insurance and means of escape.

While an attempt is made to 'match' the audience with the programme, usually following close liaison with the producer, there does appear to be a bias towards middle age and towards women. No analysis was undertaken but rough headcounts at several attendances in different studios suggest this tendency. Obviously, the studio audience is representative of a percentage of those who wish to see shows recorded rather than the general public.

The professionals interviewed were not always enthralled about the composition of the audiences and anecdotes were legion about playing comedy to parties of Polish students or hard of hearing clubs. However, when a series is popular the ticket offices may exercise greater control and discretion when consulting their waiting lists. With the less popular series or unknown quantities, it is very much pot luck:

"Somebody goes out around the various working clubs and the WVS or works groups, and they come and they give you some form of indication as to whether you're onto a winner or not. Not necessarily, though" (Producer)

Opinions were guarded about the worth of audience laughter in judging the quality of a show. The whole studio set-up is geared to making people laugh, and the intrusive laughter sometimes heard by the home audience is testimony to how a poor script or production can be engineered to provoke a favourable studio response. The studio audience tend to laugh very easily, anyway:

"I think it can be overdone, mind you. One of the problems with audiences is screeching. Because you generally find that although you invite what appears to be groups of people from various areas, you find that 70% of your audience are women...a tremendous amount of women. We had one recently on ' ' and I had to go out to her in the interval and say 'Madam, I do appreciate your enjoyment of the programme but would you mind shutting up?'. She was anticipating the lines and screeching before they actually came out" (Producer)
Once the audience is assembled it is likely that they will be greeted by or handed over to a 'warm-up' man whose job is to get them into a relaxed and receptive frame of mind. The audience are already under some feeling of obligation — the tickets are free, they have been treated with courtesy — but it is now that their importance is stressed. It is unusual for the warm-up man to tell structured jokes or act like a comic; it is, rather, his job to emphasise that we, the audience, should laugh loud, long, and often and without our active participation the show will not really be a success. There is nothing as crude as a 'laugh now' board, though clapping at the appropriate times is orchestrated.

The whole affair is coated with a friendly, chatty gloss and the sense of participation skilfully manipulated through the warm-up man with jokes about the parties in the audience ('Tunbridge Wells? I thought that was where...'), giving the various technicians and camera men 'pet' names, jibes about the drunken/camp/miserly producer and so on. The warm-up man also provides a useful service in explaining what is going on — what a certain set represents, when to expect a film extract — in such a way to stop the audience wondering about what switch does what and getting them to concentrate on the action. The purpose of the total exercise is to create an atmosphere where laughter is not only acceptable but also expected and essential.

It is almost possible to detect a slight hint of embarrassment in the warm-up man when, as choirmaster and conductor, he asks the audience to laugh again at a re-take. The request, stripped of its setting is barely credible but the audience duly oblige, having been jokingly asked to 'Wipe your mind clean — and there are some here could do with a jolly good clean...'. The technicians were usually blamed as scapegoats for any re-takes (or delays) thus maintaining
the created bond between the audience and the cast. Although the whole process is geared to the one end of recording the best possible show, the means by which this is achieved in the studio (the correct camera angle and level of sound on the technical side, the script and production values on the artistic) are played down and the theatrical elements played up. The audience are there to be entertained and record, literally, their approval as if in a theatre. When actors fluff their lines, necessitating a re-take, audience sympathy is directed by the warm-up man to the cast at the expense of the floor manager and gallery who have called for the scene to be done again. The odd situation is reached where an actor, who is clearly failing to perform properly, is exonerated and approved as his mistake is transferred to those the audience may laugh at rather than with. Laughter at re-takes is facilitated by running the preceding scene on the monitors. The film naturally carries the recorded laughter and the audience are automatically led into the old scene played as new. There are, of course, several reasons for re-takes and it would be unfair to put too much blame on acting errors or the technical hitches that occur from time to time. The likeliest reason for a re-take is when a scene has not reached the proper pitch in either raising the required laugh or maintaining the standard of production.

