





**Linguistic Aspects of Verbal Humor**  
**in Stand-up Comedy**

**Dissertation**

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*A journey of a thousand li  
starts from where one stands.*

Lao Tzu, *The Way of Lao Tzu*,  
Chinese philosopher  
(604 BC-531 BC)



*A Jeanne et Roger*

*Avec toute ma gratitude et un amour profond  
pour leur soutien sans faille*



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To them, I dedicate this thesis.

## **Abstract (English)**

This study attempts to explore the ways in which stand-up comedians organize and perform their material in order to create humor, elicit laughter, and make the audience appreciate their performances. It also examines the audience's central role in comedians' organization and presentation of the material. In order to provide authentic material, performances by comedians Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright were transcribed and served as main data for the analytical part of this study.

The creation of humor in stand-up comedy is seen as a combination of various linguistic features of joke telling such as wordplay and punning, hyperbole, repetitions, timing, and paralinguistic choices. In addition, the comedians develop a specific stage persona and create their own style of performing. Spontaneity and flexibility are shown to be two of the most important characteristics that a stand-up comedian must possess in order to give a successful performance. However, this contrastive analysis of the comedy created by two performers of very different character affirms the observation that successful humor in stand-up comedy depends neither on any specific type of stage persona nor on a specific performance style. Instead, it is created out of a comedian's use of a chain of various linguistic aspects of joke telling and in most cases out of

the incongruity revealed by the punch lines in the stories and jokes. Hence, this study not only represents a linguistic approach to humor, but also contributes to the field of discourse analysis, in particular when dealing with such features as repetitions, discourse markers, disfluencies, intonation, and so on.

## **Abstract (German)**

Die vorliegende Arbeit befasst sich mit der linguistischen Analyse von Humor. Dabei wird der Hauptfokus auf die Analyse von *stand-up comedy* gelegt, einem Genre das im Deutschen dem Stegreifhumor mit Vertretern wie Mario Barth und Otto Walkes entspricht. Innerhalb der Studie wird der Frage nachgegangen, mit welcher Struktur und mit welchen linguistischen Mitteln die *stand-up* Komiker ihr Material und ihre Aufführungen planen und durchführen. Bei dieser Analyse wird auch die Rolle des Publikums zum einen für die Planung der Aufführung und zum anderen für die Reaktion auf die Aufführung berücksichtigt. Um diese Aspekte näher zu untersuchen, wird authentisches Material der amerikanischen *stand-up* Komiker Jerry Seinfeld und Steven Wright verwendet. Dieses wurde zunächst transkribiert, um anschließend in Auszügen als Analysematerial zu dienen. Die Erzeugung von Humor wird als Zusammenspiel verschiedener Faktoren verstanden. Dazu zählen das Bilden einer gewissen Persönlichkeit auf der Bühne sowie die Fähigkeit mit dem Publikum zu interagieren und dieses als Mittel zu nutzen, den verbalen Humor zum Tragen zu bringen. Dazu muss der Komiker Spontaneität und Flexibilität in jeder ihm dargebotenen Situation an den Tag legen. Dabei bedient er sich zahlreicher linguistischer Mittel, die es ihm erlauben, sein Material erfolgreich zu präsentieren und das

Publikum zu amüsieren. Mit der Analyse zweier in vielerlei Hinsicht kontrastiver Charaktere wird verdeutlicht, dass Humor in der *stand-up comedy* nicht durch eine bestimmte Persönlichkeit oder eine bestimmte Art des Präsentierens geschaffen wird. Es handelt sich vielmehr um eine Verkettung gewisser linguistischer Mittel. Dazu zählen zum Beispiel der Einsatz von Wortspielen, Hyperbeln, Wiederholungen, Pausen, Intonationsmustern, die in Kombination mit der Art des Präsentierens, je nach Komiker, zum Erfolg führen. Die vorliegende Arbeit beschäftigt sich somit mit der Struktur und Organisation von humoristischem Material und analysiert in detaillierter Art und Weise die Verwendung linguistischer Mittel in verbalem Humor. Somit wird mit dieser Studie nicht nur ein Beitrag zur Analyse von verbalem Humor in engerem Sinne, sondern auch zur Diskursanalyse in entfernterem Sinne geleistet.

*Humor is a serious thing.  
I like to think of it as  
one of our greatest earliest natural resources,  
which must be preserved at all cost.*

James Thurber  
(American humorist and cartoonist,  
1894-1961)

## 1 General Introduction

*Humour is probably  
the most significant characteristic  
of the human mind.*

Edward de Bono, *Thinking Course*

In observing our behavior in daily life, we surely realize that all of us regularly react with humor and laughter in the most different situations. Therefore, we have to admit that humor represents a central aspect of our everyday conversation and it is a general fact that all humans naturally participate in humorous speech and behavior, which justifies Oring's point of view when classifying humor and laughter as "cultural universals" representing "a condition of our humanity" (2003:x).

Gruner (1978:1) emphasizes this point thus

without laughter everyday living becomes drab and lifeless; life would seem hardly human at all. Likewise, a sense of humor is generally considered a person's most admirable attribute.

This is why the study of humor occupies an important place in research in English linguistics and has attracted the interest and attention of researchers for centuries. Important philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the foundations of humor research, a field that has been

developing continuously ever since. Various researchers<sup>1</sup> have dealt with specific categories of humor and have either developed humor theories or modified theories put forth by former researchers. Although research on humor in its numerous genres has been pursued for centuries, only scant attention has been paid to research on stand-up comedy. This observation may be due to the fact that stand-up comedy is a quite "young" genre of humor. It began in the framework of the *commedia dell' arte* in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Close examination of the development of stand-up comedy has shown that it underwent an important change during the 1960s. Until that time stand-up comedians did not play a central role when performing, but rather served as a kind of pause-filler, as, for example, before the arrival of a famous band or a theatre group. They had to be there to entertain the audience while they were waiting for the event they had actually come for. So listening and reacting to the stand-up comedians' show was just a by-product of waiting for the main event. Starting from the time that stand-up comedians started to appear in TV shows launched during the 1960s and 1970s, the success

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<sup>1</sup> Bergson (1911), Freud (1905/1960, 1920/1961), Eastman (1922), Hockett (1960/1977), Fry (1963, 1993), Wilson (1979), Gruner (1978), McGhee (1979, 1983), Mintz (1983), Raskin (1985), Attardo and Raskin (1991), Attardo and Chabanne (1992), Attardo (1994, 2001), Chiaro (1992), Berger (1993), Nilsen (1978, 1998, 2000, 2005), Norrick (1989, 1993, 1993a, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004)  
For a detailed bibliography on humor research see Nilsen (1992, 1993).

of stand-up comedy as a real linguistic genre began to grow. People started to get interested in the stand-up comedians' work and showed their interest by buying their tapes. Within a few years, stand-up comedy had become a well-known and appreciated form of creating humor that was drawing ever greater popular interest.

In the following study, the main focus will be on linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy, and it will be my aim to explore the ways in which stand-up comedians organize and perform their material in order to elicit laughter and make the audience appreciate their performances. American stand-up comedians all use the English language, but what they do with language is different with regard to normal everyday talk. They principally play with it and use various linguistic and rhetorical structures to achieve their aim of making the audience laugh. My research will deal with the analysis of stand-up comedy, but will narrow the task down by focusing on linguistic aspects of verbal humor expressed in stand-up material and the importance and significance of the audience. With authentic material<sup>2</sup> from two famous American stand-up comedians, Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright, I will explore the question of how they realize verbal humor

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<sup>2</sup> When I speak of "authentic" material, I think of real, recorded material one can get on tape.

in their performances and to what extent humor theories can be applied to their work. Seinfeld and Wright are both popular stand-up comedians and represent surprisingly different, nearly opposite characters, which justifies the interest in the study of their work. While analyzing their work, I first listened to the tape and transcribed the material, before watching their video performances, in order to get visual support of what they are talking about. This procedure gave me important insight into their ways of performing the material by using paralanguage in form of gestures and various facial expressions. I realized that examples which did not seem to be funny while just listening to them became interesting and appropriate for my analysis when watching the DVD. This is the reason why I will also focus on the analysis of gestures and facial expressions in my study, in particular with Wright, because we are repeatedly confronted with the contrast between his apathetic and monotonous style on the one hand, and his use of paralanguage on the other hand.

The analysis deals with numerous questions, among which are most significantly the following:

- To what extent do Seinfeld and Wright's performances create humor out of incongruity (by means of a clash of contrastive meanings) and disappointment (by means of a surprise ending that the recipients do not

expect)? To what extent is their verbal humor covered by the incongruity theory?<sup>3</sup>

- To what extent does their work express aggressiveness and disparagement and is therefore covered by the superiority theory?<sup>4</sup> Do they use verbal humor as a means of power?
- To what extent can the release theory<sup>5</sup> be applied to Seinfeld's and Wright's stand-up comedy?
- Which humor techniques can be found in their material?
- What joke strategies do they follow in order to make their performances successful?
- Why do they use figurative language in their performances?
- Which linguistic aspects of joke telling do they follow?
- How do Seinfeld and Wright approach their audience?

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<sup>3</sup> For further details on the incongruity theory see Willmann (1940), Koestler (1969), Shultz (1972, 1976), Suls (1972, 1977), Nerhardt (1977), McGhee (1979), Pepicello (1979), Wilson (1979), Morreall (1987), MacHovec (1988), Raskin (1985), Attardo and Chabanne (1992), Attardo and Raskin (2001) etc. and section 7.1.

<sup>4</sup> For further details on the superiority theory see Bergson (1911), Suls (1977), Morreall (1987), MacHovec (1988), Allen (1998) and section 7.2.

<sup>5</sup> For further details on the release theory see Freud (1905/1960), Spencer (in Morreall (1987)), Fry (1963), Grice (1975), Kline (1977), Raskin (1985) and section 7.3.

To begin this topic I will first report on the history of stand-up comedy in general (Chapter 2), before providing a short presentation of two of the most influential American stand-up comedians, Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright (Chapters 3 and 4), followed by further information about the data and the transcription conventions I used (Chapters 5 and 6).

Chapter 7 provides a short overview of previous research on humor going back to Plato and Aristotle who are considered to be the first to have developed humor theories. Subsequently, it presents the most important humor theories and their proponents<sup>6</sup>. In my study, I will deal in detail with the incongruity theory, the hostility theory, and the release theory, because they represent the central theories on which all modern theories are based.

Chapter 8 will deal with various genres of humor, particularly jokes, which represent one of the most common topics in everyday conversation and thus build a perfect basis for stand-up comedy. Humor plays a crucial role in our everyday lives and in general helps to ease a situation by making it more comfortable and casual for those involved, which is one reason why jokes play a central role

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<sup>6</sup> See Freud 1905/1960, Bergson 1911/1956; Willman 1940; Fry 1963; Koestler 1969; Goldstein and McGhee 1972; Suls 1972, 1977; Grice 1975; Gruner 1978; McGhee 1979; Wilson 1979; Chapman and Foot 1977; Raskin 1985, 1987; Apte 1985, Morreal 1987; Attardo 2001.

in stand-up comedy. Jokes can occur in various forms, as, for example, narratives, proverbial phrases, limericks, one-liners, knock-knocks, riddles, or funny personal anecdotes. In this chapter, I will deal with a basic issue about different genres in combination with the discussion of humor theories mentioned in the previous chapter. Subsequently, I will explain the internal structure according to Hockett (1960), and the characteristic forms of jokes.

Chapter 9 represents the main part of my study and deals with stand-up comedy in comparison to humorous dialogues, before moving on to the importance of joke performance and the role of the audience in joke telling in general, and stand-up comedy in particular.

In what follows (Chapter 10) I will deal with important joke techniques and concentrate on non-verbal joke techniques, ridicule and power, solidarity and politeness.

Chapter 11 provides an overview of the use of figurative language in stand-up comedy and contains wordplay, puns and ambiguity, implication and allusion, and hyperbole. In addition, I will deal with the importance of the primary linguistic features in humor (Chapter 12), reporting on the use of the most common characteristics of stand-up comedy, such as repetition and formulaicity, cut-

offs and various disfluencies in the form of pauses and false starts. I will also mention the most common discourse markers and the importance of intonation in joke telling.

In the main part of this thesis (Chapter 13), I will relate in a detailed manner the analysis of verbal humor in stand-up comedy and use authentic material from two American stand-up comedians to approach this subject. I have transcribed the material in order to be able to work on the basis of written text excerpts. Besides the audio recordings on CD and the transcripts, I also watched Seinfeld's program *I'm Telling You for the Last Time* and Wright's program *When the Leaves Blow Away* on DVD, in order to be able to interpret the comedians' non-verbal behavior and the use of paralanguage on stage. I have to mention that Wright's live program *When the Leaves Blow Away* is identical to his audio tape *I Still Have a Pony*. In particular, I will refer to selected jokes and examine to what extent various humor theories can be applied and which linguistic aspects of joke telling are predominant. I will pay attention to features such as repetition of parts of speech (nouns, verbs, pronouns, definite and indefinite determiners), frequency of conjunctions (e.g. "and"), parallel syntax, hesitation phenomena, and interruptions. In addition I will focus on the occurrence of figurative

language, such as wordplay and punning, ambiguity, implication and allusion, and hyperbole.

Furthermore, I will examine how the stand-up comedian performs the joke, because jokes depend on performance in various ways. There are significant differences between written joke texts and the oral joke performance. In the oral version, there are pantomimes, gestures, and voice shifts, which will be dealt with in the section on intonation and paralanguage. Therefore, I will identify characteristics such as false-starts, restarts, cut-offs, stutters, self-corrections, and the reaction of the listeners during and after the performance. Thus, my study includes several scholarly fields such as research on humor theories (Willman 1940; Koestler 1969; Goldstein and McGhee 1972; Suls 1972, 1977; McGhee 1979; Wilson 1979; Chapman and Foot 1977; Raskin 1985, 1987; Apte 1985, Morreal 1987; Attardo 2001), the internal structure of jokes (Hockett 1960), the language of humor (Ross 1998), as well as the power relations (Holmes 1992, 1995, 2003) between the joke teller and the butt of the joke.

## 2 History of Stand-up Comedy

Stand-up comedy is the term for a special genre of comedy in which the performer, who is called the stand-up comedian, stands on the stage and speaks directly to the audience. In general, stand-up comedians are individual performers who plant themselves in front of their listeners with their microphones and start telling a succession of funny stories, one-liners or short jokes, and anecdotes, which are often called "bits", in order to make their audience laugh. The humorists' personalities, their interaction with the audience and their ability to spontaneously react to heckling are crucial aspects for successful stand-up comedy.

Research on the origins of stand-up comedy shows that its roots have not been clearly traced. In his *Encyclopedia of 20<sup>th</sup> century American Humor*, Nilsen (2000:287) explains that stand-up comedy began to grow out of the burlesque and vaudeville traditions and traces its roots back to the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Italian *commedia dell' arte*. He explains the term *vaudeville* as either originating from the French "voix de ville" meaning "voice of the village" or from the French "vaux de Vire" meaning "valley of Vire" (2000:304). But whereas burlesque and vaudeville also included music and variety acts besides the comic spoken parts, stand-up comedy is derived from only the spoken parts of such shows.

According to Double (2005:20), the history of stand-up comedy originated from the work of jesters, *commedia dell'arte*, Shakespearean clowns, British music hall comedians, and American vaudeville entertainers. Double also mentions late 19<sup>th</sup> - century lecturers such as Mark Twain, who started to entertain their audiences successfully by telling humorous stories and jokes and by creating uneducated characters who spoke in strong dialect. Mintz (1983:134) also stresses the connection to the *commedia dell'arte* troupes in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and mentions the stock characters and their spontaneous and uncomplicated performances. Their stories were simple, so that even uneducated audiences were able to follow them.

In America, the earliest form of stand-up comedy had its roots in vaudeville, which first started in the form of the minstrel or variety show. White comedians painted their faces black and started to perform by speaking and singing in black dialects.

Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the minstrel show developed into American vaudeville. The first famous vaudeville theater was opened in 1865 and was Tony Pastor's New Fourteenth Street Theater in New York. Tony Pastor was the first to present vaudeville to a respectable audience and went down in history as the "father of vaudeville" (Nilsen, 2000:304).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humorists all performed burlesque and vaudeville, very popular genres of American variety entertainment or popular theater, before focusing on stand-up comedy.

During the 1920's vaudeville theater would undergo a certain pressure because numerous performers also appeared on radio shows, meaning that audiences could listen to their acts without having to pay in the theaters. This was certainly one of the reasons why vaudeville began to decline and had nearly completely disappeared by 1935. Their main topics focused on everyday matters in their personal lives and could therefore attract the audience's interest. Nevertheless, Americans were able to keep stand-up comedy alive in the "Borscht Belt", a famous holiday resort area, and along the "Chitlin Circuit" (Double, 2005:23/24), which were regions with numerous cabarets, small theaters and nightclubs in America's largest cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Washington, and various others. They offered opportunities for the stand-up comedians to gain popularity. In these years, stand-up comedy became informal and was infused with dark humor, sarcasm, and satire. Lenny Bruce, for example, started off in the Borscht Belt and became famous for his obscene and vulgar topics and his remarks about illegal drugs, racism, and hypocrisy. From then on, it was normal to break overtly

into taboo areas during the performances. Topics dealing with drugs, sex, and violence had become common. The first comedy club worldwide was opened in Sheepshead Bay, New York, in 1962.

In the 1970s, stand-up comedy began to reach its peak and expanded rapidly from nightclubs and smaller theaters to huge concert halls and arenas. Names like Richard Pryor, George Carlin, Steve Martin, and Bill Cosby became predominant in the scene and famous television shows such as *Saturday Night Live*, *The Tonight Show*, *Late Show with David Letterman*, or *The Larry Sanders Show* contributed to establishing the success of these stand-up comedians. Carlin became famous in the early 1970's mainly through his identification with the politics of the hippies and his remarks about drugs. Martin's style was characterized by his highly subversive delivery and he was one of the first comedians to perform in huge arenas. Cosby and Pryor were both African-American comedians, but whereas Pryor dealt with racial topics and presented honest work about his turbulent personal life, Cosby completely excluded racial topics in his performances. Rather he told stories about his childhood and his youth. He also became famous in his successful sitcom *The Cosby Show* during the 1980's. Television had developed into a real comedy market place and increased the popularity of numerous stand-up

comedians. In the 1980's, stars like George Carlin, Dennis Miller, Robin Williams, Eddie Murphy, Jerry Seinfeld, and Billy Crystal became famous because of such television shows and began to perform live stand-up comedy sessions. Nowadays, stand-up comedy still prevails in our society and is being kept alive by new media such as the Internet ("You Tube" and "Laugh.com" for example) or particular comedy channels like Comedy Central, all over the world. New York, Los Angeles, and Boston are considered to be the birthplaces of the stand-up comedy scene, and stars such as Jerry Seinfeld or Steven Wright began their careers in the most famous nightclubs in and around these cities.

As far as other countries are concerned, it is important to mention that Great Britain also represents a stronghold of stand-up comedy. Similar to the situation in America, its history began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and according to Double (2000:29), "it evolved in parallel with its American counterpart". It mainly found its beginning in huge music halls. The performers in these halls were mostly singers who performed in front of working-class audiences and could attract their interest so that these music halls soon gained huge popularity. By 1868, London already had more than two hundred music halls in the city center and even more in the outskirts. This music hall style was characterized by songs, which were

often comic and performed directly in front of the audience. During the following years, this style approached more and more the modern stand-up comedy style in which performers start telling a succession of funny jokes or one-liners.

In the 1920s, variety underwent the same problems as vaudeville in America when it began to decline due to the emergence of films. Thanks to George Black and Val Parnell, the London Palladium reopened in 1928 again so that variety could continue.

From 1960 on, variety could not withstand the competition from television and could only be maintained in the early working-class clubs. Entertainment in these clubs began to boom and new, famous clubs such as the Batley Variety Club were opened in Yorkshire in 1967. In the meantime, more stand-up comedians came from the British folk music clubs in which stand-up comedy was becoming more conversational.

Television and radio further contributed to the increasing interest in stand-up comedy, and such stars as Bernard Manning, Bobby Thompson, Stan Boardman, and Frank Carson became famous through television shows like *The Wheeltappers* and *Shunters Social Club*. In 1979, Peter Rosengard even opened the first American-style stand-up comedy club, namely the Comedy Store in London, in which

the most successful performers of the 1980's began their careers. It did not take long before British stand-up comedy began to spread all over the country, and particularly political humor began to dominate this comedy scene.

When analyzing the history of stand-up in America and in Britain, we have to realize that in both cases it began in theaters or music halls before evolving further in comedy clubs. In comparison to the history of stand-up comedy in America and in Britain, it is interesting to follow its history in Germany, where stand-up comedy in the American style has only been known since the early 1990's on, when comedians such as, for example, Otto Waalkes and Helge Schneider began to fill their audience with enthusiasm by performing in live shows and concerts. But even if it took a long time for stand-up comedy to find its place in Germany, television shows such as the *Quatsch Comedy Club* or *Nightwash* reinforced its growing success, and nowadays it plays a crucial role in German comedy. Since 1991 Cologne has even been the venue for a stand-up comedy festival which regularly attracts national and international performers each year and awards the famous German Comedy Prize every October.

### **3 Jerry Seinfeld**

Jerome Seinfeld was born on April 29, 1954, in Brooklyn, New York. Later, his family moved to Massapequa, Long Island, where he spent his childhood. From that time on Seinfeld followed the vaudeville performers, before starting his own career as one of the world's best stand-up comedians ever. After his studies at Queens College, he became more and more interested in stand-up comedy and started to appear in various comedy clubs and television shows such as *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, the *Late Night with David Letterman*, and the *Merv Griffin Show*. In 1989, he even created a television show, *The Seinfeld Chronicles*, which was later renamed *Seinfeld* and became one of the most successful American television sitcoms ever. The show ended in 1998 and brought him several awards, such as the Emmy Award in 1993 (for Outstanding Comedy Series), the Golden Globe Award in 1994 (for Best Actor-Musical or Comedy Series), and even twice the Screen Actors Guild Award in 1997 and 1998 (for Outstanding Ensemble-Comedy Series). Just a few months after his sitcom had ended in 1998, Seinfeld also created one of the most famous comedy specials, *I'm Telling You for the Last Time*, which will serve as the basis for my study and will be analyzed in the following chapters of my work. It is a live album produced by Jerry Seinfeld and recorded at the Broadhurst Theater,

New York on August 6-9, 1998. The tape is 72:27 minutes long and provides the main basis for my linguistic research. It has 21 tracks entitled 1. "Intro", 2. "Cab Drivers", 3. "Air Travel", 4. "Florida", 5. "Halloween", 6. "Supermarkets", 7. "Drugstores", 8. "Doctors", 9. "Men & Women", 10. "Chinese People", 11. "McDonald's", 12. "Olympics", 13. "Scuba Diving", 14. "No. 1 Fear", 15. "Sky Diving/The Helmet", 16. "Clothing", 17. "Late TV", 18. "Crooks", 19. "Horses", 20. "Bathroom" and 21. "Q + A". I have transcribed the whole tape in order to be able to work on the basis of written text excerpts. In my study, I did not take the final segment, "Q + A", into consideration because it cannot be considered stand-up comedy as such, but only provides a section in which Seinfeld voluntarily interacts with his audience.

In 2007, Seinfeld also co-produced and starred of the animated film *Bee Movie*, which was released November 2, 2007. Apart from his career as a comedian and producer, Seinfeld is also the author of a bestselling book called *Seinlanguage* (1993), which stayed on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 33 weeks and represents an adaptation of his own stand-up material.

Jerry Seinfeld possesses a natural gift for developing humor out of the most everyday topics that are normally not funny as such. But he is able to deal with these common and

most ordinary occurrences in a way that is different from most of the other stand-up comedians. Seinfeld's objective is to present critical humor towards mainstream culture. He shows in a perfect manner how everyday situations with the most trivial topics can serve as raw material for a successful comedy routine. Throughout the whole performance, he keeps his natural speech patterns and develops a stage persona which is very close to his own actual self. This can also be seen by observing his outer appearance. He is always well-dressed and appears very elegant as a normal New Yorker does. So his stage persona is actually identical to his off-stage persona and allows him to stay the same character as in his everyday life. By focusing on everyday topics to create humor, he does not have to invent funny stories to make his audience laugh. This allows him to make his delivery as natural as possible. Seinfeld's stage persona expresses both determination but also reservedness, which are responsible for his great success. When I speak of determination, I mean Seinfeld's ability to know exactly how to display his personality in front of his audience, which is the reason why he can extract humor out of the most familiar everyday topics. He makes use of these topics in order to directly communicate to his listeners and integrates them in his performance, which helps him to acknowledge his audience.

Seinfeld is remarkable in his ability to show that it is sufficient to go on stage and start quipping about events that make the audience aware of their own foibles and therefore cause them to laugh and appreciate his performance.

#### **4 Steven Wright**

Steven Alexander Wright was born on December 6, 1955, in Burlington, Massachusetts. Like Jerry Seinfeld, he is a famous and successful stand-up comedian, actor, and writer, and is even an Academy-Award winner for his short film *The Appointments of Dennis Jennings* in 1998. He has created an individual style that is unique in the stand-up comedy scene. One of his performance characteristics is his deliberately slow and particularly monotonous style of delivery, which mainly consists of hilarious one-liners and short jokes. In contrast to Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Wright does not talk about everyday topics as such, but fakes everyday life and invents absurd and often surreal stories during his performances. Double (2005:286), in his work, termed this style "deadpan delivery". Wright's monotonous and apathetic style is unique in the stand-up comedy scene. His quite soft way of speaking gives the impression that he is only talking to himself rather than addressing his audience. Whereas Seinfeld's stage persona is similar to if not even the same as his off-stage persona, Wright invents a passive stage persona and presents the audience material that is explicitly invented for his show. With Wright there is nothing real, everything is invented and faked, even his own persona on stage. One of Wright's predominant strategies in his verbal humor is timing. He regularly

introduces longer pauses in order to prepare his audience for the following punch line and therefore to reinforce the laughing effect. Over the years his unique style of performing has brought him great success. As far as the structure of his jokes is concerned, we can analyze a definite punch line in each and every joke. The surprise effect always comes in the second part of his jokes. Most of his jokes, in which he regularly pretends to speak from his own point of view, express a bizarre, even surreal content. Nevertheless, we can rarely find real self-deprecation in his jokes. Wright principally speaks in the first person singular, but only uses this strategy to serve as an example when playing with popular notions rather than to relate any experience he really had himself. The succession of jokes demonstrates a special sort of fluidity because he chooses the jokes in a way that is appropriate to his audience's reactions. His performance mainly depends on the laughter on the part of his recipients. In contrast to Jerry Seinfeld, who always looks well-groomed and dresses like a normal New Yorker, Wright even aims to look weird on stage. Most of the time he appears with a hat and shaggy hair, creating humor not only out of incongruous situations in his material, but also out of his outer appearance on stage. It is obvious that Seinfeld cares more about outer appearance. Using negative politeness, he aims

at expressing respect and social distance towards his audience. Wright, however, does not care about formal politeness and creates solidarity in a different way, by establishing common ground. He stresses in-group thinking and wants to show his audience that they share certain things, such as the understanding and appreciation of his humorous stories and one-liners.

Similar to Jerry Seinfeld, Steven Wright has been interested in comedy from his teen years on, before becoming a star himself. Like Jerry Seinfeld, his career also began to flourish with regular appearances on television shows like *The Tonight Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Late Night with David Letterman*. In 1985 he created a live album entitled *I Have a Pony*, which was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1985. It lasts 41:42 minutes and mainly presents Steven Wright's characteristic style of telling successions of one-liners. It has 14 tracks: 1. "Introduction", 2. "Ants", 3. "Hitchhiking", 4. "Ice", 5. "Dog Stay", 6. "Rachel", 7. "7's and the Museum", 8. "Water", 9. "Jiggs Casey", 10. "Cross Country", 11. "Book Store", 12. "Winny", 13. "Apt." and 14. "Babies and Skiing". In 2007 Steven Wright produced the follow-up album entitled *I Still Have a Pony*. It represents an audio version of his Comedy Central television special *When the Leaves Blow Away* (2006) and lasts 42:28 minutes. It has

thirteen tracks: 1. "Quote", 2. "I Met This Woman", 3. "The Store", 4. "Camera", 5. "The Kitten Song", 6. "Twin", 7. "Monopoly", 8. "Hitchhiker", 9. "Planetarium", 10. "My Grandfather", 11. "Shopping Carts", 12. "Mumble Song" and 13. "Friends of Mine Song" and was nominated for the Grammy Award in 2008. Because songs do not belong to stand-up comedy, I will not take the sections "Rachel" (IHAP), "The Kitten Song" (ISHAP), "Mumble Song" (ISHAP) and "Friends of Mine Song" into consideration in the following study.

