To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Robert David Zapinsky entitled "Comic Style and the Comedian's World: Phenomenological and Interpersonal Dimensions of Humor." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Leonard Handler

Leonard Handler, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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L Evans Beck

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Graduate Studies and Research

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COMIC STYLE AND THE COMEDIAN'S WORLD: PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND INTERPERSONAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMOR

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Robert David Zapinsky

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DEDICATION

To the man who was Captain Spaulding.

(1891 - 1977)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to fashion a description of humor grounded in social interaction. Previous studies have focused on the content of humorous communication and on locating the common denominators of jokes and humorous situations. A vastly different and richer view of humor emerges when one focuses on the phenomenological process of humorous communication.

The framework of the present analysis is derived from Goffman's theories of impression management and his "dramaturgical" model of social interaction as well as from work by communications theorists dealing with the paradoxical nature of human, and particularly humorous, communication. These approaches lead to the view that comics profoundly violate the rules of public interaction as well as the linguistic, conceptual and cognitive categories of experience.

A review of the research on comedy underscores the importance of a broad and elusive variable which one might best label the comedian's "world." An underlying intentionality, or "world," may be delineated in the work of any given comic. This intentionality frames the nature of the relationship between the comic and his audience, and is perhaps the most significant factor in both the generation and management of the tension rooted in comedic processes. The elements belonging to the comic's world include, but are

not limited to, the persona he presents to his audience, the body-image he projects and relates to his audience, the moral-view he depicts, and his idiosyncratic linguistic style and stage "personality."

In order to test and anchor the above theoretical considerations in a more concrete manner, empirical studies were done of the comic worlds of three famous comedians. For this purpose, selected nightclub routines, literary works and cinematic performances of Groucho Marx, Lenny Bruce, and Woody Allen were used. Surprisingly, the styles and worlds of these comedians are quite unlike one another and idiosyncratic in terms of the most relevant and salient dimensions that emerge in each case.

Thus, one finds that the projection of a consistent body-image, sharply polarized and paradoxical self-definitions, and the psychological enactment of a profound mind-body split are the most useful variables in understanding the sources of comic tension in Woody Allen's world. Woody also generates a strategic intimacy that allows one to fit his comic material into a uniquely <u>personal</u> nexus, rich in historical associations.

The thrust of Groucho's comedy is quite different, and involves an assault on adult rationality and experiential modes. One finds that his communicative style is structurally similar to hypnotic induction procedures; Marx paralyzes

audiences and forces them to embrace a fully phenomenological stance, one in which the exuberant anarchy of Groucho and his brothers is all that one has left to latch on to.

Finally, Lenny Bruce's comic world is one where tension comes from themes of victimization and from paradoxes that permeate his work. Lenny preaches moral relativism and invalidates adult values, but his style is burdened by moral outrage. He places powerful but inconsistent demands on audiences, leading them to attempt to please Bruce and enter his world because alternatives are blocked or too painful.

What emerges, finally, are the many functions and meanings laughter may have. In one comic world, people may laugh to affirm their "membership" of that world; in another, laughter may validate a definition of the comic which the audience wants to perserve and may invalidate aspects of the comedian which clash with this image; in a third, laughter may function to frame and structure experience, and as a way to grapple with the paradoxes of the comic's persona and world. To understand why people laugh at comics, one must study the individual world of each comic and the particular relationship each has with his audiences.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THEORIES OF HUMOR AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Gregory Bateson (1952) has observed that the paroxysms of laughter are structurally and perhaps neuro-physiologically similar to the convulsions of grief and orgasm; in any case, they are as universal. And, just as great minds throughout the ages have tried to explain and come to grips with tragedy and sexuality, so too, have philosophers since ancient times attempted to grapple with the phenomenon of laughter. Aristotle, Plato, Bergson, Hobbes, Kant, Descartes, Schopenhaur and Freud are among the roster of great men who, when not dealing with "Being," "Time," "Ideas," or "Man," have incorporated humor and laughter into their view of the world. In modern times, laughter has been dealt with by psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, cyberneticists, communications theorists, zoologists, philosophers, and biologists. Generally their efforts have been as interesting and unenlightening in explaining why men laugh as the efforts of those philosophers mentioned above, and one may legitimately wonder if much progress has been made in understanding humor since the Greeks made their original observations two thousand years ago.

Despite the number and diversity of theories about humor, one finds overriding similarities between different approaches towards theorizing about humor and in the theories themselves. Before undertaking a review of the research on humor, it is first necessary to examine and classify the different theoretical approaches. Most researchers (Berlyne, 1954; Flugel, 1954; Monroe, 1963) generally classify the theories of humor into three broad categories: superiority theories, "conflict" or incongruity theories, and tension-release theories. One author (Monro, 1963) goes on to offer a fourth broad category of ambivalence theories, but it seems that the examples he discusses can be recast into one or another of the three theoretical positions mentioned above.

Superiority Theories

Thomas Hobbes (Berlyne, 1954) is generally considered to be the originator of those theories of laughter based on superiority or "moral degradation" of the other. One laughed, he maintained, at the perception of a flaw, weakness, or folly in another, and the delight of laughter was the delight or "sudden glory" in the realization of one's superiority over the other. Additionally, one could laugh at one's own weakness, provided that it had been overcome in the past, in which case a past sense of self now

serves as a source of self-esteem in the present. Alexander Bain (Monro, 1963), writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, did much to extend Hobbes' argument. Bain did not believe that consciousness of one's own superiority was necessary for laughter to occur; one could laugh vicariously, as it were, by seeing some other person triumphant over an other. Additionally, the feeling of triumph could be directed at institutions, ideas, and other inanimate objects. Laughter at play-on-words and puns, for example, would then be due to a triumph over the power and majesty of words themselves. Bain even argued that laughter which seemed to stem from tension-release was really due to the degradation of the societal mores, interests, and establishments which had imposed the restraints. Generally, the position taken by Hobbes and Bain is adequate to explain laughter at most types of humorous situations, although the superiority view which they espoused has had great difficulty accounting for the humorous delight of sheer absurdity, word rhythms and associations, and intellectual wit based on the incongruity of ideas (Monro, 1963).

It is, however, in the writings of Albert Rapp (1947) that the superiority theory of humor is carried to its extreme. Rapp assumed that, at least originally, all laughter came from one original source. Considering the vicissitudes in the life of primitive man, Rapp argued,

rather plausibly, that laughter would have been preceded by an aggressive comparison or contest with an enemy, and that the laughter itself was a transfer to a less physical level of the overt reactions involved in physical beating; Rapp here is borrowing from a writer named Kallen, who argued that laughter occurred when primitive man, while fighting for his life, realized he was going to win and that he would have his prey totally at his mercy. Baring one's teeth when laughing, for example, is a derivative of the baring of teeth in a savage fight to the death. Laughter is the sudden release from the strain when the energy mobilized for such a fight is no longer needed to vanquish the enemy and spills over into a triumphant and gleeful expression of victory.

As civilization developed, this theory suggested, the aggressive amd savage sting of laughter was gradually numbed and submerged, laughter having become a reinforcing goal itself. Nevertheless, Rapp felt that the primitive base of laughter could be found in any form of humor. We laugh, for example, at riddles because riddles are staged verbal contests, in which we laugh with the winner at the loser. In primitive contests, usually physical in nature, the winner would typically laugh at the loser, who in turn felt deep shame and humiliation. With the socialization of man, the riddle became a socially staged contest, with the

reaction of shame becoming de-emphasized, and now even the loser may laugh in good grace at his own stupidity.

The superiority theories mentioned above may accurately be described as structural in nature, in that they attempt through biological, anthropological, and anatomical considerations, as well as through analysis of typically humorous situations to explain what humor is as opposed to what it is for. Questions of purpose and functions of humor were largely ignored.

Bergson (1911) is one superiority theorist who attempted to provide a bridge between structure and function of humor. Bergson observed that laughter occurs in situations where one finds rigidity, inelastic, stereotypical and maladaptive behavior, and, generally, any instance in which the "body reminds us of a mere machine." Bergson highlighted the derisive aspects of laughter, and emphasizes its socially corrective power--derived from the observation that laughter mocks eccentricity, aberration, and maladaptation. Ludovici (Flugel, 1954), by emphasizing that superiority and the laughter it engenders may cover up deep abiding feelings of inferiority, indirectly opened up the possiblity of understanding laughter by its functions. McDougall (Flugel, 1954) viewed the consequence of superiority as excessive sympathy and not aggression; laughter, he argued, functions to generate euphoria which inhibits one from experiencing a

dangerous and dysphoric overdose of sympathy. Flugel himself argues that laughter arising from superiority may be over-determined, with the overt aggressor possibly disguising an underlying sympathy for his victim, so that both could then direct aggression against a third party. Theodore Reik (Flugel, 1954), analyzing Jewish humor, argues that self-directed aggression and deprecation which characterize Jewish wit mask the aggression which Jews feel towards a Gentile world, which Jews hold responsible for creating the very deficiencies which they ridicule in themselves.

Tension-Release Theories

Turning to the second broad category of theories of humor, which, according to one scholar in the field (Summo, 1958), represents the viewpoint most widely investigated by modern researchers, one finds the theories that construe the essential basis of humor and laughter as the release of tension. Kline (Monro, 1963) rejected the idea that laughter involved superiority or derision, arguing that laughter occurred when mental tension, exceeding the capacity for controlled or organized thinking and emotion, occurred in the context of the triumph of "good" values simultaneous with a departure from or exaggeration of expected norms. Besides incorporating incongruity notions into his tension release theory, Kline also suggested a functional aspect of

humor: not only is humor a release from the strain of conscious attention it also allows people a sense of freedom, a release from monotony and the unquestioned world order, a placing of events in proper perspective.

By far the most comprehensive and influential of the tension-release theorists is Sigmund Freud (1916, 1920). Freud borrowed a key argument from Herbert Spencer, who was generally considered an incongruity theorist, which held that laughter resulted from a surplus of tension and that its sole function was to dissipate that tension. Analyzing the structure of jokes and the techniques of wit, Freud noted the occurrences of condensation, displacement, and the "nonsense" of primary process thinking, and concluded that humor and wit were similar to the psychoanalytic mechanisms involved in dream-work. Laughter occurred when a lesser expenditure of energy is required than what one had been prepared for. The pleasure involved in this psychic economy had its roots in the nonsense, word-play, and primary process operations of childhood. Hence it is possible for adults to laugh at what Freud called harmless wit, which was the enjoyment of wit for its own sake, because the pleasure of saving energy was reminiscent of childhood modes of cognition and fantasy. More typically, adults laugh at what Freud called tendency wit, which was wit involving the momentary gratification of repressed sexual and aggressive wishes. In

fact, by mollifying the censor and momentarily reducing the need to use energy to maintain the inhibition, tendency wit also saved the energy that was invested in the defenses. Here Freud appeared to be arguing that the function of wit, like that of dream-work, was to conserve energy and that this would be accomplished by disguising and partially gratifying impulses. Freud believed that in the case of dream-work this resulted in a relaxation of the censor and a continuation of sleep. He ignored this aspect in his comparison of sleep and wit, namely, the idea that for wit to be successful, it must, like dream-work, successfully delude the censor. Instead, Freud maintained that the primary focus of laughter was the conservation of energy in a manner similar to the primary process operations of childhood. By over-emphasizing considerations of psychic economy, Freud had to postulate a primary underived form of laughter, laughter at nonsense for its own sake, which caused him to virtually ignore the fact that much of his theory implied that the function of wit was to deceive the censor (Monro, 1963). In fact, subsequent researchers and psychoanalytic theorists have ignored Freud's stress on conservation of energy and have worked from the standpoint that the function of wit was to gratify instinctual wishes and reduce inhibitions (Flugel, 1954).

Several years later, Freud differentiated humor from harmless and tendency wit (Freud, 1928). In humor, Freud stressed, the outstanding features were the denial of reality and the triumph of the pleasure principle. Humor was a more mature form of play than both types of wit and involved a distancing from one's own misfortunes and a philosophical and somewhat comedic acceptance of them. Humor, then, is tied to superego functioning, in the sense of a parent reassuring the "child" or ego that its concerns are trivial and something to be joked about.

Incongruity Theories

The third major area of humor theories, and the one whose arguments and examples have proven most difficult to integrate with the other two, are the incongruity theories. Kant was probably the originator of this viewpoint, arguing that laughter resulted "from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (Monro, 1963, page 147). That is, incongruity in situations which result in the breakdown of expectations or dissolution of attitudinal sets, could cause laughter.

Schopenhaur (Berlyne, 1954) developed Kant's notion into a more formal theory. All which is ludicrous, he argued, could be reduced to a syllogism, with an absurd, if sophistically correct, conclusion. The unexpected

subsumption of an object under another idea or class of objects from which it formally differs is the source of humor. Note, however, that Schopenhaur considered only the structural properties of jokes, ignoring both the content and function of humor. Spencer (Monro, 1963) attempted to extend the incongruity theory and relate it to tension release by arguing that "descending" incongruity--the manipulated shift of attention from great things to small ones--resulted in the dissolution of an emotional attitude and a release of surplus energy in the form of laughter.

Having surveyed the classical theories of humor, one may now make the following observations:

Firstly, most of those who theorize on the subject of humor attempt to fit it into their own particular world-view or theory of the mind. Thus Hobbes, who viewed society as predicated on the argument that people had to band into society to control the savage, competitive and aggressive instincts of the individual, emphasized superiority and aggression in his ideas about humor. Freud, who construed man as a mechanistic and hydraulic system of forces and counterforces, argued that laughter would result from a conservation of this hydraulic, psychic energy. To the extent that these classical theories of humor are wedded to interesting but outmoded or naive concepts of man or society, they too suffer from naivete and oversimplification.

Secondly, there appears to be a relevant distinction (and, in the case of some writers, a confusion) between structural and functional aspects of humor. The fact that some writers can find latent aggression, others latent sexuality, others incongruity, and still others expressions of superiority in jokes and humorous situations suggests that none of these factors is an adequate explanation of humor. Moreover, the idea that many of these writers can then go on to express the function of this humor, sometimes in completely different terms, does little to simplify the problem. Obviously, in broaching this issue, one is leaving the terrain of humor per se and touching on epistemological considerations relating to the meaning of explanation. Conceivably, one could, as the author of this paper will attempt to do, bypass the issue of structure versus function as necessary for explanation, by adopting a phenomenological stance, eschewing explanation of why people laugh in favor of a description of the process. Both structural and functional aspects of humor will necessarily emerge, though neither will be offered to "explain" humor; hopefully, functional and structural aspects will interrelate and form a unitary gestalt, with neither one being more necessary or basic to understand the process of humor.

Thirdly, most of the aforementioned writers act as if there is only one explanation of humor and will go through

all kinds of logical and rhetorical contortions to find examples proving their theory, while simultaneously ignoring or trying to incorporate the objections of the other classical theorists. For example, by trying to incorporate ideas of incongruity into his tension-release theory, Freud is forced to maintain the existence of a primary pleasure in laughter, that in turn forces him into several inconsistencies and elusions with respect to the role wit plays in deceiving the censor and gratifying impulses. Albert Rapp is perhaps the guiltiest of all in this respect, assuming that all laughter originally had to come from one source; even if it once did, that source does not have to be the primary operative feature in the various forms of contemporary humor.

One cannot help but marvel at the failure of classical writers to simply accept the logic of their opponents' arguments; only Eyesynck (1942) has had the insight to incorporate the three major theoretical arguments into his model of humor. Drawing an isosceles triangle, Eyesynck placed the labels "affective" and "conative" at the base of the triangle with the label "cognitive" at its apex. He goes on to suggest that all theories of humor, as well as instances and events which typically caused laughter, could fit at one or another point within the triangle, with no one point having more intrinsic validity than any other. Parenthetically, it should be noted that the "affective" and

"conative" positions are closer to each other than to the "cognitive" position because Eyesynck felt that there was much similarity and overlap betweeen the former two approaches. Monro (1963), reviewing the various theories of humor does not have too much difficulty integrating the tension-release and superiority approaches, but argues that both of these orientations have as their stumbling block the arguments and examples of the incongruity position. Generally, a comprehensive model of humor will have to absorb not only the ideas that humor provides release from tension and typically does this by allowing the expression of aggression, but it must also account for the presence of elements of surprise and logical inconsistency found in many humorous situations which the incongruity theories account for so well.

Fourthly, most of the classical writers take a surprisingly molecular approach in the analysis of humorous events. That is, most writers analyze jokes and then try to find the common denominator within these jokes and other "classically" humorous situations, such as a man falling on a banana peel, a pie thrown in one's face, etc. Not only is the unit of analysis (i.e., the joke or highly circumscribed "classical" situations) quite molecular, but the notion of looking for a common denominator also partakes of a molecular, atomistic and reductionistic approach to the study of humor.

These remarks should not necessarily be construed as criticism, since a reductionistic approach has its utility. However, a molar and holistic approach, in which the humor is studied as it occurs in natural settings and in natural, more global units (which admittedly do not lend themselves to facile analysis) has not been utilized.

Finally, and consistent with their refusal to compromise and take into account each of the broad categories of causes of laughter, most classical theorists fail to differentiate between the physiological, psychological and social determinants and functions of laughter and humor, and fail to consider the ways in which these factors may interact. Note that a similar conceptual fuzziness was mentioned above in terms of the difficulty the classical writers have had in differentiating structure and function. Humor may have a variety of bases and functions; hence, it would be less appropriate to consider the correctness of a particular theory than to consider what level of abstraction one uses is his approach to theorizing about humor (Stephenson, 1950).

It is fairly apparent that the fourth and final points, those pertaining to the exclusive use of a molecular approach and the refusal of writers to be conceptually distinct about the level of abstraction they use, have had their most telling effect in terms of the inability of most

theorists to appreciate and discuss humor from a social and social-psychological viewpoint. To be sure, some writers have recognized how critical the social factors are as determinants of humor and the extent to which humor is a social phenomenon. Flugel (1954) noted that the phenomenon of tickling, which typically was so difficult for any theory of laughter to account for, required an "other" to tickle and to induce the laughter, thereby indicating what he called laughter's "psychological" base. Berlyne (1954) notes that despite all achievements in computer science and cybernetics, no computer or mechanical or electronic simulator is capable of producing any skill corresponding to humor creativity or appreciation. Allport (Perl, 1933) felt that the social environment was critical in producing a humorous response by allowing for the release of common restrained impulses, the feeling of moral sanction accompanying their release, and the facilitating stimulus of others laughing. And Coser (1959) makes the interesting observation that laughter occurs within a communications network in which others are present, that it is atypical to laugh by oneself, and that one who does so runs the risk of becoming socially stigmatized.

The neatest summary statement of the issues raised above is that the classical theorists on humor were wedded to a particular set of epistemological assumptions about the

way the world was and how knowledge of it could be discovered. Typically, one finds much emphasis on analysis, mechanisms, reductionism, and a rather obsessive concern with "explanation" of the phenomenon of laughter in cause and effect terms. Thus, the confusion between structure and function, as well as a confusion between how important each is in "explaining" an event, is likely due to the fact that both structures and functions of humor were construed as its "causes." Concern with analysis and with the finding of least common denominators have led theorists to ignore molar behavior, and to attempt to find the theory of humor, when, in fact, it is fairly clear that no single formula can explain all humorous situations. Similarly, analysis in cause and effect terms does not lend itself to a consideration of societal interaction, as would a field-theory approach for example, and therefore it is predictable that the social-psychological underpinnings of humor would have been ignored.

The question arises as to what a model of humor would look like if one took a phenomenological viewpoint, and searched, not so much for the theory of humor but attempted to describe, rather than explain, the process of humor. As V. K. Menon (1931) notes, humor is not an objective attribute or verbal statement; if this were the case, everyone would find the same events funny. Rather, humor is a subjective phenomenon, an emotional reaction within situations.

Jokes are not intrinsically sidesplitting or unfunny, and, in fact, much of what people laugh at should not be considered jokes at all, but elaborately built-up situations that must be understood within their own total context. Hence, the study of humor does not merely invite the phenomenological method--it demands it. There is no objective, all-embracing theory or explanation of humor simply because there cannot be one. Humor cannot be abstracted from its natural context, but must be studied within the social fabric of events in which it is typically embedded.

It is in this spirit that the present work will attempt to describe a certain type of humor production--the cinematic, written and nightclub productions of three select comedians. Before this can be done, a methodological framework will be presented that is consistent with a phenomenological, descriptive approach. As will be shown, such a framework, required for ordering the data, can usefully incorporate the communications perspective of writers such as Jay Haley and Gregory Bateson with the dramaturgical metaphor of Erving Goffman. Hopefully, the logic of studying the humor of a group of people who make their living by being funny will have its own intuitive appeal. Moreover, the study of molar segments and live performances of comedians and the attempt to describe and characterize the idiosyncratic world which they invite their audiences to enter is an

attempt to redress the oversights of the classical theorists, and to consider humor holistically, as it occurs in its natural and fully social setting.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON HUMOR

Generally, the psychological literature on humor is relatively sparse and is characterized by contradictions and a lack of agreed upon findings. In fact, more consensus is found among researchers in the field when they discuss the need for further research and the inadequacy of current experimental procedures than when they discuss the results of research already completed.

The earliest experiments in the field were characterized by the collection of diaries, questionnaires and anecdotes from subjects. These experiments were important, not so much for their findings, but for their attempt to derive an understanding of the factors which would make people laugh in natural settings. Theoretical positions were eschewed, and when experimental design was used at all, it would typically be conceptually simple, utilizing psychophysical techniques and introspection.

Hall and Allen (1897) did one of the earliest classical studies in this vein. They simply asked subjects to recount stories relating to instances of laughter and to humorous situations. They concluded that laughter tends to occur as a tension-reduction mechanism, and resulted when the restraints at what was forbidden begin to break down.

Unfortunately, what was "forbidden," these authors felt, inhered in the content of the humorous communication and not in the act of or manner in which the humorous communication occurred.

Another classical study was done by Martin (1905). Utilizing psychophysical techniques and introspection, Martin presented a series of humorous pictures to subjects and found that incidental factors, such as the number of pictures, the amount of repetition, body posture of the subjects, and the size of the pictures and speed of repetition, could affect the subject's appreciation of the pictures.

Kambouropoulou (1926) conducted an experiment to link personality attributes with appreciation of different types of humor. She asked seventy female college students to keep diaries for a week in which they recorded everything which made them laugh. She concluded that jokes which made subjects laugh could be divided into incongruity or superiority types; she found that subjects laughed at superiority jokes as much as 65 per cent of the time. When asked to rank sixteen jokes for humorous appeal, the subjects displayed a high degree of consistency with respect to their individual preferences for "superiority jokes" or "incongruity jokes." Utilizing a self-rating questionnaire and friends' ratings, Kambouroupoulou also found a positive correlation

between appreciation of superiority types of jokes with what he labeled "personal" humor, and extraversion.

Reviewing studies done in 1937 and 1974, in which questionnaire material was used in lieu of diaries to determine what made subjects laugh, Pollio and Edgerly (1975) concluded that there is still a high degree of consistency in the types of humorous events at which college students report laughing. These authors added more categories to those utilized by Kambouropoulou and found a higher proportion of laughter occurred at the more "benign" forms of humor. Their basic conclusion confirmed Kambouropoulou's finding that even contemporary students tended to laugh at superiority jokes and situations more than half the time.

Another one of the more significant earlier studies, and one which involved an appreciation of the social matrix of humor, was a study done by Perl (1933). Presenting the same joke content visually, orally, and in written form to solitary subjects and to groups of subjects, Perl asked each subject to rate the jokes presented. She concluded that jokes presented orally tended to be rated slightly funnier than jokes presented in writing, and that jokes presented in cartoon form were rated significantly higher than when presented in written or oral form. Additionally, Perl found that jokes presented to an audience tended to have a more dispersed rating distribution than when presented to solitary

subjects. Finally, Perl noted a social facilitation effect tended to raise the scores of the least funny jokes.

As a summary statement, one finds that there was little research done in the area of humor from the time of Perl's work until the early 1950's. It was only when psychologists began to see the areas of self-stimulation, curiousity, and play as worthy of serious experimentation that humor was also allowed back into the psychological laboratory. Essentially, experiments were now performed to validate one or another of the theoretical approaches discussed in the first chapter.

Beyond the findings of Kambouropoulou and the conclusions of Pollio and Edgerly (1975), research supporting the superiority theory of humor has been quite sparse. It is likely, however, that this situation is more reflective of the interests of most researchers than it is of any fundamental weakness in the superiority theory. La Fave, McCarthy and Haddad (1973), testing Hobbes' theory that humor involved putting down another, found that jokes were seen as funnier to the extent that one's own group was enhanced at the expense of other groups. It is difficult to decide whether the findings of these authors support a particular structural viewpoint of humor (i.e., the joke as putdown) as much as it underscores a particular social function of humor (i.e., strategic manipulation designed to increase group morale via putdown of outsiders).

Cantor and Zillman (1973) presented cartoons to subjects in which one would be likely to either sympathize with or resent the hero of the cartoon, who was then put in disparaging situations that were either mild or severe. The authors came up with the unexpected finding that, in the "sympathetic" condition, severity of the misfortune did not effect appreciation of the cartoons, but in the "resentment of hero" condition, severity of misfortune actually impaired humor appreciation. This finding should not be construed as refutation of the superiority theories, since the authors found that, apart from severity of misfortune, resentment of the hero increased the subjects' appreciation of the cartoons. Rather, the findings of this study point to underlying aggressive and tension-release components that are implicit to laughter at "superiority" situations, and suggest that a naive or simple superiority theory is not adequate to understand the interplay of aggression, sympathy and the balance between covert and overt gratification of impulses with the appreciation of humor.

Studying the psychodynamic qualities of sexual jokes, William Fry (1972-a; 1972-b) found that most sexual jokes are about women and portray them as sensuous, insatiable "dumb blonde" types, or, alternately, as hard, calculating and practical, even when appearing to be in the throes of passion. He suggests that sexual jokes reveal the antagonism

of men towards women and are an attempt to defuse the female image of its power and reassure men of their masculinity. Again, this study points to the interplay between superiority and tension-release models of humor and suggests to this writer the relationships between structure and function of humor, if perhaps failing to sharply clarify them. Fry's work is also significant in that it is rooted in psycho-analytic and superiority theories, but also stresses function, intentionality, and the need to adapt to a given field or context as important features for the understanding of humor.

As with the research for the superiority model, research into the incongruity theories has been quite sparse. D. I. Kenny (1955) had a group of college students rate jokes for degrees of humor. These jokes had been pre-rated by a smaller group for unexpectedness of ending. Kenny predicted that unexpectedness of the endings, which he equated with the incongruity of the joke, should increase humor appreciation. The opposite was found to be true; subjects preferred jokes with expected endings. Kenny concluded that this finding could have been due to the fact that the jokes themselves may have tapped into unconscious motivations and conflicts in subjects and that this factor may have completely over-ridden the humor-enhancing effects of incongruity.

In the same vein, Schick, McGlynn and Woolam (1972) manipulated the anxiety levels of subjects before presenting them with both familiar and unfamiliar cartoons to be rated for degree of humor. They found that all subjects preferred the familiar cartoons, but that the humor ratings of the unfamiliar ones improved with increased exposure and familiarity, and that the preference of the familiar over the unfamiliar was more pronounced in highly anxious subjects.

Obviously, given the work of Kambouropoulou (1926) and Pollio and Edgerly (1975), in which incongruity was shown to be a prominent feature of events and jokes which resulted in laughter, one cannot construe the failure of experimental findings discussed above to bear out incongruity theories to be reason enough to discard this approach. It would be more accurate to say that a paradox has been generated: the notion that incongruity causes people to laugh has both intuitive appeal and empirical validation, but experiments in the field suggest that people prefer the expected over the unexpected in humor. It is hoped that an understanding of this paradox may emerge through the phenomenologically oriented, communications/dramaturgical model of comedy to be presented in the chapters which follow. To anticipate this understanding, it may be stated briefly that humor must arise out of a consistent, familiar context or world to which an audience can relate, and while it is

probable, perhaps even essential, that incongruity would be a feature of such a world, audiences relate to, and appreciate the stable relational regularities of the individual comic's universe. Incongruity itself can be a stable feature of such a world, particularly if one focuses on the idiosyncratic style, manner, and cognitive modes of a comic's incongruity instead of on the content.

By far, most of the research done in the field of humor has been rooted in the tension-release model. Much of this research has come from a "naive" psychoanalytic viewpoint--naive in the sense that researchers in the field of comedy have dispensed with the elegant but cumbersome aspects of Freud's theory related to the conservation of psychic energy as the source of laughter. Researchers influenced by Freud's views now see humor as providing pleasure by gratification of forbidden impulses and by reduction of the anxiety stemming from this forbidden gratification as well as from the breakdown of inhibitions.

A related strategic approach to research involves the introduction of a drive-reduction model which also assumes that humor gratifies and reduces drive states, particularly sexual and aggressive ones. Humor is thus a positive reinforcer because it becomes associated with the reduction of the particular drives involved. Note that this approach, while a tension-release model, derives from

classical--particularly Hullian--behavioral theory and may dispense with cognitive and unconscious considerations which are so important to the Freudian model. Generally, whichever of these two approaches researchers have adopted, one of two basic designs has been utilized. In the first, researchers typically correlate humor appreciation with an inherent level of arousal in experimental subjects, with the arousal level presumably related to fixed personality traits, structures or conflict areas of the subjects. The other design induces and differentially manipulates the level of arousal in the experimental situation in order to study the effects of level of arousal on the appreciation or creation of humor.

