

Stand Up and Be (En)Counterred

Resistance in solo stand-up performance by Northern English women, marginalised on the basis of gender, class and regional identity.

Kathryn Elizabeth Fox

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT**Stand Up and Be (En)Counterred:****Resistance in solo stand-up performance by Northern English women, marginalised on the basis of gender, class and regional identity.**

This practice-led thesis takes the standpoint of a female, Northern English stand-up poet to look at how the stand-up form can articulate and resist marginality. It draws on my professional stand-up practice to explore how class, gender and Northern English regional identity are intertwined in stand-up performance and how a “Northernness Effect”, based on historic conceptions of a subaltern North of England, impacts on representations of Northern stand-up performers. The pieces of practice I focus on include a comedy show about class that I recorded for Radio 4 and a performance autoethnography. This thesis is underpinned by original empirical research, including ethnographic interviews with 27 Northern performers and a content analysis of 260 newspaper comedy reviews.

Under-researched moments of “in-betweenness” in the art form of stand-up and the positions of marginalised practitioners are highlighted in order to analyse the form as a dialogical site both for intimate, intersubjective encounter and for struggles which counter pervasive classed and gendered stereotypes.

The dialogic nature of stand-up is illustrated within the thesis itself by the use of an interrupting voice which thinks it is hilarious and owes a lot to Bakhtin’s theories of carnival and heteroglossia.

The resistant possibilities of various stand-up postures are explored. The “scholar stand-up” is proposed as an addition to Joanne Gilbert’s five types of female comic performance posture. In addition, the resistant possibilities of the archetypes of the “unruly woman” and the “female trickster” are posited as generative for female stand-ups grappling with the complexities of living social mobility and marginality.

The thesis also asserts that stand-up can function as an academic methodology and critical pedagogy, particularly when used as autoethnography. It therefore suggests “humitas” as a new word for humorous performative utterances, in order to counter readings of humour as “only” play or lacking in efficacy.

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- Clip 1: Lots of Planets Have a North
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- Clip 3: Unruly Woman
- Clip 4: Eton College
- Clip 5: Workshop

Additional Material:

USB containing:

1. Video Clips of Practice as above.
2. *Price of Happiness* Class Show Preview Video.
3. Lots of Planets Have a North Performance Autoethnography Video.
4. Appendix: Radio 4 Broadcast version of *Price of Happiness* Class Show, Script of Class Show and *Lots of Planets Have a North* Autoethnography. PDF of thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

This practice-based PhD considers resistance in solo stand-up performance by Northern English women marginalised on the basis of class, gender and regional identity. I am a professional stand-up poet from the North of England and have mobilised my own stand-up practice to explore this issue using methodologies from performance and comedy studies and the social sciences. I have also conducted wider sociocultural research and interviewed 27 stand-up practitioners, and undertaken a content analysis of 260 newspaper comedy reviews. This mixture of practice-based research and original empirical research exemplifies the “mixed methods” that Lockyer (2006) points out are particularly appropriate to capture the multi-dimensional processes of production and consumption that constitute stand-up comedy, although the mixed methods she suggested did not include practice-based research. This thesis argues that these contribute a vital and under-represented inside view of stand-up.

I began doing “open-mike” performances in 1998 and became a full-time stand-up poet, which involves earning money from performances, workshops, broadcasts, commissions and residencies, in 2006, when I was thirty-one. I am deliberately using the term “stand-up performance” in this thesis rather than “stand-up comedy” because it is a term which covers the hybrid form of stand-up comedy and performance poetry I practise, which I call “stand-up poetry”. I’ve been based in the North of England throughout my career, although I perform and travel all over the country. I have often been aware of being in a gendered or classed minority, though this changes in different contexts. For example, I am particularly conscious of the relative lack of female stand-ups when I gig in comedy clubs, whereas I am particularly conscious of the lack of Northern voices when I do poems on Radio 4. I have often felt I am trying to work against and resist some aspect of my identity in my performance and writing – what is expected of me as a woman, a Northerner, a comic, a poet or a working-class person – while sometimes playing up and highlighting these elements.

Before beginning my research I was aware that debates about women and stand-up comedy raged in the media and were also being pursued in academia, but I was less aware of any debate or research on the perception of Northerners. There seemed to be an unquestioned common narrative about the people from the North of England being particularly funny, but I was aware that I and many of my fellow comics and poets faced

prejudice when dealing with the media and producers, and difficulties rooted in our geographical (and sometimes social and economic) marginalisation compared to performers based in the South. I was occasionally asked to contribute to conversations about arts and cultural policy in the North, particularly based on my work facilitating performance and writing projects for young people, but noticed that these issues didn't seem to be raised there very often either. Inequalities in the creative workplace—such as sociologist Katie Milestone's revelation (2016) that only 23% of creative industry workers in Manchester are women, as compared to 42% nationally— are not widely discussed among stand-up practitioners or producers and consumers in the cultural industries.

I began to gather that some of these gaps and silences were connected to class and to denial about its continuing importance in culture and representation, and started to follow sociologists of class and gender such as Bev Skeggs, Kim Allen and Imogen Tyler (on Twitter, not in the street). I wanted the voices of practitioners to be represented more often in these conversations, but didn't really want to give up my practice in order to join them myself, so when I discovered there was such a thing as a practice-based PhD it seemed the perfect solution. As a stand-up, I tend to write and perform what I'm thinking about, and I wanted to write and perform these issues. This is why performance autoethnography emerged as a key methodology for me. Autoethnography is a methodology which is "between autobiography and ethnography" (Ellis et al, 2011). Ethnography involves being a "Participant Observer" in order to describe a cultural context and its practices and relations, from the inside. It uses "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) – that is, layered, sensory and detailed observational writing – to describe a culture. As the auto suggests, in autoethnography, there is a focus on writing the experiences of the self into the research. This can be both a process and a product according to Ellis et al (2011), in a way that is embodied by this thesis.

Some practitioners of the methodology have developed "performance autoethnography", which, Spry says, "corporeally manifests the dialogical praxis of critical theory and the performing body" (2001, p.421). This widens the emphasis of the autoethnography from the writing to the performing body. Combining the stand-up poetry form with this critical social sciences method therefore allows me to consciously challenge canonical ways of writing and doing research as a participant observer from inside my practice. I have included video of a performance called *Lots of Planets Have a North* in my practice and would describe that as a performance autoethnography. I have also gathered some of my

data about how Northernness is interpreted by audiences by doing performance autoethnographies during the course of my research and talking to audiences during and after them. Due to my particular art form, I would say these could be described as “stand-up autoethnographies”. In particular I focused on a comedy show about not wanting to be middle-class that I recorded for Radio 4, as part of a four-part series I had made called *The Price of Happiness* (The first two were transmitted in 2015 and the next two, including the class show, in 2017). Clips of the show as a work in progress and the live recording are included here, and it is the live versions of this show I am submitting and analysing as part of my thesis. I have included the recording script and broadcast version of the show in my appendices for reference.

My practice of talking to audiences chimes with Conquergood’s idea of a “dialogical performance” (1985), which respects the difference of the Other, but starts conversations with them. In this thesis I explore the potential of my stand-up practice to be an intimate dialogue with an audience, rather than the aggressive monologue it is sometimes (e.g. Double, 2005) presented as being. I am aware of alternately resisting the expectations of the roles of PhD researcher/academic and of stand-up performer during the process of researching and writing this thesis. Using Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological work on taste (2010) and the comic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) has helped me recognise how moving between positions and identities is crucial to my practice and to my resistance.

That dialogism is really important in the performer-and-audience/writer-and-reader relationship too, isn’t it? It breaks the fourth wall.

Whoa. Who are you? I’m just getting into a flow here.

I’m your interrupting dissertation voice. You must remember me. Last heard way back in “Anti-dissertation: a social science fiction” (Fox, 1996).

Seriously? You’re citing my undergraduate dissertation from 20 years ago in my PhD introduction. I’m doomed. I really will have to follow through on that joke I’ve been making about how it’s compulsory to get your examiners drunk before a viva for a PhD in stand-up comedy.

I’ve had to come back. You can’t start capitulating to a monologic authoritative discourse now. And your performance practice is so much about heteroglossia. You’re going to have to show that in the thesis itself too.

Heteroglossia?

Don't pretend not to know. That won't wash, since the readers know that you're me and vice versa.

You mean Bakhtin's concept (1982) of multiple voices within the same text representing not the author's unified view, but genuinely giving voice to other positions and ways of speaking, like in the novels of Dostoyevsky? A polyphonic multiplicity of positions which is the opposite to the monological authority of the state or the police or the church? A sort of underpinning of carnival, which Bakhtin saw as a time when "lower" and "higher" status discourses interpenetrated and fertilised each other and was an inevitable reaction to more monological times, language being characterised by struggle and liminality and whatnot? Really, a pretty suitable sort of discourse to have in a thesis which is soon going to say that carnival is a powerful concept for looking at classed and gendered expressions of Northernness in solo stand-up performance. Especially one making use of Stallybrass and White's excellent *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986). They say that only a "challenge to the hierarchy of sites of discourse" (p.201), which usually comes from the marginalised, could actually lead to political change. Perhaps a Northern woman's stand-up practice in a PhD thesis could be that?

Well, if you're as idealistic and utopian as Bakhtin is sometimes criticised for being (e.g. by Kayser, 1981), perhaps...

You've made appearances in other texts, haven't you, annoying and slightly parodic second voice?

*I pop up from time to time, you know. I have my moments. I liked the halcyon days of discourse analysis, social psychology and the sociology of scientific knowledge back in the mid-nineties. There I was in Malcolm Ashmore's *The Reflexive Thesis* (1989). I'd already popped up in Mike Mulkay's *The Word and the World* (1985) and was hinted at in Mick Billig's "Repopulating the depopulated pages of social psychology" (1994).*

Well, could you please pop off for now, although I'm sure you will be resurfacing later on? I might find you a bit irritating, but actually I think you may somehow embody and illustrate some of the issues to do with discursive power which are going to come up again and again throughout this thesis. Talking of which, it is important to say that I underwent a University of Leeds ethical review process before setting up my interviews. All interviewees

and workshop participants filled out a consent form agreeing I could quote them in my thesis. I explained to them that their remarks could be attributed to them, or anonymised and that they could withdraw their consent to have their words and images used at any time. As the performers are already public figures who are familiar with being interviewed about their approach to performance, they were more than happy to have their contribution to this thesis acknowledged. Workshop participants consented to me using video of the workshop processes and their performances and interviews. For convenience I have referred to them by their (real) first names only in the text.

Stand-up is a reflexive form and, as anthropologists such as Douglas (1999) and Turner (1982) have found, comedy has ritualistic public functions which can help build community and change the social order. Mintz (1985) points out that the stand-up comedian can become a social and cultural mediator, and Gilbert (2004) suggests that this function allows women and marginalised others to commodify their social commentary as entertainment. Stand-ups can adapt to their surroundings whilst also pointing out the contradictions within them. However, the argument about whether comedy is a reactionary or resistant force still rages. The rapidly expanding field of comedy studies has mostly settled and unsettled that question for itself by answering “both”. For instance Lynch describes how humour has a “dialectical nature as a simultaneous expression of both control and resistance” (2002, p.425). Despite this increase in academic interest, Friedman (2011) points out that academia in general ignores comedy and that, as an art form, it has been “absent from all recent large-scale study of British cultural participation and consumption” (p.11).

I draw on work from feminist sociologists of class and gender such as Bev Skeggs, Valerie Walkerdine and Imogen Tyler to explore how stand-up is a form which can demonstrate the complexity and difficulty of living out social mobility and being in between class and gender positions. These approaches are underpinned by the work of queer theorists, particularly Butler (1990), who asserts that gender is something we perform, rather than an essential biological identity. However, the specific effect of region is one of the things most consistently left out of the sociologies of class and culture and comedy and performance studies perspectives on stand-up. I have used postcolonial studies – notably Said’s notion of “Othering” (2003) and how it applies to Northern Englishness – in order to fill in these gaps, as well as Bakhtin’s idea of the chronotope (1984) to illuminate the way that

Northernness is often used to signify a time as well as a place (consider the persistent old-fashioned images of flat caps, mills and whippets connected with the North of England).

The original contribution of this thesis lies in reflecting on the role of stand-up performance as linguistic and social boundary-crosser from the inside. This allows me to reveal neglected cultural and sociological areas of “in-betweenness” with regard to class, gender and regional identity. The ambivalence of humour in stand-up allows an (en)counter which is both intimate and challenging and denaturalises norms and stereotypes. Throughout, I emphasise the productivity of looking at stand-up as a dialogical, rather than monological, form.

Thesis Overview

The thesis begins with a chapter analysing the stand-up as ethnographer and cultural commentator. This sets up one area of the way that the stand-up enacts resistance within society, and also demonstrates how my area of practice, within this practice-based PhD, can act as resistant voice in the methodology and production of the thesis. In a general sense resistance means a refusal to accept or comply with something, but when I talk about the resistant stand-up tactics and strategies I use within my practice and my thesis, I am referring to resistance to hegemonic discourses and narratives. The form of this thesis will echo the content. There will be vignettes in boxes, throughout, which enter into moments of my stand-up practice. I have also woven extracts from five poems to introduce the themes of each chapters. The poems summarise the key themes that came out of my interviews with fellow Northern stand-up practitioners. My interviewees’ words are quoted verbatim, with each stanza in the poem being from a different speaker. The lines in italics are my interjections. Giving the poems titles underlines their constructed nature as a poetic performance of the heteroglossia of this thesis.

In order to counter the suggestions of some humour and comedy studies researchers that humour makes nothing happen and is “only joking” (e.g. Davies, 2011), I have coined the neologism “humitas” for the process and rhetoric by which humour contributes to the performative utterances of my thesis. Humitas is a blend of “humour” and “gravitas” and describes the blended frames of humour that makes things happen, exemplified in satire, a themed wedding, a “fun” funeral or a stand-up thesis. I am particularly interested in how humour can operate outside the frame of “licensed” performances of comedy in a space that McKenzie has described as the “liminal-norm” (2001, p50). I have developed the

notion of the “scholar stand-up” to highlight how I combine practical and theoretical knowledge when I use stand-up in academia. It is an addition to the five “postures” that Gilbert (2004) says are used by female stand-ups. My use of this in performance is illustrated with a video clip of my performance autoethnography *Lots of Planets Have a North*.

The second chapter introduces the concept of the “Northernness Effect”, in which I argue that the specific history of Northern England as a culturally “separate” nation from the rest of England is both reflected in and constituted by stand-up performances. Performer and audience enact and are created by a “Northern imaginary” which is classed (as working-class), gendered (male) and reified as historic and of the past. Northern stand-ups are themselves marginalised within the wider context of the British cultural industries, as reflected in their relative lack of cultural consecration via awards and the approbation of cultural tastemakers. I illustrate cultural imperialism using a textual analysis of 260 newspaper reviews of stand-ups. Female, gay, disabled and ethnic minority Northern performers are doubly marginalised. I explore ways that stand-ups “queer” the Northern imaginary and use reverse discourse and mobilise ambiguity to playfully resist stereotypes whilst drawing on them in order to unite audiences. I also use my own practice, and draw on interviews with 27 Northern performers, and analysis of live gigs. I explore the idea of how Northern stand-ups can resist both the negative effects of the “Northernness Effect” and the exploitative commodification and appropriation of their labour by oscillating between positions.

In the third chapter I introduce a feminist standpoint to this situated lens and interrogate how the resistance of working-class women is misrecognised through these lenses. I also appropriate two conceptual figures who could be termed “archetypes”. These include the “unruly woman”, who stems from Rowe’s (1995) research on the grotesque, female bodies, class and comedy. Also, the “female trickster”, who comes from Visweswaran’s exploration of the feminist ethnographer as a female trickster (1994) and Tannen’s (2007) elaboration of postmodern female trickster figures who challenge the social order by being difficult to categorise within it. I suggest that although these figures can be imposed on female performers as ways to categorise them, they can also be consciously drawn on (much like the “postures” that Gilbert identifies) as strategies in stand-up performance, particularly in order to resist categories, stereotypes and the Northernness Effect.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I reflect on how more conscious versions of the resistances I have identified throughout the preceding chapters have worked in my new pieces of practice. This includes looking at how the paradoxical challenge and intimacy of the stand-up (en)counter can work in my interactive Radio 4 stand-up show about not wanting to be middle-class and how the Northernness Effect is both mobilised and troubled there. I also interrogate how the notion of humitas works in my performance autoethnography (and reflexively in the thesis as a whole, particularly in its use of heteroglossia and the dialogic voice), and how the commissioned radio shows may function as alternative performance autoethnographies. The roles of liminality and in-betweenness as my key modes of resistance are highlighted. Critical performance autoethnography's function as pedagogy is more evident in this chapter as I also look at how I used my skills as a facilitator to develop a feminist stand-up pedagogy in workshops and a performance with a group of women. We oscillated between the roles of performer, spectator and facilitator. This chapter includes illustrative video clips of my practice.

I then conclude by summarising my contributions and arguments and acknowledging that, although the role of the resistant stand-up could be critiqued as idealistic in nature, it operates throughout this practice-based thesis in order to demonstrate the knowledge and community-making possibilities of stand-up.

This thesis carries both the limitations and the strengths of being a situated account by one stand-up performer who constantly has to overcome her own resistance to her vulnerabilities and contingencies as a person and a performer. That's why it also includes original qualitative research from 27 Northern stand-ups, to widen the picture (in a way which fits with my notion of performance as a dialogue both with an audience and with a wider field).

I think you're trying to say that there's quite a lot to pack into not so many words, so you'd best get on with your first chapter, start unpacking your methodology and give a sense of how you're defining the field of contemporary stand-up.

The Embarrassment of Impinging- Poem

I'm the posh one now.
I embarrass myself by saying impinge
or something like that
and in Manchester I'm rough as fuck.

This feeling of not belonging anywhere.
Being slightly between two things all the time.

Somewhere between assonance and a rhyme.

I was compering
at the Comedy Store in London
and all these acts
were ignoring me in the dressing room,
I said, what are they doing that for?
Like I was a piece of dirt.
This comic said
you've got to understand
they feel like they've worked
a long time to get here.

*See me on the stage
so I cannot disappear.*

CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING STAND-UP AS PRAXIS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter will propose a new definition of stand-up performance which acknowledges its relational and situated nature as a practice and as a methodology. This means I advocate paying attention to the cultural context in which the stand-up performer practises, as well as to their identity positions (such as class, gender and ethnic or regional identity) and how they negotiate them across the different contexts. I use the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's work to analyse how this happens in my own practice. Building on descriptions of stand-up as cultural critique or anthropology, a case is made for how it can work in academia both as a methodology (particularly as performance autoethnography) and as praxis. I do this by introducing the figures of the stand-up anthropologist and ethnographer, as well as the scholar stand-up. I describe how this posture can be used to undertake ethnographic methodologies in this thesis and my associated practice-based research, as well as in the wider commodified and subsidised-art settings in which stand-up is practiced.

1. Defining Stand-up Performance

Stand-up performance is generally practised by a solo performer, often using a microphone and minimal props. Stand-up comedy is generally performed at dedicated comedy nights or even specially designated comedy club venues, though it can also form part of mixed bills of music and variety. Oliver Double, an influential figure in the field of comedy studies within the UK, points out that stand-up is difficult to define because "the boundaries are fuzzy" (2005, p.53) and its characteristics of "personality, rapport, immediacy and even funniness" are central to other types of performance. His simple definition of stand-up comedy is:

A single performer standing in front of an audience, talking to them with the specific intention of making them laugh. (1997, p.4)

What stands out here is the uniqueness of this as a type of performance that requires a reference to the (very specific) role of the audience in the production of the performance.

Stand-up comedy's similarity to conversation (the privileging of the verbal in "talking to them") adds to the difficulty of categorising it. Logan Murray, who is a well-known facilitator of comedy courses, says that:

One of the great secrets of stand-up (and the one we comedians all try to hide from civilians) is that a good comic uses exactly the same skill set that any of us use in everyday life. We talk, we listen, we think on our feet and we play. (2010, no pagination)

Arguably many people do not often listen, think on their feet or play in everyday life, but the principles of the practice are laid out there. Stand-up is defined as a heightened version of everyday interaction.

Murray also encapsulates the means by which stand-ups develop their skills. He says newcomers should write some material they think is funny and book themselves a five-minute open-mike or try-out spot. If the elation at trying it overcomes the fear, they should do it again, and then enter the process of continually honing their material. This certainly reflects the advice I have been given by stand-ups over the years: that stage-time is the key to honing your skills, the more of it the better. What scientists Collins and Evans (2007) call the "somatic tacit knowledge" of stand-up is learned on stage with an audience, and this embodied learning about how to manage the performer-audience relationship is what I try to capture in Chapter Four. Collins and Evans have grouped tacit knowledge into three categories. "relational knowledge" is knowledge that we have, but is rarely made explicit, although it easily could be when someone has to explain to somebody else how to do a task that they usually do without consciously thinking about it. There is "somatic knowledge" or bodily knowledge, whose sharing depends on our bodily affordances and abilities. Then there is "collective, social knowledge", which requires immersion in the language and practices of particular societies and is what people draw on in order to construct knowledge about how to construct knowledge. It cannot be explicated in full.

It is possible to pass on relational tacit knowledge about stand-up. These are the conversations that happen in dressing rooms, when stand-ups tell novices to start their set with their funniest joke and end with the second funniest, or suggest where to get gigs. Arguably, due to the male-dominated nature of the form, this is a type of knowledge which women may sometimes have difficulty accessing if they're not partaking in the "back room" conversations where it is passed on. Somatic knowledge of stand-up is acquired over

practice time on stage. It builds on the somatic knowledge of turn-taking in conversation, of exaggerating facial expressions in order to provoke laughter, of conveying a comedic frame via tone of voice and facial expression, and of mastering manoeuvres such as getting the microphone out of the stand confidently. It is mostly relational. Again, there is a gendered element to how accessible this knowledge is – if it is learned in front of and in conjunction with an audience, they may respond differently depending on the gendered meaning of gestures and mannerisms. For example, an audience may respond less positively to a woman who is perceived to be “losing her dignity” by making ridiculous faces than to a man who is doing the same. Finally, collective tacit knowledge is about residing in a shared web of cultural connotations and nuances about what is funny, what is kitsch, what is naff, what is longed for, what is grotesque and what is taboo. Knowledge about what is “appropriate” classed or gendered behaviour is contained here; this is necessary knowledge if a stand-up is to be able to resist or transgress it.

There is a sense in Murray’s (2010) description too of the dialogic nature of stand-up: how it is honed not just by an individual artist realising their unique vision, but by a performer and an audience in tandem. This is beyond even the “autopoietic” performance processes that Fischer-Lichte (2009) describes as the “in-betweenness” of performance, in which what performers do affects spectators and vice versa in a feedback loop. This embodied reflexivity is carried over into a stand-up’s writing process. Stand-ups often imagine an audience in front of them, responding to what they write.

This autopoietic writing and performing process parallels what McKinney and Iball describe as a “spiral of reflecting and practicing” (McKinney and Iball, 2011) in the practice-led development of praxis. What may be left out in descriptions of a stand-up comedian’s praxis is a theoretical standpoint accounting for how they make their decisions. My thesis will attempt to make this process conscious. As Murray (2010) describes it, and as Gilbert affirms, a comedian will use “what works” (Gilbert, 2004, p.68) in order to get laughs.

I would argue that there are, however, parameters imposed by genre and context which influence which discourses and repertoires a stand-up performer will draw on when they decide “what works”. I would further contend that more attention should be paid to the impacts of class, gender, geographical and other situated identities on both the autopoietic loop between performer and audience and the way that material is then edited and generated. Attention should also be paid to the shifts in positioning that a stand-up performer undertakes across different contexts with the same material.

The work of the French sociologist Bourdieu (e.g. 1993, 2010) is useful when looking at this because he researched how cultural workers' tastes and dispositions impact on the cultural contexts in which they operate (and how those cultural contexts operate on them). His concept of cultural capital is particularly generative when looking at classed, gendered and regional identities in comedy and poetry. He says that people's inherited bodily dispositions and tastes (*habitus*) can be deployed in particular areas of society and the economy (*fields*) in order to accumulate worth and value which is relevant to that field (*cultural capital*). For example, the *habitus* of a middle-class child who has been trained to enjoy classical music, reading and skiing holidays means they are used to particular ways of appreciating and talking about art and life which mean they may deal more confidently and adeptly with an interview at a public school than a working-class child. The middle-class child may also recognise the interview as an opportunity to accumulate further cultural capital, whereas the working-class child may not.

Bourdieu's theory of practice can describe both how the stand-up performer acts as cultural producer within a specific context (*the field*) and how the strategies they mobilise are received by an audience which shares (or doesn't share) bodily dispositions with them (*habitus*) and generates value which can be exchanged (*cultural and symbolic capital*). Bourdieu's work helps to highlight social and cultural context as an important factor in the audience/stand-up performer dialectic. He describes how people jockey for position in a field by using the analogy of a game, in which players deploy different-coloured tokens representing different types of capital (such as social and economic) available to them. Their moves feel fluid and spontaneous because the range of possible moves within their field has been instilled since birth, via their *habitus*. Bourdieu says some people have a better "feel for the game" (1993) than others and are able to be strategic about how they use their tokens in order to boost their position and perhaps diminish that of their opponents. I would suggest that this corresponds to Collins and Evans' (2007) notion of "collective tacit knowledge". The game-playing tactics of comedians involve making this collective tacit knowledge explicit. They wave their coloured tokens in the air and shout, "Look at this game we're unconsciously playing – shall I tell you all that we're playing it and reveal the rules?". This is clear in the interview material I explore in Chapter 2. It is a different way to play the game, but it is still playing the game. For some people, entering into the field of stand-up comedy is a way to deploy the tokens they have in the field of cultural production. If they possessed tokens of a different colour, they might have used them to become an opera singer or a theatre director. I would contend that I would not

have had the right colour tokens to enter the field of stand-up performance had I been born in Yorkshire twenty years earlier (when most comedy took place in working men's clubs), mainly due to my gender. While growing up I didn't acquire the right colour tokens to play Ophelia at the RSC (due to my class and regional accent).

Bourdieu saw the habitus as continually adjusting to its circumstances and conceded that at certain liminal moments (though he does not use the term "liminal"), there is a freedom for shifts in habitus to occur, particularly in the activation of dispositions which are already there but dormant. It is generative, though not infinitely so – as evident in his definition of habitus:

Schemes of perception, appreciation and action [which] enable (people) to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react. (2000a, p.138)

Although this can lead to pessimistic interpretations of Bourdieu in which there is little possibility for resistance or "lines of flight", as Deleuze (1987) would say, from structural oppression, Bourdieu does acknowledge that resistant strategies can be developed and passed on – though this must happen at a level as deep as that at which the habitus itself is inscribed – bodily, psychologically and socially. It is for this reason that he says that, for example, feminist "conscious raising" activities are not enough to challenge hegemonies. He asserts that:

While making things explicit can help, only a thoroughgoing process of countertraining, involving repeated exercises, can, like an athlete's training, durably transform habitus. (2000a, p.172)

Applying Bourdieu's theory to stand-up performance, I would contend that the repeated exercises involved in developing stand-up material (usually on stage but sometimes in workshops with expert practitioners or peers) can constitute just such a countertraining. I will explore this further in Chapter Four when I recount comedy workshops I ran with women. The liminal, "in-between" spaces of stand-up performances can open up cracks in the habitus of the performers and workshop participants and allow the expression of previously dormant energies. For Bourdieu, it is possible for someone to recognise the gap between their habitus and the field they're in as an illusion (*illusio*) if they recognise the rules of the game of the field and refuse to play by them. He also concedes that the habitus will change in response to new experience and that there can be "blips" (2000a, p.

162) when new modes of adjustment are needed. Dealing with their own feelings of not fitting in by calling out the rules of the game is the *raison d'être* of many stand-up practitioners, and with this they have much in common with social scientists and performance researchers.

Do you mean like what I'm doing?

Exactly, dialogic voice, exactly. Thank you for breaking the *illusio* again. It is clear that this countertraining can only be an intersubjective process in the stand-up performance form. I see it as happening between performer and audience, although this is still under-investigated in performance and comedy studies. Miles has called for more phenomenological approaches to stand-up and says that “attempts to seriously analyse the stand-up comedian–audience relationship barely exist, at least in emotional terms”. (2014, p.12). A practice-based research which attends to these intersubjective performer-and-audience relationships whilst taking account of how structure affects agency and vice versa can be useful here. Bourdieu’s theory of practice is capable of underpinning this in my thesis because his concept of *habitus* describes the nexus where they meet and how “the body is in the social world but the social world is in the body” (2000a, p.152).

For this reason I would like to make the relational nature of stand-up clearer and have rewritten Double’s definition of stand-up in a way which takes account of the crucial role of the audience and the complex range of responses which might be provoked and which troubles the idea of a performer having a “specific intention” to make the audience laugh. My proposed new definition would be:

Stand-up comedy is a form of performance in which a solo performer talks to an audience and constructs a temporary community with them in which laughter becomes a privileged interactional response.

I can see the Comedy Store taking that for its new tagline...

I’m going to pretend that interjection never happened, even though that’s not very dialogic of me, and proceed to an examination of how I fit into the wider field of stand-up as a practitioner who works in a cultural context in which sometimes the dominant currency is economic and sometimes it is cultural (broadly, art versus money). I will begin to look at how this impacts on my practice itself, and on how I relate to an audience. I will begin with

a vignette exemplifying how the same punchline can be heard differently across three different contexts.

2. Locating Stand-up Performance

1. It is a working men's club in Saltaire, a small village in West Yorkshire which Titus Salt originally built for his mill workers in 1851. The compère calls himself the "Simon Cowell of Saltaire" and wears a flat cap, jacket with glittery lapels and slippers. The ethos of the night might best be described as "surreal music hall spoof". It is called "Cabaret Saltaire". There have been spoof musical acts, including a "Little Johnny Cash" and, just before I come on, the "Czeztikov" (pronounced "Chesty Cough") Brothers with their "psychic dancing goat boy, Gary". Not a real goat. I wonder how I will fare in this line-up, given that my act is not spoof or ironic. The compère introduces me as a "stand-up poet". Earlier, in introducing the acts who would be on that night, he had said, "She's a local lass," and then said my name, to nearly no response (I was originally from near there, but left two decades before to go to university). I take the mike from the stand and plant myself in the middle of the stage. There is a lower laugh than usual to my first comic poem, perhaps because the ethos of the night would dictate that I am setting myself up to be an ironically bad poet, not a sincerely comic poet. I sarcastically thank them for the riotous applause to my name at the start and say I haven't lived in Bradford for years and do some of my stand-up about Bradford and about Newcastle, where I moved to. It gets good (big and deep) laughs. I say to the audience of Christmas cabaret revellers, "I call myself a stand-up poet. Because if you say you're a comedian who does poems... nobody comes to see you. But if you say you're a poet who does comedy... nobody still comes to see you... but at least you get Arts Council funding." There is a roar of laughter, almost of triumphant approval, and a round of applause. This line does not usually get a round of applause. It feels like it is approval for me getting away with it somehow. Getting one over on the people who hold the pursestrings.

2. It is a white-walled, fully lit conference room in Birmingham at 10 am. Arts Council committee members in suits and smart casual wear sit around large tables. The technical operator gives me a handheld radio mike which I carry up to the stage with me. Chairman of the Arts Council Peter Bazalgette has introduced the day, which is an opportunity for local and area council members to talk about future Arts Council strategy in the aftermath of Brexit. Then he introduces me and says I have done poems and comedy on Radio 4, that I am doing a PhD in stand-up performance, that I must be good at spotting talent

because I encouraged the stand-up comedian Sarah Millican to do comedy after she came to a workshop I ran, and that I am a “friend of the Arts Council” who will be writing a poem summing up the day later. I do a funny poem about Northern voices. It gets a reasonable laugh at the end and chuckles at the punchlines throughout. Laughs and energy don’t build. The audience resets to zero after each laugh. I don’t expect more. It’s daylight, it’s morning, it’s a corporate event. I say, “I call myself a stand-up poet. Because if you say you’re a comedian who does poems... nobody comes to see you. But if you say you’re a poet who does comedy... nobody still comes to see you... but at least you get Arts Council funding.” There is a big, deep laugh, as big as a comedy club laugh, and surprised grins round the white tablecloths.

3. It is a small, vegetarian café in Newcastle on a dark November evening. A regular monthly night for new local comedians or local comedians trying new material. The owner of the café does ten minutes of material about running a vegetarian café and goes down well with the audience of mainly twentysomethings. The twentysomething acts talk about boyfriends and girlfriends and I whisper to the friends I have come with that I feel old. The compère introduces me by telling the audience that I ran a workshop that he did ten years ago. I age ten more years. My first joke, about how my multi-coloured hair is a look that suggests “My Little Pony, the wilderness years”, gets muted laughs and I age ten more years. I say, “I call myself a stand-up poet. Because if you say you’re a comedian who does poems... nobody comes to see you. But if you say you’re a poet who does comedy... nobody still comes to see you... but at least you get Arts Council funding.” There is another muted laugh. I wish I could start the whole stand-up set again.

In this section I locate stand-up geographically and in relation to a high art-mass production spectrum and then overlay the two lenses. The situated nature of stand-up performance is rarely acknowledged in texts which primarily analyse single performances (e.g. Double, 2005; Gilbert, 2004; Mizejewski, 2015), most often recorded performances from mainstream comedians. I would contend that stand-up is a productive art form for witnessing how class, gender and regionality are constructed performatively, in the sense in which Butler (1990) contends that identities are unconsciously constructed from reiterated performances, rather than expressing fixed or essential human identity based on “natural” or biological imperatives.

I will explore both parts of my practice – the stand-up comedy and the performance poetry – and thus demonstrate how one performer can operate across a wide cultural field. I

would contend that, although this is a visible part of my practice, this versatility is characteristic of many stand-up comics and poets. Stand-up comedy is a much more commercial field of production than poetry, though. As a practitioner across both fields, I observe that stand-up poetry mostly takes places in small pub rooms and arts centres. Stand-up comedy is on television and sells millions of DVDs, and the top stand-ups sell out arenas. My broad view also allows me to look at how resistance might be possible in fields that conform both to what Bourdieu (2010) classed as the “mass sub field of production” in which big audiences and money are most valued, as well as fields which conform to the “restricted sub field” of production in which “art” holds a higher cultural value.

As the sociologist Friedman (2014), who has applied Bourdieu’s work to stand-up comedy, has pointed out, contemporary comedy itself also subdivides into fields of mass and restricted production. Throughout this thesis, I will be contending that factors relating to class, gender and regional identity have some influence over which field a performer is categorised into. For example, in Chapter Two I will examine how “Northernness” can be commodified and add to the mainstream marketing of a comedian such as Peter Kay or Sarah Millican. At the same time, in my own case, it can make the “stand-up” element of my performance and writing more visible than the “poetry” element to audiences and tastemakers. Northernness can act as a (classed and gendered) filter for certain aspects of a performer’s work and ultimately impact on how their cultural products are distributed and consumed. I call this the “Northernness Effect”.

Brodie (2014) explains the “in-between” nature of stand-up as a form by taking a folkloric approach to it. He points out that it is the only “mass-mediated cultural performance activity” which relies absolutely on an audience – not in the way that a writer needs a reader but “like a skier needs snow” (p.36), to the extent that its usual consumable product is a live show.

He also identifies the third place that stand-up as a form takes – between Adorno’s mass cultural product of the culture industry and folk culture – and the tensions that this invokes. For him it means that “stand-up comedy is inherently folkloric”, as it is live, despite the fact that “the economics of stand-up comedy, however, are directed toward turning a live performance into an object” (Brodie, 2014, p.37) which can be sold and distributed.

Arguably stand-up poetry is able to stay closer to the folk culture end of this spectrum. Poetry books and CDs are consumer products, but they are less likely to enter a mass culture market than those of stand-up comedians (Pam Ayres and John Cooper Clarke are notable exceptions). Greater access to public funding, such as Arts Council funding, than for stand-up comedy (which is not currently funded by the Arts Council at all), also allows stand-up poetry to stay within this third space, without having to enter the highbrow culture arena of literary poetry. In some ways my position seems to fulfil Richard Schechner's prediction that Philip Auslander referred to during a discussion about the relationship between television and live performance: that there will be more in-between genres of performance. Schechner said that "in between is becoming the new norm" (Auslander, 1994, p.68). Auslander points out that artists like Spalding Gray and Laurie Anderson can occupy liminal positions between the "high vanguard" categories like performance art (or poetry) and "popular entertainment" like stand-up comedy. He says this postmodern boundary blurring means that artists can enjoy "enormous cultural mobility ... eliding distinctions between forms of performance, high art and popular culture and the traditional distinctions among audiences that go along with them" (ibid., p.126).