## 5 Data

Stand-up comedy will serve as the data source for the analytical part of my study. As mentioned in the previous sections, my investigation is based on a corpus of authentic material presented by the stand-up comedians Seinfeld and Wright: *I'm Telling You for the Last Time* by Jerry Seinfeld; *I Have a Pony* and *I Still Have a Pony* by Steven Wright. Authentic, in this case, means audio and video recordings of actual performances. My data is therefore performance and not written text. The reason for concentrating on performance rather than pure transcripts is that in written texts linguistic features, such as discourse markers or disfluencies are completely omitted. But because I focus precisely on these features, my data has to be a live performance on tape. In addition, I used the DVD of the television special *I'm Telling You for the Last Time* (1998) by Jerry Seinfeld and *When the Leaves Blow Away* (2006) by Steven Wright, in order to have a basis for analyzing the occurrence of paralinguistic and non-scripted behavior, such as body language (gestures, facial expressions etc.).

The material was chosen because it displays in detail the comedians' strategies for organizing their performances. As far as Jerry Seinfeld is concerned, his material is, on the one hand, marked by the choice of the

topics that are mainly based on everyday situations, and, on the other hand, by the frequent occurrence of paralanguage. The visualization of absurdities serves to enhance the audience's appreciation of his performance. As already mentioned, Seinfeld restricts the topics of his material to commonplace situations that all members of the audience know from their everyday lives. The material he uses in his performances does not explicitly point to a humorous content, but serves to represent just his own character and provides a chain of personal experiences which make the audience aware of their own foibles. Whenever he speaks in the first person singular, he presents his own self and therefore renders his performances humorous without even telling real joking stories. Seinfeld does not create a specific stage persona. He comes on stage and starts speaking of his own, real life. This presentation of authentic experience and the way he performs it are the reason for the funniness of his performances. With Steven Wright, I chose a comedian who is very different from Seinfeld and displays a completely different procedure in his performances. Whereas Seinfeld tells of real life situations, Wright amuses his audience by telling faked life situations he could never have experienced. When he speaks in the first person singular, he only pretends to be speaking about his own ego, but

actually it is a faked person he is talking about. Wright creates a different sort of relationship to the audience. Whereas Seinfeld is concentrated on formal politeness, Wright forgoes these negative politeness strategies and instead builds up solidarity and sympathy by establishing common ground and in-group thinking. So already from this point of view, we can conclude that the success and the funniness of Wright's performances are mainly based on his message of being alike, on the absurdity of his material and his way of presenting this unreal and ridiculous material as his own experience.

In the analytical part of this study, I will examine numerous examples taken from the transcripts of both comedians in order to clarify characteristic linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy. Due to the richness of the examples for the features in question, I will only work with selected extracts taken from the different performances and will therefore restrict the number of examples for each section.<sup>7</sup> I want to mention that one extract or example may serve as the basis for illustrating different linguistic aspects of stand-up comedy in my study. This procedure does not result from a lack of examples, but will serve to emphasize the

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<sup>7</sup> The entire transcription of both performances may be found in the appendix to this study.

comedian's skill in using a combination of different strategies in order to create a humorous effect.

## 6 Transcription Conventions

In my thesis, the transcriptions follow the conventions established by Dressler and Kreuz (2000), whose model system is based on a survey of various transcription conventions<sup>8</sup> for discourse analysis purposes.

Transcriptions consist of numerous short lines which represent spoken language as segmented into intonation units. As far as the English language is concerned, an intonation unit typically consists of about four to five words and expresses one new idea unit. Generally, intonation units begin with a brief pause and end in a clause-final intonation contour. Also, they often match grammatical clauses. Each idea unit typically contains a subject, or given information, and a predicate, or new information. This flow from given to new information is characteristic of spoken language as Chafe (1994) stresses in his work. The convention of writing each intonation unit in a separate line emphasizes the frequency of intonation units beginning with "and", and thus highlights the greater fragmentation inherent in spoken language (Chafe 1982). As far as capitalization is concerned, it is reduced to the pronoun "I" and proper names; diacritics are used to mark features of prosody rather than grammatical units, and non-

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<sup>8</sup> The actual transcription conventions may be found in the appendix to this study.

lexical items, for example pause fillers like "ehm" and "um", affirmative particles like "aha" or surprise markers like "oh", are included. The transcript is written in American English.

In my data, I precisely indicated the length of the pauses in order to analyze the comedian's strategy of timing, either in the sense of gaining planning time or of preparing the audience for the following punch line. The length of the single pauses has been indicated in parentheses (cf. 17.1. Transcription Conventions). However, I have only concentrated on the fact that the audience reacts to the comedian's performance rather than on the exact time and therefore indicated neither the exact length of the audience's laughter nor of their applause. I have focused on the analysis of the causes of their laughter and the subsequent applause, and thus decided to leave out the detailed indication of the length of the time because it has no influence on my further analysis. Concerning the audience's reaction, I only indicated the most important periods of laughter, in which the audience obviously reacted with continuous laughter because of their appreciation of the joke or in which they hesitated and only reacted with weak laughter, either because of incomprehension or of lack of appreciation. Giggling and

brief outbursts of laughter were not taken into consideration.

## 7 Humor Theories

Research on the structure of humorous discourse began in classical philosophy and still represents an essential research area for contemporary linguists. Many theories of humor have been advanced by famous philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and Kant. All their theories dealt with the question of why people laugh at certain situations, whereas they do not show any reactions in others. They tried to explain the various mental processes that allow us to experience humor. Plato and Aristotle began to deal with the essence of humor about 2000 years ago and laid the foundations for today's modern theories of humor as represented by influential linguists such as Goldstein and McGhee (1972), Chapman and Foot (1977), Raskin (1985), and Apte (1985)<sup>9</sup>. In general, the principal theories of humor can be classified into three main groups:

- incongruity theories (Raskin 1985:31-36)
- hostility theories (Raskin 1985:36-38)
- release theories (Raskin 1985:38-40).

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<sup>9</sup> For detailed bibliographies of humor research see Nilsen (1992, 1993), Goldstein and McGhee (1972: 263ff.).

This classification can be found in most of the literature dealing with humor research, even if the terms for the different groups may be slightly different. In MacHovec (1988), the term disappointment theory is used when he speaks of the incongruity theory. Whereas Attardo (1994, 2001) adopts the same terminology as Raskin (1985:36-38) when he speaks of "hostility or disparagement theories" and "release theories", I want to emphasize that Wilson (1979) calls these theories in his research "conflict theories" and "relief theories". Raskin (1985) specifies the theories further and points out that they can also be characterized from a psychological perspective as cognitive-perceptual (incongruity), social-behavioral (superiority), and psychoanalytical (relief). Attardo (1994:47) clarifies this interpretation with a detailed table displaying "The Three Families of Theories".

*Nothing produces laughter  
more than a surprising disproportion  
between that which one expects  
and that which one sees.*

Blaise Pascal  
(French philosopher  
and scientist, 1623-1662)

### **7.1. Incongruity Theories**

Morreall (1987:6) considers the incongruity theory to be "the most popular current philosophical theory of humor" and states further that it "holds that the formal object of amusement is 'the incongruous'." Many influential researchers share his view and see incongruity as the essential element in eliciting humor. According to Martin (in Ruch 1998:25), incongruity theories "focus on the cognitive elements of humor." Wilson (1979:9) explains the term incongruity thus: "the general proposition is that the components of a joke, or humorous incident, are in mutual clash, conflict or contradiction". Humor results in this case from the fact that there is a difference between what the recipient of the joke expects to happen and what actually happens. This means that humor is created by incongruity evoked by two conflicting meanings. The introduction and the main part of the joke might evoke a certain expectation as to how it will turn out. But the revelation of the punch line makes our expectation vanish

and provokes therefore a sort of discrepancy which elicits laughter. Consequently, incongruity involves a moment of surprise that results from the clash of two contrastive meanings. This brings forward one of the most important humorous features, which is ambiguity.<sup>10</sup> This thesis is also supported by Shultz (1976). Nerhardt (1977:47) considers humor to be the "consequence of the discrepancy between two mental representations, one of which is an expectation and the other is some other idea or a percept". Freud (1905/1960) emphasizes in his work that the joke recipients first have to recognize incongruity before they are able to react to it with laughter. As we can see in Morreall (1987) and MacHovec (1988), Kant, Schopenhauer, and Spencer can be considered the first authors associated with this theory. Kant states that everything intended to cause laughter must be something absurd and he defines laughter as "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (in Morreall 1987:47, 130, in Eastman 1922:153). This definition shows the two main characteristics of the incongruity theory by expressing that Kant analyzed the ridiculous object in terms of incongruity which emerges from the disappointment of a strained expectation. Raskin

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<sup>10</sup> For further details see the section 11.1. "Wordplay, Puns and Ambiguity".

(1985) takes up the disappointment theory and describes it as an incongruity-related theory in which two incompatible meanings have to be confronted. According to him and Attardo (2001), incongruity refers to the cognitive consequences of humor and the emphasis is focused on the contrastive or distinct meanings of the joke. But Attardo and Chabanne (1992:169) stress that an object is never incongruous "per se", but must occur in a situation which renders it unsuitable or contrastive to another object. They see the main function of the joke introduction and its main part in "setting the background against which and in reason of which the punch line appears incongruous" and is therefore impossible to predict.

Morreall (1987:52) also cites Schopenhauer, who gives a more detailed definition in which he explicitly mentions "incongruity". He says that "the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity." In contrast to Kant, who considers humor to result from an unfulfilled expectation, Schopenhauer emphasizes the discord between people's sensory knowledge and their abstract knowledge of the same objects. He stresses that the greater the incongruity is, the greater the "ludicrous effect which is

produced by this contrast" so that "all laughter then is occasioned by a paradox, and therefore by unexpected subsumption [...]" (1987:52). Among the more contemporary researchers who have dealt with incongruity, Willmann (1940), Koestler (1969), Suls (1972, 1977), Shultz (1972, 1976) and McGhee (1979) deserve mention.

Willmann (1940:72) also mentions the term "incongruity" when he states that humor results from "the union of two ideas which involve some sort of contradiction or incongruity". He goes into further detail by distinguishing three different realizations of this "union." Either the two meanings might be united by common elements, or one might function as an inference drawn from the second meaning, or both might occur in objective reality.

Koestler (1969:35) states within the framework of his bisociation theory that humor involves "the perceiving of a situation or idea, L, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of references, M1 and M2 [...]." He expresses with the term "bisociation" the idea that two normally incompatible objects or references are perceived in concepts which are actually remote from each other. Humor therefore results from "the collision of incompatible matrices" (1969:92), from "the sudden bisociation of an idea or event with two habitually incompatible matrices

(1969:51). According to him, humor and subsequent laughter result mainly from aggressiveness or anxiety.

I consider McGhee's definition to be the most precise and detailed definition. He states that

the notions of congruity and incongruity refer to the relationship between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth. When the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous. (1979:6/7)

Before coming to a further humor theory, I want to stress that some researchers such as Shultz (1972, 1976), Suls (1972, 1977), and Nerhardt (1977), have begun debates as to whether incongruity is a sufficient condition for humor or whether its resolution also plays an important part in it. They have pointed out the fact that some incongruous elements can fit together so that the recipient can make sense of the punch line with regard to the information given in the joke. In this case, they use the incongruity expressed in the punch line to resolve it and make it congruous. Therefore, incongruity represents only a first stage which must be followed by the resolution of this incongruity in order to elicit humor on the recipients' part. Suls states (1972:82 in Goldstein and McGhee 1972):

In the first stage, the perceiver finds his expectations about the text disconfirmed by the

ending of the joke or, in the case of a cartoon, his expectations about the picture disconfirmed by the caption. In other words, the recipient encounters an incongruity - the punch line. In the second stage, the perceiver engages in a form of problem solving to find a cognitive rule which makes the punch line follow from the main part of the joke and reconciles the incongruous parts.

We can conclude that the incongruity-resolution model stresses that the recipient has a certain expectation that is not fulfilled by the following punch line. It is obvious that a good joke tries to put the recipients on the wrong track in order to surprise them through the revelation of the punch line. After having realized this incongruity, the recipient tries to resolve it in order to be able to make sense of the punch line with help of the information it contained.<sup>11</sup> Shultz (in Chapman and Foot 1976:13) emphasizes that the "mechanism of resolution is apparently necessary to distinguish humor from nonsense." Whereas incongruity in nonsense cannot be resolved, humor can be characterized as resolvable incongruity. Pepicello (1983:73) clarifies this by stating that the resolution "is assumed to reduce the arousal produced by the initial perception of incongruity, and such decreases in arousal are seen as pleasurable". When the recipients are unable to

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<sup>11</sup> For detailed examples of Shultz's and Suls' theory, see Rothbart and Pien (in: Chapman and Foot 1977:37).

resolve the incongruity, we can state that they do not understand the joke.

*Humor is an affirmation of dignity,  
a declaration of man's superiority  
to all that befalls him.*

Roman Gary  
(French novelist 1914-1980)

## **7.2. Hostility Theories**

Hostility theories, also known as disparagement theories (Suls 1977), derision theories (MacHovec 1988), superiority theories (Morreall 1987), or disappointment theories and the theories of frustrated expectation (Allen 1998:10), go back to Plato's and Aristotle's early work and refer to the negative and the aggressive side of humor, which is mainly used to disparage and humiliate specific opponents. Both philosophers emphasized in their work that laughter is a means of power and superiority when it is directed against the faults of other people and it thus expresses their inferiority. Plato considered amusement to be "a kind of malice toward [powerless] people" (in Morreall 1987:10), and Morreall (1987:3) emphasizes that "laughter is always directed at someone as a kind of scorn." In Allen (1987:10), we can find Aristotle's attitude to the source

of humor when he defines it as "enjoyment of the misfortune of others due to a momentary feeling of superiority or gratified vanity that we ourselves are not in the predicament observed."

Hobbes shares that conviction and asserts that "the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly: for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance [...]" (in Morreall 1987:20, 129, in Eastman 1922:33).<sup>12</sup> Considering that Hobbes was a political philosopher, we can come to the conclusion that for him, humor served as a means of expressing power and control in social domains such as politics as well. Even nowadays, we use humor in the same sense when we think of it as a regular means of expressing power and superiority over those we dislike.

In his work *Human Nature*, Hobbes (1650/1999:54) also stresses the fact that laughter stems from the feeling of superiority of the person who is laughing at some object. He even distinguishes between two sorts of laughter:

Men laugh often (especially such as are greedy of applause from every thing they do well) at their

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<sup>12</sup> For the original citation see Hobbes 1985 (1651): 125, Hobbes 1999 (1650): 54,55.  
La Fave, Haddad (et al.) (in Chapman and Foot (1996:63,64)).

own actions performed never so little beyond their own expectation; as also at their own jests [...]

Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison of which their own abilities are set off and illustrated. Also men laugh at jests, the wit whereof always consisteth in the elegant discovering and conveying to our minds some absurdity or another.

Hobbes's theory of humor not only takes superiority into consideration but also suddenness, which serves to create a surprise effect and seems to become a further necessary condition for humor.

Bergson (1911/1956) can be considered one of the most influential proponents of the hostility theory. For Bergson, the ridiculous is "something mechanical encrusted on the living" (in Morreall 1987:117). According to him, "the purpose of laughter is to remove that encrustation through humiliation, and thus promote free, well-adapted behavior" (in Morreall 1987:117). He defines laughter as a social corrective and points out that it is people's mechanical behavior that we laugh at rather than at the individuals themselves when he states that we laugh at their "mechanical inelasticity" (Morreall 1987: 117, 121, 125, Bergson 1911:5,9). This means that when someone automatically or mechanically behaves in a manner that is incongruous with a social norm, they become the target of the joke and elicit laughter among the others. This

laughter results from the feeling of superiority felt by the recipients.<sup>13</sup>

Suls (1977:41) clarifies in his work that disparagement theories "mean those theories of humour based on the observation that we laugh at other people's infirmities, particularly those of our enemies." He further states that the incongruity-resolution model, mentioned in the section above, can account for disparagement humor in those cases where the incongruous punch line involves a surprising misfortune. It is of interest to note that a major finding of his research was that the recipients who are part of the disparaged group will be less likely to resolve the punch line and make sense of it, whereas those who feel hostile and superior to the disparaged group will be able to make sense of the surprising punch line.

I want to conclude this section by mentioning Gruner (1978), who also stressed in *Understanding Laughter* that laughter serves as a means of expressing superiority over the inferior persons and therefore "substitutes a verbal attack for physical violence" (MacHovec 1988:31). In general, we can state that humor increases when the butt of

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<sup>13</sup> For a summary of the three basic elements of Bergson's essay, *Laughter: an essay on the meaning of the comic*, cf. MacHovec 1988:74, 75.

the joke is someone or a group of persons we do not like or towards whom we even feel hatred.

*Language is power,  
life and the instrument of culture,  
the instrument of domination and liberation.*

Angela Carter  
(English novelist and journalist,  
1940-1992)

### **7.3. Release Theories**

As their name suggests, release theories posit that humor is used to release tensions or to make one feel liberated when talking about taboo topics such as sex. The most influential proponent of this humor theory is Sigmund Freud, which is the reason why I will focus on his work in this section.<sup>14</sup> Freud was the first to work on real humorous texts; he started to identify the various joke techniques in terms of "sounds, syllables, repetition, and variation" (Norrick 2003:1334) and formulated the psychoanalytic theory of humor. Like Spencer, Freud considers laughter to be "an outlet for psychic or nervous energy" (Morreall 1987:111). For him, humor represents a

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<sup>14</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of other proponents of release theories see Spencer (in Morreall (1987)), Fry (1963), Grice (1975), Kline (1977), Raskin (1985).

means of defense that enables people to experience pure pleasure. In his early book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905/1960), Freud distinguishes three situations in which laughter might be revealed: jokes or wit, the comic situation, and the humorous situation. All three situations contain a build-up of psychic energy which fuels the release of emotion. According to him, "this superfluous energy is what is discharged in the muscular movements of laughter" (Morreall 1987:111). In the comic situation, the amusement arises because of the economy in the expenditure of thought. There is always some disappointment or deceived expectation involved in comic situations. In wit, the pleasure results from economy in the expenditure of inhibition, whereas in humor, it is due to the economy in the expenditure of feeling. Situations which would cause a sort of suffering are given less significance from a humorous standpoint (cf. Keith-Spiegel (1972:12/13, 30). In his research, Freud analyzed various jokes with help of reduction mechanisms and came up with twenty different categories, and detailed the humorous techniques they employ. In Freud's view, the main criteria and characteristics of joking include the relation to the content of our thoughts, the characteristic of playful judgment, the coupling of dissimilar things, contrasting ideas, sense in nonsense, the succession of bewilderment

and enlightenment, the exposure of what is hidden, and the brevity of wit. As one of the major structural techniques of jokes, Freud mentions condensation, in which the actual thought is condensed by introducing a composite word which cannot be understood in itself but in the context it occurs. Freud uses the term "technique" to refer to the way the joke is constructed. He even classifies subcategories of condensation, such as the dividing up of words, the multiple use of the same material as a whole, in parts, in a different order, or with slight modification.<sup>15</sup> He cites all these mechanisms as examples of economy. He also mentions displacement, in which "emphasis is displaced from the relevant to the irrelevant" (Wilson 1979:17), which means that emphasis shifts to a completely different meaning of the word. Moreover, he puts forward faulty-reasoning, absurdity, unification, representation by the opposite and the indirect representation or reference to the similar.<sup>16</sup>

Following his discussion of humor techniques, Freud introduces two forms of joking: "innocent" and "tendentious" jokes. Tendentious jokes describe events that would normally leave the audience shocked or terrified. For

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of various humor techniques are provided by Kline (1977:7/8). He also provides various hypotheses on each of their distinguishing characteristics.

<sup>16</sup> For detailed examples see Freud (1905/1960: p.14-96), MacHovec (1988:39ff.).

Freud these jokes have two functions; either they serve to express hostility and aggressiveness or obscenity and exposure. He argues that in a tendentious joke, there is an underlying, unconscious thought which is responsible for the joke's release of repressed feelings. Pleasure results in this case from the hidden aggression and hostility we feel towards certain persons who hold perhaps a more powerful position than we ourselves. Freud defines the tendentious joke as a joke that displaces aggression, and he presents three different categories of tendentious jokes: "exposing or obscene jokes, aggressive (hostile) jokes [and] cynical (critical, blasphemous) jokes" (1905/1960:137). Hostile jokes can be used to attack other people and therefore express aggression, defense and dominance. Obscene jokes express exposure because they are mainly of a sexual nature. They serve to overcome inhibition and at the same time, to satisfy shameful thoughts or ideas that people normally repress because their content is generally considered unacceptable. Freud explains these facts when he states that tendentious jokes serve to overcome "the obstacle to the aggressiveness" (1905/1960:124) and that

the prevention of invective or of insulting rejoinders by external circumstances is such a common case that tendentious jokes are especially favoured in order to make aggressiveness or

criticism possible against persons in exalted positions who claim to exercise authority. The joke then represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure. (1905/1960:125)

This sort of "liberation" and the economy of psychical expenditure, which means a saving of energy, are responsible for the ensuing laughter. Innocent jokes, known as "innocent humour, or nonsense" (Wilson 1979:159), refer to amusement at bizarre happenings, illogicalities and absurdity. Amusement is caused only by the incongruity predominant in these nonsense jokes. In this case, it is the technique rather than the aggression which amuses the audience and causes laughter. Freud states it thus:

On the basis of suitable specimens of innocent jokes, in which there was no fear of our judgement being disturbed by their content or purpose, we were driven to conclude that the techniques of jokes are themselves sources of pleasure. (1905/1960:146)

Whereas tendentious jokes display aggression, innocent jokes never threaten their listeners but rather elicit enjoyment of their content. Freud assumes that "this enjoyment is no doubt correctly to be attributed to economy in psychical expenditure" (1905/1960:147).

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that Freud's theory often represents a synthesis of release, hostility, and incongruity theories and can therefore be considered to be

more comprehensive than any other models which mainly focus on one of the theories explained.

#### **7.4. The General Theory of Verbal Humor**

Raskin (1985) deals with the semantic script-based theory of humor (SSTH), which led to the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) a few years later (Attardo and Raskin 1991). Both theories became influential in the analysis of verbally expressed humor.

##### **7.4.1. The Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor (SSTH)**

Raskin deals with the concept of the "script" and defines it as the meaning of the text of the joke. This script represents a "structured configuration of knowledge about some situation or activity" (Ritchie 2004:70). This means the script provides information about an object, an action, or an event and reveals the structure of an entity by dealing with its parts, describing how an activity is done, or how a relationship is organized. A script is defined by Raskin (1985:81) as:

a large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Every speaker has internalized rather a large repertoire of scripts of "common sense" which

represent his/her knowledge of certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations etc.

Attardo (2001:3) underscores Raskin's insistence on the fact that "scripts [...] are immediately related to, and evoked by, lexical items." Raskin (1985:99) explains his theory in the following way:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions [...] are satisfied.

- i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
- ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite [...]

The two scripts with which some text is compatible are said to overlap fully or in part on this text.

The first condition means that the joke is described as consisting of an initial part which can be subject to two possible interpretations. For the listener one of these two interpretations seems to be more obvious than the second one, which first passes completely unnoticed. In a quite sudden and surprising way, the last part of the joke brings this second possibility of interpretation closer to the listener's consciousness. The second condition reveals that contrast plays a central role; Raskin states that the two scripts must be opposed. This opposition can be realized through situational, contextual, or local antonyms. He

mentions three abstract binary oppositions, which he calls actual/non-actual, normal/abnormal and possible/impossible. So we can conclude that Raskin's hypothesis demonstrates that a text can only be considered funny if it has two different scripts and if these scripts stand in opposition to each other.

#### **7.4.2. The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)**

The general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) is a theory that was developed by Raskin and Attardo in 1991 and can be described as the follow-up to Raskin's semantic script-based theory of humor (SSTH) mentioned above. The GTVH is focused on verbal humor and describes a joke as a construction of six knowledge resources which contain

1. script opposition (SO), which we are already acquainted with from Raskin's SSTH,
2. the logical mechanism (LM), which embodies a local logic and deals with the way in which the two scripts in a joke are brought together,
3. the situation (SI), which describes the various persons playing a role in the joke, the objects, and the location of the joke,
4. the target (TA), which describes the person or group of persons at whom the joke is aimed and who or which are ridiculed or attacked,

5. the narrative strategy (NS), which identifies the style used to present the joke (e.g. a dialogue, a riddle, a narrative etc.) and
6. the language (LA), which represents all the words and other linguistic units used in the text.

To conclude this section, I would like to refer once again to the incongruity theories discussed in section 7.1. At first glance one could assume that Raskin's script-based semantic theory of humor is also essentially an incongruity theory. But Raskin himself (1987:17) disproves this assumption with help of an example which I will cite:

"Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No", the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

Raskin suggests that we are confronted with two scripts in this joke; the DOCTOR script on the one hand, and the LOVER script on the other hand. The latter emerges from the wife's response at the very end of the joke and reveals itself to be compatible with the text's narrative because it gives a "natural" answer to the question asked by the patient. But this second script is incompatible with the first one because the text cannot be describing a patient looking for medical help and a lover trying to see his beloved in secret at the same time. This incompatibility

represents the script opposition for Raskin. He underscores the fact that the two opposite scripts "are not to be identified with the two situations brought together in a joke as postulated by the incongruity-based theory; the scripts are formal [...] structures resulting from an independently postulated analytical procedure" (Raskin 1987:17). He justifies this by explaining that the goal of his theory is to "analyze the text of the joke rather than the psychological or other reasons for its production" (Raskin 1987:17). With regard to what I have learned about Raskin's theory, I want to emphasize that it is valid for written joke texts not necessarily for joke performances as we find them in stand-up comedy. Because the theory completely depends on scripts based on written words, it neglects performance completely and does not deal with body language or intonation changes, which are essential features of stand-up comedy performances. Although it is called a "general" theory, it cannot be considered general because it is limited to verbal humor. Raskin and Attardo's material is text that incorporates jokes and not performance. That means, what is excluded is "non-verbal humor" in form of paralanguage and prosody. Therefore, I will not put the main focus on this theory in the analytical part of my study.

To sum up the section on humor theories, I want to stress that all theories have met with criticism over the years. So it is obvious that the early research on incongruity, superiority, and relief theories has received the ongoing attention of more modern linguists. Morreall (1987:128ff.), Clark (in Morreall 1987:139ff., in Langevin and Day (in Goldstein and McGhee 1972: 131)), and Martin (in Morreall 1987: 172ff.) represent only some of those who have criticized the early theories. Morreall (1987: 129ff.) shows that not all cases of laughter and amusement express feelings of superiority or result from incongruity. He justifies his opinion with findings on the behavior of babies. Morreall emphasizes that they also laugh, but that this kind of laughter cannot be attributed to a feeling of superiority. Nor does it involve incongruity, so that the two theories cannot be considered to cover all cases of humorous laughter. Clark and Martin further deal with Schopenhauer's incongruity theory and come to the conclusion that incongruity is only a necessary, but in no way a sufficient condition of humor. Martin (in Morreall 1987:175) also provides a number of objections to his theory.