One of the classical studies relating enduring drive-state levels to humor preference was done by Doris and Fierman (1956). Differentiated by a self-rating questionnaire into high and low anxious groups, the subjects were shown cartoons by either a male or female examiner. The cartoons had been differentially pre-rated by mental health professionals with respect to the aggressive, sexual and nonsensical component of each. The authors found that there was a differential preference, with highly anxious subjects rating the aggressive cartoons as less humorous than low anxious subjects. Further analysis of the data revealed that this finding was valid only in the condition of opposite sex

administration. The authors hypothesized that this was due to the sex difference alone, though they could not decide why this was so or whether, despite efforts to maintain a standardized administration of the stimulus material, the examiners were giving off differential experimental cues dependent on the sex of the subject. In any case, the authors concluded that investigations of the relationship between humor and anxiety would do better to focus less on the stimulus material, jokes, or cartoons, and more on the social context in which the humor occurs.

Donn Byrne (1958) attempted to manipulate drive level and assessed its effects on humor appreciation. Taking a strictly Hullian approach, Byrne predicted increased drive level would increase subjects' ratings of humor, and conversely, decreased drive level would decrease ratings of humor. Students were administered seven cartoons and were asked to rate them for humor. Then one such group of students was told to expect a difficult exam, another group to expect a class party, and both groups were readministered the cartoons. A third group was also readministered the cartoons after having taken an exam and this group was presumed to have a decreased drive level. The pleasantly aroused group and unpleasantly aroused group showed no difference in humor appreciation on readministration. Additionally lowered drive level did not affect humor appreciation. Byrne

hypothesized that his predicitions proved false because arousal might not correlate with general humor appreciation but with specific humorous situations matched with the particular drive aroused. Unpleasantly aroused students, for example, may well have appreciated cartoons showing students cheating or ridiculing the instructor. Byrne also suggested that the artificiality of rating magazine cartoons for humor may have impeded humor appreciation and obscured results.

Epstein and Smith (1956), arguing that research had demonstrated that individuals showed consistency in preference for certain types of humor, and that such consistency was related to personality variables and degree of psychological adjustment, attempted to establish a relationship between repression of hostility and humor appreciation. Members of a fraternity were asked to rate sixteen hostile and sixteen neutral cartoons on degree of humor. They were then asked to rank order themselves and the other members of the fraternity according to degrees of hostility. Significantly under-rating or over-rating oneself compared to the group assessment was construed as a measure of repression of hostility and lack of insight, while accurate assessment of oneself with respect to group judgment was a measure of insight and lack of repression. The authors failed to find a relationship between the degree of insight and the

correspondence between individual or the group rating of a cartoon, with the correspondence between the last two of these variables taken to be a measure of the social appropriateness of one's sense of humor.

John Strickland (1959) attempted to study whether specificity of humor appreciation and drive arousal were related to each other. Mindful of the failure of the above evidence to bear out the role of repression in humor, Strickland felt that he could account for a relationship in terms of suppression and displacement. Subjects were asked to rate 33 cartoons on a fifteen point scale for degree of humor; one-third of the cartoons had been pre-judged as sexual, one-third aggressive, and one-third neutral in tone. One-third of the subjects were given extremely rude treatment by the examiner before seeing the cartoons and were presumed to be aggressively aroused, one-third were asked to rate erotic nude photos before seeing the cartoons and were presumed to be erotically aroused, and the remaining third was a control group. The hypothesis of specificity of drive arousal increasing specific types of humor appreciation was confirmed. Donn Byrne (1961), using different procedures to arouse his subjects failed to confirm Strickland's results. And Dworkin and Efran (1967), believing that previous experiments had failed to arouse the desired affects, used the Mood Adjective Checklist to measure this factor and found a

strong positive relationship between hostile-aroused subjects and appreciation of hostile humor, thus disconfirming Byrne's findings and agreeing with those of Strickland. Additionally, they found that exposure to hostile and non-hostile forms of humor tended to lessen feelings of hostility and anxiety.

Rosenwald, appalled at the over-simplification of Freudian theory by humor researchers, argued that the means of conflict resolution and the "lability" (flexibility) of an individual's defenses were as important as the presence of a particular internal conflict in determining when and what would be laughed at. He faults Doris and Fierman for using a test-anxiety questionnaire as the measure of inhibiton and then failing to use jokes relating to achievement, mastery and the like. This would have been necessary, he argues, because in analytic theory the inhibition and the joke should have a similar content. Similarly, he faults Byrne's work for assuming that hostile behavior does not occur in people with inhibitions against aggression, and also for ignoring the occurrence of over-compensation and counterphobic behavior. For Rosenwald, the pivotal factor in causing a humorous reaction should be the ease of discharge of an impulse and the willingness of the individual to confront taboo themes. In an attempt to demonstrate the validity of this argument, Rosenwald (1964) utilized TAT responses of subjects to rate them as having either direct

socialized drive discharge patterns, direct unsocialized discharge patterns, or indirect and weak discharge patterns. Each subject was then asked to rate seven hostile cartoons and seven neutral ones. Subjects with weak discharge patterns preferred to rate the hostile cartoons as being neutral or low in humor, while subjects with direct socialized discharge patterns responded more positively to hostile cartoons than to neutral ones; subjects with direct impulsive discharge patterns either extremely liked or disliked the hostile cartoons as compared with the neutral ones.

Levine and Abelson (1959), although preceding Rosenwald's work by five years, provides corroboratory evidence for his findings. Testing normals, stabilized inpatients, and acute anxiety or phobic reactions, these authors found that overt and covert responses to humorous cartoons was related to the degree of "disturbingness" (as judged by mental health professionals) of the cartoons. Hospitalized patients did not react as favorably as normals to disturbing cartoons, and the acutely agitated patients were most pronounced in their dislike of disturbing cartoons. Hence, it was argued, ability and flexibility in discharge of tension was critical for a humorous response to occur.

Arguing that the use of insult and rudeness to arouse subjects could cause them to feel threatened and lead to a suppression of humorous reactions, Singer (1968) had

groups of black subjects listen to inflammatory racial speeches and then listen to an anti-segregationist routine by a black comedian. Other groups of black subjects similarly aroused listened to a routine by the same comedian on nuclear fallout, while still other black subjects listened to a non-inflammatory speech on segregation before exposure to the hostile or the neutral comedy routines. Singer found that both types of humor reduced aggression for aroused subjects. Moreover, subjects tested in the late summer of 1963, after numerous national riots and racial incidents, showed low post-humor aggression and tension when exposed to the hostile but not the neutral comedy routine, thereby supporting the idea that hostile humor could facilitate catharsis in experimentally aroused subjects. Singer noted that it might not be the hostility of the humor per se that was cathartic; rather, it could have been the sense of mastery or perhaps the fantasy-world (of black supremacy) that the black comedian created that were the critical factors in tension-reduction.

In contrast to the results of this study, Young and Frye (1966) were able to find no cathartic effect or any correlation between differential motivational arousal and appreciation of different types of humor. These authors did find that male subjects would key their overt humor responses to that of a female examiner (who in some groups would laugh, in others act embarrassed and in others act neutral),

particularly in the case of sexual jokes, leading them to conclude that issues of interpersonal perception of the examiner and the demand characteristics of the situation are more important than either arousal or humor content in leading to a humorous response.

Reviewing the literature relating motivational arousal, catharsis and personality factors to humor appreciation, Levine (1969) concludes that there is much contradiction, and few results that most writers agree with; some researchers, he notes, have even found an increase in drive level after exposure to humor instead of the hypothesized cathartic reduction. He also notes the arousal of possible conflicting and suppressing emotions, such as anxiety and guilt in subject placed in experimental situations designed to evoke anger. Levine agrees with Rosenwald that and individual's defensive structure, coupled with his willingness to confront taboo themes and accept the humorist's invitation to enter his world and partake of the social fantasy he creates, are very critical features in predicting whether a humorous response will occur. Levine goes on to point out that researchers cannot even agree whether overt or displaced (symbolic) aggression is cathartic, and this would have to be determined before a more thorough-going strategy to study the role of humor in catharsis could be developed. Finally, he argues that the humor response has been incredibly

sensitive to slight differences in methodology, and that the overall results suggests the importance of considering humor within a social context.

Efforts to study humor in its social context come, not from psychology, but from sociology. Ruth Coser (1959) suggests that the humor response is primarily a social one and typically functions within a communicative relationship. She studied humor, not in the context of the laboratory, but in a setting where it occurred naturally, on a hospital ward. Coser found that patients used humor to socialize newer patients into the patient role and hospital routine; humor production allowed one to fashion reality for himself and the other patients, and allowed the group to reinterpret and share collective experiences which patients had previously considered private. Coser differentiated between complaints, which implied inequality and the sense that the complainer was more important than other patients, and the jocular gripe, which was more democratic, in that it allowed others to share the grievance.

In a later study, Coser (1960) examined the function of laughter at staff meetings in a mental hospital. She found that within the professional hierarchy, wit was most often directed downwards to members lower on the hierarchy, and it was never directed upwards. Those at the top of the hierarchy (presumably having more targets, but also having

more power in deciding when and how humor could be allowed) made more use of humor than those at the bottom.

Stephenson (1950) analyzed hundreds of jokes found in American anthologies and collections of humor. He was interested in distinguishing between conflict (jokes concealing malice and aggression) and control (jokes upholding certain values and preventing deviance) functions of humor. He concluded that jokes functioned to uphold "The American Way," emphasizing opportunity, equality, and ambition, while ridiculing the top and bottom classes only to the extent that their stereotyped behavior deviated from these ideals. Connotations of class consciousness and themes of aggressive conflict were minimal in the jokes Stephenson studied.

One should not construe the conflict and control functions of humor as discrete, separate entities. Reik (Flugel, 1954), in studying Jewish ghetto humor, found that the fierce self-deprecatory humor of Jews masked their aggressiveness towards Gentiles, whom they held responsible for creating in the Jews the very flaws which were the targets of Jewish self-directed humor. In this case, one sees a blending and a disguising of the conflict and control functions of humor. Moreover, humor, and the conflict and control functions which it masks, can be directed against one's own social class; Middleton and Moland (1959), asking students to write down the jokes they heard for a week,

found that black students told significantly more anti-black jokes, suggesting that they too had adopted the white value system for which they affected dislike. Another interesting finding of this study was the result that the average student only heard about five jokes a week. This finding contrasts sharply with the finding that students laugh about twenty times a day (Pollio and Edgerly, 1975). Such a discrepancy suggests that most laughter is not caused by jokes but is the product of social interaction.

Given the importance of the social setting and the functions of humor in understanding how and why it occurs, one logical area of investigation would be to study institutionalized uses of humor, particularly the social milieu, style and functions of those who become the socially designated creators of humor: the comedian, clown, wit and humorist. There is little available data in experimental psychology dealing with comedians, and whatever studies exist have been psychoanalytically oriented. Martin Grotjahn (1959) acknowledges the psychological importance of humor production; for the comedian, there occurs a creative communication between his conscious and unconscious processes, resulting in happiness from the fulfillment of one's potential abilities. Differentiating between the humorist (who capitalizes on incongruity and nonsense) and the wit (who capitalizes on hostility), Grotjahn finds that humorist are

characterologically related to masochists and depressives. They show an awareness of misery in the world but pretend to be victorious over it via infantile narcissism and denial. The wit, on the other hand, is closer to the sadistic character structure and uses words as aggression against others, and even against language itself.

Jacob Levine (1961), also adopting a psychoanalytic viewpoint, investigated the literature on clowns and fools in primitive cultures. He found frequent mention of scatological, destructive and lewd acts by clowns and also noted that the institutionalized ritualistic role of clowning allows for expression of the tribe's primitive archaic fantasies. Besides demonstrating complete abandon in these ceremonies, the clowns will typically go to the opposite extreme of marked self-abnegation; additionally, the group may turn on the clown during the ceremony and literally beat him up or defecate on him. Such unusual phenomena demonstrate both the clown's and the audience's ambivalence towards the meaning of his actions and demonstrate the strong underlying desire to punish one who defies and mocks institutions as the clown has done. Levine argues that in primitive clowning, the clown takes responsibility for acting on a fantasy he shares with the audience, and he then undertakes symbolic expiation via simulated castration, abnegation and self-ridicule.

In a more sociological vein, Klapp (1950) reflects the ambivalence which is structured into the roles of fool and clown. The fool is an institutionalized type and represents values rejected by the group, incompetency, lost causes, and failure. He is the antithesis of decorum, beauty, grace, and intelligence. The status of the fool is low; he is tolerated, licensed, but also ridiculed. The fool is a moralist-in-reverse, providing his audience with a world-view to be valued and upheld, by offering himself up to ridicule for not measuring up to that world-view.

In reviewing the thinking and research on comedians and comic style, Pollio and Edgerly (1975) seem to find a dichotomy between sarcastic wits and whimsical wits, which probably reflects the dichotomy between the elements of incongruity and hostility that are both present in most humor. Whimsical wits tend to be better liked but less influential in groups than sarcastic wits, who are more powerful, not well liked, but more appreciated by others who are also witty. In reviewing their own work on humor occuring in videotaped group therapy sessions, these authors found that two people tended to emerge as the ones who initiated humorous comments. One of these made more self-directed remarks than anyone else in the group, and his attempts at wit were preceded by body movement and agitation and were followed by nervous laughter and lack of eye contact with

others. The other person made relatively few self-directed remarks, and his attempts at wit were surrounded by an aura of confidence and self-assuredness. What emerges, the authors argue, is a portrait of a butt or whimsical wit and the sarcastic wit in this particular group, taking roles not unlike those of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, respectively. In fabricating his world, then, the comic draws on his institutionalized, if ambivalent, role as a fool which will usually incorporate aspects of both wit and butt. Additionally, he will utilize what the authors call the "fire" or those taboo themes that are the content or fuel for laughter.

In an effort to dimensionalize the possibilities of the comedian's world, Pollio, Edgerly, and Jordan (1972) asked students to list all the comedians they could think of, and from this list the authors took 37 names. They administered this list to another group of students and asked them to write down other comedians which each of the names brought to mind. Factor-analysis of the degree of overlap between comedians yielded eight clusters of comics. After considering each cluster, the authors were able to conclude that there were two discrete underlying dimensions reflected in the clusters. The first dimension dealt with the surface properties of each comedian, such as sex, race, being one member of a comedy "team," or era of popularity,

and the other dimension reflected aspects of comic style. One of the factors which emerged from the latter dimension was verbal-urbane-late-night-talk-show comedian, which the authors called a verbal fluency factor; additionally, a hostility factor was also found. Although the authors felt that their results had intuitive appeal, they were somewhat disappointed in the paucity of the dimensions uncovered.

Further research with this list of 37 comedians, which involved the asking of students to associate adjectives to individual comics and to clusters of comedians, is reported in Pollio and Edgerly (1975). Using different statistical and methodological approaches in the generation and interpretation of data, these authors found that several associative clusters and dimensions emerge. Firstly, the comedians were seen in fairly negative terms; over half of the adjectives generated about the comics were negative. Secondly, clusters of associations to other comedians suggest that the persona presented by these comedians is what people were most likely to react to, particularly to the extent a consistent body image was incorporated in the persona. Multi-dimensional scaling analysis of the data generated yielded the finding that "loud" and "zany" people were at the center of the comedian's world, and that the people clustered there tended to look rather undersirable and act "weird." The actions of these people are generally benign and self-deprecating,

leading the authors to conclude that the basic form of comedy art is the clown's art, and that "all comedians, no matter how polished or articulate, draw their inspiration from this common comic center (Pollio and Edgerly, 1975, page 29). Finally, noting the preponderance of minority comedians, particularly Jews, the authors argue that humor may be a strategy designed to acceptably channel social aggression against the ethos and prejudices of the majority.

In efforts to examine the effects of audience composition on laughter, Murphy and Pollio (1973) exposed groups of students to recordings of comedy skits by Bill Cosby and Don Rickles. Half the groups were composed of strangers, and the other groups were made up of friends. Filming and noting audience behavior through one-way mirrors, the authors found that people in the "Cosby Strangers Group" moved more than those in the "Rickles Strangers Group." Marked differences were found between Friends and Strangers in the Rickles groups but not in the Cosby groups. Friends in both conditions moved and talked and laughed a good deal. Subjects in "Rickles Strangers Groups" were markedly inactive, did not tend to laugh and had little spontaneous eye interaction or conversation with others in the group. Furthermore while 37 per cent of the "Friends" liked Rickles more, only 2 per cent of the "Strangers" did.

In an effort to interpret these findings, the authors had to consider the type of world which each of the two comedians invited his audiences to enter. They felt that Cosby's world was primarily nonsensical, with Cosby focusing on himself and on experiences outside the present. Cosby is a "nice guy," and he invites his audience to enter the world of their childhood; audience composition, then, would not be critical in responding to Cosby's routines. Rickles, on the other hand, focuses on failure, ugliness, and inferiority in the present; his is not the world of the "nice guy," but a world where he seizes upon some poor unfortunate in the audience and proceeds to destroy him with his formidable wit. Friends would support each other in this case by laughing together, the group being stronger than the individual comedian. A group of strangers would not receive this support, and the lack of laughter would have a further inhibitory effect on people in the audience.

As a summary statement, research in the area of humor presents conflicting evidence for each of the theories of humor and fails to support one or another of them. Elements of aggression (superiority theories), tension-release, and incongruity have to be integrated into any comprehensive model of humor. The research does indicate that laughter is notoriously susceptible to the experimental methods used to study it, and workers in the field express

dissatisfaction with the techniques that are currently used; many authors argue that less attention should be paid to the presentation and evaluation of humorous material by subjects and more work should be done on the interpersonal and communicative context of humor. While some attempt has been made towards this end, by using recorded skits of professional comedians instead of merely jokes or cartoons, much work still has to be done to redress this imbalance. Finally, while there has been some recent work on the various possible dimensions that enter into the creation of the world of the comedian, a detailed description of the possible idiosyncratic worlds that individual comedians have used has not been done. It is the aim of the present study to undertake this effort.

CHAPTER III

INTERPRETIVE HYPOTHESES AND PROPOSED METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In the chapter on theories of humor, it was argued that the classical thinkers of humor were wedded to particular mechanistic theories of causality, which led them to assume that there was a key to understanding humor and that the key was embedded in the structure of jokes and other "classically" humorous situations. In their pursuit of the common structural denominators of humorous situations, these thinkers either ignored functional aspects or confouned them with structural ones. At any rate, the social matrix, so critical to understanding humor, was largely ignored. Moreover, even when workers in this field transcended the atomistic and causal epistemological mold, the more creative aspects of their findings were overlooked by the mainstream. Hayworth (1928), for example, argued that laughter was a signal to the group that it could relax with safety. The notion of safety, as well as bodily tension, was critical to his theory. However, the communicative aspects of this theory were overlooked, and Hayworth's notions were typically incorporated into the tension-release viewpoint.

With respect to research, the microscopic, atomistic, causal "scientific" approach has prevailed here too.

Only in the mid-1960's did workers even consider using comedy recordings as the humorous stimuli in their experiments instead of the usual cartoons or jokes. Research findings do not bolster any particular theory, but do suggest the importance of social factors in humor. Moreover, the lack of consistent and clear-cut findings in itself is often attributed to nuances within the social/"experimental" situation. Additionally, the research suggests that there is a key variable, which may loosely be labelled "comedian's world," which is quite important in determining whether or not a response to humor will occur. This concept of the comedian's world appears to include elements as diverse as the comedian's physical appearance, style of talking and pacing, the nature of the relationship he establishes with his audience, the weltenschaung and moral order inherent in a particular comedian's material, and the more enduring characterizations which the comedian, intentionally or unintentionally, presents of himself and others.

It is fairly obvious that a descriptive ordering of data on the different worlds into which comedians invite their audiences, as well as the different styles which they may use to facilitate this "seduction," is lacking. Utilizing experimental and statistical techniques, one may, as Pollio and Edgerly have done, come up with a meaningful, if sketchy, taxonomy, which would include the dimensions of verbal

fluency, hostility, and present versus past. Or one may, as will be attempted in the present study, try a more intensive exploration of the comedy styles and imaginary worlds of particular comedians, which would lead to a richer understanding of comedy, albeit at the expense of some rigor and systematization. Despite the disparate elements which enter into the makeup of a comedian's world. a unitary gestalt or characterization should be possible, as Murphy and Pollio (1973), despite their somewhat atomistic and traditional approach, demonstrate in their discussion of the differences between Don Rickles and Bill Cosby.

With this goal--the description of the world of the comedian--in mind, one may profitably consider Svebak's (1974) approach towards humor, which attempts to move away from causation and towards phenomenological description in a specifically interpersonal, social nexus. Noting and accepting the parallels Freud draws between the processes involved in humor and dreams, Svebak emphasizes the importance of fantasy and irrationality in humor. Humor, he argues, is based on irrelevant frames of reference, and:

> The social consequences of communication of such fantasies may make one person an artist, another a scientist, a third an author of science fiction, a fourth a humorist, and a fifth a mental patient, depending on the mode of presentation.
>
> (Svebak, 1974, p. 100, emphasis added)

Incorporating Heider's ideas with respect to interpersonal perception and the balance of principle of triads, Svebak goes on to generate a theory of humor involving three elements: the humorist, the audience and the target. In the humorous exchange, the audience and the humorist are allied with each other against the target, and these three elements are related to each other at both the rational and irrational levels. Via use of communications about what is being communicated, or what Svebak calls "meta-messages," humor confounds these two levels in order that sentiments are manipulated at the irrational level of fantasy, which is where the alliance between audience and humorist and their attack on the target occur. Svebak then develops a predictive theory of laughter which includes situational dimensions such as meta-message perceptibility, interpersonal likings, and socio-emotional permissiveness, as well as intra-personal dimensions such as meta-message sensitivity, personal likings, and habitual emotional permissiveness.

What is critical about Svebak's theories for the present study is his attempt to combine Freudian notions of the significance of humor in terms of dreams and fantasy, with the ideas of the communications theorists such as Bateson and Watzlawick. As the following passage shows, although he was busily distracted with the importance of psychic economy, Freud himself was fully aware of the

significance of the content of humor, at the same time appreciating the ambiguity of humorous productions:

> . . . [wit] insists upon retaining the play with words or nonesense unaltered, but, thanks to the ambiguity of words and the multiplicity of thought-relations, it restricts itself to choice of cases in which this play or nonsense may appear admissible. Nothing distinguishes wit from all other psychic formations better than this double-sidedness and double-dealing; by emphasizing the "sense in nonsense," the authors have approached nearest the understanding of wit . . .
>
> (Freud, 1911, p. 274, emphasis added)

Unfortunately, Freud was very much wedded to a psychoanalytic model. Not only did Freud lack a conceptual framework to deal with the communicative ambiguities and meta-messages involved in humor, but to the extent he did deal with the hidden meanings of humor productions, it was always within a tension-release framework. The tensions-to-be-released were, quite naturally, circumscribed instinctual wishes. Biological tension-release was emphasized, while the function of communicating an alternative world was largely ignored.

An alternative to the tension-release framework is provided in Erik Erikson's study of the childhood of Adolph Hitler (1950). Erikson analyzes Hitler's autobiographical statements in Mein Kampf and integrates this analysis with known facts about Hitler's life and with observations about the German national character. Erikson argues that Hitler

created in his writings a myth about himself, and irrespective of the veracity of the myth or its relationship with Hitler's real upbringing, it had functional utility: it fed into the conflicts and fantasies of most Germans, and allowed for an irrational or phantastic solution of these conflicts. Note how closely this resembles Svebak's notion that humor allows for a realignment of sentiments and alliances between audience and humorist against the target on an irrational level. Hitler's elaborate, literary and phantastic creation of the world of the highly ambivalent, but intensely principled and rebellious adolescent is very much like the "fire," or the taboo that Pollio and Edgerly talk about as the fuel for the comedy. Freud, imprisoned by his psychology of instincts, could only discuss, had he chosen to do so at all, the comedian's world microscopically, joke by joke, analyzing each joke in terms of its unconscious meanings and/or defensive functions. Erikson, somewhat freed from the "plumbing" and tension-release model, can take a more phenomenological stance and telescope his readers into the world of his subject. It is precisely this feat that will be attempted in the present study, an attempt that is not possible to the extent that one remains committed to simple tension-release theories.

A relevant distinction here is the "sign" approach to the interpretation of dreams versus an understanding of

its existential function, which is the communication of an alternative world; like the dreamer, the comedian does not merely put together separate signs or symbols, and does not simply string series of jokes together. Rather, he paints a total picture, and he develops a "world." Moreover, the way to describe this world is not through quantification and experimentation. Instead, the approach must necessarily be literary. One must intensively mine a few sources, and then attempt, like Erikson has, to characterize the world which the dreamer/artist/comedian invites his audience to enter.

It was mentioned above that Freud did not have the conceptual tools or orientation to deal with the communicative properties and particularly with the ambiguities of humorous communications. Perhaps the best understanding of these features is seen in the writings of Gregory Bateson. In a series of papers and talks (1952, 1955, 1972), Bateson emphasized the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in humor. Watching animals play, Bateson noted how remarkably like fighting it was, how the animals acted <u>as</u> <u>if</u> they were really fighting, but how neither animal or, for that matter, their human audiences, really felt that a fight was going on. For this to occur, the organisms involved had to be capable of some degree of meta-communication or communication about their communication. They had to recognize the message, "This is Play," which generated, argued Bateson, the following

paradoxical communication: "Those actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote." (Bateson, 1972, p. 180). From an involved discussion of the Theory of Logical Types, Bateson arrives at the notion that humor results in figure-ground reversals, and allows for the pleasant, implicit acceptance of paradox and ambiguity, which are intrinsic to human relations (Bateson, 1952). Unfortunately, Bateson is more interested in logical paradox than ambiguity, and only leaves his reader with the suggestion that the message, "This is Play," can be transformed into the message, "Is this Play?" without considering the implications of this transformation.

It can now be shown exactly why the present writer feels Svebak's paper is so significant for this study. By adopting a more phenomenological/interpersonal stance Svebak was able to integrate two very conflicting notions into a unitary model of humor; the taboo, "fire," dream-world element incorporates both tension-release and superiority notions and represents the content of humor, while the mode of presentation, fraught as humor is with paradox and ambiguity, incorporates the incongruity ideas, particularly those of Schopenhauer. In studying the world the comedian creates, one cannot simply study its content, its symbolism, or its mythical characters; one must consider the stylistic-communicative properties, the strategic or intentional

exploitation of the properties of humorous communications and the social context in which this occurs.

In this context, it will be fruitful to turn to a particular orientation within social psychology which writers in the field have labelled the "dramaturgical perspective." The principal characteristics of this orientation are: it attempts to study meaning, which is construed as arising through communicative interaction, not mentalism or deterministic causation; individual selves are defined through interaction, and motivation is located in situations and in interactions instead of in individuals; human beings are construed as fundamentally communicators; cultural and situational relativism prevails (Brissett and Edgerly, 1975). This perspective is heartily phenomenological, and will hopefully be useful in answering the need, delineated in earlier chapters, for an interactive/descriptive model for what occurs between a comedian and his audience.

No one has been more instrumental in developing and popularizing the dramaturgical perspective than Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1974; see also Lyman and Scott, 1970, for an excellent summary statement of Goffman's work). Goffman's notions began with the idea that people are always presenting a self, a persona, information about whom they are. While some of the information is within one's conscious control, most of it is not; impressions are

unwittingly "given off," and people automatically and intentionally, if not consciously, seek to control these impressions. Furthermore, the art of impression management is largely concerned, not with the enhancement of one's own self-image, but with sustaining consensus in public institutions, situations and encounters, and secondarily, with developing and validating an image of oneself as a person capable of sustaining with poise, tact and competence, the structure so defined through interaction (Goffman, 1959). Moreover, one will work to help others sustain such a definition of themselves to avoid a contagious embarrassment, arising not so much from identification or empathy with the person to be embarrassed, but from the breakdown of smoothly functioning interaction in an encounter that has been consensually and socially defined (Goffman, 1967).

Thus, Goffman's work depends on the metaphor of the stage: people perform roles, they play to an "audience," they collude with each other to manage the presentation of information that enhances one or another definition of the situation which they find themselves a part of, at the same time selectively inattending, minimizing and suppressing evidence disconfirming such a definition. For Goffman, level of belief is one's role or its relative truth is irrelevant, just as Hitler's faith in the myth he fashioned or its correspondence to reality were irrelevant for Erik

Erikson. Even one's awareness that one is actively playing a role does not have to bear any crucial importance to the flow of interaction. What is significant is Goffman's emphasis on the ambiguity involved in impression management; he differentiates sharply between the content of a perception and the reality status one confers upon the perception (Goffman, 1974). For example, while it is probably easy to get people to agree on the content of the world which the comedian presents, it would probably be quite difficult to get them to agree on just how much the comedian is invested in what he says, how much he is really "putting his audience on," and how seriously he is "really" acting. One can never be sure of another's experience or intentions, especially when one realizes the possibility that a social actor will likely be taking in the perspective of the "other" before making a move of his own. For Lyman and Scott, if one interactant is aware of or could be made aware of the expectations of the other and the other's expectations of his own expectations, then the interaction may be called a "game." For the purpose of this study, the question may be raised, "To what extent is the comedian's presentation of a 'world' a 'game' and for what purpose is this so?"

Both the comedian and his audience, like participants of any other encounter, want to minimize tension, or what Goffman idiosyncratically labels dysphoria. Dysphoria

arises when there is a disjunction between one's level of spontaneous involvement and the rules governing the quality and quantity of the involvement in the encounter, when the definition of the social situation is threatened. "Incidents" is the label Goffman uses for the potentially disruptive elements of interaction. Curiously enough, Goffman's examples of incidents (Goffman, 1961) include unforseen events that are incongruous with the situation at hand, as well as what he calls "leaks" which, in effect are parapraxes or Freudian slips. Hence, the elements which are disruptive of interaction and the causes of tension--incongruity and the psychological defenses resulting in Freudian slips or dreams--are those very features which are inherent to humor. However, the tension, taboo, or "fire" is not intra-physic, as Freud would have it, but interpersonal, arising from violation of implicit rules and norms about the definition of social situations, and from the disruption of smoothly-flowing interactions. Of course, the fact that the taboo is also involved in the content of the jokes does not help to reduce the tension generated between comedian and audience--but it must be emphasized that the tension is generated through the process of interaction, not merely through what is being discussed, and that this tension thrives on, and may intentionally be exaggerated by, the ambiguity inherent in the humor of comedians.