In order to illustrate how the stand-up form and its practitioners operate within the tension between "art" and "money", I have created a diagram (Figure 1, p.30) which draws on one Bourdieu (1993) used to describe the 19th-century French literary field. It attempts to clarify my position within and across the restricted sub-field of poetry and the mass field of comedy. I have included some of the performances I mention in this thesis. It is useful in some respects, but risks reifying a set of relationships which are deeply fluid and relational. It is further complicated by the fact that some stand-up comedy operates according to the values of the restricted sub-field in which art is more valued than money and some stand-up poetry operates according to the values of the mass field in which money is valued more than art. I have included the geographical locations of performances in the diagram as I would contend they have an impact on the perceived cultural legitimacy of the event. For example, as I will argue in the next chapter, something I have called the "Northernness Effect" means a poetry reading taking place at the Southbank in London is likely to have more cultural legitimacy than exactly the same line up at the Lit and Phil in Newcastle. Generally, the further from the cultural centre (London), the less legitimacy a cultural event holds. This distance might not only be in miles; for example a larger city like Newcastle might still have more cultural legitimacy than a small town like Thirsk, which is technically nearer London.

What became clear while creating the diagram was that the content of my performances changes depending on the location of the cultural producer booking me and the audience they hope to target, mainly in the proportion of poems to comedy I include. Generally, I include more poetry in the events in the “restricted sub-field” and more stand-up comedy in the events closer to the mass audience.

The academic events I have started to do as part of this thesis-process, including conference performances, are also in the restricted sub-field (the left two quarters of this diagram). These are usually a mixture of lecture and poetry or comedy performance and would garner less “legitimate cultural capital”, for example in the form of recognition from an organisation like the Poetry Society, but are consecrated by universities within the sub-field of academia and performance.

I feel most freedom as a performer in the middle area when I blend stand-up comedy and poetry (the events coloured green). Here, the festivals and events which survive on a mixture of public funding and door money from the public cater to a broad range of people with a broad range of cultural tastes. I perform stand-up without pressure to be “stand-up comedy” enough to get a certain number of laughs per minute and satisfy audience members who have come specifically for commercial comedy, or to be “consecrated comedy” enough that I am innovating with form like performers Friedman (2014) names as doing so, such as Stewart Lee, Tim Key or Josie Long. I am able to do poetry without pressure for it to innovate with form or satisfy the literary requirements of poetry consecrators such as poetry publishers Bloodaxe and Picador, nor does it have to satisfy the mainstream profile and audience-pulling power of “brand-name” poets such as Pam Ayres, John Cooper Clarke or Kate Tempest. These events have a remit to attract audiences, but don’t need to do so in order to exist. I feel a freedom here which I have also felt much of the time whilst doing my PhD practice. Bourdieu recognises this kind of reflexive, artistic freedom in his theory of practice when he says, “It is so important, if one is to have a bit of freedom from the constraints of the field, to attempt to explore the limits of the theoretical box in which one is imprisoned” (1993, p.184).

He has basically summed up your reason for wanting to do this PhD up right there, hasn't he?

Yes, basically. I feel this freedom less when I am attempting to fulfil particular high levels of economic or artistic value. My Radio 4 comedy series was commissioned by a public sector broadcaster, rather than a commercial one, and felt closer to a middle ground

between art and commerce. The BBC adopts legitimate cultural values but relays them to a wider audience. Radio 4 in particular is positioned as disseminating middle-class values and using a “middle-brow tone” in its light entertainment (Born, 2005, p.29). Bourdieu (1993) suggests that literature festivals are also middle-brow events (I have included my performance at one of Britain’s biggest book festivals, Hay, in the diagram). Bourdieu says that middle-brow bourgeois art is “condemned” to define itself in relation to legitimate culture. The artist producing it censors themselves in order to appeal to the public (ibid., p. 125) and there is a consequent snobbery about this need (perhaps a self-snobbery and one felt by others). He says that, for the petit-bourgeois audiences of middle-brow art, “avidity combines with anxiety” (2010, p.321) because they’re experiencing something which they know they’re *supposed* to like, in order to display their cultural capital, but which doesn’t conform to their “ingrained” tastes. I would contend that I have been able to convert my resistance to both of these positions (subservience to the values of legitimate culture and the adoption of those values) into a sort of capital in itself, through my use of comedy, and I particularly demonstrate this in my Radio 4 show about not wanting to be middle class.

Deploying the skills and art of stand-up allows me to flexibly move between different positions in the field. I change the terms of the gig at the same time as I appear in it. I construct the gig, and am constructed by it. Again, my regionality is part of this. My Northernness might become a novelty which adds a sort of “emerging cultural capital” to the gig (as I will discuss in Chapter Four in relation to my performance at Eton College). I might highlight and mock the economic and cultural values that the gig espouses, or the institutions by which it is legitimated. For example, when I say in my Radio 4 show about not wanting to be middle-class that doing the show on Radio 4 is like “Che Guevara announcing the revolution in *Waitrose* magazine”, I am mocking the middle-class values the station is known for and my own complicity in them. In the examples in the box at the top of this subsection, my statement about stand-up poetry getting me Arts Council funding means different things to the audiences in each venue, depending on their position in relation to arts funding. It also allows me to define what I do in a certain way – or at least to assert that I am working across and between genres often seen as separate (comedy and poetry). I will explore this further in Chapter Three when I introduce the stand-up as trickster.

The tacit skills of a stand-up performer mean the work of a stand-up performance is often hidden (or at least invisible to an audience who read much of the work as “just talking”).

However, stand-ups are always observing and analysing their cultural context. This relational role of a stand-up can make them an anthropologist both in their practice and in an academic methodology – in this case, my developing practice as a performance autoethnographer, as I will now explore.

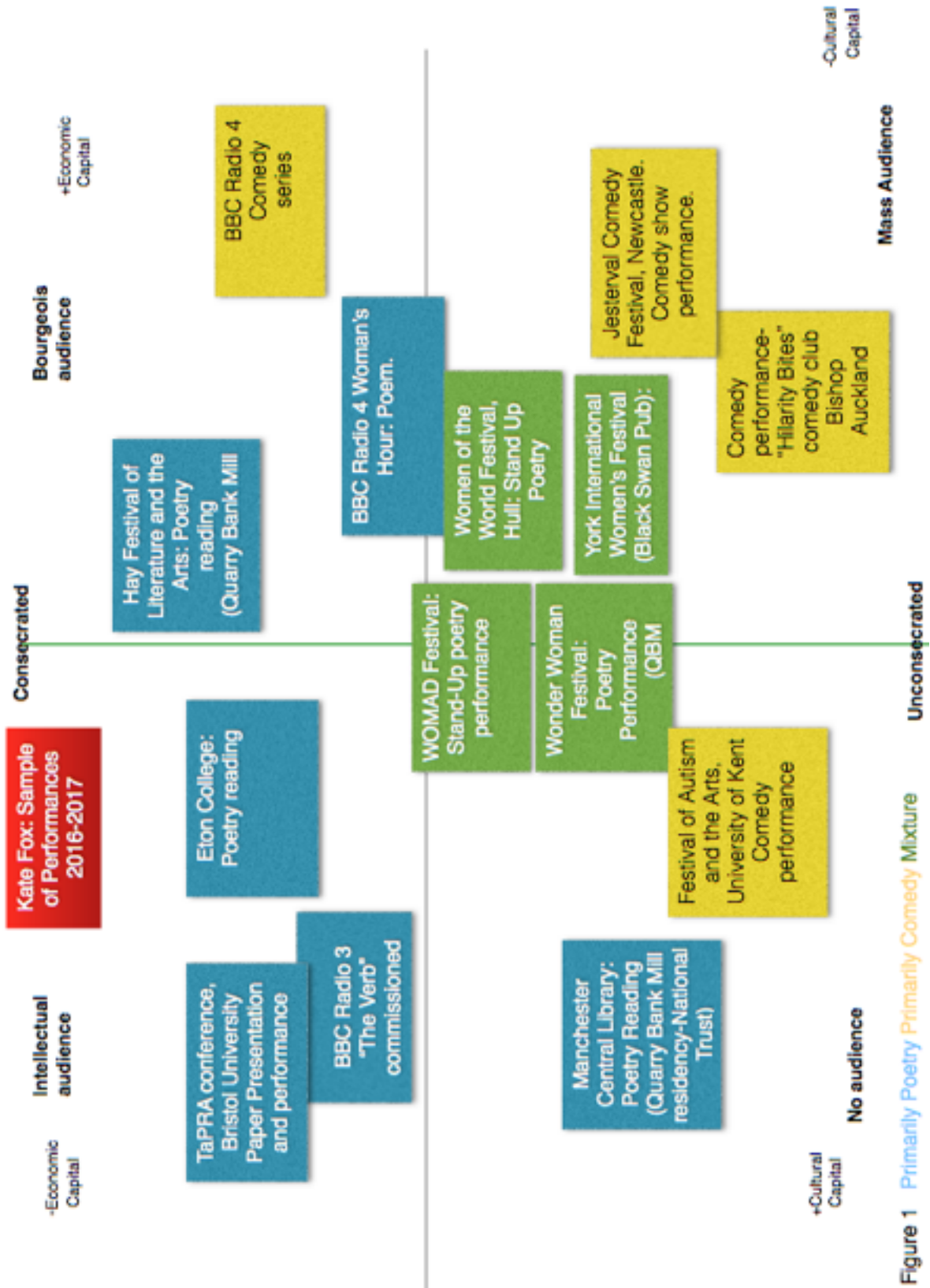


Figure 1: Locating Sample of Performances 2016-7

3. How Stand-Ups Relate to Their Audiences And Wider Cultural Contexts

The comedians are crowded into the tiny dressing room backstage in the sole-purpose Northern comedy club. There are glasses of water on the table, a typed running order is pinned on the wall. The crowd is loud outside; it's half an hour until the show. Somebody asks a guest comic if they're playing the comedy club's sister venues in Scotland.

"I do better in Glasgow," one of them says.

"It's bigger than the Edinburgh club," says another.

"Yes, so is here. Here's great, though," the female comic in her twenties says. "I did the run last year and here was my favourite of them."

"They're young, though," interjects a comedian in her fifties.

"Alright, though," adds a male comic in his twenties. "Mainly students".

The comic in her fifties replies, "I do alright with students and over thirty-fives, it's young professionals I struggle with."

The young male comic responds, "If I see a fifty-plus audience I worry."

"As long as I'm not in Kent," says the older woman who will shortly do a successful set pointing out the ridiculousness of Brexit and Trump from the point of view of a Jewish immigrant: "I die everywhere in Kent, so it doesn't matter."

Academics including Koziski (1984), Mintz (1985) and Gilbert (2004) have noted the way that stand-up comedians can be compared to anthropologists in their immersion into cultures whilst simultaneously studying them and coming to understand and question their norms. Koziski (1984) asserts that comedians and anthropologists share a way of seeing the world. They note incongruities and patterns and reveal the operation of tacit knowledge. She suggests that stand-up comedians fulfil an ancient social function as storytellers and tellers of myths. Mintz (1985) draws on the anthropological work of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner to also note the ritualistic functions of comedians. He marks the paradox and ambiguity that attends so much discussion of the function of comedy – the comedian is both negative exemplar, who we have licence to laugh at, and a spokesperson for us: a shaman and anthropologist pointing out the gap between "what is and what we believe should be" (1985, p.77). Smith (2015) describes the comedian

Russell Kane as a “comedic sociologist” in the tradition of interpretivist sociology, particularly in the way that his “self-heckles”, in which he comments on the processes of his own act and persona, illuminate the way that society could be something else. Kane highlights the stereotypes, ideal types and roles that make up contemporary British society and, by making fun of them, shows how things could be different. As Smith stresses, not all comedians fulfil this function, but it has become one of the aims of my practice.

Like Kane, I am concerned to highlight the impact of class mobility. He went from being brought up on a council estate to occupying the position of a “middle-class comedian”. I have used the class show in my series *The Price of Happiness* to examine my own journey from daughter of a single mum living in a terrace house to professional stand-up poet and the “in-betweenness” involved in being a woman in academia with a Northern English accent. I will analyse this piece of practice in Chapter Four. Friedman (2013) has also analysed Kane’s comedy and sees his work as a valuable illustration of the messiness and confusion involved in social mobility, providing vivid depictions of this which are usually missing from political and academic accounts.

For Smith (2015) there is an example of Mills’ “sociological imagination” (1959) at work in Kane’s stand-up, in which “private troubles” and “public issues” are understood as interconnected. I would argue that this is operational for many comedians. Reflection on personal issues within stand-up performances is connected to and embedded within wider social issues and structures. Smith also says that Kane’s “self-heckle” is a form of Bakhtin’s heteroglossia (1984) in which the multiply-tongued nature of discourse is put on display and undercuts the authority of a single perspective.

That’s an excellent thing to do in something that could otherwise be a monolithic, authoritative discourse.

Yes, you would think that.

Stand-up performers are also anthropologists because they need to be in order to make their practice work. They need to know where they are, who they’re performing to and what their audience’s attitudes are. I would also suggest that reflexively expressing knowledge about one’s position in the field is one way out of being trapped in the “art versus money” dialectic, as Bourdieu (2000a) suggests, even if it is not possible to escape this context completely.

In the example at the top of this section, comedians are trying to work out how well their style of performance will fit into the particular context of the venue where they're going to perform, attuned to the local setting and audience. The "dressing-room ethnography" above is an example of the everyday "micro-ethnographies" which are more commonly noticed in studies of organisations (Wasterfors, 2008).

In stand-up, performers reflect on bodily and social traits which are usually unconscious and tacit. They make them conscious and involve the performer and audience in the feedback loop of laughter. In my practice my use of ethnographic methods has become increasingly conscious. Although ethnography is a methodology used by anthropologists, and there is a case for referring to stand-ups as either ethnographers or anthropologists, or as both, I will henceforth refer to stand-ups as ethnographers only when they use this methodology as part of their practice, as I do in this thesis.

I think there are at least two moments of ethnography described in the vignette below: firstly, the process I describe during my performance, and, secondly, the recognising of it as ethnographic data which contributes to this section of my PhD, writing it up and including it here.

Ooh, meta.

1. This is a poetry gig at a literature festival. The audience sit in a library, in rows among the books. I am trying out new stand-up material I developed for the body show in the *Price of Happiness* series (2017). I talk about not waxing my pubic hair and comment that "I didn't get the memo when all the ladygardens went Kojak back in 2006". There is a ripple of murmured appreciation and laughter at the quirky phrasing of "ladygardens going Kojak", which combines a euphemistic image of a vagina with an image of a seventies American television detective played by the famously bald Telly Savalas, to make a ridiculous juxtaposition. My next line about how it was a "total deforestation, no wonder they call it a Brazilian" gets what feels to me like a slightly embarrassed laugh. Whether it's at the pun or the subject matter, I can't tell. I make a mental note that the responses to the pubic hair material are too unpredictable and perhaps, at poetry gigs, I need to somehow echo the audience's embarrassment at my talking about my pubic hair so openly by starting with some sort of mock apology for including too much information.

2. At a comedy gig in a pub in Hartlepool, I almost lose heart on my drive there when I pass a statue of Andy Capp just behind the pub. He was a cartoon character who regularly

beat his wife Flo up and became a byword for the stereotype of the North-East of England being full of domestic violence. The landlord then greets me with “Are you the stripper, love?” as I pass through the bar on the way to the function room where the gig is being held. I laugh along but think that all my work to disprove stereotypes of Northern sexism might just be pointless. However, as I stand at the bar at the back of the crowded room, I enjoy the stand-up who is talking about being a teacher and note how warm and quick to respond the audience are. I consciously think that this is an audience that quite likes a Northern stereotype, but also quite likes to see one overturned. I feel they are going to be receptive to a mixture of my work in progress and take to the stage confidently. I do my material about there not being Northern newsreaders, which gets a good response, then enjoy riding the wave of my pubic hair material which, as I note out loud, divides the audience. Some groups of women are laughing really loud and long. Some men look a bit uncomfortable. I point this out and get more laughs, even from the men. There is a huge laugh from nearly everybody on my pubic hair line about how “It was a total deforestation... no wonder they call it a Brazilian.”

Becoming more conscious of the reasons for the differences in reception of my material has helped me recognise why some types of material are more likely to work in particular contexts than others, but has also allowed me to be braver in pushing through these audience responses. It somehow also allows me to take particular failures of my material less personally. I will explain in Chapter Four how I began to recognise how the shame and vulnerability underlying people’s experiences of social mobility was impacting on how audiences responded to material about class. I was then able to incorporate this knowledge into my show in a way which enabled audiences to feel more comfortable contributing to it. Work on the sociology of class, gender and culture has been particularly useful in developing my knowledge.

For example, Friedman (2014) used Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (2010) as a framework for analysing comedy consumption and found that people with higher cultural capital tended to have a disinterested approach to comedy; they were more likely to appreciate wordplay and cleverness. Those with lower cultural capital wanted to laugh out loud more and tended to appreciate more tendentious comedy. I would say that the split between the poetry and comedy elements of my practice demonstrates an extreme version of the way that most stand-up performers are able to move through a spectrum of speech registers, from comedic language to poetic language, in order to oscillate between in-group and out-

group positions and to help an audience stay on side as they move through a variety of topics and positions.

As Bourdieu suggests, the habitus is both structured and structuring; people whose dispositions include the strategy of strong laughter responses are perhaps more likely to go to the sort of event which, via non-verbal cues such as lighting, music and spatial setting (for example, chairs close together), and the explicit encouragement of performers, will elicit loud, deep laughter. At the same time, the communal nature of comedy and the socially contagious nature of laughter can draw in those who are unsure in a way which may change their habitual responses. Mintz's description (1985) of the process by which an MC or compère asks questions of an audience at the start of an event, solicits responses, perhaps teases them, still holds true to the ways in which I see the room being "worked" at the start of a stand-up event. As Mintz describes it, the performer is established as a "marginal" figure and the audience can see that they are being addressed as a homogenous collective, rather than having to reveal their personal predilections through laughter. Comic licence is then established and what anthropologist Victor Turner would call a liminal space outside the usual norms of society comes to apply.

Turner distinguished between liminoid and liminal phenomena, though he acknowledged that each contains the seeds of the other and they could be interchangeable. Liminality is a time and space in which the usual social structures and roles are in abeyance and symbols can be imbued with new meaning. Turner says, "Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm" (1974, p.78). It makes people question and criticise existing structures. In pre-agrarian societies it referred to rite-of-passage rituals which were undertaken for serious reasons but with ludic elements. However, Turner sees industrial societies as containing more of what he called liminoid phenomena, as the boundaries between work and leisure became more sharply delineated in the 1950s. Art, entertainment and sports are examples of liminoid phenomena. They are less likely to be undertaken by large sections of society involved in social tasks (such as religion). He sums up the difference with the aphorism "One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid" (ibid., p.87)

Seeing liminal spaces as transformative has some similarities to Michael Wayne's reinterpretation of Kant's theory of the aesthetic through a Marxist lens. Wayne calls Kant a "rather anti-bourgeois bourgeois philosopher" (2016, p.96) because of his acknowledgment that the aesthetic realm is somewhere that class consciousness can be

awakened, as it involves a confrontation with those living in different class conditions. He says this opens up the possibility of reflection based on critically exploring those differences. He argues that this is different to Rancière's (2009) conception of an aesthetic realm as a place which is temporarily free of class consciousness, and to Bourdieu's pessimism about finding cultural spaces which allow people to express something beyond their ingrained habitus.

Doing a practice-based thesis has allowed me to develop spaces for myself in which I can use the stand-up form to question the ingrained responses of my own and others' habitus. Arguably, these are liminal spaces within academia itself. I will now describe the sort of stand-up persona that enabled me to do this. It emerges from the idea of the stand-up as anthropologist and has become part of my methodology whilst also challenging the idea that humour cannot be efficacious outside play spaces.

4. The Scholar Stand-up

1. In the first few months of my PhD research, having set up a pilot performance so I could write about a curated stand-up comedy and poetry event, I sent a university newsletter some information about the first *Verbal Essences* cabaret I had planned, which would take place at a venue in my research department. A reply came straight back from the newsletter's administrator: "Unfortunately the event you have just advertised is not suitable for the newsletter. Its main purpose is to promote research funding opportunities and research events and I don't feel your event falls into these categories. Please do not re-advertise."

I wrote back and explained that I was doing a practice-based PhD in solo performance and this pilot event would form the basis of my research. I said, "An audience and the atmosphere of a cabaret night is crucial. I hope you can reconsider. I can reword the event or include a mention of my research."

The administrator replied that I would need to send it to her for approval and "You certainly need to take out the portion on 'have a drink at the bar'."

I had taken my cue from research seminars advertised in the same newsletter which said things like "wine and canapés will be available" to tempt people along to teatime chats on Foucault. My advert had given details of the gig, then added, "Have a drink at the bar and have a good pre-Christmas night." I decided that now was not the time to debate the

possible classed or other semiotic implications of “a wine reception” being okay whilst laughter, pleasure and a drink at the bar were not.

2. Extract from my field notes written up after the Resonances postgraduate conference, 2015, University of Leeds:

I’d decided not to use a PowerPoint here, or visible notes, but to start with a poem so as to immediately change the “register” of speech from conference presentation to performance. I also decided I would change the environment to suit a performance, though, as it happened, the panellist following me also wanted the table pushed out of the way, so there wasn’t anything to do other than make sure I stood in front of it. No barriers between me and the audience. I started by saying that if this were a stand-up performance then I’d get them to move forward so they were all nearer me or say something about the people in the chairs playing hide and seek. Straight away there were smiles, laughs and warm faces from the audience.

I then reflexively referred to how I was performing the “now” of stand-up by saying what I and the audience could see, putting us in the same space. People had left, trying to be funny would be awkward, this room was a terrible room for a comedy gig – the audience laughed at these truths.

In the questions session following, one of the audience said she saw my presentation as being like jazz – with the poems giving structure and order and improvisation around it.

Extract from a response to my Resonances presentation by conference organiser Sarah Mawby:

Kate’s abstract was initially put in our “maybe” pile. We were concerned that the topic (“A Funny Way of Being Reflexive”) might not be quite “right” for the tone of the conference. On reflection I’m not really sure why that was. Perhaps we were going for a “traditional” set of conference proceedings (whatever that is) and felt like Kate’s approach would undermine the “serious academic discourse” of the day. When the committee decided to include Kate’s proposed presentation as part of the conference proceedings I remember plainly and authoritatively stating, “Well, it could go either way”; it could be new and innovative and interesting and exciting, or it could be wholly out-of-place.

Before Kate spoke, and during the Chair's introduction to her talk, I remember she was perched, seemingly relaxed and resting, on a table in front of the conference audience (whether she felt "relaxed and resting" is something for Kate to disclose). She seemed at ease and that made me feel at ease. As Kate stood up from her perched position on the table and started to speak the first thing I noticed was her body language and hand gestures. I seem to recall that she spoke about how if she were starting a stand-up routine she would immediately take control of the space. I remember feeling as though she very much did this with her presentation. Again, I felt at ease. Relaxed. I felt as though "this is going to be enjoyable". I remember Kate being very animated and engaging. As a researcher I remember thinking that she was doing something very clever; demonstrating her approach to qualitative enquiry through the medium of her conference presentation. I appreciated this. She was funny. Her poems broke up the academic reflections and provided something tangible for us to co-analyse with her. It felt like not only was I witnessing a performance but also that I was part of a process; not just a process of performance but also an academic process of Kate figuring all this stuff out, working through her research problems and questions.

In both of the examples above I experienced a sense of being out of place and difficult to categorise because of my use of comedy in an academic environment. I came up against other people's prejudices and ways of working. At the same time, I was able to hold my ground to operate in a mode which combined humour and serious enquiry, and make a pilot gig and an unconventional conference presentation work.

When I did stand-up in postgraduate seminars, or developed stand-up material which was heavily influenced by my academic material at the time, I became the scholar stand-up. Sometimes that was something the audience knew (such as when I talked explicitly about my PhD) and sometimes it was something only I knew. It was a flexible persona.

In order to describe how stand-up positions can be either explicit or implicit to an audience, and are partially formed by their responses, it may be useful to locate the scholar stand-up as an addition to the typology of female stand-up postures rendered in Joanne Gilbert's work (2004). Gilbert said that, apart from Judith Wilt's classic 1980 essay on humour which classified two modes of women's humour (the "maiden", a non-married woman who mocks and teases but lacks power, and the "matriarch", the married woman who deflates and exposes), women's comedic types had not been properly classified. Gilbert examined working American female stand-ups and women since the nineteenth century who had

performed on stage and came up with five common types of comedic posture. These are the bawd, the bitch, the whiner, the kid and the reporter.

Table 1: Gilbert’s Typology of Female Stand-Up “Postures”

Posture/figure	Description and notes	Piece of PhD practice primarily used in
Kid	Sociocultural observation from position of (apparent) innocence and questioning. Ingratiating and supplicatory strategy in relation to audience. Lower status than audience.	<i>Price of Happiness</i> body show and class show.
Reporter	Sociocultural observation. Equal status to audience. Questioning from a position of knowledge. Androgynous.	<i>Price of Happiness</i> body show and class show.
Bawd Bitch	More confrontational position re audience – sometimes intimidatory strategy. Overt references to sex. Often using superiority humour. Higher status than audience or subjects.	Occasional moments throughout my practice – the bawd particularly in the <i>Price of Happiness</i> body show.
Whiner/Loser	Self-deprecatory, low-status stance. Ingratiating strategy	Occasional moments. Especially in introductions.

Gilbert presents her typology in the context of “strategic self-presentation” research from social psychology (Jones and Pitman, cited in Gilbert, p.126), which found five strategies commonly used by humans in order to gain social power and shape how others see them. The three most relevant to stand-ups and to Gilbert’s consequent typologies are ingratiation, intimidation and supplication (Gilbert, 2004, p.128). These could be seen as strategies which allow stand-ups to get on stage, make people laugh and get continuing opportunities to do so. Gilbert sees these operating strongly in four of the five categories of female comic posture and acknowledges that one stand-up may use all of the strategies across the course of a set, because, as she points out, the key thing for a stand-up is to use “what works” (ibid., p.131) in any given moment or situation. Nonetheless she says that most marginal comics have a key persona and will only occasionally switch.

The bawd and the bitch both employ intimidation. Joan Rivers is a classic example of the bitch (though Gilbert contends that she also uses the “whiner” strategy of self-deprecation), who “represents female autonomy”, while the bawd “may champion female sexuality”. Gilbert says both these postures may scare audience members because they “portray themselves as insatiable, manipulative or critical, all in the context of sex and sexuality” (2004, p.129).

Gilbert suggests that the strategies of unthreatening observation underpin the postures of both kid and reporter and mean that gender is less highlighted within them than in the postures of bawd and bitch, which often overtly confront and challenge traditional gender norms, and in the persona of the whiner, which could be seen to accommodate these negative norms by agreeing that women should be subordinate.

Generally, I would see my own main stand-up postures as being those of the kid and the reporter. My style is gentle, verbal and observational rather than confrontational. Adding in academic references and theory which question gender norms seems to me an extension of these postures, but it is not quite the same as them. Hence my creation of the conceptual figure of the “scholar stand-up”. She gives sociocultural opinions, as the kid and the reporter do, but is more overtly reflexive about the context of her stand-up performance and may reference academic research.

I will be deploying several figures throughout this thesis and all of them constitute postures or positions which I consciously (and sometimes unconsciously) adopt during my stand-up practice. Some of them also function as “archetypes”: that is, relational constructions of “typical” female figures other people may use to characterise female stand-ups (for instance the unruly woman and the female trickster, which I will be introducing in Chapter Three). These two are more holistic figures governing how female stand-ups are represented (and stereotyped) whereas the postures relate more to strategies that stand-ups employ with an audience during the now of a performance. There are not clear boundaries between how and when I, or an audience, might perceive me to be functioning primarily as one of these figures, but in an attempt to clarify what could otherwise be a confusing set of personas, I have tabulated them (above and in Figs 3 and 6).

The posture of the scholar stand-up questions, in a way that Stallybrass and White point out is potentially destabilising, the hierarchy between comedic and serious discourse. They said that “only a challenge to the hierarchy of sites of discourse, which usually comes from groups and classes ‘situated’ by the dominant in marginal or low positions, carries the promise of politically transformative power” (1986, p.201). We can see shades of this challenge to the hierarchy of discourses emerging among other contemporary comedians who are beginning to incorporate scholarly discourses into their material. For example, British comedian Sara Pascoe recently used references to evolutionary psychology to underpin her show about human and animal mating behaviour, *Animal* (2016). Kiri Pritchard-McLean used psychology studies to underpin her show about gender in comedy,

Hysterical Woman (2016), and Bridget Christie has referenced feminist theory in her shows. Ruby Wax did an MA in mindfulness-based CBT and has incorporated her expertise into her recent stand-up shows and books, including *Losing It* (2010).

The female scholar stand-up can have a degree of mainstream success, as Sara Pascoe and Bridget Christie have shown, but she may also find a place in the interstices of academia or the worlds of spoken word or more niche broadcasting. She may find a platform from there to critique stand-up norms and the gender and class biases of the stand-up industry. Her ability to use humour to do so may give her more authority whilst making her less threatening – but, as illustrated in the vignette above, it may also reduce her authority and make her vulnerable in fields where the hierarchy of discourse is still weighted very firmly in favour of monologic, white male authority, or even in favour of hegemonies of middle-class femininity. My particular scholar stand-up has begun to use ethnography as a methodology while writing this thesis. She also takes on a feminist standpoint, which I will explore more in Chapter Three. My contribution to knowledge comes partially in identifying this figure, and partly in learning how to embody her in my practice. This combination of the stand-up, the ethnographer and the feminist is also embodied to some extent in Visweswaran's notion of the feminist ethnographer as trickster.

For Visweswaran, the agency of the mythical figure of the trickster is a powerful way to demonstrate the failures of research and knowledge, which can only ever be partial: "The feminist ethnographer as trickster becomes one who does not profess faith in what she believes" (1994, p.100). That is, when it comes to claiming to represent other women, or to know other women, she acknowledges that she will inevitably fail. Visweswaran says, "In enacting a trickster technique of the 'as if' I attempt to avoid speaking 'as'" (ibid., p.112). This exemplifies the ambivalence of stand-up discourses which are capable of asserting something whilst at the same time denying it or calling it into question.

Are you sure?

Funny. The trickster is another liminal figure, a border crosser, who shifts across the thresholds of this thesis. She can perform her own contingency. Although I have interviewed 27 performers about their experience of gender, class and Northernness, I know that this is only a partial view of what this complex positioning is and means. Working from a non-essentialist gender position, Visweswaran makes the point that a

feminist ethnography should not solely focus on female subjects and audiences and defines it as “ethnography that foregrounds the question of gender inequality vis a vis the lives of men, women and children” (1997, p.593). For her, this keeps alive the complex set of power and social relationships by which gender is defined in the first place, rather than relying on gender identification.

In her description of the many kinds of feminist ethnographies (2001), Skeggs describes the category of empiricist feminists who believe that women possess a special and particular kind of experience, which has not been given a place in other discourses. This knowledge is called “tacit knowledge” and can be known and described. This is, of course, the tacit knowledge I have described Collins and Evans (2007) as delineating in three categories and the “tacit knowledge” that Nelson (2013) says is available to creative practitioners and can be excavated through their descriptions of their performance processes. It turns out that it is this knowledge, common to much practice-based research, that I am keen to hold in an “as if” position when I write about and represent it in my research. Although I am convinced that research on stand-up practitioner processes should not ignore their relationships with their audiences, I do not want to fall into the trap of representing this as fully knowable, explicable or representable. The anti-rhetoric of stand-up ethnography seems a useful vehicle for this purpose of a “trickster” ethnography. It is generative for rendering what Du Bois ([1903]/2016) calls the “double consciousness” of the marginalised who are spoken about by those in positions of power and must also speak to them.

Because of humour’s lower cultural capital (compared to serious discourse), the idea of a stand-up having a reflective and theoretical practice, a dialogical praxis, (In the sense in which it is used by McKinney and Iball [2011] or Paolo Freire, [1970]) can be perceived as an oxymoron. The scholar stand-up resists this. Given the pervasive association of Northernness with lower intelligence, the Northern scholar stand-up also counters the Northernness Effect, whilst at the same time treading the tricky path by which she might be rejected by her egalitarian colleagues for pretentiousness and “being up herself”.

Like when people find out what you’re studying and ask sarcastically if you need a PhD to go on Live at the Apollo nowadays...

Quite. I don’t think one of the scholar stand-up’s qualities is to be particularly mainstream, or commercial. In fact, she resists commodification, though is able to also resist the

hegemony by being able to earn money from the public sector, the academic sector and the private sector: enough to make a living, anyway.

Of course a PhD's not going to help you get on Live at the Apollo. A penis maybe...

Was that really necessary?

No, but it does allow me to insert a short practice note which illustrates the pervasive masculinity of the discourse around stand-up. I don't think all stand-up lines need to be subjected to a Freudian explanation, but one works for what I just said. There is the psychic economy of condensing the images in the joke which allows energy to be released. It is a tendentious joke – that is, it is obscene or hostile and, along with much marginal humour, it makes those in power into the butt of the joke. It displaces feelings of humiliation onto a target and, in its tendentiousness, arouses and relieves the audience. Laughter is the catharsis (Freud, 2003). As Gilbert says, "Dick jokes get the biggest and quickest laughs and in stand-up comedy, size does matter" (2004, p.68).

That's probably why I prefer stand-up poetry, really. There is more variation in rhythm and size. As the actress didn't say to the bishop. Let's move on.

For me, the critical and reflexive potential of the posture of the scholar stand-up allies the transformative potential of the form with the sort of critical and performance-oriented qualitative social science of scholars such as Conquergood (2013), Denzin (2013) and Spry (2001), as well as the burgeoning "Performative Social Science" practised by Jones (2007) and Gregory (2014). Bakhtin's work on dialogue is also an inspiration for Dwight Conquergood (2013), for example, who developed an ethnography which focuses on how embodied dialogic performance can highlight the politics of representation of text and of researched and researcher. Eventually he moved beyond the idea of dialogue to that of "co-performative witnessing" because he felt that performance studies held a radical opportunity for academia to move beyond a divisive, oppressive "scriptocentrism" and value different ways of producing and sharing knowledge than just the text, including embodied ways. He says that the "constitutive liminality of performance studies lies in its capacity to bridge segregated and differently valued knowledges, drawing together legitimated as well as subjugated modes of enquiry" (Conquergood, 2013, p.41). Comedy is a subaltern form, allied with matter and the body – with what is lower. If it is permitted across the threshold of academia it holds the potential to highlight the arbitrariness of what

seems like a “natural” division between text and brain on the one hand and body and emotion on the other. Critical stand-up autoethnography also holds the potential to take part in the wider shifts that practice as research is part of, subtly and incrementally as may be, in which the body is returned to the academic text (see e.g. Nelson, 2013).

Victor Turner (1982) also advocated strongly for ethnographers to turn their field notes into dramas and for the usefulness of the dialectic between “flow” and “reflexivity”, which is a strong characteristic of performance genres including – very much, I would suggest – the stand-up mode. When I am comedian and poet, I am also participant-observer, ethnographer and researcher. When I am ethnographer, researcher and participant-observer I am also comedian and poet.

It's like you have to have two voices when you're a practice-based researcher. One inside your head commenting on your practice and reflecting on it, another inside your head commenting on the audience and how they're responding, and directing you in what you need to say next. All while you're still trying to stay “in the moment”. No wonder you need a dialogic voice in this thesis.

Well, quite. Though I don't want to be prescriptive about how many voices a stand-up practitioner does or should have if they're also a researcher. It probably varies depending on how different people process incoming bodily and brain data in different situations.

The scholar stand-up is a good example of a posture that developed organically out of my practice and a new context in which I was performing, including new ways of relating to an audience. It was also informed by my reading of theory and methodology – therefore it constitutes an example of praxis. I will end this section with a vignette which could be said to date the “birth” of my posture of the scholar stand-up. It was partly messy, spontaneous and contingent.

This extract is from contemporaneous field notes that I then wrote up for a “think piece” on the “Documenting Comedy” conference at Salford in 2015 for *Comedy Studies* journal (Fox, 2016).

An imposing glitter of tall buildings on Salford Quayside, approached by quiet tram from Manchester

As the first talks start, I notice noise leaking. Ghost applause that the other speakers begin to acknowledge. A pillar right between the two halves of the audience. Bright light and daylight. Nothing that will help comedy performance.