As far as the analytical part of my study is concerned, I will mainly refer to Freud because his theory can be considered as a synthesis of release, hostility and

incongruity theories and thus represents a comprehensive model. Concerning incongruity as such, I will examine the jokes in order to find out if they contain incongruity in the sense of incompatible and contrastive ideas (cf. Morreal (1987), McGhee (1979), Raskin (1985)) and unfulfilled expectation, as Kant stressed in his research (cf. Morreall 1987:47, 130, Eastman 1922:154). Moreover, I will examine them for their expression of superiority towards the persons that are ridiculed. Therefore, I will mainly follow Plato's, Aristotle's and Hobbes' research (cf. Morreal 1987, Allen 1987, Hobbes 1650/1999) because they focused on laughter as an expression of superiority of the persons who are laughing at powerless people or specific objects.

## 8 Genres<sup>17</sup> of Humor

This section provides a brief overview of the various genres of humor. Stand-up comedy represents only one field of humor. Wordplay and puns, ridicule and funny personal anecdotes are others. In general, jokes can take many forms, such as narrative jokes, proverbial phrases, one-liners, knock-knock jokes, or riddles. They all have their own particular structure.

Various linguists have already dealt with the most different kinds of humor. Among those who have dealt with the discussion and the analysis of joke telling are important names such as Freud (1905/1960; 1920/1961), Schegloff (1968; 1982; 1987; 1988), Sacks (1972; 1973; 1974; 1992), Schenkein (1972), Tannen (1984; 1989) and Norrick (1989; 1993; 1993a; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2004). They focused particularly on conversational joking, which is obviously different from stand-up comedy. Whereas in conversational joketelling at least two persons participate, stand-up comedy consists of the humorist's monologue addressed to a receiving audience. As for the differences between dialogues and monologues in joke telling, I will explicitly deal with them in the paragraphs 9.1. and 9.2.. Nevertheless, the researchers' work served

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<sup>17</sup> I used the term "genre" in the sense of a certain type of humor which is considered as a class because it has special characteristics.

as essential background material for my analysis because their research on conversational humor contains crucial insights that can also be applied to the genre of stand-up comedy and which point to interesting aspects in the examination of differences and similarities between conversational joke telling and stand-up comedy. I emphasize here in particular the importance of the comedian's identity and his performance skills, but also the audience's reaction in form of laughter. Humor normally causes laughter and this laughter results from something that happens unexpectedly or that is completely irrational, illogical, unreasonable, or extremely exaggerated. McGhee (1979:10) maintains that "incongruity is central to all humor" and thus puts the focus on the incongruity theory referred to in section 7.1. Fry (1963) emphasizes that humor results from ridiculous situations that consist of several paradoxes, and that humor only becomes obvious when a punch line or any other key information serves to resolve these paradoxes in an unexpected way. In the following, I will deal with the internal structure of jokes and their various forms in order to establish a basis for my analytical discussion of stand-up comedy.

### 8.1. The Internal Structure of Jokes

In the examination of the internal structure of jokes, I refer to Hockett (1960), who stated in *The View from Language* that jokes have three different components:

- 1) Build-up
- 2) Pivot
- 3) Punch line

The "build-up" forms the body of the joke. It is the sentence which introduces the joke and presents the orientation and much of the complicating action. The "pivot" signifies the word or phrase around which the ambiguity is created. The "punch line" serves to conclude the joke and often introduces "a conflicting point of view or a new scene entirely", as Norrick explains in his work (1989:118). The punch line therefore represents a surprise effect for the audience and is responsible for their amusement and appreciation, normally expressed in general laughter.

To clarify the structure, I have chosen an example from Alexander (1997:42):

After waiting for half an hour in a Soho restaurant the customer called over to the waiter: "How long will my spaghetti be?" he asked. "How should I know", replied the waiter. "I never measure it."

The three components of the internal structure according to Hockett (1960) are:

After waiting for half an hour in a Soho restaurant the customer called over to the waiter:

⇒ Build-up

"How long will my spaghetti be?" he asked.

⇒ Pivot

"How should I know", replied the waiter.

"I never measure it."

⇒ Punch line

The build-up consists here of the orientation section and much of the complication action. It informs the recipient about a customer who is waiting for his spaghetti in a restaurant. His question "How long will my spaghetti be?" represents the pivot of the joke, because the waiter misinterprets the question. The waiter's answer forms the punch which concludes the joke. It serves as its resolution. Although stand-up comedians do not explicitly use the exact structure as described by Hockett (1960) when telling jokes from their own lives or everyday affairs, we

can nevertheless comprehend their structure even if they sometimes skip the build-up and start immediately with the pivot. This is the reason why listeners in general do not recognize the pivot term immediately and are amused by the surprise effect of the following punch line. Whereas the build-up section can be neglected without having an influence on the success of the joke, there must be a pivot section which forms the basis for the following punch lines.

The joke mentioned above also contains some structures of narrative as defined by Labov (1972). There is an orientation and a complication unit, which is represented by the build-up, and there is a resolution, which is represented by the punch line.

According to Sacks (1974:337), the joke structure is similar to the form of a story. He describes joke telling as being composed, as with stories, "of three serially ordered and adjacently placed types of sequences." The three sequences are called the preface, the telling, and the response sequence. The telling of a joke normally concludes with a punch line that builds its response sequence. So the punch line serves to conclude the joke and is intended to cause laughter which in turn emphasizes the recipients' understanding and appreciation of the joke. But Sacks points out that not every recipient has to laugh.

Delayed laughter or even silence can also follow a response sequence. These moments of silence can express a lack of understanding or appreciation. The performers can also encourage his audience by starting to laugh immediately after the punch line. They are thus prompting their audience to laugh in defense of the joke's funniness. However, if the recipients do not share his amusement, this strategy can also cause arguments. So the best solution for the performer would be to give the punch line and wait for the recipients' to start to laugh before joining in with laughter. As far as the reaction of the listeners is concerned, we can apply Sack's analysis of the audience's reaction in conversational joke telling to that of stand-up comedy. While dealing with the authentic stand-up comedy material of Seinfeld and Wright, I realized that the audience does not always react in a consistent manner. Although they most often laugh heartily and express their appreciation of the joke performance, sometimes the humorist's jokes only set off weak laughter or no laughter at all. At this point in time, we have to analyze the reasons for the delayed laughter or even the complete absence of it. Absurdity, triviality, or banality might be some reasons; misunderstanding or even complete incomprehension might be others.

## 8.2. Characteristic Forms of Jokes

Preliminary to the analytical part of my study, I want to provide the definitions of different genres of verbal humor. Jokes in their various forms represent a genre which we regularly encounter in everyday life. It is important to realize that not all jokes are necessarily narrative. There are also jokes which are not narrative in their form, such as one-liners and riddle jokes which will be dealt with in detail in the following section. Another interesting genre of jokes is the knock-knock joke. It has an entirely formulaic structure and mainly occurs in conversational joke telling. This is the reason why I have decided not to concentrate on this genre in my thesis.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of my study of stand-up comedy, I will concentrate on one-liners and short jokes or "bits". Both joke forms are particularly characteristic for the two stand-up comedians, Steven Wright and Jerry Seinfeld, whom I will more closely deal with in the following chapters of my study. Particularly Steven Wright's performances are made up of very short and often confusing jokes. They cannot even be compared to short stories but rather to traditional one-liners. Chiaro (1992:65) dealt with one-liners and described them as "an extremely slippery category to

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed analysis of knock-knock jokes see Chiaro (1992) and Alexander (1997).

classify because so many examples are indeed 'original' in structure and thus impossible to group together with others". As their name suggests, one-liners consist of one line as in the example below from Chiaro (1992:66):

A vegetarian is someone who gives peas a chance.

Nash (1985:38) would categorize this one-liner in his section "joking definitions and humorous verdicts" which present a syntactic pattern as we can see in the example above. This example consists of a subject which reveals the person to be defined, the copulative verb "(to) be", and the definition of the person in question. Referring to the humor theories, we can apply the incongruity as well as the release theory to this one-liner. We can consider parts of the joke to be incongruous when we take into consideration that "peas" are vegetables. Nevertheless, they are personalized. The way in which the vegetarian is described and defined leads the readers and the listeners to the comical. But the personalization of the vegetables is only one source of amusement. At first glance, the joke does not seem to be aggressive or hostile towards a certain group of people because it just mentions vegetarians and even puts them in a positive light by presenting "their favorable attitude" towards vegetables. But when we analyze the joke

in detail, we become aware of the fact that the joke actually addresses two different groups of people: vegetarians and non-vegetarians - even if the latter are not mentioned explicitly. The assertion that a vegetarian is a person who gives peas a chance dramatizes the situation by implying that non-vegetarians are waging war on vegetables. This exaggeration in form of punning builds the source of humor in this example. The use of figurative language (→ implication) allows the speaker to express his aggressive feelings towards non-vegetarians without directly addressing them. Therefore, we can consider figurative language to be a further way of expressing power over specific opponents.

The following example is taken from Ross (1998:10):

*Keep Fit* by Jim Nastics

The humor in this example derives from punning and therefore involves a type of linguistic ambiguity that consists of running words together in spoken language. It results from the similarity of the pronunciation of two words, which is the basis for the humorous comment in the end. Whereas "Jim Nastics" stands for the company name or the name of the person who could help to "keep fit", the stream of sounds forcibly makes us think of the noun

"gymnastics", fitting perfectly in the context of sport, which the slogan is actually all about.

Moreover, riddle jokes represent a further form jokes can take. Shultz (in Chapman and Foot 1977:19) defines riddles as

a form of humour which is somewhere between problem solving and the appreciation of jokes; it's a problem whose solution evokes a good deal of pleasure and humour.

The solution of the riddle generally elicits laughter through its incongruity. The unexpected and surprising end forces the recipients to figure out the way in which it really makes sense. Often the recipient has to detect linguistic ambiguity to resolve the incongruous element. This process justifies the categorization of riddles within the incongruity-resolution model.

Green and Pepicello (1979) define the riddle as a humorous form that is:

(1) based on the question-answer format; (2) potentially solvable from the information included in the question, if the riddlee is able to determine the witty devices for confusion employed in the riddle; (3) solvable by virtue of participation in a cultural system (i.e., shared language, world view, and tropes); and (4) placed in a conventional locus within a particular tradition in a performance context.

So a riddle joke consists of a short question and answer exchange between two people. It is important to mention

that its purpose is not for the recipient to give the answer. Normally, the answer is provided by the person who asked the riddle unless the recipient has already heard the joke before. Originally, the riddle joke started as a word game which was formulated in rhyme, as shown in an example taken from Geller (1985:71):

Riddle me, riddle me  
riddle me ree,  
I saw a nut cracker  
up in a tree.

What the riddle describes is a squirrel. It is interesting to analyze the structure of this riddle as far as the repetitive pattern in the first two lines is concerned. The humorist repeats the same term three times before adding the nonsense syllable "ree", which is necessary to complete a regular rhyme scheme. Neither example is funny in the real sense. It is only the wordplay and their strict rhyme schemes which are responsible for the amusement of the readers and the listeners. In the latter example, humor derives from the play on the word "nut cracker" which is used as a riddle word for the solution "squirrel". Moreover, it represents at the same time a sort of absurdity and is thus covered by the incongruity theory. The absurdity can be found in the idea of a "nut cracker" sitting up in a tree.

As far as the focus of this study is concerned, riddles do not occur in stand-up comedy performances in their traditional form. Rather they mainly occur as short stories or jokes about everyday situations revealed in a monologue in front of an audience. When we find riddles, they are no longer formulated in rhyme, but have a question-answer structure, such as the famous "What's the difference" jokes, which all start in the same formulaic way with the question "What's the difference between X and Y?" The answer is always meant to elicit laughter and amusement and often consists of a play on words, e.g.

What's the difference between a jeweller and a jailor?

One sells watches and the other watches cells.

Here the recipient could never come up with the answer unless he or she already knew the joke. So the opening question does not represent a real question because the joke teller does not expect the recipient to answer. We can state that the joke teller plays two roles in this case. On the one hand, he or she plays the role of the real joke teller who asks the question. On the other hand, he or she also plays the role of the fictitious recipient who provides a funny and absurd answer and thus provokes

amusement in the real recipients. In the above example (Chiaro 1992:68/69), humor derives from wordplay. The author plays with the homophones "cells" and "sells" and "watches" and "watches" in form of a chiasm. We realize in this case that the author makes use of metathesis or sound substitutions in order to achieve the humorous effect. Although the distinction between "sells" (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form of the verb "to sell") and "cells" (plural form of the noun "cell") is not noticeable purely through pronunciation, we see in the written context that the author has played with language by substituting one consonant for another, yet the sound stays the same. The parallel sentence structure also plays a crucial role because it emphasizes the chiastic pattern expressed by the transformation of the verb form "sells" into its homophonic plural noun "cells" and the plural noun "watches" into the simple present verb form "watches" in the second part of the sentence. In contrast to the riddles above, the humor is not verbally expressed, but derives from the phonological identity of the words. Moreover, we can argue again that amusement results at the absurdity of being called upon to consider a commonality between a jailor and a jeweler so that we can apply the incongruity theory to this example.

A further example in which humor is based on linguistic ambiguity could be found in Ross (1998:9):

What's black and white and red/read all over?

A newspaper.

In this example, the adjective "red" is homophonous with the irregular past participle of the verb "to read". This phonological identity is responsible for the humorous effect of the joke. Again we have to stress that this confusion can only be effective in spoken language since the words are spelled differently and therefore cannot be confused when we read them in a written text. As far as the humor theories are concerned, we can again state that the riddle contains incongruous elements. It would be absurd for an object to be black and white and at the same time red all over. We can also apply Raskin's semantic script-based theory when we consider the colors black and white to be opposite scripts. The fact that the humorist assumes that his audience has never heard the riddle before also allows stand-up comedians to work with this type of joke because they do not have to rely on their audience to get the answer. In case some happen to know it and intervene by heckling, the comedian even has the chance to react immediately and prove his skill in performing spontaneously. We can find an excellent example of this in

the analysis of Seinfeld's performance (1.14-21), which will be shown in the analytical part of my study.

"Question-Answer" jokes must also be mentioned here. Many of them start by asking: "How many men do you need to do ...?" and end with an answer that provokes laughter. Nearly everyone in the English-speaking world knows the light bulb jokes, e.g.

How many real men does it take to change a light bulb?

None, real men aren't afraid of the dark.

This example, which is taken from the Wellington Corpus (DPC014), creates humor through disappointment and can therefore be explained by the incongruity theory. Because the joke teller begins the question with "How many", the audience expects a specific number even if the question as such expresses nonsense. Moreover, when the joke teller uses the adjective "real" in front of "men", they necessarily imply that there is also a group of men which can be classified as "unreal men". So just by asking the question, the listeners will first wonder what they mean by "real men" and how they define them in comparison to "unreal men", and certainly what "unreal men" are. Moreover, the content of the question as such is senseless because we know that it is absolutely no problem to change

a light bulb alone. We have all done it a hundred times so that beginning this question with the question marker "How many..." makes no sense at all. The revelation of the answer contains a surprise effect in that it does not give an explicit answer to the difference between "real men" and "unreal men". Instead, it argues that the previous question was superfluous. This is the reason why even such a nonsense remark elicits the audience's laughter resulting from "the abrupt collapse of an expectation", as Eastman (1936/2008:94) explains it.

A very common way of joking is the usage of certain formulae or catch phrases which allow the recipients to recognize immediately that a joke is about to ensue. Such formulae can consist of repetitive openings such as the following vocatives "Mummy, Mummy..." or "Waiter, waiter...". They not only have the function of signaling the audience that the author is about to present a new joke but also to address them directly. Most of the vocatives are spoken with a distinctive intonation as a strategy of getting the audience's full attention before starting with the actual joke content.

"Mummy, Mummy, can I play with Grandma?"

"No dear, you've dug her up twice this week already!"

The humor derives in this example from the paradoxical behavior of the child and the mother. Hearing the initial question, the audience cannot foresee how it will go on or whether the question has already provided the basis for the punch line. At first it seems the child has asked a normal question because it is nothing special for children to want to play with their grandparents from time to time. The surprise effect is provided by the absurdity of the mother's answer. It is absurd enough that the child is accustomed to playing with his dead grandma from time to time, but it is even more absurd that the mother reacts as if this behavior is normal. Another example is

"Waiter, waiter, there's a fly in my soup!"

"Don't worry sir, there'll be no extra charge!"

In this case, the humor stems from the misinterpretation of the waiter who sees the fly as a free addition to the soup and not as a cause for complaint or reason for apology. Again, the audience cannot foresee the waiter's response even if I consider it to be different from the example I cited above. In this case, I can imagine that the audience is anticipating an unusual response on the part of the waiter. Nevertheless, it is not possible to come up with the exact answer without having heard the joke before. Both examples are taken from Chiaro (1992:61).

Also, there are opening frames such as "I say, I say, I say..." which is an ancient way of introducing a joke as in the example below taken from Chiaro (1992:61).

"I say, I say, I say, my dog has no nose!"

"Really! Then how does it smell?"

"Awful!"

The humor derives here from the misunderstanding of the ambiguous question. Whereas the person who asks the question is referring to the dog's ability to smell, the dog owner misinterprets his or her question to be referring to the odor of his dog, to how the dog smells to other people.

In this section, I also deal with forms of jokes which are not necessarily characteristic of stand-up comedy. This is the reason why I want to focus on the differences between dialogues and monologues in joke telling in the following section.

## **9 Stand-up Comedy**

The following section provides a brief, initial overview of the differences between stand-up monologue and conversational dialogue, followed by a contrast between joke telling in stand-up comedy and conversational joke telling. In further sections, we will have a closer look at joke performance and the central role of the audience in stand-up comedy.

### **9.1. Differences between Stand-up Monologue and Conversational Dialogue**

Attardo (2001:62) calls stand-up comedy "a highly artificial, scripted genre." It represents a genre in which a single comedian comes on stage with a microphone and starts a performance in front of an audience. The comedian's performance principally consists of a succession of short joking stories and one-liners that are usually presented in a monologue without interruptions by the audience. In a conversation, however, it is rare that only one person speaks, while all the others listen carefully and let the speaker finish without interrupting. So it is obvious that we may observe various differences between stand-up monologues and conversational dialogues.

Whenever people meet, they normally start talking to each other without being careful not to interrupt others.

In a lively conversation, it is obvious that all persons try to participate by making brief comments and utterances while another person is talking. They all want to take part in the conversation, which is the reason for simultaneous talk, a phenomenon we will not find in stand-up comedy. The only way in which the audience can participate in stand-up comedy is by heckling. In conversations, however, the participants play a central role and sometimes respond to the speaker's comments with brief utterances such as "really", "yeah", "okay" or "mm hmm" in order to signal feedback to the speaker. These utterances indicate that the listeners are following the comments of the speaker.

In addition, simultaneous talk can also occur in the form of overlaps, a term which refers to periods during which more than one person talk at the same time. While one speaker is talking, another suddenly interrupts in order to make a comment on what was said before.

Another form of simultaneous talk is expressed by co-constructions and joint productions. They indicate that speakers interrupt others in order to continue their utterance and to complete them. Sometimes, both speakers even simultaneously utter the same thing. This happens in particular when the second speaker foresees exactly what the first speaker is going to say. The second speaker

demonstrates knowledge by interrupting and finishing the first speaker's sentence.

A further difference as compared to stand-up monologues is the process of latching, in which one speaker picks up the last word of a former speaker in order to be able to continue with his own statement. Norrick (2000:23) defines the term by explaining that

occasionally a second speaker times a response or comment to fall exactly at the completion point of a word or phrase in the talk of the preceding speaker, so that neither an overlap nor a transitional pause occurs.

Latching is typically transcribed using equal signs on successive lines. An example can be found in the joke "Mary at home (48.12)" taken from the Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English:

17. Mary I'm supposed to work for Professor  
Harrison
18. grading tests and stuff over Thanksgiving=
19. =but he decided to do them all himself
20. because... he said that...
21. he's gotten sort of a way
22. of how everybody is doing, you know?

The previous section should be considered an introduction to the following, in which I will concentrate on the differences that we are confronted with when comparing joke telling in stand-up comedy with conversational joke telling.

## **9.2. Differences between Joke Telling in Stand-up Comedy and Conversational Joke Telling**

Important linguists such as Schegloff (1982), Sacks (1992), and Norrick (1993, 2000), have concentrated on conversational joke telling in their work and have mainly focused on characteristic features such as simultaneous talk, overlaps and latches, as I mentioned in the previous section. Although these features do not prevail in stand-up comedy, I consider them important background for my study. Various aspects of these singular features may also be found, with some modification, in stand-up comedy. One example is the overlapping of the stand-up comedian's punch line and the audience's laughter.

In dealing with stand-up comedy, I have particularly concentrated on the characteristic features of monologues in joke telling. Although there are many similarities to linguistic aspects of conversational joke telling, such as repetitive and formulaic structures and the use of various discourse markers and disfluencies, there are also differences which result from the fact that a stand-up comedian talks to his audience in a monologue. Attardo and Chabanne (1992:171/172) emphasized in their work that "comic monologues are often difficult to distinguish from jokes from a textual point of view" and that "sometimes they are just a chain of punch lines". They further explain

that "humorous short stories or tales, novels, one-man shows [...] can be differentiated from mere jokes by their greater complexity and elaboration". The stand-up comedian, whom they call "a specialist of joking" (1992:172), has the exact program in mind and does not rely on the audience, which is the reason that features such as simultaneous talk, overlaps, and latches do not prevail. This is in no way to diminish their importance and the fact that they are some of the most frequent characteristics in conversational joke telling. Simultaneous speech occurs often particularly in conversational joking. When people meet at a party, they often start telling jokes. Sometimes one of the guests already knows the joke and interferes with the joke teller's performance by making comments such as "Oh I know" or by joining in and telling the punch line simultaneously with the joke teller.

As far as the audience's reaction in form of laughter is concerned, Norrick (1993:13) also emphasizes that laughter often overlaps with speech in jokes so that simultaneous stretches of laughter can be recognized. Especially after the punch line the whole group normally bursts into general laughter in which one tries to outdo the others. This is an interesting observation which can also be applied to stand-up comedy. Although sections of overlapping talk cannot be found in stand-up comedy, we can

often observe that the last part of the punch line coincides with the audience's laughter and thus constitutes an overlap. This is particularly the case when the stand-up comedian has provided a long build-up which makes the audience foresee how they will continue, or at least that they are about to reveal the punch line in the next step.

In addition, dialogues and conversational joke telling often contain numerous characteristic beginnings which help to transition from the previous topic of the conversation. Simple sentences such as "Oh, I remember a joke" or "Hey wait I've got a joke" (Sacks 1992, vol.I:99) can serve to break off from the previous topic and introduce the joking. From this time on, the introduction of one joke can start a chain of further jokes following in response to the first one. Although this is in some respects a strategy that stand-up comedians also use during their programs, we must emphasize the differences. Stand-up comedians do not expect the audience to comment. They just want to get the recipient's attention when they explicitly mention the beginning of a new funny story, whereas in conversation, the humorist tries to get a specific reaction from his recipients. In this context, I want to mention the study by Schegloff (1982:82), who mentions story prefaces that tend to characterize the events taken up in the following story, such as the phrase "a funny thing happened...". There is a

form of introducing questions which can also serve to interrupt the preceding conversation and draw attention to another topic. A question like "By the way, do you know the joke about...?" may introduce a completely different topic of discussion. These prefaces often call for response from the recipient. This can be a simple response such as "Oh, yes, I know the joke" or "No, come on, tell it." So just prior to the telling of the actual joke, there is a short lead-up. Simple utterances introduced by the list-initiating markers such as "first of all" or discourse markers, such as "well", serve to continue the conversation and start the joke telling. This is a phenomenon we cannot observe in stand-up comedy in which the audience has the more passive role of being entertained without being involved.

Various linguists have studied response forms in conversational joke telling, as, for example, Schegloff (1982), who dealt with the use of "Uh huh" and other forms of response between sentences. He also mentions head-gestures such as nods as further response forms (1982:73/74). These utterances and gestures, which are referred to as "backchannels", indicate that the audience is captive and is carefully following the joke teller's performance. The phenomenon of back channeling is another difference between conversational joke telling and stand-up

comedy. The stand-up comedians try to involve their audience in a different way. They address them directly and try to keep their attention and earn their appreciation, but they do not wait for their response. As soon as they realize that the audience is not reacting, they have to change their way of performing so as not to lose their attention. They do not have the time to pay attention to individual persons, so that they cannot rely on back channeling in the same way that a joke teller in a small group does.

### **9.3. Joke Performance in Stand-up Comedy**

Koestler (1969), Wilson (1979), Charney (1983), Suls (1983), Napier (1996), Allen (1998), Greenbaum (1999), and Norrick (2001) represent only a selection of linguists who have worked on aspects of joke performance in their research. Wilson (1979:2) defines the term "joke" as "any stimulation that evokes amusement and that is experienced as being funny." This definition puts the emphasis on amusement but does not take into consideration laughter as a response to humor. However, I consider laughter to be even more important because it shows that the audience has understood the joke. Furthermore, it provides a sort of feedback for the comedians and evaluates their performance of the joke. In my opinion, a lack of laughter signifies

that the audience did not understand the joke or did not appreciate it.

This leads us to the most important aspect of successful joke telling, which is the way the comedian presents the joke. A successful delivery has to allow the audience to follow the comedian's train of thought, and professional stand-up comedians have to be funny during each and every performance, no matter what emotional state they are in. Comedy in general is a combination of material and performance in which each needs the other in order to be successful. It requires a lot of effort on the part of the stand-up comedians, but the more effort they put into their performance, the better the results. The performance of a joke often heightens the funniness of a joke and encourages the amusement of the recipients, which leads them to laugh. So the performers themselves bear responsibility for the successful telling of their joke. The stand-up comedians have to step out on stage with all their material in mind and must face an audience they want to impress and present themselves with great confidence. A comedian's personality, point of view, and original style will be essential for the success of the performance and their appeal. Their main task is to perform the joke in a way that keeps the audience on track so that they can enjoy it from the beginning to end. Greenbaum (1999:33) describes

stand-up comedy as "an inherently rhetorical discourse", which "strives not only to entertain, but to persuade." She emphasizes that stand-up comedians "can only be successful in their craft when they can convince an audience to look at the world through their comic vision." The performer's delivery has to create an excitement on the part of the recipients. This excitement must rise with each new word so that the teller can captivate his audience. One way of raising the excitement is to make use of paralanguage, such as gestures and various facial expressions instead of telling the joke monotonously without any animation. The performers must be liked by their audience, otherwise their jokes cannot be effective even if they are delivered well. Thus it is important for the performers to engage with their audience and to stay connected.

Moreover, timing is a crucial aspect of successful and effective delivery. Hobbes was dealing with the issue of timing when he spoke of "sudden glory"<sup>19</sup> within the framework of the superiority theory. Similarly, Koestler (1969:51) also stresses the importance of timing. He emphasizes that "the sudden bisociation of an idea or event with two habitually incompatible matrices will produce a

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<sup>19</sup> For further details see section 7.2. and Koestler (1969:53).

comic effect [...]. Napier (1996:54) describes the art of timing as

being able to anticipate the audience reaction to a line [...] and wait to deliver the next laugh [...] until just the right time when the laughter or applause starts to fade [...].

Suls (1983:54) emphasizes that timing must take into consideration two aspects of humor processing:

First, in oral presentation the joke premise must be told in such a way that the listener has enough time to generate an (erroneous) expectation and therefore be surprised by the punch line. Provided with too much time the listener may anticipate the punch line correctly; provided with too little time no expectation will be generated. The emphasis on timing frequently mentioned by comedians suggests this is an important ingredient in producing humor.

He states further that timing is also important for the resolution of the incongruity of a joke. It has to occur rapidly, otherwise the humorous experience will remain minimal. These remarks demonstrate that rhythm plays a central role and the performer has to decide whether to adopt a slow or a fast rhythm for his performance. In any case his style must contribute to his audience's understanding. According to Norrick (2001:256),

the overall tempo of the performance, the ebb and flow of given and new information highlighted by repetition and formulaic phrasing along with

rhythms of hesitation and more fluent passages all co-determine timing.