A fairly common trick of producers, to increase the laughter and gee up the audience in the studio, is to:

"...do the first scene twice. Unless it goes exceedingly well, they pretend that technically they want to do it again because very often you get more and better laughs the second time"

(Producer)

More often, though, decisions are guided by considerations of what the finished product will look like in terms of professional pride and the obligation to the wider audience:
"Your main concern must always be what's best for the show. Sometimes when you feel like screaming at somebody you've got to think 'Look, there's 15 million people going to watch this so let's get it right'. You have, always, an obligation to your audience...they deserve a good show, they deserve the best you can give them" (Writer)

The responsibility for ordering a re-take rests with the gallery, subject to other sources of advice:

"Usually the producer. Sometimes a member of the technical crew who has spotted something the producer hadn't or couldn't. Sometimes an actor who feels he can do it better...re-takes are almost invariably for technical reasons. The writer would normally never ask for one, because he saw the run-through which would normally be the same as the take - and he should have voiced his objections then" (Writer)

An alternative view, reflecting a difference in status, is given by another writer:

"Ultimately the director - though I always sit in the gallery when recording and at the end of each scene the director will say 'All right?' and if there's anything bothering me, I'll say so and we'll re-take. There are generally three heads watching - the director, the writer, and (the Head of Comedy) - and we all have our say as do the technical men...

A team thing really, but the director runs the gallery" (Writer)

The whole process of recording the programme for future transmission may take anything between an hour and two hours but the time passes quickly. The studio audience are not really given the chance to let their concentration lapse as the periodic re-takes are dealt with humorously and may be used to engender a sense of conspiracy between the cast and the studio audience at the expense of the home viewer.

There are alternatives to the studio system, suggested by the interviewees, but there are drawbacks:

"With ' ' we seriously discussed whether it should have an audience because we thought it was a little bit gentle...but I think if we're frightened of an audience then there's something wrong" (Writer)

Filming a programme and either adding a laughter soundtrack or recording the response of an audience to whom the film was shown not only failed to give the best result in artistic terms but also ran counter to the ethic of entertainment. A laughing audience was a concrete
demonstration of the skill of those involved from writer through producer to cast. Their job was to entertain and even accepting that the audience laughter is somewhat engineered it still made the show live and theatrical. Opinions varied on the value of audience laughter as a guide to the worth of a programme but at least, accurate or not, it was the proper end to the presentation of comedy. As an event, the studio recording was an immediate conclusion to the weeks of writing and days of rehearsal which could be taken as its own reward. With little or no contact with the home audience, the event is a finale which demands an audience to complete the occasion. The mutual applause in the gallery and on the studio floor after the audience has left takes place in an atmosphere of celebration (unless things have gone drastically wrong) as the studio is where the process culminates for the participants rather than the television transmission at some time in the future.

Inherent Drawbacks

There are several practical limitations which the presence of a studio audience automatically imposes upon the production of situation comedy. Firstly, the amount of filmed as opposed to 'live' material is restricted (in conjunction with the pressures of budget) since there must be a large percentage of actual performance. While the monitors tend to receive as much, if not more, attention as the concurrent stage action, the audience is still there because the theatricality of the occasion is paramount. As a result, much of the script must relate to 'indoor' action which necessarily restricts the scope and tendency of the plot (and is another push towards domestic comedy set within four walls).

Secondly, there is an element of time. There are reasons for the half hour span, largely historical, but the possibilities of experimenting
with longer shows is rather limited by recording with an audience. To enable the audience to be gathered, the operation cannot start too early in the evening and the usual times to start are 7.30 or 8pm. The studio will be cleared by 9.30 or 10pm for a number of reasons including union agreements and to give the audience enough travelling time to get home. In addition, the premium on studio space ensures that a programme must be recorded in its allotted time to prevent the enormous complications which re-recording and re-scheduling would entail. To take two hours to produce half an hour of television is far from erring on the side of caution — it is cutting it very fine when one considers set and costume changes, fluffs and re-takes, and a margin for safety. Put simply, it may also not be possible to keep the audience amused for the length of time it would need to record shows with ultimate durations of more than half an hour. The constraints, especially on the writers, of television half hours has already been discussed.