I also realise that our panel will happen straight after a talk and I somehow have to set the stage. I have got props. I am going to put a used script, audience suggestions and confetti from *The Price of Happiness* on the stage to form what Matthew Reason called “an archive of detritus” (2006). It will be both ridiculous (an exaggerated way of showing the metaphor) and illustrative of the metaphor. Almost self-parodying. I realise after that the audience have no way of picking up on this element. Why wouldn’t it be sincere?

I look out at the audience during an earlier speaker’s talk. Seats in theatre rows around the central pillar so no audience intimacy building. Many empty seats. Young students with very blank faces, some yawning. A palpable lack of physical energy in the room.

I start quickly. Flinging confetti and my script from the stage and then trying to read my paper – including some of the “funny” lines. As “I’m basically doing a PhD in me” gets no response whatsoever from the audience, not, as far as I can tell, a chuckle, I abandon some of my other lines about being a stand-up researcher. I rattle through the slides, skipping some entirely, trying to make an argument about the “archive of detritus” – the ephemera such as props and annotated scripts that are usually left out of documenting stand-up performers.

I notice that three or four of the women in the right-hand side of the audience – older than undergrads – are making very encouraging faces throughout, almost as if urging me on. Later, when I talk to another speaker about the difficulty of the performance set-up, he confirms he’d noticed this too.

I directly ask one comedy researcher whether I should have done more paper and less performance and he says he thinks I should have done more performance. That papers are always the same and it’s refreshing to have something different.

Fellow panellist Ian Wilkie starts talking to me about the content and the concept of the archive of detritus – as well as evaluating the performance/audience interaction. This, I realise, is the more usual vocabulary of the fellow stand-up performer. Digging into the mechanics of what worked and didn’t. It is a relief to do.

The description above captures some of my internal process, guided by external cues from audience members and my internal evaluations, at an early point when I was trying to calibrate my roles as researcher, ethnographer and stand-up performer. I have now acted on several of the adjustments suggested – by myself and others – and tested them out in further performance situations in academia. For example, I now use stand-up poems to more clearly frame the distinction between “normal” paper and performance paper. Hopefully this extract demonstrates something about how stand-up practice itself develops in process between performer and audience. It also made me reflect on how I might evaluate ethnographic stand-up. I will now describe below how I rewrote existing criteria for ethnographic performances in order to apply them to stand-up autoethnographies and include an annotated video excerpt from the stand-up performance auto-ethnography I developed.

Criteria for Evaluating Stand-up Autoethnographies

Denzin (2013, p76) says the criteria for evaluating performance autoethnographies involve ethics, aesthetics and epistemologies and that they shouldn't use white, middle-class norms of writing and behaviour but instead look at how far they attack cultural mythologies. As stand-up comedy is usually seen as a “lower” and non-scholastic mode, I would argue that the form itself reflects a rejection of academic norms and what Bourdieu calls the errors of the scholastic vision (2000a). It aims to engender visceral responses. It can also fulfil feminist calls for a practical, public pedagogy. This is my summary of his criteria for performance ethnographies, as he lays them out in his book *Interpretive Autoethnography* (2013).

1. They should unsettle, criticise and challenge taken-for-granted meanings.
2. Invite moral and ethical dialogue while reflexively clarifying their own moral position.
3. Engender resistance and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different.
4. Demonstrate that they care, are kind.
5. Show instead of tell, using the rule that less is more.
6. Fulfil three criteria that Denzin relates to “feminist, communitarian criteria”: exhibit interpretive sufficiency (Denzin says this means it must be sufficiently deep, detailed and nuanced to allow the development of a critical consciousness), be representationally adequate (free of stereotyping) and be authentically adequate

(multi-voiced, morally discerning and truthful in a way which leads to transformative social criticism).

7. Be political, functional, collective and committed.

(Denzin, 2013, p.78)

In his explanation of practice as research methodology, Nelson also highlights the importance of performance and the way that multiple ambivalent meanings can sometimes be conveyed more fully in performance than is possible within traditional academic written texts:

In performance a gesture, a vocal inflection, a manner of looking, a mode of address might readily indicate a particular version of the perceived need in traditional philosophy not only for something to be known but for it to be known it is known. (2006, p.109)

I have taken Denzin's criteria into account when creating and analysing my own practice but I have also used his recommendations for performance autoethnographies in order to give myself an additional context-relevant guideline for my own practice and, in a sense, "translate" his language into a stand-up performer's context. The criteria I propose here aim to respect the stand-up form. Despite the fact that there are many factors that can impact on how much a particular audience laughs, I don't believe that a stand-up performance autoethnography can be said to succeed if no audience anywhere can be made to find it funny. Part of the skill of the stand-up ethnographer is to find somewhere where they can create that joking relationship with an audience. Although I'm not advocating academic conferences or seminars as the most fertile ground for a rip-roaring event of full-throated hilarity, I have usually managed to make an audience laugh at least at some of the points I intended.

Criteria Specific To Stand-Up Autoethnographies:

1. The stand-up ethnographer should establish a "joking relationship" with an audience (an audience laughs/is amused sometimes)
2. Give the audience the sense that change could occur outside the "magic circle" of comedy and carry over into the "real world".

3. Use resistant/marginal methods of humour which challenge hegemonies (e.g. parody, reverse discourse, mimicry and masquerade).
4. Make an audience feel able to undertake dialogue in an atmosphere in which spontaneity and immediacy are valued.
5. “Punch up” at targets rather than “punching down” (that is, target the powerful and oppressors with humour, not the powerless and oppressed).
6. Use comedy to reveal the ideologies the performer lives and struggles with.

As stand-up performers evaluate their work while they’re performing and adjust it and improvise in order to calibrate their performance to a particular audience, I would suggest that “in-situ” evaluation during the performance is one means by which stand-up ethnography can be evaluated. For example, by asking questions of the audience directly or internally assessing audience responses. Intensive reflection on audience response in conjunction with other performers is another usual part of stand-up performance. This can lead to practice-specific vocabularies being developed and passed on.

Throughout the development of my practice I have also experimented with ways to get an audience to respond directly to my work, sometimes by contributing lines to a poem which I read out at the end of the performance, or by filling in forms or blank body outlines immediately afterwards. These dialogical approaches are partly inspired by the audience evaluation methods of Matthew Reason, who has said that post-performance drawing allows audiences to create what he calls, after Derrida, a “counter signature” in which their experience of a performance can be retraced in another way (2010, p.32). It also reflects the ways that stand-up performer and audience’s subjectivities are entwined in a complex and potentially transformative way.

Two years into my thesis research and practice, I used Denzin’s criteria and my own, to guide me in developing a performance auto/ethnography I performed at a seminar in my department. In the clip below I have shown how I applied my stand-up specific criteria to this performance.

CLIP 1: Lots of Planets: https://youtu.be/U7Sua_BnMaQ

The performance, and the feedback I gleaned from it, exemplifies a process as much as a product. It marked another crucial point in the interaction between my work as a

practitioner and my work as a thesis researcher. I will say more about this as a methodology in the next section.

5. Humitas

Much of the work on stand-up in comedy and humour studies focuses on how it operates in cultural performances, such as comedy clubs. However, I would contend that the scholar stand-up is an example of ways in which stand-up is now able to operate outside the “liminal-norm” of contemporary comedy. Here I am appropriating performance scholar Jon McKenzie’s term in order to describe how resistant attitudes from stand-ups are an expected feature of contemporary comedy. He says the liminal-norm “Operates in any situation where the valorisation of liminal transgression or resistance becomes itself normative- at which point theorisation of such a norm may become subversive”. (2001, p. 50). Crucially, stand-ups are also now operating outside licensed performance spaces to become increasingly potent cultural spokespeople. I would argue, activists and public figures, including politicians, increasingly use the techniques of stand-up. In order to highlight the performative and efficacious uses of comedy in the wider public sphere, including in academia – specifically this thesis – I searched for an appropriate word. I was surprised to find that there wasn’t one.

Therefore, I would like to conclude this introductory chapter by introducing a term which underpins my assertion that humour can function as resistance and that this resistance can move beyond the confines of cultural performances. I expand on this more in a chapter in the forthcoming book *Comedy and Critical Thought: Laughter as Resistance* (Giappone, Francis and MacKenzie, 2018). During my research it came to feel significant that there is not currently a specific word for the rhetorical process in which humour acts as a performative utterance, though it is sometimes acknowledged that certain types of humour, such as satire, are intended to comment on society. Performative utterances are explained in Austin (1962) as the ways in which words can make things happen, such as how “I do” can enact a marriage. This forms the basis of Butler’s (1990) theory of gender identities as something that we do through repeating performances of them rather than as something that is determined by biological differences. One of the reasons for the persistent characterisation of humour as “merely” play could be because humour studies often focuses on the units of humour – jokes, which are dismissed as performative utterances – rather than on socially situated, complex and relational joking relationships.

Sociologist and joke analyst Christie Davies (2011), for instance, says unequivocally that jokes are unimportant, change nothing, have no material consequences and are only ancillary to other communicative messages. I want to break the binary in which it is not acknowledged that seriousness and humour can occur at the same moment, within the same frame, so I have coined the word “humitas”.

Humitas is a blend of humour and gravitas, the light and the heavy. It is a rhetoric and a process. The coining of the neologism is an attempt to overcome the “dividing practices”, to use Foucault’s term (1984), by which humour is persistently “Othered” and left out of academic discourse. Although humour is an expected tool in the discourse of the professional stand-up performer, it is often argued that it is mere decoration or obstruction when used to achieve “serious” ends. This thesis argues that it can be efficacious in the practice of autoethnography and in feminist praxis and pedagogy. It is an important element of my methodology throughout this thesis. Although I have conceived it partly by observing the increasing blending of humorous and serious modes of discourse in the wider cultural sphere, in this thesis I will mainly be exploring it in relation to how I used my stand-up in academia and how I have used my research in my practice. In other words, in this thesis Humitas describes the interface between me as academic and me as practitioner, and the ways I negotiate both serious and humorous registers.

i) Humitas in Academia

Early in the development of this thesis, I decided that if I was to prove that stand-up can be efficacious and resistant outside comedy clubs then I should be able to demonstrate this by using humour both in my practice and in the thesis itself. This connects with an increasing usage of humour as an academic methodology. For instance, education researcher Professor Cate Watson (2015) has advocated for humour as a methodology in the social sciences. She pinpoints the paradox which can confront those who advocate this: if their academic work doesn’t itself use humour effectively then they can be accused of hypocrisy, but if they *do* use humour than their work might not be taken seriously.

Bright Club is an interesting example of how humour as methodology can feed into university impact agendas. It operates in universities nationally and is a forum for academics to present their research using the medium of stand-up comedy, usually at night in pubs or theatre venues. Impact agendas from research councils require academics to disseminate their research more widely and demonstrate value for public

money by reaching more people. In contrast to this agenda which is imposed from the top down, social scientists themselves have also made calls for their research to reach more people. For example, Burawoy (2005) has made an influential call for a public sociology which reaches beyond universities and is less insular. Hynes (2016) has recently suggested Marina Abramovic's artwork *The Artist Is Present* could answer this call for a public sociology in a less "heroic" way by enacting a "live sociology" which engages with emergent social phenomena. Hynes sees Abramovic as embodying the openness to unintelligibility of the artist who does not impose pre-existing categories as an "expert".

It could be argued that a traditional conception of stand-up as monological and predominately male might conform to those "heroic" conceptions of live sociology in which an expert disseminates their research to new audiences. For me, however, there is something generative about the idea of a more dialogical stand-up which is able to engage in conversations with an audience, whilst at the same time using humour to demonstrate an embracing of contradictions. This links back to the potential of critical performance autoethnographies. Denzin (2013) says these must move back and forth between performance (in terms of creating performance texts), process (examining a social form or event – in my case I am looking at identity and representation in a performance form itself) and analysis (looking at the social context of the lives of the people who are experiencing the process).

Others have advocated stand-up's usefulness in autoethnography. Michael Hemmingson (2008), for example, said that stand-ups and social scientists can be interchangeable. He says that social scientists using comedy in performances should encourage their audiences to get involved, and to heckle and ask questions. He thinks humour is therapeutic and cites and agrees with Kip Jones (2007), who thinks that too much autoethnography draws on serious and tragic modes. Denzin passionately calls for "militant utopians" (2003, p.193) who can create critical and oppositional public spaces, in institutions (including universities) and in all public spaces. They will use performance as pedagogy and make oppression visible. He emphasises the transformative role of performance for both performer and audience. I think there is a fertile seam to be mined on the boundary between arts-based research and social science research which uses artistic and creative methods, and I would locate my thesis in this space. I believe that it points the way forward to some possible ways to effect change by using performative humour and can show that stand-ups can be, and are, militant utopians.

This challenge, however, does mean overturning dominant representations. These can be classed, gendered and regionalised stereotypes, as well as preconceptions about what comedy can do and what knowledge can be. I will be suggesting that humitastic resistance undertaken by female, working-class comedians does exist but is less likely to be read and recognised as such by mainstream media and market channels than that of male, middle-class comics. There are also classed implications to my taking on the posture of the scholar stand-up whilst being predominately read as a working-class woman.

ii) Stand-up Activists

There is not space in this thesis to expand more on the possible social and historic causes of an increased porosity between stand-up comedy and activism. I would briefly suggest that it is a trend that is increasing and that it might be explained by many of the factors underlying postmodernity and the blurring of genres. Politicians are also becoming more likely to use humour in the public sphere and across the political spectrum (for example, see Barack Obama's State of the Union addresses or British foreign secretary Boris Johnson's appearances on satirical BBC One quiz show *Have I Got News for You*). Political anthropologist Dominic Boyer (2013) says there is "Something funny happening to politics" and says stand-ups, and politicians using stand-up, can function as truth tellers who cut through stylised news and entertainment discourses.

As the boundaries between liminal and liminoid phenomena are blurring, increasing numbers of comedians and poets are taking their social and cultural commentary outside the stand-up space and demonstrating their own "serious play" which aims to effect change in the world. For example, there is the comedy of Mark Thomas, whose performative political activism has involved campaigning against the Ilisu Dam project in Turkey which would have taken the livelihood of villagers away. Josie Long's "Arts Emergency" charity aims to provide an "alternative old boys' network" of mentors for deprived young people and tackle issues of lack of social mobility for young people, particularly their difficulty accessing media and arts fields. Sarah Millican's feminist online magazine *Standard Issue* was started because she wanted to provide more positive and varied representations of women than the often critical and commodified representations in mainstream women's magazines. Stand-ups are harnessing the cultural capital of the form and using it for their own activist projects.

I would suggest that this is connected to, but not analogous to, a perceived increase in the public role of stand-ups. For example, an *Atlantic* piece on the role of comedians as public thinkers (Garber, 2015) noted American news comedian Stephen Colbert's inclusion in *Foreign Policy's* Top Twenty Public Intellectuals. In 2015, British comedian Russell Brand was included at number five in political magazine *Prospect's* World Thinkers list, which otherwise consisted mainly of economic and political thinkers.

In this thesis I contend that what starts with a stand-up performer acting as anthropologist in order to highlight and question social norms can result in them successfully changing social attitudes. As Quirk notes, stand-up "is a popular form which is licensed to test attitudes and has particular strengths in persuading its audience to shift their reference points" (2015, p.201). Although, as she cautions, it is unlikely that one gig can convert the masses, nonetheless "the contribution of any one gig or any one comedian may be subtle and incremental but this is not the same as being trivial" (ibid., p.201).

Table 2: Stand-Up Figures Referred to in This Chapter

Figure	Description and notes	Citation	Piece of PhD practice primarily used in
Stand-Up as Anthropologist	Commentating on culture from inside it – noting patterns and revealing tacit knowledge. Can include making the above an academic methodology.	Koziski (1985), Mintz (1985), Gilbert (2004).	<i>Lots of Planets Have a North.</i> Interviews with stand-ups.
Stand-up as Ethnographer	Similar to seeing a stand-up as anthropologist- but theorised more explicitly within a social sciences framework.	Hemmingson (2008) See also Smith (2015)	<i>Lots of Planets Have a North.</i> Interviews with stand-ups.
Scholar Stand-up	Sociocultural observation. Drawing on academic references or methodology.	Fox (this thesis)	<i>Lots of Planets Have a North,</i> performance autoethnography. This thesis. Stand-up workshops.
Stand-up Activist	Explicit social campaigning using, or as, a stand-up.	Fox (this thesis) but implicitly in work on Mark Thomas (e.g. Quirk, 2015) and Russell Brand (e.g. Brassett, 2016).	Stand-up workshops.

Having introduced and located my practice, including the ways it is re-located by the process of doing this thesis, I will now explore how a Northern lens impacts on the classed and gendered nature of stand-up comedy. I will demonstrate it to be a situated form which can be haunted by the past, present and future of the imagined communities in which it takes place, as well as by the histories of the (unruly) performer.

Bleeding Northerners- Poem

Much as I bloody love Oasis,
 which I do,
 it didn't help that Liam Gallagher
 swanned around in the nineties in his parka
 acting like a dick.

*The image that connects,
 the image that gets in the way*

It's like "It's tough here, it's hard here but we're alright,
 we're alright chuck".

There's no
 "Does a Northern man not laugh
 when you tickle him?
 Does a Northern man
 not bleed when you cut him open?"

It mentioned all the things
 about him being fat and Northern.
 I mean, someone wouldn't say
 "Oh he's a thin, middle class young man"

I know I'm small
 and I know I'm from Manchester
 but there's no need
 to go on about it.

There was a lot of very posh Southern kids
 going "Look at us, slumming it in the North!"
 and I went "What, Nottingham?"
 and really strongly,
 militantly
 became a Northern person.

It turns out I was Northern.
 I never knew.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW STAND-UPS CONSTRUCT AND ARE CONSTRUCTED BY THE “NORTHERNNESS EFFECT”

In this chapter I argue that a cultural bias I dub the Northernness Effect impacts on perceptions of Northern English performers and expresses a classed and gendered cultural imperialism by which the region is stigmatised and Othered in relation to the more socially and economically powerful South of England. I have undertaken a mixture of sociocultural analysis and empirical research to reach this conclusion.

I conducted 27 interviews with Northern performers and a content analysis of 260 newspaper comedy reviews and have been able to demonstrate that this stigma is based on embodied cultural capital, mainly by means of performers' accents. The Northernness Effect also reifies the region as stuck in the past, as exemplified by the archetype of the “Northern comic” which haunts contemporary Northern stand-ups. I argue that this figure, epitomised by the excessive comedian Bernard Manning, functions as a “female grotesque” and a barbaric Other to the civilised middle-class man who is England's “somatic norm”.

I suggest that stand-up is a form in which a “Northern Imaginary” and hegemonic working-class masculinities and femininities can be challenged and resisted, as well as potentially reinforced. I also look at how “in-betweenness” is a crucial space for resistance for Northern stand-ups, partly because of how it exemplifies the social mobility experienced by stand-ups entering the field of cultural production, and partly because it challenges the misrecognition engendered by the Northernness Effect.

Haven't you used that line about how you're “destroying the Southern media hegemony one flat vowel at a time” numerous times in your stand-up, both in the North and in the South, and in those very cultural spaces and institutions you would see as part of it?

Yes. I have. And I think it, and the subsequent laugh, means different things to me and the audience every time. However, I'm going to take a bit of a step back in this chapter before I get back on to my own practice, because I think this is an important and under-researched issue. Cultural geographer Ridenpaa (2014) has pointed out that humour can be a way to narrativise contested and marginalised identities, and called for more research on the affective power of humour in the construction of spatiality and otherness. This chapter partially answers that call.

1. What Is the Northernness Effect?

What I am calling the “Northernness Effect” refers to the connotations that attach to a Northern accent, to Northern performers and performances and how these are perceived both outside and inside the North of England. I would define it as a sociocultural bias that affects how Northern performers are received, promoted and rewarded. This bias impacts on performers’ career trajectories and the strategies they use with audiences inside and outside the North of England. Its embodied elements – particularly accent and body size – automatically convert higher legitimate cultural capital into lower cultural capital and cause performers to be read as working-class, even though they might be read as middle-class on the basis of education and income. However, it potentially contains its own form of capital, which could be called Northern capital and is linked to values of authenticity, community, humour and lack of pretension. The Northernness Effect contributes to performers feeling “in between two worlds” in terms of culture and identity when they navigate between fields in which it can operate as positive or negative capital.

I interviewed 27 stand-up performers, 12 men and 15 women, who identify as Northern, including professional stand-up comics, poets and cabaret performers. These were hour-long semi-structured interviews about how their Northernness, class and gender shaped, and were shaped by, their stand-up performance. I used a snowball method of sampling and recruitment, identifying performers whose careers were likely to be impacted in some way by their Northernness by dint of the fact that they all had detectable Northern accents and identified themselves as Northern. I then thematically analysed my interviews. This is, as Braun describes, a flexible method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (2006, p.79). I mapped key themes which chimed with the themes emerging in my literature review on the effects of a Northern English regional identity. In summary these were about the importance of regionality in stand-up for belonging and fitting in, for establishing a connection with an audience, and for performing (and playing with) a perceived “authenticity”. There were also themes reflecting stand-ups’ frustration over how Northernness contributed to them being misrecognised as performers – particularly being stereotyped as stupid or lacking authority, being taken less seriously or having their language and accent mocked. I triangulated their sense of being stigmatised by conducting a content analysis of 260 newspaper reviews of mainstream touring comedians and will present the results here.

It is particularly salient to explore the Northernness Effect within the stand-up field because of the persistent associations between Northernness and comedy. I have found that there is a strong, historically based archetype of Northern comedy which, paradoxically, is not taken seriously by the Southern media and cultural sphere for which Northerners serve as a ridiculous Other whose voices cannot function as sources of authority. This characterisation of Northerners as a social group conforms to one of the forms of oppression that philosopher Iris Marion Young (2009) defines as “cultural imperialism”. She says this is experienced when “the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as Other” (2009, p.58). This stereotype is classed as well as gendered, though it is not attributable to either class or gender discrimination alone.

2. The Making of the Northernness Effect in Comedy

There could be a case for examining whether the other four forms of oppression Young identifies, particularly powerlessness and marginality (the others are exploitation and violence), could be applied to a North of England which is acknowledged to be at a great socioeconomic disadvantage compared to London and the South-East (see for example Savage, 2015; Hetherington, 2016). This is particularly the case for Northern women, who are under-represented in the field of culture generally (e.g. Milestone, 2016) as well as the wider fields of politics and leadership (Fawcett Society, 2016). Sociologist Katie Milestone has argued that the symbolic capital which “links social constructs of northernness, masculinity and creativity” (2016, p.46) is one of the reasons that Manchester, which has the highest number of creative workers outside London, has a smaller proportion of women (23%) working in the creative industry than the rest of the country (42%). She suggests that more attention should be paid to place-specific habitus when looking at work and funding in the cultural industries.

Cultural studies researcher Karl Spracklen argues that Northern Englishness is:

A tool of marginalisation and oppression, a convenient myth that keeps people happy in their subaltern state because while they might be marginalised, they are not as marginalised as those Others who are not allowed to be members of the imagined community. The north is a symbolic wilderness for the hegemonic elites of England. (2016, p.11)

I want to argue that discourses about Northern comedy become a smokescreen for ignoring struggles over power, classification and representation by which Northerners are marginalised. At the same time Spracklen suggests that Northerners themselves are complicit in playing up to the stereotypes and stigmas they struggle with. There were examples of this from my interviewees who knew that Northernness conferred an amount of cultural capital upon them, which could sometimes be converted into economic capital within the field of cultural production.

The association of the North with comedy contrasts with another persistent idea of Northern England as dark, industrial, barbaric and grimy. However, if the imaginary North functions in a Bakhtinian sense as a grotesque body to the classical body of Southern Englishness (in a similar way to that in which the archetype of the Northern comic – the fat, loud, swearing crudeness of Bernard Manning, for instance – functions as the grotesque body to the classical English gentleman), the contradiction is resolved. As Bakhtin (1984) emphasised, high-low inversions depend on and interpenetrate each other. In order for there to be a certain notion of a civilised, traditional, primarily rural England, there must be the idea of the dark, urban engine room of the North. Conversely, sociolinguist Katie Wales says that “One important consequence of this idea of the North as another country is that it is rarely seen as essential to ‘Englishness’ and national identity” (2004, p. 28).

Perhaps reinforcing this sense of it not being essential, Northerners are often characterised as primarily funny. Newspaper articles and books routinely proclaim the idea or stoke an imaginary competition by asking whether Northerners are funnier than Southerners (e.g. Beaumont, 2014; Jarski, 2009). Rosemarie Jarski’s book *The Wit and Wisdom of the North* (2009) contains a foreword by Stuart Maconie in which he says of Northerners, “Above all, we are a right laugh” (2009, p.xiii). Although Jarski concedes that it’s not necessary to be born in the North to be a Northerner as it’s more “a state of mind”, albeit one in which “humour plays a crucial, if not defining, role” (p.xxii) she is happy to go on to essentialise by defining Northern humour as “above all the humour of recognition. Northern comedians don’t try to be cleverer or smarter than us, they’re inclusive rather

than exclusive” (p.xvi). She adds that “Sexism is an accusation regularly levelled at the humour of the North and, as home to Andy Capp, Roy ‘Chubby’ Brown and Viz magazine it’s a tough charge to defend ... the North is still a stronghold of the Unreconstructed male” (p.xix) and “Northern women are born copers” (p.xix). With less essentialism, Spracklen confirms the idea that “The north is a place where white, working-class masculinity is constructed and performed” (2016, p.10).

Another example of research which descends into essentialism, after originally attempting to “debunk the northern comedy myth” (Hannan, 2009, p.xii), is Tony Hannan’s *On Behalf of the Committee: A History of Northern Comedy* (2009), a comprehensive study of the field by a journalist and comedy enthusiast. He concludes that “There is indeed a recognisable strain of British humour that is transparently Northern in style and outlook, even if, in more recent years, a once clear line has blurred, possibly to the point of extinction” (p.xii). Perhaps because he is not also attempting a social analysis of class which might help explain some of the persistent myths, he says that he has come to believe that Northern comedy has provided UK comedy with its “backbone and heart” and characterises it as the “self-deprecating yin to London’s self-aggrandising yang” (p.xiii). Note the opposition not between North and South but between the North and specifically London: an opposition essentially between the margins and the centre. This reflects a gendered characterisation of the North Hannan goes on to draw. He says that because of Northern comedy’s emphasis on character and the recognisable stuff of day-to-day life, it is feminine – whilst acknowledging that “women [in Northern comedy] – whether controlling or nurturing – are another constant presence, albeit as viewed through the eyes of men” (p.xiii). Further he says, “If the North is traditionally the mother figure in British comedy, the South is its bossy and opinionated father” (p.xiv).

I want to suggest that one reason the idea of Northernness as funny is upheld by those both inside and outside the North is that the narrative of “laughter through tears” could well be a way in which working-class suffering is acknowledged without having to be addressed or recompensed. Sociopsychologist Valerie Walkerdine has drawn attention to how trauma is transmitted intergenerationally in an embodied way. Although she does not specifically mention humour and laughter, I would suggest that it is an embodied, affective response which can be passed down through generations as a way of combatting or masking trauma. Her paper “Transmitting class through generations” (2015) was based on research in a de-industrialised steel town with long-term high unemployment and social deprivation

and highlights how this suffering is still under-recognised. She says, “There is no doubt that long term histories of suffering exist within working class communities. While there is now an address to other forms of longer term oppression such as slavery, this has not been extended to class” (2015, p.175). She suggests it could be that the ubiquity of poverty means working-class people are pathologised and blamed for their own suffering. She also suggests the handing down of class trauma operates as a “haunting” which is readable in the artefacts and conversations and events of people’s lives and says, “To be able to study classed histories as haunting, operating as small and large histories, seems a fertile line of enquiry though vast in its scope” (ibid., p.178).

She draws on psychoanalysis to find other examples in which “large histories are mirrored across the small” (Walkerdine, 2015, p.177), including in the ways that people speak or are silenced and, I would add, in the ways that they laugh or make others laugh.

Walkerdine describes how this intergenerational trauma and class transmission is embodied and uses the ecological, post-Lacanian approaches of Guattari and Ettinger to “stress the complex inseparability of historical, material, location, cultural, embodied and affect, unconscious and embodiment” (p.177). This also calls to mind what Bev Skeggs found in her 1997 ethnography of white working-class women in which she concluded that, rather than display trauma as an affect (in, for example, middle-class identity politics), working-class women tended to cover it up, refuse victimhood and display endurance and coping.

This idea also exists in Stallybrass and White’s idea of a carnivalesque resistance which is carried in bodies, in regions and in laughter. They say; “The low-other is despised and denied at the level of political and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture” (1986, p.6).

“Haunting” is also a good way to describe the way that references to Northern working men’s clubs and the archetypal Northern club comedians, particularly Bernard Manning and Les Dawson, recur even in connection with contemporary stand-up comedy. They feel like abject yet inescapable images which keep popping up, whether it is comedians in interviews saying they won’t mention Bernard Manning, reviews referring to working men’s club comics or Peter Kay’s millennial sitcom about a working men’s club, *Phoenix Nights*.

Reflecting on how so many stereotypical images of Northernness are actually images of the past – from flat caps and whippets to coal mines and Hovis adverts (a sepia toned,

bread commercial filmed on cobbled, Northern streets to a soundtrack of brass band music) – I realised that Northernness and its recurring tropes need a concept which acknowledges the spatiality of time and the chronology of space. Handily, Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope is exactly this, explicated in his definition:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. (1982, p.84)

Resistance of the stereotypes of Northernness, or resistance using the stereotypes of Northernness, is usually troubling the chronotope of Northernness itself. According to Bakhtin major chronotopes can also contain and contest minor ones. Northernness itself is a chronotope. The working man's club is a minor chronotope which sits within and recurs again and again within Northern comedy. These chronotopes can be subverted – or confronted by other chronotopes. They are more specific and located than a myth and are similar to a stereotype but perhaps can, in the instance of Northernness, serve the function of anchoring a stereotype to a particular time, as well as particular qualities.

It is primarily via voice that myths and chronotopes of Northernness are embodied in people. Voice is an important element in a stand-up comedian's persona. It is also a key way in which their position in the cultural hierarchy is determined. As Friedman says, "It is the embodied rather than the objectified forms of capital that largely distinguishes the privileged in the field of comedy" (2011, p.352). Embodied capital can include bodies, make-up, hair and ways of dressing and moving, as well as voice and accent. Although Friedman doesn't focus on voice and accent in his research, they emerge as crucial markers in any discussion of Northernness in performance.

In my previous work and training as a radio journalist and newsreader, issues around where I was "allowed" to speak were explicit. For example, the programme director of one North-East commercial radio station said I didn't sound enough like a newsreader to read news bulletins. A radio consultant at a commercial radio station where I worked in Manchester advised that I shouldn't read bulletins I had written because the breakfast show's co-presenter was also female and two female voices would "confuse" the listeners. I am using my PhD practice to highlight this by making the historic (and contemporary) lack of any national newsreader with a Northern English regional accent a motif in my

stand-up performance autoethnography for the cultural imperialism whereby Northern voices lack authority.

Northerners are made audible rather than visible, as it is primarily through their accent and dialect that they are distinctive. In her sociolinguistic history, Katie Wales underlines how “Northern English” (and its speakers) is perceived very much in relation to an Other, the prestigious Standard English, which is perceived as superior; thus, along with other vernaculars, Northern English is dismissed not only as “nonstandard”, but also therefore as “subordinate” (2004, p.4).

It is in the 18th century that Wales locates the beginnings of a written and spoken “standard” English, which, though it may have developed in a very piecemeal fashion, centred on a Southern English and saw the marginalisation of Northern English forms. The internalisation of the inferiority of their language is echoed by many of my interviewees, including in the awareness of it as inferior in *relation* to “standard” language. It is also a vehicle by which working-class women can be socially abjected as “common”. Several of my female interviewees showed an awareness of this. For example, Mancunian comedian Rachel Fairburn said, “There’s certain jokes I’ve had to change around or drop because I think it comes across as uncouth because of how I speak”. During the Industrial Revolution many of today’s particular stereotypes of Northernness were solidified and the link between a peasant class speaking non-standard English reified into that of a working class and a Northern accent, which led to what Wales calls an “existential tension” for the Northerner placed in a liminal space “between two worlds” (2006, p.141).

This embodiment of class differences via accent is in turn embedded in structures. At the same time as the coal, textiles and shipbuilding industries of the North were suffering their worst decline in the 1920s, the BBC was beginning, as a national broadcasting service, to define the nation and its language. Mugglestone describes how the BBC was an effective means of “perpetuating the standard ideology in the public mind” as well as “further diffusing notions of the accents appropriate to various status groups and occupations” (2007, p.275). She notes that regional accents such as Cockney or Yorkshire, for instance, were confined to the realms of comedy and light entertainment, and gives examples of attempts to overcome the Received Pronunciation hegemony. The Yorkshire-born Wilfred Pickles was briefly put on air as a London announcer during the Second World War in the belief that his Halifax accent would confound German attempts

to imitate it, but listeners said they “could not believe the news” when it came in Yorkshire tones with flat vowels and he was soon removed (ibid, p 272).

Studies finding accent prejudice often connect this to regional accents in general, or class features, rather than specific features of particular regional accents or associations. For example, university lecturer Katie Edwards (2014) wrote about her research on accents in academia. She began by giving an example of imitation and mockery she had faced when introducing herself to a postdoc student at a conference – they had exaggerated her Yorkshire vowels back to her. She said she couldn’t find a single black female academic with a regional accent, and all the women she interviewed who had had them had toned them down in order to fit in. The male academics had kept or exaggerated their regional accents. Addison and Mountford’s “Talking the talk” study (2015) found that more middle-class ways of talking meant that classed value could be added to people’s selves, which they said was perceived as crucial in these competitive times in the neo-liberal higher education system. Although their study took place in a Newcastle university, those with the local “Geordie” accent (which the researchers also had) stood out rather than fitting in, felt they were seen as less intelligent and experienced feelings of shame and defiance (echoing my findings with my interviewees in the very different milieu of comedy and poetry performance). “Posher” ways of talking were ways of “playing the game” of demonstrating value which is attached to qualities associated with subjective personhood such as accent. This, of course, has implications for how my scholar stand-up is received within academia. Perhaps, as my Northern accent already has a lower value, one way I attempt to resist this and give it a higher value is to perform material which highlights its relative lack of value. This mirrors a resistance whose paradoxical tactics characterise the position of many Northern stand-ups.

Ee by gum.

You see there, dialogic voice, you are doing and undoing the Northernness chronotope at the same time. You’re interjecting with a Yorkshire dialect phrase, but presumably you’re doing it with a knowing wink?

Of course. If I used emoticons in this heteroglossia, there’d be a semicolon and a closing bracket coming at you right now.

3. The North Equated with Lowbrow Culture

What Friedman (2014) identifies as the split between the “low cultural capital” of club comics and the “high cultural capital” of primarily Oxbridge comics is historic and still runs as a thread through British comedy today, operating broadly as a North-South divide. As Double (2005), Medhurst (2007) and Hannan (2009) recount, the form of music hall was associated with the working class and saw Northern acts like George Formby and Gracie Fields move from the music hall stage to films and television from the 1920s. Variety took over in the 1950s, with posher venues and more middle-class audiences. Then working men’s clubs helped Northern acts like Bernard Manning and Les Dawson find a place on TV in the 1970s. Comedy and Northern comedy was seen as a lowbrow form. These settings reinforced the link between Northernness and low-brow comedy.

At the end of the seventies there was a strong movement against the perceived racism and sexism of those 1970s “club comedians”. This new movement involved comedians seeing the form as a platform for left-wing, oppositional views. In their history of “alternative comedy” in Britain, Wilmut and Rosengard (1989) also situate this in relation to the sixties comedy of *Beyond the Fringe*, whose practitioners came from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, as well as in the London-based Comedy Store: “They shared a rejection of most of what had gone before – not only the racist and sexist already mentioned, but also the erudite middle-class approach of the university wits” (1989, p.xiv).

As Friedman puts it, contra Bourdieu’s pessimism about cultural change, since the alternative comedy boom “comedy has enjoyed significant social mobility” (2014, p.25). This particular strand of Oxbridge comedy has continued into what Friedman calls the “consecrated” and legitimated (by awards and critics), “highbrow” comedy of performers such as Josie Long, Tim Key and Stewart Lee, who practise a style of comedy he says involves “formal innovation” (2014, p.24) and which uses modes often associated with high-art such as surrealism and the absurd. Most of the examples Friedman gives of lowbrow comics are Northern working-class men and most of the examples he gives of highbrow comics are Southern, Oxbridge-educated men. Although Friedman’s research on how Bourdieu’s concept of cultural distinction operated in the comedy field has been invaluable to this chapter, I would say that he didn’t take the Northernness Effect into account, even though his own data showed it clearly. He acknowledges that he found it harder to establish rapport with those of his respondents who had lower cultural capital,

and perhaps there are subtle elements of the sociocultural bias that constitute the Northernness Effect that make it easier for an insider-Northerner like me to discern.