Both linguists stress the importance of finding the right moment for delivering the punch line but also for deciding when to continue with the next joke after the audience has laughed.

In addition, the use of repetitive structures and formulaic phrases also relates to successful timing. The comedian has to know when to use hesitation markers and hedges or repetitive structures to build up an effective starting point for his joke. Often the use of formulaicity and repetition creates a specific pattern which contributes to the funniness of the joke. I also observed that the performers use planned pauses as a means of strengthening the comic effect of the joke. They can even increase this comic effect and therefore the audience's reaction, as is often the case in Wright's performance. One of Wright's most frequent strategies is to insert pauses before revealing the punch line of his joke. Stand-up comedians often make the audience wait for the punch line in order to enhance their reaction. But it is important to choose the correct moment to deliver the punch line, otherwise, the audience could come to a partial or even complete prediction of the incongruity.

Furthermore, it is important to let the audience calm down before starting the next joke performance. This is what I realized when studying Seinfeld and Wright. Although Seinfeld's performance is characterized by a quick succession of funny stories, he always waits for the audience to calm down before starting a new topic.

In addition, timing even allows the audience to participate in the performance in the form of heckling, and it enables the stand-up comedian to react to these interruptions. This interaction has been examined by Charney (1983:38), who describes timing as "a relation between the person on stage and the audience." He also emphasizes that the performers have to decide how fast or how slow they want to tell the story in order to ensure the desired effect on their audience.

With regard to all these aspects of successful joke telling, I want to emphasize that concentration is one of the most important skills a comedian must have in order to manage timing. No matter what reaction their audience shows, they have to be able to collaborate with their audience and they are responsible for the moment in which they deliver the most important part of his joke.

All in all, I want to conclude that timing is more than just the use of a pause at the correct moment before revealing the punch line of the joke. It already begins in

the build-up of the joke when the joke teller has to weigh the use of linguistic aspects, such as repetitions, formulaic phrases, false and restarts, cut-offs, pauses, and also a variation of his speaking tempo and the change of intonation in order to deliver a successful joke performance.

As briefly mentioned above, the joke teller can also make use of exaggerated intonations. Voice quality plays an important role in verbal humor. The performer must be able to imitate different voices, even different regional accents, in order to make his performance livelier. According to Rutter (1997:234), "the voice is used by the comedian to create a character which they play for the entirety of a narrative sequence."

The comedian may also use the voice as a prop for a limited time, as either a "quotation" from a character, or as a caricature by itself. Caricature is a technique in which people are portrayed by exaggeration of their characteristics. This exaggeration can render them ridiculous and therefore expresses the fact that these people are often disliked. Caricature can also occur verbally when the joke tellers change their tone of voice and start imitating the particular style of speaking of another person. In both cases, we can argue that caricature fits into the superiority theory because the joke tellers

want to express a sort of power and superiority over their inferior opponents. So joke telling in stand-up comedy can be compared with dramatic acting or any other kind of entertainment. The performers must take on the same tasks that an actor or an entertainer has. Their aim is to tell the joke in a way that amuses their audience. Telling a joke in an entertaining way enables the tellers to increase their appeal to their audience.

The performers themselves must observe and analyze their audience's behavior and only they can decide when to reveal the punch line, as I mentioned in the section about timing. Excellent performers integrate their audience into their performance. This does not mean that they compulsively wait for responses on the part of the listeners, but they can make use of their slightest reactions and can select the perfect moment for delivering the last part of his joke. The gift for finding precisely this moment distinguishes a bright comedian from a less successful one. These interactions show that stand-up comedy can cause a real conversation between the performer and the audience. And the reactions on both sides usually enhance the quality of the performance. As far as the interaction with the audience is concerned, I also want to stress the importance of heckling during the performance. The moment at which someone interrupts the comedian and

shouts something obliges the performers to prove their spontaneous qualities. The comedians have to demonstrate their ability to respond in a direct and effective way. If the performers are clever enough to respond craftily, they can inspire their audience.

As mentioned above, comedy represents a combination of material and performance. Having talked about the importance of the quality of performance, the material is the second crucial factor in successful stand-up comedy. The comedians have to know what material will cause the audience to burst into laughter and they have to know how to tell their jokes in a quite rapid succession. The audience always wants to be entertained and does not want to wait for funny moments but demands constant input from the joke teller, which means hard work on the part of the performer. This responsibility and pressure means there is a constant burden on stand-up comedians. Each and every joke has to be as sudden and as pointed as possible so as not to lose the audience's attention, but rather to keep them in a constant state of laughter and amusement.

Numerous comedians try to mention various topics in the course of a routine in order to give their audience some references and to enable them to get the joke. Therefore, most of the best stand-up comedians create humor out of the simplest and most everyday topics, which is

another reason why I concentrated on Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright. For most of their work they use simple topics such as phones, cab drivers, private life, airplanes etc., which hardly anyone would ever expect for their performances. By presenting them in an amusing way, they create humor through the shared knowledge associated with these stories. The art of a good comedian is to find comedy in everything, to find subjects and routines that are familiar to the audience, to recognize their ridiculousness and to deal with it in a way that is appreciated by the audience. The more experience humorists gain, the more they improve and know how to handle their material and their audience. By understanding how the audience might react, the stand-up comedians can exhibit their ability to control the situation. They can combine their verbal performance with paralanguage in the form of gestures or varying intonations in order to intensify the comical aspects.

Particularly stand-up comedy changes from one time to the next, with each new performance being different from the last one, so that each and every performance represents a new challenge for the comedians. Although the material is scripted and rehearsed, the stand-up comedian's language and performance must be spontaneous. They do not always recite the same lines in the same order, with the same timing, or with the same gestures and intonation. Their job

is to entertain their audience, to be able to change their program, and to act spontaneously on stage. They have to find the perfect mixture of planned material and spontaneous reaction and must also experiment and improvise in order to maintain the interaction with their audience. Allen (1998:194, 195) stresses the difficulties of sustaining a high-quality performance, describing the situation thus:

you can succeed for fifteen minutes and then suddenly, with three weak jokes, a moment of poor timing or a distraction because of some movement on stage, lose command of an audience and be in trouble.

He cites Richard Pryor (in Allen 1998:195), who made an interesting comparison when he said:

When you're apprehensive and show a little fear and doubt because you're not getting any laughs, man, an audience will eat you alive. They sense fear, and it's like being in confrontation with a wild animal that senses you're afraid. In both cases you're doomed.

Greenbaum (1999:34) emphasizes in her work that "comic speech, as it moves from thought to transcript to performance, is in a constant state of revision, bouncing off the needs and mood of the audience." So the comedians have to be prepared to handle spontaneous incidents before returning to their actual script. The beginning of a joke

is the most important moment, so the opening line should be as sharp as possible to get the full attention of the audience and should prepare the audience for fun and certainly for the opportunity to laugh. If the performers are able to open effectively, they will be able to enhance their audience's laughter from there on out and guarantee their attention throughout his performance. It is obvious that it is hard work for comedians because they can easily lose their audience's attention once they allow them to relax, and it is very difficult to regain it after having lost control over their program. Comedy in general has to develop constantly. Otherwise, it will get boring and the performer will lose the audience immediately. We can all agree on the fact that there is nothing worse than listening to an old joke for the third time, so the comedy material must be fresh and varied. The performers must be aware of the fact that they have to update their material regularly in order to present inventive, new, and sharp material so that they can attract their audience's attention and regain their recognition. Moreover, "the ability to surmount such awkward moments comes with experience", as Allen (1998:195) emphasizes in his work.

*The human race has one really effective weapon,  
and that is laughter.*

Mark Twain (American writer  
and humorist, 1835-1910)

#### **9.4. The Central Role of the Audience**

Rutter (1997:92) emphasizes the importance of the audience in stand-up comedy by saying that "Like conversation, stand-up is a 'collaborative production' [...]" and "is made possible by the active involvement of those that make up the interaction." Ross (1998:101) states that "the 'naked' confrontation with an audience makes stand-up more dynamic, but is risky for the performer" at the same time.

Stand-up comedy represents a sort of teamwork, a collaboration between the performers and their audience. Both are dependent on the other and when analyzing stand-up comedy, we become aware that it is mainly the audience that is responsible for the performer's timing. Their reaction in form of laughter or silence shows the joke teller if they have understood the joke or not, and further, if they appreciate it or not. Norrick (2003:1344) describes it aptly when he says that laughter "ratifies and evaluates the teller's performance." Suls (1972:44) agrees, stating that

appreciation of humor requires comprehension of  
the material and that appreciation should be

highest when the material requires a moderate amount of challenge or effort. Appreciation will be low when the joke material is too easy or extremely difficult to understand.

Numerous linguists such as Spencer (in Morreall 1987), Freud (1905/1960), Eastman (1922), Goldstein & McGhee (1972), Chapman & Foot (1977), and Apte (1985) put the focus of their research on laughter in humor. Their work illustrates the diversity of meaning laughter can express. Eastman (1922:4) describes laughter as "a definite affirmation of hospitality and delight". This definition assumes the audience's acceptance of the joke teller's humor, an aspect that is also stressed by Kane, Suls and Tedeschi in Chapman & Foot (1977:16), who further state that "laughter can be used as a form of ingratiation (a form of opinion conformity)." Fry (in Chapman & Foot 1977:25) deals with the appeasement function of mirthful laughter and emphasizes in his essay that laughter not only displays appeasement but is actually characterized by a multiplicity of functions. He therefore asserts that laughter "should be regarded as a node in a complex nexus of impulses and motivation." He also mentions that "a laugh may be a signal of accession - 'a laugh of triumph' - or of appeasement" and distinguishes it from a smile, which "may express establishment of one's dominances". Spencer (in Morreall 1987:99ff.) and Freud (1905/1960) concentrated

their work more on laughter as an expression of a certain kind of "energy". Spencer saw laughter as a means to channel "surplus energy". Freud refers to Spencer (in Freud 1905/1960:179) and supports his thesis that laughter serves as a discharge of mental excitation when he states that "in laughter [...] the conditions are present under which a sum of psychical energy [...] is allowed free discharge" (1905/1960:181). All this research indicates that laughter plays a crucial role in humor and thus serves to express a whole variety of feelings within the reaction of the audience.

Giving a good performance means hard work for a comedian because the audience constantly wants to be entertained. If they earn the appreciation of their listeners, they will generally applaud and laugh. So we can consider laughter a means of classifying the presentation of a joke. The audience can also intervene with laughter. Particularly in stand-up comedy we can observe the audience starting to laugh at the very beginning of the joke or right after the build-up. In this case, we cannot state that laughter serves to evaluate the content of the joke. It rather results from the skillful performance of the joke teller or the fact that the audience has begun to at least partly predict an incongruous punch line.

Concerning the end of the joke, it is evident that a joke telling sequence is nearly always completed and finished by a punch line which serves to conclude the joke and give reason for laughter. But it is obvious that there is not always the same reaction from the audience. Their reaction in form of laughter also depends on the performance and on their appreciation of the joke. It has to be stressed that the punch line of a joke does not necessarily oblige listeners to laugh. Listeners do have the right to react honestly; delayed laughter or even relative silence is also a possible reaction to a joke performance. It is also important to stress that each audience is different. There is no standard audience and therefore no standard style which guarantees that the performer will be appreciated and achieve success. Each audience responds differently even if the performance is exactly the same. Some may react with weak laughter or no laughter at all, whereas others find the punch line hilarious and reward their performer with hearty applause.

With regard to conversational joke telling, I can confirm that laughter in stand-up comedy has the same function as laughter in conversation. Sacks (1974) pointed out that laughter is the immediate response to the punch line. A lack of laughter signifies a lack of understanding or appreciation.

Schegloff (1982:73/74) mentions in his work on conversational joking that the recipient can also support the joke teller's performance by making gestures, nods or simple utterances as "mm hmm", or "yeah". These gestures and utterances show that the recipients are interested in listening to the joke and are capable of getting it. Other recipients react honestly by withholding laughter, either having failed to understand the joke or wanting to show the teller their lack of appreciation. Sacks (1974:350) emphasizes that the recipients can react with no laughter at all in order to "negatively grade the joke or its telling." Not every joke is considered funny by everyone, so recipients have their lack of amusement at a joke.

Although Schegloff and Sacks dealt with laughter in conversational joke telling, I think their observations about laughter are also true for stand-up comedy. As in conversational joke telling, laughter in stand-up comedy represents a means to attract people to a source of pleasure. The better the joke tellers perform their jokes, the more they can attract people's attention, cause their amusement, and further, put themselves into the limelight.

## **10 Joke Techniques**

### **10.1. Paralanguage**

Paralanguage plays a central role in comedy in general and represents a crucial characteristic in stand-up comedy. Apte (1985) puts his emphasis on the verbal performance as the basis for humor and stresses the importance of paralinguistic elements in humor. Throughout his essay, he supports the thesis that "nonverbal expressive movements, especially gestures, constitute an important element of the key of verbal humor" and emphasizes that gestures are often "essential to convey the nonserious intent of the verbal message" and "can also be exaggerated more readily for visual impact". The revelation of "nonserious intent" by use of gestures can therefore reinforce the incongruity predominant in humor. Further, he states that "gestures are important in humor that depends heavily on performance and acting" (1985:205). These statements reveal that the quality of the humorists' performance depends not only on the content of the jokes and the stories they reveal. It is far more than just the actual words which contribute to a successful performance. As I have already mentioned in section 9.3. (Joke Performance in Stand-up Comedy), the comedians need to be aware of the importance of their stage persona and their manner of presenting the show. Therefore, intonation and body language are essential features of a

successful performance. We will observe frequent use of paralanguage in the following sections on Seinfeld and Wright, which is a further reason why I decided to focus on these two comedians and their life performances. Seinfeld has a very active stage persona and often imitates the noises that the characters in his stories make. This technique serves to enhance the audience's reaction.

Wright, however, portrays an extremely passive stage persona. In analyzing his behavior, we have the impression that he does not use paralanguage at all. But upon examining his performance in further detail, we can come to a different point of view. Wright makes excellent use of paralanguage by incorporating his apathetic style of performing. Even if he does not imitate characters in the same way Seinfeld does, he has created his own stage persona and therefore his own style of using paralanguage.

*Ridicule is generally made use of  
to laugh men out of virtue and good sense,  
by attacking everything praiseworthy in human life.*

Joseph Addison  
(English essayist  
and poet, 1672-1719)

## 10.2. Ridicule

Ridicule and derision are features of the joke telling techniques that display impoliteness and aggressiveness. They are used to overtly reject another person's or group's identity. Speakers often use ridicule to make fun of someone else or even to insult or attack someone verbally. The ensuing laughter on the recipients' part stresses their agreement and therefore strengthens the intention of excluding a certain group. Berger (1993:48) defines ridicule as "a form of direct verbal attack against a person, thing, or idea." He further continues by asserting that

it is designed to cause contemptuous laughter and humiliation [...] [and] takes a number of forms: *deriding*, which involves attacking someone with a scornful tone; *mocking*, which is to imitate another's appearance or actions; and *taunting*, which is to remind someone of some annoying fact.

Wilson (1979:189) states that "the joker derides all or a portion of his audience" in expressing ridicule. He even distinguishes various types of ridicule and also presents

"private ridicule", "shared-ridicule" and "self-ridicule" (1979: 189/190). Private ridicule is distinguished by the fact that "the butt of the derision is absent and unlikely to hear of the wit, or dead and buried" (1979:189). This provides an opportunity to express overt hostility towards authority and can therefore even cause a feeling of solidarity among like-minded people against the person who is the butt of the humor. This definition shows that private ridicule is directed to real people who are either living or dead, and it is principally used to disparage racial and cultural minorities. Shared ridicule is being used when the jokers deride themselves and their audience at the same time. Freud (1905/1960) addressed shared ridicule when he argued that Jewish people tend to enjoy telling anti-Semitic jokes and therefore disparage their own ethnic group.<sup>20</sup> Self-ridicule is the term used when the jokers only deride themselves. For the purposes of my analysis, I have decided to speak of self-deprecation<sup>21</sup> rather than self-ridicule. To me the verb "ridicule" carries a very negative connotation and actually is not intended to be funny. But the use of self-deprecation creates humor by presenting the comedian's own shortcomings

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<sup>20</sup> For a detailed explanation of ostensibly anti-Semitic Jewish wit see Freud (1905/1960: 36, 55/56, 62/63, 71-73, 84, 92, 95, 133-138, 174).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Ross (1998:60ff.).

with which he wants to amuse the audience. So actually it can be considered a positive source for creating humor which even helps the humorists to express solidarity and make the audience identify with them. By ridiculing someone or something, the speaker wants to express hostility and superiority by criticizing the behavior of a specific person or group in question. In stand-up comedy, we principally encounter private and shared ridicule, the aim of which is to focus on a specific person or group by presenting them as ridiculous and silly. But when the speakers start using themselves as the butt of the joke, I would prefer speaking of self-deprecating humor because they only pursue the aim of exaggerating personal characteristics or experiences in order to make themselves look funny rather than criticizing themselves or placing themselves at a disadvantage. Self-deprecating humor can only rarely be found in Seinfeld's and Wright's performances, which will be shown in detail in the analytical part of my study. Sometimes comedians use self-deprecating humor to reveal vices or weaknesses that can be generalized for all human beings so that it even tends to turn into shared ridicule. In the sense of the "hostility theories" mentioned in section 7.2., ridicule allows the

speaker to display superiority over opponents and "supports existing status and power" (Wilson 1979:212).<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, Wilson stresses that ridicule is a technique which allows the speaker to criticize one's opponents in a "jocular format" (1979:190). He points out the joke's ambiguous message when he suggests that "the joke content presents serious abuse, while the joke form implies levity and unserious interpretation. Ridicule expresses a double-bind. Its form contradicts its content" (1979: 191). Nevertheless, ridicule is a technique people use daily in their everyday lives. There are many situations in which they react with sarcasm, which is also a form of ridicule. Sarcasm makes use of "cutting, contemptuous, and "biting" remarks, delivered often in a hostile manner" (Berger 1993:49). Berger also stresses that sarcasm is used "as a stance, as an everyday manner of dealing with people." In using it, people often say exactly the opposite of what they mean. It often happens that someone tells a story which is interesting and funny in their opinion, whereas for others, it does not seem to be funny at all. So the normal reaction people show is to respond dryly: "Oh, yes, very funny" without showing any emotion, not even a hint of a smile, and especially without raising the voice. So

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed study of hostility theories see Hobbes (1650, 1969), Bergson (1911/1956), Suls (1977), and Gruner (1978).

sarcasm mainly serves to make the speaker feel embarrassed and "tends to be a costly kind of humor, unless the sarcasm is directed towards oneself and turned into a form of victim humor" (Berger 1993:49).

The same reaction occurs when speakers make mistakes. This situation immediately provokes ridicule, which leads to general laughter and amusement. Only rarely are such slips of the tongue ignored and treated politely. Normally, speakers and listeners try to mock wherever possible.<sup>23</sup> Wilson (1979:194) also asserts that ridicule serves to portray social criticism or persuasion when the speakers want to "humiliate or discredit" their opponent in front of the rest of the audience. In this case, ridicule can even be used in the sense of satire, which means "ridicule of behaviour or attitudes of which the joker disapproves." The main aim of the speakers is to attack their opponents by laughing at them and presenting them as ridiculous. It is obvious that ridicule causes the most amusement when the butt of the joke is not liked or appreciated by the audience.<sup>24</sup>

But ridicule is not only an aggressive and impolite technique. Self-deprecation and self-sarcasm are forms of

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<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of slips of the tongue see Freud (1915, 1991: 50-108). *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

<sup>24</sup> For further information on the audience's reaction to the form and content of derisive jokes, see Table 1 in Wilson (1979:205).

ridicule that help to show sympathy. By telling embarrassing personal stories, speakers openly admit to not being perfect themselves. They even allow the audience, through their behavior, to make fun of them in turn. This form of ridicule emphasizes that they do not consider themselves perfect human beings who are only capable of laughing at other people's faults; on the contrary, it emphasizes that they do not take themselves too seriously, and that they are even willing to make fun of themselves. So in this situation, they allow others to profit from their own faults and misbehaviors in order to laugh and to enjoy them at the speaker's expense. Freud (1905/1960) alludes to the self-ridicule expressed in jokes, citing in his book numerous Jewish jokes in which Jews make fun of themselves and some characteristics of their own ethnic group.<sup>25</sup> This use of ridicule is widespread in the stand-up comedy scene and enhances the audience's amusement.

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of self-ridicule in Jewish jokes see Freud (1905/1960) Part A. Analytical Part: p. 36, 55/56, 62/63, 71-73, 84, 92, 95, 133-138, 174.

*As the purpose of comedy is to correct the vices of men,  
I see no reason why anyone should be exempt.*

Tartuffe, preface (1669)  
Molière (French comic playwright, 1622-1673)

### **10.3. Satire**

In terms of the humor theories, it is clear that ridicule and satire are closest to Plato's hostility or derision theory (see section 7.2.). Satire is mostly used to make fun of people superior to oneself. According to Berger (1993:49), "satirists attack specific individuals or institutions or happenings". Koestler (1969:72) defines satire as "verbal caricature which distorts characteristic features of an individual or society by exaggeration and simplification." Kane, Suls and Tedeschi (in Chapman & Foot 1977:15) concur with Berger and Koestler by emphasizing that "a satire may have the purpose of showing the absurdity of certain mannerisms, class privilege, professional pretensions, institutional rules[...]." They further note that "in face-to-face interactions poking fun at or ridiculing or putting down another person amounts to a refusal to accept the identity projected by the target and the meaning of the social situation that the identity implies." Satire can be considered a subcategory of ridicule and is thus a further humor technique that can be regularly found in stand-up comedy sessions.

#### **10.4. Power, Solidarity and Politeness**

Power, politeness, and solidarity are social phenomena we are all familiar with in everyday life. With regard to our language we have to emphasize that it contains a referential and affective function. The referential function of our language refers to the conveyance of information, whereas the affective function has to do with the expression of people's feelings and the display of various social relationships. Politeness is a sign of respect and thus the expression of what people feel for others in apologies, compliments, greetings, or thanks, for example. It is obvious that the rules of politeness differ from one country to another so that "linguistic politeness is culturally determined", as Holmes states in her work (1992:285). Further, she asserts that "different speech communities emphasize different functions, and express particular functions differently" (1992:285). Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a politeness theory with various politeness strategies which are meant to save face for the recipient. Demanding or imposing utterances intrude on a person's autonomy and can therefore be considered "a potential *face-threatening act*" (Holmes 1995:5). Brown and Levinson (1987) consider these threats a danger for the communication and speak of a need to make mitigating statements or some verbal repair in the form of politeness.

Politeness, in their opinion, consists of strategies that are adopted by the speakers. One of these strategies is *bald on record*, in which face-threatening acts occur in unmitigated form (cf. Mills 2003:ch.2). Further, they analyze the *positive politeness* strategy, which builds on a positive relationship to the other person and is mainly used when the speakers know their audience quite well. It is concerned with "demonstrating closeness and affiliation (for example, by using compliments)" (Mills 2003:59). It is characterized by more directive speech acts, and even the use of slang expressions or swearing can be considered to be positive politeness. They also analyze *negative politeness*, which expresses indirectness; it is the behavior of not wanting to impose on others, and thus it avoids face-threatening acts, as mentioned above. It expresses respect for social differences and is characterized by the fact that the speaker maintains some social distance and formality (by using apologies, mitigation, and hedges). Lakoff (2003:514) states that "positive and negative politeness strategies are often tied to meanings of solidarity and power" by virtue of the fact that "positive politeness is tied to solidarity (because of its focus on connections) and negative politeness to power (because of its focus on freedom and independence, which a powerful person has more of than a non-powerful person)."

The last strategy Brown and Levinson (1987) analyze is *off-record*, one that avoids overtly committing face-threatening acts by using indirectness, silence, or ambiguous utterances.

Power, from a linguistic point of view, means that a speaker is both able to control his audience and reach his aims. Politeness and power can be expressed through various linguistic features. Directive speech acts such as orders or commands are mostly realized in the form of imperatives and thus express a form of the speaker's power over the recipients. Indirect speech acts help to express politeness and occur in the form of indirect questions, hedges or the use of modal verbs. Hedges such as "you know", "I think", "sort of", or "of course" help to express politeness. According to Holmes (1995:87), "you know" can reveal both referential and affective meaning. In its affective meaning, it is a solidarity marker and thus a positive politeness device. It can be used by the speakers to attribute understanding and sympathy to their audience. Moreover, it can also function as a booster, stressing the mutual knowledge of the participants. In its referential meaning it is used as a hedge and expresses the speaker's uncertainty about a certain topic. "I think" is a negative politeness device and mainly functions as a hedge in order to soften negative utterances and criticism or as an

expression of uncertainty. "Sort of" is principally used as a hedge in the function of a solidarity marker and thus expresses positive politeness. In addition, intonation and the tone of voice also play a central role in the expression of politeness. Lakoff (2004:49/50; in Holmes 1992:318) calls tag questions a politeness device which can express uncertainty on the one hand, and facilitative or positive politeness on the other hand. Further, tag questions can be used to soften directives or criticism.

In contrast to Brown and Levinson's (1987) rather form-based approach, Spencer-Oatey (2009) has studied what she terms "face needs" (2000:13) and focuses on an identity perspective that is more action-oriented. For her, face and identity are cognitively similar because both relate to the notion of 'self'-image (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2007:644) and consist of a range of attributes and self-aspects. She refers to Brown and Levinson's (1987) thesis that speech acts are intrinsically face-threatening to either the hearer or the speaker but reproaches them for ignoring "the dynamic aspect of people's face sensitivities" (2009:137). In her opinion, Brown and Levinson (1987) more strongly emphasize the hearer's face needs and neglect those of the speaker. In her approach, however, Spencer-Oatey (2009:147) considers self-presentation "an important interactional concern that interrelates with issues of face." In that

case speakers not only keep up the face of the hearers by performing positive politeness but also maintain their own face by presenting themselves as respect-worthy persons. It is also important to mention her assertion that during an interaction "people only feel a threat/loss/gain in face when they perceive that an attribute they are claiming is not ascribed to them by others (or vice versa, in the case of negatively-evaluated traits)" (2009:141). As far as the term "face" is concerned, Spencer-Oatey suggests that it should be replaced by "rapport-management" (2000:12) because face seems to focus on concerns for self, whereas rapport-management expresses a balance between self and the other. For her, face is associated with personal value (2000:14, "quality face") and social value (2000:14, "identity face"). The aim of her study is to concentrate on the "management of interpersonal relations" in a way that language is used to "promote, maintain or threaten harmonious relations" (2000:3). Rapport-management further analyzes the way that language is used to "construct, maintain and/or threaten social relationships and [...] includes the management of sociality rights as well as of face" (2000:12). Therefore we can argue that Spencer-Oatey's analysis focuses more on the social aspect of politeness than Brown and Levinson's (1987) does and makes more sense when applied to stand-up comedy. Her focus on an

identity perspective can be brought in connection with the creation of a specific stage persona. Stand-up comedy does not aim to showcase an ideal person, but a specific person who creates their identity on stage. This is why the process of creating a specific stage persona ties in with Spencer-Oatey's concept of identity.

Moreover, in contrast to Brown and Levinson(1987), Spencer-Oatey deals with impoliteness, which can also be found in the material I deal with in the analytical part of my study. Steven Wright does present himself in an impolite way towards his audience when reacting in his apathetic and monotonous way of performing, so that it is important to take it into consideration, too.

In conclusion, note that these strategies can also be found in humorous contexts. As far as the humor theories are concerned, we should note that the hostility theory as well as the release theory include power as an essential element. Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes considered power to be a crucial element in their work when they note that laughter is used to express superiority over opponents.<sup>26</sup>

Humor also serves as a means to soften the seriousness of a situation and it expresses the feeling of solidarity,

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<sup>26</sup> For further details see Bergson (1911/1956), Hobbes (in Eastman 1922), Suls (1977), Allen (1987), Gruner (1978), MacHovec (1988), Freud (1905/1960), Fry (1963), Grice (1975), Raskin (1985), Spencer (in Morreall 1987), Norrick (2003).

a fact that is also recognized by Holmes (2003:109) when she states that "humour releases tension" and "reaffirms group solidarity".