Thirdly, there is the limitation of space. Not only is there a maximum number of studios (Thames Television had, for example, only 2 available in 1977) but the space within them dictates how many sets can be constructed, especially as the seating for the audience is likely to take up more than a third of the floor space. It is unlikely that there will be room for five sets and the usual number is 3 or 4 split into major — a living room, a kitchen — and minor sets such as a hallway or a landing. Obviously, all the sets must be constructed

1. For example, one recording attended needed fake flares to help simulate an 'outdoor' scene at night. Watching from the gallery, one could sense the rising panic as they either extinguished themselves after a few seconds or roared dangerously into life. The delay was probably no more than 10 minutes but sufficient to cause heated conversations and mild hysteria as the gallery clock began to dominate everyone’s vision.

2. There is a useful floor plan reproduced by the BBC (1977a:30-31).
to co-exist in the one studio and afford as good a view as possible to the audience, though it is normal to place a minor set behind the others and relay the action there by way of the monitors. The natural consequences are that action is channelled towards interior locations with a core of living rooms, offices, and prison cells; the largest one set increases the options to classrooms and hospital wards, and may provide a limited 'outdoor' location like a rear garden. It would, of course, be overstating things to suggest that the spatial element need be definitive in determining what sort of comedy appears on television but it is argued that it is all part of the same parcel which acts to favour the tried and trusted rather than the innovative.

Concluding Remarks

It is hoped that this chapter has gone some way to suggesting that feedback, however defined, is imperfect between the creators and the consumers of comedy. It is not possible to agree with those authors such as de Fleur (1966) and Riley (1959) who minimise the differences between mass and interpersonal communication by reference to feedback and information exchange.

There are at least two aspects of this 'noise' which may have some bearing on the matter of comedy. The first, are the public getting what they want, is beyond the scope of this thesis (and the question as phrased is almost entirely meaningless). The second is that it would be naive to assume that situation comedies are as they are simply because the imperfect systems of audience research convince the planners to supply more of the same.
It is not proposed to give a summary of past chapters, and such conclusions as can be drawn have been incorporated into the text as necessary. Rather, the opportunity will be taken on this final page to add what may be a personal opinion on a central theme, based on the foregoing but not supported here by any analysis.

In comparing interpersonal and mass communication by reference to humorous material, the individual has been seen in relation to society. Several strands concerning joking, taken from the 'review' chapters, do not appear to apply to the mass media. Of these, let us take the idea of jokes as comprehension tests used to define in-groups and out-groups. The whole point about the mass media or, rather, television situation comedies is that everyone gets the joke and everybody is seductively invited into the group. There can be no doubt that a 'joke' is intended and, because there is no effective feedback or possibility of 'negotiation', the joke must be broad enough to be reflective rather than didactic. The audience are invited into their society by telling them what they already know and not by teaching them how they should behave. Comedy on television holds up a mirror — and the metaphor is apt — because it does not have the will to hold up a blackboard.

There is no conspiracy or executive intrigue to present dramatic pictures of the known rules and conventions in such a way as to encourage acceptance of them, even though this may in fact happen. Put very simply, there is something about comedy that defies serious reaction and there is something about television which relishes the chance to entertain. The nature of these undefined qualities for comedy and for television has been suggested in the preceding pages; suggestions are, of course, always open to reinterpretation.
The following list records brief details of the comedies transmitted over a rough three-year period. The contents of some have been discussed in the text and others have passed into common knowledge; many were failures, as judged by the television companies, and their plots have passed into relative obscurity. For these reasons the only details that follow are: title, channel or company, producer, and writer(s). As may be noticed, there are over sixty (some 20 plus per annum) which represents, as the great majority were series of 7 or more episodes, a very large slice of television output.