I would suggest that in this context of the highbrow and lowbrow divisions, the Northernness Effect has material effects. Friedman, O'Brien and Laurison (2016) surveyed British actors and found that there was a "class pay gap" whereby actors from lower income backgrounds earned, on average, £11,000 a year less than actors from more privileged backgrounds. Although my research is not extensive enough, or quantitative enough, to make claims about the pay differential between stand-ups impacted by the Northernness Effect and those who are not, I want to suggest that it will have a material effect on them too. For some, who find mainstream popularity, this may be a positive effect and they will be able to mobilise their Northernness into cultural and economic capital yielding millions of pounds. This is particularly the case for those who are able to mobilise an unambiguous Northernness which fits the reified image of the Northern chronotope. For most, due to a combination of geographical distance from comedy scouts and the media industry and some of the sociocultural stigma attached to the Northernness Effect, it will yield less economic and cultural capital than for their Southern counterparts. I am struck, for example, by how few Northern performers have won the prestigious Edinburgh Comedy Awards, which confer legitimacy within the British comedy industry. There have been 35 main prize winners and 24 newcomer winners since the prizes began in 1981. Of these 59 awards, only three went to Northern acts: the Northern sketch group League of Gentlemen and Daniel Kitson won the main prize in 1997 and 2002 respectively, and Sarah Millican won the newcomer's award in 2008 (Edinburgh Comedy Awards, 2017). Any impact on their income was rarely made explicitly by my interviewees, although one comedian connected his failing to negotiate a fee for a national radio comedy gig to the booker's sense of cultural superiority based on his class. Here he comedically exaggerates the radio producer's refusal; "He went, Oh there's no money. Geordie monkey in brackets working class scum, you should be proud of the privilege of entertaining your betters".

Several of my interviewees felt that their use of language and accent marked them as "stupid" in the eyes of legitimating cultural authorities. For example, Mancunian comedian Rachel Fairburn talked vividly about not realising she was Northern until she travelled to the South and was mocked and treated noticeably differently from people with standard accents. She said, "If you've a regional accent, people do doubt your intelligence

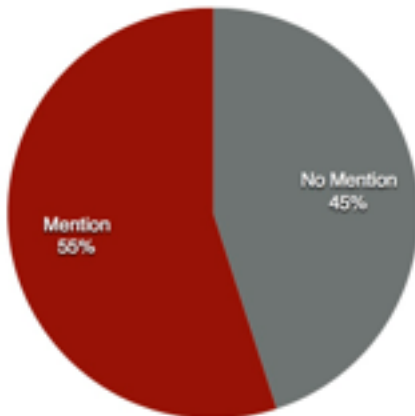
massively.” This appears to be primarily a classed effect; regional accents are associated with being working-class. Mancunian comedian Mick Ferry said the division of comedy tastes between the lowbrow and highbrow has been continued (and regionalised) by the influential comedy website Chortle, which he said saw comics as “smart... or Northern”.

4. The Northernness Effect in Reviews of Comedians

I decided to undertake some further empirical research to test my hypothesis that mythological and class perceptions contributed to the continuing misrecognition of Northern performers by tastemakers. I therefore examined 260 comedy reviews in a mixture of national newspapers, Edinburgh Festival reviews and local touring comedy reviews: ten each for 26 mainstream comedians (13 Northern, 13 Southern – for full list, see Appendix 1). I looked at mainstream comedians as they had enough profile to have been reviewed nationally and regionally. I was particularly looking to see how, or if, regional characteristics and embodied aspects of class or gender were referenced (see figures 3 and 4).

The discourses of comedy critics are important here because, as Friedman asserts, “As one of the key arbiters of cultural value, critics play a central role in the formation of cultural capital” (2014, p.127). He also sees these tastemakers as having an important role in how comedy is talked about in everyday discourse: “Critical discourse not only affects aesthetic judgments, it also spreads beyond the printed word into everyday conversations about art” (ibid., p.127). I would contend that it also impacts on stand-up performers’ attitudes to their performances and their audiences and may have material effects on the creation of performances – either in acquiescence to, or resistance to, the judgments of reviewers. National comedy critics perpetuate and reflect existing myths and stereotypes about Northernness and comedy, particularly in their emphasis on the embodied cultural capital of the stand-ups as a factor in their performance

Total percentage of sampled comedy reviews mentioning birthplace/regional identity of NORTHERN comedians.



Total percentage of sampled comedy reviews mentioning birthplace/regional identity of SOUTHERN comedians.

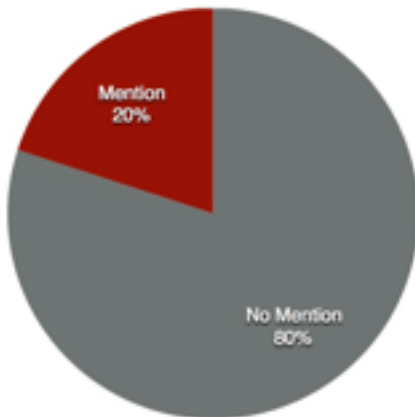


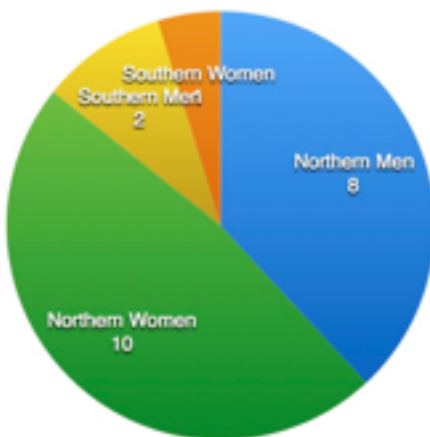
Figure 2: Sampled Reviews Mentioning Comedians' Regionality

My key finding was that regionality was much more remarked on for the Northern comedians than for the Southern ones. Over half, 55%, of the reviews of Northern performers mentioned some aspect of their regionality. Usually it was conflated with their identity – so, for example, Peter Kay was referred to as a “Bolton comedian” by both national and regional (including Northern) reviewers. Sarah Millican was referred to as a “Geordie jester”, a “Geordie lass next door” and “stand-up’s top Geordie”. Particular qualities were also attached to Northernness, so, for example, Hayley Ellis was referred to as a “warm Mancunian” and a “cheeky Manc”; Katie Mulgrew had a “North West bluntness” and “makes herself the butt of her own jokes in typical Northern style”.

The regionality of the Southern comics was only referenced in 20% of their reviews. When it was, it was less connected to their identity or style, so, for example, there was one reference to Josie Long being “Orpington-born” and Lucy Porter as “Croydon-born”. “Southernness” was not referenced at all as a descriptor – though there was a reference to Michael McIntyre’s “inherent Britishness”. There were no localising references at all to Jimmy Carr, Stewart Lee, Bridget Christie, Daniel Kitson or Sara Pascoe. I would suggest that this is because Lee and Carr are closer to what Puwar calls the “somatic norm” (2001) which Puwar has defined as “the corporeal imagination of power as naturalised in the body of white, male/middle class bodies” (2001, p.652). All of them are examples of the “consecrated comics” that Friedman referred to, who are seen as having higher “legitimate” cultural capital in the field of comedy – partially connected to their class and use of language. An exception to the lack of Southern marking was the comedian Micky Flanagan, described in nearly all his reviews as “a Cockney”, which is a spatialised (and cultural) working-class identity similar to the Northern working-class identities of Scouser, Geordie and Mancunian. Daniel Kitson is a Northerner but possibly the theatre setting and formal innovations of shows he often describes as “storytelling” mean such middle-class signifiers overcome the “Northernness Effect” in his case.

There was also a striking difference in the level of references to the voice and accent of Northern and Southern comedians, which emphasised this “marking” of an embodied Northern identity. Eighteen reviews mentioned the voice and accent of Northern comedians, usually descriptively. For example, Sarah Millican’s accent was twice called “sweet”, whilst Gavin Webster’s North-East accent was called “treacly” and a “North Eastern twang” in separate reviews. John Bishop’s accent was called a “lispy Liverpool brogue” and a “thick Scouse middle-class accent”. Some accents were perceived to have been emphasised by the performer themselves, such as in a reference to Seymour Mace’s “exaggerated” Geordie accent. Southern accents were only commented on in two reviews. One described Sara Pascoe as speaking in “drowsy estuary”, whilst another referred to Russell Kane’s “Estuary vowelled delivery”. “Estuary English” has been described as a marker of a socially mobile rather than working-class speech, which sits somewhere between “Cockney and Queen” (Rosewarne, 1984). I would interpret the big difference in emphasis as part of a process by which Northern comedians’ accents are marked as being outside the norm. That norm could be extended to include other accents which are not Received Pronunciation (Russell Howard’s Bristolian accent, for example), but not to Northern ones.

Sampled comedy reviews mentioning voice/accents of the comedian.



Sampled comedy reviews mentioning embodied characteristics of the comedian.

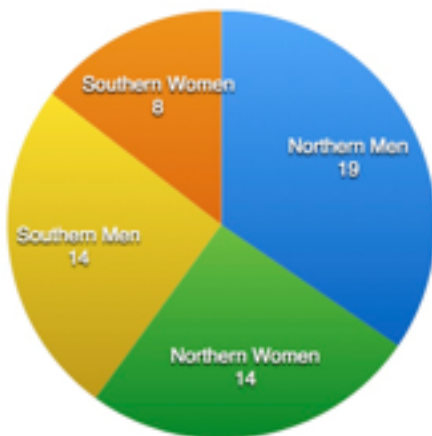


Figure 3: Sampled Reviews Mentioning Comedians' Body/Voice

There were also 19 reviews which remarked on other physical characteristics of Northern men, 14 each noting embodied characteristics of Northern women and Southern men and only eight reviews mentioning the embodied characteristics of Southern women. These comments were more heterogeneous than the ones about accents and often picked out particular distinctive characteristics of the performer. For example, there were several references to North-East comedian Ross Noble's curly hair. He was described variously as a "Geordie clown cum Geordie", a "wizard haired Geordie" and a "leonine Geordie comedian" (though I additionally looked beyond British reviews for him as he has toured extensively in Australia and noticed the Australian reviews rarely referred to his Britishness or his hair). Distinctive body parts seemed to become a synecdoche for classed aspects of a comedian's persona – but with Northern comedians, these were more often conflated with their regionality as well. So, for example, both Lucy Porter and Lucy Beaumont had

several reviewers comment on their small stature in a very gendered way, with both of them being referred to as an “ingénue”, but only the Northern Lucy Beaumont had her body and her regionality linked so that there was a reference to her “bright eyed, distinctly accented tones”. This running together of the Northernness Effect so that a male gaze is joined by a Southern ear can also be seen in the review which said she was a “wide eyed ingénue ... the flattened vowels add to the sense that she’s from a strange, alternative place, a Northern Narnia”.

Again this conflation of embodied characteristics and regional identity only happened with one Southern comedian: Micky Flanagan, who was described as a “Cockney comedian famed for his sauntering stage presence” and having a “signature Cockney walk”. By contrast, the middle-class Michael McIntyre’s walks were noted but not connected to a regionality – he just had a “cantering physicality”, “funny walks” and “trademark pacing” across three different reviews.

The more “consecrated” performers had very few references made to their voice, body, hair or posture: Stewart Lee, Jimmy Carr, Sara Pascoe, Josie Long and Daniel Kitson. However, it is hard to control for the number of references comedians themselves made to their regional identity, accent and body, and how this might skew the extent to which reviewers noted these characteristics. It is possible that Northern performers are more likely to refer to their own physical characteristics, Northernness and accents, or that performers with higher cultural capital are less likely to draw attention to their own physicality. It is also possible, as some of my interviewees suggested, that Northern performers could be aware of the comedic and cultural capital contained in an easily legible working-class Northernness and play up to it. However, I have tried to counter this by including several Southern comedians who have described themselves as working-class. Apart from, as I have noted, the Cockney identity of Micky Flanagan, the self-proclaimed working-class identity of comedians such as Bridget Christie, Russell Kane, Russell Howard and Sara Pascoe was significantly less “marked” and their regionality was not entwined with descriptions of their embodied capital to anything like the same extent it was for the Northern comedians.

Another issue, however, was that it was difficult to find Northern stand-ups who self-identified (or could reasonably be identified by audiences) as middle-class and/or possessing higher cultural capital, even when they had the same educational and income markers as Southern stand-ups. As previously mentioned, their accent – and their own

cultural identity, which they experience as one of being “between two worlds” – mitigates against this. Only Daniel Kitson, of my list, might be identified by audiences as middle-class, particularly, as I mentioned, as he does “storytelling” shows in theatre spaces. I would theorise that, although nearly as many Northern stand-ups as Southern stand-ups have higher education (seven of the Northern comedians and 11 of the Southern comedians in my analysis had been to university; three of the Southern comedians had been to Oxbridge), Northernness is a factor making it less likely for themselves or others to “read” them as having higher cultural capital. Hence my assertion in the definition of the Northernness Effect that it automatically lowers legitimate cultural capital.

This prejudice was somewhat affirmed in Friedman’s (2014) chapter on his “go along ethnography” with nine comedy scouts, who he called “hidden tastemakers” at the Edinburgh Fringe, in which (uncommented on by Friedman) specifically Northern geography was used as a synonym for “working-class” several times. It was also interesting that the scouts were looking for acts to fill particular niches for voices catering to particular market segments – either following fashion (for example, the current fashion for young, good-looking male comics with trendy haircuts), or replicating existing successes and types (it seems clear here that Northern comedians moulding to the success of Peter Kay and Sarah Millican could be seen as a particular “type” by scouts who are able to commodify their Northern capital). Friedman said there was also an issue for those working in public service broadcasting of “policy imperatives around diversity and variety”. He emphasised that scouts made many (non-empirically based) assumptions about comedy tastes – often describing them “in terms of social class or cultural capital”, even if this was in the form of “smuggled in subtly snobbish assumptions” (2014, p.157).

I recognised one of the pseudonymous scouts as being a significant gatekeeper for me and several of my stand-up and poetry colleagues. She was quoted as saying of her listeners:

They expect good language and cleverness. So with our comedians it’s not about people talking like me – god forbid – but I find there’s a sing-song element to regional accents that doesn’t translate well on radio, the microphone is kind of relentless in seeking it out. (Friedman, 2014, p.157)

Here, the necessity for a “higher” language register for her national, public service radio station is alluded to – the “good language and cleverness” – but this is somehow eclipsed by “sing-song” regional accents which don’t “translate” well on radio. Literary language

may well become literally inaudible, according to her, because of a regional accent that the microphone itself hears too acutely (a distancing device interposed between a voice and a listening ear as if the microphone is somehow unable to translate regional accents, rather than a middle-class commissioner).

Another agent, looking for mass market comedy, used the regional identity of a stand-up she had scouted as a shorthand:

He's Northern, he's from Middlesbrough, and people like that. It's the kind of cheeky chappy thing. So he has that same straightforward Northern thing that Jason Manford has. So I think he appeals to (pause) – I hate to say working class but you know what I mean. (Friedman, 2014, p.157)

Friedman notes that “This conflation of ... ‘cheeky’ or ‘straightforward’ comedy with audiences from lower social positions was also a common practice among scouts in the restricted sector” (2014, p.158) – that is, scouts in the restricted sub-field of comedy more associated with arty or avant-garde stand-up – and he suggests that this is because of the scouts’ own fairly privileged cultural positions. He concludes that in their role as brokers between comedians and audiences, scouts draw on a repertoire of assumptions strongly based around class and cultural capital and end up “constructing, reproducing and intensifying” these comedy taste divisions. I would add that it is highly likely that they contribute to the continuing conflation of Northernness with working-classness and a lower place in the cultural hierarchy. My interviewees were well aware that the stigma of Northernness was often explicitly connected to being read as working-class and consequently to feelings of being stigmatised as stupid or less intelligent than people who would be read as normatively middle-class. These tastemakers maintained their own cultural status by casting the language and tastes of working-class people as different, lesser and even disgusting.

This could also be seen in my final key finding from the review analysis. There was evidence of the “Northern comic” archetype being drawn on in reference to the Northern stand-ups, and I would argue that this archetype mobilises middle-class feelings of disgust about excessive working-class bodies. So, for example, Gavin Webster was described by the *Guardian* as “on the surface a meat and spuds chap ... a thick set Geordie”. The *Independent* referred to the “inflated frame” of Peter Kay, the Arts Desk called him “a big lad” and the *Telegraph* pointed out he was “undeniably fatter”. Sarah Millican was referred to as a “plump, mumsy looking woman”. Chortle referred to Justin Moorhouse as a

“chubby, cheery comic” whilst *Broadway Baby* put him into the typology of a “Fat Northern Bloke Leaning on a Mike Stand Comic”. I have described previously how this archetype exemplifies the way that the North is sometimes represented as the civilised South’s barbaric Other.

I would suggest that the “Northern comic” exemplified by Bernard Manning and Roy “Chubby” Brown is an example of the female grotesque: that which has been abjected by the (unexcessive) classical bodies of English men. Mary Russo’s work on the grotesque helps unpick this. She says, “The category of the female grotesque is crucial to identity formation for both men and women as a space of risk and abjection” (1995, p.12). She argues that the identities of male grotesques are “produced through an association with the feminine as the body marked by difference” (ibid., p.13). The discourse around Northernness in these reviews suggests that the bodies and voices of comedians who fit the archetype are being marked in just this way.

The particular archetype of the Northern comic doesn’t attach as strongly to all Northern comedians – just male ones whose larger bodies and Northern voices (with a particular timbre associated with time in smoky pubs) fit. For example, Mancunian stand-up Justin Moorhouse has constantly been compared to traditional comics like Roy “Chubby” Brown in reviews, including one picked up in my analysis. He has spoken out against this in his Edinburgh shows but has decided to try to remove some of the embodied associations he provokes in order to stop being devalued (commercially and morally) in the way that traditional working-class club comedians were disparaged:

For this show in Edinburgh I’m just not swearing – I’ve taken every swear word out of the show. Why’ve I done that? I’m a big fat, gruff working-class Northern comedian. When I swear I do sound like Bernard Manning. So you take that out. (Goldsmith, 2015)

Moorhouse is strikingly reflexive about other aspects of his embodied persona, down to noting that wearing tank tops makes him look “cute” and recognising that although he will not change his body or accent, he can at least exert control over his linguistic register and remove the swearing that strengthens associations with the Northern comic archetype.

There is scope for further research on how both male and female stand-ups resist associations with the female grotesque. I think the resistance of female stand-ups is less immediately visible (partly because their deployment or exaggeration of the grotesque

might be a resistant strategy in itself). I will point to how this operates, particularly in terms of how it evokes the “unruly woman” archetype, in the next chapter.

5. An In-Between Space as Resistance to the Northernness Effect

As I conducted this research, it began to make me realise that in my own stand-up, I was already able to resist some of these stereotypes in an embodied way – by dint of being a woman speaking in a traditionally masculine space. I also began to think about how I could reflexively draw attention to the “Northernness Effect” in my practice itself, which I eventually did, particularly by talking about my experience as a newsreader whose voice was regarded as “too Northern”. Another form of resistance I have long practised became clearer when I recognised that I was one of the “culturally homeless” people Friedman’s research on comedy audience (2014) had found. We are forced to oscillate between positions but choose to act as tricksters who move between “in-group” and “out-group” positions in relation to an audience.

Many other Northern stand-ups are caught in an ongoing cultural struggle which sees them act in a space which is analogous to Friedman’s “mixed cultural capital” respondents. In his research on comedy taste (2014), 30% of his comedy audience respondents had mixed cultural capital, in that they either fitted into the long-term “intermediate class” (as defined by the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification and including higher supervisory workers and small business owners) or, in 81% of these cases, were upwardly socially mobile. I would suggest that an even higher proportion of stand-ups with working-class roots have mixed cultural capital because practising the form itself causes them to enter the field of cultural production – and the form itself occupies a space which is neither lowbrow nor highbrow but in-between. Another way to define the Northernness Effect would be as a way for those with power to attempt to disavow this in-between position in order to maintain Northernness as England’s barbaric Other. As Friedman says, the form of stand-up itself has undergone considerable social mobility since the 1970s. It is no longer so easily associated with the lowbrow.

One of my interviewees, Gavin Webster, expressed how he recognised that dominant types of stand-up he saw on the television did not express his sense of dislocation:

I really didn't like the alternative comedians, I didn't think they were speaking to me. They all seemed to come from the South, they all seemed educated. But if you look at the dickie bow tie lot, the working men's club comedians, I couldn't put my finger on it but I had nothing in common with them either. They were just old blokes with jokes.

I would argue that Webster has now gone on to express a new space in his own stand-up, from the situated position of a North-East comedian. As many of my interviewees did, he talked about resisting pressure (from his agent) to move to London. Perhaps staying in the North of England helps maintain a sense of belonging which counters the lack of fit so many of my interviewees spoke of feeling when they worked for Southern-based media institutions.

Friedman said that the comedy tastes of his mixed cultural capital respondents contained features of both those with low and those with high cultural capital. For example, they might express a liking for both Bernard Manning and Stewart Lee. This corresponds with the "tolerant cultural omnivore so prevalent in the literature" (Friedman, 2014, p.92). However, Friedman found that straddling both taste cultures wasn't rewarding and empowering for these respondents; in fact it left them "not wholly comfortable with the comedy of their upbringing, but lacking the linguistic confidence to convert new, more legitimate, comedy tastes into embodied cultural capital" (ibid., p.92). Contrary to the idea of "cultural omnivorousness", he found that his mixed cultural capital respondents expressed insecurity and worry about whether they were understanding culture correctly. He described them rather as "culturally homeless" (ibid., p.92). This corresponds to Bourdieu's concept of "habitus clivé": "A habitus divided against itself, in constant negotiation with itself and its ambivalences" (Bourdieu, 1999, p.511).

This "in-betweenness" surfaced again and again in my interviews as something that performers felt both when they were "at home" and performing elsewhere. A sense which impinged on both identity, as Liverpoolian stand-up poet Jackie Hagan indicated of her forays into the theatre world ("If you're half and half you don't know what the fuck you are"), and sense of place, as Chesterfield-born and Oxbridge-educated poet Helen Mort said: "This feeling of not belonging anywhere. Being slightly between two things all the time".

I would, however, argue that because of this dislocation, stand-up performers can embody and articulate the contradictions of being both culturally omnivorous and culturally homeless. They create a liminal space which an audience can also temporarily occupy. Simon Donald is the creator of the popular *Viz* comic and also now does stand-up comedy. He connects the cross-class audience for *Viz* to that for his stand-up and links this to his background, which means he can be “all things to all people” and make both working-class and middle-class people recognise elements of his comedy and its targets. In our interview he said he grew up “in a posh area but went to a rough school and didn’t go on to further education” and is seen inside the North-East as “really posh” but outside it as “a pure scumbag”. This corresponds to what Abrahams and Ingram (2013) call a “chameleon habitus” in which the terms of two different social spaces are altered and “rearticulated” in order to create a new, third space. Although their work was on how particularly working-class students did this in universities, it is something we see again and again as the “Northernness Effect” kicks in. Performers are forced to oscillate between multiple positions when they are presumed to be working-class and encounter an audience space in which there are audience members from diverse social backgrounds, or an audience milieu which is already coded as middle-class – particularly some theatre and poetry spaces.

In Chapter Four I will show how the intersubjectivity of stand-up performance allows these multiple identities to be evident to both performer and audience. A lack of fit can be evident, but can then generate humour when it is pointed out. An example of this might be a performer with a strong Northern accent exclaiming, “Well, this is posh,” when stepping on to the stage in an ornate hall. They raise a laugh from an audience, recognising an incongruity: their voice sounding in this hall. The performer finding their place in pointing out that they are out of place.

I would therefore further critique Friedman’s work on the grounds that, although he interviewed comedy audiences and a stand-up (Russell Kane) in order to map some of the terrain showing stand-up to be a fertile form for those caught between two cultural worlds, he did not demonstrate the ways that this productive dislocation is actually achieved by stand-ups acting in tandem *with audiences* in order to constantly remake an imaginary North of England. Some of this remaking consists of playing with the form and its context. Some of it is linguistic. All of it stems from stand-ups and audience members together performing the feeling that they are between two worlds.

Mythologies of Northernness can also be excluding and restrictive for those performers who don't fit the mould by dint of ethnicity. There is scope for much more research on these intersections and on how, for example, there are very few Northern black and ethnic minority stand-up performers. Lemn Sissay is a black poet and performer who is originally from Wigan. He told me that he didn't fit the "white, male" narrative of Manchester and didn't look like the version of it usually sold to the rest of the country. He asked, "So what happens when a young black man comes to Manchester and makes his name in poetry across the country and across different parts of the world? He still doesn't fit with the Manchester narrative, you know? So ergo, he's a threat to it." Isma Almas is a semi-professional stand-up comic from Bradford and said that her working-class identity is important to her, as is her Muslim and Pakistani identity. She said that doing stand-up meant she "didn't fit with what a Muslim woman is supposed to be doing", which was something she played on in order to surprise and engage audiences and generate humour. These interview responses make clear that stand-up is a form which enables performers to play relationally with their sense of belonging and not belonging and to posit, embody and question "authentic" Northern identities and voices. This can operate in more than one domain at once, so Almas also refers to the impact of the Northernness Effect when she performs outside the region:

In London, I have to slow down a bit on stage, actually pronounce "the", not lose myself in being Yorkshire. Whereas when I'm at local gigs I can just relax and just go with the accent.

Moving outside their customary contexts is one way in which Northern stand-ups can challenge the way they are stereotyped. However this is still likely to lead to misrecognition in which cultural imperialism is reinforced by their lowbrow status being raised. This can be felt at an embodied level, or in terms of discourse about them. It is generated by both micro and macro practices. For example, one of my interviewees, Jackie Hagan, described a sense of class dislocation while taking her stand-up poetry from nights in pubs into the world of subsidised theatre, which she felt at a level of language:

You have to say things in a debatable way to be taken seriously by middle-class people and that's not how working-class people debate. We debate with humour and bollocks.

She also said that she experienced this class dislocation in terms of how she conducted herself in the theatre environment (she felt she was judged for drinking, for example). Along with all my interviewees, she was deeply reflexive about her own practice and suggested that the in-between place she carved out involved her performing her sense of outsidership: “I end up being the weirdo and I don't mind playing that part because I've played it so long and I sort of enjoy it, and I enjoy being outside of the rules because you don't have to do the rules, which is an effort to do, and also I can look at them from outside and go, ‘They seem like bullshit to me,’ because I've lived them.” Here is an example of a performer both breaking and exposing the “rules of the game”. However, there was an ambivalence to this and she said she sometimes ended up being fetishised as “a mascot” by “normal” or “middle-class” audiences and coming to feel less true to herself.

The symbolic violence that occurs when Northerners are Othered and fetishised can also be seen when they are discussed in wider cultural discourse. I will now briefly discuss Victoria Wood and Alan Bennett as examples of Northern comedy performers whose in-betweenness has led to them being misrecognised. The Northernness Effect operates on their class identities, confusing their reception. It is also gendered, operating more strongly on Wood than on Bennett. This is well illustrated by the varying ways Victoria Wood was described after her death in 2016. The *Times* writer Caitlin Moran (2016) hailed her as a fellow working-class voice. A *Guardian* article said she was “a northern English, working-class Lancastrian and Mancunian national treasure” (*Guardian*, 2016). Her *Guardian* obituary, meanwhile, said she was a “middle-class sophisticated woman whose critics compared her to Noel Coward and Alan Bennett” (Jeffries, 2016). Jack (2016) reflected on this disjunction in order to write a piece on the changing “escalator” of social mobility and concluded that Wood’s parents, an insurance salesman and a mature student, might have thought they were getting “above themselves” to say they were middle-class and described themselves as “respectable working class” instead. He locates himself in Wood’s Northern chronotope, having been born eight miles away and eight years before, and characterises it as having a shorter, easier escalator from the working to the middle class than the present day, with more people on it than now and more available white-collar jobs to ease the transition.

This difficulty categorising Wood has also led to her being under-studied. Medhurst says that “despite a career spanning three decades and an unquestionable status as one of the most popular comedy performers and writers in Britain, Wood has attracted remarkably

little detailed critical study” (2007, p.178). He goes on to explain this by pointing out her lack of cultural capital – how she didn’t go to Oxbridge, is neither cool nor kitsch nor cultish, and has never required “rediscovering”, been internationally recognised or produced a major feature film. He also connects the lack of academic attention to the specific style of her humour, which is about “communality” and “social embrace” rather than “sourness”, “moody fringes” or “undercurrents” (ibid., p.182). Medhurst is, however, baffled at Wood’s lack of critical study despite what he calls the “complexities of her writing” (ibid., p.184) and the range of stylistic traditions she draws on, which have led to her being compared to everybody from Harold Pinter to George Formby. He does not quite make the leap to attributing this in any part to her gender or class or the Northernness Effect. He does, however, acknowledge that Alan Bennett, to whom she is also often compared, has been the subject of much more critical commentary.

Alan Bennett was also born to “respectable working class” parents in the North of England (Leeds in 1934), though he went to Oxford and began his career with the Oxford Revue, coming to prominence with the *Beyond the Fringe* revue in 1960. Medhurst suggests that Bennett’s is a “comedy without sneers, a comedy unafraid of warmth, a comedy interested in the overlooked and unfashionable” and that therefore “the word ‘cosy’ hangs over him like a small, chintz cloud” (2007, p.162). Northernness is undoubtedly part of this overlooked unfashionability. Medhurst does more to refute this charge against Bennett, though, saying of the 1988 television documentary *Dinner at Noon* in which he observed the comings and goings at a Harrogate hotel that he was “part shuffling anthropologist, part prowling predator” (ibid., p.165), noting the social distinctions like accents, which denoted those who were climbing or not even getting on the social escalator.

Medhurst says that an eye for the fine grain of social distinctions is one of the main factors Wood and Bennett have in common and quotes Bennett as saying that he hasn’t found the traditional three-tier account of social class convincing, though he is interested in classes and types. Actually it is another thing that Medhurst attributes to Bennett – “An unerring eye for how class, space, culture and geography interweave in the stitching of English identities” (2007, p.164) – which is needed in descriptions of how class and cultural capital function in stand-up performance and which I hope my thesis can provide from a practitioner’s point of view.

Bennett and Wood both intertwine strikingly different linguistic registers to comedic effect. I would suggest that this is a common feature of the “in-between” stand-up performer. It

surfaces time and again in my stand-up poetry. It was also seen in Les Dawson, who, as Oliver Double points out, wanted to move to Paris and be a Bohemian writer, before becoming an archetypal club comedian known for his mother-in-law jokes. “He’d describe the stars in the night sky ‘like pieces of quicksilver carelessly thrown on to black velvet’ before coming out with a punchline about needing to put a new roof on the outside lavatory” (Double, 1997, p.130). These mixed linguistic registers can be a way to challenge how some stand-up comedians are still trapped within the restrictions of their embodied cultural capital and the effects of a rigid Northern chronotope. They may not always work. Double quotes Dawson as saying in 1975 that he didn’t still want to be telling mother-in-law jokes on a club stage in thirty years’ time (ibid., p.131), but points out that he was still strongly associated with them for the remaining two decades of his life.

I would suggest that the reflexivity of Wood and Bennett about class, as well as that of many of the stand-ups I have interviewed and of myself, is a result of the “in-between” position we occupy as a result of our regionality and class. It makes us into what Bourdieu et al. called “extraordinary practical analysts” (1999, p.511). Our torn and precarious position in the social structure, after starting from a working-class position, makes us acutely sensitive to the contradictory injunctions of our families, which might be both “stay and be like me” and “leave and don’t be like me”. Bourdieu says that “In order to live or to survive [extraordinary practical analysts] practice a kind of self-analysis, which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp and to the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions” (ibid., p.511).

Conclusion

A discussion of my practice is, for me, incomplete without an understanding of the Northernness Effect and how it operates in the realm of stand-up performance. At the same time, it is difficult to analyse how this actually impacts on an audience’s reception of my performance. Some of them may be alert to the performative codes I am using to attempt to resist the Northernness Effect; some of them may have their stereotypes about Northernness reinforced. This is evident in the work I have done on analysing audience reactions to my own, and other Northern performers stand-up during the course of making my new work, but much more audience research is needed.

There are also structural elements to how the Northernness Effect functions which would benefit from further research. For example, the impact of performers living far away from the comedy producers who are overwhelmingly still based in London, or the relative

socioeconomic disadvantages of the North of England and their effect on how many people enter the field of stand-up. There is a danger of my work exaggerating the sociocultural influence of “Northernness” when its meanings are increasingly fragmented and may register significantly less strongly with young people.

Nonetheless, I would contend that stand-up is a form where popular culture and politics can intersect and that it may be a space where both audiences and performers can resist and challenge dominant hegemonies, including ones about regionality. It is necessary, though, to look more closely at the wider context of stand-up to fully understand gendered factors including stereotypes affecting women, for insights into how Northern female stand-ups are received. I will do this in the next chapter, and begin to demonstrate how, in turn, the Northernness Effect can impact on how feminisms are perceived when they are practised by Northern female performers.

That's Not Nice Pet- Poem

I would never want it to seem that women have it harder
because I hate that sort of thing
but it's true.

Men can speak about whatever they want.
Their dick, sweaty balls.
Female comedians talk about periods.
That's the stereotype
so I avoid it.

You've got to be likeable straight away
so that's what I am
a likeable Northern lass

Equal opportunity piss taker,
that's how I see myself.
I take the piss out of all people
but I see value in them as well.
That's why I find feminists...
some of them are genuinely man-haters you know
and I think that's not nice pet.
I'm against the exploitation of the female form
but I like to see a nice arse as well.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW THE UNRULY WOMAN AND THE FEMALE TRICKSTER CAN CHALLENGE THE NORTHERNNESS EFFECT

I am on stage with Sharon and Helen, two singer-songwriters who intersperse beautifully sung narratives of overlooked women with hilarious banter based on Helen's struggling middle-class, yummy mummy persona and Sharon's self-proclaimed gobby working-class feminist ranter. Noise filters through from the Edinburgh bar to our curtained-off area in the Free Fringe venue. I look out at the audience and spot the Yorkshire couple I flyered who got excited when they saw the word "Yorkshire" on the leaflet, and the two young women who make me wonder if they came because of the word "feminist". I say the line I use in order to speak to all of them and myself: "I tend not to say I'm a feminist poet even though I am a feminist and I am a poet. But I find the two words together can become mutually offputting. A bit like 'Christian' and 'musician'."

The Northernness Effect intersects with class and gender. In this chapter I will explore how those intersections work in practice in the contemporary stand-up comedy field. I will introduce the figures of the unruly woman and the female trickster in order to examine female performers' modes of resistance to the Northernness Effect. The "Strong Northern Woman" is identified as a geographically specific variant of the "Unruly woman" archetype. The unruly woman is explored as a means by which female performers can both subvert and comply with stereotypes of Northernness and the Northern grotesque. I use Tyler's work on social abjection to analyse how the unruly woman functions as a figure of both disgust and attraction.

I then go on to look at another figure- the Female Trickster- who I use in my practice in order to oscillate between positions and to avoid being stereotyped. This figure can work to confuse the habitual readings of Northern female stand-ups as working-class, whilst also highlighting the resistant tactics of Northern women. I contend that the nature of their resistance is often misrecognised, but suggest some tactics used by Northern female stand-ups including myself, constitute subtle and complex means of resignifying our class, gender and regionality.

1. Strong Northern Women and the Female Grotesque

In the previous chapter, I identified the “Northern Comic” as a grotesque archetype which haunts Northern male comedians. Northernness as a quality brings other qualities “Down to earth”, including humour. Performers can use this for comic effect, but it can also be restrictive. Popular representations of Northern women are also seen through a lens of grotesque realism, though not with specific reference to stand-up comedians as there have historically been so many fewer female ones.

Popular cultural representations of Northern women show how a repertoire of humorous resistance based on the idea of the “Strong Northern Woman” operates. A particularly good example is seen in the Northern English soap opera *Coronation Street*, which first aired in 1960 and has long been celebrated for its strong working-class female characters who are adept at using humour. Smith and Tyler (2017) describe the queerness of the soap’s female characters and link this to how “femininity ... and in particular heterosexual female respectability, has never been accessible to non-white or working-class women” (2017, p.324). They note how the show’s gay creator Tony Warren reversed the way in which working-class women’s “failures” of femininity became comedy material by celebrating how its “working class female characters queer respectable femininities through class” (ibid, p324). One key example was the character Bet Lynch (Julie Goodyear), who started off as a barmaid and became a landlady over 25 years as a regular in the soap from 1970. She was known for her leopard print clothing, blonde beehive hair and camp, drag queen qualities. Smith and Tyler cite a journalist who said, “She’s all biceps and bosoms ... but with a sharp line in putdowns that keeps men in their place” (Smith and Tyler, 2017, p.324). The excessiveness of *Coronation Street’s* matriarchs from Elsie Tanner and Bet Lynch to Hilda Ogden and Vera Duckworth makes them “unruly women” (Rowe, 1995), and I will explore this figure later in this chapter in relation to Northern female stand-ups. I want to suggest that in some ways it can represent liberating resistance and in others it can reinforce and reify normative middle-class femininities by pathologising working-class Northern femininities as excessive and “Other”.