A further complication arises. Goffman devoted a book to the study of stigmatized people who have to manage a spoiled identity. In this study (1963), he differentiates between the discredited aspects of the self, which are obvious or known stigma such as looks, physical handicaps, race, dress, and the discreditable aspects, which involves the management of potentially known and damaging information about the self, such a dubious ancestry, deviant sexuality, or a criminal record. Obviously, comedians have their own fair share of stigma to manage: discredited features, such as the "fool" status as outlined by Orrin Klapp, as well as obvious personal features such as weight, physical unattractiveness, stature, and, to an extent, ethnicity. Also, discreditable information will prove to be a problem, as images of the comedian and facts about his private life are, or can be, distorted through publicity. Goffman suggests that stigma are similar to incidents in that they disrupt smooth interaction in encounters and lead to tension, embarrassment and dysphoria, with resultant efforts by the interactants to reduce this dysphoria. He also discusses efforts by the stigmatized to manage their stigma in public to reduce this tension; comic exaggeration, control of information flow via ambiguity, blunt honesty, and attempts to catalyze intimacy are among the more common strategies employed.

The generation of hypotheses about the interaction between comedian and audience and about the nature of humor itself, escalates sharply once a dramaturgical standpoint is adopted. Such hypotheses are quite relevant to the present concern, the descriptive analysis of the "worlds" or myths of select comedians. Once the notions of game-playing and the dramaturgical metaphor are introduced, one is forced to deal with strategic considerations. For example, one could consider the extent to which:

1. The comedian's world is an attempt to manage discredited and discreditable features of his own life or of his social role as comic.

2. The comedian's world results in an increase in tension to be managed.

3. The comedian's world is an attempt to reduce tensions arising from the social situation or arising from the nature of the world created.

4. The comedian uses the world he creates, the images and myths he generates, the ambiguity inherent in human communication, and the ambiguity surrounding the humor itself (particularly in the question, "Is this Play?") to intentionally create and then reduce tensions suddenly as a strategy for obtaining laughter.

As a way of anchoring these considerations in a more concrete context one may consider the following joke from a Woody Allen nightclub routine:

> . . . [I was so depressed] that I even contemplated committing suicide . . . I finally decided against it because I was in analysis at the time . . . and I would have had to pay for the sessions I missed.
>
> (Allen, 1972-a)

Obviously, it is possible to analyze this joke from the standpoint of the incongruity theorists: a man, driven to contemplate suicide, balks because of a nonsensical and irrelevant consideration of paying his bill after his death. Similarly, the joke could be satisfactorily analyzed from a tension-release standpoint: Allen is making fun of the hitherto-sacred institution of psychoanalysis. To take this last notion a step further, the audience would laugh because Allen's comments invoke their own hostility towards their own analysts (or father-surrogates, bosses, etc.) and the laughter is an attempt to allay the anxiety generated.

Suppose, however, one uses some of the considerations outlined above in the analysis of this joke. Allen is communicating to his audience that he was depressed, that he has contemplated suicide, and that he is seeing a therapist. Moreover, on a meta-communicative level, he is letting his audience know that the quality of the relationship he has with them is such that he can communicate these "facts" to them (cf. Haley, 1963, for a discussion of the relationship-defining features involved in meta-communication) albeit in a joking manner (cf. Goffman's discussion of practical

jokes, in Goffman, 1974). The crux of the tension generated here involves the appropriateness of these communications to the audience, with the underlying possibility that Allen may be somewhat serious about what he is saying. Strangers do not normally tell each other such things or listen to them in comfort; baring of one's soul in a nightclub, where people are supposed to laugh and have fun, is inappropriate and incongruent with the expected definition of the comedy-nightclub situation. Furthermore, Allen's "confessions" violated certain norms involving behavior in public places (Goffman, 1959): one stranger must accord another certain civilities and considerations which involve respect of the other's privacy and a recognition of each of the parties involved as competent, tactful individuals, capable of sustaining such an interaction. Allen violates his audience's right to privacy by treating them as intimates, and he, also disconfirms a definition of himself as a competent, tactful social interactant. If Goffman's perspective is adopted, Allen's joke creates a tremendous collective tension, and the laughter is not only an attempt to reduce tension, but an attempt to reinstate the definition of the situation as a nightclub comedy routine, to re-validate the view that what Allen is saying is, after all merely play.

The reader may object that the argument being offered raises as many questions as it answers. Perhaps

Allen could have gotten the same laugh by telling the joke in the third person. Within the scope of this study, such an objection is not answerable. Actually, it is by no means clear that Allen could have gotten the same laugh if he had told the joke differently; it is also obvious that Allen, and virtually every other comedian one can think of, spends an incredible amount of time and effort building a consistent, if "fictional," characterization of himself and developing a "world." Extrapolating from the research presented earlier, as well as the point of view presented in this chapter, it is plausible to argue that much of humor involves the generation and release of tension, that this tension is largely interpersonal in nature and involves the nature of the relationship between the comedian and his audience. The "world" the comedian creates is, paradoxically, both the source of much of this tension, as well as the probable lever in its dissipation.

For the purposes of this study, an attempt will be made to further delineate the process of creation and reduction of tension by means of the "world" the comedian creates. Such a world lends itself to a unitary, if broad and literary (as opposed to scientific) characterization--in this respect, the comedian's "world" has an underlying phenomenological intentionality, not necessarily involving deliberateness or strategy (although, obviously, it may),

but a patterned, coherent relationship that is both sensible and purposive within a social field or framework. Moreover, it is clear that each comedian may have different strategies involved in the generation and communication of his "world." These strategies amount to what would be the comedian's particular comic style, and this too becomes part of the comedian's "world."

It should be remembered that the fundamental task of this study is, at least initially, a phenomenological description of the alternative "worlds" of comedians. The discussion of Goffman and of the communicative relationship between comedian and audience earlier in this chapter will serve as a model or framework in which to order and deal with the data. Thus, the content of the comedian's myth or "world" will be considered, not simply on its own merits, but in terms of its ability to create and manage tension, to define and manipulate the quality of the relationship between comedian and audience, and, to a lesser extent, to manage the stigma of the individual comedian. The interrelationships and interplay between the content of the myth and its meta-communicative properties (i.e., between a comedian's self-characterizations and his style of relating to his audience) will vary from one comedian to another, and will, in any case, have to await description of each comedian's world.

The concept of the "comedian's world" is a fairly broad notion that needs some clarification. Some idea of the world-view, moral order, or weltenschaung of the particular comedian is involved; more obviously, and certainly more accessibly, are those aspects of the comedian's act relating to the projection of a fictional persona, as well as a real, or partially real self. This can be construed as a continuum, with any situation the comedian allows himself to be portrayed in--whether it is Groucho Marx portraying the devious Captain Spaulding or Woody Allen talking about his analyst--having at least some reality base in the comedian's personal life or feelings. Groucho always seems to "put us on" and Woody appears to deal with real personal issues. The boundaries between artist and his comic persona, however, are never so clearly defined. The uncertainty about Bateson's question, "[To what extent] is this Play?" is never fully resolved by the comic and must remain a source of tension between him and audiences. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this study, some attempt will be made to operationalize and restrict the formulation of each comedian's "world" to those jokes, situations and stylistic aspects of performance that bear on the presentation of a persona, an image of the comedian derivable from his material, which may be construed as real, partly real, or wholly imaginary, and that bear on the

management of the relationship between the comedian and his audience.

Three comedians will be considered in this study: Groucho Marx, Lenny Bruce, and Woody Allen. One consideration in the choice of these comics was their significance in the world of comedy; Groucho Marx is considered to be one of the leading comics from a previous generation, Lenny Bruce has shaped contemporary comedy as much as any other comedian and has been the subject of several books, a Broadway play and a movie, and Woody Allen may be the leading funnyman in contemporary film. All three comedians have established themselves in diverse media--Allen in movies, literary prose, and television, Bruce in recordings and nightclubs, and Marx in film, television, radio and books. Moreover, the style of each comedian, as well as the characterizations and images each projects, is reasonably consistent from one work to another and one media to another. This would be least true in Groucho's case, as the movies he was involved in were scripted by others; however, the pool of writers used in each of the movies were often the same, Groucho was allowed a good deal of improvisation, and the characterizations of each of the Marx Brothers was reasonably consistent in each of the movies. The internal consistency in each of the comedian's performances will obviate the need to closely and intensively study every performance of each comedian or

even a large sampling of their performances. Instead, the main body of the comedian's work will be characterized globally and largely from secondary sources such as movie reviews or critical anthologies of each comedian's work (cf. Eyles, 1972, and Adler and Feinman, 1975).

Each of these three comedians was primarily an intellectually-oriented wit, and would, in Pollio and Edgerly's (1975) mapping of different comedians, be most similar in style to those comedians represented on the "skinny-wierd" dimension (although Bruce was never particularly skinny). Each of the comedians is reasonably sarcastic and iconoclastic, and it will therefore not be too difficult to recognize the taboo or "fire" that each is dealing with. Finally, each of these men was originally raised in a New York-urban-Jewish culture; this would lead one to expect a similarity in weltenschaung, a similarity in style, and, very possibly, a similarity in the nature of the stigma which each might have had to manage. It is to be expected that a sensibility which one might, perhaps simplistically, consider urban-New York-Jewish, surfaces over and over again in each of these comedians' "worlds."

The sources of comedy to be utilized in the present study were chosen largely on the grounds of accessibility. For example, although Bruce was successful in nightclubs and Allen on television, their work in these respective media

are, for obvious reasons, not accessible for study by the present author. On the other hand, books, recordings, articles, and several movie scripts proved to be quite accessible. Again, it is to be stressed that internal consistency within the body of a comedian's work will not be proven here, but assumed; any reader familiar with their work is capable of recognizing that this is the case for the comedians concerned.

For Woody Allen, we shall look at a collection of nightclub routines recorded by him in the mid-1960s (Allen, 1972-a), two collections of his essays (Allen 1972-b; 1975), and a soundtrack from one of his movies (1972-c). Additionally, we shall be concerned with his overall work in the movies, particularly his creations Annie Hall (Allen, 1977), Love and Death, and Play It Again Sam (Adler and Feinman, 1975).

In the case of Groucho Marx, source material will come from three of his best known movies (Duck Soup, 1972; Monkey Business, 1972; A Night at the Opera, [1935] 1972). Other direct source material will come from his recorded concerts (Marx, 1972) and from the present author's notes and selected material (Marx and Arce, 1977) from the television quiz show You Bet Your Life.

Finally, for Lenny Bruce, recordings from two of his live concerts (Bruce, The Midnight Concert, no date; and

Bruce, Live at the Curran Theater, no date) will be used. Other important source material will come from Bruce's "autobiography" (Bruce, 1972) and a collection of some of his best transcribed routines (Cohen, 1968).

Additionally, news features, reviews, critical studies and essays on the performances, comic style and sensibilities of each of the comics will be used. Hopefully, such secondary source material will help to characterize the respective styles of each comic, and will allow one to obtain a more global view of their work than examination of the few sources mentioned above will allow.

Basically, a descriptive analysis of the public image or persona which each comedian projects, as well as a consideration of the moral sensibility and communicative style of each, will be the focus of this study. Essentially the comedian, one way or another, does violence to his audience. Thus, in developing the descriptions mentioned above, one must maintain an awareness of the tensions that arise through a projection of the comic's world. The comic transgresses comfortable or appropriate boundaries of social interaction; he projects a tension-inducing, often ambiguous image of himself; he creates situations where the norms of interaction are systematically violated; and he uses the meta-communicative features of humor to manipulate and control the kind of relationship he has with his audience.

What Woody Allen did in the joke about suicide analyzed above, most comedians do throughout the body of their comedy, even to the degree that one may sometimes feel that the goal of being funny and getting laughs becomes secondary. Obviously, much more is occurring than a simple attempt to get laughs by portraying a nonsensical world or a world where taboo and instinctual impulses are gratified. It is with the purpose of demonstrating and understanding what else is occurring when the comedian paints his world that this study now turns.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORLD OF WOODY ALLEN

Born Allen Stewart Konigsberg 39 years ago, Woody Allen began comedy writing in high school. In the 1960s he became a renowned nightclub performer, as well as scriptwriter of successful Broadway plays such as Don't Drink the Water. A comedy writer for movies, Allen eventually directed and starred in his own films; his most recent success, and biggest box office hit is Annie Hall. Those familiar with his comedy are aware that he maintains a consistent and quite recognizable persona throughout his work. Allen's persona generally tends to soften the impact of the "fire" of his material largely by establishing an enduring, relatively three-dimensional relationship with his audience.

As will be shown in the following pages, his persona is the metaphor for his comedy. Speaking to a universal conflict and reflecting gently but consistently the phenomenological plight of Western Man, Allen seduces his audience into sharing a quasi-intimate relationship and, through artful manipulation of the perceived definition of Woody's self (hereafter, "Allen" will refer to the artist, Woody Allen, and "Woody" will refer to the persona portrayed), Allen keeps the parameters of the relationship with his audience fluid, thereby creating dramatic tension, which is dissipated through laughter.

Play It Again Sam (Allen, 1972-c; all quotes are from the recording), which will be discussed first, was written originally as a play by Allen, starring him on Broadway, and was later made into a movie.

A Moral Fable: Woody, Bogie and Self-Discovery

The story line of Play It Again Sam concerns the efforts of Allen Felix, a recently-divorced movie-critic, to obtain sexual and emotional satisfaction with a woman. He is aided by his best friend Dick and Dick's wife Linda. Several attempts at blind dates end in fiascos, as the audience is treated to the spectacle of Felix frantically but futilely trying to impress and seduce one buxom beauty after another. Finally, with Dick away on one of his perennial business trips, Felix and Linda almost by accident fall in love and have an extremely satisfying sexual experience. The climax of the movie occurs with the three people in the triangle arriving at the airport; Dick's suspicions are aroused that Linda is having an affair with someone, and Felix lies to him, "confessing" that he was falling in love with Linda, but that all she could talk about was how much she loved Dick.

The final scene, including music, is almost a verbatim pastiche of the movie Casablanca. The whole movie, in fact, is a takeoff of this romantic epic. Bogart appears

several times to Felix throughout the movie as an inspirational apparition who talks Felix out of his fears and gives him advice on how to triumph over women. But the advice given is not in the romantic, almost mushy, vein of the movie Casablanca. Early in Play It Again Sam, Bogart tells Felix that "women are simple . . . I never met one who didn't understand a slap in the face or a slug from a forty-five." When Felix meekly replies that he and his ex-wife did not have that kind of relationship, Bogart derisively exclaims: "Relationship! Where d'ya learn that word? From one of those headshrinkers?" In this movie, Bogart is not noble--he is tough and very physical, a man of action.

Felix is very much the opposite. Taking a blind date to the discoteque, he gets into a fight with a motorcycle gang and "slapped my chin onto one guy's fist, and hit another one on the knee with my nose." Moreover, his efforts at chivalry are not rewarded, as his date runs off with the leader of the gang. Allen Felix is a thinking man, both by vocation and habit, and if his thoughts often lead him to obsessiveness and passivity, it is hardly surprising. His ex-wife tells him, "I can't stand the marriage . . . I find you suffocate me. . . . You're one of life's great watchers . . . I want to do . . . I want to laugh." For Felix, thought is an ontological given while action is, at best, problematic.

Felix is a professional neurotic, clearly at odds with his body. In the beginning of the movie, the audience finds him frantically searching for aspirins to ease a psychosomatic headache, and wondering aloud in self-conscious parody if he will have to "boil the cotton to get the extra?" He is physically clumsy, at one point wreaking havoc in his bathroom as he tries to wrestle with his hair-dryer that has gone out of control. When asked by Linda to dance at a discoteque, he replies, "I can't dance. . . . I had measles as a child . . . my body won't function," before offering the audience hilarious visual proof that, on the dance floor at least, his body indeed will not function.

Even reflecting on his burgeoning relationship with Linda, one finds the embodiment of his neurosis. There is a long dialogue in which both Felix and Linda debate the merits of aspirin versus Tylenol and whether each tastes better in tomato juice or orange juice. When Linda calls on Allen one night, anxious because her husband is on a business trip, they both obsess about whether she is indeed anxious or afraid. She tells him that she often throws up in a certain bus terminal whenever Dick has to go away, and he responds that it is a good terminal and that he has thrown up there too. The morning after Felix seduced Linda, both of them agree that they have had a wonderful experience. Felix tells her he slept like a log and asks her if it is

noon yet, only to find out it is seven in the morning. Linda asks what he thought about during sex and he replies that he visualized the last inning of a particular baseball game. She nods understandingly and tells him she had wondered why he kept yelling "slide."

Thus, for Felix success and self-fulfillment are not achieved by transcending his neurosis but by accepting it, "not by being Bogart but by being myself." In retaining his sensitivity and honesty about his weaknesses, Felix not only gets the girl in the end but realizes he doesn't need her. He emerges not as an almost-hero but as a greater man than either the macho but insensitive and brittle Bogart, or the square Ivy League, shallow but ultimately needy Dick.

There is a serious and dramatic story in this movie, and one senses that the comedic aspects are at times more the punctuation of the message than the message itself. The issues dealt with, such as relationship, divorce, sexual dysfunction and neurosis are at times only thinly detoxified by the comedy. Much of the story attempts to capture character and situation, and, despite clever comedic absurdity, Allen Felix is real, not a cardboard person. This is most obvious at the end of the movie: the use of real footage from Casablanca is not merely an attempt to parody that genre, but, paradoxically, lends credence, by its evocative nature, to the depth of Allen's sacrifice and attests to the truth of his self-transformation.

One realizes, then, that noticeable efforts are made to invest the Allen Felix character with realness and dimensionality. Bogart and Dick as characters are little more than elaborately crafted foils for the Felix character. Felix demonstrates, within the movie and role itself, not only self-consciousness, but an ability to meta-communicate, to comment on and burlesque the situations and characters of the movie, including himself. At one point, he tells Linda, "I am hypercritical; that's part of my sickness . . . I have a tendency to reject before I get rejected . . . that way I save a lot of time and money. . . ." At another point, as his wife is about to leave him, she remarks that things were different during the time they dated. Felix responds, "Everybody is different [when they're dating] . . . you can't expect me to keep up that level of charm--I'll have a heart attack!" Both these excerpts elicit laughter from the audience, but they serve more to establish Felix as an intelligent and psychologically-minded character.

Through most of the movie, particularly in the early part, the affective tone of the main character is too plaintive and depressed to be fully humorous. The impinging and castrating nature of his ex-wife is more real than light-hearted. He laments that he "managed to fool one girl into loving me and now she's gone." Again, this is quite a realistic portrayal of an insecure, recently-divorced

obsessive. His self-burlesqueing remarks are gently mocking and not hostilely intrusive, and as such embody a redeeming and likeable quality. He demonstrates an enjoyment of his neurosis, and ability to get some distance and not be wrapped up in his problems. To state this more precisely, Allen Felix alternates between immobilization in the context of his obsessive depression, and transcendence through humor, a capacity built into the persona itself. The importance of this last point is that elements of comedy and seriousness become blurred; the audience is not quite sure if Felix is a comic character in a comic role, or a serious character in a serious role who happens to possess a sense of humor. This ambiguity allows one the fantasy that they are getting to know a "real" Allen Felix, and, beyond that, a "real" Woody Allen.

It is clear from the above discussion that Allen is trying to portray in a phenomeonlogically and clinically plausible way, an obsessive-compulsive in a life-crisis situation. This has obvious and serious risks in terms of creating a tension between Felix and the audience. The portrayal of an inadequate neurotic can potentially trigger a global transference reaction in the audience, leading, conceivably, to anger at his helplessness and anxiety at his depression. Additionally, Felix represents a violation, throughout the movie, of those rules of social interaction

which dictate that one must maintain the definition of self in public as a competent interactant in social situations, in much the same way he violated this norm in the joke about suicide and his therapist (analyzed in the previous chapter). Moreover, maintaining a definition of self as incompetent during a joke is one thing; presenting oneself in a similar light for the length of a movie is quite another; a more difficult issue for the audience to ignore.

Woody Allen manages this tension in two ways: the first is by way of the sense of humor, ability to distance from self, and meta-communicate about the process with which he invests the Felix character. In the context used here, meta-communication involves the description of the "rules" of communication (linguistic rules, interactive norms, dynamic patterns, etc.) governing a process. What is involved is the notion of talking "about" a process. To be able to do this, one must obtain a certain distance from oneself and take the perspective of the "other"; to the extent one is not able to adopt this distanced perspective, one remains caught up in the rules and patterns of a given process and is likely to be unaware of these rules or patterns.

Note that to suggest that Allen Felix can meta-communicate is not merely to say that he has psychological insight. One may have many insights about self and be blind to <u>how</u> one uses such insights. Through both verbal and

nonverbal cues, Allen Felix shows the audience that he is aware that he is caught up in his own neurotic style, and he meta-communicates by giving us the sense that his very neurosis involves the misuse of insight. His insouciant manner burlesques not merely the content of his neurosis but its parameters and style. Such a meta-communicative attitude presupposes that one is not too rigidly mesmerized by oneself and one's process, and that one can obtain a larger perspective towards and distance from oneself.

Hence, Allen Felix is not rigid, but able to change frameworks and thus not mired in his obsessiveness; the implicit meta-message is that Felix, having the power of an agile mind and the ability to distance himself from his plight, is neither as inept and powerless or as seriously invested in his depression as he appears. This is not simply the result of the fact that many of Felix's jokes are self-directed. As demonstrated above, the quality of his self-directed barbs imply a distance from and awareness of his obsessions, whereas merely making oneself the butt of a joke can often be a measure of how mired one is in the neurosis. Allen's character walks a fine line between the humorous and the sympathetic.

The second way tension is managed is through the fantasy of content at the climax of the film. In Svebak's (1974) terms, at "the irrational level," Felix triumphs over

his neurosis, transcending his self-imposed limits and his audience is able to leave without feeling sorry for Felix because of his helplessness, or unduly anxious because the movie may have triggered some of their own feelings of helplessness. There is an indirect triumph of self-awareness; a vindication of the romantic notion that dogged intellectual pursuit of truth and self-truth has a positive payoff. And this is a message which, as one considers the structure and content of Allen's world, is one that the audience may take seriously and one with which they may leave the theater comfortably.

Content and Structure of Woody's World View

An inveterate Woody Allen fan would not find it very difficult to draw a composite sketch of his close personal relationships. Consider, first, his family. Though the particulars change from routine to routine, Woody's jokes are about an indifferent and at times rejecting family. His mother urges him, if he should ever see a stranger offering him candy, to go. At one point, he forms a corporation with all the members of his family as the company officers, and on the first day they try to "squeeze him out." Even as a child, Woody's parents were betraying, buying him a pet ant and telling him it was a dog. Holding up a pocketwatch to a live audience, Woody tells them that his grandfather, on his deathbed, sold it to him.

His family embodies traditional lower middle class Jewish values, such as "God and carpeting." At his grandfather's funeral, Woody finds a "replica of the deceased in potato salad." Going home to tell his mother of his divorce, he finds her "knitting a chicken," which if Jewish mothers typically knitted, would probably be what they would knit. On hearing of his divorce, his mother gets up, "walks over to the furnace . . . and jumps in." In Love and Death his parents force him to go and fight in the Napoleonic Wars, and in Sleeper the heroine and a male revolutionary recreate a scene from Woody's past--a ritual orthodox Sabbath dinner--to bring him out of what appears to be a near-catatonic state.

Woody is obsessed with sex, virility and women; his view of the opposite sex is less than charitable. Women are portrayed as castrating and betraying as in the speech from Play It Again Sam (quoted above) by Allen Felix' ex-wife. In a skit, he mentions that his father was laid off from work when his company replaced him with gadget that did all the things he could do, and that his mother, of course, went out and bought one. In Bananas, the girl Woody lusts after responds only when she is deceived into thinking that he is a heroic revolutionary, and despite the intimate and sensitive rapport which he has with the heroine in Love and Death, she continually marries brutes or wealthy men. On

stage his jokes suggest a degree of hostility towards his ex-wife; he has implied that she was frigid and has gone on to say that doing jokes about her of this nature has caused her to sue him. Parenthetically, this kind of maneuver tends to strengthen the interface between Woody's mythical persona and the actual stage-image he presents, as well as confusing the audience while manipulating the barrier between his real life and his make-believe performance. In his latest movie, Annie Hall, lack of sexual responsiveness and passion become one of the difficult issues in Woody's relationship with Annie.

Women may be hostile and betraying but Woody on stage and in film is obsessed with sex and virility. He is perpetually thirsting for orgastic satisfaction. After reading about "the sexual revolution on campus, I re-registered at NYU." He almost never obtains sexual satisfaction and must spend a great deal of time masturbating (when congratulated by the heroine on his sexual prowess in Love and Death, he responds, "I practice a lot when I'm alone"). Both in nightclub routines and movies, he is thinking of baseball games to prevent premature ejaculation.

The overall impression one gets is that Woody's world is permeated with inadequacy, duplicity and rejection. Even his rabbi cannot be trusted; in an ethical crisis over whether to do an ad for vodka he doesn't drink, Woody goes

to his rabbi who tells him not to do it. Three months later he sees an ad for the vodka, with Monique Von Vooren, and, his rabbi. There are several noteworthy features to this overview of Woody's world: typically, there are no serious consequences to the rejection and duplicity, as Allen takes special efforts to invest these psychological traumas with unequivocal surrealism and absurdity. No one can take Allen's portrayal of Woody's family or wives very seriously, on a content or literal level. Thematically, though, these motiefs permeate his work, and serve to establish psychological plausibility ("the reason I'm immature with women to this day is 'cause my parents did not love me when I was younger . . . they bronzed my baby shoes with my feet still in them") and dimensionality to the character.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the image Woody has is of a loser, and that this is the most enduring persona perceived by audiences. It is also that aspect of Woody's self which they most clearly relate to and it becomes the essential metaphor for Allen's humor. Read the following excerpt of Allen's nightclub routine burlesquing the sensibility and literary style of the "Lost Generation." Pay careful attention to when the audience laughs:

> I mentioned before that I was in Europe. It's not the first time--I was in Europe many years ago with Ernest Hemingway [laugh] and he had written his first novel . . . and Gertrude Stein and I read it and we said that it was a good novel, but not a great one, that it needed some

work but could be a fine book. And we laughed over it, and Hemingway punched me in the mouth [laugh].

And that winter, Picasso lived on the Rue de Basque, and he had just painted a picture of a naked dental hygienist in the middle of the Gobi Desert [laugh]. And Gertrude Stein said it was a good picture, but not a great one [titter] and I said it could be a fine picture . . . and we laughed over it and [expectant laughter] Hemingway punched me in the mouth [laugh].

I remember that Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald just came home from their wild New Year's Eve Party--it was April [big laugh]--Scott had just finished Great Expectations [laugh] . . . and Gertrude Stein and I read it and we said it was a good book, but there was no need to have written it since Dickens already wrote it [laugh] . . . and we laughed over it and Hemingway punched me in the mouth [laugh].

And that winter we went to Spain to see Manolete fight. He looked to me 18 and Gertrude Stein said, no, he was 19 but only looked 18, and I said sometimes a boy of 18 will look 19 and other times a 19 year-old can easily look 18 and that's the way it is with a true Spaniard. And we laughed over it . . . and Gertrude Stein punched me in the mouth [very big laugh].

And the war came and Hemingway went to Africa to write a book and Gertrude Stein moved in with Alice B. Toklas and I went to New York to see my orthodontist [very big laugh].

(Allen, 1972-a)

One notices that most of the laughs are preceded by the repeated contrast of his and Gertrude Stein's opinion of a work of art, with the punch line ("and--punched me in the mouth") drawing the greatest number of laughs. Towards the second half of the routine, the audience begins to expect this, and twice there is anticipatory laughter before Allen reaches the punch line. The reversal, where Gertrude punches him, draws the second biggest laugh of the routine,

and the payoff, Allen's visit to his orthodontist, leaves his audience howling. Obviously, this routine illustrates the superiority theory of humor, but that theory by itself is inadequate. The refrain of getting punched in the mouth is only funny because the audience has a consistent and rich historical and personal context in which it views Woody. The routine is funny precisely because Woody Allen is the victim. Without his first person narrative, the skit would be flat; it would merely be a satire on a literary movement in the 1920s. The audience laughs not because of Allen's satire of Hemingway's style, but when the recognizable Woody breaks through.

Most observers are content to let their understanding of Woody's loser image be the key to his humor, and let the matter rest. Allen, however develops a relationship with the audience that is richer and more complex than this; one that enhances underlying dramatic tension and, in different ways, reflects one basic issue, as will be seen in the section that follows.

Woody's Dilemma: the Mind/Body Split

What emerges if one looks carefully at Woody's stage persona is not just a picture of a loser in an adversary world--although the loser is certainly the most visible aspect of that self. What emerges is a picture of a man

profoundly split between mind and body, a man using his wit to survive in the realm of the physical. The "physical" here should be expanded to encompass the world of machines, the world of the body and sexuality, and the world of the "stereotypic Goy." Woody is ambivalent about this physical and alien world; he struggles to belong to it even as he must combat its hostile forces.