As far as stand-up comedy is concerned, most of the time we can find positive politeness strategies in the form of hedges, hesitation markers, question tags, or modal verbs. Stand-up comedians want to connect their audience and try to regularly integrate them. They want to express solidarity with them and often work with the "we"-strategy and indirectness in order to mitigate the rudeness of the direct statements and points of view that they want to impose on their audience. Even as they work with hostility strategies to express their superiority over specific opponents, it is obvious that they choose positive politeness strategies to soften the directness and thus the impoliteness.

As we will see in the following chapters, Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright manage rapport differently. Steven Wright wants to show the audience that they are able to understand his jokes because they are alike. He wants to convince them that if they understand his jokes, they have passed the test. Jerry Seinfeld, however, does not work in the same way. His stories do not require deep understanding or knowledge. He only tells real-life stories his audience is familiar with. We will see that Jerry Seinfeld obviously

has the potential for face-threatening acts according to Brown and Levinson(1987), but nevertheless, he is not rude in the pure sense. The audience always reacts with laughter and applause. Even people he targets might laugh at his jokes, which can even be seen in the section in which he ridicules the cab drivers' or the stewardesses' work. Often, he then uses implications or shared ridicule to soften the aggression.

In conclusion, note that stand-up comedians make frequent use of politeness and power during their performances. Often, power and authority do not have to be expressed through directive speech acts, but can also be revealed less explicitly through the use of humor, in particular through sarcasm and satire. Therefore, we can consider humor to be an interesting and effective politeness strategy, which on the one hand, can be used to express and maintain power, and on the other hand, can also serve to build solidarity with its recipients by mitigating criticism and negative speech acts.

## **11 The Use of Figurative Language in Stand-up Comedy**

In this section, I will give a brief overview of how joke tellers, particularly stand-up comedians, use figurative language as a basic strategy for their joking material. On the one hand, the use of figurative language often allows the joke tellers to express their real intention without using direct and offensive language. Wordplay, ambiguous terms, and implication are only some of the techniques which can be used to express the joke tellers' aggressiveness and therefore their power over specific opponents. On the other hand, figurative language can also contribute to shared knowledge. Allusion, for example, often involves extra-linguistic knowledge that allows the joke tellers to create solidarity with their audience.

*Seven days without laughter make one weak,*  
Joel Goodman (Director of the Humor Project)

### **11.1. Wordplay, Puns and Ambiguity**

Wordplay represents one of the most common techniques of making jokes by using the different meanings of a word in an amusing or clever way. This might be the result of what Freud (1905/1960:191) has described in his work as an "economy in expenditure."

Norrick (1993) described the effect of engaging in wordplay as a way

to present a general self-image of someone willing to suspend the conversational business at hand for a laugh, of someone attentive to the form of talk and its potential for playful manipulation as well as for communication proper. (1993:60)

Indeed, wordplay is a technique that regularly occurs in joke telling. According to Freud (1905/1960:39), the double meaning which arises from the literal and the metaphorical meanings of a word is "one of the most fertile sources for the technique of jokes." It is one of the most common techniques of making jokes by using the different meanings of a word in an amusing or clever way. Ross (1998:7) also emphasizes the importance of the double meaning of a word when he states that "an ambiguity, or double meaning, which deliberately misleads the audience" can be considered "the most obvious feature of much humour." Wordplay can be performed in various forms, including punning, sarcasm, mocking, or banter. Freud (1905/1960:41) provides us with the following example:

A doctor, as he came away from a lady's bedside, said to her husband with a shake of his head: 'I don't like her looks.' 'I've not liked her looks for a long time', the husband hastened to agree.'

This joke portrays an excellent play on words when we assume that the doctor is of course referring to the lady's condition. The problem is that he expresses his worry about her condition in words the husband can use as a confirmation of his own marital aversion. This surprise ending points to the incongruity theory in which humor is caused by the conflict between the audience's expectations and the content of what is actually revealed by the punch line of the joke.

Schopenhauer also mentioned "a spurious kind of wit, the play upon words, the *calembourg*, the pun[...]" (Morreall 1987:54). He goes on to add that "just as the witticism brings two very different real objects under one concept, the pun brings two different concepts, by the assistance of accident, under one word."

Gruner (1997:131) differentiates three major types of puns, which are the homograph, the homophone, and the double-sound pun. He states that the homograph "employs a word or words with two or more meanings." These different meanings are expressed by identical words:

Who was the first man to bear arms?

Adam. He had two.

In this example (Gruner 1997:131), the noun "arms" is used as a pun because in the question it stands for "weapons",

whereas in the answer it stands for the "human limbs". In this example, Gruner uses a homonym (a form identical in spelling and pronunciation) of which only one meaning is appropriate to the joke's context so that the other meaning serves to express incongruity.<sup>27</sup>

Further, he states that the homophone "combines two words of different meanings and spellings but which sound alike" (1997:131). As an example, he uses the following:

What is black and white and red (read) all over?

A newspaper.

A bloody zebra.

The example (Gruner 1997:132) has already been explained in detail in section 8.2. It only provides a further possible answer. Whereas the first answer "A newspaper" refers to the meaning of the irregular past participle form of the verb "to read", the second answer "A bloody zebra" refers to the adjective "red". Humor derives here from the phonological identity of both words. The last type Gruner mentions is the double-sound pun, which is considered to be more complicated because it "can be a word that *puns* on a *pun*" (Gruner 1997:132). He provides as an example the word "punnery", which is a pun on "nunnery". It is interesting

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<sup>27</sup> For further details on puns as an expression of incongruity see Apte (1985).

to see that Lederer (1988) used the same ideas in the title of his work *Get thee to a punnery*, which deals in detail with all sorts of puns and their differentiation.<sup>28</sup>

Eastman (1922:68) defines a pun as "a verbal absurdity", whereas Koestler (1969:64/65) provides a more detailed definition when he states that a pun is "the bisociation of a single phonetic form with two meanings - two strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot."

According to Nilsen (2000:238), "the English meaning of *pun*, which comes from the Italian word *puntiglio* meaning 'fine point', is the humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound." So we can conclude that puns consist of an intentional confusion of similar words or phrases for a humorous rhetorical effect and have to do with misinterpretation and misunderstanding, and can often display an aggressive effect. Norrick (2003:1348) also refers to the last-mentioned point of aggression by noting that "punning as a type of word play may function either to amuse or to verbally attack." But normally, puns should enhance rapport and make the talk enjoyable for all the speakers. Nilsen (2000:239) states that "the best puns are those that fit so well into a conversation that they

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<sup>28</sup> For further details see Lederer (1988).

increase the level of understanding for those who catch on without interrupting the conversation's flow for those who miss the point." Often, one pun leads to another and can relax a serious topic so that it develops amusement and enjoyment. An example in which a pun is used to interrupt serious talk, can be found in Isaac Asimov's *Treasury of Humor* (1971:160),

Some years ago, New York's Third Avenue elevated railway was taken down. Visiting the city some time later to lunch with an editor, I was amazed to note the unaccustomed nakedness of the vista when I faced east. Thoughtfully, I said to my lunch companion, "Third Avenue reminds me of Christmas." Surprised, he said, "Why?" "No el," I said.

In this example, the basis for the successful pun that we find in the last line is already laid in the first line when the speaker mentions the "elevated railway". At this point, nobody is conscious of the importance of this expression. The use of the term "No el" in the last line refers to the first line. It serves as an abbreviation for "No elevated railway", but also for the French word for "Christmas", which is "Noël". This double meaning explains the other person's statement that Third Avenue reminds him of Christmas.

According to Alexander (1997:25), "homophones are the source of by far the most widespread puns in English."

Homophonic puns are puns that describe the difference in meanings of words which sound identical or similar, but are written in different ways. I want to reiterate importance of metathesis, which I have already dealt with in section 8.2. (Characteristic Forms of Jokes). Examples are:

A true adman writes the prose and cons.

(→ the pros and cons).

This example is taken from Brandreth (1982:92), who plays here with the homophones "prose", the term for the ordinary written language and "pros", in the sense of "advantages" as it is regularly used in the expression the "pros and cons". Homophones can also occur in questions, such as

When does the baker follow his trade?

- Whenever he needs (kneads).

This pun plays on the difference in meaning of the homophonic verb in the third person singular "needs" or "kneads". The example is taken from Nash (1985:138).

Freud (1905/1960:50) mentions puns in the section on various joke techniques and asserts that all techniques are characterized by a sort of compression or economy. In this context he mentions the

perhaps [...] most numerous group of jokes [...] generally known as 'Kalauer' ('calembourgs')

['puns'] and which pass as the lowest form of verbal joke [...].

He continues by emphasizing that

it is enough for a pun if the two words expressing the two meanings recall each other by some vague similarity, whether they have a general similarity of structure or a rhyming assonance, or whether they share the same first few letters [...].

In this context ambiguity plays a central role. Ambiguous statements are a common aspect of comedy. Suls (1972:45) points out that "linguistic ambiguity is a common way that humor provides incongruity and potential resolution." It is important not to mistake ambiguous statements for vague statements because there is a certain difference. Vague statements usually confuse the audience, whereas ambiguous statements suggest two or more distinct interpretations. Nilsen (1978:210) stresses the importance of ambiguity for language play as in satire, sarcasm, allusion, simile, and metaphor, and is convinced that they are only possible because the human mind is able to cope with ambiguity. Stand-up comedians tend to use ambiguity during their performances in order to have their audience rethink their material and slow down their presentation. On the one hand, this method can contribute to a stronger reaction on the part of the audience and on the other hand, it also allows

the performer to gain time in order to prepare his following delivery. An example of ambiguity is:

The reporter refused to attend any more dull teachers' meetings. (Nilsen 1978:209)

This sentence can either mean that the teachers are dull or that the meetings are dull. An example of a syntactically ambiguous statement is:

When the gong sounded, a woman carrying a monkey and a large elephant entered the ring. (Nilsen 1978:211)

Common sense tells us that the woman can only carry the monkey and that the elephant was walking beside her, in front of her or behind her. But on first reading, one could also understand a woman carrying the monkey and the elephant. Both examples demonstrate that the clash of the two different contexts creates incongruity between them, which is responsible for the humorous effect the sentences have for the audience.

To sum up, I want to stress the difference between puns and ambiguity as stated by Attardo (1994:133). He emphasizes that ambiguity alone should be considered to be an essential element for puns, but not as a sufficient condition. It is not sufficient to have two random senses involved in a pun. The importance is established by the

opposition of the two senses. They must be semantically incompatible in context.

### **11.2. Implication and Allusion**

Implication is crucial for the effect of parody, satire, and sarcasm. It allows us to reveal many things we would not directly say, so it gives us the possibility of referring to socially sensitive and even taboo topics using indirect language. Allen (1998:36) states that "many jokes involve making a more or less obvious point, but managing not to state the point directly." As far as the recipient's brain is concerned, he stresses that it has to make "the slight connective jump [...] between the last statement of the joke, or exchange, as rendered, and the implicit *meaning* of that line."

An allusion is "an indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader's familiarity with what is thus mentioned" (Baldick 1990:6). Freud (1905/1960:89) emphasizes that by means of an allusion "something is suggested that is not said straight out". He describes allusion as "indirect representation" (1905/1960:94) and includes "faulty reasoning", "unification", "indirect representation", and "representation by the opposite" in

this category. He mentions an interesting example which does not portray the resemblance in sound between two words, but rather between two sentences: "New spas cure well", which alludes to the proverb "New brooms sweep well" (1905/1960:89).

Allusion is thus a means of linking to the reader's experience through other texts; Norrick (1989:117) emphasizes that "in alluding, the performer challenges the audience to recognize the source text" and concludes that, therefore, "intertextual jokes are aggressive toward the audience". Nilsen (1978:213) describes it in detail, explaining that "before a speaker makes an allusion, he or she presupposes that the listener is familiar with the idea being alluded to and that it will make the listener think of the same concept that the speaker has in mind." Ross (1998:11) emphasizes the fact that allusions "involve extra-linguistic knowledge, in other words knowledge about the world." He goes on to say that "if the listener does not share the same awareness of this, the ambiguity cannot be recognised." Ross provides an interesting example:

Cogito ergo Boom. (Susan Sontag)

This example demonstrates that the recipient would have to know Descartes' statement "Cogito ergo sum" in order to

understand it and would have to associate "Boom" with a nuclear explosion.

So we may conclude that the actual understanding of the humorous text must be preceded by the recognition of the source text so that the recipient is able to fully appreciate the allusion.

### **11.3. Hyperbole**

Cuddon (1977:310) defines hyperbole as "a figure of speech which contains an exaggeration for emphasis". As examples, he mentions everyday instances, such as "I haven't seen you for ages", "as old as the hills" and "terrible weather". As these examples demonstrate, hyperboles are not to be taken literally and are not necessarily funny as such, but are often used to increase the funniness expressed in a joke because they completely overstate the situation ridiculed. Therefore, hyperbole is a common feature in stand-up comedy. It mainly serves to exaggerate familiar situations, to make the audience appreciate the joke telling, and to enhance its laughter. The stand-up comedian often starts relating a rather simple story and then makes it increasingly funny by telling of overstated situations and occurrences which always result in hearty laughter. By using hyperbole, the stand-up comedians render the situation funnier because they claim more than they have

evidence for and can objectively justify. In this context, we can refer to Norrick (1982:172/173), who asserts that overstatements should be semantically interpreted as claims that are higher (or lower) on some scale than warranted. Often the use of overstatements serves to top former punch lines in order to keep up and steadily increase the audience's laughter. In section 7.1. (Incongruity Theories), I dealt with various linguists<sup>29</sup> who claimed that incongruity is an essential condition for humor and laughter. Hyperbole also contains some sort of incongruity in that it expresses a discrepancy between the exaggerated statement and the reality it claims to describe. Norrick (2004:222) compares it with "the simultaneous perception of an object within two contrasting frames of reference or the compatibility with opposed "semantic scripts"; cf. Raskin (1985) and Attardo/Raskin (1991). Norrick (2004:1731) further provides an illustrative example:

<A> ... and Arabella poor Arabella was lame and  
walked [s]  
<b> [m]  
<A> you know *slower than a snail*  
so we all had to walk at Arabella's pace<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Freud (1905/1960), Willmann (1940), Koestler (1969), Suls (1972, 1977), Shultz (1972, 1976), Nerhardt (1977), McGhee (1979), Raskin (1985), Morreall (1987), MacHovec (1988), Attardo and Chabanne (1992), Attardo (2001).

<sup>30</sup> This is only the first part of the example. To see the continuation see Norrick (2004:1732).

In this example we realize that the expression "slower than a snail" overstates the slowness of Arabella's pace and compares it to a snail's movement. In accordance to Grice (1975) and Attardo (1994), we could claim that the example above is violating the quantity maxim rather than the quality maxim. What we have is a speaker who is not violating the truthfulness of the situation, which would fall under the violation of the quality maxim, but one who is only overstating it in order to strengthen and exaggerate the truth. This means that the speaker does not intend to lie, but rather expresses the girl's actual slowness in an exaggerated manner.

Furthermore, overstatements can also be expressed through the use of repetition, examples of which can be found in Norrick (1993:91/92, 2004:1734):

Greg:     your miracle product.  
          your miracle detergent,  
          that was supposed to get the stain out,  
          just ate my shirt away,  
          and I now want the money back  
          for *my five hundred dollar silk-shirt*.  
Sandra: *five hundred dollars* {laughing}  
Greg:     *okay, a hundred and fifty*.  
Sandra: *okay* {laughing}.

In this example, Greg completely exaggerates the price of his shirt and Sandra reacts to this overstatement by repeating it and laughing to express her disbelief and surprise. Greg immediately interprets Sandra's laughter as

an objection to his former overstatement and admits that he was exaggerating when he responds with "okay" and corrects his previous statement by drastically lowering the price. In this case, I found it difficult to distinguish between the quality and the quantity maxim because the speaker could theoretically intend to lie and boast about his expensive shirt. If this had been his real intention, we would have to classify the example as a violation of Grice's quality maxim. Nevertheless, I dare to claim that he chooses the expression "my five hundred dollar silk-shirt" just to overstate, which proves that hyperbole in this sense can be applied to a violation of the quantity maxim and, according to Norrick (1982:169/170), can be considered to be an "amplificatio", a statement that says more than necessary or justified.

In the following, I want to discuss a special case of hyperbole, that being caricature. Freud (1905/1960:258) had already dealt with the importance of caricature in his early works and defined it as the "exaggeration of traits that are not otherwise striking". By isolating and exaggerating a certain characteristic trait, as for example in a political cartoon, a comic effect is created that makes the recipients amused; cf. Freud (1905/1960), Greig (1923), Mish (1983:208). Berger (1993:26) agrees with Freud here and states that caricature "is one of the most

fundamental techniques of humor". Koestler (1969:70) emphasizes that the "caricaturist distorts by exaggerating features which he considers characteristic of his victim's appearance or personality" and provides the example of General de Gaulle's prominent nose. It is important to note that those caricatures can only be funny if the listener or the spectator knows the person ridiculed because "the unknown cannot be distorted or misrepresented" (Koestler 1969:71). Berger (1993:26) emphasizes that caricature can also occur verbally, expressed through a change of intonation on the part of the joke teller. By "capturing and grotesquely imitating his or her particular style of speaking or writing", the joke teller uses exaggeration in order to ridicule the person in question. We can therefore classify caricature as a technique belonging to the superiority theory because, like ridicule and satire, it is used to express power and superiority over its inferior opponents. As the previous discussion has shown, caricature always contains exaggeration, which justifies treating it as a special case of hyperbole. Although this feature is not funny as such, it is essential for composing a caricature and therefore adds to the humor expressed by the incongruity of the situation described.

## **12 Linguistic Features of Joke Telling**

In the following section, I will focus on numerous linguistic features that are regularly found in stand-up comedy and allow its characterization. This section serves as a preparation for the main part of my study in which I analyze authentic joke telling sessions.

### **12.1. Repetition**

Repetition is one of the most frequent techniques we can identify when analyzing jokes. It is mainly used to determine the rhythm of the joke performance and represents a common research topic for various linguists, such as Bergson (1911) and Freud (1905,1960), Nilsen (1978), Tannen (1989), and Norrick (1993a), who dealt with the importance and the various functions of repetition in jokes. Repetition is a means to dramatize situations and to make people laugh, which is the reason why it is practiced in many forms of jokes. Humor mainly derives from "the tension created by some kind of a series being established" (Berger 1993:46). Repetition can help to strengthen the rhythmic pattern of a joke telling session. This can be seen in riddles (see section 8.2.) or in knock-knock jokes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed analysis of knock-knock jokes see Chiaro (1992) and Alexander (1997).

Freud (1905/1960:157/158, 281) also deals with the importance of repetition in joking and mentions that repetition can regularly be found in children's language. Further, he considers repetition to be a standard joke technique, particularly in the situation comedy.

Norricks (1993a) deals in particular with repetition in canned jokes and spontaneous conversational joking. He stresses two important functions of repetition in joking. On the one hand, he mentions the repetition in which words and situations are mechanically reproduced. This repetition serves to poke fun at unusual characteristics and is meant to emphasize the lack of logic in the joke. On the other hand, Norricks also emphasizes the importance of repetition with variation and creativity. By creating new utterances out of the foregoing one or by varying them, the speakers are building up the basis for humor and can create puns by playing with the meaning of the foregoing utterance.

Finally, the repetition of syllables as is often seen in slips of the tongue is also a further source of laughter. The audience immediately reacts to such slips and starts mocking and poking fun at the mispronunciation of a certain word. Norricks (1993:92) mentions the words "ratatouille" and "syllablebles" as examples.

All these examples demonstrate that repetition is a very effective means for the speaker to "produce fluent

speech while formulating what to say next" (Tannen 1989:48). But it is not only advantageous for the speaker; the listener can also profit from it to the extent that repetition, in general, makes it easier for him to follow the talk because not every word contains new information. I will also deal with repetition in view of stand-up comedy in the analytical part of my study, because stand-up comedians profit from the humorous effect repetition establishes. They often use repetition of the same bits or even of the punch line either to enhance the audience's reaction or to make sure that the audience has recognized the incongruity expressed by the concluding part of the joke.

### **12.2. Formulaicity**

Apart from repetition, formulaicity also plays a central role in joke telling. Wray (2002:93) stresses that "formulaic discourse markers seem able to support both the speaker's and the hearer's processing simultaneously." Besides, "they help the speaker to remain focussed [sic], while making the content and the speaker's intentions easier for the hearer to follow". Apart from that, Wray also emphasizes the fact that formulaicity can help the performers manipulate the audience into a direction they want them to take. For this, the performers can use

commands, politeness markers or hedges. They all serve to impose their own point of view on the audience.

As I have already mentioned above, formulaicity is important for the joke teller's timing. It provides a means with which the humorists can gain time in order to plan their further performance. Norrick (2003:1356/1357) stresses that "hesitation, formulaicity, and repetition help tellers gain planning time, but they also contribute to the overall rhythm of the performance, marking the flow of information and serving as guides to listeners." Formulaicity describes relatively fixed units of words which are often repeated during a performance. Special formulas effect the transition from a joke to a completely new topic. Jokes often start with "Remember the joke about...", "This reminds me of a joke..." and "Did you hear about...". In this context, we have to mention numerous jokes which have become famous for their formulaic openings. I want to call the knock-knock jokes, the "What's the difference" riddles and the jokes starting with vocatives such as "Mummy, Mummy..., Waiter, waiter... and Doctor, doctor..." back to mind.

We can also find jokes which deal with certain themes, for example, the elephant jokes or stereotypical jokes concerning different cultures, such as the Irish, the Scottish, the Welsh or the American. This is a form of

joking we also indulge in here in Germany when telling ridiculous stories and jokes about the inhabitants of our neighboring countries. I also refer to Freud (1905/1960), who mentioned the Jewish jokes within the framework of his humor study. They also represent a recurrent topic in his work.<sup>32</sup>

All in all, I want to conclude that formulaicity has a crucial function for joke telling in general. We cannot neglect the fact that a considerable amount of everyday language consists of formulaic expressions and therefore humorists also like to make use of this feature to lend a certain structure to their joke telling performances. As we will see later, Seinfeld and Wright also use formulaicity as a central means of structuring their program and enabling their audience to follow their performance.

### **12.3. Disfluencies**

With regard to stand-up comedians who normally talk freely and have to react spontaneously when their audience intervenes, it is obvious that they make slips from time to time, or correct themselves after they have begun a sentence with the wrong words. Others make pauses,

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<sup>32</sup> I mentioned the Jewish joke in connection with self-ridicule in section 10.2. For a detailed analysis of self-ridicule in Jewish jokes see Freud (1905/1960) Part A. Analytical Part: p. 36, 55/56, 62/63, 71-73, 84, 92, 95, 133-138, 174.

stutters, repeat words, or correct a false start. Disfluencies generally encourage the audience's attention and participation and contribute to the joke teller's timing. In the following, I want to explain the various forms of disfluencies in a more detailed manner:

### **12.3.1. Pauses**

Pauses describe a period of silence that gives the performer the opportunity to think of what he or she is going to say next, or during which the audience has time to think about what the speaker has said before. Normally, these pauses occur in the middle of sentences and do not last longer than a second or two. Pauses can be completely silent or they can be filled with vowel sounds and utterances such as "uh" or "um". Pauses in general can enable the recipients to intervene and start heckling during a stand-up comedy show. Nevertheless, Sacks (1992, vol. II: 498) stresses that pauses do not necessarily mean losing the floor.<sup>33</sup> Particularly in stand-up comedy, they are planned and form one of the most important strategies that humorists apply, as we will see in particular in the section on Wright. He demonstrates his

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<sup>33</sup> Sacks dealt primarily with conversational joke telling in his study. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize the importance of his studies which can also be partially applied to the study of stand-up comedy.

skill in the timing of a joke by using a lot of pauses during his performances in order to keep the audience's attention and amusement at a maximum.

### **12.3.2. False Starts**

False starts occur very often during joke telling sessions. The speaker begins his sentence, stops a moment, and then begins again with the same word. Also, the speakers can stop their beginning and choose another word to begin with. In this case, they correct their first beginning and start again with a new term. The following example is taken from the Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE, Part 3: Jokes, p.21):

#### **West Virginia**

1. Joyce this-
2. when people were fleeing out of the South from lynchings
3. they went north because there weren't as many lynchings
- [...]
11. but anyway
12. this guy was-
13. had fallen on hard times
- [...]
28. and so the vo-
29. so the guy said "well Lord,
30. I'll go South if that's what you say
31. because I know you'll be with me all the way."

In line 1 the joke teller actually wants to start the joke using the demonstrative pronoun "this", but stops and restarts the sentence using a temporal subordinate clause

(1.2). In line 12 and 13 the joke teller interrupts to correct the verb form. In line 28 he cuts his beginning off and restarts in a different way in the following line.

#### 12.4. Discourse Markers

Discourse markers describe words that help to relate them to other words or utterances used before. Most researchers stress that discourse markers make it easier for the listener to understand the speaker's utterances. In general, we can use discourse markers to initiate discourse, to mark a change in topic, or to stall for some time to think about how to continue as shown in the following example (Norrick 2000:49):

#### Poodle

1 Jean: Annie gave me a permanent once, too.  
2 Louise: Annie did?  
3 Jean: once and only once.  
4 [General laughter]  
5 I would never allow her to touch my hair again.  
6 Louise: **well** remember the time-  
7 Jean: yoooh.  
8 talk about afro  
9 when afro wasn't even in style.  
10 my god.  
11 Annie: **well** see I started [something.]  
12 Jean: [frizz ball.]  
13 I was a frizz ball.  
14 it wasn't even afro.  
15 I was just frizz.  
16 Louise: remember [when-]  
17 Jean: [it was] terrible.  
[...]

Schiffrin (1987) is one of the linguists who particularly focused on discourse markers in her work. The most common ones are, for example, "I mean", "look", "okay", "oh", "well", "you know", etc. They principally function as a hesitator and a means to gain some planning time when they express the speaker's uncertainty and his search for an appropriate continuation of the preceding talk. Consider the following example (Schiffrin 1987:274):

- Zelda: a. I remember when I was...young.  
b. And em...I'd say like in my earl-it was in my early twenties.  
c. I was about twenty,  
d. and I was working then.  
e. And, **y'know**, how some of the girls we'd go out for lunch  
f. and they'd have these eh...they-they read your tea leaves!  
g. **Y'know** these tea rooms?

Moreover, they can be used to correct oneself after having made a false start. "Well" and "you know" can also be considered to be positive politeness expressions when the speaker uses them to pretend shared knowledge with his audience. Apart from that, "well" and "you know" can also be used to express general agreement or reinforcement of a previous argument and sometimes serve as an introduction for further explanations or clarifications.

Besides "well" and "you know", I also want to mention the discourse markers "so" and "like" even if they do not occur as frequently as the former ones. "So" is mainly used as a transition and emphasizes that an action results from

a previous topic. Moreover, it serves to sum up a description of various actions or attitudes about them and can also mark the beginning of a question. "Like" is used to provide an example which clarifies a former aspect, or it can indicate that the speakers are searching for a way to explain what they have in mind and functions thus as a hesitation marker.

Among these discourse markers, we can also find expressions of caution, so-called hedges. They signal the type of relationship the speaker has to the utterance. Examples are "as far as I know", "kind of", "sort of", "I guess", "like" etc., which are often used as a means to express politeness. There are also interjections to be mentioned. These are small elements often consisting of two or three letters that are inserted in utterances and serve to reveal the speaker's emotions. The most common interjections are words as "ah", "wow", "ha", etc. Besides the interjections, I just want to mention the attention signals which serve to attract the audience's attention. The most common examples are small words, such as "say", "hey", "yo", etc.

As will be shown in the following parts of my study, discourse markers play a central role in joke telling and thus also in stand-up comedy and mainly function as a means to gain time for planning the effective continuation of the

performance or, as a form of direct address to the audience.