This “strong woman-ness” contrasts with pervasive ideas of the North as a masculine space. Spracklen says that “The north is a place where white, working-class masculinity is constructed and performed” (2016, p.10). Russell also notes that “The North has generally been coded as masculine (albeit in a more complex way than might be assumed) and set

against a more effeminate South” (2004, p.38). He says that Northern women have generally been characterised as “homely” and lacking fuss, although the North has also been a “key site” for England’s “strong women” such as the Brontës, politicians Barbara Castle and Bessie Braddock, and cyclist Beryl Burton. In terms of the cultural homology in which North equals lower equals grotesque body, this is not a paradox. The North is also feminine and, I would suggest, has an impact on the excessive, soft, warm bodies expected of archetypal Northern comedians from Bernard Manning to Peter Kay.

This insight also struck influential comedy critic of the Chortle industry website Steve Bennett (and me) during an additional interview I conducted, after so many of the stand-ups I interviewed talked about the importance of reviews. Bennett said:

If you’re talking about the stereotypes again, I think Northern comedy is more feminine and Southern comedy is more masculine. Because [Northern comedy is] more warm and encompassing, more maternal – and the Southern is the masculine alpha male putting people down. We’ve stumbled on something there.

I would also suggest that the gendered mythologising of the North, including the grotesque image of the Strong Northern Woman, contributes to the persistent misrecognition of the actual social and economic position of working-class Northern women. Novelist Jeanette Winterson captures the way that the mythology of comedy obscures the reality of working-class women’s marginalisation and precarity. She notes how:

Northern women were tough, and reckoned that way in the home and in popular comedy ... and in the drunken working men's clubs, stage acts like Les Dawson dressed up in headscarves and aprons, parodying, but also celebrating, the formidable women the men loved, feared and were dependent upon. Yet those women who were supposed to stand at the door waiting to whack their men with a rolling pin had no economic clout. And when they did, they hid it.

(2011, p.132).

As she mentions, the Northern female grotesque was appropriated in the fifties and sixties by performers such as Norman Evans and Les Dawson, who dressed up as matriarchal women who gossiped over garden fences and made euphemisms and innuendos about “women’s troubles”. The Northern male comic’s performance of drag was connected to working-class identity and, I would suggest, complicated by the gendered elements of the

Northern chronotope. According to Holland's interpretation of the pantomime dame, a related phenomenon to the Northern comics in drag; "The performance of the feminine is a release of laughter at the feminine and an avoidance of the effeminate" (199, p. 202). He links it also to the seaside postcard, the music hall and "to the comedy of proletarian rejection of establishment values" and, quoting George Orwell on seaside postcards, to the world "where marriage is a dirty joke or a comic disaster" (ibid., p.203). Porter (in Wagg, 1998) notes how this mockery of older women, in common with the comic mockery of overtly sexualised "dolly bird" women and of older women whose sexual desires men are unable to keep up with, is a way of "disavowing her threat to masculinity, to freedom, to control, to order; all that masculinity holds dear and needs in order to shore itself up against all the odds" (Wagg, 1998, p.94).

I would argue that female performances of Strong Northern Women, which arguably contain an element of drag, are actually more subversive of gender norms than those of the male comics who parodied Northern matriarchs. Although queer theorist Judith Butler notes that 'Drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency' (1990, p.137), she points out that drag is not parodic or subversive if it reinforces existing gender distinctions and norms, as I would suggest the male impersonations of Northern mother-in-laws and matriarchs do. The archetype of the Strong Northern Woman encapsulates what Rowe (1995) has called "the unruly woman" in comedy, who joyously performs her working class body and its contrast to the respectable and restrained norms of middle-class women. This also allows her to access what Butler has called the 'pleasure, the giddiness' (1990, p.137) of exposing the contingent nature of sex and gender by parodying its norms. Being connected with this figure however, as with the figure of the Northern Comic, can lead to female comics being reified as connected more to the past than to the future and lead to their subversion of class and gender norms being misrecognised. I would suggest that this, in part, accounts for the lack of critical commentary on such Northern comedians as Hylda Baker, Victoria Wood and Caroline Aherne. Some comedians may mobilise the capital of this figure strategically (such as Janice Connolly with her "Barbara Nice" character, who I will discuss further below). Some may however, find it imposed on them by reviewers in a way which erases the complexity of the liminal class positions they are negotiating as a stand-up performer. The forms of the Northern Grotesque, the Northern Comic and the Strong Northern Woman loom large in imaginaries of Northern comedy- but I would suggest that these are resisted in the situated imaginaries constructed by individual performers and audiences.

Much of this resistance is enacted at the level of the micro-practices of Northern female comics. Much of it could be called feminist resistance but this is likely to be misrecognised due to it being performed by working-class practitioners. Noting this is relevant because over the course of this thesis I have gradually come to recognise the feminist potential of my own practice, but have first had to unravel my ambivalent mixture of complicity and resistance to feminism and its wider cultural repudiation. I think this ambivalence has been reinforced by performing stand-up in spaces where feminism is still contested, but also in spaces where my feminist practices are rarely reflected back to me, or recognised as feminist practices by commentators, audiences or fellow stand-ups.

2. Feminist Stand-up and the Misrecognition of the Working-Class Woman

It is instructive to look at the role class plays in examples of female stand-ups who *are* recognised as resisting dominant gender norms. For example, comedy researcher Ellie Tomsett (2017) has described Bridget Christie's comedy as feminist, in contrast to the majority of women working in contemporary stand-up, who have what she says are postfeminist approaches. Tomsett concedes that standing on the stage as a woman could still be perceived as a feminist act, due to the dominance of men in the field, but says that the feminist shows which have won Edinburgh Festival awards in recent years, including Christie's, went further because of their "covering complex issues and deconstructing gender roles" (2017, p.1). She applies postfeminist theorist Rosalind Gill's work to female comedians. Gill defines postfeminism as displaying a focus on personal rather than political issues, particularly the body, without deconstructing the structural issues around the personal ones. Tomsett gives Luisa Omielan and Katherine Ryan as examples of comedians who take a postfeminist approach and says they tend to depoliticise the body as a way of resisting gender tropes by focusing on their own experiences of, say, glamour modelling and the "naturally different" behaviour of men and women in relationships, without connecting it to wider issues of how women are objectified.

It could, however, be argued that the reception of Bridget Christie is reproducing what is in fact a postfeminist emphasis on a certain type of "commodifiable" middle-class femininity. I note for example that the way that her feminism is reported in fact reflects the dominant middle-class norms of media institutions such as the *Guardian* and BBC Radio 4. Although in her later memoir (2015) Bridget Christie describes herself as working-class, I could not find reference to this in any of the newspaper stories about her Edinburgh award win. It is

as if the “unruly woman” (Rowe, 1995) that is the feminist stand-up comedian is tamed when she enters the discourse of the highly commodified world of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. She speaks out against the excesses of male comedians, performs in the consecrated mode of stand-up comedy which draws on high cultural capital practices like theatre and performance art, becomes aligned with a particular white, middle-class sort of feminism which does not speak about class, and is credited with having broken through the glass ceiling of comedy.

This tension in a postfeminism that is seen by some critics as political and transformative and by others as apolitical and individualistic is further complicated at the moment due to a focus on what is being described as “fourth wave feminism” in which there is an increased spotlight on feminism, particularly among young women using social media as a platform for it. Gill points out, in wondering whether there is a case for “post-postfeminism”, that this is currently a time in which “feminism has a new luminosity in popular culture” (Gill, 2016, p.614). She suggests that there is now a dizzying interplay of feminisms and postfeminisms in operation all at once. However, I would suggest that class and regionality are still marginalised as positions within this re-evaluation of feminist politics. Here, I am answering feminist theorist Braidotti’s call (1994) for attention to be paid to the “politics of location” of actors. As she suggests, I am finding out about local power flows and thus discovering possible spaces for resistance and “lines of flight” from a classed and gendered Northernness. This is often erased in mainstream discourses about the ways that female comedians enact resistance.

Sarah Millican has also achieved success at the Edinburgh Fringe Comedy Awards (winning Best Newcomer in 2008 for her show *Sarah Millican’s Not Nice*), but is reviewed in very different terms from Bridget Christie. Comments are routinely made about her accent, voice and body, which are not applied to Christie, as I have noted in the comedy review content analysis in the previous chapter. I would suggest that Millican’s Northernness is a key factor in seeing her framed explicitly as a working-class comic, despite the equally working-class origins of both women. The Northernness Effect is operating at full strength here. Despite her feminism, Christie rarely talks explicitly about her own class position, or class issues generally in her stand-up. She is associated with what Friedman (2014) notes is the more “consecrated” middle-class comedy of formal experimentation; she uses surreal forms and images, is based in London and married to the consecrated comedian Stewart Lee. She also talks about issues such as “No More

Page 3” which are associated with a particular sort of white middle-class feminism. Millican stands outside this norm and in some ways challenges it. In her interview with me she told me that she does see herself as resisting images women face in the media, although she hadn’t set out to do this. She set out to make people laugh but found that women identified with her truthfulness about not conforming to the usual size, shape and demeanour of most women in the media and now feels that “being brutally me is the best thing I can do”.

I will now examine how the unruly woman, which I would suggest Millican exemplifies, functions to symbolise the processes by which abjection and excess can be transformed via comedy and challenge the social order. I would suggest that, in common with Millican and other Northern performers, I am sometimes identified with the unruly archetype by reviewers, audiences or commentators, but I sometimes choose to identify with it myself (and sometimes reject it). Having introduced the idea of the trickster in chapter one to highlight how ongoing decisions about practical performance tactics may be hidden from (or revealed to) an audience, I bring her back here to embody the in-the-moment performance tactics and wider contextual strategies female performers may use in order to subvert the ways they and their discourses are framed. The female trickster skilfully oscillates between in-group and out-group positions with an audience and can thus resist the Northernness Effect in which she might be framed as the stereotype of the Strong Northern Woman. This can be a positive stereotype performers may wish to capitalise on, but it can also work to reify her and her region as “in the past” as well as to erase the realities of historic and contemporary working-class trauma and the complexities of social mobility.

3. Northern Figures of Feminist Resistance

i) Stand-up as Unruly Woman

The figure of the unruly woman, introduced to discussion of female stand-ups by Kathleen Rowe (1995), can be useful for exploring what might be left out of the contested feminisms and postfeminisms of mainstream and academic discourse. Rowe gives the example of working-class American comedian Roseanne Barr as an unruly woman who fulfils Bakhtin’s qualities of the grotesque and the carnivalesque in the sense of transgressing the categories between high and low. Grotesque realism is excessive and incomplete. It is the life cycle as viewed by the collective rather than the individual. Death is a necessary part of the cycle. Therefore the taboo, horror and death are key elements of the grotesque.

The “grotesque body” exaggerates its processes, bulges and orifices whereas the static, monumental “classical” (or bourgeois) body conceals them. The grotesque body breaks down the boundaries between the self and the world outside it, while the classical body, consistent with the ideology of the bourgeois individual, shores them up. (Rowe, 1995, p.33)

Rowe points out that the grotesque lends itself to comedy, with its absurdity, taboo-breaking and excessiveness. She links Bakhtin’s grotesque hags to the concept of the unruly woman and cites the historian Natalie Zemon Davies’ full description of the traits of the unruly woman. I will reproduce it here because it also provides a useful typology for how working-class female comedians are characterised.

1. The unruly woman creates disorder by dominating or trying to dominate men. She is unwilling or unable to confine herself to her proper place.
2. Her body is excessive or fat, suggesting her unwillingness or inability to control her physical appetites.
3. Her speech is excessive in quantity, content or tone.
4. She makes jokes or laughs at herself.
5. She may be androgynous or hermaphroditic, drawing attention to the social construction of gender.
6. She may be old or a masculinised crone, for women who refuse to become invisible in our culture are often considered grotesque.
7. Her behaviour is associated with looseness and occasionally whoreishness but her sexuality is less narrowly and negatively defined than is that of the femme fatale. She may be pregnant.
8. She is associated with dirt, liminality (thresholds, borders or margins) and taboo, rendering her above all a figure of ambivalence. (Cited in Rowe, 1995, p.31)

My stand-up practice embodies the ambiguity of the grotesque in an additional way as it slips between registers – between lyrical poetry and grotesque comedy, between academic theory and heteroglossic voices. The mess and confusions of class, gender and regionality meet in the to and fro of the laughter my audiences and I engage in. A grotesque woman could be dismissed as “merely disgusting”, which is evident in the tone of Sarah Millican’s reviews, as detailed in the previous chapter. I have been reviewed

comparatively little, but there is an element of the grotesque in the way comedy reviewer Steve Bennett noted that my Edinburgh Fringe show *Kate Fox News* was hard to classify because it wasn't quite funny enough for a comedy show, but at the time there wasn't a spoken word category in the Edinburgh Fringe brochure, and thus it "fell between more stools than Amy Winehouse" (Bennett, 2010), using a flippant reference to the late pop singer's alcoholism. Women who are hard to classify are unsettling as they challenge categories – causing matter to be "out of place", as in the anthropologist Mary Douglas' well-known definition of dirt (2002, p.44). Skeggs notes that the need to categorise things as dirty, disgusting and Other:

provides collective reassurance that we are not alone in our judgement of the disgusting object, generating consensus and authorisation for middle-class standards, maintaining the symbolic order. (Skeggs, 2005, p.970)

At the same time Skeggs and Lawler note that disgust can become a middle-class resource, as in art exhibitions which deliberately provoke it. I would suggest that female stand-up comedians can also provoke it on purpose.

For example, in my body show in my series *The Price of Happiness* I talk about having had a breast reduction and graphically describe how I worried that my newly reattached nipples would "fall off if I sneezed and land on top of somebody's trifle". This usually evokes a big laugh but also sounds and faces of mimed disgust from an audience. There is an oscillation in disgust here, which I am going to suggest is characteristic of the rhythm of stand-up comedy. I first of all evoke my excess (by saying I had 38GG breasts which were "pendulous ... they had their own micro-climate. I found a family of squirrels living under there once. And an ex-boyfriend"). Then I reduce the excess, literally, by talking about having a breast reduction. Then I evoke it again ("She removed two pounds of fat from each side. That's two bags of sugar. I don't know why they say sugar, it could be cocaine"). Then I increase this, with the image of my body being ejected outside myself, possibly to become somebody else's food. Then I pull it back in again by saying that "I then go and pick them up, very apologetically, and put them in my pocket." This is an oscillation I am able to control in a live environment with an audience; however, I am not able to control the way that a comedy critic may describe my voice or body or material outside that context. Although this segment was included in the live recording of the show, the producer cut this particular segment from the final broadcast, I would suggest because

she thought it would be perceived as too graphic, visceral and disgusting for a daytime Radio 4 comedy show.

This (partial, possible) control of one's own abjection has been theorised by sociologist of class Imogen Tyler (2009). She has rethought Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic mode of abjection as *social* abjection in order to see a way in which women can reclaim it, speak it and thus become subjects. Tyler challenges the more familiar use in cultural analysis of Julia Kristeva's description of abjection as being a psychic process of revulsion and fear of being incorporated by the maternal body. She also challenges how far affirming abjection by, for example, repeating descriptions of monstrous bodies, actually contests it; she suggests it may in fact reinforce it. She agrees with Russo (following Bakhtin) that parodying the grotesque can be a way to transgress it and calls for more attention to be paid to abjection as a social process. She says that abjection should be understood as "describing the violent exclusionary forces within modern states" (Tyler, 2009, p.87). In this reading of abjection, a way to contest it would be to make the move from abjected "thing" to subjective person – which is the process Iain MacRury describes as happening intersubjectively between a stand-up and an audience. He characterises stand-up as a "performative oscillation evoking paranoid-schizoid and depressive anxieties" (2012, p.2). In MacRury's analysis of the oscillatory movement whereby the person designated as "It" (as in the childhood game in which someone is the chased, or the chaser) moves rapidly between stand-up performer and stand-up audience, abjection is passed around the performance space. People take it in turns to be socially outcast and mocked for their identities and predilections.

In a live stand-up context, a performer can continually contest an audience's or their own tendency to reify them as a "thing" or "It" by filling in the detail of themselves as a person. This is not always possible in a review when a critic can reify a performer as a stereotype of a Northern comic or poet or a working-class comedian, as I have noted in the previous chapter. A review is fixed rather than dialogic. However, Mizejewski (2015) points out that the ambivalence of stand-ups can at least create a disturbance and confusion in the wider realm of representation, beyond the effect of a single performance.

The unruliness evoked as part of the Northernness Effect is grotesque and therefore, in Bakhtinian terms, it is liminal. Therefore, according to definitions of feminist praxis, it can be harnessed in order to help shift structures to allow, dare I say, more unruliness within them. Unruliness can be a tactic in de Certeau's terms (2011), rather than a strategy,

because, as Skeggs (2005) avers, tactics are more available to those in a relative position of powerlessness. She links this to comedy when she suggests that the “talking back” to middle-class pretensions performed within *The Royle Family*, a TV show about working-class Northerners, is an example of using tactics. She says that small-scale tactics, rather than large-scale strategies, are often all that is accessible to working-class people because of their “lack of access to the circuits of symbolic control and distribution” (Skeggs, 2005, p.977). Skeggs points to comedy’s power to devalue the pretensions of the valuer (by mocking them) and also to allow stand-ups to defiantly enjoy that for which they know they are being derided in order “to steadfastly refuse the authority of the judgment and the value system from which it emerges” (ibid., p.976). I would suggest that because of this power there needs to be more research on how the relatively open field of comedy, in which performers can attend workshops and open-mike nights, can allow an increasingly rare point of access to cultural production for marginalised people.

Many of the traits of the unruly woman could be claimed by all female comedians – for example the traits of trying to dominate men (by invading what is still perceived as a male space), making jokes and being associated with liminality and ambivalence. Perhaps, as we have seen in the difference between the reception of Christie and Millican, some female comedians would be seen to embody more of these traits than others. The Northernness Effect amplifies the image of the unruly woman. So do factors like being physically large. Other sensory qualities of “excess” are perceived in certain women and can be connected to any of those social categories which don’t fit the “norm” of the white, bourgeois, “respectable” woman. This intersectionality is recognised in performance theorist Roberta Mock’s analysis of female Jewish comedians. She says that “class, sex and Jewishness meet at the nexus of the bawdy and the body” (2009, p.5) in her analysis of the working-class Jewish comedian Roseanne Barr’s performances.

This connects to the work of British sociologists of class such as Skeggs, Tyler and Lawler on the figure of the stigmatised and abjected working-class woman. They emphasise that the class positions of such women are configured through ever-changing, constantly renegotiated relational practices which are as much practices of cultural representation as of economic inequality. Lawler notes how “working-class people are not primarily classified as disgusting through their poverty but through their lack of knowledge and taste” (2005, p. 800). Lockyer (2010) has noted that the television “chav” (slang for an underclass person)

Vicky Pollard, from the TV comedy series *Little Britain*, is an example of an “unruly woman” and suggests that although she is configured as an excessive and vulgar working-class woman in exactly the way that theorists such as Skeggs (1997) have noted is the norm for working-class women, she is actually an ambiguous figure, because of her grotesqueness. As discussed earlier, the working-class divas and matriarchs of *Coronation Street* queer femininity because their lack of “respectability” means they are deemed not to be “proper” women.

For Mock (2009), the process of “queering” the female body by not conforming to its expected norms is a type of *écriture-féminine*, in terms used by Helene Cixous in her influential feminist essay “The laugh of the Medusa” (1976). Cixous says that women have been sublimated so that when they are finally unrepressed and able to express themselves in their own terms they are “more body, hence more writing” (1976, p.886).

Is her writing an example of écriture-féminine?

What, Cixous? Yes. I would say so. It overflows with metaphor, simile, visceral description. It commands, requests, suggests. It is performative utterance. It does what it says. She enacts what she calls for. Her form echoes her content and that’s what she hopes for in the legions of women that will rise up and express both their universality and their particularity. It will cause social and political change because it will be so revolutionary.

Did it make you laugh?

Laugh? Er... not particularly.

Oh. I just thought that an essay that’s quoted so much in writing about humour might be quite funny. You know – there’s the Medusa who’s not deadly; “she’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (Cixous, p.885).

I don’t think the Medusa is laughing at Helene Cixous’ essay, to be honest. It’s impassioned, it’s polemical, it might move people to tears or cheers or something, but it’s not really doing any of the complex, socially situated things that those who help facilitate laughter do. There’s no parodies or unexpected juxtapositions here. Though she does mock women who are still in thrall to phallogentricity and big dicks. That might be quite funny if you’re definitely not one of them.

I would like to hold out the possibility that unruliness can be a form of resistance and a tactic for a performer to transform their abjection. I would also like to stress the fact that, as live stand-up is a situated and relational form, this can also be used to transform the way that an audience sees and feels the world. Aston and Harris (2013) give a sense of how this might work. They draw on Rancière (2009) and his critique of the Brechtian view of the audience as needing to be liberated from feeling in order to think. Aston and Harris demonstrate how a stand-up deploys these tactics in the context of a live gig. For Rancière, evoking affect allows for performance to be a potential site of political transformation because audience members become active interpreters as they connect the experiences on stage to their own lives and embody their own “competencies as performers” (Aston and Harris, 2013, p.14) by imagining how they might behave in comparable situations. For example, an audience might identify with a stand-up performer who is abjected in similar ways to them and experience the move from abject to subject that Tyler posits, at the same time as the stand-up herself makes this move. Millican seems to be suggesting this happens when she says women respond to her honesty about herself with a sort of joyful recognition, and I have experienced this myself at her gigs: a sort of rising defiance about not being a size-zero model. Alternatively, in my practice I might express an ambivalence about class identity (in the space between a “working-class” and “middle-class” definition of class) which reflects an ambivalence felt by audience members who are usually forced to repress or deny this because of feelings of shame. There is therefore a relief and a release in laughing about it, in a situation where they experience solidarity with other audience members feeling the same way and thus they begin to feel more connected to a community. After my Radio 4 show about class was broadcast, several people who took the time to contact me directly had also experienced a sense of class “in-betweenness” and said my show resonated with them.

Aston and Harris also value the breaking down of the thinking/feeling binary in Eve Sedgwick’s work (2002). They apply her notion of “reparative” performance, which builds on Butler’s discussion of camp and parodic drag performance to suggest that as well as revealing gender norms in a distancing way, performance can positively transform these elements in a way which theatrically reassembles things such as mainstream femininity (and masculinity, or class identity). MacRury uses the same word as Sedgwick to describe the subsequent relationship between audience and performer; “Comic performance tests an audience into recognition and a kind of containing ‘love’” (MacRury, 2012, p.15).

What I am arguing in this chapter is that stand-up performance can allow a performer to resist labels and stereotypes, but, more than that, it can allow them to change the terms under which they, and their audiences, are represented. A female stand-up who is perceived as Northern and working-class may be doubly excluded from resistant feminist discourses and may therefore have to enact a resistance which is subversive and sees her shifting positions.

Aspects of the Strong Northern Woman and the unruly woman archetypes do not fit my performance style, yet I sometimes perform for audiences who expect me to mobilise some aspects of them as soon as I open my mouth. Therefore I am now going to introduce another figure who is useful to myself and to many socially mobile Northern women who find themselves caught between two worlds and their concomitant expectations. The female trickster represents a modality in which identities are shown as slippery, contingent and multiple. She shifts between positions and is difficult to reify.

ii) Stand-up as Female Trickster

Billingsley (2013) suggests that Cixous is not specific enough about how laughter can be a resistance against silencing patriarchal discourse and uses the work of another French philosopher and novelist, Monique Wittig, to provide a material explanation of how this might actually work in practice. For Wittig (1984), language itself can be a Trojan horse or “war machine”, in her words, which disrupts the norms of phallogocentric discourse.

Billingsley sees a correspondence between this and the disruption of semantic scripts which humour theorists see happening in humour. We appear to be being led into familiar territory at the start of a joke or funny story, but then the rug is pulled from under us and the discourse is revealed to contain multiple and contradictory meanings which undermine the stability of discourse itself and of the binary categories which underpin it. Wittig’s work is usually seen as opposed to that of Cixous and other French feminist philosophers such as Irigaray because they insist on upholding an essential female difference, whereas Wittig sees the category of “woman” as one which exists in order to sustain ideological power differences; she refers to the “class of women”. This resonates with my approach to looking at class and gender through the regionality lens – specifically that of Northern Englishness.

The trickster archetype is usually gendered as male, but I would like to look at a female trickster. In defining the trickster, anthropologist Barbara Babcock (1975) notes that it is a

figure which escapes classification and operates betwixt and between. She associates trickster figures with the liminality and marginality Victor Turner asserts as characteristic of cultural production and the peripherality and pollution that Mary Douglas theorises for liminal, marginal figures. Tricksters challenge boundaries but may also be on the lowest rung of the social ladder. They can be figures who carry the “dual-consciousness” of being between two cultures during a time of transition (this resonates with the way that Friedman describes the “culturally homeless” or Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus clivé”). Babcock points out that not everybody chooses to be marginal, but she distinguishes the trickster from the tragic scapegoat as a more volitional figure who operates in a comic modality and enjoys living outside the rules. The working-class women analysed by Skeggs, Tyler and Lawler are often analysed as being in the tragic mode, but perhaps moving into the comic mode could be a way of achieving subjectivity for themselves and making their marginality something they choose. Babcock contradicts Jung and Radin’s influential view of the trickster-hero as an archetype which represents a more primitive mode of consciousness in which tribes confused reality and fantasy. She instead suggests it celebrates “the generative situation of ambivalence and contradictions that the very basis of culture engenders” (Babcock, 1975, p.164). Her trickster is a figure of *humitas*. Babcock’s trickster is still primarily male, however, so it was good to encounter a cultural analysis of female tricksters, conducted partially through an analysis of fictional female detectives in the work of cultural theorist Ricki Tannen.

Although Tannen (2007) does not reference the work of Wittig, I would suggest that her analysis of a figure she calls the “postmodern female trickster” also corresponds to that of the marginalised female stand-up performer who uses subversive, hidden humour as a process which reinscribes and resignifies the dominant order. This refuses victimhood and “turns pathos into pleasure” (2007, p.179). I have come to recognise this figure in my own practice, and I recognise it in the tactics of some of the female performers I have interviewed, particularly the ones who cross boundaries between genres such as comedy, theatre, poetry, art and academia. Her marginality is a key part of the make-up of the postmodern female trickster, but this marginality is something which may also shift and oscillate. The perennial and inevitable marginality of female comics has been described by Gilbert (2004) in optimistic terms. She says female stand-ups get paid to perform their own marginality and sees their performance of resistance which is “cloaked in the guise of entertainment” (2004, p.xviii) as providing an “important synecdoche for oppressed groups in our society” (*ibid.*, p.xviii), which challenges social structures while operating with them.

Gilbert concludes that critical commentary on female and feminist humour is always a description of marginal humour. She says she is following bell hooks in distinguishing between a “rhetorical marginality” – which someone might choose to operate from as a site of empowering resistance – and a sociological marginality, which someone can’t help but perform (for example race) and which often stigmatises them (Gilbert, 2004, p.12). She sees marginal stand-ups, including all women by dint of their minority status, as constructing what she calls a “rhetoric of victimage” in which they “perform their marginality in an act simultaneously oppressive (by using demeaning stereotypes) and transgressive (by interrogating those very stereotypes through humorous discourse)” (ibid., pp.137–8).

Someone might, for example, “pass” as straight when they’re gay, as there is no physical feature which marks them as such. This makes it a rhetorical marginality. My femaleness is a sociological marginality – I can’t easily help but perform it. My Northern Englishness troubles the categories of “sociological” and “rhetorical” marginality though. I was brought up having an accent, whose inflections and emphases have changed at different times depending on where I’ve lived. But, as many Northerners have done, I *could* choose to lose it and thus not be marginalised by regionality/class, or at least minimise the risk of being outed. Gilbert gives the example of her Jewishness as a “rhetoricalised” sociological marginality because she could have chosen not to perform it, but she did. She said this could have been seen as subversive, depending on the audience context. For her humour is unique in being able to function as “anti rhetoric” (2004, p.12); able to both state its intention and renounce it at the same time. Stand-ups are marginal and at the same time powerful – which makes stand-up a useful form through which to assert what could be called a subtly subversive feminist agenda. Wittig’s “war machine”, female tricksters. This is another way of stating what Tyler and Skeggs assert about the possibility for socially abjected women to “talk back” and “become subjects”.

Gilbert also stresses the solidarity that can come as women identify with each other through humour, even if the stand-up is being self-deprecating. She notes that scholars have tended to see women’s humour as “not typically abusive” and feminist humour as “always at some level, subversive” (2004, p.31). She points out:

Like other marginalised performers, the female comic simultaneously affirms and subverts the status quo; unlike performers marginalised by race or other characteristics, however, the female comic performs for an audience usually at least half comprised of members of her marginalised group. (2004, p.33)

I have found Floya Anthias' concept and lens of "translocational positionality" (2002) very useful for looking at how stand-up performers negotiate the in-group and out-group aspects across a single gig, or while negotiating their position within the industry. It is the key tactic of the female trickster. Rather than intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which can be interpreted as conceptualising identities as properties belonging to people or groups, this is clearer about seeing identities as processes depending on shifting locations and times. One is defined as much by who one is *not* – in terms of gender, class, race etc. – as by who one is. Aston and Harris (2013) used translocational positionality in a skilful analysis of the in-group, out-group distanciations and identifications made by stand-up comedians Andi Osho and Shappi Khorsandi across the course of their hour-long shows. Aston and Harris looked at the ways that Osho and Khorsandi's ethnicity and gender came into play at different points in the performance. This is equally effective when looking at the interplays of regionality, class and gender (and occasionally ethnicity) in the gigs I've analysed and in looking at my own practice. Oscillation and ambivalence are key words here and can be seen in my performance of ambivalence around the words "feminist" and "poet" at the start of this chapter.

It feels counter-intuitive to say that a stand-up could function as a "Feminist Killjoy"- feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's (2010) figure of the feminist who embraces the "killjoy" qualities attributed to her. However, feminist stand-ups can both "Kill" joy provoked by certain misogynistic attitudes at the same time as provoking joy and laughter about alternatives- a misdirection that I would say constitutes a trickster move. The feminist killjoy deliberately withholds laughter and disrupts what Emily Douglas (2015) notes is the "compulsory laughter" that women sometimes feel obliged to respond with in the face of sexism and gender discrimination. Ahmed came up with the figure after interviewing a fellow activist who said that people would roll their eyes when she came into a room. Ahmed recognised that embracing this "eye roll" was important. She says the feminist killjoy can be aligned with the figure of the "angry black woman" highlighted by bell hooks and Audre Lorde as a stereotype applied to black women who point out racial injustices. It plays on, and with, the stereotype of the humourless feminist.

I want to suggest that a stand-up can still be a feminist killjoy by refusing to laugh at, or provoke laughter at, certain expected stereotypes. Perhaps even at aspects of her own abjection. She may redirect laughter from the margins, where it has traditionally been directed, towards sources of power. For example, in the seventies, female stand-ups such

as Marti Caine made jokes about being battered women, but in the alternative comedy of the eighties, comedians like Jo Brand were dubbed “man haters” for their stand-up which poked fun at sexist men (see Wagg, 1998, p.111). The female stand-up in this instance was a feminist killjoy because she was redirecting laughter. She was daring to laugh differently, against prevailing norms. This requires skill in taking audiences of mixed attitudes along with you.

As already mentioned, through her reading of Foucault, and her subsequent perspective on laughter as a way to discipline and enforce gender norms, Douglas refers to “compulsory laughter” (2015, p.148): the expectation to laugh at sexist jokes, for example, or at one’s boss’s attempts at humour. She suggests there are three ways to resist this compulsory laughter: to laugh at things you’re not supposed to, to laugh differently – for example hysterically or in an “unladylike way” – and to withhold laughter when you might be expected to laugh. She says this is an example of what Foucault called “counter-conduct”, in which structures of the state which have been internalised can be resisted in bodily ways. Part of being a stand-up marginalised by both class and gender is to resist this compulsory laughter, but then cause other laughter to erupt in its place. This is the line walked by the female trickster: killing some laughter – but not all of it.

4. Examples of Female Trickster Resistance to the Northernness Effect

I would suggest that the unruly woman and the trickster have the power to challenge the Northern chronotope and I will now give examples of three more ways in which Northern female stand-ups do this in practice. Underlying all of them is a mechanism whereby some aspect of the “Strong Northern Woman” archetype is evoked by the performer. She then uses the conscious tactics of the trickster to evoke another element of the “Unruly woman” - in a way which extends the connotations of the Strong Northern Woman. For example, Kiri Pritchard McClean and Lucy Beaumont are on stage in an imagined Working Man’s Club setting, rather than at home waiting for a husband to return from one. Barbara Nice’s gossipy garrulousness becomes a way of caring for an audience rather than caring in the domestic sphere, and Sophie Willan is revealed as a “Coper”, but one who transforms this coping into comedic capital.

The possibilities for female stand-ups to resist have shifted since the Northern Comic archetype emerged, although not necessarily diminished. For example, Sheffield-born stand-up Marti Caine started out in the working men’s clubs of Sheffield in the sixties. A

newspaper obituary (Smurthwaite, 1995) noted, “Glamorous young women in figure-hugging mini-dresses did not do stand-up comedy in working men's clubs in the 1960s and Caine's novelty value served her well. She walked a tightrope between challenging the male ego, not always the easiest option amid a sea of beer-swilling chauvinists, and affirming preconceptions. She developed a talent for dispatching hecklers with withering one-liners.”

By contrast, Kiri Pritchard-McLean did her first Edinburgh show, *Hysterical Woman* (2016), about sexism she has faced in stand-up. She grew up in Wales, though she is based in Manchester, and has identified herself as “working the Northern circuit”. In her show she evoked the idyllic Northern chronotope of the working man’s club by having a neon “Working Man’s Club” sign behind her with the words “Comedienne’s Night” below it. This evokes Caine’s era when female stand-ups were differentiated from male stand-ups and their incursion into male space was made clear. They were what Tomsett calls a “Genre rather than a gender” (2017, p.59). At the climax of the show, the neon signage was re-lit to read “Working Comedian”, which is how Pritchard-Maclean said she sees herself. This was a literal resignifying of the Northern Chronotope to include her and an erasure of what she acknowledged is continuing discrimination faced by female stand-ups. There was an implicit suggestion that this is more difficult on the Northern circuit.

I would assert that contemporary stand-up does now give Northern women access to both economic and cultural capital, and that they mobilise very different forms of the Northern female grotesque in order to gain this. They make these forms work in their favour, rather than just being haunted by them, as some of their male counterparts are. The unruly woman and the trickster break frames. They are ambivalent and their ambivalence is dangerous.

i) Trickster Move 1: New relationships with audiences

Skeggs’ research on how those who are left out of existing circuits of value generate their own circuits of value could be another way of looking at how Northern female stand-ups practice a tactical resistance to intersecting stereotypes from within the stand-up form itself. Skeggs’ classic study of white, working-class women (1997) found that they generated value through respectability and caring for others. Later projects, such as her study of how women’s class identities were constructed via reality TV (Skeggs and Wood, 2012), found that wider groups of working-class people had relational modes of value, in

contrast to middle-class people who were concerned with accruing symbolic value from all their activities and accumulating it for the future. A precarious sense of the future impacted on the way her research subjects oriented themselves in and to the world:

Connection in the present generated a form of sociality that was not based on using time and energy to invest in future employability, cultural or economic property.

(Skeggs, 2011, p.505)

Allen (2002) and Double (2005) emphasise that stand-up comedy is a form of the “now”. Its performers break the fourth wall, acknowledge what is happening in the room and with the audience, talk in the present tense and adapt their material and their persona to what is in front of them. This seems to make it a perfect form to express the form of “connective sociality” that Skeggs is referring to. There was a powerful expression of this by one of my interviewees, Janice Connolly, a stand-up comedian who works as the character Barbara Nice. Barbara Nice dresses as a Stockport housewife with a bit of glamour. Leopard print coat, heels, handbag. Here, she is echoing Bet Lynch from *Coronation Street* and the archetype of the Strong (and camp) Northern Woman. One of Connolly’s trademark moves is to stage dive into the audience. She dances with them on stage, leads rousing sing-songs of advert jingles and exudes a friendly warmth with an anarchic edge. She told me after a gig we did together, “There’s so many people here and they have on their mind that they just want to get to London, and they’re on their phone – and they’re not on for this night only. And I just think comics like us are for this night only – and we might not have a great career plan, but that’s a very working-class attitude. Let us have it now.”