Consider, for example, Allen's skit on the Ku Klux Klan:

> I was down South once, and I was invited to a costume party and I rarely go to them--I went to one when I was younger, I went in my underwear shorts, and I have varicose veins, you know, and so I went as a road map. I figure, what the hell, it's Halloween, I'll go as a ghost--I take a sheet off the bed, and I throw it over my head.
>
> I go to the party, you have to get the picture, I'm walking down the street in a deep southern town. I have a white sheet over my head, and a car pulls up and three guys with white sheets say "Get in." So I figure these guys are going to the costume party as ghosts, and I get into the car and I see we're not going to the party and I tell them. And they say, "Well, we have to pick up the Grand Dragon," and all of a sudden it hits me: down South, white sheets, the Grand Dragon. I put two and two together. I figure there's a guy going to the party dressed as a dragon.
>
> All of a sudden a big guy enters the car and I'm sitting there between four Klansmen, four big-armed men and the door's locked and I'm petrified, I'm trying to pass desperately, you know, I'm saying "you-all" and "grits." I must have said "grits" fifty times. They'd ask me a question, I'd say, "Oh, grits, grits," and next to me is the leader of the Klan. You could tell he was the leader 'cause he's the one wearing contour sheets.
>
> They drive me to an empty field, and I gave myself away 'cause they asked for donations, and everybody gave cash. When it came to me I said, "I pledge fifty dollars." They knew immediately.

> They took my hood off and threw a rope around my neck and they decided to hang me, and suddenly my whole life passed before my eyes. I saw myself as a kid again, in Kansas going to school, swimmin' at the swimmin' hole and fishin', fryin' up a mess-o'-catfish. Goin' down to the general store, gettin' a piece of gingham for Emmy Lou. And I realize, it's not my life. They going to hang me in two minutes, and the wrong life is passing before my eyes.
>
> I spoke to them, I was really eloquent, I said, "Fellas, this country can't survive unless we love one another regardless of race, creed or color." And they were so moved by my words that not only did they cut me down and let me go, but that night I sold them two thousand dollars worth of Israel bonds.
>
> (Allen, 1972-a)

Reading it through, one realizes the polarity between this fragile Woody, the cerebral New Yorker, and the four "big-armed" Klansmen. As he tells it, Woody's only conception of survival in that world is to try to pass, to say "you-all and grits fifty times." Woody gives himself and symbolically, his Jewishness, away, when he "pledges" money when the Klansmen ask for donations, revealing his stinginess and his use of pledging as the modality by which Jews give money when asked for donations in temple. The life which passes before Woody's eyes as he is waiting to be hanged is the antithesis of the Jew from New York: there are no general stores, Emmy Lous or swimming holes in New York; and few New Yorkers ever fried a "mess 'o catfish" or got "gingham" for their girlfriends. Even linguistically there is a tension between Woody's world and the one that

rushes through his mind; he enunciates "mess 'o catfish" so intently, articulating every vowel, that the audience laughs. The very idea of "my life passing before me" is a cliche from a "heroic" script, and therefore peculiarly unfitting for Woody in this situation. Transcendence from the dangers of the physical is accomplished through his wit and reason, but even this is linked to Jewishness, as the Klansmen are persuaded to buy Israel bonds.

Some of the features mentioned above are found in most Woody Allen routines and movies. Woody is always being thrust into a very different and alien world where he finds himself "petrified and trying to pass desparately." Often Woody brings this on himself by daring to venture out of the safety of his own world; the troubles he got into were "deserved," for Woody should have known better than to be in the South in the first place. He should know better than to go to parties. At the same time, Woody displays a curious lack of common sense, an almost ivory-tower nearsightedness and lack of knowledge of the real world. He then plays off this stupidity for more laughs, as when he puts two and two together, and still fails to realize he's with Klansmen. One finds this "stupidity" throughout his work: in <u>What's New Pussycat</u>, Woody works as a makeup man for a bevy of beautiful women, while spending his time being bored with his job on the one hand, and obsessing about ways to meet

beautiful women on the other. He reveals the same naivete in the routine about the rabbi and the vodka ad mentioned above. His "intelligence" is usually at the root of his naivete; symbolically it is the price for living only though his mind.

Themes of Jewish-outsider-loser and Gentile-insider-winner run throughout his work. In Play It Again Sam, there is a fantasy sequence where Woody imagines his ex-wife with some brazenly physical blond tanned type "[A] Nazi" he muses. Indeed, she had rejected him because he was too cerebral, not the stereotypical "physical man." In Love and Death, Woody consistently loses Diane Keaton to one physical type after another even as they platonically carry on a great love affair. Woody constantly gibes himself for "not having the standard Hollywood tan," and for having hair "that curls up on the West Coast." He tells an audience that "he was hired by an advertising agency to look Jewish . . . tried desperately to look Jewish . . . read memos from left to right." Even so, Woody is still a loser; he gets fired for taking off too many Jewish holidays.

Part of being a man in our culture involves being proficient with tools and machines. Consider Woody's relationship to the mechanical world:

> Listen to this. Someone asked me if I'd tell this story. A long time ago, it's a wierd story. I was out in Los Angeles, and I was at a party with a very big Hollywood producer. And at that

time they wanted to make an elaborate cinemascope musical comedy out of the Dewey Decimal System. And they wanted me to work on it.

And I go out to the producer's building in downtown Los Angeles, and I walk into this elevator, and there are no people in this elevator and no buttons on the wall or anything. And I hear a voice say, "Kindly call out your floors please." And I look around and I'm alone. And I panic. In the event of any sort of emergency, I lose control of the major muscles quickly.

And I read on the wall that it's a new elevator and it works on a sonic principle and it's all sound, all I have to do is say what floor I want to go to and it takes me there. So I say, "Three, please." And the doors close and the elevator starts going up to Three. And on the way up I begin to feel very self-conscious. 'Cause I talk, I think, with a slight New York accent. And the elevator spoke quite well. And I get out and I'm walking in the hall and I look back and I thought I heard the elevator make a remark. And I turn quickly and the doors close, and the elevator goes down, you know, and I didn't want to get involved with an elevator in Hollywood, but this is the strange part of the story, that was the normal part.

I have never in my life had good relationships with mechanical objects of any sort, anything I can't reason with or kiss or fondle, I get into trouble with. I have a clock that runs counter-clockwise for some reason, and my toaster pops up my toast and shakes it and burns it. I hate my shower. If I'm taking a shower and someone in America uses his water, that's it for me. I leap from the tub, scalded. I have a tape recorder I paid a hundred and fifty dollars for it, as I talk into it, it goes: "I know, I know."

About three years ago, I couldn't stand it anymore. I was home one night; I called a meeting of my possessions. I got everything I owned into the living room: my toaster, my clock, my blender. They'd never been in the living room before. And I spoke to them. I was really adorable. I opened with a joke. And then I said, "I know what's going on; cut it out." I have a sun lamp and as I sit under it, it rains on me. And I spoke to each appliance; I was really articulate, then I put them back and I felt good.

> And two nights later I'm watching Dr. Joyce Brothers, she's explaining to a Bronx housewife how it was possible for her daughter to have gotten pregnant from joining the Peace Corps. And the set begins to jump up and down. And I go up to it, and I always talk before I hit. And I said, "I thought we discussed this; what's the problem?" And the set kept going up and down, so I hit it, and it felt good hitting it, and I beat the hell out of it. I was really great, I tore off the antenna. And I felt very virile.
>
> And two days later I go to my dentist in New York. I had gone to my dentist but I had a very deep cavity and he had sent me to a chiropodist. And I go into a building in mid-town New York, and they have those elevators. And I'm hip, 'cause I was to the Coast. And I hear a voice say, "Kindly call out your floors please," and I say, "Sixteen," and the doors close and the elevator starts going up. And on the way up, the elevator says to me, "Are you the guy that hit the television set?" I felt like an ass, you know. And it took me up and down fast between floors and it threw me off in the basement and it yelled out something that was anti-Semitic.
>
> And the upshot of the story is that day I called my parents; my father was fired. He was technologically unemployed. My father worked for the same firm for twelve years. They fired him. They replaced him with a tiny gadget this big that does everything that my father does, only it does it much better. Depressing thing is that my mother ran out and bought one.
>
> (Allen, 1972-a)

Again, the theme is one of disharmony with the physical world. In this skit, there is--humorously--the theme of retribution; albeit not on a "real" level. Woody doesn't get shaken by the elevator and his father doesn't get fired because Woody beat on the television set. Rather, these events are the result of being out of harmony with machines in the first place. This is more a sin of being

rather than doing. It is completely consistent and in character for Woody to have poor luck with machines; Woody sins by trying to be someone he is not; by trying to have normal or "masculine" relationships with machines. The theme of Woody's ineptitude in the world is reinforced when his father is fired and is replaced even in his own home by a machine. The disharmony with the world is, for Woody, inherited and racial (after the elevator gets revenge, it yells something anti-semitic). It is a fate he is born with; doomed to be out of step with the physical world. Though one need not delve so deeply into the routine to understand the humor involved, the thematic analysis reinforces the notion that Allen is creating a mythology, a structure into which the audience can fit Woody. On the irrational level of communication, such sub-threashold messages color and influence the relationship with his audience even more than the surface statements about himself or his childhood that were discussed in the previous section.

Even when he is dealing with other characters, these same characterizations and themes permeate Allen's work. A good example is his famous moose routine, which begins with Woody hunting upstate and grazing a moose. Thinking the moose is dead, he straps it to his car and takes it back to New York City. The moose is not dead, however, and Woody, not knowing what to do, decides to take

him to a costume party where he will blend in. Not surprisingly, the moose does better at the party than Woody ("the moose mingles. Scores. Someone tried to sell him insurance for an hour and a half"). The moose even wins second prize, with the prize for the best costume going to the Berkowitzes, who are dressed as a moose. The moose is furious; Woody takes him back to the wilds, but he has made an error. He has accidentally taken the Berkowitzes by mistake; and they are mounted and stuffed at the restricted New York Athletic Club. Thematically this is the story of misplaced outsiders in places they don't belong: Woody hunting, in the woods, the moose at the party, Woody at the party, the Berkowitzes in the woods and finally at the New York Athletic Club. Like Woody, the moose too is a failure, only coming in second to a fake moose. The whole bizarre situation would not have happened if Woody had stayed at home. Venturing out into the world, he finds mirrors of his own fictitious psyche: losers, misplaced Jewish spouses, inept and bungling characters, animals and organizations.

Allen's powerlessness in these stories is strategic, in that once the loser image is created and entrenched in the audience's mind, Woody will play off that image by deviating from it. The dramatic tension and the dissonance which result are a source of considerable conflict for Woody Allen fans:

> Then [Woody] betrays us. He gets the girl. And not just any girl. She is the ultra sex symbol girl, the fantasy girl displayed full-length in men's daydream magazines.
>
> But the betrayal becomes worse. Woody goes ahead and shamelessly gets the girl. But the twist of the knife is still to come. In the following scene the girl notifies the audience that Allen is the greatest lover she has embraced, and she's not kidding.
>
> It is appalling. Allen has been travelling under false colors. We have been gulled, made to feel like one of the schlemiels Woody Allen has been impersonating. He is not a schlemiel at all, but a Valentino in a schlemiel's eyeglasses, and he has made fools of us by luring us into feeling superior and then sneeking away to get the most desirable girl in the house.
>
> (Baker, 1975, p. 6)

This somewhat tongue-in-cheek review of Love and Death by Russell Baker manages to reveal a hidden dynamic within the world of Woody Allen's humor. Such a dynamic incorporates in its interpersonal dimensions all three of the classical theories of humor: hostile elements, superiority elements and incongruity elements. But the target of this double masquerade is the audience. Allen keeps his audience uncertain and vacillates between a schlep and a macho stud:

> You have to believe me when I tell you this. There is something seductive about me when I shoot crap [laugh]. I'm at the crap table . . . dicing [laugh] . . . a very provocative women comes up to me and she begins to size me up and I take her up to my hotel room, shut the door, and remove my glasses [laugh] . . . show her no mercy [laugh] . . . I unbotton my shirt and she unbottons her shirt [laugh] . . . I smile and she smiles . . . I remove my shirt, and she removes her shirt . . . I wink and she winks . . . I remove my pants and she removes her pants . . . I realize I'm looking into a mirror [laugh]. . . . I don't want to go into

> details but I was pulling glass out of my leg for two weeks. . . . I was the best I ever had [laugh].
>
> (Allen, 1972-a)

Note when the audience laughs. The first occasion is after a naked boast about being seductive when shooting crap. The second laugh occurs as he goes into the situation--his inflection and very use of the word "dicing" heighten the incongruity between the cerebral Woody Allen and the seductive gambler. The audience again laughs after Woody takes off his glasses--a line one would not expect to draw a laugh, except that it detoxifies Woody's potency in the situation. Again, the response to "showing her no mercy" is inexplicable, a line that's not funny, and only serves to increase the passion of the scene. It is important to note that Allen tells this story in a straight manner, at least until the punch line about looking into a mirror--that is, the story sounds like one a man would tell boasting about the seduction of a beautiful woman. It would not be funny if Woody told it in the third person. The atmosphere throughout the middle part of the story is one of frank tension, eliciting much nervous tittering. The ultimate cathartic release occurs because Allen lets his audience off the hook; as if saying to them that the only way such a thing could happen to Woody would be from a frank misperception and is otherwise impossible. Note the suggestions of androgyny (on

a too-literal level one might say Woody must look like a woman if he thinks that his mirror image is seductive) and its attendant themes of bisexuality and narcissistic self-absorption, and finally, even after realizing the woman was himself, a passionate climax and braggadocio ("I was the best I ever had").

It is important to realize that these themes are not occasional or incidental to Allen's comedic work, but provide a consistent counterpoint to the loser image persistently cultivated. He describes himself as "an inordinately passionate man" and in his "Blind Date" routine which follows, he recreates a seduction scene:

> And I get my date to the apartment. And the two of us are alone and we're going pretty good. I have to explain this very delicately 'cause it's really tentative. As I am an inordinately passionate man. Volatile, sensual, in general, a stud. [woman in the audience becomes hysterical and audience breaks up for more than a minute] She wants me. It's a very delicate thing, what I'm discussing here. A stud. When making love, when making love, in an effort to prolong the moment of ecstasy, I think of baseball players. All right, now you know. Now the two of us are making love violently, and she's digging it. I figure I better start thinking of ballplayers quickly. So I figure its one out in the ninth and the Giants are up. Mays lines a single to right. He takes second on a wild pitch. Now she's digging her nails into my neck, I decide to pinch hit for McCovy. Alou pops out, Haller singles, Mays holds third. Now I got a first and third situation. Two outs, the Giants are behind one run. I don't know whether to squeeze or steal. She's been in the shower for ten minutes already.

> This is too . . . I can't tell you anymore, this is too personal. The Giants won.
>
> (Allen, 1972-a)

There is a disruption in the beginning of this routine as a woman in the audience goes wild with laughter at the suggestion that Allen is "in general, a stud." The audience breaks up for a full minute, by far the biggest laugh on the 90 minute recording. The audience must invalidate this braggadocio, this expression of potency. The smooth interaction between stage performer and audience is broken; it is unclear if the audience is reacting to Allen as a performer who is playing a loser and pretending he's a great lover, or if it is reacting to the audacity of the idea that someone who looks like Allen does and presents himself the way he does could indeed be a great lover. What is clear is that a situation where Allen appears sexual is pregnant with meaning and laughter for the audience. Here, the laughter serves to punctuate Allen's boast and to underline the fact that it will be labelled as a joke, with no serious thrust. In the rest of this routine, Allen alternates between living out the passionate scene ("the two of us are making love violently and she's digging it") and fulfilling his loser image, by having to think of baseball scores. Still, Allen reveals an intense passion in telling this story and is unable to continue. Such a gambit is a persistent hint of his sexuality and drive, but the impact of

this power is buffered by the way it is lived out. This is reminiscent of the scene from his futuristic movie Sleeper where Woody stumbles into a pleasure machine, emerging from it with torn clothes, frothing mouth, rumpled hair and silly grin. While the incongruity between what Woody seems to be and the passion he evinces is a continued source of humor and laughter, on the irrational level it is yet another demonstration of his passion.

The above routines reveal themes of narcissism and potency. Allen's most recent movie, Annie Hall is a paean to his sexuality and power. Taking as its basis his concern for why he broke up with his girlfriend Annie, Woody concludes that perhaps it is because of the variant on the old Freudian joke "I would never belong to a club who would want me as a member." The position, phenomenologically, expresses both sides of the Woody persona: the inferiority, implied in the fact that any woman who would want someone like him is herself inferior, and the egocentricity implied in the idea that he could then rate that woman as inferior to himself and reject her on what seems to be idiosyncratic standards. The film opens with Woody obsessing about why he and Annie broke up and Woody, portraying the famous comedian Alvy Singer, then flashes back to his past, living with his family under the rollercoaster at Coney Island. The past then is construed as the backdrop to his present difficulties

in relationships, and the psychoanalytic process is thus established, functioning as a metaphor throughout the film. Annie, having been persuaded to start analysis herself, misses a session. Alvy remonstrates, saying this was her way of expressing hostility towards him. Annie then stings him with "You're so egocentric--if I miss therapy, you think it's because of you."

Indeed, there are several instances of sexual boastfulness and narcissistic preoccupation with the self and body throughout the film. Reminiscing about his first wife, Alvy notes, "when we first went together, we had sex constantly, we're probably in the Guinness book of World Records!" Another flashback shows her begging him to have sex, and Alvy, playing the obsessive/paranoid/Jewish/New York/liberal to the hilt, refuses, continuing to worry about the Warren Report, bullet trajectory and whether or not the shot that killed Kennedy was an exit wound or not. In still another flashback scene, Alvy, as a sexually precocious third-grader is punished for kissing the girl next to him for the third time in a month. The adult Alvy appears at his seat, and argues that he is only expressing the healthy urges of his body. He then goes around the classroom asking some of the pupils what they are as adults--a criminal, the head of a trust company, a methadone addict, etc., as a kind of vindication of himself.

Alvy sees this conflict between sexuality/body and society/mind resurface with his second wife, a strident, Jewish author and social climber. Eschewing the pompous people at a party they've been invited to, Alvy watches a basketball game on TV. When his wife finds him and nudges him about being sociable, she asks him what is so exciting about men tossing around a basketball and the essence of his reply is that it's so physical. He then tries to make love to her, verbally putting down the stuffed shirts at the party and savoring the idea of secretly having sex at the party. His advances are rebuffed of course.

Alvy sees anti-Semitic plots everywhere. When Alvy asks a record clerk for a copy of a record by a certain composer, the "big, tall, blond, crew-cutted guy" replies that they only have Wagner. Allen obsesses over this with a friend, particularly the way the clerk said "Vagner, Vagner." Later, talking with the same friend, Alvy tries to blame the U.S. refusal to help New York with its financial problems on anti-Semitism. "They think we're all liberal/intellectual/ pinko/homosexual/Jews. Sometimes I even feel that way myself." His friend replies that this is nonsense, that Alvy does not understand the vagaries of politics. Alvy returns with, "you're talking politics, I'm talking foreskin." The motief continues with the tension between New York and Los Angeles; it ultimately culminates with Annie's desire to

go live in L.A. and have the kind of lifestyle that causes Alvy to realize that the relationship is indeed over. Alvy is distinctly out of place in L.A., with its big cars, sunny, temperate climate at Christmastime, and health/physical fitness consciousness. In the meantime, Alvy goes out with other women, a Rolling Stone reporter for instance, who, in a bedroom scene, apologizes for taking so long to climax. All the women in the movie, in fact, appear to suffer from one sexual dysfunction or another. Even Annie must smoke grass to enjoy sex, a desire which incenses Alvy more and more as the relationship goes on. In one scene where Alvy particularly objects, the audience sees a ghost-like projection of Annie's mind get up from the bed, sit down and idly pick up a drawing pad and draw herself having intercourse. When Alvy magically sees this and protests, she responds that he should not worry, at least he's got her body.

One of the themes in the movie (and in the Allen world-view), is concisely expressed in a scene where Alvy, disoriented by the impending separation from Annie, stops a couple on the street in Greenwich Village and asks them if they're happy. They respond,"yes," and he wants to know why. The woman responds that she's shallow, uninteresting and has nothing to say for herself--whereupon the man responds that he is the same. This theme surfaces in most of Allen's

work: one may belong, feel good and be vacuous, or one may be an outsider, never fitting in, always the victim of his own, private torture.

At times, Woody appears to decide in favor of the physical, the uncomplicated, the passionate, while at other times he appears to opt for self-awareness, which for his character is the foundation of his neurosis. Ultimately, though, he never makes the choice, ambivalent about the intellectual values he personifies and yet deeply wanting to belong, to have real orgasmic sex--often--and to be secure in his body and with himself. It is this ambivalence that is what is most endearing and most frightening about Woody's character and his world. Living out the conflict phenomenologically on stage humanizes him, perhaps more than any comedian since Chaplin. It is quite understandable that when he first started as a comic, people would seek him out after his nightclub performance to tell him that life was for them like he portrayed it on stage; that they would call him on the telephone and use him as a confessor, mentor, analyst (cf. Zinsser, 1963). Woody personalizes this abstract, and for Western man, universal struggle, wrestling with the choice of mind versus body in every stage and screen appearance.

"Listening to [Allen's] public monologues has always given me and mine a peculiar sensation that our own

interior monologues have been tapped and are being broadcast," writes The New York Times critic Richard Shickel (1975). He credits Allen with accepting and using the psychoanalytic metaphor in his comedy, and then goes on to locate Allen's appeal largely in an audience of the comic's generational contemporaries, who are generally liberal intellectuals who share Allen's familiarity with psychoanalysis and his literary values as expressed by his sensitive characterization and thoughtful self-examination.

Thus, a typical opening for Allen's act would be the following greeting: "Tonight I want to share with you some of the important things about my personal life." This is what audiences expect from Allen, and he follows it with an act that it wholly in the first person voice, ostensibly and (when he clearly weaves in intercurrent life events), sometimes quite clearly proferring a warm, thoughtful persona for the audience to relate to and perhaps identify with. The quasi-confessional quality of his act (with its clear and "scary" implication that it is a "real" confession--a possibility Allen's audiences are quite aware of) coupled with his free-associative style, halting speech, and ability to appear as an impromptu ad-libber, his utilization of his "past," his frequent mention of his own analysis on stage, his focusing on his private world, feelings and fantasies and his utilization of analytic insights all enhance the

"analytic" metaphor. The effect is that Allen appears to be talking to himself, with the audience feeling no demand (except perhaps when he transgresses the structure of his persona, as in calling himself "a stud") to respond. With this degree of freedom, the audiences may then get into their own interior voices in relative safety. If this becomes frightening, Allen leaves the audience with still another out: his ability to distance himself from his persona and world-view, thus reinforcing the meta-message, "this is only play."

Admittedly, as demonstrated repeatedly above, there is an artful blending of what might be real and what is playful and between the loser image and the image of a "stud." Since the persona itself is the basic Woody Allen joke, any incongruity between the cerebral-loser image and the powerful-physical one invariably creates tension; the audience may then relax into the safe laughter as Allen demonstrates what a loser Woody is. The audience will also use laughter in an equilibrating manner: to confirm the weak image of Woody and to disconfirm the strong one. Laughter also validates the quasi-psychoanalytic world between Woody and his audiences. His "confessional" mode is tolerated and enjoyed because it is congruent with the self audiences assume he is. Appearing to be neurotic, he is allowed to treat the audience as therapist.

It is crucial for his success that Allen never solves the war between mind and body, never fully makes a choice between the value system of the insider and that of the outsider. Too much of the tension, the driving force to his humor, derives from the contrast between these two poles, and from his hiding out between them. Moreover, the subtle seeding of his work with themes suggesting his power, and suggesting that he has merged the cerebral Woody with the physical Woody, softens the possible harsh effects of his weak-neurotic image; even "in character" it is important that Allen never appear to be mired in this stance. If this happened, interactional norms would be too seriously compromised, and the positive-affective reaction Allen elicits could well be overshadowed by anxiety, anger or frustration.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that people respond to Allen in the way they do, that interviewers are typically and obsessively concerned with letting their readers see what the "real" Woody Allen is like. The nature of the relationship Allen offers is generally non-threatening, consistent and three-dimensional.

> When Allen walks the streets of New York, strangers don't treat him quite the way they do other show business celebrities, don't gawk at him or shyly ask him for his autograph. They yell out his first name as though he were an old pal and they often follow him for blocks trying to engage him in conversation because they assume that the Woody on the street is the same man they've seen

> on their movie screen the past 12 years. . . . [T]he character he plays is so real and chummy that his fans feel they have an intimate personal relationship with him.
>
> (Rich, 1977, p. 72)

Even to the degree this reaction is manufactured, and to some extent it may well be, it still attests to the intentionality of presenting a "real" person, and one that is seen repeatedly in interviews about Allen.

On the communicative level, the fantasy level, and the presentation-of-self level, Allen works to detoxify the "fire" Woody presents to the audience. His stage personality and his consistent, plausible and psychologically insightful playing on mind/body, insider/outsider issues are the main components of the functional relationship which Woody has with audiences. Since everyone has some conflicts on this level, there is a commiseration or sharing with the character Allen portrays. We all know what it is like to be an outsider, and Allen, in meta-communicative terms, is able to strike a balance between seriousness and play that enables the psychological conflict to be explored un-threateningly. If at times he reverses things and uses his style and persona to increase tension, we ultimately, if uneasily, find ourselves resonating to him more, and then laughing harder from that identification and tension. By acting as if he is intimate, Woody, on the fantasy level, <u>becomes</u> intimate, and our laughter is our way of sharing a relationship with him,

an explicit declaration that we too know what it is like to be Woody Allen.

This discussion of Woody's world would be incomplete without some assessment of the role of paradox in Allen's work. His power to make us laugh is rooted in the self-paradoxes he presents to us and in his use and control of the psychoanalytic metaphor. The boundaries between the comic and his persona are, in Allen's case, unclear and hopelessly intertwined. Such blurring of boundaries is itself a source of tension; we are never able to determine to what extent Allen is serious or merely playing.

The tensions are enhanced by the contradictions in the image of Woody presented to us. Woody may appear neurotic, impotent and out of touch with his body. He repeatedly shows us, however, that he is passionate, sexually potent, and self-aware. He makes sexual inadequacy his trademark, but tells us, in effect, he is better at making love than we are. He may claim neurotic stupidity, but reveals verbal fluency, inner truth and even wisdom. He plays at being weak but is really more powerful than we ourselves are.

In such a world, laughter is simply a way to fathom the paradoxes of self-definition and self-perception Woody presents us with, as well as a way for us to bracket his power, define his persona, and reassure ourselves that he is, after all, just playing.

CHAPTER V

THE HUMOR OF GROUCHO MARX: EMBARRASSMENT, ENCHANTMENT, AND HYPNOTIC SPELLS

Born Julius Marx eighty six years ago, Groucho was considered one of the greatest comedians of all time, and is frequently compared to Fields, Keaton and Chaplin. Groucho, unlike these other greats, was a success in all the entertainment media: vaudeville and stage, movies, radio, television and books. However, most of his success was in the seventeen films made with his brothers, Chico, Zeppo and Harpo, and in the radio and television series You Bet Your Life, which ran for more than a decade.

Of the seventeen movies made by the Marx Brothers during the twenties, thirties and forties only a few of the early ones stand out as comic classics; after the first six or seven of their movies, the formula and scripts began to get trite and the Marxes' energy level depleted with advancing age. Then too, only in a few of the early films did the Marx Brothers have talented scriptwriters such as Morrie Ryskind, George Kaufman or S. J. Perelman, and only then did they have such good working relationships with their writers. Material was written specifically for the Marx characters and in the case of several of their films, jokes were previewed on the stage on national tours before they were

included in the scripts. It is from these earlier movies--Monkey Business, Coconuts, Horsefeathers, Duck Soup and A Night at the Opera that most of the excerpts and analyses in this study are derived. In discussing the world of Groucho Marx in these films, one is really dealing with the world of the Marx Brothers. Greater attention will be given to the nature of Groucho's persona than to that of the other Brothers, but the cinematic world of Groucho must also include all of the Marx Brothers.

In discussing the Marx Brothers' world, most critics call attention to the anarchic and chaotic aspects of their work. Irving Howe, for example, writing on the social impact of Jewish comedians two generations after the Marx Brothers' movies, argues that the Marx Brothers "split the conventions of stage entertainment into extremes of social satire and chaotic farce," and that they "dissassembled the world, treating it with gleeful nihilism by no means inappropriate to their time." (Howe, 1976-a) Other writers have also searched for clever satire of American institutions in the Marx films (cf. Zimmerman and Goldblatt's analysis of Horsefeathers). The critical and scholarly consensus seems to be that the locus of the Marxes' comedic appeal lies in their extensive use of incongruity and in their anti-establishment orientation, which some critics emphasize in order to account for a rise in the appeal of the Marx Brothers

in the past decade (cf. Richard Shepard's preface in Anobile, 1974).

While it is true that Marxian humor embodies both of these features, this is far from the complete story. Essentially the Marxes are anti-establishment only because the establishment happens to be in the way of their fun, pausing long enough to demolish a particular institution simply because it's there, with no particular ill-will intended. Any target that the Marx Brothers destroy is more by accident or incident than by intention or design. Moreover, while elements of satire do exist in the Marx Brothers' films, their films do not meaningfully lampoon societal institutions because their targets are usually too global and inchoate. Typically, institutions do not last long enough under the Marxian onslaught to be satirized.

It would be conceptually simpler if one constructs an "ideal type" Marx comedy. As a vehicle for this, the movie Duck Soup will be discussed; where Duck Soup differs from the typical Marx movie, excerpts from other movies will be utilized. All dialogue is from the movie transcript.