### **12.5. Intonation**

Intonation describes the way the speaker's voice rises and falls while speaking. Various linguists emphasize the importance of intonation. Among them, Schifffrin (1987:ix) states that "the impact that a single expression has in conversation may differ depending upon the way in which it is said." In joke telling, intonation also plays an important role and is largely responsible for the successful performance of a joke. It is important to catch the audience's attention while speaking, and this is not possible when the speaker is just sitting around and talking monotonously. On the contrary, one of the remarkable features of a good performance is a lively style of speaking that encourages the audience to follow and to participate in the talk. So the comedians have to try to take on the role of an actor when they want to tell a joke successfully. They have to imitate different voices for the various characters and have to emphasize the most significant words so that the audience is aware of them as words they should pay attention to. A good performance can always grab the audience and is a main condition for the successful delivery of a joke or a story. Although I stress

in this section that monotonous talk cannot lead to a successful joke telling, I am aware of exceptions, which I will show on my own when dealing with Steven Wright in the following parts of my thesis.

### **13 Analyzing Verbal Humor in Stand-up Comedy**

While dealing with stand-up comedy, I decided to focus in particular on Seinfeld's and Wright's performances. To me, they realize the greatest potential of the humorists in stand-up comedy, something which is proven by years of continual success. I decided to study these two comedians because they follow completely different strategies in performing their material, but nevertheless work in the same comedy field. Seinfeld's interesting personality, which consists of his resolute appearance on the one hand, and his self-effacing style on the other hand, builds the main foundation of his success. Therefore he manages to appeal to his audience even if the content of his jokes is trivial and actually does not provide any reason for laughter at all. Seinfeld deals with situations everybody is familiar with so that one might assume that it is rather difficult to engage people's interest. He comes up with topics such as air travel, doctors, or supermarkets, and makes them seem ridiculous or trivial. The problem the listener is confronted with is that the content of the stories does not explicitly reveal funniness and humor in and of itself. What makes the audience appreciate his performance is the combination of his own style of delivery (use of paralanguage, facial expressions etc.) and his way of dealing with common topics that we all know but would

never verbalize. This combination establishes the reason for his long-term success. Seinfeld possesses the ability to tell even long stories compellingly because he can play with intonations in order to achieve and even enhance the humorous effect. The audience always reacts to the stories when he presents the absurdities of the most different situations. Most of the time the audience is surprised when he reveals the punch line, but this moment of unexpectedness is immediately followed by recognition of the incongruity principally predominant in his punch lines. By choosing such common and familiar situations, Seinfeld includes everybody. His jokes contain aspects of incongruity and superiority so that pleasure mainly comes from the shared experience of the stand-up comedian and his recipients. Throughout his whole performance, he successfully demonstrates his skill in responding spontaneously to actual circumstances such as heckling, and he even encourages the audience to intervene.

Wright generates great interest because he stands in stark contrast to Seinfeld, starting with their outer appearances. Whereas Seinfeld always appears well-dressed like a normal New Yorker and thus stresses the similarity between his on-stage persona and his off-stage persona, Wright even looks weird on stage, and he uses his strange

appearance as another way to render his performance ridiculous.

As I mentioned above, the air of determination represents a crucial aspect for a successful performance, but with Steven Wright I will present an exception which further justifies my interest in his work. Wright convinces his audience with his characteristic style of monotonous performance in which he presents himself in an apathetic manner. Most of the time he stands around passively and lowers his eyes. Sometimes he even turns away from his listeners. But this behavior reflects his stage persona exactly and he plays it in an effective and confident way, which has brought him a high reputation in the comedy world. Wright also engages in a sort of self-deprecating humor and is able to intensify the humorous effect with his excellent sense of timing. His jokes usually consist of totally bizarre and awkward content, so the recipient will not be able to resolve the incongruity expressed in the nonsense and is therefore left with a sense of absurdity. Wright's apathetic and rather awkward behavior, as well as Seinfeld's determined yet self-effacing style, led me to concentrate on these comedians in order to present a varied picture of verbal humor in stand-up comedy.

Before concentrating on various linguistic features, I want to examine the beginning of Wright's performances as

compared to Seinfeld's performances. In so doing, I want to explain the different characters and stage personae of both comedians. Even from the start, the recipient can observe differences in the way they perform. The following excerpts are from the introductory scenes of Wright's program *I Have a Pony* and Seinfeld's program *I'm Telling You for the Last Time*:

*Introduction (Wright: I Have a Pony (IHAP))*

1     Presenter: ladies and gentlemen.  
2                 please welcome  
3                 (1.0)  
4                 from Boston, Massachusetts,  
5                 Steven Wright.  
6     Audience: {applause}  
7     Man:         okay.  
8     Audience: {applause}  
9     S.W.:        thanks.  
10                I used to be a parking attendant in Boston at Logan  
                  Airport ..

*Introduction (Seinfeld: I'm Telling You for the Last Time)*

1     Presenter: ladies and gentlemen..  
2                 Jerry Seinfeld.  
3     Audience: {applause}  
4     J.S.:        [okay.]  
5     Audience: [{applause}]  
6     J.S.:        "good night,  
7                 good night everybody,"  
8     Audience: ((laughter))  
9     J.S.:        <well well well.>  
10                (3.0)

Wright's performance *I Have a Pony* starts in the same way as Seinfeld's program. But whereas Seinfeld visibly enjoys the audience's frenetic reaction at the beginning, Wright stays calm and does not show any movement or facial

expression. First the audience is confronted with a presenter who announces the performer. Then we recognize an audience who welcomes the comedian with applause (Wright, 1.6). Whereas Seinfeld starts his performance with the word "okay" (Seinfeld, 1.4) in order to calm down the audience and to be able to start with the program, in Wright's performance it is a spectator who says the word "okay" (1.7) before Wright begins his actual performance by thanking the audience for their applause (1.9). This reaction indicates already that Wright is not seeking direct contact with his audience nor intending to respond to any form of heckling. Instead, he starts immediately with his actual program. Whereas Seinfeld continues by introducing his performance with a triple repetition of the discourse marker "well" (Seinfeld, 1.9) and a following pause of three seconds (Seinfeld, 1.10), which both serve to convey a sense of calm, Wright immediately begins his program without even the slightest pause or transition.

*I Still Have a Pony* is the follow-up album to the album *I Have a Pony* and was published in 2007. As I mentioned at the beginning of my study, it is an audio version of his Comedy Central television special *When the Leaves Blow Away* (2006) and lasts 42:28 minutes. When we look at the beginning of this program, we notice that it is very similar to the beginning of his first performance.

*Introduction (Wright: I Still Have a Pony (ISHAP))*

1     Presenter: good evening.  
2                 please welcome from Boston  
3                 Steven Wright.  
4     Audience: {applause}  
5     S.W.:        thanks.  
6     Audience: ((laughter))  
7     S.W.:        when I was a little kid,

We have a presenter who introduces Steven Wright (1.1-3) and an audience that welcomes him with applause (1.4). As in the extract analyzed before, Wright first thanks his audience motionlessly (1.5). This apathetic reaction provokes laughter (1.6) without any real reason. He then immediately starts with a faked story of his own life (1.7 ff.).

As far as my analysis is concerned, I will point out that one selected example might be found in different sections. This is due to the fact that I will deal with the examples in detail and will always focus on only one specific aspect of verbal humor rather than deal with various aspects in one single section. Because some examples are rich with humorous strategies, they will be dealt with in different sections.

### **13.1. Analyzing Verbal Humor in Jerry Seinfeld's *I'm***

#### ***Telling You for the Last Time***

Seinfeld creates humor through the use of certain strategies which he follows throughout the whole

performance. Besides the use of everyday topics and his tendency to address his audience directly, his main strategy for creating humor is the use of certain joke techniques, particularly ridicule and paralanguage. Therefore, I will deal with them at the beginning of this section before having a closer look at his use of linguistic aspects of verbal humor, such as repetition and disfluencies. At the end of this chapter, I will examine more closely Seinfeld's strategy for establishing direct contact with his audience. The final aspect of my analysis will focus on the study of transitions, because Seinfeld follows a strict plan during his performance and links one topic to the next.

#### **13.1.1. Ridicule**

Seinfeld's performance is mainly characterized by his frequent use of ridicule, primarily private ridicule and shared ridicule. This latter subcategory gives him the opportunity to include the shared knowledge of his audience. He presents sections in which his aim is not only to ridicule other people, but also to amuse his audience with self-deprecation and even self-sarcasm. As far as the structure of this section is concerned, I will follow Wilson's model of distinguishing private ridicule and shared ridicule (Wilson 1979: 189/190). As mentioned in

section 10.2. (Ridicule), I will speak of self-deprecation instead of self-ridicule because to me the humorist principally wants to make himself look silly in order to create a humorous and funny story rather than badly criticize his own behavior. In the following analysis, I will use the verb "mock" in the sense of making fun of others and thus making them look foolish.

### **Private Ridicule**

As we have seen in section 10.2.(Ridicule), private ridicule is directed towards absent persons. This would argue for the fact that it is a joke technique that allows one to express one's hostile feelings towards people superior to oneself. Wilson defined private ridicule by stating that "the butt of the derision is absent and unlikely to hear of the wit, or dead and buried" (1979:189). The possibility of expressing hostility towards authorities might lead to the feeling of solidarity among the joke teller and the audience provided that the recipients share the joke tellers' attitude towards the butt of their joke. As will be shown in the following, Seinfeld uses ridicule to express superiority over the person or the group of people that are being disparaged. The audience's reaction in the form of laughter and

applause attest to their agreement and strengthens the power relation expressed by the punch line of the joke.

As indicated at the beginning of this section, Seinfeld frequently makes use of ridicule in his performances. In the following, I will focus on selected examples from my research corpus which clearly point out Seinfeld's intention of expressing hostility and superiority. Consider the following extracts:

### *Cab Drivers*

67 J.S.: so what's with the cab drivers and the B.O.?  
68 Audience: ((laughter))  
69 J.S.: how long are these shifts?  
70 Audience: ((laughter))  
71 J.S.: do they ever stop  
72 or do they just get in the cab  
73 and just drive 'till they're dead?  
74 Audience: ((laughter))  
75 J.S.: that's what it's starting to smell like in some of  
these cars.  
76 Audience: ((laughter))  
77 J.S.: you're in the back there  
78 and you're going "oh man"  
79 and then  
80 ((laughs))  
81 they give you that ..  
82 they have that cherry stuff ...  
83 the cherry "pop-it" on the dash,  
84 you know,  
85 so you get the cherry B.O.,  
86 Audience: ((laughter))  
87 J.S.: which is supposed to be some sort of improvement I  
guess,  
88 I don't know,  
89 I can't imagine even ...  
90 fruit going that long without showering.  
91 Audience: ((laughter))

[...]

136 J.S.: I guess he does this all the time.  
137 he's got a license,  
138 I can see it right there."  
139 I don't even know what it takes  
140 to get a cab driver's license.  
141 I think all you need is a face.

142 Audience: ((laughter))  
143 J.S.: this seems to be their big qualification.  
144 Audience: ((laughter))  
145 J.S.: "that's the law now,  
146 no blank heads are allowed to drive cabs."  
147 it also helps to have a name  
148 with like, eight consonants in a row.  
149 Audience: ((laughter))  
150 {applause}  
151 J.S.: what - what is that "o" with the line through it?  
152 Audience: [((laughter))]  
153 J.S.: [what letter is that?]  
154 I don't remember that letter in school.  
155 Audience: ((laughter))  
156 J.S.: you need a chart of the elements  
157 if you wanna report the guy.  
158 Audience: ((laughter))  
159 J.S.: "yes officer, his name was Ammal,  
160 and then this symbol for boron.  
161 Audience: ((laughter))  
162 J.S.: I believe.  
163 I had the periodic chart with me at the time,  
164 Audience: ((laughter))  
165 J.S.: I'm quite certain it was not manganese."

Seinfeld's entire segment about the cab drivers in New York represents an excellent example of his skill in making fun of a specific group of people and even expressing sarcasm about the group of cab drivers. Although it is possible that some people in the audience belong to the group of cab drivers, I decided to classify this extract as private ridicule because Seinfeld speaks of them as a separate group and includes his audience while making fun of them. Although Seinfeld obviously threatens the cab drivers' face by expressing power and mean humor over them, the audience joins him with laughter and amusement, which demonstrates their solidarity with him. It is interesting to examine the beginning of this segment because Seinfeld starts in medias res without any introduction. He immediately begins with

three subsequent questions which already cause the audience to laugh. The audience realizes that Seinfeld is poking fun at the cab driver's work and therefore reacts with laughter, which reveals their solidarity with him. We can see that the audience even laughs (1.68 and 70) at trivial setup lines which are not actually funny per se (1.67 and 69). Looking at line 67, Seinfeld works here with an abbreviation when he mentions the "B.O." (1.67) and continues to use it during his entire performance without using the full words. In general "B.O." is the abbreviation for "body odor", but further examination of this segment reveals that Seinfeld never mentions the words "body" or "odor", but just sticks to the two letters assuming that everybody knows what it means. Instead of giving the full words, he makes the audience aware of the meaning by choosing words from the field of "odor", as for example "smell" (1.75) and the fragrance of "cherry" (1.82/83, 85). At the beginning, Seinfeld strings some questions together (1.71-73) which serve to prepare his punch line in line 75 when he compares the smell in the cabs with the smell of dead bodies. With this comparison he refers to line 73 and heightens the effect of his previous statement. From line 72 onward, we realize that Seinfeld starts getting more aggressive towards the cab drivers' behavior. The provocative question (1.72/73) serves to express power over

them. With reference to Plato and Aristotle as well as modern researchers such as Suls (1977) and MacHovec (1988), Seinfeld acts in this case in accordance with the hostility theories. Seinfeld points, with the last question and the following punch line (1.75), to the negative and the aggressive side of humor which he uses in order to disparage and to humiliate the New York cab drivers. Since the audience continuously laughs (1.68, 70, 74, 76) at Seinfeld's performance, they are apparently joining him in expressing power and superiority (Hobbes 1650/1999, 1651/1985; Gruner 1978; Allen 1987) over the cab drivers who constitute in this case a group that is inferior to the joke teller and his audience. In order to be able to make his audience join him and share his attitude, he uses the strategy of presenting a situation everybody comprehends. He tries to ridicule it even more harshly when he speaks of the "cherry stuff" (1.82) on the dashboard and when he changes variety of B.O. into "cherry B.O." (1.85). He therefore not only ridicules the group of cab drivers as such, but also the entire situation around them. Seinfeld organizes his performance by accumulating ridiculous descriptions that, on the one hand, serve to cause general laughter (1.86) and, on the other hand, serve to clarify his intention of expressing superiority over this specific group of people.

In line 90 Seinfeld evokes hostility and aggression again by referring to his previous statements from lines 73, 75 and 82 when he says: "fruit going that long without showering." It is interesting to see how Seinfeld uses linguistic features such as hedges (sort of (1.87), I guess (1.87)), and hesitating expressions (I don't know (1.88), I can't imagine (1.89)). They serve his strategy of not being too direct towards his audience but attaching importance to positive politeness and solidarity. This solidarity is expressed in form of laughter (1.91) in which the audience admits to joining Seinfeld's mockery.

In the following, Seinfeld continues with his strategy of ridiculing the cab drivers when he starts speaking of their licenses (1.136 ff.). He reveals his own opinion that ends with a hyperbolic punch line in line 141 and causes the audience to react with real laughter (1.142 and 144). Again Seinfeld displays an aggressive attitude towards the cab drivers. By claiming that "all you need is a face" (1.141), he implies that cab drivers do not have to be intelligent in order to do their job; on the contrary, this hyperbole serves to express that anybody can get the license without any qualifications at all. In line 143 he refers to line 141 by calling their "face" (1.141) "their big qualification" (1.143) for doing their job. Both statements and their implications emphasize Seinfeld's

strategy of expressing power and portraying the cab drivers as inferior to him and his audience. They could both be considered impolite and rude, but interpreting the audience's reaction in the form of laughter, we can assert that they are expressing solidarity with him and his performance, which indicates that they share the same opinion.

In the following, Seinfeld mocks the cab drivers' names, which are often difficult to pronounce and understand, saying: "it also helps to have a name with like, eight consonants in a row" (1.147/148). This statement is meant to humiliate cab drivers and can be understood as a xenophobic attack in consideration of the fact that he stresses that for the most part foreigners drive these cabs in such an insane way. Nevertheless, Seinfeld reaps laughter and applause (1.149/150), which would confirm Hobbes' point of view within the framework of the hostility theories. Hobbes' thesis is that laughter results when an audience realizes their superiority and it therefore enables them to express power. Seinfeld even wants to keep his listener's reaction going and continues to stress the stupidity of the cab drivers in line 151. Seinfeld is making fun of the exotic letter in the cab driver's name, as well as his own ignorance about the letter. He even tops it by introducing hyperbolic

statements claiming the necessity of a "chart of the elements" (1.156) and the "periodic chart" (1.163) to figure out what the letter could mean. So Seinfeld completely exaggerates and mocks the drivers when speaking of "boron" (1.160) and "manganese" (1.165). Yet this style of presenting is effective because the audience feels enthusiastic about his performance and laughs continuously (1.152, 155, 158, 161, 164).

The sort of mean humor that Seinfeld presents with this example might be considered dangerous territory. He treats the cab drivers as a separate group, although he has to be prepared for the fact that there are cab drivers among his audience. Yet although he is obviously threatening the cab drivers' face by expressing power and mean humor towards them, the audience constantly joins him with laughter and amusement, which emphasizes their solidarity with him and softens his aggressiveness. It is obvious that Seinfeld shows potential for face-threatening acts, but he is not rude in the pure sense.

Seinfeld follows the same strategies in another example of private ridicule taken from the section about the fast food chain McDonald's.

#### *McDonald's*

1559                    eighty jillion, billion zillion, killion tillion  
1560                    is anyone really impressed anymore?

1561 "oh, 89 billion sold  
1562 alright, I'll have one.  
1563 Audience: ((laughter))  
1564 J.S.: I'm satisfied."  
1565 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1566 J.S.: °who cares°?  
1567 I would love to meet the chairman of the board of  
McDonald's,  
1568 to just say to him,  
1569 "look, we all get it.  
1570 okay? you've sold a lot of hamburgers.  
1571 whatever the hell the number is.  
1572 ((laughs))  
1573 just put a sign  
1574 "McDonald's - we're doing very well.  
1575 Audience: ((laughter))  
1576 J.S.: we are tired of hearing about every God-damn one of  
them."  
1577 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1578 J.S.: what is their ultimate goal,  
1579 to have cows just surrendering voluntarily or  
something?  
1580 Audience: ((laughter))  
1581 J.S.: showing up at the door,  
1582 "we'd like to turn ourselves in,  
1583 we see the sign.  
1584 we realize we have very little chance out there.  
1585 Audience: ((laughter)),  
1586 {beginning applause}  
1587 J.S.: we'd like to be a Happy Meal,  
1588 if that's at all possible.  
1589 Audience: ((laughter))  
1590 {applause}

As in the example with the cab drivers, Seinfeld decides to introduce this excerpt by means of questions that make the audience aware of a situation they are all familiar with. In line 1559 he invents the name of numbers which do not exist in order to enhance the irritating behavior of McDonald's when they count the number of burgers they have sold. This invention of non-existing numbers serves as a possibility to express his aggressiveness and therefore his hostility towards the fast food chain. In line 1560 he asks a question in order to get the audience's attention before

he reveals the punch line in the two following lines, by claiming that he will have one burger out of these 89 billion. This punch line is appreciated by the audience and excites their laughter (1.1563) because the audience has realized that Seinfeld is reacting with sarcasm by mentioning the opposite of what he has said before. At the beginning of the segment, he condemns the silly practice of the fast food chain by making fun of the number of burgers sold, but then he sarcastically agrees to buy one and even reveals that he feels satisfied (1.1564) in the end. Laughter results in this case from the incongruity expressed in his own behavior. Seinfeld completely ridicules McDonald's success story and stresses this by making further gestures with his hand when speaking the words "doing very well" (1.1574), which causes laughter (1.1575). As we have already seen in several passages before, he uses the strategy of maintaining or even enhancing the audience's laughter by delivering a chain of punch lines as in line 1576, when he mentions that everybody is annoyed with their counting. It is interesting that Seinfeld refers to all people when he uses the pronoun "we" (1.1576). From line 1578 onward, he continues lining up further punch lines which provoke real laughter from audience members who overtly appreciate his performance and therefore voice their solidarity with what he is talking

about. This is particularly the case when he continues to mock McDonald's by revealing its goal "to have cows just surrendering voluntarily" (1.1579). Lines 1582 to 1584 serve to extend his mockery when he even personalizes cows by making them say: "we'd like to turn ourselves in, we see the sign. we realize we have very little chance out there." He lines up a series of main clauses which all start with the personal pronoun "we". This is supposed to make clear that Seinfeld intends to include all existing cows. The personalization renders the situation even more ridiculous and causes laughter and even beginning applause, which are both reinforced by his last punch line in lines 1587 and 1588 when the cows even try to choose which meal they want to become after their slaughter.

The first two examples demonstrate that Seinfeld follows the strategy of talking about familiar topics in order to include the audience and make them support his own point of view. It will be shown that he chooses situations we can all comprehend and therefore manages to include the whole audience in his work.

An interesting example of private ridicule can also be found in the segment on *Horses*. In this segment, Seinfeld makes fun of people who bet on horses. But instead of describing their behavior, he puts himself in the horses' position and plays with intonation when imitating speaking

horses. Seinfeld personalizes the horses and aims to present them in the most ridiculous way possible when he imitates their behavior. During the whole segment, Seinfeld mocks the notion of horse racing and in particular the spectators who have bet on horses.

### *Horses*

2079 I mean, are they walking back to the stable  
afterwards,  
2080 going "I was third",  
2081 "I was fifth",  
2082 "I was ninth."  
2083 Audience: ((laughter))  
2084 J.S.: "you cut me off, watch that."  
2085 Audience: ((laughter))  
2086 J.S.: "I'll kick your ass next time."  
2087 Audience: ((laughter))  
2088 J.S.: I think more likely, they're thinking,  
2089 ((singing))  
2090 "oat bag,  
2091 Audience: [((laughter))]  
2092 J.S.: [I get my oat bag now.]  
2093 oat bag time for me."  
2094 Audience: {applause}  
2095 J.S.: I mean, I'm sure the horses have some idea  
2096 that the jockey is in a hurry.  
2097 Audience: ((laughter))  
2098 J.S.: I mean, he's on him,  
2099 he's urging him,  
2100 he's hitting him,  
2101 "come on, come on",  
2102 you know, so,  
2103 "this is important  
2104 that I get somewhere for this guy .. quick",  
2105 but they must get to the end and go  
2106 ((breathing deeply))  
2107 "we were just here,  
2108 Audience: ((laughter))  
2109 J.S.: what was the point of that?  
2110 Audience: ((laughter))  
2111 J.S.: this is where we were.  
2112 Audience: ((laughter))  
2113 J.S.: that was the longest possible route  
2114 you could take  
2115 to get where you wanted to be.  
2116 Audience: ((laughter))  
2117 J.S.: why don't we just stay here?  
2118 I would've been first."  
2119 Audience: ((laughter))  
2120 {applause}

The fact that he personalizes these animals and imitates their movements adds to the humor. Seinfeld projects human behaviors on horses in order to vividly portray the bettor's strong desire to see their horse win the race. In so doing, Seinfeld aims to ridicule one specific group of people. In line 2089 he even imitates a singing horse. The audience's laughter and his remarks overlap immediately (1.2091/2092) and end with the audience's applause (1.2094). After that, Seinfeld provokes further laughter (1.2097) when imitating a jockey and claiming that he is sure that "the horses have some idea that the jockey is in a hurry" (1.2095/2096). He stresses his previous consideration by lining up three sentences with a parallel structure (1.2098-2100). He then starts speaking from the point of view of a breathless horse and steadily provokes the audience's laughter (1.2108, 2110, 2112, 2116, 2119). Seinfeld achieves a constant build-up of humor in his remarks. He even imitates how the horse pants (1.2106) and shows its foolishness when it says to the jockey: "we were just here, [...] what was the point of that? [...] this is where we were [...] that was the longest possible route you could take to get where you wanted to be" (1.2107-2115) and concludes with the question: "why don't we just stay here, I would've been first" (1.2117/2118). The audience immediately expresses their appreciation for Seinfeld's

great performance through laughter and applause (1.2119/2120). By using personalization, he creates humor out of unexpected situations. He makes horses think, speak and sing and not only just eat and run, as we normally imagine their behavior. The whole segment has proved that Seinfeld uses the strategy of projecting human thought processes on horses in order to mock people who bet on horses and to point out the ridiculousness of such a situation.

To conclude the section on private ridicule, I decided to choose the following extract because it demonstrates that private ridicule can also be combined with self-deprecation. In this segment, Seinfeld expresses his mocking of doctors. I decided to classify this excerpt as private ridicule because, in my opinion, Seinfeld speaks of doctors in general and does not aim at a direct confrontation with people in the audience who are doctors too. From this point of view, the example can be compared with his segment about the cab drivers I dealt with at the beginning of this section. He just wants to include his audience in making fun of doctors by ridiculing a common situation we can all imagine.

#### *Doctors*

1244 J.S.: doctor always wants you to take your pants off,  
1245 "take your pants off and get in there  
1246 I'll speak to you with no pants.

1247 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1248 J.S.: you take your pants off  
 1249 and then I'll tell you  
 1250 what I think about everything.  
 1251 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1252 J.S.: I speak to no one wearing pants."  
 1253 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1254 J.S.: it's a little psychological leverage for him  
 1255 in any difference of opinion,  
 1256 "pants" always beats "no pants".  
 1257 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1258 J.S.: just once I'd like to say to that doctor  
 1259 "you know what,  
 1260 I'm not ready for you yet,  
 1261 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1262 J.S.: yeah, why don't you go back into your little office,  
 1263 I'll be in it in a minute.  
 1264 and get your pants off too."  
 1265 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1266 {applause}  
 1267 J.S.: what does he need that little office for?  
 1268 I guess he doesn't want people to see him looking  
 stuff up.  
 1269 "what the hell was that?  
 1270 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1271 J.S.: Jesus Christ that was kinda gross.  
 1272 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1273 J.S.: I'm in big trouble here,  
 1274 that wasn't the tube or the circle.  
 1275 Audience: ((laughter))

This segment describes the behavior most doctors display to their patients and it ridicules their work through exaggeration in order to make the audience laugh. Seinfeld makes use of overstatement and satire, a further subcategory of ridicule, when he directs his attack at these specific individuals.<sup>34</sup> Kane, Suls and Tedeschi (in Chapman & Foot 1977:15) state in their studies that "a satire may have the purpose of showing the absurdity of certain mannerisms, class privilege, professional pretensions, institutional rules[...]." In line 1244

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<sup>34</sup> For further details on the use of satire see Berger (1923), Koestler (1969), Kane, Suls and Tedeschi (in Chapman & Foot 1977).

Seinfeld starts mocking the doctors' habit of requiring patients to take their pants off prior to consultation and he imitates a fictitious doctor's ridiculous statement which finds its punch line in line 1252 when the doctor says: "I speak to no one wearing pants." So Seinfeld excessively exaggerates by pretending that doctors always want their patients to take their pants off and calls it their "little psychological leverage" (1.1254). With these mocking remarks Seinfeld expresses his aggressiveness and hostility towards them, so that we can classify this joke as being mainly covered by the superiority theory. He tops it when he admits that he would like to take revenge and send a doctor back to his office in order to get his pants off too (1.1258-1264). The whole segment is characterized by the use of numerous instances of hyperbole which guarantee the audience's interest and amusement. The audience shows its appreciation through laughter and applause (1.1265/1266) and therefore overtly shows solidarity with the hostility Seinfeld expresses towards the group of doctors he disparages. Before changing the topic, he profits from his audience's good mood and enhances their laughter by adding a few senseless punch lines in lines 1268/1269, 1271 and 1273/1274. Taking the whole example into consideration, we have to state that it actually represents a synthesis of private ridicule (as far

as the ridicule of doctors is concerned) and of self-deprecation, because Seinfeld also amuses his audience by rendering himself ridiculous. This leads us to the following subcategory of ridicule in which I will put the focus on self-deprecation.