She connected this emphasis on the now with a particular working class attitude which also extended to her career, which was not about accruing capital into the future. Her egalitarianism was expressed in her decision not to have an agent, which would be the norm for most of the comedians who have high-profile television work (which comes through the big agents who produce the television shows; for example, Off the Kerb agency produces BBC One’s *Michael McIntyre’s Comedy Roadshow* and most of the acts featured on it are clients of that agency). She said, “I want it to be a level playing field. And I want everyone to achieve because they’re good.”

Importantly, it is not just the present tense in itself which is the connective element, but also the sociality, as Skeggs says. Janice contrasted her attitude to the audience with that of comedians who “take the piss out of them” – using them as material (perhaps as value) added to their set, but without giving anything back. She saw herself as involved in an

emotional exchange: “I decided to try and love the audience – so everything I do is to try to big up people.”

It is clear that for Janice, her way of performing stand-up, her approach to being a creative labourer, and her explicitly working-class identity are entwined. She sees herself as being outside existing circuits of value and explicitly calls her work “political” in the way that it emphasises the moment (the “one night only”) and the embodied joy of laughter which she describes as a way of resisting the middle-class circuits of value from which she is excluded. It is a way of resisting as both performer and audience: “I think we’re all funny, and I think the working class are great at laughing, truly great. And that is the only advantage we’ve got over everybody else. We know how to laugh. We know how to fucking laugh.”

Here, Connolly is herself making a distinction between an uptight middle class and a working class who are more in touch with their bodies. Barbara Nice is a Northern character, but Janice sees her political attitudes as more class-based than regional and in fact says she now regrets having made her character Northern. She feels it would have been “breaking new ground” to be a Midlands character, where she now lives, but that there was more “comedy mileage and collateral” in being Northern because the existing stereotypes made it “easier” for people. Here, despite her independence as a stand-up comic, she is referring to the fact that she is actually in a commodified comedy market and that Northernness is a quality that has value and sells in the field.

My interview with her took place after we had both been on the bill at a Labour Party benefit gig in Newcastle and she was including me in conversation alongside her as a working-class comic with values of inclusivity, love for the audience (we both used the word “love” about our ideal relationship with the audience), seeing herself and the audience as equal in status, and a “one night only” attitude to laughter as a release from work.

I was glad to be included, as I do see the values of inclusivity, love and equality as crucial to the way I work with an audience and also see them as resistant and political in a way that isn’t often recognised. In fact Janice’s assertion that these are political was an affirmation of it for me. At the same time, I found I felt some distance from the “one night only” values and explicit solidarity in a working-class identity. My place in what Friedman has called the under-researched cultural journey of the socially mobile (2014, p.94) makes it harder for me to recognise myself here. Barbara Nice’s character breaks the rigid spaces

demarcating performer and audience and feels like it has clearer working-class signifiers than my act in which I alternate stand-up comedy and stand-up poems. At the same time, we both fit into the contemporary stand-up comedy circuit rather than the traditional one because our material is original and self-written. I would suggest that, as my comedy review content analysis showed, our gender and the Northernness Effect may make us less likely to be consecrated or recognised as innovative contemporary comedians, despite the fact that we are working in that lineage.

ii) Trickster move 2: Talking back

I will now share a further example of resistance, in which the idea of Northern women coping silently or channelling pain into laughter is queered by a stand-up being very open about a painful childhood, whilst at the same time making comedic capital out of it. This connects back to the ideas of the “Strong Northern Woman” I discussed at the start of this chapter.

Sophie Willan’s 2016 Edinburgh show *On Record* uses the liminal space of stand-up comedy to forge a space in which she claims the right to “talk back” (to use Skeggs’ 2004 words) to the social workers who labelled her “defiant, rebellious and rude”. Willan resignifies labels which have attached to her actual person. Throughout the show she brings characters from her childhood to life, such as her heroin-addicted mother, and uses actual extracts from her social services files of that time as a counter-narrative. After a set piece involving a description of a disastrous family party, she imagines comedy critics giving the participants reviews in the style of Edinburgh reviewers – for example, “The *Herald* says Sophie’s mum possesses gruff Lancashire accent and toothless gurn, perhaps a predecessor of Les Dawson.” The “talking back” even extends to the reviewers who, as my textual analysis of comedy reviews (see Figures 2 and 3) has shown, do indeed refer to Northern accents far more than Southern ones.

Willan reconfigures the comedy space itself as somewhere where it is useful to be “defiant, rebellious and rude”. She explicitly says, “I want to reclaim those words this year, so I’m going to do it here with you in this room.” They’re then projected on a screen on the stage behind her. “‘Rebellious’ – it’s a sign of creativity; ‘defiant’ – it’s a sign of a strong will; ‘rude’ – well, I’m just fucking honest, aren’t I?”

Here there is a clear reversal of what Skeggs (2005) argues is the obligation for white working-class women to show and tell themselves in public whilst “failing” to achieve the

exchange values of middle-class people in their displaying of acceptable affects. Willian shows and tells her story in public and receives applause, approbation, comedic capital (in the form of laughs) and increased capital within the field of cultural production due to the success of her show.

iii) Trickster move 3: Changing the Chronotope from Within

Hull comedian Lucy Beaumont's resistance comes partly in resignifying the Northern chronotope. She acknowledges that an imagined version of a Northern past can be seductive in its "romance" and become part of an image she uses. She distances herself from it by saying she was not "born" to working men's clubs, but they have nonetheless become personalised and iconic images which are then reconfigured in her comedy, where they land somewhere between irony and truth. The pilot for her radio series *To Hull and Back* was recorded at the Walton Street working men's club in Hull, with Johnny Vegas playing a Northern working men's club comic. The explicit connection of Lucy's persona with the place is made in producer Lianne Coop's assertion that it is key to her identity: "Why did we come to Hull? It's because it's a huge part of who Lucy is and a lot of what her material's about. There was never any question that we would do the show anywhere else" (*Hull Daily Mail*, 2013). The other element of the chronotope – time – is not made explicit, but it is implicit in the Northern working men's club imagery; however, the masculine atmosphere is subverted, also implicitly, by the main performer and writer being a woman.

For me, these examples help trouble Lawler's pessimism (2005) about whether women can actually challenge the terms by which they are oppressed. She asks how Judith Butler's assertion that the dominated can claim authority to speak by resignifying the terms on which their domination is marked can apply to class (in the way that it can apply, for example, to gay political movements and their reappropriation of the word "queer"). She cites Skeggs' (1997) work on how white working-class women are reluctant to claim or name their classed position, and says that Butler doesn't take enough account of an audience – who need to listen and grant a speaker authority. She says that "it needs to be asked how far such resignification is even possible for working class women, when across cultural, political and theoretical representations, their habitus is constituted only in negative terms" (Lawler, 2005, p.126). She also says that seeing resistance only as the overthrow of political systems, along with "a constitution of the white working class as

revolutionary and backward” and the denial of the existence of class, combine to make instances of resistance difficult to recognise.

Although I agree that this resistance often goes unrecognised when enacted in the stand-up of women who are read as working-class, it is clearly visible. Furthermore, contemporary stand-up has become a field in which working-class and socially mobile women are once again naming their class status explicitly, and contesting it. They are objectifying the things which might cause them to become objectified – such as their bodies, their sexuality and their class status – and claiming their status as subjects.

The examples of female resistance in stand-up I am recounting here are also what cultural studies researcher Maria Bakardjieva (2009) calls “sub-activism”. This is inspired by sociologist Ulrich Beck’s notion of sub-politics: the movements and niches outside the official and corporate worlds of politics in which people actualise their identities in loose collectives or as individuals pursuing particular interests and issues. Bakardjieva discerns sub-activism as a way of “doing” citizenship which is submerged even below the world of sub-politics. It consists of the small-scale decisions and everyday practices people follow on a political or ethical basis. She says there is always the potential for this activism to become visible and become harnessed to larger-scale public actions, though mostly it consists of “feeble motions immersed in the everyday, many times removed from the hot arena of politics” (ibid., p.103).

Sub activism, counter-conduct, micro-practices, counter-training: all of these are reminiscent of the tactics rather than strategies which de Certeau (2011) suggests are open to those without power. Stand-up performances can be a way of constructing alternative circuits of value in Skeggs’ Marxist terms. They can also allow female performers and audiences to “laugh differently”. This may involve being a postmodern female trickster who is able to subvert an audience’s expectations whilst still keeping them laughing.

I will now illustrate how these tactical resistances have operated (and sometimes failed) in my own practice. These have included elements of some of the types of resistance I have included above. My dialogical stand-up is a “circuit of alternative value”, in contrast to monological stand-up. My talking about class “in-betweenness” is an attempt to complicate the Northern chronotope and “talk back” to ways in which working-class positions are

abjected. These tactics require skills in oscillating between different postures, and that is what the next chapter will show in practice.

Table 3: Stand-Up Figures/Archetypes Referred to in Chapter Three

Posture/figure	Description and notes	Citation	Piece of PhD practice primarily used in
Unruly Woman (Also Strong Northern Woman)	<p>Archetype. A woman defined by excess (of body/speech/humour). A frame-breaker. Often working-class. A grotesque.</p> <p>Parodic, consciously performed Northern working class woman defined by resilience and humour. Queers "respectable" middle-class femininity.</p>	<p>Historian Natalie Zemon Davis, cited and applied to comedy by Rowe (1995)</p> <p>Specifically named as an archetype and related to the Unruly Woman by me, but commonly referred to in some form across literature and cultural studies.</p>	<p>A classed reading might see me as one across all my practice.</p>
Female Trickster	<p>Archetype. A woman who troubles categories, uses humour and irony to challenge status quo, refuses victimhood and questions hierarchies.</p>	<p>Tannen (2007), based on the trickster archetype used by Jung/Radin. Updated to reflect postmodern female embodiment.</p>	<p>This thesis. <i>Price of Happiness</i> class show.</p>
Feminist Killjoy	<p>A woman who refuses the complicity of the "compulsory laughter" of patriarchy and laughs differently.</p>	<p>Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2010)</p>	<p>Stand-up workshops. Much of my stand-up material</p>

Shadow Self - Poem

I find myself torn between wanting to be loved
and wanting to rebel against them.

It's all about connection
and I don't mean in a wanky way,
but if I tried to connect with them too much
then I'd lose my authenticity
so that's what I mean when I say
about meeting them halfway.

*The stage lights as safety lamp,
inner burning, your firedamp.*

At my first youth theatre session,
I went from a shadow
to an enormous camp monster.
It wasn't pushing me,
it was letting me be.

I've become bolder
and being brutally me
is the best thing I can do.

The poetry ego and super ego
have learned to take that raw id
to be more acceptable to the world.

*Flickering in and out of seeing and being seen,
maybe "really" you exist
somewhere in-between*

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF MY PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH:

OPERATING IN BETWEEN

In this chapter I will look at my practice through two lenses. First through that of stand-up praxis as in-betweenness, particularly focusing on the class show I recorded for BBC Radio 4, which was part of a four-part series I made called *The Price of Happiness*. This show forms part of this thesis. Next, I will look at comedy workshops I facilitated with a group of women in Bradford as an example of (feminist) pedagogy. Throughout, I will highlight my signature practice of creating an intimate space with an audience in order to encourage a collaborative and dialogic stand-up. These lenses combine to highlight how I have developed an artistic practice and a pedagogy based in praxis, which has the potential to enable both affirmation and resistance.

As I have throughout this thesis, I will interweave these perspectives with Bakhtin's carnival theory, which is particularly useful as a lens for looking at my stand-up practice inside the academy. His ideas on grotesque realism can be applied to performance which involves the "lowering of all that (which official culture regards as) high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (1984, p.19). This is a good description of what happens when I use comedy within academic discourse. It leads to a mixing of the categories of high and low discourse; it is what Bakhtin calls a heteroglossia.

Well, he says all language is a heteroglossia, to be fair. There's no such thing as a language. Just lots of languages all at once, full of different-feeling tones. He would even say that the language of academia and the language of stand-up taste different in your mouth.

That's what you've been here to illustrate, my ever-interventionist dialogic voice. You're showing, not telling, this heteroglossia and breaking the academic monologue. But we'll hear more about you in the conclusion when I critique my use of stand-up methods in the thesis itself.

1. Stand-up Praxis: Dialogue Between Performer and Audience

In this section I explore my Radio 4 comedy show about class in terms of how it operated as a piece of dialogical stand-up performance. I question how resistant it was able to be

and look at the importance of performance contexts such as the BBC, a York pub and Eton College for determining how my material was received. I discuss both how I position myself and operate in major cultural organisations (the BBC) and smaller ones (Eton), in terms of my wider career and in the moment to moment process of stand-up, as well as how I develop and seek a particular kind of dialogic relationship with audiences.

i) The BBC: A Space for In-Between Voices

The Radio 4 shows I made are constructed around a critique of the desirable aspirations connected with middle-class femininity. I find out how much an aspect of it costs, then ask an audience their opinion on this “price of happiness” and get them to vote on whether I should have it. The first show was about the price of children, the second the cost of a big white wedding. These both aired in summer 2015, although the shows had been developed a year before I started my thesis. My producer suggested we pitch another two shows in another Radio 4 commissioning round and they were commissioned at the end of 2015. This enabled me to incorporate them into my new PhD practice research process, which fit perfectly with the themes of the two shows: the cost of being middle-class, and the cost of looking good. I am focusing my documentation and analysis on the class show, as it uses material at the intersection of my identities as a Northern woman. Underlying all the shows, as suggested by the title *The Price of Happiness*, is a question about whether the cost of normative happiness is too high. Lawler says speaking out about the actual political, structural nature of narratives of class is exposing, but is also what is needed in order to “stage a radical refusal of the ways we have been positioned and pathologised” (1999, p. 20). I would like to locate all of my *Price of Happiness* shows as examples of a performed narrative of such a radical refusal.

Feminist theorist Ahmed (2017) has explored happiness as a path by which women are directed to normativity. It can also become a debt that families extract from their children: “If your parents gave up happiness for you, you must give them it back” (2017, p.52). She gives the example of immigrant parents like her own whose child becomes a “conventional hope” (ibid., p.52) because in the national imaginary, your parents are seen as what is holding you back. The narrative of attaining happiness by moving up or away from the family then comes into play. This becomes part of pervasive narratives of working-class “escape” which frame it as always positive and necessary. Friedman (2011) and Allen (2014) challenge these celebratory discourses of upward social mobility, pointing out that these ubiquitous discourses are overly simplistic, whether promulgated by governments

urging “aspiration” or sociologists who don’t take enough account of the costs and complications for the socially mobile. This is also gendered. Allen (2014) demonstrates how the Blair government’s focus on girls aspiring to “move up” requires them to demonstrate tastes for the right cultural objects and ways of being, and gives advantages to those who already possess the “right” kind of (middle) class capital, excluding and judging those who don’t. In her 1999 study of upwardly mobile working-class women, Lawler says, “Women who leave behind a working-class position could be seen as ‘getting out and away’ through the acquisition of economic and cultural capital marked in pathological terms” (1999, p.12). But she points out that, for women, there is no equivalent figure to the working-class hero “done good” (who is figured in so many accounts of Northern working-class “angry young men” in the sixties). Their acquiring of the cultural objects of middle-class status is often negatively marked as shallow consumerism. They have what Lawler calls a “disrupted habitus”, in that it requires effort to “pass” as middle-class and feelings of shame and pain about one’s actual self being wrong are evoked. My class show became an illustration of these ambivalent feelings in myself, and in the audiences I dialogued with during the show.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, stand-up can be a way of staging situated resistances, and the nature of the resistance will change in each context and with the positioning of the different people in each audience. My class show has been performed in universities, pubs and arts centres. But it became particularly resonant when it was recorded for BBC Radio 4.

Although the BBC has long been implicated in upholding a particular white, middle-class version of Englishness, it is also a platform for challenges to this. In fact, the contradictions inherent in its original mission, set by founder Lord Reith, to “inform, educate and entertain” could be said to encourage just the sort of in-betweenness that is the basis for my resistant practice. Born’s magisterial ethnographic study of the BBC (2005) puts its finger on how this operates. She says that BBC radio was one of the “first sustained experiments in the juxtaposition of cultural genres. The audience was offered an entirely new experience in which factual and fictional, high and low, the serious and the humorous jostled alongside one another” (2005, p.29). Although she notes that cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams saw this as having a tendency to lull audiences into not recognising contradictions, she sees it as allowing each genre to “comment implicitly on the qualities and the limits of other genres” (ibid., p.29).

Williams' position echoes the debate on the middle-brow nature of the BBC. In the 1930s, novelist Virginia Woolf dubbed it the "Betwixt and Between Corporation" and characterised exponents of middle-brow culture as having neither the quality art of highbrows nor the authentic enjoyment of life of lowbrows, being too concerned with commerce and with being perceived as cultured. Bradfordian writer and social commentator JB Priestley, argued for a categorisation of "Broadbrows" who "look at things simply and steadily and [ask themselves] if they have any value" (cited in Pollentier, 2011, p.45) This has some parallels to Friedman's figure of the mixed cultural capital person and resonates with my preferred positioning of myself as a stand-up in the middle ground between art and commerce, back in Figure 1. Along with Priestley, I see it as a space of possible critique, whereas Woolf saw it as a space of compromised values.

Born's study concludes that the BBC is still able to reflect and represent the divided nation and its confusing place in a globalised world but stresses that "public service media cannot only be about a proliferation of micro publics, but about achieving a unifying space ... in which mutual encounters take place between expressions of the sometimes incommensurable component cultures of the nation" (Born, 2005, p.516). My class show, which pits the Northern English working-class culture against the Southern English middle-class culture which is perceived to dominate Radio 4, is a good example of a counter-public (Warner, 2002) being accommodated within the dominant culture. According to Warner, counter-publics are usually marginalised people who do not accept the dominant modes of public address but, I would argue, could also include people who privilege alternative discourses, such as comics and poets.

I highlighted this incongruity – and my status as an unruly woman being read through the "Northernness Effect" – early in the show by saying I was aware that "talking about not wanting to be middle-class on Radio 4 was like Che Guevara announcing the revolution in *Waitrose* magazine". I used comedic exaggeration and incongruity to highlight the fact that this was an irony. But it also highlighted the unusualness of Northern accents like mine being heard in that space. I was using comedy to draw attention to my own distance from the "somatic norm" (Puwar, 2001). This was an example of comedic disidentification (I was disidentifying both from being middle-class and from being the usual sort of contributor to BBC Radio 4 comedy, at the same time as being a Radio 4 comedian). In Bourdieu's terms, I was calling out the rules of the game and refusing to go along with the "illusio" in which Radio 4 is naturally a middle-class space. Queer theorist Munoz suggests this sort

of comedic disidentification means cultural critique can be accomplished while at the same time “providing cover from, and enabling the avoidance itself of, scenarios of direct confrontation with phobic and reactionary ideologies” (1999, p.119).

ii) Hearing the Voice of the Audience

Stand-up is often characterised (e.g. Barreca, 2013) as an “inherently” aggressive form, and gendered as masculine. Double, for example, characterises stand-up as competitive rather than potentially collaborative, saying that the relationship between the (male) comic and his audience involves “power struggles”, “hostility” and “battles of wit” (2005, p.199). My practice demonstrates a way of doing stand-up which values intimacy rather than aggression, the meeting of performer and audience as equals and the opening up of dialogue rather than the perpetuation of monologic discourse. I would not characterise this as a “feminine” way of doing stand-up, and I suggest that its dialogism creates a space in which identity binaries can be challenged. I will use examples from my class show to demonstrate this in action in my practice. The word “oscillation” is key and comes up again and again. I enabled myself and the audience to shift positions in order to perform our ambivalence around our class identities. As the work developed I gradually solidified my position with regard to the audience by giving them a role as my “class identity counsellors”, whilst I was their patient or client.

As Reay says, “Living class in a deeply unequal society like the UK is a powerfully defended and defensive experience. We uncover projections and repressions when we focus analytically on class habitus. It is the stuff of shame, fear, anxiety, arrogance, denial, guilt and huge ambivalences (the ‘hidden injuries of class’ Sennett and Cobb write of- 2005, p.21). I began to viscerally realise this in early performances of my material for the class show which didn’t work and seemed to make the audience feel uncomfortable. They were much more reluctant to talk openly to me than in any other show I’d made (even in my show about not wanting to have children, which I had thought would be a much more sensitive subject).

It became apparent that not only did I need to level the playing field between myself and my audience, but I needed to shift status so that I had lower status than them. I then needed to combat the reality that I was the one with the amplified voice and the radio platform for a show by exaggerating this shift in status and making it explicit – hence telling them that they were my “class identity counsellors”. The notion came about because of several conversations with audience members after the show in which they joked about

needing a “class support group” in order to sort out their tangled feelings about their class identities.

Gilbert might call this an “ingratiating” strategy which allowed me to connect with my audience without claiming a higher status which might alienate them. This may partly be the case, but it also allowed me to make it clear to the audience that I valued their voice and role. It echoes comedy scholar Tim Miles’ description of the relationship between audience and stand-up as being “like that of a doctor and patient” (2014, p.13). He says it is a complex, emotional relationship that has not been explored very thoroughly but is based on interaction, identification and intimacy. Though in his formulation the audience is usually in the role of patient rather than doctor, I flipped this in order to give myself the lower status.

The title I gave the audience in the class show was a play on the job title “gender identity counsellor”, whose role is to “officially” decide whether somebody meets the criteria to change their gender. It suggests that gender and class are both performances, whilst being subject to being defined by others, including social structures. It is this fluidity that I wanted the class show to convey. At the same time, a gender identity counsellor holds “official” biopower which allows them to certify someone’s gender. The fact that there is no such authority in the designation of class status was performatively demonstrated to the audience by the way they assumed the role but ultimately were only able to vote as to whether I was middle or working class and the vote had no real-world consequences. There is probably a balance to be struck in how much power to give an audience so that they will still regard their role as comedic.

The setting up of this relationship between me and the audience was an example of the dialogical engagement between self and other which performance ethnographer Conquergood has called “dialogical performance”. He says that this approach “aims to bring together different voices, world views, value systems and beliefs so they can have a conversation with one another” (1985, p.9). It underpins Conquergood’s view of performance as a moral and critical pedagogy. By describing the moral and ethical dimension of it, he is emphasising the responsibility to portray the other in a way which respects and conveys their difference rather than glossing over it, sensationalising, idealising or being inaccurate. This dialogical approach is evident in my practice when I describe being in conversation with other people, such as audiences or workshop attendees, but I would contend that it is also an approach which runs through all my

methodologies as a performer and writer. It is in reflecting on how the other is portrayed in my work, and in researching and then reflecting on the responses of audiences and on how structural and individual issues impact on how people experience something, that my scholar stand-up is most evident. She is generally less evident on stage, except in my performance autoethnography *Lots of Planets Have a North*, which I introduced in Chapter One.

The practice I've chosen to discuss in my first video clip, below, took place in a "pay what you like" preview of the class show at a pub in York, as part of York International Women's Festival.

CLIP 2: Class Show Preview: <https://youtu.be/24f3S2AbDFo>

My sense of the audience was that they had quite mixed class backgrounds. Some had come along to take up open mike slots I offered to women as part of the show, some were students, some were other artists connected with the festival and some were people who had seen the event advertised in the festival brochure. This clip is of a point in the show where I ask the audience to suggest things they think I might possess, in order to see whether I'm middle-class. It's an opportunity for the audience to perform their sense of what middle-classness is, and for me to perform my reluctance to admit to being middle-class on the basis of things I own. It's also one of the most freeform parts of the show, as the audience can ask anything and I respond and sometimes engage in longer conversations. In this instance, the suggestion that because I owned lots of books I was middle-class sparked some arguments and resentment at the suggestion that working-class people don't. This seemed to be getting right at the heart of some of the shame and pain of the working-class position, which is enforced by a culturally hegemonic bourgeoisie who regulate language and cultural codes.

My persona and attitude to the audience are involved in my tactics for getting the audience comfortable enough to share their thoughts at this point. For me, this involves not mocking members of the audience as some compères might at the start of the night. It also involves self-deprecating humour and responding to small moments during the event to show that I am in the room "with" the audience.

I also stand quite close to them rather than far away or on a high stage. Usually I would still use a microphone, though, in order to assert that I will be doing most of the talking (it wasn't working in the performance in the first clip, so I didn't use it). Later in this chapter I

will discuss how, in running a stand-up workshop, I move between the roles of facilitator, performer and spectator. Here, in this performance where I know I want the audience to speak as part of the show, I move between the roles of performer and facilitator. When I'm performer, I'm more fixed in one position and projecting my voice out to the audience in order to assert my voice above theirs and make sure attention is focused on me. When I'm facilitator, my body language opens and I move closer to them. I can switch rapidly between these roles, and my decision about whether or not to change the frame is partly embodied; if I sense that the attention of the audience is shifting towards their own discussions, then I will return to performer-mode. A short one-liner that will raise a substantial laugh is a way of gathering the audience's attention again – so provoking laughter can be a way of re-harnessing audience attention and motivation to listen, even when the subject matter is difficult or contentious.

There is an embodied rhythm to this, which chimes with the non-verbal synchrony between audiences that experimental psychologist Gill (2011) describes. She studied people listening to music together and found that they begin to move rhythmically, via their breath and pulse etc., in a way which helps develop a temporary group identity. The way she describes a move towards a "crescendo of simultaneous mutual synchrony" (2011, p.115) sounds like an audience moving towards a big release of laughter. At the same time, as the stand-up, I lead the synchrony. The psychoanalyst Bollas (1995) compares the rhythms of stand-up to the early approaches of a mother with a baby. He calls her the "great comic in the sky" who "exaggerates human expression – wide-open eyes, a great big smile, lengthened – and goofy – vocalisations" (1995, p.237). This provokes the baby into laughter – or it might scare them. It's all a matter of the right timing and distance. He compares it to the stand-up moving back and forth on the stage, who might "compel laughter, driving a false self into a predetermined response" or, if getting the timing and spacing right, call forth "our true self's spontaneity" (ibid., p.237). The approaches described above both recognise the constant movement between closeness and distance that is key to stand-up and that I can be observed making use of in order to approach the contentious topic of class in the clip above.

In the clip, you can see the way I use the stand-up form to negotiate some class resentment and transform pain into laughter, whilst still acknowledging the different classed positions. I become a lightning rod, in a sense, to spark the oscillations. This provides a performative example of class struggle at work, something called for by Tyler,

who says, “The most effective forms of class analysis are concerned not with undertaking classification per se, but rather with exposing and critiquing the consequences of classificatory systems” (2015, p.507).

iii) Hearing My Own Dialogic Voice

Some of the material in the class show came out of stand-up bits I tested in a great variety of audience settings over the eighteen months I was working on it. From comedy nights to poetry readings, university seminars and arts conferences, I was able to try out material so that I could work out what I wanted to say, and what audiences were able to hear and find funny. This tried and tested material then formed the building blocks of the show, so that I could also insert riskier sections where I talked to the audience. I only tried these out in previews of the whole show – at slots which were billed as “previews” or work-in-progress, so that an audience knew it may not be fully honed.

As I mentioned above, in early previews for the class show, I was really struggling to get an audience to respond to me openly. After one particularly difficult show, an audience member who is a fellow working-class stand-up poet suggested that I should approach more of my own vulnerabilities and uncertainties around class in the show. This struck me strongly and broke through what must have been some of my own resistance around these issues. I realised that audiences are more likely to reciprocate with honesty if they perceive me as being honest too. This tension between hearing the voice of the audience and hearing my voice as performer connects to my experiences as a workshop facilitator. I have learned that workshop participants feel more comfortable sharing their own experiences and trying things if I do too. I don’t take on the role of an expert who teaches them; I take on the role of someone who might struggle with creative work too. In writing workshops I write alongside the participants and share work in progress. I realised there was a danger in the class show of me attempting to have all the answers, which prevented the audience from engaging with me.

Straight after that particular show, I reflected on recurrent themes in my work and returned to the idea of voice – of my voice never being right and of how hurtful this has been. I wrote, and tried out (in some gigs specifically for stand-ups to try new material, so the audience knew not to expect polished sets), some new material about being teased as a “posh snob” when my family moved house when I was eight. I linked this to the difficulties I had in getting on air as a newsreader and in being told to change my voice because it sounded too “common”. At some fairly unconscious level, I think I was also aware of my

anxieties (and possibly anger) around being a voice “out of place” on the BBC due to the Northernness Effect, having done poems on Radio 4 fairly regularly over the past ten years. Voicing my own uncertainty about my class status made it all right for the audience to voice theirs. I also changed the audience questions so that they were asking me questions about my class status, rather than voting on whether they themselves would want to be middle-class. I became the butt of the joke, the potentially abjected one, who could be made abject either by the middle-class people in the audience as not “one of them” or by the working-class people in the audience as one who had rejected them by moving away. I was the one who accepted a label – but at the same time, I kept my subjectivity by voicing my confusion. It was also “safe” for the audience to abject me, because I was enacting the role of a person with a voice on the middle-class platform of Radio 4. They knew they couldn’t “really” hurt me. I will now look further at how the archetype of the unruly woman impacted on the development of my performances, both in terms of my persona and its reception.

iv) Voices Abjected in and by Stand-Up: The Unruly Woman

In the previous two chapters I have suggested that working-class Northern women are abjected figures in public discourse; see, for example, Skeggs, who says that the “excess of the grotesque, weeping, leaking, excreting bodies of working-class women” (2005, p. 968) has become a way to reinforce the boundaries of propriety, by depicting them as “other”. I would suggest that some of the female Northern stand-ups I have interviewed convert this excess into symbolic value in their stand-up performances. They subvert and commodify their abjection by turning themselves into subjects, particularly through a focus on their “weeping, leaking, excreting” bodies. This abjection, which sociologist Tyler says most dictionaries would define as the casting out and away of what is unwanted (2009, p. 87), is transformed by being celebrated. This celebrating of grotesque bodies is also the most familiar representation of the “unruly” Northern woman. As I have indicated above, my primary expression of this grotesque position is to perform my own liminality. I move between the registers of discourse of stand-up (where I fit as a Northerner, but not as a woman) and poetry (where I fit, to some degree, as a woman, but not as a Northerner). I thus bring the norms and contingencies of class, gender and regionality into question.

CLIP 3: The Unruly Woman: <https://youtu.be/Bq1DIOS3cfM>

In the radio recording of the body show, which was recorded on the same day as the class show, there was a very definite moment, shown in the clip above, in which I passed along my sense of being “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2002, p.44) onto an audience member who had been laughing a lot throughout the show – often more loudly than anyone else. Had it been a normal gig, I would have made reference to her earlier, because I knew the audience would have been well aware of her, and it distances a stand-up from an audience to not mention something they’re all aware of. In this situation, though, I was reluctant to make other audience members self-conscious about their own laughter, so I didn’t say anything. Then I had to re-record the “Cultural Capital quiz”, in which I made my sociological reading explicit and asked audiences to compete to see how much cultural capital they had. One of the questions in it was about whether people laughed “Inaudibly”, “At medium volume” or required a “Tena Lady [incontinence pad] and a plastic seat cover”. I pointed my finger at the laughing woman. She laughed even harder, and everybody else laughed. I want to suggest that I had projected my potential abjection, as working-class voice in a middle-class space, on to her, as a more “obviously” excessive working-class woman in that moment. She was a more visible (or audible) target because of her loud laughter. At the same time, that very laughter transformed the shaming gaze for both of us. I made symbolic and laughter capital out of it. She had her unruliness affirmed and accepted. I am aware that both these interpretations are provisional and perhaps optimistic. As MacRury (2012) says, laughter is ambivalent and difficult to read. Different audience members would have been laughing in different ways and from different positions. We had performed a vignette of abjection, and both, perhaps, contested it. I had the power of the microphone, and now I have the power of the thesis authorship. It is only transformative if I use it to contest the arbitrariness of the codes which have designated us both as unruly women – but sometimes, evidently, there is capital to be made from reinforcing the abjection.

The working-class voice (and poet) on Radio 4 is also grotesque – and there can be a power in this. This role becomes an alternative to being abject; it allows you to exist and be powerful within a system where you’re a “space invader” (Puwar, 2001). Maybe it can also license you to comment on and ultimately change the system which doesn’t recognise you. It also becomes another way of performing “Northern womanhood” which throws the customary oppositions between the strata of the lower and higher, the bodily and the cerebral, the serious and the funny, the male and the female into confusion. An example of this happened during my performance at Eton College, which could also be read as my

attempt to refuse abjection and marginality on the basis of my classed, gendered and regionalised identity.

CLIP 4: Eton College: <https://youtu.be/5y8Qre-hAP0>

I was unexpectedly invited to perform at Eton, the country's most exclusive boys' school, long known as a pillar of the establishment, which proudly boasts about having produced 19 of Britain's prime ministers, including, most recently, David Cameron. I was a last-minute replacement for the black revolutionary poet Linton Kwesi Johnson in their summer reading series. The teacher who invited me said that my being Northern, female and funny was a bonus. I got the sense that they had a slot reserved for minorities, for those who did not embody the "somatic norm". This highlighted how my Northernness was being fetishised and "Othered". I was thanked in the introduction for having come "all the way down" from Yorkshire and afterwards for being "refreshing".

As Spracklen has noted and I have discussed in Chapter Two, "The north is a symbolic wilderness for the hegemonic elites of England" (2015, p.11). It would be fair to say that Eton is a training ground for just such hegemonic elites. Spracklen also asks, "Why do Northerners play at being Northern, even though the play excludes those who might have a common political interest in opposing the southern hegemony?" (ibid., p.11) This question could apply to my class show on BBC Radio 4, to my gig at Eton, and to any other of my performances, particularly in the time while developing this thesis, in which I have chosen to foreground Northernness in an attempt to complicate it.

I think you might be overegging this a bit. You just did some funny, mildly subversive poems for some hot-housed young lads. You didn't exactly bring down the establishment.

Or maybe I was licensed as a wise fool, trusted to reflect the establishment back to itself without threatening it. Or perhaps, again, I was co-opting hegemonic discourse, another common strategy Gilbert suggests is undertaken by marginalised performers, and mocking it, therefore "exposing its particular biases" (Gilbert, 2004, p.25). I was a licensed unruly woman.

At Eton, the audience was much less mixed than for the class show. It consisted mainly of middle-to-upper-middle-class boys, aged 14–18. I was definitely an outsider on the grounds of gender, class, regionality and age. But moving between poetry and stand-up, talking about how there has never been a national newsreader with a Northern accent and

how the North is socioeconomically disadvantaged, and still making an audience who would usually ignore or disagree with this, like and respond to me, allowed me to get my points across without alienating them. Being able to move between the positions of insider and outsider, “I” and “we”, was a strength and allowed me to bring counter-cultural ideas into that forum – the Trojan horse strategy. At the same time, it did hold the danger of me being fetishised, Othered and ultimately, dismissed.

The clip shows how I, as a pink-haired, sparkly-lapelled woman, was noticeably out of place in a grand room filled with besuited boys and pictures of dead white men. This lack of fit always holds a tension as a performer (and perhaps, for the audience). Commenting on it can defuse the tension. Afterwards one of the students stood up and thanked me and said I had taken them from “Glastonbury to Greggs”. Although one of my poems did mention Greggs, the bakery chain is a synecdoche for working-class consumption of cheap baked goods and the reference may have been a placing of me as working-class, rather than in the “in-between” position I have been claiming I occupy when I perform the class show. In that case it would have been an example of the “symbolic violence” which I have sometimes experienced when I’m being fetishised or Othered as a Northerner. That would then make me question how resistant my performance is. It could merely reinforce the tropes of Northernness I’m seeking to overturn and my subtle, Trojan horse approach to challenging them could fail to be received by audience members who cannot read the codes I am seeking to perform in order to overturn them. My “outsider” stance could have been read as appropriate deference to my social superiors. This position was negotiated on a moment-by-moment basis at the gig in Eton. Sometimes I made fun of it, and the audience members, such as when I suggested one of them might be Mick Jagger’s grandchild. I “played” Northernness in order to highlight it. Its relationship to structural inequality, such as the lack of national newsreaders with a Northern accent, is usually invisible. In order to make that visible, I had to make my own complicated relationship to my class and regionality visible. But for those whose relationship to class and regionality is much less fraught or conscious, my struggles could have been intellectually and affectively illegible and made me both “reviled and desired” (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p.4) as an amusing Northern jester, come to entertain the toffs.

v) Were These (En)Counters Resistant?