Marx movies are usually loosely framed with regard to geographical time and place. The place in this movie is a Ruritarian fairy-land kingdom called Freedonia, conveniently, and only slightly, set apart from society as the audience would know it. Groucho plays Rufus Firefly, about

to become president of the country. Groucho, of course, is eminently unqualified for the job, but has obtained it because the richest woman in the land, Gloria Teasdale (played by that magnificent Marxian foil, Margaret Dumont) will only lend money to save Freedonia from bankruptcy if Firefly is made leader. This too is typical: Groucho, who of all the Marxes comes closest to belonging to society, to having a position of power, achieves this by virtue of a relationship to Margaret Dumont (e.g., in Horsefeathers, he simply succeeds the retiring president as head of the college). Thus, his position in society is dependent on luck, or someone's whimsy, while his background qualifications and the justification of his being in the position in which he finds himself are quite tenuous. Because the setting of the movie is global and vague, so too is Groucho's identity and his position in society.

If Groucho is but loosely anchored in Freedonian society, Harpo's and Chico's positions are even more precarious. Harpo is Firefly's chauffeur, Pinky, and Chico is "Chiccolini," who eventually is appointed Freedonian Minister of War. Both of them, however, work for "Trentino," Ambassador from a hostile country. Their allegiances are consistently confused; although they spy on Firefly, and try to steal his secret war plans, they ultimately wind up fighting with him and helping to win the war. The logic of their

switched allegiances is unclear and one is not even sure that they had indeed switched until the end of the movie. Thus, like Groucho, the other two brothers' position, allegiance and identity is unclear.

Duck Soup reveals the quintessence of Groucho's style. On arriving for his inaugural ceremony, Firefly proffers Mrs. Teasdale a card, telling her to keep it, as he has fifty-one left. She looks at him doubtfully but tells him that he is the most able statesman in Freedonia. He responds:

> Well, that covers a lot of ground. Say, you cover a lot of ground yourself. You'd better beat it. I hear they're going to tear you down and put up an office building where you're standing. You can leave in a taxi. If you can't leave in a taxi, you can leave in a huff. If that's too soon you can leave in a minute and a huff. You know you haven't stopped talking since I came here? You must have been vaccinated with a phonograph needle.

Notice the number of reversels, puns, twists of expression and disruption of normal flow of interaction in Firefly's response. There are four insults here, delivered in a clipped, rapid-fire manner. "Ground," "leave" and "huff" are used in one context, only to be misused in a succeeding sentence. Adding to the confusion, "ground" becomes the reference for the insult about putting up an office building. Moreover, there is one more reversal--the reversal of roles, with Groucho accusing Mrs. Teasdale of talking while he's doing all the talking.

Characteristically, anyone who is a victim of Firefly's assault does their best to ignore him and continue doggedly on their own course, as is typical of the Margaret Dumont character.

Mrs. Teasdale: Promise me you'll follow in the footsteps of my husband.

Firefly: [Faces the audience] How do you like that? I haven't been on the job five minutes and already she is making advances to me.

Mrs. Teasdale: Why, he's dead!

Firefly: I'll bet he's just using that as an excuse.

Mrs. Teasdale: [Proudly] I was with him until the very end.

Firefly: No wonder he passed away.

Mrs. Teasdale: [Dramatically] I held him in my arms and kissed him.

Firefly: Oh, I see. Then it was murder. Will you marry me? Did he leave you any money? Answer the second question first.

Mrs. Teasdale: He left me his entire fortune.

Firefly: Can't you see what I'm trying to tell you? I love you.

Groucho proceeds with his anarchic control, with the tension of his insulting Mrs. Teasdale, feeding off both her literal-minded thick-headedness and her refusal to be anything but serious and pompously self-absorbed. The "other" cannot win in Groucho's world; one's very efforts to

escape Groucho's power and ignore his barbs are used by Groucho to enhance his humorous assult.

Groucho is pretty "up front" about his intentions, courting Mrs. Teasdale for her money; yet, paradoxically, she does not seem to catch on. Indeed, most of those who interact with Groucho seem to discount the truth or seriousness of what he is sometimes saying. The reversals, insults, incongruities and subtlety of what he says often leave those he talks to in a hypnotic state, unable to react intelligently to what he says.

His communicating with the audience at the beginning of the excerpt above is frequently found in his movies. This approach has serveral purposes in the Marxian world. It violates the logic of space and time as the audience experiences it unfolding on the screen. Groucho is also inviting the audience to side with him, sharing his innermost thoughts and motives. For example, on occasion, Groucho will turn and comment to the audience that one or another joke was poor, or will tell them, during an instrumental solo, "I have to stay, but there's no reason why you can't leave until this is over." Finally, this type of meta-communication, while establishing at times his more private feelings, serves to undermine and invalidate what one would most naturally construe as his motivations. This is because Groucho is letting us know that he takes nothing seriously,

not even the role he is playing with Mrs. Teasdale; not even the movie in which he is appearing. And, if Groucho truly takes nothing seriously, the audience is never fully able to assess the validity of what he is sharing with them. Groucho remains ultimately unfathomable, a con-man who publicly gives his tricks away, a lover who would as soon insult the woman he is appearing to seduce, as go to bed with her. The prospect that everything is play and not serious implies that nothing is necessarily real, a prospect most unsettling to the "other" in Marxian movies and to the audiences who watch them.

In effect, one is witness to a personal without "content," without personality or structure that would enable one to get through to Groucho, to control him. Even as Groucho lampoons Margaret Dumont, one senses that he would just as soon be making fun of his audience. If the audience may feel privileged to be taken into his council, it is doubtful about whether it really is in his confidence, and uncertain if it will remain there. Ultimately, all one is really able to believe about Groucho is the mental agility and disruptive power that he embodies in his style on screen.

If Groucho leaves little in the way of personality or motivation for the audience to structure and relate to, his consistent use of wit and rapid-fire delivery to thwart another's intentions exacerbate the problem. Without motives

himself, he is uniquely able to invalidate the intentions of the "other," consistently reframing what the "other" says to prevent any intelligible action in the movie.

This is best exemplified in scenes such as the opening one from Coconuts. Groucho is the manager of the hotel and his bellboys are up in arms, because they haven't been paid their wages:

Boys: We want our money.

Groucho: On, you want my money? Is that fair? Do I want your money? Suppose Washington's soldiers asked for their money? Where would the country be today?

Boys: But they did ask.

Groucho: And where's Washington?

In this opening dialogue, Groucho inverts the boys' intention, acting as if they are asking something illegitimate from him, managing to reverse roles and take the stance of one who should be justifiably outraged, while putting the boys in a defensive position. Groucho then goes on to bring in an essentially irrelevant issue, George Washington. The boys, now on the defensive, do not object to this irrelevancy; instead they counter Groucho's charge within the structure he sets up. Groucho is still too agile; by asking, "Where's Washington?" he creates the illusion that their objection--that Washington's soldiers did ask for money--proves his very point. Again, the laws

of logic are suspended, with the tone and content of the dialogue showing that Groucho has reframed the opposition of the "other" to work for him.

However, the boys continue to object and Groucho responds:

> I'll make you a promise. If you'll all stick with me and work hard we'll forget about money. Let's get together and make a regular hotel out of this place! I'll put writing paper in the hotel, and, next year, if you behave yourselves, we'll have envelopes. I'm going to put extra blankets in all your rooms--free; there'll be no cover charge. Think, think of the opportunities here in Florida. Three years ago I came here without a nickel in my pocket and now I've got a nickel in my pocket.

Here Groucho acts as if he is doing the boys a favor; they must, however, work hard to earn this favor. His tone and rhythm completely gloss over the incongruity and meaninglessness of the reward they will earn; they are prevented from angrily refusing his offer simply because they cannot believe he has the audacity to make such an irrelevant offer in the first place. The same is true of the last two lines of the above excerpt: here Groucho is appealing to the cliches in the "land of opportunity" motief, having previously whetted their appetites with the promise of future rewards. However, the payoff (a nickel after three years) is so incongruous with the idea that Florida is a land of opportunity, that they are stunned into silence.

Surprisingly, the boys are still able to object:

Boys: We want our wages!

Groucho: Wages! Do you want to be wage slaves? Answer me that!

Boys: No!

Groucho: Of course not. Well, what makes wage slaves? Wages! I want you to be free. Remember, there's nothing like liberty--except Colliers and the Saturday Evening Post. Be free my friends. One for all and all for me. Me for you and three for five and six for a quarter!

Having weaved in themes pertaining to George Washington, the land of opportunity and team spirit ("let's get together and make a regular hotel out of this place"), Groucho continues in this patriotic vein, appealing to their love of freedom. He deliberately utilizes the term "wage slaves" in two ways: the first, in the normal manner, which appeals to the boys' outrage at being not fairly paid for their work, and the second, in the literal sense, reframing perceptively the notion that the very desire for wages means that one is a slave to them. He then realigns himself <u>with</u> the boys, appearing to want to give them their freedom; this is literally true--by not paying them wages, Groucho liberates them from wage slavery in the second sense of the term. He, in effect, transforms himself from their slave-driver to their emancipator.

Finally, his last line embodies the quintessence of hypnotic skill and technique. It <u>sounds</u> logical, derived

from the rhythmic use of three-word phrases, the repetition of the middle word "for," the use of stock cliches at the beggining and end of the sentence, and the numerical progression in each successive phrase. In the middle of the sentence, Groucho has managed to slip in the injunction "all for me" but the sentence seems so plausible that it is all one can cognitively do to realize their actually was any inconsistency. Groucho, of course, never gives one a chance to point out this inconsistency.

In confronting Groucho, the boys brought to the situation their alliance with each other, their outrage at victimization, and their desire for remuneration. Groucho perverts these features, and their very words, for his own ends. Expectations and motivations are utilized in unexpected ways. While Groucho's logic is nonsensical, his patter and style are plausible and it is no surprise that the bellboys fail to recognize what he is doing and continue to work without wages. Calculatedly oblivious to his own use of absurdity and incongruity, Groucho counts on the desire of the "other" to make sense out of what is happening and to maintain and continue a structured interaction. As quickly as they try to fit events into their own expectations, Groucho perverts their intentions and expectations to fit his self-initiated events; the harder one tries to maintain a semblance of order and structure, the more disorder will

ensue. This dilemma includes the audience as well as his targets on the screen.

In communicative terms, such a process, which is typical of Groucho's interactive style, is analogous to what is called the "hypnotic confusion" technique (cf. Haley, 1967). This technique, developed by Milton Erickson, requires that linguistic conventions, logic, and plausibility be confounded, that one in effect talk nonesense, and grievously violate the expectations of the subject, without giving off "meta-messages" which communicate that one is in fact doing such things. In effect, the hypnotist utilizing this technique systematically violates the most basic expectation of the other: that linguistic and interpersonal interactions will occur in logical, orderly, secondary-process fashion. Simultaneously, the hypnotist must act as if he believes the interaction to be normal and structured, thereby preventing the subject from commenting on the anomalies. In the communications model, one must comment or meta-communicate publicly about a perception for that perception to have any validity. By short-circuiting this possiblity, Erickson is placing the subject in a bind. The victim becomes dazed, confused and bewildered; his logical faculties dulled, and his mind more open to subliminal suggestions. At some point, Erikson, like Groucho, will introduce suggestions (cf. "all for me" in the above excerpt) as part of the

patter. Like Margaret Dumont, subjects continue doggedly to persist in their original goals and intentions, but Erickson counts on this: their very commitment to the rational structured world is what Erickson's assault of absurdity uses to create the psychological bind that results in the trance state.

What does this comparison with hypnosis mean in terms of Groucho's world? In part, it explains a particular reaction audiences have to Groucho (cf. the discussion of Groucho, Milton Erickson and public fantasies below). It also suggests to the reader the degree to which Groucho's style "prepares" the audience to laugh at Marxian antics by inducing a hypnogogic, regressive state. (One of the peculiarities of the confusion technique is the ease with which it effects observers as well as subjects.)

An important feature of this view is that it suggests an explanation of how the tensions intrinsic to Groucho's style and structureless, anarchic world function to enhance the comedy and laughter. Like Groucho's targets on the screen, the audience is also too helpless to assimilate his rapid-fire delivery of ad-libbed incongruities, absurdities and insults. Laughter then becomes an economical way to place some structure on the chaos, to positively and productively label and dissipate the tensions intrinsic to the bewildered, slightly-dazed state in which the audience finds

itself. The audience is eager to unload its tension somewhere and the antics of Harpo, Chico and Groucho provide convenient markers (in effect giving off the meta-message, "this is play, you can laugh now") that enable them to do this. The stylistic anarchy of the Marxes is, for audiences, the only constant which they can hold on to; the only structure they recognize and can utilize to label the tension which results from Groucho's disruptive, unstructured, communicative style.

It is quite important to grasp the magnitude of the tensions Groucho creates interpersonally, through violations of the rules of interaction. Besides placing the "other" in a hypnotic, confused, helpless state, Groucho and the other Marxes show no respect for the boundaries of the other person. Typically, the Marxes will ignore the "other," disconfirm the self which he presents and even attack him physically.

These features can be seen in the following excerpt of a scene from Monkey Business. In this scene, Groucho, who has been hired to protect a gangster, tries to persuade his boss's enemy to hire him as a bodyguard also:

> Groucho: You're just the man I wanted to see. I could show you how to save 20%. Interested? Of course you are. . . . [I]n the first place, your overhead is too high and your brow is too low. Interested already, aren't you?

Gangster: I . . .

Groucho: Now wait till I get through.

Gangster: I haven't got time.

Groucho: Now there are two fellas trying to attack you, aren't there? And two trying to defend you?

Gangster: Why . . .

Groucho: Why that's 50% waste. Now, why can't you be attacked by your own bodyguards? Your life will be saved and that's a hundred percent waste.

Gangster: Say, what are you gettin at? [Stares at him bewildered]

Groucho: Now what have you got. You still got me and I'll attack you for nothing.

Gangster: What?

Groucho: I anticipated that question. How does an army travel. On it's stomach. How do you travel? On a ship. Of course you're saving your stomach.

Gangster: I don't think you realize . . .

Groucho: Oh, I realize it's a penny here and a penny there, but look at me. I've worked myself up from nothing to a state of extreme poverty. Now what do you say?

Gangster: I tell you what I say . . . I say . . .

Groucho: Then it's settled. In case I'm gonna attack you I'll be there to defend you.

Like the previous excerpt of the scene with the bellboys, this scene can be construed as a paradigm of the confusion technique. Note, though, how presumptuous and intrusive Groucho is throughout the scene. In the beginning he keeps asking the gangster if the gangster is interested in his proposition, but he never gives the gangster a chance to answer. Groucho treats him as if he has been in agreement with Groucho all the time. When the gangster tries to tell Groucho how interested he is, Groucho cuts him off, treating what he was about to say as an unsolicited interruption; when the gangster protests that he has no time, Groucho literally continues as if he'd never even said this. As the scene progresses, the gangster appears more bewildered and tongue-tied. Groucho's "questions" are a demand that the gangster make up his mind. Ultimately Groucho makes up the gangster's mind for him, blithely uninterested in what he has to say. Groucho dominates the scene and the only alternative the gangster could have would be to walk away.

Assault on another's identity and disconfirmation of the other's sense of self and intentions are typical of the interpersonal violence Groucho commits. In his interactions with his brothers, which have the effect of underlining the loss-of-identity theme and enhancing the structurelessness of experience, Groucho receives retribution for the "violence" he commits, as he becomes the victim and must experience the loss of structure and disconfirmation himself.

For example, in Duck Soup, there is a scene where Harpo is disguised as Groucho in a nightgown, glasses and dark moustache, and is ambushed by Groucho as he is trying to steal the war plans. Unfortunately they meet at what looks like a framed mirror. Firefly suspects his mirror image is someone else. To prove this he wriggles his behind, does a contorted dance, and pokes his head around the frame while Harpo mimes the same movements. They even encircle the mirror and exchange sides; when one drops his hat, the other hands it back to him. It could go on forever, but Chico interrupts the game, dressed in a nightgown, glasses and dark moustache.

The theme of disconfirmation of self is quite obvious in this scene; when one suspends the rules of logic, space, time and language, the conventional methods of self-confirmation do not apply. Thus, Groucho will not simply reach through the mirror to prove that Harpo is another person. Phenomenologically, one in this position must build solely from the direct experience of his senses within the particular field of interaction. The rules that he and Harpo "build" to establish Groucho's selfhood and Harpo's literal duplicity are a structure unto themselves.

One could view this scene as humor in the Bergsonian vein; i.e., humor derived from stereotypical, inelastic behavior in which "the body reminds us of a mere machine."

But for one to stop here would be to miss the essence and the terror of the Marxian process and their world. This scene must be considered thematically, that is, as one where identity is confounded and the validation of the self is at best, problematic. This is quite similar to Groucho's scene with the gangster in which the gangster had difficulty getting a word in edgewise; whatever thinking he is allowed is attributed to him by Groucho. One notes, moreover, that in this scene the energy and force surrounding the mystification of self come from Harpo, not Groucho--the latter is the victim.

This last consideration is a clue to the function of the other two brothers' relationship to Groucho in the Marxian world. Chico, with his mock-Italian accent, stupidity and con-artist approach, is the literalist of the spoken word--as such, a practicing phenomenologist gone awry. In every one of the better Marx movies there is at least one scene between Chico and Groucho, where each one tries to out-con the other. Invariably, Groucho is confounded and outdone. Symbolically Groucho cannot loosen his hold on adult reasoning and goal-orientation to become the phenomenological "child" Chico is.

Perhaps the most famous of these scenes is from A Night at The Opera, in which Groucho, hearing that the New York Opera Company wants to sign a particular tenor, tries

to get that tenor signed up first so that he can collect a percentage. He must persuade Chico, whom he takes to be the tenor's manager to agree to a contract.

The opening of the scene partly invalidates the motivations and supposed seriousness of what follows, with Groucho claiming that he had shot a man whom Harpo had just sandbagged. Both Chico and Groucho put their foot on the man's body and treat him as if he were a bar rail. Groucho learns that Chico is a foreigner, hence, not legitimately belonging to the present society. Groucho remembers that he is looking for somebody--he too is not centered in terms of his legitimacy in the current interaction--and then reverses roles with the foreigner, asking Chico if he, Chico, remembers whom Groucho is looking for. Chico acquiesces with this reversal, saying that he forgot; it had slipped his mind. Groucho remembers that he wants to sign the greatest tenor in the world and Chico claims to be his manager. Both Groucho and Chico work on the contract with the mistaken identities (Chico is actually managing a young, callow tenor) underlying their negotiations. Groucho, already in an illegitimate position by trying to sign the tenor based on information he overheard, gives very little information away, only to get even less from Chico. They both continue to talk about the "greatest tenor in the world" and "that fellow" but Groucho never knows the name of the person to be

signed for the New York Opera, and when he asks Chico whom he is managing, Chico has forgotten his tenor's name.

Chico, anxious to make his own 10 percent of the deal, agrees to sign a contract even though by the time Groucho has gotten through listing his profits and relevent (and irrelevant) taxes, the tenor will break even "if he doesn't sing to often." Chico's "stupidity" is firmly rooted in the audience's mind. Chico is also illiterate and manages to avoid getting trapped into reading the contract. However, he manages to hold his own as each tries to invalidate the perceptions and actions of the other:

Groucho: Well, go on and read it.

Chico: All right--you read it.

Groucho: All right, I'll read it to you. [Pause] Can't you hear?

Chico: I haven't heard anything yet. Did you say something?

Groucho: Well, I haven't said anything worth hearing.

Chico: Well that's why I didn't hear anything.

Groucho: Well that's why I didn't say anything.

Both Groucho and Chico hedge, each refusing to budge from his position or commit himself more than the other. Both collaborate to confuse themselves and the audience by confounding reading, hearing and speaking.

Responding on his own instincts and the pattern of the words in the contract, Chico manages to persuade Groucho to discard, one by one, each of the contracts provisions, which both proceed to tear from their copies.

In this scene, Groucho meets Chico on Chico's terms (the only people with whom Groucho doesn't have full control, but to whom he attempts to relate within the structure they impose, are his brothers) and guided by his own instincts, Chico is typically able to thwart Groucho's manipulations. Note how the scene is cleverly written to provide the surface appearance of logic, the thrust of Chico's objections is instinctive ("Chico: 'That's no good.' Groucho: 'Why?' Chico: 'I don't know. Let's hear it again.'").

Given his stance, it is indeed Chico who maintains control of the scene, for Groucho must allay Chico's "gut-level" suspicions at the same time he has to deal with a verbal non-logic that sounds as respectable as the "legalese" within the contract itself ("Chico: 'Why can't the first party of the second part be the second part of the first party?'"). Groucho gives up trying to figure out the logic of such objections and agrees to rip the relevant clause out of the contract. Later, Groucho is finally reduced to Chico's own terms, agreeing to rip out a clause because Chico believes that Groucho won't like it.

Finally, after this exasperating scene, in which Groucho barely holds his own, and the foot and a half contract is reduced to a scrap of paper, Chico undoes it all by saying that he forgot to mention that he couldn't write. Groucho replies that there was no ink in the pen anyhow. Hence, the structure of the contract scene, so elaborately worked up, was futile anyway. It is even unclear if they ever agree to a contract; the end of the movie, after Chico's tenor is signed, has them both arguing in the same vein, about the "party of the eleventh part." This scene, perhaps more than any other in Marxian lore, shows the ability of the Marxes to fashion a structure on their own terms--only to undermine it, literally with a stroke of an empty pen. Again, the audience sees that the Brothers are truly without consistent motives themselves--their own process stands, usually only momentarily, on its own terms. One begins to grasp the magnitude of the psychological trauma inflicted on the Marx Brothers' audience; even as it struggles to find consistency and logic to the Marxes' world-view, the Brothers are already undermining it. Groucho may be "punished" or bested in such scenes, but the interpersonal violations and the wholly-phenomenological outlook prevail.

Harpo, who never spoke a word in any of the Brothers' films, plays a role similar to that of Chico, except that what Chico does with words, Harpo does with actions.

Consider the following scene from Duck Soup in which Groucho acts as if he is meeting Harpo for the first time (even though Harpo had chaffeured him throughout the movie in a motorcycle side-car set-up that always left Groucho behind). By treating Harpo as a stranger, Groucho invalidates his identity. Groucho asks him who he is and Harpo replies by pulling up his shirtsleeve and revealing a picture of himself, thereby establishing identity through action. Groucho comments that he doesn's like modern art, but wonders if Harpo has anything by the old masters, whereupon Harpo pulls up his other sleeve to show a tattoo of a belly-dancer moving in time to music as Harpo flexes his muscle. Groucho queries if Harpo knows her phone number, and he, of course, pulls up his shirt, where a number is tattooed on Harpo's side. Groucho asks admiringly where Harpo lives and Harpo opens his shirt where a dog kennel is tattooed on his chest. A film of a dog barking is then superimposed on his chest. (This is an example of a theme tied to Harpo's persona: a defiance of the laws of physical and visual possibility.) Still trying to out-do Harpo's resourcefulness, Groucho exclaims in mock exasperation that, "I know one thing. I bet you haven't got a picture of my grandfather." Whereupon Harpo bends over and starts to pull up his shirt. Groucho finally restrains him and gives up the contest.

As a process, this scene is similar to the contract scene with Chico, in that Groucho agrees to the rules of communication (in this case visual) laid down by the other brother and is beaten at his own game. As phenomenologists, Chico and Harpo out-do Groucho, accepting only their own intuitions, sensations and powers while defying the constraints of pre-structured experience or aphoristic cliches (cf. Harpo's pulling out a candle from his coat lit at both ends, when told that one could not light a candle at both ends; or giving a panhandler a steaming cup of coffee when asked for a dime to buy some). With Harpo and Chico, and only with them, Groucho chooses to be bound by the constraints of society and the establishment. This is possible because Groucho, more than Chico or Harpo has some tenuous contact with the power structure of society, and, moreso than the other brothers, he enters into society and its demands, trying to meet it, to some extent, on its own terms. Groucho also provides more of the vital energy and direction to the disruption of the society, with the other two contributing anarchic side plots and driving perhaps another nail or two into society's coffin.

Their personas take the Marxes' world-view to its child-like extreme: dislike of authority, naive, almost visceral intelligence, a disruption of society in concrete and often physical terms, and impatience with convention.

Both are, more than Groucho, children, more concerned with their own immediate gratification than with any long-range goals. As such, they threaten the serious adult world and they contribute as much as Groucho to the confusion of the audience's experience.

Consider, for example, the function of the obligatory harp solo by Harpo and piano solo by Chico which were features in all the Marx movies but Duck Soup. These rituals were thought by critics to be merely an excuse to allow the Brothers to display their musical talents. However, each of these scenes tended to be hypnotic; a restful structured, calming interlude from the havoc wreaked on experience by the Marx Brothers. Moreover, each tended to heighten audience involvement in the non-verbal. The hypnotic and soothing quality of these scenes (often played with children as the audience) tended to have a regressive, almost tactile pull, hence further removing one from committment to the logical, rational adult mode of social intercourse. Again, the only thing taken seriously is the immediacy of children's play, whether it is Groucho attempting to contest the legitimacy of Harpo's reflection in a mirror, or Chico playing the piano to an appreciative audience.

It is Groucho's somewhat more consistent adherence to pleasure as a goal--always trying to find himself a sinecure, a wealthy woman to marry, while at the same time

lustfully chasing every women he sees--that gives him his power vis-a-vis the other two brothers. They just have pleasure without having to work at it, whereas Groucho is always implementing one scheme or another to con some hapless woman out of her clothes--and/or her money.

The whole arena of sexuality, in fact, is one of the ways Groucho's power is enhanced, putting to rest the notion that comics have to be sexless or inadequate to joke about sex. Superficially, Groucho's movement style, his shuffling walk, his stature and posture, as well as his preoccupation with sexuality resemble Woody Allen's style. Where Allen derives his humor and angst by living out, in character at least, his obsession with his own inadquacy, Groucho uses his body and his sexuality to augment the power of his persona.

Groucho's quick, darting movements, his expressive use of hands, face and gestural language, his knowing leer and his physical agility (demonstrated in his dances or movement) are trademarks of the Groucho character. If his walk appeared to be that of an inferior, visually it dominated the stage and was a convincing counterpart to his mental agility. Other characters in his movies, particularly Margaret Dumont, were excessively rigid, and carried themselves with erect, ramrod postures that gave credence to this characterization. In most Marx movies, an implicit

polarity developed between big/established/well-dressed/conventional/awkward and unconventional/non-establishment/small/agile. Literally embodying the latter as an intentionality (even his thick, greasepaint moustache and morning coat burlesqued society by their very existence), Groucho's very presence was a powerful force in the disruption of the former.

If in action and words Groucho projected a comfort and ease with his body not seen in comedians such as Woody Allen, it was reflected in his looseness with sexuality. The audience was privy to his ceaseless romanticizing of women, and could attest to his success as a womanizer. How else could one explain Margaret Dumont's faith in his abilities and her blindness to his insults? Enough sexual jokes were sprinkled throughout each movie to establish Groucho's credentials as a lover. In one case, while boarding an ocean liner, Margaret asks Groucho, "Do you have everything?" He responds with, "I've never heard any complaints yet." In Horsefeathers, sexual doubts and angst seem quite alien to Groucho, who tells another professor to go home to his wife and then adds that he, Groucho, would go in his place and, outside of the improvement, she'd never know the difference.

For Woody Allen, sexuality is never fully playful; it is too real for him not to take seriously. Sex thus brackets Allen's power, and to the extent that he stays with

the loser image, limits it. Groucho has no such limitations or inhibitions about sexual encounters and rejection does not traumatize him; one might say that Groucho is secure in his masculinity, but it is doubtful if the persona he portrayed would ever refrain from chasing women long enough to stop and think about it. In his attempts at seduction, Groucho is never at a loss for a joke and would as easily insult a woman as have sex with her.

Woody Allen's power comes from the ambiguity around the theme of sexuality, from his blurring of the extent to which he is really and intimately talking about himself and sharing intimate thoughts instead of merely role-playing. Power and sexuality relate quite differently in Groucho's world. His ability to embody sexuality, coupled with his indifference to it, give him power. More than content, it is his style and process that make Groucho awesome. Initiative falls to Woody Allen by accident, while Groucho never loses it.

Eyles (1966) points out that the other great comedians were pathetic, reactive characters (e.g, Fields), rejected, down-trodden and sullen, jibing society as an angry gesture, or naive, sentimental "small" creatures in a hostile universe. Groucho, in contrast, was a heroic figure actively going out, meeting the world and taking control of it. If such power enchants us and makes us laugh, it is

partly because of our own desires not to take life seriously. Groucho takes nothing seriously (unlike Fields, who did). Groucho does not even take his own motives too seriously for more than a moment. He is thus able to distance himself from anything--opera, war, being caught as a stow-away, and especially work. He may have a hidden agenda--to live off society--but he is quite open about it and contemptuous of the power of the society to stop him. His attempts to maintain his cover as a bodyguard, the head of a sanitarium or as a great African explorer are only sporadic and for the fun of it. At other times he will take great pains to ignore or sabotage his own agenda with equal zest. His phoniness is his badge and is a necessary, if symbolic, marker of the power of his abnegation of the self as a motivated entity.

Groucho's refusal to be caught up in society, relationships, or himself is the very thing which allows him to be impervious to most of society's pressures and to brave its sanctions and threats with impunity. Yet, this same power means that Groucho is not behind what he says or stands for; and his commitment to a phenomenological stance is one which need not be too seriously considered. His interactions with Chico and Harpo, in which he is consistently thwarted, further lessens his power.

If he is indeed the agent or source of the destructive iconoclastic force, Groucho ultimately is also lost in its vortex; the endings of the Marx Bothers' movies are abrupt, escalating, intensely-physical scenarios, often with Harpo and Chico dominating in a chase scene, and not atypically with the destruction of the social and even stage setting (e.g., in A Night at the Opera, Harpo substitutes the score from "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" for the operatic score and directs the orchestra as Groucho sells peanuts to the audience). The endings reinforce the phenomenological stance and child-like mode which are assumed by the Brothers in the film; as if having toyed with society the Brothers now grow tired of their game and want to end it with a sudden explosion. Typically, Groucho has few lines at the end of a movie, by then the physical force of the climax makes his verbal ad-lib pale by comparison; Groucho loses center stage and the power associated with it.