### **Self-deprecation**

As already mentioned in section 10.2.(Ridicule), self-deprecation refers to the joke tellers only deriding themselves and wanting their audience to laugh at their own expense. This joking technique can only rarely be found in Seinfeld's performance. At the very beginning of his performance he provides an example of self-deprecation:

#### *Introduction*

24 J.S.: this is the Broadhurst Theater.  
25 it's a .. uh,  
26 ((clears his throat))  
27 legendary theater,  
28 I know .. nothing about it.  
29 Audience: ((laughter))

He starts speaking of the "Broadhurst Theater" (1.24) and starts preparing the funny ending of his talk by speaking of a "legendary theater" (1.27). At this point the audience is not aware of the fact that the line serves as the pivot for the punch line to follow. This becomes evident in the next line when Seinfeld reveals that he knows "nothing about it" (1.28). In this case, Seinfeld provides

incongruity expressed by ambiguity, which makes the audience laugh. On the one hand, he makes fun of the fame of the theater and plays with a contradiction; on the other hand, he mocks himself when he admits that he knows nothing about the theater although it is very famous, even "legendary" (1.27). This ambiguity draws laughter (1.29). Laughter also results from the surprising punch line the audience does not expect. They probably supposed that further details about the theater would be coming but instead were disappointed by the abrupt ending.

In the following, Seinfeld provides a further example of self-deprecation, when he speaks of his own experience with horseback riding and mocks his own clumsiness when he describes his level as "zero, nothing, whatever the system is" (1.2155).

### *Horses*

2155                    zero, nothing, whatever the system is.  
2156 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2157 J.S.:            I can't do it,  
2158                    is that clear enough for you?  
2159 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2160 J.S.:            I'm going where the horse wants to go, okay?  
2161 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2162 J.S.:            that's my .. level"  
2163 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2164 J.S.:            of course, they hear that,  
2165                    they start looking around,  
2166                    "all right, is Glue-Stick back yet?  
2167 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2168 J.S.:            how about Almost-Dead,  
2169                    why don't you saddle him up?"  
2170 Audience:        ((laughter))  
2171 J.S.:            so I get on this U-shaped ..  
2172                    lightning-quick steed I got here ..  
2173                    I had the only horse

2174                   you could put your feet flat on the ground  
2175                   while you're riding him.  
2176 Audience:       ((laughter))  
2177 J.S.:            I'm riding the Hammock, here.  
2178 Audience:       ((laughter))  
2179 J.S.:            looking up at my friends,  
2180                   "I don't feel like  
2181                   we all got the same kind of horse."  
2182 Audience:       ((laughter))  
2183 J.S.:            it was kind of a secure feeling,  
2184                   I could just kind of walk along with them there,  
2185                   you know.  
2186 Audience:       ((laughter))

He reinforces the audience's laughter (l.2156, 2159, 2161, 2163) by continuously presenting himself in a ridiculous way and poking fun at himself (l.2157/2158, 2160, 2162). He then even continues and reveals funny remarks by imitating the guy who asks if "Glue-Stick" (l.2166) is back yet. The horse's name causes laughter (l.2167) because it expresses the possibility that he gets glued at the horse's back so that he cannot fall down any more. He then mentions the name of another horse which is called "Almost-Dead" (l.2168), which expresses that this horse cannot run any more or at least only very slowly so that the danger of falling off is minimal. Seinfeld then makes fun of himself again when he admits that he got "the only horse you could put your feet flat on the ground while you're riding him" (l.2173-2175). This remark causes the audience's laughter (l.2176), which is increased by his following remark: "I'm riding the Hammock, here" (l.2177). He even humiliates himself by explaining that his friends had different horses

(1.2180/2181). This remark is meant to contribute to the recognition of his complete inability to ride horses and therefore causes laughter again (1.2182). The next lines describe the "secure feeling" (1.2183) he had with his horse, which is an understatement and therefore provokes further laughter (1.2186). Throughout the whole segment, Seinfeld puts the main emphasis on making himself look foolish and making the audience laugh at his expense particularly with the help of hyperbole.

To conclude the section on self-deprecation, I chose the following excerpt taken from the segment *Late TV*, because it provides an excellent example in which self-deprecation tends to turn into shared ridicule.

*Late TV*

1946 I could get into bed  
1947 and go to sleep right now.  
1948 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1949 J.S.: but I don't.  
1950 I don't go to bed,  
1951 I fight ... sleep,  
1952 and continue searching for entertainment.  
1953 Audience: ((laughter))  
1954 {applause}  
1955 J.S.: >"no, I gotta find a car blowing up,  
1956 somebody naked,  
1957 I don't care what it is, I gotta fight"<  
1958 Audience: ((laughter))  
1959 J.S.: what is this?  
1960 go to bed  
1961 the finger that hits the button on the remote control  
1962 is the last part of the human body to fall asleep.  
1963 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1964 J.S.: you're out cold,  
1965 that finger's still going,  
1966 it's still looking.  
1967 Audience: ((laughter))

Seinfeld describes his own behavior and underlines that he does not go to sleep but fights and continues "searching for entertainment" (l.1952), which provokes laughter and applause (l.1953/1954) at his own expense. Humor derives in this case from the incongruity shown in the fact that he is tired and wants to go to bed and his contradictory behavior when he forcibly tries to stay awake. In the following lines, he ridicules the situation when he says: "the finger that hits the button on the remote control is the last part of the human body to fall asleep" (l.1961/1962). The absurdity of not even being able to control his physical movements anymore makes the audience laugh (l.1963). Seinfeld then pursues his strategy of introducing a chain of punch lines and adds further remarks about his fight when he describes that the "finger's still going, it's still looking" (l.1965/1966), which makes the audience burst into real laughter. In this example, Seinfeld proves excellently that successful self-deprecation makes the audience recognize their own foibles and laugh at themselves. This is already evidence by the very early reaction of the audience in line 1948 even if they first only laugh with restraint. But the following lines make the audience recognize their own foolish behavior and make them react with laughter and applause (l.1953/1954, 1958, 1963, 1967). Seinfeld provokes the audience's recognition of

their own foibles by mentioning that "the finger that hits the button on the remote control is the last part of the human body to fall asleep" (1.1961/1962). He decides to speak of the "human body" in general and not just of his. This observation demonstrates the fact that self-deprecation often tends to turn into shared ridicule, which I will have a closer look at in the following section.

### **Shared Ridicule**

According to Wilson (1979), shared ridicule occurs when the jokers deride themselves and their audience at the same time. I focus in this section on examples that ridicule situations we are all familiar with and in which Seinfeld directs his talk to the audience because he wants to emphasize that they cannot deny that they behave similarly in the situations he is describing. As mentioned in the section before, successful self-deprecation tends to turn into shared ridicule. But the examples chosen in the following section differ from those in the previous section in that Seinfeld himself is no longer the focus of attention and therefore does not aim to make only himself look foolish.

The first example of shared ridicule is given at the very beginning of his performance when Seinfeld speaks of

phones and the absurd behavior people demonstrate in dealing with them.

### *Phones*

44                   oh the phones,  
45                   what we have got nuts with the phones, haven't we?  
46                   we're crazy with the phones.  
47                   this guy thinks he needs that phone.  
48    Audience:    ((laughter))  
49    J.S.:         >the thing that amuses me the most about the phone  
                  machine is the-<  
50                   how often we call people now,  
51                   trying to get the machine.  
52    Audience:    ((laughter))  
53                   [{{beginning applause}}]  
54    J.S.:         [that's what's happened now with the machine]  
55                   if it's the person that picks up,  
56                   then you're ...  
57                   "oh, uh ..  
58    Audience:    ((laughter))  
59                   {applause}  
60    J.S.:         I, uh ...,  
61                   oh I didn't- I didn't think you would be there.  
62    Audience:    ((laughter))  
63    J.S.:         I - I just wanted to leave a message saying:  
64    Audience:    ((laughter))  
65    J.S.:         sorry I missed you".  
66    Audience:    ((laughter))

From the beginning on, he makes the audience aware of the fact that the frequent use of phones, a topic we are all familiar with, is completely unnecessary. Seinfeld stresses this by introducing his talk with the interjection "oh" (1.44) and a following question which directly addresses the audience (1.45). It is interesting that Seinfeld uses the word "machine" in this context (1.51) and even repeats it a few lines further down (1.54). By speaking of a "machine" instead of the word "phone", he dramatizes the situation and thus earns the audience's appreciation and

enhances their laughter. From line 55 onward, he describes the situation and people's absurd behavior in further detail and reveals that they are calling someone without really wanting them to respond and in case the person really picks the phone up, callers are astonished and do not know what to say (1.55/56). Using paralanguage and imitating one such caller in the following lines, he enhances the funniness of his story so that he may earn the audience's appreciation in form of laughter and applause (1.58/59, 62, 64). In line 65 he finally mocks the caller again when he reveals the punch line, saying: "sorry I missed you", which is a completely unnecessary sentence that is spoken out of surprise that someone has really picked up the phone. This statement causes laughter (1.66). This joke clearly shows that shared ridicule does not necessarily always have to express hostility and superiority, but may also serve to express social criticism and persuasion. We are all aware of the fact that phones have an important place in our lives and we cannot deny that we often use them without really having an immediate cause.

Another example of shared ridicule can be found in the segment on supermarkets. Seinfeld makes fun of the customer's "ritual" of buying milk. I decided to mention this excerpt in the section on shared ridicule because

Seinfeld not only mocks the group of customers he explicitly talks about, but actually mocks all of us and reminds us of our foibles when making our daily purchases. Seinfeld works with hyperbole and wildly exaggerates the customers' uncertainty about whether they have milk or not, and dramatizes this dilemma. He deals with a completely unimportant topic, but because of the fact that we are all familiar with this banal uncertainty, his story becomes stupid and makes the audience join in with laughter.

### *Supermarkets*

869 J.S.: milk is a big problem for people on the supermarket.  
870 they're never quite sure if they have it,  
871 if they need it,  
872 they bury it way in the back, in the supermarket.  
873 you gotta find it,  
874 you gotta back your way through all the displays,  
875 "ah, there it is.  
876 there is the milk.  
877 do we have any milk?"  
878 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
879 J.S.: people are never really sure if they have milk.  
880 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
881 J.S.: "I think we have milk,  
882 we might have °milk°.  
883 I know there's a carton in there,  
884 °I don't know how much is in it°."  
885 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
886 J.S.: "well, what should we do?"  
887 because you wanna be sure.  
888 there's nothing worse  
889 than thinking you have milk  
890 and not having it.  
891 you know,  
892 you got the bowl setup,  
893 the cereal,  
894 the spoon,  
895 the napkin,  
896 the TV,  
897 the newspaper,  
898 everything is ready to go.  
899 you're gonna lift up the carton  
900 and it's too light  
901 "ah"  
902 Audience: ((laughter))

903                    {applause}  
904 J.S.:            "oh no  
905                    too light"  
906                    or sometimes you think you need milk,  
907                    "hey, we better pick up some milk."  
908                    like many of you are thinking right now.  
909 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
910 J.S.:            "you know he's right,  
911                    maybe we should pick up some milk."  
912 Audience:        ((laughter))  
913 J.S.:            so you'll pick up some milk on the way home.  
914                    and then you'll discover you already had milk.  
915 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
916 J.S.:            and now you got way too much milk.  
917 Audience:        ((laughter))

Seinfeld describes the whole preparation for eating a bowl of cereal with milk (1.892-898) and then delivers the punch line by just giving a desperate sigh "ah" (1.901), which clarifies that he has not got any milk anymore. We see that the brief interjection is thoroughly sufficient for conveying an understanding of the situation to the audience and it thus causes their laughter and applause (1.902/903). Seinfeld verbalizes the whole punch line in lines 904 and 905 before he starts talking about the opposite situation when people think they need milk and so pick some up to be on the safe side (1.906/907). The audience reacts with some weak laughter because they know the situation and Seinfeld continues directly addressing his listeners (1.910, 913/914) and comes to the first punch line in line 914 when he says: "and then you'll discover you already had milk." This remark causes weak laughter, but Seinfeld has not finished yet and adds "and now you got way too much milk"

(1.916) in order to explain the opposite problem one can be confronted with when buying milk in the supermarket. This second punch line causes real laughter and allows Seinfeld to profit from the audience's good mood when he keeps adding even funnier punch lines in order to enhance the laughter. Again we can refer to the incongruity theories. Seinfeld first uses the strategy of making fun of the situation when people have forgotten to buy milk before he amuses his audience by revealing what happens if they have too much milk and desperately try to cope with that problem.

Seinfeld then begins a new story by claiming that women are curious about men. This introductory line already shows that the following topic will be shared with half of the audience. The following lines (1.1363-1372) serve to introduce his new story and to build up a sort of tension before delivering the punch line. From the beginning on he starts ridiculing men's behavior towards women.

#### *Men & Women*

1362 J.S.:           and I know women are curious about men.  
1363                   women wanna know what men are thinking.  
1364                   I know women are looking at me,  
1365                   right now.  
1366                   and you're wondering  
1367                   "I wonder what goes on in that little brain of his."  
1368 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
1369 J.S.:            I could tell you the truth,  
1370                   if you would like to know  
1371                   what men are really thinking.  
1372                   would you like to know?  
1373 Audience:        ((laughter))

1374 {applause}  
1375 J.S.: I will tell you.  
1376 nothing.  
1377 Audience: ((laughter))  
1378 {applause}  
1379 J.S.: we're not thinking anything.  
1380 we're just walking around ..  
1381 looking around.  
1382 Audience: ((laughter))  
1383 J.S.: this is the only natural inclination of men.  
1384 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1385 J.S.: we like women.  
1386 we want women.  
1387 but that's pretty much as far as we've thought.  
1388 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1389 J.S.: that's why we're honking car horns,  
1390 yelling from construction sites,  
1391 these are the best ideas we've had so far.  
1392 Audience: ((laughter))  
1393 J.S.: we're working on some new programs,  
1394 but it's not easy when your mind's a blank.  
1395 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1396 J.S.: honking the car horn to me ..,  
1397 that's the lowest level.  
1398 this is the last living brain cell,  
1399 comes up with this one.  
1400 what is this?  
1401 he's in the car,  
1402 she's on the street,  
1403 "bip bip brrrrrrrr."  
1404 Audience: ((laughter, gets even stronger))  
1405 {applause}  
1406 J.S.: what- what does he think,  
1407 "well, I guess I made my point."  
1408 Audience: ((laughter))  
1409 J.S.: what is she supposed to do,  
1410 kick off the heels,  
1411 start running after the car.  
1412 Audience: ((laughter))  
1413 J.S.: grab on to the bumper.  
1414 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1415 J.S.: the car comes to a stop,  
1416 "it's a good thing you honked  
1417 I had no idea how you felt"  
1418 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1419 J.S.: why do men do these things?  
1420 why are they acting these ways?  
1421 why are men rude, obnoxious, getting drunk,  
1422 screaming out, peeling out rubber,  
1423 making kissing noises, why?  
1424 why?  
1425 telling awful jokes,  
1426 why do men behave so badly?  
1427 I know what you ladies are thinking,  
1428 "no no, not my guy,  
1429 I'm working with him,  
1430 he's coming along."  
1431 Audience: ((laughter))  
1432 J.S.: no he's not.

1433 Audience: ((laughter))  
1434 J.S.: he's tricking you.  
1435 Audience: ((laughter))

First he tries to get the audience's interest by imitating what they are thinking in line 1367. This remark causes weak laughter (l.1368) because it approaches the audience in an indirect way. Then he makes them more and more curious about what men are really thinking when he says: "I could tell you the truth, if you would like to know what men are really thinking. would you like to know?" (l.1369-1372). This final question is already the reason for laughter and applause (l.1373/1374). We see that Seinfeld decides to use the indirect way of asking his audience and uses several modal verbs (could, would like) with which he expresses positive politeness towards his audience (Lakoff 1973 and Brown and Levinson 1978). By asking this question, Seinfeld does not expect an answer but just wants his audience to become attentive. Everybody then waits for the answer but Seinfeld first puts another remark in between when he repeats that he will tell them the answer (l.1375). This line does not reveal any new information. But this strategy of exact timing serves, on the one hand, to gain some planning time and, on the other hand, to make the audience more curious about the ensuing punch line which consists of only one word, namely "nothing" (l.1376). This

punch line causes laughter and applause although it does not have any content or sense, but the disappointment the audience is feeling, makes them laugh and express their appreciation (1.1377/1378). Seinfeld then adds further remarks which serve to keep up the audience's amusement (1.1379-1383). During this segment, he ridicules men's behavior towards women and therefore even mocks himself, particularly when mentioning the method of "honking car horns" (1.1389) and "yelling from construction sites" (1.1390). He tops it with his statement that "these are the best ideas we've had so far" in line 1391, which causes the audience's laughter. His following remarks serve to enhance the listeners' laughter by emphasizing men's stupidity and calling their minds even "a blank" (1.1394), which reminds us of his mockery of the cab drivers in New York (1.146). Seinfeld's strategy in the next lines (1.1396-1403) is to constantly build the audience's laughter when he describes what he thinks before he honks the car horn. The introductory lines serve to keep up the audience's interest because they all want to know why men behave in that way. From lines 1427 onward, he puts himself in the women's position by claiming that they are thinking that their men are different because they are working with them (1.1428-1430). This remark causes laughter which is sustained because Seinfeld opposes the women's attitude in line 1432

and even tops it by claiming that men are tricking them (1.1434). Through these aggressive remarks, he clarifies the power relations. He controls the audience which his performance and therefore expresses superiority over them.

The previous examples have affirmed the assumption that successful self-deprecation turns into shared ridicule. In all examples Seinfeld includes himself and indirectly includes the audience when talking about various situations we are all familiar with, as shown in the example of the phones, the supermarket, and men's behavior towards women. In delivering his material, Seinfeld manages to make us laugh at our own expense because he makes us aware of our own behavior in certain situations. His skill in visualizing it makes us react with laughter.

### **13.1.2. Intonation and Paralanguage**

In section 10.1. (Paralanguage), I have referred to Apte (1985), who deals with the verbal performance as the basis for humor and stresses the importance of paralinguistic elements in his research. He considers "nonverbal expressive movements, especially gestures" to be "an important element of the key of verbal humor" (1985:205). As will be shown in the following sections, paralanguage also plays a crucial role in stand-up comedy; Apte states that "gestures are important in humor that depends heavily

on performance and acting" (1985:205). Throughout his entire performance Seinfeld often uses various forms of intonation shifts and body language. The use of paralanguage helps his audience to visualize aspects of what he is talking about and thus supports the humorous effect of his performance. The following examples display a selection of passages in which Seinfeld employs the technique of making use of intonation and paralanguage in order to present a lively and varied performance.

When talking about phones at the very beginning of his performance, Seinfeld starts making use of intonation shifts, which can be seen in the following extract:

#### *Phones*

40 J.S.: I'm surprised it doesn't happen more often though,  
41 because it's hard to  
42 ((whispering))  
43 "oh wait, put it on the vibrate only."  
44 oh the phones,  
45 what we have got nuts with the phones, haven't we?  
46 we're crazy with the phones.  
47 this guy thinks he needs that phone.  
48 Audience: ((laughter))  
49 J.S.: >the thing that amuses me the most about the phone  
machine is the-<  
50 how often we call people now,  
51 trying to get the machine.  
52 Audience: ((laughter))  
53 [{{beginning applause}}

Seinfeld holds the audience's attention by shifting his voice in lines 42 and 43 in order not to give a monotonous performance and risk losing the listeners' interest. By whispering, he forces the audience to listen carefully and

to focus their attention on his performance. In the following, Seinfeld changes the rhythm of his voice. First he speaks very distinctly when he reveals the information in line 47, before he starts speaking more quickly than the surrounding discourse (1.49) in order to keep his audience interested. He speaks so quickly that it is rather difficult to get all the constituent words he mentions. But it is precisely this strategy of changing the intonation from a slow delivery to a rapid delivery that provides entertainment. Moreover, this change helps him to emphasize and reveal the content of his joke which serves to attempt social criticism by pointing on the stupidity of the frequent use of phones. This altering rhythm in combination with a topic we are all aware of is rewarded with laughter (1.52) and applause (1.53). In this case, humor not only derives from Seinfeld's description of the absurdity of the people's behavior, but also from the technique Seinfeld uses in order to enhance the funniness of the joke.

When Seinfeld mocks the high security levels at the airport, he also uses a shift of intonation in order to enhance the laughter. One example can be found at the beginning when he imitates an x-ray machine in lines 199 and 200 in order to keep his audience's interest and amusement.

## *Air Travel*

199                   ((imitates x-ray machine))  
200                   rrrr rrrr rrrr.  
201                   he's looking in the TV set.  
202                   I - I always look in the TV set,  
203                   I - I cannot make out one object.  
204 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
205 J.S.:            I don't know what this guy is doing.  
206 Audience:       ((laughter))  
207 J.S.:            it's my own bags,  
208                   I can't understand one thing:  
209 Audience:       ((laughter))  
210 J.S.:            "what was that?"  
211                   he's going "what is that,  
212                   a hairdryer with a scope on it?  
213                   that looks okay,  
214                   keep it moving."  
215 Audience:       ((laughter))  
216 J.S.:            "some sort of bowling ball candle?  
217                   that's fine,  
218                   just we don't want you to hold up the line,  
219 Audience:       ((laughter))  
220 J.S.:            don't hold up the line."  
221 Audience:       ((laughter))

Seinfeld describes the security staff's behavior (1.201-203) and uses these introductory lines to simulate a dialogue between the security personnel (1.210-214) when they look at a hairdryer and are surprised at the scope on it (1.212). Nevertheless, they don't check it and let it pass without asking the traveler any questions (1.213/214). His intonation expressing boredom serves to stress the indifference on the part of the airport staff. Seinfeld exaggerates this attitude in lines 216 to 220 by showing that they actually allow the strangest things, such as a "bowling ball candle" (1.216) to pass without opening the bag. The punch line "we don't want you to hold up the line" (1.218) is repeated in line 220: "don't hold up the line",

which allows him to reinforce the effect and keep the audience laughing. The last line is spoken in a very monotonous way which stresses the regularity and the sheer force of habit with which the personnel do their work. With regard to the whole segment, I can conclude that Seinfeld regularly modulates his voice in order to enhance the audience's reaction. Nevertheless, he preserves his serious manner of talking about the topic and does not let the audience influence him with their mood. Through using hyperbole, Seinfeld expresses his hostile thoughts towards the personnel and therefore constantly reveals power and superiority over them. The audience joins his attitude by showing its appreciation.

In line 237 we have an example in which Seinfeld combines the use of voice shift with body language when he wants to know if the audience is aware of the kinds of faucets he is talking about. He first changes his voice and speaks more quickly than in the surrounding area. As in the example above (*Phones*), this change of rhythm on the one hand, and the absurdity of his statements ("hey, I got a little water there" (l.239) and "oh, oh, another couple drops" (l.242)) on the other hand, enhance the humor.

#### *Air Travel*

237 J.S.: do you know the ones I mean,  
238 when you gotta go

239 >"hey, I got a little water there<  
 240 Audience: ((laughter))  
 241 {applause}  
 242 J.S.: >oh, oh, another couple of drops"<  
 243 Audience: ((laughter))  
 244 J.S.: what- what is it that they think we would do  
 245 if we could have the faucet?  
 246 just turn them all on full,  
 247 run out into the parking lot,  
 248 laughing, pushing each other >into the bushes?<  
 249 Audience: ((laughter))  
 250 J.S.: "COME ON, THE WATER'S ON, let's go.  
 251 Audience: ((laughter))  
 252 {applause}  
 253 J.S.: I turned it on full blast"  
 254 Audience: ((laughter))  
 255 J.S.: "you idiot, we're businessmen,  
 256 we're gonna miss our plane  
 257 WHO CARES? WATER"  
 258 Audience: ((laughter))

On the DVD we can see that Seinfeld makes use of various facial expressions, even grimaces, in simulating the travelers' surprising reaction. These forms of nonverbal communication are the reason that the audience appreciates his performance. In the following, he lines up exaggerations and hypothesis (l.244-248) before switching to a further punch line in line 250: "COME ON, THE WATER'S ON, let's go [...] I turned it on full blast" (l.250, 253). He really cries it out and bombards his listeners with a chain of punch lines (l.255-257): "you idiot, we're businessmen, we're gonna miss our plane" and "WHO CARES? WATER". During the whole segment, the audience has no opportunity to calm down and keeps laughing because of Seinfeld's extremely extroverted style. Seinfeld runs over the whole scene making crazy movements and therefore

manages to keep them laughing through his excellent performance in which he repeatedly changes the rhythm of speaking and the tone of his voice.

At the end of this segment, he provides a further example when he talks about the unnecessary equipment in the bathrooms.

### *Air Travel*

409                    I mean, is the Wolfman flying  
410 Audience:        [((laughter))]  
411 J.S.:             [in there or who'd ..?]  
412                    on the full moon,  
413                    just goes  
414                    ((imitates Wolfman))  
415                    "aaarrrrrr  
416                    click click click  
417                    aaarrrrr  
418                    click click click".

When Seinfeld provides a possible reason for the installation of the used razor blades slots and mentions "the Wolfman flying" (1.409), he emphasizes the funny effect by imitating the sounds and the expression the Wolfman makes, (1.415, 417) and those the razor makes (1.416, 418). The whole passage is an excellent example of Seinfeld's skill in performing and combining verbal humor with non-verbal humor. He knows exactly how to use body language and intonation in order to make the audience appreciate the show.

As a final example of Seinfeld's use of intonation shift and paralanguage, I have chosen an extract from the

segment *Scuba Diving*, in which Seinfeld uses a kind of a song to enhance the laughter.

### *Scuba Diving*

1748 I consider myself something of a sportsman...  
1749 been scuba diving..  
1750 another great activity  
1751 where your main goal is to .. not die.  
1752 Audience: ((laughter))  
1753 J.S.: that's pretty much all I thought about that day, just:  
1754 ((singing))  
1755 "don't die, don't die, don't die, don't die"  
1756 Audience: ((laughter))  
1757 J.S.: >"there's a fish, there's a rock  
1758 who cares, don't die.<  
1759 ((singing))  
1760 I don't wanna die, don't let me die,  
1761 let's swim and breathe and live.  
1762 because living is good  
1763 and dying ... not as good."  
1764 Audience: ((laughter))  
1765 {applause}

Seinfeld continues, changing the rhythm of his voice and singing more quickly: >"there's a fish, there's a rock who cares, don't die.< [...] I don't wanna die, don't let me die, let's swim and breathe and live. because living is good and dying ... not as good" (l.1757-1763). Seinfeld causes laughter and applause with his presentation.

To conclude the whole section, we can sum up that intonation and paralanguage represent two of the most frequent techniques Seinfeld makes use of in his performance. As far as the shift of intonation is concerned, this can be proved by listening to the tape. Watching the DVD provides numerous examples showing the point at which Seinfeld uses gestures to reinforce the

effect of his story and, particularly, to keep his audience interested. He always endeavors to make eye contact with the audience and to use his hands to support what he is talking about. The combination of intonation change and the use of gestures keeps the performance lively and maintains the audience's attentiveness and interest. The use of gestures proves important for humor that depends on performance and acting. There are many examples of Seinfeld's stories that are not funny because of their content but rather his style of performance. Gestures serve to make certain situations more graphic and can therefore render numerous jokes successful.

### **13.1.3. Repetition**

Repetition is considered to be one of the most frequent techniques used in joke-telling sessions. Its main aim is to determine the rhythm of the joke performance (cf. Bergson (1911), Freud (1905/1960), Nilsen (1978), Tannen (1989), Norrick (1993, 1993a)). Repetition serves to dramatize situations and to cause humor because of "the tension created by some kind of a series being established" (Berger 1983:46). Repetition serves to strengthen the rhythmic pattern of a joke telling session. Throughout his whole performance, Seinfeld regularly works with the feature of repetition as a means to keep up the audience's

attention and thus their understanding of his jokes. This repetitive structure enhances the humorous effect of his jokes.