I will conclude this section by reintroducing the Denzin-inspired criteria for stand-up performance autoethnographies I introduced in Chapter One, to reflect on whether my

practice has met them. I will choose particular moments in order to respond to each criterion. Although I used creative audience feedback methods after some of my preview performances to help guide the development of my show, such as getting them to draw and write on body outlines, I didn't use them after my final show recording as I felt that I might struggle to get honest feedback from an audience who may have been "rooting for me" as a performer who had just shared her personal story. That gives extra value to having developed criteria by which I can assess my own performance. I would say that, although I have included a "performance autoethnography" I performed in a seminar as a separate piece of practice, I think that my class show did also function as one, particularly in its use of my personal story interwoven with references to structural issues and others' experiences, and I will be critiquing it as such.

1. Establish a "joking relationship" with an audience (an audience laughs/is amused sometimes).

The audience laughed a lot throughout the performances analysed. They could have felt more encouragement to laugh, when they knew they were part of a radio recording, though in the body show they laughed less than they had during preview shows. A radio recording can either increase or inhibit laughter and this is hard to measure. However there was what felt like a baseline of reasonably regular laughter. My greatest struggle was to achieve a joking relationship with the audience throughout the development of the class show. Greater sensitivity to the audience's class divisions, distancing the questions on class from them and applying them to me, and establishing the audience in a play frame as "class identity counsellors" all helped, along with punchlines which were refined and tested across multiple shows.

2. Give the audience the sense that change could occur outside the "magic circle" of comedy and carry over into the "real world".

I think I embodied this sense, in that I was a Northern woman talking about these issues on a radio station that has previously been seen as favouring "Oxbridge" comedy voices. I also talked about my changing social status and mentioned my career in poetry and my PhD, which could leave some audience members with the impression that positive social mobility was still possible. At the same time I wanted to trouble this and show that the class aspirations often presented in the public sphere are not always realistic or desirable and can cause pain and trauma to those who pursue them. It could be said that the

narrative of the class show also embodied a sort of stasis and confusion around class and didn't provide hints of resolutions or alternatives. The concluding poem was about my dog being brought up middle-class and was supposed to be an ironic take on how a society that is clearly not a meritocracy deludes itself that it is one. This irony could easily not have been decoded by some audiences.

3. Use resistant/marginal methods of humour which challenge hegemonies (e.g. parody, reverse discourse, mimicry and masquerade).

Gilbert might argue that, as a woman, I would have no choice but to use marginal humour strategies. I did use parody and reverse discourse. I steered clear of much beyond gentle and brief mimicry because I felt that would reinforce negative stereotypes about both the working and the middle class. In a sense, I got the audience to do it for me by asking them to identify middle-class possessions. There were some moments where my search for a moment that "worked" or relaxed an audience into laughter led me to get an "easy" laugh based on stereotypes.

4. Make an audience feel able to undertake dialogue in an atmosphere in which spontaneity and immediacy are valued.

My sense was that this did happen. The audience knew I was responding to them in the moment and not always on script and, in as much as spontaneity can happen in the context of a radio recording, many people did feel able to speak.

5. "Punch up" at targets rather than "punching down" (that is, target the powerful and oppressors with humour, not the powerless and oppressed).

Although I tried to do this, and not to mock working-class people and "chavs" in the way that much current comedy does, I often felt that the subjects I was raising made people feel defensive. Many preview-show discussions involved people trying to place themselves on an imaginary ladder of social mobility, and to justify their own privilege or lack of it. The introduction of the class identity counsellor was an attempt to lessen the risk of being read as doing this, and give the audience a role in which they had more status than I did to make class judgments.

6. Use comedy to reveal the ideologies the performer lives and struggles with.

I did this, although it was something I struggled with, as recounted above. It involved searching for my own vulnerabilities and feelings of shame and alienation which are buried very deep. However, the shows captured one element of my identity and challenged representations around it. Being obliged to fit into a “comedy” box, though, did mean I wasn’t able to use the multiple shifting between registers, moods and tones that the move from stand-up to poetry can achieve and which feels like the truest linguistic mark of my conflicted class status.

2. Stand-up Pedagogy: Between Spectator, Facilitator and Performer

I would argue that watching, performing and learning to do stand-up can all act as pedagogy in dialogical performance; in fact, as Conquergood (1985) says, pedagogy is part of its purpose. In the section above I have concentrated on the performer and audience experience. I will now look at how a similar process can function for the participants in stand-up workshops I facilitated.

Having looked more at class above, I will now turn to gender in dialogical performance and to how getting female participants to question performances of gender functioned as a kind of feminist pedagogy. The three exercises I developed with these women encapsulate three of my own key techniques for resisting classed and gendered norms using stand-up. These are “saying what you’re not supposed to say” (which corresponds broadly to the illuio-busting role of stand-up as anthropologist and the scholar stand-up), “being present” (which is a key element of forming a dialogical relationship with an audience in “the now”) and “smashing stereotypes” (which can be functions of the scholar stand-up and the female trickster).

My facilitation techniques helped move the participants from spectators to reflexive commentators on their own performance and also helped created a joyous and accepting space for the sessions. I encourage critical thinking in dialogue, in a way similar to that of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in which marginalised people come to learn with, rather than from, each other. He says they develop a critical consciousness in which they “come to see the world not as static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation” (1996, p.64). Getting the audience to take on a role as class identity counsellors was also an example of attempting to develop this critical consciousness in them, actually during a performance.

I ran a series of ten two-hour comedy workshops across two years with women recruited via an advert on Bradford's Theatre in the Mill website. I was facilitating the workshops initially for the theatre director Natalie Diddams, who wanted female comedy to be an element of her feminist adaptation of the Aristophanes comedy *Thesmophoriazusae*. We both realised that the women were keen to develop their own stand-up skills and incorporated the sessions into our respective PhD research. The women ranged in age from their twenties to their sixties and there were generally between eight and twelve women at each workshop, with minimal previous performing experience. I included reflections on my ongoing PhD practice along the way and we watched clips of female comedians and discussed the issues arising for women in comedy. This led to wider discussions around feminism, the role of women in society and the continuing marginalisation of women in comedy. A typical workshop would consist of warm-up drama games, watching a clip and then having a discussion about female comics and then undertaking a main writing or performing exercise. In the following sections I will use a description of three exercises I devised, and a clip of a session and performance to show how these sessions moved the women from spectators to new stand-up performers.

i) Facilitation as Pedagogy

In the comedy workshops I used my active listening skills to reflect the participants' thoughts back to them and encourage them to become reflective performers and spectators. This helped create a psychologically safe space which mirrored the performance space I aim to create with an audience. My approach to facilitation has been influenced by the principles of Carl Rogers' person-centred therapy. I took a counselling skills course at a college and joined a related "encounter group" run on person-centred principles, at the same time as I was starting to perform more as a stand-up and to facilitate performance workshops back in 2005. I felt that the person-centred principles were making me a more congruent, free performer. In fact, it was at this time that I was moving from doing stand-up comedy to doing stand-up poetry. I saw this as a time of "finding my voice" and therefore used the principles in helping other people to do the same. Rogers found that in living these principles in relationship with a therapist, his clients were able to develop them in relationship with themselves. The five tenets of person-centred therapy also began to underlie my approach as a performer in developing a relationship with the audience. They are: a non-directive approach in which people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, non-judgmental facilitation which accepts where a group is, setting a psychologically safe growth-promoting climate,

unconditional positive regard for the people you're working with, and reflective listening that actively mirrors back what a group is saying (in Kolb et al., 2014, p.207).

I thought that my start in person-centred counselling was a somewhat idiosyncratic approach to performance and facilitation, but, in fact, many other educators have used Rogers' principles in facilitation. Kolb et al. (2014) set out an "experiential learning theory" in which a facilitator mainly takes a non-expert position with learners but is also able to flexibly move between positions as facilitator, subject-expert, coach and standard-setter and evaluator – all whilst attending to a "complex relational process that involves balancing attention to the learner and to the subject matter while also balancing reflection on the deep meaning of ideas with the skill of applying them" (2014, p.229). As I've gained experience as a stand-up, I have found myself primarily taking on a facilitator role (which Kolb et al. note involves beginning with the learner's experience, and is a warm, creative, empathic style with lots of discussion and personal stories). This was in evidence in the non-hierarchical relationship I aimed to develop with the audience in the class show.

Kolb et al. say that learning happens when there is a "learning spiral" in which two different ways of grasping experience – concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation – become transformed through reflective observation and active experimentation. This is a good description of the processes in my comedy workshops and also seems to underpin what Amsden (2016) describes as Philippe Gaulier's "Pedagogy of Spectatorship" in his clown training. Amsden says that "the relationship between clown and audience in the classroom is at the centre of Gaulier's clown pedagogy" (2016, p.5). People learn to clown by making other people laugh – and the fellow students are also the spectators who will either laugh, or not.

Amsden contrasts this with Mark Evans' reflections on acting training in the UK in which the tutor is "an informed expert and surrogate audience" (Amsden, 2016, p.5). She says that although Gaulier stresses his authoritarian role as teacher, with gnostic pronouncements on their performance, he is also a spectator – and in their role having to give feedback, the students become "student/artist/spectator/teacher". She also connects their role to that of Jacques Rancière's "emancipated spectator" who, like them, "observes, selects, compares, interprets" (ibid., p.7). Authority is located in the audience, as much as in external experts. This is also the locus of authority in the stand-up workshops I have attended and run, with their emphasis on the dialogue between stand-up and audience.

ii) Revealing the Ideologies in Tacit Knowledge

I devised three new exercises for these workshops which had a noticeable impact on the women's performances and which made my tacit knowledge about stand-up explicit. Throughout the workshops I was transmitting relational tacit knowledge (Collins and Evans, 2007), as I described in Chapter One, which includes the specialist vocabulary of stand-up. For example, I told the women that doing well in a set is referred to as "killing" and doing badly is referred to as "dying". It occurs to me as I write this that even referring to a stand-up performance as a "set" is some of that relational tacit knowledge. At the same time, I used my skills as a facilitator to help them become reflexive performers who could keep acquiring their own relational and somatic tacit knowledge, whilst having a critical perspective (based on the feminist pedagogy we did together).

Part of gaining authority as audience and as performer involves becoming reflective about ideologies and how they are embodied in the ways you consume cultural production. This is why I have used Bourdieu's work to locate myself as a stand-up throughout this thesis. In the context of the pedagogy of yoga, tai chi and Feldenkrais techniques, Kapsali (2013) also calls for a more reflexive approach which takes in the sociohistorical context of the training, rather than presenting it as ahistoric and devoid of ideologies, and says this is particularly important within an increasingly commodified actor training. She points out that this can increasingly be undertaken by affluent participants who may be unwittingly conforming to particular bodily hegemonies. I would ally stand-up training more closely with the clowning training which Mark Evans suggests promotes an "unruly" bodily training (2014, p.151), which, it could be argued, is already more resistant to dominant hegemonies. Furthermore, in contrast to the year-long, expensive clown trainings, stand-up workshops are offered at low cost by stand-up practitioners in blocks of six to ten weeks, so I would suggest that they are more accessible to people who are socially and economically marginalised.

iii) Exercise 1: Things We're Not Supposed to Say

"Things We're Not Supposed to Say" was a sequence of exercises which explored things that women are not supposed to say or to talk about. We warmed up for this by walking around the room, introducing ourselves to each other by swearing as much as possible and aping manly body language. There was much laughter as women found themselves taking up more space in the room and walking with their legs apart. Then we brainstormed things that women aren't supposed to say on big sheets of paper in the middle of the

circle: everything from “Was that it?” after a sexual experience to “I’d like a raise, please, because I’m brilliant at my job.”

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Douglas refers to “compulsory laughter” (2015) as a way to enforce gender norms and relates it to Sara Ahmed’s notion of the happiness that women are compulsorily supposed to display in order to be complicit in their own gender domination. I would argue that as well as laughing at things we weren’t supposed to, we seized a further power in these workshops by getting others to laugh at things they weren’t supposed to – and supporting each other in overturning the gender norms.

Because self-praise developed as a strong theme of what we weren’t supposed to say, I then got the women to go round the circle and say something positive about themselves that they wouldn’t usually feel able to utter. Comments ranged from “I’m the cleverest person I know” to “I am beautiful”. This workshop was the last of five in the first series, and the women encouraged each other and laughed throughout. There was an exhilarating energy in the room.

The final exercise was to write a piece of comedy about something we’re not supposed to be funny about, and the women wrote about everything from miscarriages to relationship counselling and bad sexual experiences. Butler says that “laughing in the face of serious categories such as the medicalisation of women’s bodies is indispensable for feminism” (1990, p.xxviii).

This session felt like a breakthrough in my own facilitation and is what convinced me to link it to my PhD practice. As with using my own vulnerabilities in the class show, it opened up the possibility of a stand-up based on a greater intimacy between stand-up performer and audience. This was modelled by the way that we simultaneously opened up to painful and shameful issues while keeping the energy of laughter going. It was an example of affective solidarity and feminist humour in action. As Willet et al. said,

Not only does the ridicule of stereotypes undermine them as social norms; humour also dissipates anxiety and other negative emotions through its cathartic powers. Feminism ... offers one way to confront and detoxify the stereotypes and to joyfully re-appropriate the energy and eros from systems of domination. (2012, p.245)

iv) Exercise 2: Becoming Present

The next exercise involved asking the women to come into the stage space and introduce themselves, and then to come into the stage space again and stand silently while trying to become “present” with the audience.

I emphasised to them that we would all find our own ways to do this. I was illustrating the non-directive philosophy of Carl Rogers’ person-centred approach. He recognised that the student possesses as much expert knowledge as the teacher. I also reflected that we were learning how to be an audience – which made explicit what Amsden (2016) has called a “pedagogy of spectatorship”. I suggested to one participant, Laura, who was laughing and seemed to be struggling to feel comfortable, that she take a deep breath. She was the fifth student to do the exercise but the first one I had made a suggestion to. I then facilitated an exchange in which I asked her and the other participants for their feelings and thoughts rather than imposing mine. Another participant, Sophie, suggested that my intervention helped Laura take the exercise “seriously”; here she was becoming reflexive both as participant and as spectator. The participants’ further reflections on their warm, embodied responses to Laura’s “presence” suggested that we were moving towards a rhythmic and collective sense of wellbeing. We were also able to be reflexive about what is usually a completely unconscious syncing of pulse and breath. Gill and Scharff describe groups forming identities and moving towards a “crescendo of mutual synchrony” (2011, p.115). The reflective process we undertook demonstrates that this tacit knowledge can be made conscious.

I practised one of Rogers’ (2004) tenets of person-centred learning, “reflective listening”, by reflecting the group’s words back to them in what became a key moment of feminist consciousness after all the women had done the exercise. Caroline recognised that the real sense of presence they embodied when being silent contrasted with how, in the exercise before this, where they had introduced themselves on stage using words, many of them had been apologetic for taking up space. The group then took part in an open dialogue, responding to Caroline’s question about whether that was “tied in with being a woman”. Melanie recognised that it was hard to just display “being” without feeling the need to be entertaining or productive. The women continued to encourage and affirm each other with vocalisations and nods and laughter of recognition in the discussion as they reached the conclusion that in risking being present on stage they were supporting each

other in being honest and vulnerable. Aileen concluded; “All them layers you live with ... you’ve stripped them off.”

The exercise elicited discussions of what bodily and mental presence was. I described it as a state of being without doing anything, whilst being open to, and aware of, the audience and oneself. According to theatre practitioner Wright (2006), it corresponds to Lecoq’s state of neutrality. Wright describes this as “moving with no story behind your movement ... Contrary to popular belief, ‘neutral’ doesn’t mean neuter or uniform. Basically it’s a state of tension that we all go to when we’re not in conflict of any kind” (2006, p.107). He says that there are two impediments to this basic state of neutrality; the first is “your personal holding patterns as demonstrated in the way you habitually move and the way you hold yourself”, and the second is “your natural instinct to ‘act’ and your desire to express your feelings” (ibid., p.109). He airily suggest that alignment disciplines like Alexander Technique or tai chi will help with the first. But that erases the classed and gendered elements of these ways of holding a body. In the stand-up workshops, the women talked about feeling they needed to smile or do something, be pleasing in some way, when they stood on the stage without speaking. The idea of just “being” is often difficult to take on board for women socialised to attract or socialise or please or be productive or caring.

I think this “being” exercise is a strong example of Bourdieu’s description of “counter-training” consisting of “repeated exercises” which can, “like an athlete’s training, durably transform habitus” (2000a, p.172). Evans also evokes Bourdieu to say that practices must “not therefore simply replicate the students’ or teachers’ habitus but reveal and interrogate it” (Evans, 2014, p.150). This is part of Evans’ advocacy of a “rigorous and even unruly playfulness” (ibid., p.151) to undermine power discourses and to provide a counterpoint to actor training which commodifies certain aesthetic dispositions. I would say that my stand-up workshop exhibited this rigorous playfulness – although this had not been the case to such a degree in my stand-up facilitation until I began adding more explicit questioning of gender and class practices due to the research involved in this thesis. The critical conversations the participants and I had, combined with the physical performance and comedy exercises, constituted counter-conduct, counter-training or however you might want to term this process of learning to “laugh differently”.

Can this counter-training in comedy workshops have any wider impact on society? Gilbert (2004) quotes Stallybrass and White to acknowledge that although discursive power is not

the same as political power, a shift in discursive power can help precipitate one into political power. She asks, “When a female comic performs her marginality, is she challenging the existing power structure? Yes. By the very act of standing onstage, speaking about any topic and getting paid, a female comic is empowered rhetorically and economically – by most standards a ‘feminist’ triumph” (Gilbert, 2004, p.167). I would suggest that this triumph is not enough if it does not also involve the female comic in an awareness of her marginality, her discursive power and her triumph. The description of the final exercise and the clip exemplifies how this was the case in my workshops.

v) Exercise 3: Smashing Stereotypes

The final exercise I devised attempts to get participants to evoke and subvert stereotypes they have felt oppressed by. This is what Gilbert asserts is the strategy of marginalised performers simultaneously affirming and subverting the status quo (2004, p.32). I got them to write down phrases or labels that could be used to stereotype themselves, from the very general to the specific – for example, woman, Northerner, PhD student, vegetarian. Then they were to come up with some one-liners which deflated or defused the stereotype. I came up with some examples from my own set – such as saying that I have coloured hair, but the look I’m going for is “My Little Pony: the Wilderness Years”. We then went round in a circle and brainstormed around the women’s suggestions. Many of them used the resultant ideas as the basis for the start of their comedy sets at the following week’s public sharing. Several of these focused on their bodies. They clearly had an awareness that they were looked at and judged as women when setting foot on stage. Mizejewski argues that feminist scholar Susan Bordo’s work on how bodies “speak”, in terms of the feelings and affects they evoke, is particularly relevant to the female stand-up “who offers her body for scrutiny in a visual dynamic that is traditionally male” (Mizejewski, 2015, p.212). These one-liners provided ways for the women to defuse and take control of that – for them to allow their bodies to speak for themselves.

I was also struck by how many of the stereotypes expressed by the women related to regionality and connected with the themes that emerged from my interviews with professional comedians. For example, Vikki gave one of her labels as “Northern” and said that made people think she was “thick, uneducated ... I work in London quite a lot and I get that look when I start talking in a meeting.” Sophie A said, “I’m Northern – so poor, stupid and cold,” which provoked a lot of laughter. Sophie A suggested a tag line of “Which is true, but it’s still better than the South.” Aileen also said she had a line about being a

Northerner, then said, “I’ve just thought, if I delivered this up here it would be different to delivering it down South.” I shared my experiences at this point, and talked about having a choice of lines to address Northernness, depending on where I was performing.

Conversely, Sophie C, who had spoken before in workshops about people taking more notice of what she says because of her “posh” accent, volunteered how difficult it was to explain the whole “North–South thing” to her mum in London. Sophie C said that, on account of being seen as “middle-class and posh and from the South”, she was stereotyped as “entitled but also naive”.

Having discovered such resistance to talking about class from audiences in my class show, the fact that class was approached from such diametrically opposite positions in this workshop confirmed to me that stand-up can help provide a space where heteroglossia can be celebrated and in which identity positions can be shown as provisional and contingent. Here, the diversity of the women’s positions provided a literal example of what Wayne says is the role of the aesthetic as opening up “a peculiar kind of consciousness raising contact with the (classed) other” (2016, p.116). In the clip below we can see an example of one of the participants’ journeys as she used the aesthetic space of stand-up and the exploratory space of the workshop to begin to challenge classed and gendered stereotypes.

CLIP 5: Workshop: <https://youtu.be/MAbIWclZYmo>

In the clip, we see how the reflexive skills developed in the atmosphere of affective solidarity of the workshops help Helen become a reflexive stand-up performer. I took the role of facilitator in these discussions, prompting and provoking, but occasionally adding opinions based on relational and collective tacit knowledge, such as that, although dark material was often where big laughs were, it was important not to go where we weren’t ready to go as a performer. Helen playfully traversed multiple identities and positions as she entered to her choice of song (Queen’s “Fat Bottomed Girls”), then berated the sound man for being rude, defiantly said her version of salad was an onion on a burger, acknowledged the relative lack of physical capital of a “fat lass and a ginger man” and revelled joyously in sleeping with men who were “younger than her knickers” after her divorce. She evoked and transgressed stereotypes at such speed that any fixed subjective position or lens through which to read her would have been impossible – or at least an act of wilfully reifying a performance which defied it at every turn. Arguably she was making her own body speak for itself and showing up the similarities Mizejewski points out in

Bakhtin's notions of the grotesque and the carnivalesque and feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's accounts of bodies as "events" and processes "exemplifying nomadic subjectivity, located in many changing sites, unattached to single fixed identities" (Mizejewski, 2015, p.217).

The workshops, the public performance and the women's reaction to the process confirmed in practice for me what Douglas (2015) says about how laughing differently opens up the possibility of new relations of gender and of challenging gender binaries. It can lead to new ways of being a subject, caring for the self and influencing others. Laughing differently also helped me reflect on how I now felt more confident in using my practice to challenge oppressions based on class, gender and regionality and in seeking out spaces where I could make and remake space for this counter-conduct, which had already been a feature of my practice to date. I also felt more confident in creating a stand-up space which valued dialogue above confrontation as a way to prompt audiences into being emancipated spectators. The scholar stand-up had found a way to articulate and share her knowledge with others, and to learn from them too, so they could all put this knowing into embodied practice and find ways to laugh differently together.

That Sort of Elbow-Poem

You'll never stop people who want to get on stage
from doing it and everybody can be brilliant
everyone has something to say

We're all the same
us and the audience.

Equal opportunity piss taker,
that's how I see myself.
I take the piss out of all people
but I see value in them as well.

'Come into my house.
Sit down on my settee,'
and the audience are all around you.
And 'You're alright, love, you're alright'.
That's what you're saying.

*The performance of being real,
a performance of authenticity
an audience can hear and see
and feel.*

When I talked about things that happened to me
in an honest and funny way,
people responded.
with that laughter of recognition and elbows.
You know, "You're like that, Sandra".
That sort of elbow.

CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the key arguments of the thesis, taking each chapter in turn. I also reflect on how other scholars and/or practitioners might use the ideas I have put forward. In this thesis I have continually emphasised the importance of looking at stand-up performance as a situated, dialogical form which can act as a site for the resistance and construction of multiple intersecting identities across the axes of, in my practice, class, gender and regional identity. This is slightly different from looking at stand-up as a “live” form – although I am asserting that a crucial element of live stand-up that is usually cut from recordings is how a performer and audience together construct an imaginary sense of their geographical location.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One, I have suggested that practitioner approaches are valuable, as they can give an embodied, insider perspective on how a stand-up reads and writes the cultural context they operate in as an anthropologist or ethnographer. My proposed new definition of stand-up includes a reference to the feedback loops that constitute it as a practice, which means that, as Brodie says, there is a recognition that a stand-up needs an audience “like a skier needs snow” (2014, p.36). It would therefore be useful to have audience perspectives on stand-up which also take into account its situated nature and the way that the relationship between audience and stand-up might shift several times across the course of one performance. These could be gathered by using the increasing battery of creative audience research methods (e.g. Reason, 2010). This could be useful for performance and humour scholars and practitioners themselves.

Also in Chapter One I detailed a series of positions, strategies or figures which I have developed during the course of this practice-based research. Some of them were already present in my practice, such as the “kid” and the “reporter”, which Gilbert (2004) identifies in her categories of female comic attitudes. Yet some of these, I have argued, are new. In particular I have offered the figure of “The scholar stand-up”. This figure has developed as a response to me performing and researching stand-up in an academic context and marshalling conscious theories and practices together into a praxis – and then performing this praxis, sometimes exaggeratedly or with an element of irony. She has allowed me to

perform the distance between my intentions and the possible reception of my work. She has also allowed me to highlight the ways in which stand-up *is* a praxis which can allow the bodies of the performer and audience to be heard through their laughter in scholarly discourse. This is a contribution to how scholars might use humour and performance in order to achieve impact and disseminate their work.

I have coined the word “humitas”, a blend of “humour” and “gravitas”, to highlight the fact that humour can be performative. It refers to humour and seriousness operating within the same frame at the same time. The coining of this word is a rhetorical move, as it struck me as significant that there was not already a word to indicate humour operating in this mode. Humitas is a rhetoric, a process and a frame. It can operate within the liminal-norm of a comic performance and, more interestingly for my purposes, outside it. Naming it will allow other scholars to recognise this phenomenon and investigate its resistant potential.

In Chapter Two I detailed how the “Northernness Effect” is a mythological and sociocultural stigma which can be seen functioning in this case study of stand-up performers in the North of England. In interviews with these performers, and in a content analysis of comedy reviews, it is evident that Northernness now, and historically, is embodied as a signifier for a working-class, lowbrow and grotesque culture in a way which sometimes means the work of Northern performers is misrecognised.

I have speculated that this has material effects on creative workers in the North of England. For a few it can propel them to a commodified “everyman/woman” status, whilst for others it means fewer creative opportunities, less income and fewer awards. Stand-up is an arena in which, drawing on Bakhtin, what I describe as a Northern chronotope – whereby Northern England is associated with the past – can be both celebrated and challenged. This chronotope can lead to men being pigeonholed as the archetype of seventies “Northern comics”, which I would contend are a form of female grotesque. I illustrated how the female equivalent is the “Strong Northern Woman”.

As I detailed in Chapter Three, stand-up as a form can be a way in which Northern female stand-ups resist several aspects of their marginalisation. Within it, working-class or lower-middle-class women can “talk back” in their own words, challenging narratives which make working-class women objects of disgust. It is a forum in which they can create alternative “circuits of value”. These might be ones in which community and egalitarianism are valued above commodification and the individualisation of neoliberalism. For audiences, stand-up

can function as a space in which the Northern imaginary and Northern hegemonic masculinities and femininities can be reinforced or subverted; it could be hoped that greater awareness and less denial of the Northernness Effect among researchers, cultural policy makers and practitioners will lead to more instances where it is subverted than reinforced.

Throughout Chapter Four I illustrated a characteristic oscillation within my own practice of stand-up which operated when I was performing the shame, pain and anxieties of social mobility. This was also evident when I explored how my facilitation of stand-up workshops for women enabled me, and the participants, to oscillate between the roles of spectator, performer and facilitator. The reflexivity allowed us to develop what Freire (1996) calls a “critical consciousness”. In these workshops this was explicitly a feminist critical consciousness and we began to challenge traditionally gendered ways of laughing. This constituted an embodied resistance which Bourdieu would call a “counter-training” against the embodied requirements of orthodoxy and Foucault would call a form of “counter-conduct”. I also recounted the ways I attempted to give my audience more agency to express their own criticality and become what Rancière (2009) called “emancipated spectators” who are affectively and intellectually engaged. I gave them a role beyond simply that of audience. They were “class identity counsellors” who would work *with* me to determine what class I was.

Further Reflections On How Others Might Use These Ideas

I would argue that future stand-up scholars, who blend the anthropologist and the public sociologist with their practice, have much to offer the emergent fields of arts-based research and the performative social sciences – which might then benefit from an influx of social diversity and of communicative impact, as long as universities don’t appropriate this or require lecturers to turn into stand-ups against their will. Stand-up scholars could critique the neoliberal university system or find themselves complicit in it. My work operates between these tensions.

The description and demonstration of the stand-up ethnographer could serve as a starting point for both ethnographers, who might recognise that the craft of stand-up is something which can be learned and deployed in their research, and stand-ups, who could recognise that they have something to contribute as cultural commentators and may be inspired to learn research skills in order to explore social phenomena. Stand-up ethnographers

working in the dialogic mode can build relationships with audiences and embody some of the ambivalences, ambiguities and joyfulneses of their research and the dissemination of it as I have exemplified in this thesis. The subsequent blurring of the boundaries of seriousness and the comic/playfulness that I have identified in the word *Humitas* can be used as a model to reflect on how the work of these stand-up ethnographers is performative and resistant, as well as to analyse the how the rhetoric of comedy operates in the public sphere more generally.

I would also argue that I have identified tools and approaches which can be used to productively analyse live literature and performance poetry practice- via my own hybrid mode as stand-up poet. There is still a dearth of material and models available for exploring performance poetry and what there is does not currently draw on the relatively wide set of methods and methodologies used to interrogate stand-up comedy. This is particularly relevant at a time when some performance poets and spoken word artists, such as Kate Tempest and Hollie McNish, are gaining wide audiences for their work and selling significant numbers of books and albums. The consequent tension between art and commerce, which is mediated through the persona of the performer, strongly echoes similar tensions in stand-up comedy. Research on one field can and should inform the other.

There is also a need for more research looking at how the structural aspects of the creative industries interact with the Northernness Effect. I would suggest, for example, that stand-up might be a fertile site for working-class resistance at a time when the cultural industries are increasingly middle-class because it allows people to enter the field of cultural production without requiring as much cultural and economic capital as other cultural forms such as theatre and dance, which involve expensive professional training. Acknowledging that class prejudice based on regionality still exists could help policy-makers and creative practitioners recognise and combat it more effectively.

This can be a gendered as well as a classed resistance. There are limitations to how far this resistance can be recognised or effective when confined to a sphere of cultural performance or academia. However, I have detailed why I came to recognise how the figure of the “unruly woman” may shape audience responses to me, and to work more consciously with the archetype of the “female trickster” who recognises that she can find a belonging in performing her lack of belonging. This work could be valuable to practitioners,

participatory artists and practitioner- trainers who want to use humour in their work, particularly when looking at class and gender resistance and marginality.

I would say that truly fulfilling the directions I have pointed out in my practice would require me to move beyond them and I have begun to do this in collective actions such as a protest I led outside the Northern Powerhouse conference called Lass War (Halliday, 2017) in which me and a group of women protested the lack of female speakers by dressing up as men in hard hats and man-suits, thus exposing the hyper-masculinity of the Northern Chronotope to ridicule.



Figure 4: Lass War Photograph

The Possibilities and Limitations of Stand-Up as Resistance

Stand-up as a form contains powerful possibilities for resistance because of its place in a third position between art and commercial entertainment. However, this can also constrain the possibilities for what stand-ups and audiences can do within the field. Bourdieu did not write about stand-up as a form, but I think he would have recognised both its “illustrious” potential and its potential to be co-opted as a means of class distinction by both practitioners and audiences. Perhaps there is more potential for resistance for the figures who are freed from operating purely within a stand-up field: the unruly woman, the feminist killjoy, the scholar stand-up and the female trickster. They can achieve what Quirk suggested are the “small, incremental changes” (2015, p.178) that performances can effect on opinions, on a broader canvas than stand-up, such as journalism, politics and academia.

I am not asserting that it is possible to find a space outside existing systems of cultural and knowledge production. But perhaps, as Wayne suggests, there is an “in between” space in the aesthetic realm. It can become, in Wayne’s Marxist analysis of Kant’s theories of aesthetics, “a realm of discovery beyond immediate individual interests and immediate interests of the class or group which politics defends” (2016, p.116). It allows the ability to “[reflect] on and not simply be a reflection of material conditions” and requires “coming into a peculiar kind of consciousness raising contact with the (classed) other” (ibid., p.116). He says this painful consciousness is the “open wound of the aesthetic” (ibid., p.116).

Just to interject again, before I run out of space to speak; I know I’m biased, as your dialogic voice, but, to be honest, can you really say that the dialogic voice is also a stand-up voice? I mean, is it recognisably your stand-up voice? For example, your signature practice of a sort of self-deprecating, ingratiating, friendly style which aims to create a psychologically safe, dialogic space and puncture traditional binaries of high and low discourse – is that actually what I, the voice, am doing? How do you know when you haven’t got that instantaneous, intersubjective play with an audience and the response of their laughter and their freedom to talk back to you?

It’s different to live performance, for sure, but part of the point of the scholar stand-up is that she is a hybridised figure. She exists between the page and the stage and troubles the boundaries between these ways of expressing knowledge. This particular scholar stand-up is aiming to get a PhD and is thus fitting into a particular set of rules and parameters. But she is also pointing out their contingent nature and disidentifying with them when she can. Maybe this can be joyous and affirming to others.

This research process has given her new names for concepts she previously didn’t have, and it has required her to translate perfectly adequate words and concepts she already did have into new ones. However, the process itself is deeply classed and gendered. This has been much critiqued by feminist and postcolonial scholars, such as Visweswaran (1994), hooks (2000) and Said (2003), among others. The stand-up voice and the poems which include the actual voices of my interviewees, highlight the voices and multiplicities which are traditionally excluded from research, at the same time as including them. A heteroglossia.

If you say so. Though, to be honest I think you might have crossed over to the other side in doing this PhD. To you, smashed avocado only used to be bathroom sets you saw

abandoned at the side of the road. Now you're making up new words and everything. By the way, do you really think anybody's going to take humitas seriously? It might be a blend of humour and gravitas, but it's still a hybridised form of humour. As many people have pointed out, such as Gilbert, "Humour, no matter how subversive, will never be taken seriously" (2004, p.177).

But, as I keep saying, that is changing. The carnival is changing and spreading. As Russo points out, "It could even be said, with reservation, that in relation to academic institutions, what has come to be called 'theory' has constituted a kind of carnival space" (1995, p.65). I would argue that, as many performance studies people (e.g. McKenzie, 2001) have pointed out, performance studies is an interstitial space. In other words, a carnivalesque one. One which can change the nature of the public sphere.

Brilliant. I must ask a performance studies scholar about that next time they're on Newsnight. Oh – hang on. They're last on the list to be taken seriously on Newsnight. Just after sociologists and Theresa May.

Well, that's why we need to be tricksters. You know, like Visweswaran (1994) said. You don't go about saying what you actually believe. You've got to be more subtle than that. Anyway, I am trying to actually live the theoretical possibilities of my concepts.

Good for you, I suppose. It sounds like you might finally have found some ways to counter the Northern chronotope via poetry, comedy and commentary. This thesis writing is a stand-up performance too, though, isn't it? What have you actually managed to counter in doing that? It's still a standard PhD, after all.

I don't think it's a completely standard thesis. The "new ethnographer" Goodall described typical scholarly writing as "ungendered, divorced from class consciousness and ... unable or unwilling to give voice to its own racial or sexual subjectivity" (2000, p.190) and called for ethnography which is "untamed and in some rhetorical ways undisciplined". He says it will only have credibility when it is "self-reflexive" and authority when "richly vulnerable" (ibid., p.191). I think there is some of that here.

Though I still remember that sort of visceral stinging sensation I got when I read Skeggs on the subject of reflexive and new ethnographers. She basically said that they were self-indulgent and solipsistic and that "textual decentering shows off the cleverness of the author while supposedly decentering them at the same time" (2002, p.363); it's actually a

way for them to exercise their power by showing that they can play with it. You know, like I'm playing with my linguistic power and capital here. She also talked about how she hurt her parents when she wrote about them in her 1997 ethnography and concluded she didn't need to put herself at the centre of her texts.

And how did that make you feel?

Are you turning into my PhD identity counsellor? If you must know, it reminded me of when my mum used to say I was "too clever" and "too big for my boots" if I came home from school with another report filled with As and that time when my stepdad was listening to me chuntering away about my day when we were walking hand in hand in the supermarket and he suddenly said with an edge of utter contempt, "Can you talk about anything other than yourself?" I must have been about seven.

Oof. Yes, they weren't big on encouraging your self-expression. For all sorts of complicated structural and individual reasons. No wonder it always comes with an edge of shame. But I really don't think Skeggs meant you. She said that those reflexive researchers use their ways of telling their self and the selves of others as properties that they can exchange in the publishing world and that "their story is based on their identity which is usually articulated as a singularity and takes no account of movement in and out of space, cultural resources, place, bodies and others but nonetheless authorises itself to speak" (2002, p.360). Your use of the ambivalence of stand-up and your encouraging of dialogue mean that you're not fixing or reifying your identity positions or those of others; quite the opposite.