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As explained in Chapter 7, informality was the keynote of most interviews and a loosely framed aide-memoire was employed instead of a highly structured schedule. The aide-memoire was divided into the following sections:

PRESENT SITUATION

1. What is your title or present position?
2. What duties go with that title?
3. Is this your major/sole occupation?
4. Are you a salaried employee? If not, how are you paid?
5. Do you have a contract? If so, what are the terms?
6. By whom are you currently employed?

TRAINING AND PREVIOUS WORK, JOB SATISFACTION

7. In what year did you start work in television?
8. In what capacity or position?
9. Can you briefly outline the steps taken to get to your present job?
10. Did this involve specific training?
11. What television situation comedies have you worked on?
12. What other work have you done in your present career?
13. Are you basically satisfied or dissatisfied with your present position? For what reasons? If dissatisfied, what do you hope to do about it? What are your ambitions?

COMPARISON WITH OTHER MEDIA

14. Have you worked in your present career outside of television?
15. Does television give as much give you as much creative freedom as other media?
16. Does television give as much security as other media?
17. Are there any specific advantages or disadvantages to working in television (compared to other media)?
AUDIENCES

18. What kind of audience views your present programme?

19. Is this answer based on research data, the views of colleagues, personal contacts and general impressions?

20. Does this audience differ from the audiences for other types of shows in general, and for other shows that you have worked on?

21. Does the home audience differ from the studio audience?

CREATION OF PROGRAMME

22. How did your present programme come to be on television? Is this the 'normal' process?

23. What say did you have in choosing the main and supporting cast?

24. Did you have any say in choosing the producer/writer?

25. Did you have any say in choosing members of the production team?

BBC AND ITV

26. Are there any differences between the channels which you feel affect you?

27. Are these views based on practical experience?

28. Do you need full networking on ITV?

29. Which channel would you prefer to work for, and why?

MEDIA CONSUMPTION

30. Which newspaper do you read regularly?

31. Which journals, magazines, and 'trade' papers do you read?

32. Do you read TV critics' columns? Do you pay any heed to them?

33. Roughly how much television do you watch? Any particular sort of programme?

34. Do you often go to the cinema? What sort of films?

35. Do you often go to the theatre? What sort of plays?

36. Anything else (radio, ballet, opera and so on)?

37. Do you watch and read for education, information, or entertainment?
THE CREATIVE PROCESS

38. How long does it take you to write a script/sort out production details?

39. In making decisions about the script and programme, which factors play an important part?
   Your idea of the audience you hope to reach
   Your past experience
   Advice from colleagues
   Your conception of what makes something 'comic'
   The series nature of situation comedies
   Financial factors
   The studio audience
   Any other

40. Who has the final say in decision taking and making?

41. How much importance do you ascribe to the producer, the writer, and the cast in determining the success or failure of a programme?

42. Please detail your working relationship with the writer/producer and cast

43. Have you any experience of writing/producing/acting?

44. What factors combine to make a successful programme/series?

45. How do you judge the success or failure of a show/series?
   Audience reaction in the studio
   Audience ratings and research
   Comments from colleagues
   Your own yardstick
   Any other

46. What factors tend to interfere with the success of a show/series?

FEEDBACK

47. How necessary do you think is the presence of the studio audience?
   For the cast? For the production staff? The home audience?

48. How do you view the role of the 'warm-up' man?

49. Has canned laughter ever been used in your programme? Or in other programmes? Why not or why?
50. Some research suggests that people rate something as funnier if they hear or see other people laughing - do you agree?
51. What sort of 'feedback' do you get from the home audience, if any? Letters, comments, other?
52. Does the 'feedback' from professional critics help you at all?

THE NATURE OF COMEDY

53. Have you read any works on comedy and laughter?
54. Do you agree with the view that for something to be funny there must be a butt or a victim?
55. Should television comedy just be entertaining or should it, for example, hold up anti-social behaviour to ridicule?
56. Do you need a sense of humour to write/produce comedy?
57. Frank Muir thought that comedy follows certain rules - there must be conflict, a strong story-line and so on - do you agree?
58. What makes people laugh? How do you make your programme funny?
59. Are there any guidelines on references to sex?
60. Does a comic treatment of race relations increase or deflate racial tension?
61. Are there subjects too serious to be comically treated? Or too 'tabooed'?
62. Who has ultimate control over the content and how is this control exercised?
63. Do you know of examples where content has been changed on the advice or command of someone (above the producer)?
64. How does television comedy compare with comedy in other media? Is there an English sense of humour?