Historical Considerations: the Taming of the Marxes

Critical reviews, audience responsibity and production changes bear out the idea that there was too much power in Groucho's style and persona. Duck Soup, for example, was critically panned, the consensus being that the pacing was too furious. Audience response to that movie was also

poor, despite the fact that many people, Groucho Marx included, consider it to have been the best Marx Brothers movie (cf. Eyles, 1966; Marx, 1977; Zimmerman and Goldblatt, 1970). This paradox may be understood when one considers that the movie was without the typical side-line romance, songs, plot development, or Harpo and Chico musical solos. According to Westerbeck (1974), devices such as songs and romantic subplots were not merely cinematic conventions of the time, as most critical evaluations of the Marx movies imply, but were quite functional, in that they served to "insulate the Marx Brothers recklessness from any contact with real problems or genuine emotion." Westerbeck views the cumbersome plot and setting as providing a context where the Marx Brothers' shenanigans can be funny and not vicious. "Anarchy isn't comical in the real world," he writes, "[s]o their films have to pose and sustain a noticeable artifical one." Thus, the plot, the distraction, the boring irrelevancies, soften the impact of the Brothers' phenomenological rape of the audience. In Duck Soup these buffers are lacking, so that it is "pure, undiluted, Marx, sticking to essentials [having] the greatest density and penetration of wit" (Eyles, 1966, p. 86). The movie was too much for the audience, and this showed at the box office.

Today, Duck Soup has enjoyed a critical and box-office revival. In attempting to account for the fresh

interest it has stimulated, one team of critics (Zimmerman and Goldblatt, 1970) believes that the movie's portrayal of governments and their ineptitude has been more than justified by the way governments have performed since, hence the satire of dictatorship is more meaningful to contemporary audiences. Nonetheless, to construe Duck Soup as a counter-culture satire of dictatorship and governments in general is to constrain a Marx Brothers' movie and to commit them to an ideal when stylistically they remained uncommitted. The search for satire in movies such as Duck Soup tells one more about the needs of the audience than about the Marx Brothers' content. This should not be construed as a dismissal of Zimmerman's reasoning, for in truth, it is important to grasp the extent to which such needs are engendered in Marx Brothers audiences. The efforts to construe their movies as satire suggest that critics and audiences had a need to structure the Marxian experience. A need opposed to the main thrust of the movies themselves.

With the poor box-office receipts of Duck Soup, the Marxes left Paramount and went to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer with a new producer, Irving Thalberg. He tried to give the Marxes depth and softened their characters, transforming them from "ruthless practical jokers to sympathetic, abused characters" (Newsweek, 1935). This was done in A Night at the Opera, by paying more attention to the typical, obligatory

romance scenes and by making the Marxes instrumental in bringing the heroine and the fledgling tenor together, and displacing the heartless operatic tenor and the illegitimate manager of the opera company. Moreso than ever before, the Marxes became the targets, with Groucho actively getting kicked down a flight of stairs after being fired by Margaret Dumont. The scene after this has Groucho jobless, disinterested and without a "con," abused in the park by a policeman, kicked off a park bench by the other brothers and drinking from a water fountain that has no water. Oddly enough, the creative gambit worked, with A Night at the Opera reaping their biggest box-office returns as well as generally favorable critical acclaim. Moreover, it was found that women, who had been less interested than male fans, began to like the movie team anew. It appears that investing the Brothers with ideals, and making them weaker, was what audiences wanted.

One gets even more of an insight into the attraction and threat of the Marxian world when one considers aspects of the successful radio and television show, You Bet Your Life (cf. details from Marx and Arce). The show ran over 13 years during the late 1940s and 1950s and was one of the top ten shows for most of these years. Its appeal cannot be understood only in terms of the quiz show fad during those years; the prizes were far too small. Yet the show always

had higher ratings than similar shows. The design of the show minimized the quiz part and typically involved a male and female couple meeting Groucho and being interviewed by him.

The idea for the show came to producer John Geudel after watching a radio broadcast starring Groucho and Bob Hope (cf. A. Marx, 1954, for the discussion of this event). The dialog went as follows: Hope: "Why Groucho, what are you doing way out here in the Sahara Desert." Marx: "[Extemporizing] Desert? Hell, I've been standing in a drafty corrider for forty-five minutes." Hope broke up, dropped his script, and they both ad-libbed for half an hour.

Geudel told Groucho:

> Hiring you to do a show in which you read a script is like buying a Cadillac to haul coal. You're much better at ad-libbing than talking to another stooge. It gives you more reality--you might talk to real people for a change. A real old maid or truck driver rather than other people holding scripts because your character comes over thin and brittle whereas I think you have a certain warmth.
>
> (Marx and Arce, 1977, p. 53)

The quiz show was carefully crafted to give the feel of ad-libbing, and those involved with the radio and television show felt this to be a vital part of its success. This was done by having the staff carefully interview contestants and cuing Groucho as to what he might probe for on the air. Groucho tried meeting the contestants before the shows but the spontaneity was lost and he quickly reverted

to the previous system. Another way in which the spontaneity was kept was by editing the shows via video tape, allowing the shows to go on for over an hour, then paring them down to the half hour of air time.

Audience reaction also helped to shape the format of the show. At first, Groucho would joke during the quiz portion of the show, but the audience reaction was quite negative. The humor in the interview was what gave the show its essence. Strangely enough, the audience demanded that the quiz be conducted in a serious manner. This is especially odd because the money involved was small, and Groucho could, at his discretion, rig an easy question to make sure a contestant got some money. The audience knew this and there would be a large negative response in the mail if Groucho let a war hero or sweet old lady get away without winning some money.

Clearly, two forces are at play here: the audience's need for structure, and their need, presaged by producer Geudel, to see Groucho in human terms, even if this did damage to his brand of comedy. Indeed, watching reruns of the show today, one gets the clear sense that when Groucho is appearing to be polite and interested, he is restraining himself; that is, he is clearly not being Groucho. George Eells (1957), reviewing the success of Groucho's show, writes that the show casts Groucho as a recognizable person

with human frailties, "a cross between Superman and Walter Mitty." In Time (December 31, 1951) a cover story characterized Groucho as follows: "The rest of his delivery is still there, the perfectly timed twitch of the eyebrows, the play of the luminous brown eyes, now rolling with naughty thoughts, now staring through the spectacles with only half-amused contempt, the acidulous faint smile, the touch of fuming disgust in his voice; above all the effrontery." This is indeed the Groucho persona: physical, brash, contemptuous--perhaps more a dirty old man on the television show than the conniving, lascivious youth of the movies. On television, the restraint he showed with some of his guests was merely the flip-side of the power he had used to tie others in knots in the movies. A writer for the quiz shows (Marx and Arce, 1977) reveals that most celebrities refused to go on the show, fearing a battle of wits with Groucho and damage to their public images. Also, the audience desired that Groucho be "punished" occasionally; bested in a contest of wits, as he was in the movies by Harpo and Chico. Eells tells a story of an eighty-year-old contestant who told him on stage that she would leave if he did not put out his cigar. Marx looked stunned and put it out, realizing that this was what the audience wanted. In these vignettes, one senses the power audiences attribute to Groucho, the perceived relationship between power and his ad-libbed style and, finally, the audience's periodic need to see Groucho curbed.

On television, Groucho still retained his ability to build up or destroy a situation; for example, after teasing Rocky Marciano's mother about her prize-fighting son's fights with stumble bums to gain his title, he praises her for raising such a great prize-fighter only to ask: "Tell me, were all his fights fixed?" Groucho's willingness to feed off the genuine personal embarrassment of others extended even to the announcer of the show. For example, on the air, Groucho would frequently mention that George Fenneman was a Stanford graduate; and when he would make mistakes with cash totals, Groucho would say things like, "You know, that boy's a Stanford graduate." Fenneman got queries from Stanford, as well as San Francisco State (his alma mater), and complained to Groucho, who agreed to straighten out the misunderstanding on the air. That night, he said, "George, I understand you've been lying about the school you went to." Fenneman tried to explain that he was not a Stanford graduate, that he went to San Francisco State. Groucho asked for the name of the school again, and when told, he replied, "There's no such school. You made that up. You know you'd have to go to Stanford to be that stupid." (Marx and Arce, 1977, p. 69).

This interaction, of course, is vintage Marx, involving disconfirmation of another's self-statements, attribution of motives to the other, double-binding and

outright lying--with the only payoff being the destruction of the definition of the social situation and the embarrassment of the "other."

Several theories have been outlined so far pointing to the source of Groucho's humor. Perhaps the most promising link between the interpersonal tension and rule violation found in Groucho's world and the fact that people do laugh is the embarrassment of others, which his style so frequently engenders. His insults, creation of dysphoria, double-binding, disconfirmation and all the many tricks of Groucho's style of confused communication all have a common result: the other is left dumbfounded, confused, bewildered, not knowing what to say or how to react, his base motives and facades exposed, his intentions awry and his definition of the social situation useless. One is left, at the very least, embarrassed, and at the very most, humiliated and ashamed.

Embarrassment is a peculiarly social affect, depending on the presence of another person, in reality or even in fantasy. It is also tied to disruption of social situations and violation of rules of public interaction, as is so clearly argued in Goffman's (1959) theoretical framework. In the Marxes' world, the audience is clearly in collusion, if only by their presence and laughter, in the embarrassment which the Marxes create on screen. Shame and

related affects phenomenologically arise through a sudden loss of expected structure, identity, or "content"; one feels that he would like to hide, to avoid being seen by the other, but that there is no way to vanish. Teetering on the edge of structurelessness, confused and bewildered, hypnotized by Groucho's patter, guiltily implicated in the dysphoria created on the screen, the audience is perilously close to experiencing its own embarrassment. With pleasurable and perhaps painful personal associations, the audience laughs and agrees to be swept away by the Marxian onslaught. The Brothers' very speed works for them; captive witness to the embarassment and humiliation of others, the audience is not allowed to linger too long in destruction of the "other," because the Marxes have spared us the pain and moved on to another target. The awkward silence which normally occurs when someone else is embarrassed is filled by the sounds of the audience's laughter, sounds which structure the void and make it seem playful. Hence, the audience's laughter itself is the only cue that the embarrassment is play.

To the extent this reasoning is accurate, it explains why the appearance of ad-libbing was so important to Groucho's audiences. If embarrassment is perversely a cornerstone of Marxian humor, it is important to make a situation look as unplanned and accidental as possible. Groucho's ad-libbing makes the embarrassment or potential

humiliation all the more real and unexpected, while the "other" squirms to recover. This would also explain in part Groucho's relatively unimpressive performance in An Evening with Groucho (A&M records, 1972, edited from concerts). In a concert setting, there simply was no other person to be embarrassed. Marxian humor depends on the existence of that other for interaction to be thwarted, for experience to become muddled and for embarrassment to permeate the performance.

Dysphoric Interaction and Lack of Self-Content: The Source of Groucho's Power

Ultimately, it is Groucho's ability to fashion at will what Goffman (1959) termed "dysphoria" that makes him such a powerful figure. Recall that dysphoria arises when inconsistencies to the prevailing definition of a given social situation occur. Dysphoria is possible simply because people are invested in maintaining smoothly-functioning interaction. Groucho created tension because he appeared not to care about smoothly-functioning interaction. Groucho's lack of committment to social order could be tolerated as long as his targets were, like Margaret Dumont, patently unreal. Even so, audiences desired a softening of Groucho's cinematic presence, a softening achieved through his dialog with Harpo and Chico, and in later movies, by investing him with romantic committments and hapless luck.

In television, with "real" people--contestants, audience and announcer--Groucho's potentially dangerous power loomed too large. Audiences demanded that Groucho pay homage: to the quiz part of the show (even though this was not the main thrust of it); that he act courteously with military men, old ladies and contestants who "deserved" to have their dignity maintained; and on occasion, that he allow himself to be bested by contestants. Groucho had to be bound by the constraints of society or else he was simply too dangerous; the audience sensed his unwillingness to maintain social definitions or to preserve the dignity of others.

In fact, perhaps it was the zeal and elation with which Groucho created dysphoria that caused audiences to discern (or project) a sadistic side to Groucho. Vincent Canby clearly was aware of this, and wrote in an article written after the comedian's death:

> Behind his wisecracks lay a kind of Beckett landscape, hard, bleak, cosmically disinterested. Groucho, in top form, was unbeatable, hilarious; one marvelled at the speed with which his brain operated. But he was also a little scary. One suspected something merciless there, and it's that something that lights up his movies, gives them their dimension and is why we continue to go back and see them again and again.
>
> (Canby, 1977, p. 4)

Unfortunately, Canby leaves one with an enigma, attributing "something merciless" to Groucho, without himself

defining what it is. More than likely, it can be tied to his lack of commitment and delight in the embarrassment of the "other." His powers to confuse, mystify and psychologically manipulate and invalidate the "other" remind one of the magic frequently attributed to great hypnotists like Milton Erickson. Like the transference the public had to Erickson, Groucho looms larger, and more awesome, precisely because his techniques appear unrehearsed, ad-libbed, on the spot and tailored to the situation. In his role, Groucho lives by his wits, the speed of his tongue, his power to out-do the other. Indeed, casting Groucho as a quizmaster, one who always has the answers and challenges you to get them, augments this fantasy picture of a very powerful intelligence, always engaged in a verbal contest.

Subliminally, audiences respond to this implicit challenge. People always confront Erickson with the dare, "I'll bet you can't hypnotize me." And, scarily enough, he always does. With Groucho, the challenge is in fantasy and is one of a verbal duel: "Will Groucho always have a comeback or will some contestant (ourselves?) be able to embarrass him, to cause him to be at a loss for words?" Parenthetically, there was a similar challenge with Harpo: "Will any situation be so extreme or difficult to communicate by mime, that Harpo will be trapped into speaking?" Harpo could always be dismissed because he lived too much in the physical

world and was too alien. Groucho, however, would enter civilization, exposing and burlesquing its trappings. He could beat us at our own game.

Indeed, imagine how dangerous, uniquely dangerous, Groucho was because of his "cosmic disinterest." Groucho would always meta-communicate, effectively distancing himself from the process and never become enmeshed in the fabric of interaction; his perceived lack of caring or commitment made his destructive wit potentially boundless and untamable. Not even invested in his own ego or self-esteem, he was truly unreachable and unstoppable. We could be hurt by Groucho's barbs, confused, embarrassed and invalidated, but he would not be touched by our own.

Adopting a fully-phenomenological stance is at once both liberating and frightening. In his banter, body language, lack of consistant motives or principles, Groucho is too fluid, too lacking in "content," too chaotic in process to be assimilated by audiences. It is not hard to understand the zeal with which audiences latch on to any feature of the Groucho style and personality--his greasepaint moustache, his knowing leer with raised eyebrows, his cigar, his rapid-fire insulting style: these become the "content" of Groucho's persona, those regular features of dress, manner and style that were the only certainties he offered his audience. In time audiences would impose their

own structure on Marx movies and come to cherish the Brothers' comic personas, their musical solos, etc. (And, how quickly, though momentarily, such structure is invalidated in the mirror scene of Duck Soup, when all the brothers are made up like Groucho.)

Although care is taken to protect the audience from the Marxes' attack of their targets, the audience cannot be wholly immune from Groucho's hypnotic (in the Ericksonian vein) barrage. For the character himself, the phenomenological stance appears liberating and exhilirating. But for the audience there remains the confusion, bewilderment and awe felt from watching the power of Groucho at work and from being vicarious participants in the contest of wits.

On still a deeper level, there is always the power and anxiety surrounding the Brothers' joyful but relentlessly phenomenological stance. If undiluted, Groucho and his brothers can not be tolerated in any more than moderate doses. At their best, the Marxes abandon the adult world and have no interest in or commitment to its values.

The artistry of Groucho and his brothers is rooted in the interface between their comic style and the world-view which they embody and impart to their audiences. Groucho's style and hypnotic force drive a wedge between the modes of adult experience and the child-like, chaotic, physical force which he and his brothers model.

Paradox is at the core of Groucho's persona and his relationship with us. Groucho appears powerless but always destroys the powerful social order. He invalidates and sabotages his own motives and affects cosmic disinterest, but he is dedicated and single-minded in his anarchic disruption of the Establishment. He pretends to be a con-artist, but he is relentless in his exposure of phoniness and pretense. He is skilled with words, but he is always bested by an illiterate and a mute. He dresses weirdly, acts crazily, and talks nonsense, but ultimately it is society that is made to look weird and nonsensical, and we who feel crazy.

Groucho's skill at ad-libbing, frenetic pacing, and ability to use and misuse words help to blur the boundaries between sense and nonsense, between a sane, cognitive, rational adult world and an insane, affective, hypnotic child-like one. It is our very commitment to social conventions and a rational world which insure that Groucho will be able to paralyze our rationality, enchant us, and put us under his spell. The Marxes' repudiation of motives and values, and their energy and pacing also prevent a cognitive relationship to their world and foster a visceral one. Finally, we surrender to the Marxes' regressive tug and attain a buoyant state, not unlike a skydiver in free-fall, for we too are in the sandbox, right beside the Marxes.

CHAPTER VI

THE COMEDY OF LENNY BRUCE

Born in 1925, Lenny Bruce became one of the most controversial comics of this century before his death--officially listed as a drug overdose--in 1966. Bruce's medium was the nightclub, although he had minor success in directorial, production and writing jobs in movies and television. His successful comedy albums were recordings of his nightclub performances and even his loosely factual autobiography was largely composed of transcriptions of his concert routines. His career as a comic before the mid-1950s was stylistically mediocre and critically unremarkable (cf. Berger, 1975). His unique style evolved in the late 1950s and lasted only until the early 1960s; by 1964, his performances were too focused on his courtroom battles and arrests for drug and obscenity charges to be studied as comedy.

It is virtually impossible to obtain a gestalt of Bruce's (as with Groucho and Woody, "Lenny" will be used in referring to the persona which the artist "Bruce" creates and to the stage "person" that the audience relates to) style and comic world from the critical reviews and studies of his humor. On the one hand, critical reviews were biased, derogatory and failed to find any wit or merit to his humor;

he was labelled a "sick" comic, a rubric that included Mort Sahl, Shelley Berman and Nichols and May, and Walter Winchel described Bruce as "America's number one vomic." On the other hand, one finds the literature on Bruce to be similarly wholly favorable; he is evangelized, labelled a "secular moralist," considered to be a comic genius and his routines are mined for great depth and meaning. Such works are less critical studies of Bruce's comedy than they are polemical defenses of him and assault on his detractors. Bruce, according to one writer,

> . . . uniquely among members of his profession continues to shock and infuriate, to be the subject on the one hand, of passionate and almost unprecedented advocacy, and on the other of constant surveillance amounting to persecution.
>
> (Goldman, 1963, p. 313)

All this does not mean that critical response to Bruce's work need be ignored; instead it points to an anomaly which must be accounted for by any theory of the phenomenological and interpersonal dimensions to Bruce's world. An explanation of how it is that critics are so polarized and emotional in their attacks or defenses of Bruce lies in the nature of the relationship he established with his audiences more than in his material, an argument to be developed after Bruce's created persona and world-view are more completely described.

There are some studies of Bruce's work which will be utilized in this essay because of their scholarship--especially Albert Goldman's writings (1963, 1971, 1974). Admittedly, Goldman is too invested in locating the source of Bruce's humor in his Jewish-American upbringing and in debunking Brucian comedy and myth. He also attempts to demonstrate at length that Bruce plagiarized from the work of a "comic's comic"--Joe Ancis. Generally, however, Goldman's extensive scholarship has done more to demystify Bruce and elucidate the nature of his comedy than all other critical studies and reviews combined.

Traditionally, Bruce's appeal has been explained (and sometimes explained away) by his satirical appeal and his extensive use of shock in his act in the form of obscene words, actions, and vulgar content. In one of the more balanced write-ups of Bruce's performances, New Yorker music critic Douglas Watt (1969) finds that Bruce gives the "impression of a cocky half-educated young man bursting with opinions" and having "probably too much preoccupation with sex and certainly far too many scatological references." Goldman (1963) finds the shock of "watching Bruce perform to be the shock of recognition" and Bruce's comedy has, perhaps simplistically, been cast in terms of the conflict theories of humor discussed in the first chapter. By saying the forbidden, by satirizing institutions society holds sacred,

by sublimating id processes, Bruce awakens anxieties in his audiences which can only be quelled by laughter.

Indeed, as the following excerpt suggests, much of Bruce's humor appears to be a straightforward substantiation of Freudian theory:

> Now all of us had bad early toilet training--that's why we're always hung up with it. All of us at the same time got two zingers--one for the police department and one for the toilet.
>
> All right he made a kaka, call a policeman. All right, all right. Are you going to do that anymore? Ok, tell the policeman he doesn't have to come now.
>
> All right, now we all got "Policeman, policeman, policeman," and we had a few psychotic parents who took it and rubbed it in our face, and those people for the most, if you search it out, are the censors. Oh, true, they hate toilets with a passion, man. Do you realize if you got that wrapped around with a toilet, you'd hate it, and anyone who refers to it?
>
> (Bruce, 1972, p. 155)

If this excerpt is clearly an example of the taboo--internal conflict--laughter-as-release formula, it is still not a complete understanding of Bruce's appeal. Goldman (1963) points out that there were "sick" comedians before Bruce became prominent and denies that Bruce can be fathomed on the basis of taboo content alone.

Looking at the above excerpt, one finds several features that are not congruent with a Freudian tension-release model. The first incongruity is one of bluntness. The psychoanalytic viewpoint holds that in the joke, a forbidden wish is disguised, with laughter resulting as an

expression of the taboo and as a defense against it. In material such as that quoted above, however, Bruce by no means "disguises" the "Freudian" psychosexual underpinnings of the content; on the contrary, he makes them explicit and communicates about them. When the meaning of a wish cannot be disguised during sleep, one has a nightmare, and the sleep-preservative function of dreams fails. By extention, would not the tension-reducing function of the joke fail of the hidden content is made obvious? One would predict that such bluntness would insure a lack of laughter at the joke as opposed to a positive response.

Framing this material in explicitly analytic terms changes the phenomenological intent of such jokes and changes the meaning of the communication. By communicating and acting as if he is aware that he is communicating psychological insights to his audience, Lenny is reframing the quality of relationship the comedian normally has with an audience. Specifically, Bruce is defining as a rule the notion that motivation can and will be construed by him in causal psychoanalytic terms, and he is establishing a world in which repression, conflict and sexuality are intertwined and are to be the communicative currency of his material.

With the explicit use of the psychoanalytic interpretive scheme, Bruce is also relating censorship to psychopathology. This is done in a personalized context; those

who find Lenny obscene are construed to have troubles with anality. As a relationship-defining rule, Bruce is letting the audience know that disapproval of his act will be "labelled" within a psychiatric context, and that he, Lenny, will be the one to make such a determination. A double-bind is created for the audience; one may either laugh at his material or risk denigration by being publicly "understood" and labelled psychiatrically.

With this strategy, which permeates so much of Bruce's material, he assumes the power inherent in the analytic stance. This is quite different from, say, Woody Allen, who uses the psychoanalytic insights and nomenclature and free-associative talking style in his act, but takes the role of analysand. If Woody stirs transference reactions in his audiences it is by invitation and not force. In fact, Allen's use of the analytic metaphor is subsumed under the obsessive picture he paints of Woody; Woody's "analysis" is part of his stock routines, and serves to detoxify and distantiate Woody and the audience from the "fire" he works with. Bruce, on the other hand, uses such material to enhance and legitimize his power. He becomes the analyst, and his pronouncements, like those pithy gems from real analysts, serve to frame "the truth" unlike Woody's insights, which merely frame his own neurotic style.

This confrontation with "truth" is, as one would expect, fraught with its own intrinsic difficulties, ambivalences and tensions, which in turn permeate Lenny's comic persona and mythology. It also defines, in the present author's view, the polarized and often hysterical treatment of Bruce in the literature: one must either accept Lenny as a social prophet and moralist, unique and profound in his view of society, or totally reject him by labelling him "sick" or obscene. Lenny himself would label this a reaction formation. This, incidentally, is not solely a function of his psychoanalytic perspective; as will be argued below, the way Lenny relates to the audience demonstrates an intentionality that is rigidly absolute and ignorant of shadings, allowing no dispassionate middle ground.

The consistent use of the analytic perspective in his act relates to how Lenny Bruce is unique among the comedians in this study: he presents a systematic, worldview, employing psychology, politics, morality and language to establish an explicitly and repeatedly articulated philosophical system. Of course, both Groucho Marx and Woody Allen demonstrated an underlying unity, a consistent intentionality and attitudinal set in their comedy. However, while their stances defined and permeated their stage personas, they served essentially as a context or "ground" for the comic material. Their intentionalities were explored

through a meta-communicative analysis of their work by the present author and were in a sense "behind" the comic material. With Bruce, his "world" dominates center stage and he explicitly talks "about" his philosophy.

Another significant difference between Bruce and the other two comics is Lenny's vehemence and bluntness in the espousal of his system. In the following excerpt, notice the lack of any evidence of nonseriousness towards the material. In tone and linguistic style, it is a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of organized religion:

> Goddamn the priests and rabbis. Goddamn the Popes and all their hypocrisy. Goddamn Israel and its bond drives.
>
> What influence did they exert to save the lives of the Rosenbergs--guilty or not? The Ten Commandments doesn't say, "Thou Shalt Not Kill Sometimes . . . ."
>
> (Bruce, 1972, p. 91)

In tone, style and material, Lenny develops a moral world-view that is the manifest and not the latent content of his material.

Essentially, Bruce's language and attitudes embodied in his world-view are permeated with the show-business hyperboles of agents, the hipster/dopster/jazzman argot, and the machinations and sensibilities of a Madison Avenue advertising executive. Consider, as an example, one of Bruce's most famous routines, "Religions Incorporated" (Cohen, 1968, pp. 61-67). Starting with the "what-if"

supposition that Religion is really big business, Lenny portrays a Religions Incorporated corporate meeting; corporate leaders include Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Danny Thomas, Pat O'Brien and General Sarnoff.

The meeting begins with a congratulatory address from the company president, who tells Billy Graham, "[Y]ew come a lawng way, sweetie--who would have thawt back in '31--we were hustling baby pictures then and shingles and siding . . . now Catholicism is up nine points, Judaism up fifteen, and the Big P, Pentecostal is stahtin ta move." He then mentions the upcoming annual Plymouth-Dodge raffle--of a Church. The President then shows the other corporate members some of the latest hot-selling items on the religious market, including a genuine Jewish-star-lucky-cross-cigarette-lighter, a kiss-me-in-the-dark mezuzah, and cocktail napkins inscribed with "another martini for Mother Cabrini."

The fantasy becomes more and more surreal. A corporate prayer for heavenly salvation yields a telephone call from the famous rabbi, Stephen J. Wise, who, speaking in a British accent, advises the corporation to subdivide. The routine concludes with a long-distance talk between Oral Roberts and Pope John ("Johnny, Baby, What's Shakin'?") with Billy Graham asking the Pope for a Ferrari because the car is made in Italy, and with Oral telling the Pope not to worry, that no one even suspects he's really Jewish.

In Bruce's world, Good, as embodied in organized religion, loses its moral connation when one "sees" that religion is merely a big business. Similarly, one finds that the Mythical Evils of society are debunked in the Brucian schema as well. In another routine, for example, Lenny lets his audience know how Hitler came to power (Cohen, 1968, pp. 135-138). The story begins when the Dictator quits, and two German theatrical agents, having only 72 hours to find a replacement, conduct tryouts for the part. To their dismay, no one is suitable, until they happen to notice the man painting their office. They persuade him to take the part and give him as a stage name ("Adolph--what? Something to hit the people . . . Adolph Hit-the-people? Something . . . Adolph Hitler."). After the agreement is reached, one of the agents, noticing Hitler's departing fascist salute, incorporates it into the "act" ("Who vaves zis way but a beautiful nut like this? It'll catch on. . . . It's free form . . . easy. . . . I can see the kids doing it. . . . Adolph, you ever get hung up for words, give zem zis bit, sveethart.").

By proffering this meta-communicative perspective to his audience (meta-communicative in the sense that individiual motivations and events are explicitly subsumed under the profit motive, and that Bruce will let the audience in on this approach before or while enacting the fantasy) Lenny

is driving the wedge between the sincerity which people invest in beliefs in good and evil, and what is really behind such good and evil. Thus, Hitler did not really "hate" the Jews--he was simply enticed at the chance to make a buck, and the Third Reich is really a musical. Similarly, one's faith in religion as good is equally misplaced; can eating meat on Friday really be a sin if the Pope is actually Jewish? Hence, aside from his explicit attack on the heroes and villains of contemporary culture, Lenny is implicitly disturbing his audience in a more serious vein, by suggesting that their value systems are not worthy of belief and are at best arbitrary constructions of the business or entertainment worlds. Lenny's consistent use of the ad-agency-theatrical-con-artist metaphoric tone and perspective becomes the cornerstone of the moral relativism he directly preaches to his audience.

Famous heroes and villains are not the only ones to fall victim to Lenny's cynical and jaundiced view that sentiments are laughable and arbitrarily manipulated. Lenny will often attack the audience's perception of its own enlightened humanity and liberalism:

> I'm so liberal that I've never had any sympathy for the white Southerner--He tawks lahk that, he tawks lahk that. The poor schmuck probably doesn't even talk like that, but some schmuck in

> the Bronx wrote a screenplay with him tawkin' lahk that, so the putz ends up tawkin' lahk that.
>
> (Bruce, 1974, p. 79)

If audience faith in its own humane liberalism is based on arbitrary and irrelevant values, then that liberalism itself is open to attack:

> . . . and I start to dig something . . . who's always showing me these [articles on George Rockwell]? Liberals. Who's interested in reading everything they can on bigotry? Liberals. George Lincoln Rockwell is a very knowledgable businessman with no political convictions whatsoever. He's just hip . . . writes something in an article . . . they keep reading it and buying it . . . they support it. He probably works to rallies of nothing but Jews shaking their fists at him.
>
> (Bruce, 1974, pp. 81-82)

In effect, Bruce demolishes what the audience is and believes without providing a substitute.