Though, just one more thing for you to beat yourself up about now while we're here: aren't you in fact making cultural and economic capital out of your so-called marginality now that you've done a fully funded PhD in it and are making performances for which you get paid out of it? And are you making cultural capital out of the Otherness of your fellow Northerners or working-class people and women and selling it back to both them and to those who Other them?

Harsh. Can I remind you that Gilbert has pointed out that marginalised performers make economic and cultural capital out of their marginality and that this should be seen as a "feminist triumph" (2004, p.167). Though actually, more pertinently, those Denzin and Conquergood precepts about respecting the difference of the Other in dialogical performance are things I take very seriously. I am also thus far rarely talking about "Others" in the sense that I am usually speaking partly for my identity. The amount of

cultural capital I am actually going to accrue by studying Northerners or stand-up comedy is debatable. There is not enough research done in these areas precisely because they're marginalised within academia too. And as for cute gimmicks like you, my dialogic voice, well... I'm not sure that's going to help me be taken seriously in academia or out of it. I may have hindered my professional "brand" as much as helped it by becoming even harder to classify. Though I will happily quote queer theorist Judith Jack Halberstam, who points out that this opens opportunities for new ways of knowing things:

Being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production... (2011, p.7)

Oh my God. I get what's happened now. With my help as the dialogic voice, you've basically tried to resolve these conflicts by writing a middlebrow PhD thesis. You're like the Grayson Perry, the Proms, the BBC One adaptation of Cranford, the Masterchef of PhD students. You couldn't bear to deploy only legitimate or high cultural references and write about the historical role of violas in Germanic court culture or something, but you didn't want to spend the rest of your life without having a reason to quote Foucault on hysteria.

Doctor, doctor, you feel like a pair of curtains. Well, pull yourself together. Or pull this thesis together. Doctor, doctor, you can't use your relationship with a stand-up audience as therapy – or can you? Doctor, doctor, will a title validate you or just become another label to try and resist?

Don't start breaking down into absurdity now, dialogic voice. That would be a whole other thesis. I also detect some cynicism here about the role of the creative worker. It's almost as if you think that I can't escape my structural positioning. That even my resistance will be used to create value for myself or be appropriated by institutions. I think there is something beyond that. I do. Or, at least, I have to. But I agree, it is limited. I hope this thesis has shown at least, glimpses of it despite my awareness of its boundaries.

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Pritchard-McLean, K. 2016. *Hysterical Woman*. Pleasance, Edinburgh. First performance: 6 August 2016.

Thom, J. 2014. *Backstage in Biscuit Land*. Pleasance, Edinburgh. First performance: 1 August 2014.

Truscott, A. 2013. *Asking For It: A One Lady Rape About Comedy Starring Her Pussy and Little Else*. Bob's Bookshop, Edinburgh. First performance: 3 August 2013.

Wax, R. 2010. *Losing It*. Radlett Centre, Hertfordshire. First performance: 20 April 2010.

Willan, S. 2016. *On Record*. Pleasance, Edinburgh. First performance: 16 August 2016.

My Performances Cited (chronological order)

Phase One: Researching being a “scholar stand-up”

Fox, K. 2014. *Verbal Essences*. stage@Leeds, University of Leeds. 5 December 2014.

Fox, K. 2015a. *The Price of Happiness*, series 1. BBC Radio 4. 28 June and 5 July.

Fox, K. 2015b. Paper presentation/performance. Documenting Comedy Symposium. 13 May, Salford University, MediaCityUK.

Fox, K. 2015c. Paper presentation/performance. Resonances postgrad conference. 21 May, University of Leeds.

Labour Party Benefit Featuring Kate Fox, Barbara Nice and Patrick Monahan. 2015. 29 November, Byker Working Men’s Club, Newcastle.

Phase Two: Developing material for the performance autoethnography and class show

Fox, K. 2016a. *Lots of Planets Have a North*. Postgraduate seminar. 16 March, Performance and Cultural Industries School. Alec Clegg Studio, University of Leeds.

Fox, K. 2016b. *The Wrong Stuff*. 6 June, Jesterval Comedy Festival, Newcastle.

Fox, K. 2016c. Stand-up poetry set. 30 July, Hip Yak Poetry Shack, WOMAD Festival.

Fox, K. 2016d. Paper presentation/performance. 6 September, TaPRA conference, University of Bristol.

Phase Three: Sharing my new work, continuing to experiment with troubling classed, gendered and regionalised stereotypes (and chronotopes).

Lass War. 2017. 21 February, (outside) Manchester International Conference Centre, Manchester.

Fox, K. 2017a. *Poetry at Lunchtime*. 29 April, Eton College, Eton.

Fox, K. 2017b. *Una Q Horn*. 30 April, Autism and the Arts Festival, University of Kent.

Fox, K. 2017c. *Quarry Bank Women’s Work*. 29 May, Hay Festival, Hay.

Bradford Women's Comedy Workshop Sharing. 2017. Compèred by Kate Fox. 19 March, Theatre in the Mill, Bradford.

Fox, K. 2017d. Wonder Women Festival stand-up poetry performance. *Dolly Mixtures Showcase*. 4 March, Royal Exchange Studio Theatre, Manchester.

Fox, K. 2017e. *The Wrong Stuff*. Preview of the *Price of Happiness* recording. 5 March, York International Women's Festival, Black Swan Pub, York.

Fox, K. 2017f. Various performances. 10–12 March, Women of the World Festival, Hull City Hall, Hull.

Fox, K. 2017g. Womanifesto poem. *Woman's Hour*. BBC Radio 4. 11 March. [Online]. [Accessed 1 July 2017]. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b08gwfyq>

Fox, K. 2017h. Comedy performance. 19 June, Hilarity Bites Comedy Club, Bishop Auckland Town Hall, Bishop Auckland.

Fox, K. 2017i. *The Price of Happiness*, series 2. BBC Radio 4. 19 and 26 June.

APPENDIX 1

<i>Interviewees:</i>	<i>Interview Date</i>
Isma Almas (Comedian, Bradford)	20/06/16
Lucy Beaumont (Comedian, Hull)	25/01/16
Steve Bennett (Reviewer, London)	14/01/16
Janice Connolly (Comedian, Birmingham)	29/11/15
Danny Deegan (Comedian, Manchester)	14/08/15
Simon Donald (Comedian, Newcastle)	04/08/15
Hayley Ellis (Comedian, Manchester)	23/08/15
Louise Fazackerley (Poet, Wigan)	24/08/15
Rachel Fairbairn (Comedian, Manchester)	26/08/16
Mick Ferry (Comedian, Manchester)	22/01/17
Jackie Hagan (Poet and comedian, Manchester)	19/10/15
Joey Holden (Comic actor, London/Yorkshire)	07/11/15
Steve Larkin (Poet, Oxford/Sunderland)	24/08/15
Sharon Jagger (Singer, York)	10/08/15
Rowan McCabe (Poet, Newcastle)	22/07/15
Matt Miller (Poet and comedian, Newcastle)	24/08/15
Sarah Millican (Comedian, Knutsford/South Tyneside)	07/01/17
Mike Milligan (Comedian, Newcastle)	29/07/15
Patrick Monahan (Comedian, Teesside)	29/11/15
Helen Mort (Poet, Chesterfield)	07/02/16
Katie Mulgrew (Comedian, Lancashire)	19/11/15
Gerry Potter (Poet, Liverpool)	19/09/15
Lemn Sissay (Poet, Manchester)	29/02/16
Naomi Sheldon (Comic actor, London/York)	07/11/15
Helen Turner (Singer, York)	10/08/15
Gavin Webster (Comedian, Newcastle)	22/07/15
Jenny Wilson (Comic performer, Yorkshire)	28/11/15

APPENDIX 2

Comedy Review Bibliography

Comedians:**Southern****Northern**

Mickey Flanagan

John Bishop

Stewart Lee

Daniel Kitson

Lucy Porter

Lucy Beaumont

Russell Kane

Hayley Ellis

Russell Howard

Chris Ramsey

Sara Pascoe

Ross Noble

Josie Long

Sophie Willan

Miranda Hart

Sarah Millican

Bridget Christie

Seymour Mace

Michael McIntyre

Peter Kay

Jack Whitehall

Katie Mulgrew

Jimmy Carr

Gavin Webster

Phill Jupitus

Justin Moorhouse

Lucy Beaumont

Bennett, S. 2014. Lucy Beaumont, We Can Twerk It Out. 4th August, 2014. *Chortle*. Available from: http://www.chortle.co.uk/shows/edinburgh_fringe_2014/1/22766/lucy_beaumont%3A_we_can_twerk_it_out?review=3765/review. Accessed on: 8th Feb, 2018.

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Jimmy Carr

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Note Re Missing Reviews: Although I retain the original data used to analyse the reviews, it is no longer possible to access the full` details of some online. Particularly Fest Mag reviews before 2010 Including one for Sarah Millican, two for Justin Moorhouse and one for Lucy Porter. Also TV Bomb reviews: including one for Katie Mulgrew and two for Lucy Porter. And the Post group local newspaper reviews including: Russell Howard's Bristol Post review, Josie Long's Cambridge Post review and Ross Noble's Nottingham Post review. Others missing include: Micky Flanagan's Reviews Hub review, Phill Jupitus review on Cornwall Live, Russell Kane on The Gaudie, Sophie Willan review of The Novice Detective in The New Current and a review of Russell Howard's Wonderbox show on Cuckoo Review.

APPENDIX 3

SCRIPT USED FOR RECORDING OF THE PRICE OF HAPPINESS CLASS SHOW

RECORDED: Saturday 11TH MARCH, 2017

0. SIMMA PLAYS INTRO SONG: LIVE GUITAR**“Stuck in the Middle”**

1. KATE Thank you, hello I am Kate Fox and welcome to the Price of Happiness...the series where I look at things I do not want (and how much I save emotionally and financially in the process?): this week, I'm asking what's the cost of having a Middle Class status.

2. I know that doing a show saying that I'm not sure about being middle class on Radio 4 is like Che Guevara announcing the revolution in Waitrose Magazine...

3. (Though I was never a Radio 4 listener myself until I was on it - I think we need a more Northern version so it could do shows like “The Northern Shipping Forecast - there will be no more ships built up here since our industry was decimated by Thatcher after she was voted in by you Southern bastards).

4. Class is also really hard to define.

5. 60% of people say they're working class - 40% say they're middle class.
0.00001% of people say they're Mylene Klass.
6. But sociologists would say that actually only 25% of people could be defined as the established middle class and 14% are traditional working class. The rest is a bit more of a fuzzy grey area.
7. And 6% of people are the elite. People who use three-ply toilet paper and are related to...well, each other mainly.
8. If you're now thinking, "I've just never really thought about class actually" as one young student said in one of my shows recently then - you're middle class.
9. I'm not sure I'm working class anymore but I'm not sure if I'd want to say that I have become middle class.
10. Can I be in between like with dress sizes?
I'm size 17 but apparently that doesn't exist.
Maybe if I lost a few inches off my waist and had less tubular boobs I could be middle class.
11. Tubular boobs - Mike Oldfield's less successful follow up album to Tubular Bells.

12. What is the price of being or becoming middle class - and is it one I would want to pay? I'm going to ask you to help me decide over the course of the show. I need you to be my Class Identity Counsellors.
13. You will help me decide whether I am ready for the transition from working to middle class, or indeed, whether I'm there already.
14. Class identity confusion is rife. It can lead to people questioning who they are, how they talk, the clothes they wear and which is the right bathroom for them to use. Jenni Murray has even questioned whether people who have only crossed over into the middle-classes so they can wear nice frocks from Boden are "real" middle class people.
15. I feel like I want to defend and speak up for working class people who are unfairly scapegoated for problems that aren't their fault like the lack of jobs - but am I doing it from a position of fellow solidarity? I mean, the other day my husband complained because an avocado had fallen out of my coat pocket onto his toe and I thought...possibly our problems are no longer working class. On the other hand, when I'm away he buys himself a tinned Fray Bentos steak and kidney pudding to have for his tea as a treat.

16. Working out what class I am has become more of an issue for me since I started working in more middle-class places: a traditional University, poetry and arts venues, Radio 4...

I went on a residential writing course where you had to take it in turns to help cook. I was given the task of chopping up what I thought was a daffodil bulb. I had no idea how to do it. It was my first encounter with a garlic clove. I was 32.
17. I've gradually become aware that there's a language I just don't speak.
18. I've discovered that some people can "read" the class of others so they can place them in the social hierarchy and decide whether they want to be friends with them. I'm not very good at that. I'm more like one of those barcode scanners at the supermarket that can't read anything so the checkout person has to punch the code in manually while loudly tutting.
19. Being good at this scanning is a sign of being middle-class. I was on a panel once about working class writers and Jonathan Dimbleby asked me where I went to school. Not a question people usually bother to ask because it suggests they might have heard of the answer.
20. I said, "You're probably not familiar with Queensbury Comp in Bradford are you? I don't think we ever played Charterhouse at rugby".

21. Though there are signposts that even I can discern. You'll know that you're actually working class if you've been blamed for Brexit but you're not Boris Johnson.

22. If your baby comes out and the first thing it does is eat your placenta... with a nice rosemary and thyme jus, then it's probably going to be middle class.

23. Some people give clues away that they're definitely not working class - like when their children take a test called "How working class are you?" they hire private tutors to get them through it, then a lawyer to sue if the results aren't what they wanted. Bonus points if they announce the results in the Times; "Mr and Mrs Aga of Worthing would like to congratulate their daughter Phoebe on being proletariat as heck".

24. In writing this show I have discovered that people feel uncomfortable to admit what class they think they are in public. I've sometimes wished I was asking them about something they'd be happier to own up to - like having an STD or having committed murder or watched Mrs Browns Boys.

25. Obviously it depends where I perform it. The BBC wanted me to perform this show in Newcastle because it's closer to my natural habitat. Sometimes you get middle class people in the audience who don't want to speak up because they think the proud working class people will look down on them. Sometimes you get working class people in the audience who don't want to speak up because they think the proud middle class people will look down on them. Sometimes it's a relief when you get an M.P in who everyone can proudly look down on. I'm aware that this whole issue is baffling to many people from other countries who don't see themselves as having a class system.
26. However, when I was growing up, we didn't think about class. I believed John Major when he said we had a classless society. Then Tony Blair said "we're all middle class now". Which is clearly irrational. You can't all be in the middle.
27. That makes as much sense as when he said there's no WMDs or George Bush is great to work with or "Don't worry Wendi Deng, just tell Rupert Murdoch those curly grey hairs on the pillow were off the cat".
28. As recently as 2015, in the depths of austerity and benefit cuts, Labour minister Tristram Hunt - I wonder what class he might be? - said that Labour wanted to appeal to voters who shopped at Waitrose. That was a

euphemism for middle class people which he couldn't actually say, on account of them apparently not existing any more.

29. However, since Brexit and Trump, things have changed. People are talking about the working class again. In the world I work in, in the arts and universities, people suddenly want to know what working class people think about things.
30. But they don't know any. They're like big game hunters trying to lure them in by leaving Hula Hoops and Sunny Delight out. I know loads, including poets, comedians and normal people. I should set up an agency; "Friends with Benefits".
31. It's particularly difficult getting working class people who can afford to be actors or musicians. I believe Coronation Street are going to have to set up a breeding programme for future cast members in a wildlife park just outside Burnley.
32. But is class defined by education, income, background, culture or all or none of these things? Can you choose what class you are? Is laughing at the quinoa-eating and correctly pronouncing, Waitrose-card owning, VW-driving, Boden-wearing cliché of a middle-class person a way of being in denial about your true class status?

33. I'm going to let you - the audience, my Class Identity Counsellors, assess where I am in this process. I'll give you some of detail about my background and let you ask questions.
34. When I was eight, my family moved from Keighley, a town near Bradford (whose only famous people have been Peter Sutcliffe the Yorkshire Ripper and Gareth Gates - both of whom are notorious for their very long sentences) to a small village in rural Cumbria.
35. Despite a broad Bradford accent, there were shouts of "Posh snob" as I walked through the playground on my first day. Just because I was new.
36. It was made worse when the class teacher gave us all a Maths and English test and made a big fuss when I got top marks.
- The chants started in the playground after: "You is a posh snob, you is a posh snob".
- I said "I think you'll find it's you **are** a posh snob"...that made me very popular...
37. Maybe it persisted because we lived in a detached house outside the village. Though this was a change in status for my Mum - eight years earlier she'd been a single Mum, bringing up twins in a terraced house in Pudsey - home of the one-eyed bear - with an outside toilet.

38. So - does that make me working class - having had an outside toilet for the first three years of my life?
Most people wee themselves where they stand for the first three years of their life anyway - longer if they're in the cast of Geordie Shore...
39. My Mum gave me quite a class-neutral name. Kathryn which was shortened to Katie and Kate.
We've got Katie Price - and also Princess Kate Middleton.
Only one of them gets paid for her topless pictures.
40. My Mum is from a very working class family of cloggers and weavers.
She left school at 15 and did a secretarial course.
41. I'm the result of an affair she had with her first boss and then she married her second boss who ran a small steeplejacks firm (not a firm of small steeplejacks - finding it hard to reach things wasn't their selling point) — so she had literally climbed the social ladder.
42. Though apparently 35% of people nowadays say they don't want to climb the social ladder - no wonder.
I think it's become like the ladder leading up to the Magic Faraway Tree.
You just don't know what land's going to be at the top of it when you arrive.
Will it be "Just About Managing Land"
"Squeezed Middle Land"

or “Precarious Millenials Who Will Never Be Able to Afford a House Land”

43. Never mind Generation Rent - young people now are soon going to be Generation Tent.
44. Plus of course, the ladder always used to go up. Now it also comes down.
45. Those whose manufacturing jobs were lost long ago might well say to the squeezed middle - where were you when they came for us in the eighties? Naming your children after interesting things in your spice rack.
46. My Mum and Step Dad were Thatcherites. Running a small business, sending their kids to the local comp, driving a Ford Sierra.
Pitched somewhere in the confusing class ground across the cobbles between Coronation Street’s Rita the shopkeeper and Mike Baldwin, the factory owner.
47. It’s been predicted that there will be no middle class at all in Britain in 30 years’ time because of soaring house prices. Basically only Richard Branson will be able to afford a house. He’ll own all of the U.K mainland which he will have converted into a giant conservatory to his main residence in France and the rest of us will all be squashed on to the Isle of Man where we’ll have to have twelve jobs each in order to be able to afford to live on weevils.

48. You can ask me now if I have what you think I need to be middle class, my Class Identity Counsellors. Try and subtly read me slash ask questions that show you're desperately trying to see if my class status makes your scanner beep. They could be tangible things like a pasta maker or more nebulous things like a degree or a soul...

49. I think being seen to have certain things is an important part of being middle-class - someone said to me - we're all the same, we all go to the toilet.

The woman next to her said, "Yes, but which toilet? I have two..."

(IF NOT MENTIONED SAY AVERAGE INCOME IS £26,500 and
AVERAGE HOUSE PRICE is £218, 964)

50. **KATE ASKS THE AUDIENCE TO ASK HER QUESTIONS AND KEEP A TALLY: ROAMING MICS READY IN AUDIENCE**

51. The cost of being middle-class is undoubtedly higher.

A year of Cadburys will cost you £52 - this is assuming one bar a week, I did try it on the basis of one bar a day at one point. But that's probably

just me. Whereas a year of Organic, Willy's Ginger and Lime Dark Chocolate from Sierra Leone would cost nearer £104.

52. You could get bus travel for a year round Wolverhampton for £1481 but it costs you about £7000 a year to run two cars - a big one and a runabout.
53. I'm not sure my background has equipped me to spend more than I need to - or maybe it's just being born in Yorkshire. I'd best tell you more to help you with your assessment.
54. My stepdad was a grammar school boy who became a taxi driver but then took over that small steeplejacks company. His family of Yorkshire business people became civic do-gooders-councillors and Mayors. They were classic petit bourgeoisie. My Mum would have thought that classic petit bourgeoisie was something from Marks and Sparks that you put in the microwave - or just very pretentious.
55. We got our big shop at Morrisons and our bits at Marks and Sparks. Where you shop used to be more of a clue before budget shopping became a thing. I'm now over 20 miles from my nearest Waitrose. Though they've had to close stores because more people are budget shopping. They ventured into some places where they should not have gone according to the Guardian which said when they closed; "Staines, Leek, Cardiff - these are not typical Waitrose heartlands".

56. It might as well have said “Who would ever have been so stupid as to think people in those places could properly appreciate a Heston Blumenthal snail studded Skyr yoghurt?”
57. In Ripon quite near us we do have a Booths. They’re an independent chain who get called the “Waitrose of the North”. We’ve started going to it because we were put off Tesco’s by the horsemeat scandal. At least you have faith that if they give you horsemeat in Booths it would come from a pure thoroughbred stallion.
58. They also appeal to a thing that broadcasters don’t think is a thing - a northern middle class.
59. They have bags that play on it and say Preston not Heston, Cumbria not Umbria. I’d like to suggest one for their range - Norris not Boris.
60. But all the shops want to be more middle class now - even Greggs has those Moments cafes - and they don’t even think you’re swearing if you ask for focaccia.
61. Next they’ll have an artist in residence. Damian Hurst’s half a sausage roll. Tracey Emin’s Unmade Pasty, Andy Warhol’s Pop Tart...
62. We didn’t have lots of books in the house but we did have Enid Blyton series and Jean Plaidy’s historical romances which I devoured - so I

believed life would mostly be a great big picnic with lashings of ginger beer, then you'd get your head chopped off.

63. Neither of my parents wanted me to go to university. Their backgrounds meant they thought I should do my A levels but then get a proper job and start earning some money. Something like hotel management.
64. Being clever was not something to be encouraged. What use had it been to anyone down the generations when they wouldn't have had chance to go to university, or often even to school? It was particularly superfluous for girls to be clever.
65. I don't know what would have disappointed them more when I was sixteen - me coming home with a baby or a copy of the Guardian.
66. I wanted to go to University because I thought I'd get a better job in the long run.
And indeed - I went off to University and ultimately got a job as a poet and have never been able to afford a house. That's shown them.
67. Of course, University is a special time where you meet new people and open new horizons and if you're from the North and go to a University that isn't in the North then everyone will imitate your hilarious accent and ask you if you're related to the cast of Coronation Street.

68. I briefly had a middle class boyfriend at university - I knew there was something about him that was different from me. He played classical music on a proper record player and ate dinner at the table not in front of the telly and made pasta sauce from scratch not from Lloyd Grossman. Other than that, I've mainly had working class boyfriends who have felt a vague sense of anger, shame and resentment at a system stacked against them - like people attempting to book a Christmas delivery slot at Waitrose.
69. My husband is the son of a Wallsend bus driver. So he's in demand by the Labour party to be a Mayor. Actually my husband is in-between like me. He works in a newspaper shop four mornings a week and is a writer of comic thrillers. Obviously only one of those is his true vocation. But with the newspaper industry in terminal decline he had to have a back-up plan.
70. We've shared the double bind of being mocked by our families for being up ourselves and liking big words and polenta. But not accepted by truly middle class people because they know that we're mocking them for being up themselves and liking big words and polenta.
71. I was in a shop the other day and a woman said, "We're going yurting at the weekend". I tried to compete. I said "Well, we're going cottage-ing".

72. Maybe one of the biggest symbols of being in between working class and middle-class and thus confused about your class identity is what they call code-switching.
- Moving between different types of speech in order to fit in. The most well-known example of that is having a phone voice.
73. I thought I didn't do that - then I realised I have an iPhone voice. If I didn't then Siri wouldn't understand me.
74. I'm actually doing a PhD in stand-up performance now and am finding that there are not many working-class accents among the staff or students of the quite traditional university I'm at. So it does make me insecure in a way. Is it a soft g or a hard g in hegemony?
75. I know it probably sounds a bit strange that I'm doing a PhD in stand-up. Some people have wondered whether you're even going to need qualifications for doing stand-up comedy now. I was like - I don't think a PhD will improve my chances of getting on Live at the Apollo. Maybe a penis would, but that's another story...
76. Sometimes people ask, "Doesn't studying comedy suck all the joy out of it? I'm like, no, analysing how a joke deconstructs the social hegemony doesn't suck all the joy out of it at all...."
- I'll know my viva's going well if my external examiners heckle me in the middle of it.

77. I think class is like the red and green tables at school - you're told that it's just random groupings but really you know you're being ranked according to who the teacher thinks would make best use of a cafetiere.
78. If we agreed definitions of class, we might have to actually do something about the deep-rooted inequalities in society.
79. Though I know what you're thinking at this point. You're thinking Kate, surely you've been promoting the simplified and outdated Marxist conceptions of class as connected to your relationship to the means of economic production and Goldthorpe's sixties notion of class as being based on rational choices and outcomes, when you should be using Ranciere's conception of class conflict as a way of naming the uncaptured and struggling or French sociologist Bourdieu's analysis of class as based on the cultural, historic and educational dimensions inscribed in your habitus like they did in more complex groupings of the Great British Class Survey of 2013.
80. To which I say....bollocks!
- No. Not really. It's a valid point. Thank you for bringing it up.

81. I certainly think inherited cultural factors play a big role in people's lives. But circumstances can also change in a way which effects the resources available to you.
- For example, I actually left home at 16 because my parents were - well, if they were middle class they'd have been called eccentric and if they were working class they'd have been called certifiably crackers... and I lived in a damp bedsit, next door to a massage parlour while I did my A-levels. When I say massage parlour, I don't mean the sort with sandalwood essential oils and fluffy towels.
82. I had to put pound coins in a gas meter from my £31.40 a week income support, do my laundry at the launderette, have free school dinners, a fish and chip supper every Saturday and a discounted takeaway at the Chinese every Sunday.
83. I had hardly any possessions or money and no safety net. One of the legs on the lumpy single bed that was the only furniture in there apart from a table and a chair collapsed. But - I propped that bed up with Jane Eyre and Ian McEwan's 'Black Dogs'. Which for some people would mean that I was definitely privileged and middle-class.
84. I'd like someone who's willing to [come up here and] battle me to see which of us has the most cultural capital.
- First we'll battle it out to see who has the most, what's called legitimate cultural capital - that is, the sort of capital given by big traditional

institutions. It's classical music, it's appreciating fine art, it's certain sorts of tastes which get developed young. I have one friend who went to private school but is determined that she's working class because when she was growing up her parents only owned three cassettes. And one of those was the Barron Knights.

85. VOLUNTEER FROM THE AUDIENCE COMES UP ON STAGE / IS SAT NEAR FRONT

86. Are you most excited by:
- a. Anton Chekov
 - b. Ant and Dec

87. Do you own this album?

88. SIMMA PLAYS A SNATCH OF KEANE, 'SOMEWHERE ONLY WE KNOW'

89. When you find something very amusing is your reaction closest to:
- a. Saying, "Hah, that's funny"
 - b. Laughing at medium volume but only if other people around you are laughing
 - c. Requiring a pack of Tena Ladies and a plastic chair cover to hand.
90. We're going to take it in turns to say in our natural voice:
"Hello, this is the News at Ten"

91. Would you rather watch
- a. The Queen's Coronation
 - b. Coronation Street
92. As you can tell, this is a very scientific method....
93. But there are different types of Cultural Capital and I would contend there is such a thing as Northern Cultural Capital. That's the type that I have that means I'm allowed on Radio 4. Fulfilling a quota.
I'll prove it to you.
94. **KATE holds up bread bun and whispers into mic, "I'm holding up a bread bun" debate re the correct term will then ensue in the audience)**
95. What would you call this?
96. Have you ever argued with somebody else over the correct term for a bread bun?
97. Were you ever told, when young to take your coat off inside so you'd
"Feel the benefit"
98. **GRAMS: A snatch of a song (e.g. "Blaydon Races")**
Can you translate these words?

99. Could you say the following sentence, "Let's call a spade a bloody shovel"
100. Have you ever talked to a stranger at a bus stop?

CONCLUDE GAME WITH APPLAUSE – THANK AUDIENCE MEMBER ETC

101. Now then, you might have noticed I myself am Northern - I hardly mention it - and that has an impact on how I experience class. I can explain better in a poem:

102. **NORTHERN VOICES**

103. However, luckily I wasn't aware of anything I lacked when I was at University and so I happily carried on deciding that I was going to be a national newsreader on the radio or telly.

Little knowing that with my accent, that was like a young Gregg Wallace saying that he wanted to star in the L'oreal shampoo adverts when he grew up.

104. You see, you might have access to cultural capital or economic capital or educational capital but certain things can block your ability to deploy it - its like in a computer game, you might have picked the gold coins up but until you meet the two-headed dragon with a beard - or Theresa May - you cannot actually use the gold coins you are carrying.

A Northern accent can sometimes block your ability to use your gold coins - though apparently it doesn't impair your ability to come up with tortuous computer game metaphors based on your last experience of playing on the Atari in 1983.

105. But I didn't know. Did you know there's only ever been one national newsreader with a northern accent? Wilfred Pickles, the most Yorkshire name ever.

He was put on air during the Second World War in order to "confuse the Germans". But he was taken off after three days because so many people complained about his accent.

106. Basically, British people would rather be invaded by Hitler than have a northerner reading the news.

107. But I was blissfully unaware that because a Northern voice is thought automatically to be working class and less authoritative and clear, it couldn't happen.

108. Some people genuinely believe there is something inherent in a Northern accent that means it should not be allowed to read the news.

109. It's the same thing that causes people to complain that the actors on the BBC drama Happy Valley are mumbling - but really it's because they are Northern.

We should have subtitles on northern dramas and put them on BBC4 because then they'd be cool like Scandi-noir.

(I love how you can gradually pick up words from things like The Bridge using the subtitles.

110. Tak, Braw, Absolut, Laptop.

I've calculated that at this rate of language acquisition I'm going to be fluent in Scandinavian languages in approximately 1027 years.)

111. That should have been one of the questions you asked me - do you watch subtitled crime dramas on BBC4?

112. We should fight back more against discrimination - like when they've said they're going to take four hundred thousand photos from the media museum in Bradford and take them to London to make them more "geographically accessible". We should say you can have them, as long as we can then take at random, four hundred thousand photos from the hard drives of Conservative Cabinet ministers.

113. I'm not saying that if you've got a Northern accent people automatically think you are: a) working class and: b) stupid, but it's astonishing how often when someone wants to convey that someone is either: a) working class or: b) stupid, they will, coincidentally, use a Northern accent to do so.

114. That is why so many of our finest Northern minds have conveniently lost their Northern accents along the way. Jenni Murray, Kate Adie, Gazza. Okay, he might just have retained a tiny trace of one. It does tend to be more of a female thing to lose your accent. I've just never been able to imagine losing mine;
- "Where did it go? Down the back of the settee, did I leave it at the bus stop? I know I just had it when I was in the chippie".
115. It takes more effort to lose an accent than to keep one - but reviewers will write about northern accents as if they're outlandish affectations that someone has put on. "Their deliberately regional accent", or even better "Their defiantly northern vowels".
- I'd like to think they've just misspelled definitely. No one ever says "Their conformist R.P accent" or their "Constructedly South Eastern twang". It's something you can't help. Their "rebelliously two-nostrilled nose" or their "uncompromisingly lip shaped lips".
- But do you know what accent one study showed was foreigners favourite accent when it was played back to them because of its mellifluous music?
- Brummie.
116. Yes - when I've said this in Birmingham, they've reacted with shock because they've been brainwashed into believing their accent is ridiculous.

117. It's like they're actually a British beauty queen we're harbouring in our midst, scared she was going to show us up or emigrate to L.A to have an unsatisfactory career in porn films if we let her know that she was a stunner, so we kept telling her teeth were too crooked - when all along Birmingham was the most beautiful of them all.
118. Anyway, I'm sure that Northern accents are second.
119. But in order to get a job as a newsreader, the tutor on my radio journalism course told me I was always going to have to submit a tape of my voice when I went for an interview.
120. And that I should go for Northern stations.
121. But it turned out I was too Northern even for Northern stations, especially commercial ones who quite like their newsreaders to sound as if they're awaiting sinus surgery.
122. One station did give me a chance. Rutland Radio, the smallest radio station in the smallest county where one of the first stories I covered was a council meeting about whether they should still fund biscuits at council meetings.

123. It was there that I was one of the first to make that classic radio error that has also been made by Nicky Campbell among others, when I was trying to pronounce the Master of the Cottesmore Hunt. Turned out he was indeed a bit of a hunt.

124. They gave me voice training and I was given the same advice as Margaret Thatcher when she first started public speaking - to lower my voice and speak almost in a whisper in order to have more authority.

125. In my next radio job the first story I covered was about a dead frog found trapped in a bag of lettuce in Whitley Bay.

126. Then I discovered what I had in common with Wilfred Pickles.
An American radio consultant called Dennis said I wasn't allowed to read my own news bulletins because there was already a female presenter on the breakfast show and two female voices on the air in the morning would "confuse the listeners".

127. So I moved radio station again and given that I was only earning eleven grand a year it didn't make much difference.

128. I settled in there in Newcastle. Though I was still having to do my newsreader voice in order to convey the necessary authority. "Hello, this is the news at 6 o'clock, I'm Kate Fox"

129. One day the phone rang in the studio. I picked it up. These voices chanted “You is a posh snob, you is a posh snob...”
130. So it seems that I can never escape aspects of my cultural inheritance. They are written in my body and my voice. Some people will see me as working class because of it and others as... a posh snob. That is the cost of being in between, on the cusp. An eternal confusion. Never belonging or fitting in with either class - going to Waitrose and taking the free coffee - but then giving it to a homeless person because you feel guilty.
131. Which am I?
We have established that I have **[LIST THE POSSESSIONS / ATTRIBUTES FROM THE MIDDLE CLASS LIST]**
Now it's your chance to vote. Where am I on the class spectrum?
132. Hopefully you can help me through the difficult transition.
You could issue me with a certificate to say that I'm allowed to shop in Cath Kidston if I pass. The power is yours.
133. So - say “Rah” if you think I am middle class
“Wahey” if you think I am working class
and “Pure and Simple every time” if you think I am Mylene Klass.

134. You might be thinking it's more nuanced than that and you wish you could call me upper something or lower something else, but we've only got two minutes left, we haven't got time for nuance. As Tony Blair might have said to Wendi Deng. Okay. Let's vote.

135. **[KATE COMMENTS ON VOTE]**

136. I'll end by saying that I know for many people, class is something they pass on to their children without necessarily admitting it. Like syphilis. They want to think that their children have got where they are on their own merits not because of any advantages they may have passed on. I don't have children, but I do have a dog. This is about my much-loved cocker spaniel Norbert. Maybe because I don't want him to be confused or in-between, I think he is definitely a middle-class doggie:

137. **SIMMA PLAYS GUITAR UNDERNEATH**

138. **KATE POEM: A DOG OF THE MERITOCRACY**

Yes - class is part of what you inherit,
 though if Norbert ever got to Crufts
 I'd like to think that he had got there
 on his own merit.
 Not just because we'd groomed him
 for success, made sure his fur
 didn't look a mess,
 encouraged him to parade,

tail-up through the ring,
shushed him during that phase
when he barked at everything,
trained him not to poop
on the judge's shoe.

We do have a chart
containing his pedigree.

On his father's side,
are champion workers
going back years.

Renowned for their drug-sniffing noses
and prominent ears
(much like the royals).

It's a heritage we can point to
with pride,
though things go a bit weird
on his mother's side.

Not far back in her pedigree
there's a spaniel whose show name
was "Let's Talk About Sex Baby".

I'm not making that up.

But we didn't want either lineage
to unduly influence him

when he was a pup.

He's his own dog.

We just provide nourishing kibbles.

James Wellbeloved, rather than Pedigree Chum.

He went to the best puppy school,

we plan his activities,

we wipe his drool

but everything he achieves

will be completely on his own merits.

He could choose whether to be in adverts,

or chase ferrets.

But as it happens

he likes to do pretty much

what his Mummy and Daddy do,

not including the public nature

of his having a poo.

He socialises, he sleeps,

reads the Guardian,

shares our world view.

Due to all those books I read,

has excellent bite inhibition,

so is unlikely to be subject

to the dangerous dogs act.

We decided not to leave him intact

so there are no mongrel litters on the street
no puppy maintenance payments
he has to meet.

He's free to spend the days
sniffing his friend's bottoms.

So, no, I wouldn't say
he's had a headstart,
just because his Daddy
cooks him eggs and lambs heart.

It's all down to his talents,
and the way they have unfurled,
in what is still
it must be said
a dog eat dog world.

139. CREDITS:

The Price of Happiness was written and performed by me, Kate Fox.

The producer was Lianne Coop and it was an Impatient Production for
BBC Radio 4.