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

65. Where and when born?
66. Father's usual occupation?
67. Education?
68. Married, with children?
69. Work history prior to working in television?
70. Address (if not already known)?

GENERAL OPINIONS

71. Whose work do you most admire in television comedy - writing, producing, acting, organizing?
72. What are your views on the current state of television? Are there any changes you would like to see?
73. What are your views on the 'arts' in general? Any changes?
74. Any further comments on any matter at all?

Respondents were also asked about earnings, unions, and political affiliation. These questions were best left to come out in general conversation and were usually prompted by questions 4, 30, and 72.

In print, the schedule looks inordinately lengthy but many questions required a one word answer and one question (such as 26 for example) would provoke answers to the whole section of 'BBC AND ITV' as well as covering other areas. There was no easy match between the schedule sections and those sections employed in Chapter 7 but they roughly broke down as follows:

SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND LIFE STYLE 30-37, 65-68, 70 (also politics)
OCCUPATIONAL CAREER 7-11, 69
PRESENT OCCUPATION 1-6, 12-14, 43, 64 (also earnings)
PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY 15-17, 45, 53-63
WORK AND MARKET 18-29, 38-42, 44, 46-52, 71-74 (also unions)

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was only used when it was impossible to arrange a meeting, and after all the interviews had taken place. Modifications were made in the light of experience - the running order of the
schedule was altered slightly and some questions were combined to bring the length down to manageable proportions. Adequate spacing was inserted, erring on the side of excess, to try and avoid the unnecessarily brief answer (and it was felt that 'continue on a separate sheet of paper' was a bit too reminiscent of exam papers and job applications). A spare copy of the questionnaire was supplied.
Over a 9 month period, from November 1974 to July 1975, all the billings for situation comedies were recorded from the magazines in which they appeared. The BBC programmes were fully networked while those appearing on ITV were not necessarily shown on any channel other than ATV (and the billings were recorded from the Midlands edition of the *TV Times*). Each billing was coded as per the schedule beneath into non-exclusive categories.

The sample is not entirely representative as no BBC2 situation comedies were being transmitted during the period; also, the summer months, when companies often try to revitalise sagging schedules with new programmes, were not covered. The mathematical level of analysis is the most simple imaginable; rather than trying to prove an assertion with figures and statistics, the approach aimed to give a general picture of trends and tendencies.

**Schedule**

1. Presence or absence of billing
2. Blank used as a safeguard
3. Number of programme to correspond to transcribed billing
4. Channel of transmission
5. Coded if billing contained implication of trouble or conflict
6. As 7. if billing was explicit
7. Coded if billing contained implication of some benefit
8. As 9. if billing was explicit
9. Correspond to the nature of the trouble or benefit
10. Marriage
11. Sex
12. Small-scale economics, financial matters
13. Violent actions done to or by a character
14. Medical matters, general illness
15. Criminal actions
16. General family matters
17. Relations between generations
18. Race, ethnicity
20. Employment, work
21. Class
22. Change or potential change of status
23. Disruption of routine, unexpected events
24. Inevitability, sense of fate, routine
25. Neighbours, friends, colleagues
26. Non-erotic attitudes between male and female
27. Authority, politics, power
28. Mistaken identity, misunderstanding
29. Lack of skill, stupidity, ignorance of convention
30. Other, unspecified
31. Coded for first episode or 'one-off' programme
32. Coded if characters named in billing
33. From 32, code if characters esteemed or disparaged
34. Code for named actors and actresses appearing above the billing
35. Day of week on which programme was transmitted
36. Subtitle or not
37. Code if comedy is stated
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