Another cornerstone to Bruce's world view is that of linguistic relativism, a theme he would often lecture to his audience about. Consider the rather Talmudic argument, but a phenomenologically correct one, that he uses to demonstrate why he is not obscene:

> Here is a toilet. Specifically, if I can tell you a dirty toilet joke we must have a dirty toilet. That's what we're talking about, a toilet. If we take this toilet and boil it and it's clean, I can never tell you a specifically dirty joke about this toilet. I can tell you a dirty toilet joke in the Milner Hotel or something like that, but this toilet is a clean toilet. Obscenity is a human manifestation. This toilet has no central nervous system, no level of consciousness. It is not aware, it's a dumb toilet, it cannot be obscene. If it could be obscene it could be a Communist toilet it could be cranky, a tratorous toilet. It

> can do none of these things. Nobody can offend you by telling you a dirty toilet joke.
>
> (Bruce, 1971, p. 155)

Another variant on the Brucian theme of linguistic relativism was the way that Lenny claimed to his audiences that his use of shocking vulgar words in his act was a device to de-condition people from their emotional reactions to such words and the implication that particular body parts or functions could be dirty. Repetition, Lenny argued would help to make such words lose their negative emotional connotation. "If the President got on television," Lenny used to tell audiences, "and said, '[T]onight I'd like to introduce the niggers of my Cabinet,' and yelled, 'nigger, niggernigger niggernigger . . .' at every nigger he saw, until nigger didn't mean anything anymore, then you'd never make a four year old nigger cry when you called him that." Note that such an approach makes words relative, so that by the time Lenny finished with this type of routine, "nigger" in fact did not have its initial power. Significantly, though, one finds that Lenny, in such bits, gives his craft a powerful moral tone; he now assumes the power of a teacher.

The ultimate implication of the world which Lenny presented to audiences is complete moral relativism. Talking about a teenage friend of his who became homosexual after spending a summer in Atlantic City, Lenny labels this deviancy "environmental." Homosexuality introduced his friend to a

peer group and gave him an identity, and is therefore morally acceptable, no matter whom it alienates. "He could just have easily have come back a water skier, or junkie, or Jehovah's Witness--the point is, he came back as something." Moral judgments are construed as invalid here.

In a more political vein, Lenny compared the plight of a Klansman called to testify before the House on Un-American Activities Committee with that of the writers persecuted during the McCarthy Era for Communism. "Some poor asshole now gets schlepped up to HUAC, who doesn't know about anything--all he wanted to do was sell some used car to a guy in Tennesse" (Kofsky, 1974, p. 43). Or, then again, there is Lenny's dictum on Radio Free Europe: "All I can tell Europe is that this is my country and I dig it here, it's good to me and there's no right or wrong. . . . It's mine, that's all."

If words--particularly obscene words--are not what they appear to be, and human motivation, social convention and morality are consistently aggressively satirized, re-framed, made into something they're not and finally dis-counted, the observer of Lenny's world finds himself in a situation approaching the effects of the anarchy of the Marx Brothers. As theorized in the previous chapter, constant disruption of structure and normal interactive flow increases hypnotic susceptibility and lead to an experiencing of the

anxieties intrinsic to a truly phenomenological stance. Indeed, one experiences that kind of hypnotic susceptibility and awkward discomfort listening to Bruce's recorded concert, Lenny Bruce at the Curran Theater. Two of the six sides of the album have virtually no laughter at all--one hears instead a tense, powerful attentive silence from the audience during Bruce's performance. Bruce uses his voice to heighten this susceptibility, doing in vocal style what Groucho does with words. At times he screeches in anger one minute, implores the next, runs words together, talks in a high falsetto, repeats phrases over and over, and, at one point, does a word-poem, "To Come is a Preposition" which captures the tension and rhythm of passionate sexual intercourse and climax.

The whole style of his act robs the audience of structure and violates its expectations. Bruce meanders from one subject to another, sometimes returning to his original subject to prove a point, sometimes not. He reads from newspapers, quotes from numerous trials, loses his audience with vague esoteric references, mumbles into the mike inaudibly, trailing off in midsentence and drops his voice and alternately raises it at random. The structure-lessness of the show combines with the rapid-fire change of mood, vocal tone, language and dialect to enhance the hypnotic, eerie quality of the performance.

It is instructive to contrast such features of Bruce's performances with those of the Marxes. Unlike the Marxes, Bruce does little to lessen audience stress. His rambling, unpredictable act does not have the consistent and recognizable "process" of each Marx Brother. The Marxes' characteristic "badges" and styles give us an object for our affections. Though they rob us of rationality, the Marxes present us with familiar, if sketchy, personas, each in one way or another embodying some aspect of the pleasure-seeking playful child. In part, this might enhance the anxieties we would feel because the engineers of the frightening loss of social definitions are these three incarnate models of child-like regressive process. It is more likely that the child-personas of the Marxes tend to loosen, distract, and elate audiences with the obvious zest that the brothers exude when engaged in their anarchic play; the bottom line of the Marxes' phenomenology and allegiance to nothing beyond the experience of their senses, is, simply, that they appear to have fun.

The Marxes model something positive in other ways too. Appearing at cross-purposes, they ultimately come together for the same anarchic end. By keeping consistent personas and using the same routines in each movie, they retain an underlying (and endearing) unity. Additionally, they demonstrate a periodic closeness to each other that is

easily sensed. In the Marxian world, abandonment of rationality and living in the moment are quite easily construed as enjoyable and even liberating.

Although they undermine the validity of pre-structured experience, the Marxes never really make any demands on an audience and appear self-sufficient and self-contained. Groucho, for example, never needs our presence to be powerful; his power lies in his unequivocal ability to ad-lib and mortify the other. If he offers us an alliance, it is on equal terms, without demanding response. Chico might at times bore us with his musical talents, or the scriptwriters might give Groucho a bad line, but one senses that Groucho always feels the freedom to turn to the audience and share his perception of such mediocrity, and to treat the audience, the movie, his character, his jokes and his brothers with the lack of respect he feels they deserve.

Clearly, when comics such as Lenny or Groucho assault rationality and values, they must not make too many demands on the audience. They must also provide the audience with plausible objects for its affections, even if such objects are just cardboard characters with a greaspaint mustache or a clown's clothes. Robbing an audience of its rational mind, the Marxes are willing to give something in return: identifiable and genuinely likable images of three children whose sandbox is the adult world. Mindful of the

stresses under which his comedy places audiences, Groucho is willing to pay homage when the targets become too real and to be defeated by Harpo and Chico, who are too alien themselves to be as serious a threat to us as Groucho represents. Finally, there is no sense of urgency emanating from the Marxian world, no real demands on an already strained and tense audience.

Such considerations, the way the Marxes "care" for their audience, must be kept in mind as one explores the difficulties inherent in Lenny's world and the pitfalls to his style. Implicit in a discussion of Lenny's persona, one needs to evaluate the importance of what Bruce offers audiences in light of what he takes away from them. In the following pages, one must pay attention to the demands Lenny makes on the audience, to the communicative "rules" he establishes, and to the ability of the audience to relate itself to his world and respond meaningfully to his material.

In his act, Lenny would often talk about himself and his perceptions, weaving intercurrent life experiences into his routines and sharing with the audience his reaction to his experiences. In fact, this feature of Bruce's act was so prominent, it led critics to believe that "Bruce went out of his way to be as painfully honest with his audience as possible" (Kofsky, 1974, p. 14). As was seen in the

case of Woody Allen, such "honesty" can be highly functional to the comedian-audience relationship, providing the audience with the sense or fantasy of meaningful sharing with the performer.

However, there is a danger to this strategy, a danger that was actualized in Bruce's work: a comedian may give the appearance of intimacy and candor, he may even create tension by appearing to be too "personal" in his act, but meta-messages must be provided to the audience which say, in effect, that the comedian is "really" or at least partly pretending. This gives the audience the "out" of believing (or at least wondering uncertainly about when) the comic is sometimes pretending. If there is too little clarity about the extent to which the comedian is "putting on" his audience, the quality and balance of the performer-audience relationship shifts. The audience must deal with the dysphoric--in Goffman's sense of the term--aspects of sharing too much with a stranger. The boundaries of inter-personal public distance will have been passed and there will be too much tension for laughter to occur. One finds below that in Bruce's "fantasy" routines, his bringing his own intercurrent life troubles onto the stage, his lack of meta-message distantiation, and his overall mythical quasi-autobiographical presentation of self, Bruce failed to allow the audience distance, appeared too serious, and, ultimately

portrayed himself as an ambivalent, powerful, absolutistic, demanding performer, whom the audience could not, in terms of his "rules" and patterns of the relationship, satisfy.

Bruce took great care to invest in Lenny those mythical and auto-biographical attributes necessary to establish the credibility of Lenny's world, and to make it appear that Lenny's "life" was quite consistent with the philosophy he espoused. Bruce does this largely by depicting Lenny himself as one of the "con-men" that also turn out to be behind politics, churches and other societal institutions. Bruce wrote and talked freely of how Lenny pretended to be a transvestite in order to expedite his discharge from the Navy, of how he helped rig a segment of a quiz show for a cut of the profit, of how he committed fraud in Florida by pretending to be a priest soliciting donations for a leper colony. At other times, Bruce would weave the fabric of surrealistic "cons" while onstage allowing his audience to participate vicariously, as when he opened his show at the Curran Theater by noting the small size of the crowd and making up a scheme to recruit skid row alcoholics to fill up the house. His consistent use of esoteric criminal and con-artist terminology, his playing to the band, his hip-slang talk also helped to cement Lenny's credentials as a bona fide con-artist. These self-disclosures establish Lenny's understanding of the world that becomes his metaphor and

also his honesty and moral authority in disclosing that world to his audience.

Many of Bruce's fantasy routines leave the audience with the sense of Lenny as guilt-ridden and obsessed with his own sins. In one such routine, "The Palladium," Lenny develops a story of a narcissistic, self-involved stand-up comic who demands that his manager book him at the Palladium, a famous vaudeville house in England, believing that performing in such a "class room" will give his career a needed boost. Boasting to his manager that he has new bits, that he knows how to play to Jewish and Italian audiences, the comedian gets his booking date. Onstage at the Palladium, he bombs, and nothing, not even doing an impersonation of Al Jolson ("You can knock me, but don't knock a guy that's dead . . . a guy who helped a lot of servicemen") can salvage his act. He leaves in despair, telling his audience they're squares and promising not to do a bit that everyone likes. Refusing to cancel his contract, he returns the next night, faces the same rejection, and ends his act by screaming "Screw the Irish" in an attempt to get some audience reaction before he is dragged off the stage. If a perceptive indictment of the cliches of the show-business world, this routine also demeans the world in which the audience locates Lenny and relates to him; it therefore represents an oblique self-disparagement. Communicating such a fantasy to another

implies some self-absorption in its themes of narcissism and the fear of audience rejection, and therefore allows a sense of auto-biography to be involved in the routine.

Bruce is more direct in another show-business fantasy "The Tribunal." It is a Day of Judgment fantasy in which all over-paid entertainers are punished when they are unable to justify their excessive incomes. Bruce concludes this routine in which punishment is meted out to each sinner (e.g., for Sammy Davis, his mezuzah will be taken away) by telling the audience that he is really not a moralist. If he were, he'd be giving away his salary to teachers, and informs the audience that he is actually saving money for that day when he will be forced to give some of it back.

Audience perception of Lenny's concern with guilt and inadequacy are even more acute when he talks of his function as a comedian, telling them that at times "I see myself as a profound incisive wit, and then as a pompous subjective ass." In his relationship to the audience,and in the context of fervently preached relativism, Bruce creates an interesting paradox, as suggested in the following quote:

> Today's comedian is not doing an act. The audience assumes he's telling the truth. What is the truth today may be a damn lie next week . . . the truth. When I'm interested in truth, it's really a truth truth, one hundred percent. And

> that's a terrible kind of truth to be interested in.
>
> (Cohen, 1968, p. 111)

After embracing and preaching relativism, Lenny displays a pronounced absolutism. In tone and content, he is obsessed with rationalization and self-justification. Even as he denies that he is rationalizing, his speeches on obscenity and its purpose in his act, his recounting of his false arrests and courtroom appearances, his assault on religion immediately following his decision to pretend to be a priest (cf. Bruce, 1972, pp. 74-75) cannot be perceived as anything but elaborate attempts at self-vindication.

To a degree, Lenny equates and locates his transgressions on stage with the excesses of society: "[A]ll my humor is based upon destruction and despair. . . . If the whole world were tranquil, I'd be standing in the breadline--right back of J. Edgar Hoover." Lenny thus ties his audience in an intensely moral world, with personal responsibility being all too real, oppressive and serious, where there is only black and white, and where anything less than perfection is failure. Even the professed content of Lenny's "relativism" clashes with his style of presentation: Lenny is too committed to his philosophy, too invested in his words to really appear comfortable and congruent with the non-judgmental relativism he preaches. Unlike the Marxes, whose demolition of the structure of the adult world is made

credible by their indifference to its values and adherence to having fun, Lenny, the on-stage persona, does not act in accordance with the phenomenology he preaches.

Lenny oozes committment, concern, righteous and self-righteous anger and passion. In his act, Lenny's reading from his trial transcripts, for example, was clearly serious. Ultimately one cannot let go of the adult, structured established world if one takes either that world or one's self too seriously. The self-involvement without distancing cues characteristic of Lenny's persona is clearly indicative of the profound mind-body split, and not of the non-judgmental phenomenology which Lenny affected. Worse still, it is easy to see how the stage persona becomes too close to the "real" Lenny Bruce to allow audiences the distantiation required for comedy.

Another inconsistency in Bruce's stage world emerges. Having made the ontological basis for moral judgments useless, Lenny himself appeared to audiences as extremely, if subtly, judgmental. This is clear in his allegedly verbatim routine enacting his arrest for using the word "cocksucker" in a San Francisco nightclub:

> Then we got into a patrol wagon and another officer says, "You know, I got a wife and kid . . ." "I don't want to hear that crap," I interrupted. "Whatya mean?" "I just don't wanna hear that crap, that's all." "Did your wife ever do that to you?" "No." "Did anyone?" "No." "Did you ever say the word?" "No." "You never said the word one time?" "Let ye cast the first stone, man?"

> "Never." "How long have you been married?" "18 years." "You ever chippied on your wife?" "Never." "Not once in 18 years?" "Never." "Then I love you, because you're a spiritual guy."
>
> (Cf. Goldman, 1974, p. 471)

The incredulity manifested by Lenny as he recounts this story is an indictment and ridicule of the policeman's lack of sexuality and conservative morality. Lenny clearly judges the sexuality of others by the hedonistic values and standards of his own sexual preferences; to differ from Lenny is to be weird, funny, and the object of his ridicule. Later in this routine, Lenny argues that fellatio is not intrinsically homosexual and that "it relates to any contemporary chick I know or would love or marry." Although his views appear sensible, his style of presenting them to audiences is an obvious flaunting of his own sexuality and lack of inhibitions. His sexual freedom becomes the vantage point from which Lenny ridicules the other as well as the basis of his alliance with audiences against the "target." He presents audiences with an insoluble paradox: "I am immoral and moral values are meaningless and are used by the mainstream to oppress others, but I will judge and ridicule you if you do not meet the standards I set up."

On a fantasy level, Lenny creates a theme of Reichian proportions and scope: a repressed, twisted Establishment attacking the vitality in a sexually free Lenny, a theme echoed in his bit on censorship and anality quoted earlier

in the chapter. In this scheme, there is a brilliant and significant reversal: Lenny, via sexuality, becomes powerful and the "policemen" of the world are recast as sexually repressed, inadequate outsiders. Lenny is presumptious in relating to the audience as if it is privy to the joys of oral sex, and uses this presumptiveness to share the "insider's" perspective in this vignette. By laughing at the policeman's inhibition, the audience, in fantasy and thought, if not action, appears as sexually contemporary and liberated as Lenny the hipster.

This leads to another critical and inconsistently judgmental aspect of Lenny's world: the polarity and struggle between the insiders and the outsiders. Lenny's routines always have opposites at their premise: Jew versus Gentile, Southerner versus Northerner, Liberal versus Conservative, ad-men, con-men and show business agents versus audiences and victims, and, most frequent of all, Lenny Bruce versus the police, the law, and the courts. In his world, there are always those "in the know" (such as the corporate heads of Religions Inc.) and the people they dupe. Adversary struggles between opposites is quite a regular theme in Lenny's routines, typically with one or another side having inside knowledge, secrets or shared and hidden perspective.

It is largely out of the adversary world he embodies and his ability to offer the other a shared and

hidden perspective that Lenny's relationship with his audience is fashioned. Lenny transforms this secret perspective into a source of power, as seen in the vignette about his arrest; laughter at that routine comes from a triumph, a sense of being better than the other. The mythical persona which Bruce developed on stage of a Jewish/hipster/dopester/jazzman/satyr was an artful gestalt that neatly blended the worlds of the taboo, the deviant and the exciting. In his skilled use of slang, third-world dialects and esoteric underground references, Lenny was proudly living out onstage the role of sensitive "beat" outcast, persecuted and harrassed by the Establishment of the 1950s and 1960s.

It is predictable that the locus of power for someone playing out this role was his very "out-sidedness" and ostracism, the sensibilities and sense of victimization that Lenny would appear to audiences to share with the other deviants and casualties of mainstream America. The display of perceptivity and awareness of what lay behind the Establishment facade became a perspective from which audience and performer could share a relationship and a sense of strength. Lenny's speaking style and use of hipster dialect framed a stance from which he would ridicule straight middle-class "wholesome" American life. Lenny's favorite trick of lapsing into Yiddish terms when describing sexual activities in effect linked the guttural earthy language of the Jews with

the sexual awareness and passion he would attribute to them and other outsiders.

One can theorize that the kind of relationship fashioned by Lenny with his audiences was fraught with its own tensions. The desire of the audience to belong to his world must have been quite strong. The alternative to belonging, certainly, would be quite unacceptable for audience members, given the way Lenny portrayed the outsiders as sexually twisted, emotionally crippled, hypocritical and morally responsible, if only through indifference, for the misery in the world. Laughter could thus be self-construed and self-labelled as evidence of affirmation of membership in Lenny's inside world, as evidence that one is perceptive enough to "see" what Lenny is talking about.

Thematically, the world which Lenny thrusts on his audiences is founded upon conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, powerful aggressors and victims, accusations and persecution, moral absolutism and a tone of outrage and betrayal, polarities of insider-outsider, and a sense of belonging which is grounded in the sharing of secrets. One experienced with the vicissitudes of mental illness might find a likeness between such a world and that of the clinical paranoid. Even the playfully-conveyed themes of the "con-artist," "marketing Hitler" or the "Church-for-profit" partakes of a paranoid world-view with its clear themes of

someone typically putting something over on another person and taking advantage of him, and its sensibility that motivation never is what it appears to be.

Perhaps nowhere does Lenny reveal a clearer preoccupation with secrets, an outraged sense of having been victimized and cheated, an ambivalent over-evaluation of "self," coupled with self-denigration, a conflict over whether he really is on the inside or on the outside than in his routines involving Jewishness. Thematically these routines invariable incorporate inadequacy and link them to Jewishness. For example, in the excerpt which follows, one sees Lenny's desire for the perfect mother coupled with his sense of having been cheated:

> Fay Bainter, Andy Hardy's mother, screwed up every mother in the world. She really did, man. Dig, who can be like Fay Bainter . . . always in the kitchen sweeping with an apron on. And Anglo-Saxon and my mother was sweating and Jewish and hollering, man. Why Couldn't she be like Fay Bainter? [T]hat's what everyone wants their mother to be. And she was a virgin. She never balled anyone . . . that [movie series] was some heavy propaganda man.
>
> (Bruce, 1972, pp. 151-152)

In effect Lenny says everyone has been very deprived; the outrage of having lost the perfect mother is targeted on the culture which created such stereotypes. In still another routine, Bruce describes the most beautiful women as German and Irish ("Winner chicks, the most goyish goyish" [Cohen, 1968, p. 221]). Denying that Jewish women

are necessarily unattractive, Bruce goes on to say that the "pink nippled, freckeled, goyish punim [Christian looking face] that's rare tribe [a choice woman]!" With someone like Jewish Elizabeth Taylor he says that "even if [I] can't see the moustache he knows its there--and a mole with hair on it."

Perhaps his classic "Jewish" routine is "Why Ruby Killed Oswald" (Cohen, 1968, pp. 48-50). Bruce began the routine by telling the audience that Ruby killed Oswald because Ruby was Jewish, and that the real villian was Ruby's grandmother. Even the language in this routine is suggestive of a confessional, of getting something off his chest:

> I really want to tell you that. I want to tell Christians that, you know. I can tell it to you because it's all over now, I wouldn't cop out when it was goin' on.

Lenny then confesses that he himself had "tremendous hostility" for Christian boys while he was growing up, becuase they really knew how to fist fight and he was afraid to fight. He also admired them for fighting. Since his neighborhood was predominantly Jewish, it never got to be an issue. Ruby however grew up in Texas ("they're concerned with Bawls. And shooting guns--a Jew in Texas is a tailor"). Ruby, it develops, killed Oswald to win the respect of Christians to become a "Jewish Billy the Kid." The end of the story has Bruce telling the audience that this portrayal

of the Christians as super-masculine bullies was just Ruby's grandmother's fantasy. Bruce concludes by upholding the self-denigrating aspect of the Jewish-"goyim" stereotype: "even the shot was Jewish--the way he held the gun . . . a dopy Jewish way . . . he probably went Nach! too."

It would make sense to consider this routine as a satire on all stereotypes and the perils to which they lead one, with the conclusion on Bruce's part as a further form of self-parody. Adopting a more "clinical" stance, one can easily see the ambivalence towards Judaism, with the story suggesting themes of self-hate, inadequacy and duplicity (on the grandmother's part and on Bruce's part for upholding the stereotype). Bruce's world is one where people are motivated by weakness, self-doubt and the desire for mother's (or grandmother's) love, where efforts to belong and fit in may be founded on illusion or lead to self-despair.

Thematically and psychodynamically it is Lenny's equation of inadequacy and hostility in this routine that is quintessentially paranoid. Lenny makes this equation twice, once in revealing how he felt hostile towards non-Jews because they knew how to fight and he did not. The second instance, of course, is that of Ruby himself, who thinks that killing Oswald will make the Texans, the "real men" respect him. The payoff, the fact that it wouldn't work because Ruby's grandmother was lying, thematically traces

perceived self-inadequacy to the family, its correct psychodynamic source.

And finally, in the excerpt which follows, notice the interface between insider/outsider, between shame, moral outrage and rationalization, with Bruce enacting the absolutistic, demanding, audience member:

> Louis. That's my name in Jewish. Louis Schneider. "Why haven't ya got Louis Schneider on the marque?" "Well, cause it's not show biz. It doesn't fit." "No, no I don't wanna hear that." "You Jewish?" "Yeah." "Ashamed of it?" "Yeah." "Why are you ashamed you're Jewish." "I'm not anymore! But it used to be a problem--until Playboy came out." "Yeah, that's right. You can't be that urbane bachelor and drive down the street in a Jag yelling 'kike.'" That's what really happened.
>
> (Cohen, 1968, p. 42)

Phenomenologically, the paranoid view of the world implicit in such routines functions to create or increase distance from the other and simultaneously uses affective distance and anger as a way of relating to and obtaining closeness from the other. And, since the "real" Lenny Bruce is not adequately differentiated from the persona, then Lenny becomes, in his material and for the audience, the cognitive and affective focus of the paranoid themes. Thus, if Lenny's world is indeed similar to the paranoid's world, one would find that an incredible demand is placed upon the audience: it must "relate" to Lenny even as it is being alienated, and its response to the persona is critical in

enabling that world to be dramatically feasible. In previous sections it was shown that Lenny establishes a relationship with the audience based on the insider perspective. Given the paranoid drama enacted, it should be clearer now that the audience must respond to this perspective if Bruce's act is to work. The power of Lenny's comedy is augmented by, and even requires, the shocked sensibilites, fears, and hypocrisies of audiences. Their guilt, fanned by Lenny's direct accusations and outraged moral tone, enhances their desire to belong to his world, and thus enables an "us versus them" motief to thrive.

Lenny must have something to attack, an attitude or position to which he can be contrary, as a way of establishing his "inside" relationships with the audience. It is his contrariness and not his targets which define Lenny's personna: ". . . the reason I don't get hung up with integration," he was fond of telling audiences, "is that by the time Bob Newhart is integrated, I'm segregated." Again there is a parallel with the Marxes, but Lenny demolishes targets with his anger, whereas the Marxes did it invitingly, with a sense of play. Given Lenny's intensely moral tone, one would feel that not sharing in Lenny's world would cause one to become the target of his anger or ridicule. Since the performer effectively monopolizes communication, an audience would have no way of commenting on such a bind.

In fact, it is not surprising to find Lenny distancing himself from the audience with anger. Some of his routines are unabashedly hostile and alienating, and if critics such as Goldman (1963) prefer to find redeeming value in such routines, alluding, perhaps to Bruce's role as a shaman, it still does not alter the strong, affectively-angry stance Lenny assumed with the audience.

For example, on stage he might telephone the babysitter of a couple in the audience and tell her that the couple had been killed in a car wreck, and then hold up the phone to the audience so that they could hear the girl's shriek. Occasionally he would open his shows with: "Now you know what's going to happen? I'm gonna piss on you. The clapping is from those who have been here before and enjoyed it." In still another "bit," he takes a chair and moves as if to hit a heckler. When the audience sees him pause, they laugh, and he angrily responds that in their laughter they would condone a killing if it happened to be part of a nightclub act. One more example should suffice: Bruce would tell the audience that he often imagined giving a spiked drink to an Avon lady and, when she fell asleep undressing her and leaving a note which read, "You were balled."

Even the physical persona that Lenny presented on stage exacerbated the distancing from the audience:

> Bruce's intention is less and less communicated by what he says and depends now, to a great extent, on affective devices--his manner, his tones, his physical appearance. . . . [N]ow, [Bruce] comes on stiff-legged and stooped, wearing shabby clothes, his face a pale mask of dissipation. Having discarded the civilized mask that people wear in public to protect themselves, Bruce comes before his audience as a mythic figure--beat, accused junkie "underground" man who has suffered in acting out their own forbidden desires. He is self-destructive, alternately terrifying the audience and arousing their sympathy and concern . . . [by] regularly opening his act commenting on his recent arrests.
>
> (Goldman, 1963, p. 216)

The primal imagery and screeching, heightened use of bizarre and psychoanalytically rooted physical metaphors and imagery, "arous[al of] their sympathy and concern," and angry argumentative tone all provide a strongly affective component to Lenny's act. Lenny creates, portrays, and engenders strong affective emotions. Into this intensely affective, charged relationship with the audience, one finds Lenny supplying not an emotional closeness, but a <u>demand</u> for closeness, an injunction to join him in his moral crusade. Additionally, he displays poorly-hidden rage, coupled with the frightening physical activities of the shaman. The moral order, the conventions of stage and interaction, are annihilated, but nothing positive is substituted. Parenthetically, the reader might note how different Bruce's affectively-laden comedy is from that of Woody Allen or Groucho Marx. In Allen's comedy one senses a wistful,

affective tug, but the thrust of his comedy is largely cognitive. Similarly, Groucho's world, rooted as it is in the violation of experiential categories, language and interactive rules, derives its impact and tensions from cognitive sources. One is left confused and bewildered by the Marxian process and receptive to their antics and joyful celebration. Unlike Lenny's world, both Groucho's and Woody's worlds are gentle in tone and affectively positive.

On a regressive level, Lenny appears to the audience angry because he was not taken care of, and the need and demand for love are communicated at times in fantasy skits, and at times quite directly:

> The reason I'm in this business, I assume all performers are--it's "look at me, Ma!" It's acceptance, you know--"Look at me, Ma; look at me, Ma; look at me, Ma." And if your mother watches, you'll perform until you're exhausted, but if your mother goes, Psthew!
>
> (Cohen, 1968, p. 102)

Perhaps his clearest and most hypnotic rendering of this demand occurred at the very end of his concert at the Curran Theater:

> Nobody wants to go back to that room alone unless they can say, "Ma, gimme a glass of water" . . . 'cause I don' want the water--all I want is the water with your hand attached to the glass and your arm attached to your hand and [frantically spoken] stay here! When I go to sleep don't sneak

out! 'Cause when I wake up I want to see you here all the time.

(Bruce, Curran Theater, n.d.)

The situation created for the audience is comparable to the kind of bind a psychotherapist often finds himself in when working with a paranoid patient. The patient's demand for intense closeness from the therapist is enmeshed in behaviors and suspicious, angry affect to cause the therapist to keep his distance; in pushing him away, the paranoid receives the payoff of feeling abandoned and betrayed by a hostile world.

Lenny presents contradictory demands to audiences: if they try to conform to his absolute perfectionistic morality, he will attack them for their holier-than-thou and judgmental attitude (much as he attacked the liberals who dislike George Lincoln Rockwell or Klansmen in the excerpts quoted above); if they adopt a moral relativism, he preys on their guilt about the execution of Chessman or the effects of Southern bigotry; if they are indifferent to him and his world, he portrays them in psychiatric and repressed terms; and if they try to have a warm, affective relationship with him--which he directly demands, at times--he alienates them with his paranoid stance and hostility. Again, the audience is unable to comment on the bind.

In effect, there are few ways out of this bind. One may laugh, but such laughter is simply an attempt by the

audience to detoxify these binds and dismiss them with the label "humor" (cf. Pollio's [undated manuscript] discussion of instrumental versus expressive functions of laughter). Such laughter is wholly derived from the interpersonal field, that is, from the tension in the relationship between Lenny and his audience. Or one may read into Bruce's work profound social comment, prophetic gifts, or the educative genius of a Zen master. Critics like Goldman and Tynan have taken this route; such viewpoints are not without merit, but they effectively remove Bruce's work from the comedic realm. Finally, one may leave the scene, pan Bruce and call him vulgar or sick, or even have him arrested. This route is the inverse of the second alternative, and it too takes Bruce's work out of the province of a study of humor.

The analysis of Lenny Bruce's comedy, developed here clearly shows that the relationship between comedian and audience is a delicate, complex affair. Lenny Bruce erred both on the level of impression management and by his failure to strike a balance between interpersonal tension and release through humor. This occurred largely because of a lack of clarity in meta-message information, a failure to provide adequate distancing cues between the onstage self, the comic material and the audience. The nature of Bruce's world, subtle, complex and interesting as it is, does not leave room for an affectionate, playful quality in the

audience-performer relationship. In its insistence on "realness" and "honesty" Lenny's world forced the audience to treat the disturbances Lenny enacted in a literal manner and the response was one of frank tension. He communicated too much to his audience, leaving too little margin for the audience to fantasize, unlike Woody, who kept audiences guessing about his "real" self.

Obviously, Bruce became successful in the field of comedy, achieving fame and audience laughter in his career. To be sure, he had a repertoire of successful stock bits, a superb, creative and agile imagination, an uncanny ability to use dialects, and a novel performance style. Ultimately, it was those people who could share in Lenny's paranoid drama and sensibility that gave Bruce his fame and success. The mechanisms of Lenny's world were not highly functional for comedy per se, but they did provide Bruce with a coterie that remained loyal to him and provided the seeds of the counter-culture image which helped make him famous, although largely after his death. (Cf. Goldman, 1974, who considered a poster of Lenny, marketed after his death, to have made him more famous than all his comedy routines.)

The author would like to conclude with the observation that no psychiatric conclusions may legitimately be drawn from this essay about Lenny Bruce the artist. Psychiatric consideration and analogies were used to establish

a way to understand the nature and paradoxes of Lenny's world and his tension-laden relationship with his audiences.

Clearly, Lenny's mastery of this "paranoid" metaphor and its themes are at the center of his comic world. Lenny blurs the boundaries between victim and aggressor, insider and outsider, persona and audience. This creates insoluble problems for us and prevents a "reasonable" response to his world; we do not know whether to feel guilty because we are victimizing him or angry because he is victimizing us. Are we the insiders of his world or the outsiders he so vehemently (and justifiably) rages against? Does Lenny expect us to be moral, or will he ridicule us for a holier-than-thou attitude? Lenny claims moral relativism and appears to be amoral. He then tells us, however, that he is more moral than we are. He preaches hedonism and uninhibited self-expression, but he acts tortured, twisted and repressed. He creates an emotional connection founded on a shared sense of victimization but then alienates us and repudiates this connection. He is weak, needy, and repressed but also stronger, more independent and freer than we are.

Unable to answer such questions and resolve these paradoxes, we search for a way to defuse Lenny's power, detoxify his accusations and ease the guilt he engenders. Our solution is to laugh our way to membership in Lenny's world, without ever being allowed (or wanting) to join.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

The author's private hopes in conceiving and executing the present study were that an interpersonal model would shed some light on the process of being funny. As the investigation of the comics developed, it became clearer that the relationship between the audience and performer was both delicate and complex, and more questions than answers have developed from this investigation of the comedic process.

The three comedians investigated are in many ways markedly different from each other, both in the worlds which they developed and in the personas and images they presented. It is important to try to derive the common denominators, both in terms of the questions to be asked and the answers found for all three comics, before proceeding to a methodological critique of the present study and a consideration of the promising future research issues and strategies.

Common Denominators of the Audience-Performer Relationship

One feature emerging from the present study is how differently, and how profoundly, a comic may wreak violence on his audience. Some of the metaphors developed in the study--particularly the hypnotic and psychiatric models--

hint at the varied assaults in which comedians will engage. Each of the comedians studied here creates dysphoria in Goffmanian terms by invading one's privacy, by developing the public image of an incompetent, and by invalidating consistent definitions of the social situation.

Clearly, however, the comic's attack on us extends beyond the violation of the rules of interaction developed by Goffman. Experiential categories are assaulted, and linguistic concepts are rendered useless. Aspects of the comic's linguistic style often reveal a structure similar to hypnotic techniques and place us in a "trance-like" state. Adult structure is consistently, and at times relentlessly, demolished, and paradoxical injunctions are given (implicitly and explicitly) to us by the comic. This loss of structure leaves us without labels for the experiences and settings we now face; the paradoxes which the comic weaves paralyze our ability to orient and respond to his world.

The "how" of their assaults vary greatly from comic to comic and it is not necessary to elaborate here on the techniques used. What needs to be considered, however, is the magnitude of the tensions generated. Future investigations must incorporate the concept of tension-release in understanding humor, but the focus must shift from the material to the way it is presented, from comic content to interactional process.

Several variables consistently emerge as most relevant when exploring the tension-laden domain of comic and audience. The most important of these is Svebak's (1974) concept of meta-message clarity. If a comic's meta-messages to the audience are non-existent, unclear, or deviate from the meta-message, "This is Play," an increase in audience tension is likely to occur.

Thus, Woody Allen keeps the lines of communication blurred by shifting perspectives and self-definitions from a schlep/loser/bookish/neurotic/Jewish/weak gestalt to a powerful/aggressive/competent/passionate gestalt in the fabricated context of an existential (mind/body) split. Allen gives frequent meta-messages that he is distanced from the image and perspective with which he is so publicly identified. This helps him to shift rapidly between seriousness and playfulness and prevents us from deciding just how real Woody's world is for him. We do not know whether Woody is "real," serious, and self-preoccupied, or whether he is "surreal," playful and insouciant. These rapid on-stage shifts of self-distance and self-definition blur the boundaries between Allen and his comic persona, and also make it harder for us to define the social situation.

The blurring and unclear use of playful meta-messages in Lenny Bruce's comedy leads to an extreme, and one would expect, unsatisfactory level of tension for comedy.

What develops is a sense of not being able to relate to Bruce's world while at the same time feeling an urgency and demand to do so. Here, lack of meta-message clarity is exacerbated by the effects of Bruce's paradoxical injunctions to audiences. Lenny acts one way and frames his actions in a very contradictory way, without leaving us cues for assimilating these contradictions and winning his approval.

In Groucho's case, although the meta-message that everything is play shows clearly in his work, we are given no cues for how to relate to him or to structure our experience. Groucho's embrace of pure playfulness is overwhelming because linguistic, spatio-temporal, and other adult experiential categories are rendered useless by his intense pacing and nonsensical barrage. We demand some way to anchor our experience and invest it with meaning, but the Marxes only partly oblige. Hence, our tension from the wild communicative assault always remains, as Canby (1977) phrased it, "the reason we go back to see them again and again."

Another universal tension-related issue has to do with the comic's exercise and perception of his power and audience ambivalence to it. Traditionally, most experts felt that the comic must appear weak and inferior to the audience, a theory having its roots in the superiority model of humor, and finding persuasive exponents even in the present time (cf. Pollio, undated manuscript). "The audience

laughs because each of these performers [comics in drag, fat people, speech defects, etc.] is perceived as less dominant than even the lowest member of the audience (Pollio, undated manuscipt, p. 16)." Pollio then goes on to weave this notion into a complicated biologically-based theory of laughter based on dominance. If these notions are accurate, one would expect that there would be considerable audience resistance to perceiving the comic's dominance, or even perceiving a comic's self-perception of such dominance. Laughter would then serve an equilibrating function, invalidating the comic's power when necessary to preserve the audience's preconceived notion of the comic's persona.

If Woody paints himself in the image of a loser, his connection to power, his own narcissism, and passionate sexuality are never more than thinly veiled. A contextual study of Allen's material reveals a surprising number of references to the "potent" Woody, and the persistent public identification of Woody Allen as a loser suggests his audience's strong desire to keep him weak and powerless.

With Groucho Marx and Lenny Bruce, the problem of power becomes more extreme. Both display their power in their process and interpersonal style (Woody's is rooted more in his persona and statements about it). Both could easily permute the rules of communication to their own ends. Groucho's power inheres in his ability to ad-lib and insult,

to embarrass the other grievously and to destroy definitions of a social situation with a few words; it also grows out of what was perceived as indifference and lack of commitment, which audiences construe or fantasize as callousness and cruelty. With respect to Lenny, power inhered in his ability to create a strong, affectively-charged environment, to weave a powerful and plausible paranoid world-view with him as its center, to reframe boundaries between insider and outsider, to articulate a rigid and intensely moral world, and to portray a persona deeply committed to life and sexuality, boastful of his potency and persecuted for his perceptivity.

What emerges is the dues a comedian must pay for his power. Violation of interactional norms by an inferior person is something audiences may dismiss and laugh off; if the locus of violation is seen as a dominant person, however, the threat is too frightening, and the meaning of the violation may be perceived as too literal and too real. Groucho had to modulate his persona to be accepted by television audiences. In fact, each of the brothers had to be "softened" and made sympathetic in later movies. Moreover, Groucho must be controlled and limited by his brothers, and ultimately, lost in the vortex of his movies' anarchic climaxes. Lenny is never fully able to give the audience a credible atonement for the power he assumes. Paradoxically, in his "weakest" moments, sharing his loneliness and need for approval, Lenny

is still fully in control, demanding moral involvement and "love" while angrily preventing us from responding.

To summarize the power issue, one might say that the idea that a comedian had to be a weak, inadequate buffoon does not hold for any of the comics studied here. Intrinsic to comic performances is the power to make audiences laugh, and to ridicule and poke fun. Although comic cannot be truly powerless, he must strategically manage power in his act. Power is used to build tension artfully, but must not overwhelm or intimidate an audience. The power which comics wield is rooted in the use of paradoxical communication, particularly in the presentation of the self. The comic may affect amorality (Lenny), neurotic sexuality (Woody), or lack of sanity and social interests or power (Groucho), but he then shows us that he is more moral, sexual, sane or powerful than we ourselves are. Such paradoxes of self-image depend on the comic's creation of and control over an idiosyncratic "language" and set of metaphors for viewing the self and the world. Laughter provides an outlet for tensions which arise from the comic's self-paradoxes. It also enables us to consensually validate and to communicate limits and labels for the perplexing social reality the comic creates.

Another important issue in tension-management is the give-and-take quality of the relationship between the comic and ourselves. One must consider the comic's demands

for audience involvement as well as the balance between the world the comic takes away and the world he provides in its place. For example, Woody's world demands very little from us because it emanates from a consistent and credible persona. Allen developes an analytic metaphor which only requires us to sit back and listen. Given the plausible illusion that we are relating to the "real" Woody Allen, the nature of the relationship has to be the one-sided intimacy of psychoanalysis. We feel that we know Woody, and the general affective tone between Woody and us is quite positive. Unlike Groucho, who involves us simply by virtue of our witnessing the embarrassment of the other, Woody never really plays on guilt or requires that we enter his world. An ambience is created in which one wants to share with Woody, and since he so clearly appears to laugh at himself, one's laughter at his act communicates an understanding, a recognition that the anxieties and insecurities he is so honest about belong to us as well. The analytic scenario he weaves nudges his public toward their own gentle and thoughtful introspection.

Groucho's world strips us of cognitive tools which adults used to make experience intelligible. Robbed of structure, bewildered and dazed by the Marxian comic style, we would seek something to hang onto. Groucho never really gives us the structure we want; instead, we are forced to settle for an attachment to the "badges" of his persona

(intonation, greasepaint moustache, cigar, etc.), as well as to the consistencies in the Brothers' style and anarchic process. This still leaves us with a great deal of tension, and laughter conceivably becomes a strategy for biologically accomodating the relentless pacing and severity of the Marxian assault. Modelling high-energy playfulness, the Marxes provide a reasonable and likable outlet for audiences: "become children and laugh with us." Essentially the affective tone of the Marx personas is cheerful, and their relationship with each other appears lively and enjoyable.

Lenny's world also robs us of experiential conventions, but leaves a primitive and negatively-charged affective relationship between comic and audience. Here it would seem that Bruce erred by not giving us something positive and likable to replace the cognitive universe he invalidates. Bruce, however, in creating a paranoid foundation to his world, offers us strong and meaningful connections, an alliance of insider versus outsider. In the author's view, Bruce would have been a more effective comic if the alliance so created did not demand (and model) absolute honesty from the audience while at the same time invalidating it. Much of the relationship Lenny develops is fraught with double-binds and demands, and requires an intensity that breaches the boundaries of the comic, which Lenny ultimately leaves.

Emphasis is placed on the audience/performer relationship because a viable relationship is required by audiences as a buffer to the comedian's assault on structure and experience. Svebak (1974) anticipated this view by saying that "interpersonal likings" (which in the present study is taken to be the emotional contact between audience and performer) is one of the critical variables in predicting the likelihood of audience laughter. Clearly, it is not sufficient that we simply "like" the comic; rather, our relationship with him must allow us to place his material in a personally relevant context, and must provide us with a "language" and "vocabulary" for relating to his world.

It is in the field of relationships between comic, his persona and audience, that one senses a blending of the incongruity and tension-release models of humor. Incongruity, simply expressed, leads to dissonance or tension. As discussed in Chapter III, it is precisely in the field of human interaction that consistancy, rules, and agreed-upon definitions are important. Incongruity in this realm creates interpersonal tension; one would predict that redress or balance would be sought along interpersonal lines. The function of the comic's persona is not merely to be the butt of jokes, or to allow the audience to feel superior; it serves to provide relational regularities in a world that

suddenly has none, and to provide an interpretive schema with which experience can be reframed, perhaps in alien terms, but in some terms, nonetheless. One finds, particularly in the case of Woody and the Marxes, a remarkably consistent persona, and, in the case of Lenny, a very structured and articulated world-view. These constancies function as a vital security blanket, and if the performer perhaps toys with the parameters of these constancies, it best be gingerly and artfully done. Toying with what the audience comes to take for granted (and value, simply because it now has something to take for granted), makes the comic both dangerous and powerful; when Woody apparently seriously refers to himself as "a stud," the overly-hearty laughter from the audience makes one think that it protests too much. Laughter validates the image of the comedian which the audience wants to keep and invalidates other images that are dissonant with it.

This leads to a final area of consideration: the nature of laughter itself. Pollio's work (undated manuscript) enlarges the scope of laughter by rooting it in biological antecedents; the present work suggests the validity of this theory and implies that laughter, occurring in a social context and deriving from social tension, can have many functions, some of them contradictory. In the present study, the function of laughter appears largely to structure

and label experience as humorous. The experience and tensions that are so reframed may be largely psychodynamic, as when one laughs at Woody's jokes about his sexual inadequacy, or it may be more interpersonal, as in responding to Marxian embarrassment of the other. It may be cognitive in roots, arising from hearing too many rapid-fire word-puns, or it may be communicative-relational as in response to Lenny's paradoxical injunctions. In some cases, Pollio's biological bent is adequate without qualification; one biologically laughs from the tension of the sheer number and rapidity of comic assaults, simply as a way to release physical stress. Laughter may also be a way to structure a connection with the comic, to show oneself and the other an understanding of that comic's world. It may even arise from a need to provide meta-message cues lacking in the comic's act. And, most interesting of all, perhaps laughter may be a way to structure and label a hypnotic state. Rarely--to use Pollio and Edgerly's figures, less than one-third of the time--is laughter simply a response to a joke.

If one is willing to examine the world each comic creates, including the persona projected, and the "psycho-pathological" aspects of the relationship between comic and audience, then and only then, can the communicative context and the "meaning" of laughter be understood.

Research Metaphors, Assumptions and Strategies: A Critical Review

Even as the worlds of each of the comics studied differed vastly, so too were there differences in the approaches used. Each approach and tactic had virtues and limitations. The methods used made possible a description of different comedians' worlds; the value of the research methods which shaped this essay ultimately rest with an assessment of the finished product. If the descriptions of comic worlds in the present study have heuristic or conceptual value for the reader, then the methods used to derive such descriptions are likely to be worthwhile.

The most important limitation was the failure to find ways--in a study of the phenomenal field between the comic and audience--to study and reliably measure that audience's input to the interaction. Here, availability and convenience limited access to the _in vivo_ work of each comic, with the result that audience reaction had to be inferred.

Such inferences are limited by the accuracy and subjectivity of secondary sources. For example, in finding substantiation for the argument that Groucho was too powerful for audiences, the author utilized somewhat vague historical inferences: the movie reviews of, and the production changes following the poor success of _Duck Soup_, and the relative

success of the movie which succeeded it. Other points raised in favor of this argument were the vague anecdotal stories surrounding the production of Marx's You Bet Your Life quiz show. By itself, such scholarship is somewhat dubious, and its utility in the present study can only be restricted to confirmation of the plausibility of the author's line of reasoning, and is not proof of such reasoning. "Evidence" was more useful in framing arguments of the author than in proving them.

Perhaps a less subjective approach involved the use of live albums and transcribed routines. Goldman (1971), however, rejects out of hand the use of transcribed routines of Lenny Bruce, claiming that the printed word could not adequately capture the rhythm, poetry and idiom of that artist's work. Such an objection has to be given credence; to the extent that the author did not study Lenny Bruce "live," he may have failed to appreciate and capture certain variables of Bruce's world.

The validity of using recorded albums is also somewhat unclear. Often such albums are edited from several performances and concerts and present the comic in his best, if somewhat artificial light. Performances and individual audiences differ: the Marx Brothers were notorious for breaking up one audience and putting another to sleep. A Night at the Opera was successful only because producer

Thalberg arranged a second preview across the street from the theater when the first audience did not laugh once (cf. Zimmerman and Goldblatt, 1970). As for the recorded work of Woody Allen, the tapes were made in the Greenwich Village nightclubs of New York City, an audience quite different from a nation-wide one, and one ready to laugh and respond to Allen in the currency of Woody's world; hence it is difficult, if not impossible, to get a feel for the basis of Allen's more universal appeal from these recordings alone.

The use of the laugh tracks from the albums, mostly in the chapter on Woody Allen, falls prey to the same criticism; nonetheless, it was a very useful strategy and one that yielded some surprises, in terms of the audience's fixation and investment in Allen's loser image and readiness to laugh at any cue which evoked that image. Were the author to do a further study on comedians, he would use this approach in a more consistent way, analyzing and studying, laugh by laugh, when and where the audience reacts to a live routine or movie. Obviously, one researcher would have difficulty attending very many performances with notebook in hand, but a few would suffice to provide verification or disconfirmation for what is the essence of a particular comic's appeal. (Here again, critical reviews and other compilations served as an extension of the author's eyes and ears.)

Generally, the author found that it was not particularly useful to study comedians in media efforts outside of the areas in which they achieved their greatest success. In fact, the printed work (of all three) was not very illuminating. Groucho's An Evening with Groucho did not reveal the world he portrayed too well; additionally, it was not very funny, and the author's subjective impression was that audience laughter and appreciation emanated more from his legendary status (Groucho was approaching 80 when the concerts were taped) than from an appreciation of his concert. Similarly, although themes were lifted from Bruce's autobiography, his comic style and world were not prominent throughout the work. For Woody Allen, however, the style and rhythm, surreal premises, psychological mindedness and intellectual satire which was found in his spoken and cinematic routines was evident in written work, such as his essay collections, Without Feathers and Getting Even. Reading these collections, one found it easy to imagine Woody Allen actually speaking the printed material as comic routines, and the situations were richer in that they became framed by the persona, speaking style and the world of Woody Allen. This observation may be a result, however, of the present author's familiarity and personal comfort with Woody's mannerisms.

With respect to the metaphors utilized in this study, the author believes that such analogies were productive in understanding the tensions and psychological effects of the particular comic's world. Two such models were given: a hypnogogic model for Groucho Marx and a psychiatric model for Lenny Bruce. It is to be hoped that future researchers will not restrict the heuristic value of these metaphors to the comedians of the present essay, but will apply these metaphors to the study of other comic worlds.

Additionally, the assumptions used and questions raised by implicit use of psychoanalytic notions in the present model should be considered. One such assumption borrowed from dynamic psychotherapy and psychoanalysis is the idea that if the comic evokes a certain world on the irrational level, it is plausible to expect the audience to respond with an appropriate transference reaction. This last term should be construed in more of a Sullivanian sense--a generalized distortion of how one sees the other--than in the narrower psychoanalytic sense. Another assumption borrowed from the field of psychotherapy includes the Sullivanian notion that people (and audiences) operate to minimize anxiety; the communicative, expressive and intentional aspects of laughter were then construed as anxiety-coping strategies that emanated from the interaction between comic and audience.

Finally, the notion that the irrational level is an important factor in understanding the comic's world was also assumed in the present study. At times, the psychoanalytic framework was used, and at times a more communicative/behavioral or cognitive viewpoint was taken. Although one might wish for a unitary perspective, it is clear that the orientations used complemented one another. The utility of psychoanalytic and psychiatric metaphors in the present social-psychological study of the comic process underscores the need for more sophisticated psychoanalytic thinking about the intrapsychic effects of comedy. Such thinking would have to be more in terms of the conflicts stimulated by the performer and his interactional process (his exhibitionism, narcissism, erotization of speech, regression, etc.) than in the conflicts stimulated by his jokes. Such an interactional psychoanalytic perspective could only enhance the viewpoint developed in this study.

As a summary statement, the nature of evidence used in this study was in literary, intuitive and often subjective terms. Another observer might come to very different views about the nature of a particular comic's world; the author makes no claims of absolute objectivity or completeness: the nature of the evidence used shaped the author's biases as much as his biases shaped the material and evidence used. This is hardly surprising; a study of the

interaction between comic and audience necessarily involves the subjectivity of its author, since the author is himself a member of the comic's audience and must enter into the phenomenal relationship of comedian and audience.

Future Research: Correlating Audience Laughter with the Comic's World

As should be obvious from the foregoing discussion, there is a need for a more rigorous methodology to test the ideas developed in this study. Various means must be developed to assess audience response to comedy; the microcosm of the laboratory is perhaps too contrived, and, it would seem, the concert hall or movie theater is too anonymous and uncontrollable.

One tactic that makes sense is the use of a laugh meter to capture not only the duration, but the loudness or volume of laughter. Clearly, material laughed at can express more than one dimension in a comic's relationship to his audience, and humorous stimuli would have to be categorized and rated along a multi-dimensional continuum. In terms of the more salient issues of the present study the most relevant variables might be:

1. Power: the degree to which a comic assumes a powerful stance in the theme, latent content or style of the material.

2. Meta-communicative clarity: the degree to which the comic is clearly joking versus the extent to which he appears to be involved with his material.

3. The consistency with which the comic's material relates to and confirms his public persona.

4. The extent to which material disconfirms the persona.

5. The paradoxical communications given to an audience.

6. Rating of material on the affective versus motoric versus ideational dimensions: are audiences more or less likely to respond when a comic transgresses modes (e.g., Woody Allen in Sleeper) and what if any implications are there to this?

7. The stylistic or content expression of different forms of pathology: to what extent does a comedian appear depressive, obsessive, hysteric, paranoid etc?

8. The affective tone of material.

Relating and correlating "objective" audience response to material rated on certain communicative and irrational levels might help to map a particular comic's world and its appeal to audiences.

In a related area, one of the needs not sufficiently satisfied in this study is that for further research on the audience relationship to the comic by more direct measures.

As Murphy and Pollio have shown, audience response to Don Rickles and Bill Cosby differs by nature of the different worlds evoked. Would not one predict a lowering of vital signs during a Cosby routine and a state of hyperalertness in that of Rickles? Admittedly, the prospect of a class of freshmen college students hooked up to a skin galvanometers and other biofeedback equipment smacks of the artificial; perhaps a correlation of behavioral measures--fidgeting, laughter, attentiveness--with the comic material would go a long way to establishing when and what audiences laugh at--a question answered somewhat impressionistically in the present study.

Another approach that would be useful would be the use of audience participation measures to focus on irrational content and theme. This could be done in a preliminary fashion through the simple use of questionnaires. The utilization of pre- and post-psychodynamic projective tests, particularly the TAT, would develop empirical data tapping the comedian's world. One wonders, for example, if an audience exposed to a Lenny Bruce tape might show a significant difference in the themes of aggression, paranoia, or, perhaps, anality. Are Groucho audiences more sensitized to issues of exposure and embarrassment? Admittedly, the interpretation of any significant differences would require a monumental theoretical rethinking of comic/audience

relationships; one should expect this when one taps into the unconscious audience reaction to comic material.

A more elegant and numerically economical approach would be to have several clinicians rate a particular comic in terms of body language, vocal tone, linguistic manner, appearance and other non-obtrusive measures, even to the point of forumlating a "diagnosis" of the comic. Such efforts would go a long way towards mapping out the irrational levels and effects of the comic's presentation of self, and suggest avenues of transference between comic and audience. Clinicians would be more able than laymen to verbalize that which audiences react to subliminally. The only difficulty with such an approach would be a "recognition" factor. It would be hard to find a clinician whose biases and pronouncements about particular comics or comedians in general would not color his judgments.

Clearly, one will have to explore the meaning of laughter not in relation to jokes, but in response to the comic/audience interaction. Formulations of the function of laughter have been found in Hayworth (1926) and Pollio (undated manuscript) among others. Further research into the area of humor will yield not only a substantiation of their ideas, but a richer taxonomy of laughter responses, a taxonomy derived from the intentionalities in the phenomenal world between the comic and his audience.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to fashion a model of humor grounded in social interaction, human communication, and the phenomenal field of the comic and his audience. An interpretation of the tensions intrinsic to comedic interaction was derived from Goffman's theories of the dramaturgical nature of public behavior and from the paradoxes involved in human communication.

An attempt was made to relate those tensions intrinsic to humorous interaction to the worlds and idiosyncratic styles developed by three professional comics. The study of these different comic worlds highlights the belief that there is a remarkable degree of consistency and richness to be found in any given comedian's work; identifiable personas emerge and themes and communicative patterns repeat themselves. An underlying intentionality was found in the work of each comic studied, and this intentionality frames the nature of the comic's relationship to his audience.

One of the significant benefits of this study was an appreciation of the magnitude of the tensions involved between a comic and his audience. Comics violate the rules of public interaction and the linguistic, cognitive and conceptual categories of experience, utilizing paradoxical

communications, double-binds and the ambiguities of the spoken word. It was hypothesized that the massive assault on experience leads to a hypnagogic state and results in a desire by the audience to reframe and structure comic material. The success of a comic depends on his ability to utilize this susceptibility, to establish a viable relationship with the audience and to manufacture a personal context--a "world"--in which his style and material could be plausibly and meaningfully assimilated and framed by the audience.

Generally, the comic's persona is a useful heuristic device in understanding the comic world created. It also functions in the management of audience tension. As a rule, when the comic displays too much or too little seriousness or commitment, tension will increase. Too great or too one-sided a display of strength or weakness will have the same effect. If the comic is perceived as too much like or too identified with the image he projects, this too will increase tension. One may summarize these findings by concluding that too much clarity or too much vagueness on the part of the comic is tension producing; more precisely, there has to be a balance between what is clearly stated about the comic's persona and what is left unsaid. A similar and perhaps causal relationship will exist between meta-communicative clarity and meta-communicative ambiguity, or between providing too many or too few cues that the comic is only "playing."

The widely-held notion that comics have to appear as weak, inadequate characters was not borne out in the present study. On the contrary, in terms of their material and their ability to mystify audiences and invalidate social definitions of experience, comics display an inordinate amount of power and often a boastful awareness of that power. This was clearly demonstrated by the extent to which each comic joked, not just about sex itself, but about his own sexual conquests, freedom and potency. Perhaps an exception to this was Woody Allen, whose power (to create audience tension) inheres in the ambiguity between his potency and flaccidity. It seems that audiences want comedians to not be too strong, and that each comedian, in his own way, takes steps to bracket and detoxify his power. Any attempt to elucidate the relationship between audience and comic will have to consider the implications and impact of the power the comic wields and of his publicly-communicated awareness of that power.

The results of this study suggest that a rethinking of the models and theories of humor is needed. The interpersonal/communications orientation blends the incongruity, superiority and tension-release theories. In terms of this study, incongruity is a factor in creating tension; the structurelessness imposed by the comic demands a restructuring--creates a drive in audiences--to label and understand

their experience. This line of reasoning would adequately incorporate the superiority orientation as well: any public display of superiority (anger, hostility, etc.) is a violation of structured interaction and will, like incongruity in behavior, create tension and dysphoria.

Although the three models can be incorporated in the present approach, one ought not stop here. More effort is needed to conceptualize the communicative, expressive and instrumental functions of laughter as a strategy for adjusting to the particular tensions of a particular comic's world. Even as the number of conceivable comic worlds and personas may be large, so too are the functions of laughter in those worlds. Laughter may function as a tension-release, an expression of sharing, disconfirmation of the other, an attempt to fill silence, etc. It may even be that within the interpersonal model, jokes, gags and comedy badges like the pie-in-the-face are less the causes of an audience's laughter than they are semi-relevant markers that allow laughter to occur for whatever reasons the audience needs to laugh. In the complex field between comic and audience, jokes may turn out to be cues to humor but not its essence.

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VITA

Robert David Zapinsky was born in New York City on September 15, 1951. He attended local public schools and was graduated from the Bronx High School of Science in 1968.

He then attended Columbia University and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and History in June 1972.

The following September, he enrolled in the Clinical Psychology Program at the Graduate School of The University of Tennessee at Knoxville. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Psychology in March 1978.

The author currently resides in San Francisco, where he is a therapist in private practice, specializing in the use of bodywork and experiential techniques in treatment.