In the following, Seinfeld uses repetition in form of alliteration and anaphora in order to give his joke a sort of rhythmic pattern.

### *Air Travel*

268 J.S.: "tuna sandwich, 13 dollars,  
269 Audience: ((laughter))  
270 J.S.: that's what we ...  
271 tuna's very rare, here.  
272 Audience: ((laughter))  
273 J.S.: it's all a tiny world in the airplane, isn't it?  
274 there's always that  
275 tiny table there,  
276 tiny computer,  
277 °everyone's° in a little cramped seat,  
278 tiny food,  
279 tiny utensils,  
280 tiny liquor bottles,  
281 tiny bathroom,  
282 tiny sink,  
283 tiny mirror,  
284 tiny faucets.  
285 so it's a small problem,  
286 gonna be a slight delay,  
287 we're gonna be a little late.  
288 Audience: ((laughter))

It is obvious that Seinfeld plays with the repetition of the sound 't' during the whole excerpt. Lines 268, 270, 271 and 274 start with terms that begin with the letter 't'. The following fifteen lines are pronounced without any interruption and Seinfeld plays with the word "tiny", repeating it ten times throughout the whole section (l.273, 275, 276, 278-284). This repetitive structure provides a

rhythmic pattern for his joke and serves to put all the attention and stress on the small size, to highlight the absurdity and to heighten the ridiculousness of his story. In the last lines, we realize that Seinfeld has stopped repeating the adjective "tiny" and makes use of semantically related adjectives when he speaks of a "small problem" (l.285), a "slight delay" (l.286) and being a "little late" (l.287).

A further example of anaphoric use of repetition can be found in the section about the differences between men and women. I found it an interesting example because it also clarifies Seinfeld's use of parallelism. He not only uses the same beginnings but even uses the same sentence structure for all his remarks.

#### *Men & Women*

1379 J.S.: we're not thinking anything.  
1380 we're just walking around ..  
1381 looking around.  
1382 Audience: ((laughter))  
1383 J.S.: this is the only natural inclination of men.  
1384 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1385 J.S.: we like women.  
1386 we want women.

First he uses a parallel structure "we're not thinking anything. we're just walking around .. looking around" (l.1379-1381) and takes it up again in lines 1385 and 1386 by saying: "we like women. we want women".

After having analyzed selected data in which repetition is used as a strategy to gain planning time and to give the joke a rhythmic pattern, I want to focus in the last part of this section on repetition used as a means to stress the humorous effect of the joking material.

An example can be found in the segment in which Seinfeld complains about the thankless second place in sport events.

### *Olympics*

1652 J.S.: "it's a hundredth of a second,  
1653 what was the difference in the - in the marching,  
there?  
1654 what was it?"  
1655 "well, it was like from now ...  
1656 from now, n-now, now, n-now,  
1657 Audience: ((laughter))  
1658 J.S.: n-n-now, n, n, eh.  
1659 Audience: ((laughter))  
1660 J.S.: that was it.  
1661 it's was it, eh, oh"  
1662 Audience: ((laughter))  
1663 J.S.: "I trained,  
1664 I worked out,  
1665 I exercised my entire life,  
1666 I never had a date,  
1667 I never had a drink,  
1668 I never had a beer,  
1669 I was doing push-ups since I was a fetus ..  
1670 I flew half way around the world,  
1671 everybody I knew in my whole life was there,  
1672 the guy shot off the gun and then .. oh"  
1673 Audience: ((laughter))  
1674 {applause}

From line 1652 onward, he continues imitating one of the people who is trying to figure out the reasons why he or she could not win the gold medal but only got the silver medal instead. He cuts off his sentence in line 1653 before

he restarts by repeating his previous remark. He even repeats the question in line 1654 before imitating the athlete who is trying to respond beginning with the discourse marker "well" in line 1655. In lines 1656 and 1658, Seinfeld reveals the punch line in which he makes the athlete stutter and say: "from now, n-now, now, n-now, [...] n-n-now, n, n, eh.". This stuttering shows the athlete's hesitation when he speaks and makes the audience conclude that he had reacted in a similar way when he had started to run. In line 1658 Seinfeld picks the stuttering up to keep up the audience's laughter (l.1659). Lines 1660 and 1661 confirm the audience's assumption when Seinfeld makes the athlete admit that "that was it" and "it's was it, eh, oh". Both remarks earn the audience's appreciation (l.1662). From line 1663 onward, Seinfeld lines up the athlete's preparation for the competition and falls back upon formulaic structure. Each and every sentence starts with the pronoun "I" (l.1663-1670) and Seinfeld follows a parallel structure, particularly in the sentences from lines 1666 to 1668, by repeating the word "never" three times in order to increase the dramatic effect of the story he tells us. The audience is impressed by the length of the list of what the athlete has done and not done and this tying structure prompts the audience's appreciation (l.1673/1674).

In conclusion, consider the importance of repetition for humor in general, but in particular for verbal humor as we encounter it in stand-up comedy. The examples have proved that the comedian can use repetition in order to pursue various aims. The first examples I have chosen emphasize the importance of repetition as a means of stalling for planning time. The comedian uses this strategy to protect himself, gaining additional time that allows him to pretend a spontaneous reaction in the following. Apart from this use, the comedian can also repeat words he has used himself when he gives his joke a rhythmic pattern as displayed by the example cited in the second paragraph of this segment. The last example chosen stresses the use of repetition in order to strengthen the humorous effect of the joking material and therefore to enhance the audience's reaction. In the following, I will have a look at a further example in connection with hyperbole.

#### **13.1.4. Hyperbole**

Throughout his routine, Seinfeld makes use of hyperbole to strengthen the humorous effect of his funny stories, not only through the content but also his performance techniques. This technique helps him to make sure that most of the audience will get the punch line of his joke. Most of the time he uses hyperbole to overstate a situation all

Americans are familiar with. One excellent example of hyperbole in connection with repetition used as a means to stress but also to ridicule a situation is taken from the segment in which Seinfeld tells us about his addiction to candy when he was a little child. The use of hyperbole expressed with the help of repetition helps Seinfeld to place the focus on the aspect through which he is trying to get attention and to create humor. In this example, Seinfeld not only makes the audience laugh by talking about his own childhood, but intends for the audience to remember a similar situation from their childhood. Therefore, Seinfeld's focus in this example is actually not to present himself as the butt of the joke but to include the audience and to make them aware of this ridiculous behavior shared by all American children at Halloween by using hyperbolic and repetitive structures throughout the whole extract.

### *Halloween*

472 J.S.: one thing I do like of being down there  
473 with the old people is  
474 that it makes me feel like  
475 I'm little again,  
476 like a little kid.  
477 and when you're a kid,  
478 you can eat amazing amounts of food.  
479 and that all just candy,  
480 that's all I ate when I was a kid.  
481 the only thought I had, growing up,  
482 was "get  
483 (1.0)  
484 candy."  
485 Audience: ((laughter))  
486 J.S.: that was my only thought in my brain,  
487 for the 10 years of human life.  
488 just >get candy, get candy, get candy, get candy, get

candy, get candy.<  
 489 family, friends, school,  
 490 these were just obstacles in the way of getting more  
 candy.  
 491 Audience: ((laughter))  
 492 J.S.: that's why you had to teach kids  
 493 not to take candy from strangers  
 494 if they're playing in a playground.  
 495 and they can barely understand it.  
 496 "don't ..."  
 497 "no candy?  
 498 from .. strangers?  
 499 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 500 J.S.: alright.  
 501 candy, strangers, no candy.  
 502 alright, because otherwise I'm taking the candy,  
 503 anywhere I can get it."  
 504 Audience: ((laughter))  
 505 J.S.: there's such candy moron, idiot brains,  
 506 "if this man has candy  
 507 >I'm going with him, goodbye,  
 508 don't care what happens to me.  
 509 Audience: ((laughter))  
 510 J.S.: [get candy, get candy, get candy.]<  
 511 Audience: [((laughter))]  
 512 J.S.: "no, don't go, they'll torture you,  
 513 they'll kidnap you!"  
 514 "it doesn't matter,  
 515 he has an 'oh Henry',  
 516 I have to take that chance.  
 517 Audience: ((laughter))  
 518 J.S.: get candy, get candy, get candy."  
 519 so the first time you hear the concept of Halloween,  
 520 when you're a kid,  
 521 remember the first time you even heard about it,  
 522 it's like .. your brain can't even ...  
 523 "what is this?  
 524 Audience: ((laughter))  
 525 J.S.: who's giving out candy,  
 526 someone's giving out candy?  
 527 Audience: ((laughter))  
 528 J.S.: who - who is giving out this candy?  
 529 everyone that we know is  
 530 Audience: [((laughter))]  
 531 J.S.: [just giving out candy?]

From the beginning on, Seinfeld overstates the situation in pointing out his strong desire to "get candy" (1.482, 484), which makes the audience laugh (1.485). By constantly repeating the expressions "the" or my "only thought" (1.481, 486) and "get candy" (1.488), and by calling

"family, friends, school" (1.489) "obstacles" (1.490), Seinfeld totally exaggerates and adds to the humor of his description. Up to that point, Seinfeld makes the audience profit from his own silly behavior. In the following lines (1.492-503), he laughs at the fear all parents have, which is that their children might be approached by strangers and he mocks this situation by giving the advice "that's why you had to teach kids not to take candy from strangers if they are playing in the playground" (1.492-494). These lines now serve to direct ridicule at the parents, which expresses hostility and superiority over them. The following lines serve to emphasize his mocking when he describes how he had decided not to listen to his parents by saying "if this man has candy >I'm going with him, goodbye, don't care what happens to me [...] get candy, get candy, get candy"< (1.506-510). This remark brings laughter from the audience and stresses Seinfeld's absurd desire to get candy at all costs, no matter how dangerous it might be to accompany strangers. In lines 512 and 513, Seinfeld shifts from his own point of view to that of the parents and overstates the situation by imitating a desperate mother or father who is trying to prevent their child from going with a stranger. But when he starts imitating the child in lines 514 to 516, he ridicules the situation and makes the audience laugh (1.517). Throughout the whole

segment, Seinfeld uses hyperbole to vastly overstate the situation and go beyond the anticipated exaggeration. Thus he uses himself as an example of a situation every American is familiar with. By exaggerating a child's strong will to get candy, he ridicules the compulsion to have a big bag full of candy at all costs. Seinfeld uses the sentence "to get candy" to generalize a situation familiar to all Americans and uses hyperbole to shed light on a well-known fact. During the whole excerpt, Seinfeld demonstrates that repetition can be used to exaggerate a situation. In almost every line, he repeats the word candy (l.479, 484, 488, 490, 493, 497, 501/502, 505/506, 510, 518, 525/526, 528, 531). The frequent use of the term emphasizes the funniness and the absurdity of his story in which he incessantly stresses that he is addicted to it and tries to get it at all costs. Sometimes he uses the term even twice in one line, as in line 501. Moreover, he pronounces the term "get candy" very quickly in order to express the nervousness of the child and repeats it six times in line 488, and three times in lines 510 and 518. In lines 525 to 531 we see that Seinfeld not only repeats the term "candy", but whole structures, such as "who is giving out candy" or "giving out candy" (l.525/526, 528, 531).

In the following lines, Seinfeld speaks of embarrassing situations, for example when the rubber band

breaks and snaps away; he imitates the child as he or she is desperately trying to fix it so that he can continue collecting candy.

570                   you go to your first house  
571                   "trick or -snap- it broke,  
572 Audience:       ((laughter))  
573 J.S.:            I don't believe it".  
574                   "wait up, I gotta fix it, you guys.  
575                   come on.  
576                   wait up".

Seinfeld changes his voice and expresses, on the one hand, the child's panic and, on the other hand, the fear that the mask will not be repaired by the time the door is opened. By exaggerating the child's hectic behavior, he ridicules a common phenomenon, which he enhances in the following lines:

644                   you're trying to breathe through that,  
645                   remember that little hole,  
646                   it gets all sweaty in there,  
647 Audience:       ((laughter))  
648 J.S.:            ((imitates very deep breath))  
649 Audience:       ((laughter))  
650 J.S.:            and the mask starts slicing into your eyeballs,  
651                   "I can't see,  
652                   I can't breathe,  
653                   but you gotta get the candy,  
654                   let's keep going."  
655 Audience:       ((laughter))  
656 J.S.:            about a half-hour into it,  
657                   you take that mask,  
658                   "oh, the HELL with it"  
659 Audience:       ((laughter))  
660 J.S.:            ((imitates doorbell))  
661                   "bing bong",  
662                   "it's me,  
663                   gimme the candy"  
664 Audience:       ((laughter))  
665                   {applause}  
666 J.S.:            "I'm Superman, look at the pant legs,  
667 Audience:       ((laughter))  
668 J.S.:            whatta hell is the difference"

669 Audience: ((laughter))  
670 {applause}  
671 J.S.: remember those last few Halloweens,  
672 getting a little too old for it.  
673 Audience: ((laughter))  
674 J.S.: just kind of going through the motions.  
675 Audience: ((laughter))  
676 J.S.: "bing bong",  
677 "come on lady, let's go.  
678 Halloween, doorbells, candy,  
679 let's pick up the pace in there."  
680 Audience: ((laughter))

Seinfeld reveals his skill in performing by imitating deep breathing (l.648), running over the whole stage, and adding the final touch by imitating a child who says: "I can't see, I can't breathe, but you gotta get the candy, let's keep going" (l.651-654). In the next lines, he expresses the disgusted behavior of a child who cannot bear the mask any more and decides to throw it off with the words: "oh, the HELL with it" (l.658). Seinfeld pronounces the word 'hell' with heavy stress to emphasize the child's disgust and describes the child's further attempt to get candy even without wearing a mask (l.661-680). The audience seems to be enthusiastic with his performance and keeps laughing and applauding all the time (l.659, 664/665, 667, 669/670, 673, 675, 680). By imitating deep breath (l.648) and the sound of a doorbell (l.660/661), Seinfeld gets the audience to visualize the situation and therefore strengthens the funniness. During the whole segment, Seinfeld profits again from his audience's shared knowledge. Everybody is familiar with the situation as such, so that Seinfeld can fully

concentrate on his ridiculous performance of his material. In analyzing this segment, we can recognize that Seinfeld not only invents material to make the audience laugh. I am convinced that he is remembering a real situation he has perhaps experienced himself when he talks about the child who cannot bear his mask any more.

The following example proves again that Seinfeld creates humor by making use of shared knowledge and hyperbole when he speaks of people's uncertainty about whether they have milk or not. He totally exaggerates the situation when people buy milk although they still have some at home, and ridicules it by describing the way they try to make use of the milk afterwards before its expiration date.

### *Supermarkets*

913 J.S.: so you'll pick up some milk on the way home.  
914 and then you'll discover you already had milk.  
915 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
916 J.S.: and now you got way too much milk.  
917 Audience: ((laughter))  
918 J.S.: that's no good either,  
919 now it's a race against the clock with the expiration date.  
920 Audience: ((laughter))  
921 J.S.: that freaky thing.  
922 now you're eating giant punch bowls of cereal,  
923 three meals a day.  
924 Audience: ((laughter))  
925 J.S.: you're washing your face with milk.  
926 Audience: ((laughter))  
927 J.S.: bringing cats in from all over the neighborhood,  
928 ["hurry up and drink it]  
929 Audience: [((laughter))]  
930 J.S.: come on, it's almost time"  
931 Audience: ((laughter))  
932 J.S.: how do they know that  
933 that is the definite exact day?

934                   you know,  
 935                   they don't say "it's in the vicinity",  
 936                   "give or take",  
 937                   "roughly"  
 938                   (1.0)  
 939                   they brand it right into the side of the carton  
 940                   ((imitates hot-branding))  
 941                   -sssss-  
 942 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 943 J.S.:             "that's your God-damn day right there,  
 944 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 945 J.S.:             oh don't screw with us.  
 946 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 947 J.S.:             we know what day is the FINAL day  
 948                   and then it is so over ..."  
 949 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 950 J.S.:             ever had milk the day after the day?  
 951                   scares the hell outta you, doesn't it?  
 952 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 953                   {applause}  
 954 J.S.:             the spoon is trembling  
 955                   as it comes out of the bowl,  
 956                   "it's after the day,  
 957 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 958 J.S.:             I don't know what the hell I'm doing here,  
 959                   I don't know why I'm doing this,  
 960 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 961 J.S.:             I smelled it,  
 962                   you smell it,  
 963                   what is it supposed to smell like?  
 964                   I never smelled milk"  
 965 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 966 J.S.:             maybe the cows tip them off  
 967                   when they're milking them  
 968                   "July 3<sup>rd</sup>."  
 969 Audience:        ((laughter))  
 970                   {applause}

In line 919 he dramatizes the circumstances by speaking of "a race against the clock with the expiration date." Such an absurd remark causes laughter and Seinfeld tries to put himself in the customer's position and repeatedly exaggerates when he looks for various options for consuming the milk as quickly as possible. He proposes eating "giant punch bowls of cereal, three meals a day" (1.922/923) or says that "you're washing your face with milk" (1.925) or

that you try to bring "cats in from all over the neighborhood" (1.927) and beg them in panic: "hurry up and drink it [...] come on, it's almost time" (1.928,930). Seinfeld knows exactly that this bombarding of punch lines, which serves to express totally absurd ways of dealing with a trivial problem, will enhance the audience's reaction. Before he goes on to a new topic, Seinfeld adds a discussion of how suppliers determine the expiration day and tries to explain the difficulty of doing this with absurd remarks (1.935-939). His strategy in the next lines is to let loose a chain of one-liners that make the audience laugh continuously. In line 950 Seinfeld asks a question but immediately delivers the answer himself by exaggerating so extremely that the audience reacts with laughter and applause (1.952/953). In order to keep up the audience's amusement, he invents a story and finally mocks customers again when he speaks from the point of view of a spoon in a bowl of cereals which comes out frightened and says: "it's after the day, [...] I don't know what the hell I'm doing here, I don't know why I'm doing this, [...], I smelled it, you smell it, what is it supposed to smell like? I never smelled milk" (1.956, 958/959, 961-964). The audience continuously reacts with laughter, and when Seinfeld finally suggests that perhaps the cows determine

the date when they give the milk (1.966-968), it culminates in a burst of even more laughter and applause (1.969/970).

As mentioned in section 11.3. (Hyperbole), I treat caricature as a special case of hyperbole and want to present an example in which Seinfeld uses hyperbole in order to caricature various people. He mainly follows the strategy of playing with his voice and of using different intonation patterns in order to exaggerate specific characteristics of people. A few examples show Seinfeld's use of paralanguage when overstating the people's behavior. In these cases, he uses specific gestures or facial expressions in order to stress the grotesque and ludicrous behavior of the people who are the butt of the joke. The exaggeration of certain gestures serves to substantiate the content of his story and to make the audience aware of what he is talking about. Therefore, it serves to increase their laughter. Whenever the joke teller is imitating another person, I put these parts in quotation marks in order to stress that he has changed his voice.

The following example demonstrates Seinfeld's use of hyperbole in order to express power and superiority over the persons in question.

#### *Air Travel*

324 J.S.: then the stewardess has to come out,  
325 put on her little show ..

326 with the emergency equipment,  
327 this whole performance  
328 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
329 J.S.: that they go through.  
330 you know, one of them is behind the curtain,  
331 reading the script,  
332 and the other one comes out front  
333 and acts it out,  
334 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
335 J.S.: you know.  
336 ((singing))  
337 "we have seat-belts,  
338 oxygen masks and things for you to use."  
339 Audience: ((laughter))  
340 J.S.: they show you how to use a seat-belt,  
341 in case you haven't been in a car since 1965.  
342 Audience: ((laughter))

Continue to mock the tiresome tasks on board, Seinfeld makes fun of the stewardesses' work and overstates it ironically as "her little show" (1.325) and "this whole performance" (1.327). He mocks their behavior when he describes that "one of them is behind the curtain, reading the script" (1.330/331), whereas "the other one comes out front and acts it out" (1.332/333). His strategy is to present them as ridiculous by interpreting their work as a sort of theater or entertainment. Seinfeld decides here to introduce a part in which he sings. This decision might result from the audience's hesitant reaction, which is proved by the weak laughter in line 334. So his recognition of the weak laughter may have caused him to change his program in order not to bore his listeners. That is why he starts performing in a different style when he starts singing, which brightens up the mood and enhances the ridiculous effect of his presentation. Watching the DVD, we

can see that Seinfeld enhances the audience's reaction through his strategy of using paralanguage. He even dances while imitating what the stewardess says. By singing, he makes fun of the stewardess's meticulous way of explaining the security measures on board (1.337/338), which causes real laughter in the audience (1.339). Seinfeld immediately reacts to their behavior by making a funny explanation about why they show their passengers how to use a seat-belt (1.340/341). This explanation is meant to keep the audience attentive and consequently laughing (1.342) and serves to mock the stewardesses as well as the passengers at the same time.

As the previous examples have shown, hyperbole is one of the most essential joking techniques because it allows the humorist to convey a message and to render familiar stories ridiculous. It must be stressed that hyperbole in itself is not funny. For example, Seinfeld's hyperbolic phrase "now it's a race against the clock with the expiration date." (1.919) is not funny in itself, but becomes amusing in its context which overstates the truth. It is more the humorist's clever performance in connection with figurative language that reminds listeners of their own experience and therefore allows them to see the humor in numerous situations. In caricature, hyperbole does not necessarily express hostile and aggressive thoughts about a

specific group of people but can also be used to enhance the humorous content of a story by overstating certain specific traits of the persons in question. An important observation is that imitation has the greatest success if the situation ridiculed is familiar to the audience. Whenever Seinfeld speaks about persons or situations which are very familiar to the audience and represent a sort of collective humor, he gets the strongest reactions resulting from the shared experience.

#### **13.1.5. Wordplay and Punning**

Wordplay and punning represent two techniques of verbal humor that have attracted the interest of many researchers over the several decades (cf. Freud (1905/1960), Eastman (1922), Koestler (1969), Asimov (1971), Nilsen (1978, 2000), Brandreth (1982), Nash (1985), Norrick (1993, 2003), Alexander (1997), Gruner (1997), Ross (1998)). Wordplay and punning are two techniques Seinfeld repeatedly makes use of. Freud asserted that the double meaning in these techniques stems from the literal and the metaphorical meanings of a word and represents "one of the most fertile sources for the technique of jokes" (1905/1960:39). The two meanings mainly serve to heighten the ridiculous effect of the situation and therefore earn the audience's appreciation in the form of laughter and applause.

In the following, I first want to mention wordplay in the sense that Seinfeld feigns misunderstanding or misinterpretation of certain words. After that, I want to focus on punning in the sense of playing on the meaning of a certain word.

In my opinion, the most excellent example of wordplay is represented in the segment in which Seinfeld tells the audience that one of his friends will have a nose job next week. Because I consider it the best example of wordplay in his entire performance, I want to cite the whole segment in detail.

#### *Doctors*

1276 J.S.: a friend of mine is going in for a nose job  
1277 ... next week.  
1278 guy.  
1279 Audience: ((laughter))  
1280 J.S.: rhinoplasty,  
1281 that's what they call it.  
1282 you've heard that term.  
1283 rhinoplasty.  
1284 rhino.  
1285 Audience: ((laughter))  
1286 J.S.: is that necessary?  
1287 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1288 J.S.: the person, obviously, is aware there's a problem.  
1289 Audience: ((laughter))  
1290 J.S.: they made the appointment.  
1291 Audience: ((laughter))  
1292 J.S.: do we really need to compare them to a God-damn  
rhinoceros,  
1293 Audience: ((laughter))  
1294 J.S.: for Christ's sake?  
1295 when you go in for a hair transplant,  
1296 they don't say  
1297 "we're going to perform a cueball-ectomy  
1298 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1299 J.S.: [on you, Mr. Johnson.]  
1300 we feel that the chrome-domia has advanced,  
1301 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1302 J.S.: to a point that we call skin-headia.  
1303 Audience: ((laughter))

1304 J.S.:           these are technical terms,  
1305                   you don't really °need to bother yourself with°.   
1306 Audience:    ((laughter))

The audience is in such a good mood they even laugh before Seinfeld has said anything further, but they can imagine that his following story will be funny, so they have to laugh even before they get the actual joke (l.1279). In line 1280 Seinfeld uses the term "rhinoplasty" and starts playing with this word, or more precisely with the parts of the word. He wants to make the audience aware of the fact that he is thinking of a "rhino" in the sense of a "rhinoceros" when he repeats it twice in line 1283 and 1284. This allusion makes the audience laugh (l.1285) and Seinfeld even tops it by asking seriously: "is that necessary? [...] the person, obviously, is aware there's a problem. [...] they made an appointment" (l.1286-1290). In this situation, Seinfeld controls the audience's reaction and constantly gets them to laugh by feigning complete misinterpretation. He wants to enhance it with each and every following line and is successful because the audience reacts with continuously building laughter (l.1287, 1289, 1291). Lines 1292 and 1294 serve to give the whole story the final touch when he is beside himself with rage and says: "do we really need to compare them to a God-damn rhinoceros [...] for Christ's sake?" Although it is the

first time that Seinfeld explicitly mentions the comparison with a rhinoceros, the audience has known before what he intended to express. But nevertheless, they react with laughter again (1.1293). In the following, he continues to express indignation over the situation by using the example of a hair transplant. He thoroughly exaggerates the issues he has just addressed by asking his audience to imagine the hair transplant professional referring to his procedure as "cueball-ectomy" (1.1297) and to the patient's condition as "chrome-domia" (1.1300) and "skin-headia" (1.1302). With these creatively invented terms, Seinfeld wants to allude to the fact that the patient has to have a hair transplant done because he is bald and thus resembles a skinhead, and that his head looks like a cueball, that his scalp is as shiny as chromes. These allusions and the serious tone with which he speaks prompt the audience's laughter (1.1303).

Another example of wordplay in which Seinfeld pretends to misunderstand and misinterpret a term is taken from the segment about *Horses*.

### *Horses*

2216 J.S.: get out of a car that has 300 horsepower  
2217 to sit on an animal that has one.  
2218 Audience: ((laughter))  
2219 J.S.: why - why do we use the term horsepower?  
2220 is that also to insult the horse?  
2221 the space-shuttle rocket boosters,  
2222 each one ... has 20 million horsepower.  
2223 why are we still comparing it with the horse?  
2224 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
2225 J.S.: any chance we're gonna get back to using horses,

2226 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
2227 J.S.: for rockets, trying to keep track of  
2228 how many we're going to need?  
2229 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
2230 J.S.: "hey horse, the rocket engine just broke down,  
2231 can you get 20 million friends together really fast?"  
2232 Audience: ((laughter))  
2233 J.S.: "20 million, that's a lot."  
2234 ((laughs))  
2235 Audience: ((laughter))

Seinfeld starts playing with the term "horsepower" (1.2216). He asks: "why - why do we use the term horsepower?" (1.2219) after having cut off the question word first and restarted the question. What follows is Seinfeld's strategy of enhancing the audience's laughter through his pretense of misunderstanding and his subsequent stupid comments. This example demonstrates that Seinfeld uses the same strategies throughout his entire performance. In the first example mentioned in this section, Seinfeld uses the same strategy. He asks if this term is used "to insult the horse?" (1.2220) and mentions the "space-shuttle rocket boosters" (1.2221) and their horsepower. All these comments only result in weak laughter (1.2224, 2226, 2229) except the one in lines 2230/2231 when he talks directly to a horse saying: "hey horse, the rocket engine just broke down, can you get 20 million friends together really fast?" and then even imitates the horse responding: "20 million, that's a lot" (1.2233). Seinfeld starts laughing at himself (1.2234) before the audience joins in (1.2235). Humor in this joke derives from Seinfeld's strategy of feigning

misunderstanding as well as from the absurdity that is responsible for the incongruity expressed in the content of this joke. The incongruity lies in his suggestion that real horses be used to replace a damaged rocket engine.

The following extracts provide examples of punning and play on the different meanings of a word. The first example is taken from the section *Men & Women*, in which Seinfeld mocks marriages.

*Men & Women*

1307 J.S.: I, uh, I'm not married,  
1308 I am a single guy,  
1309 there's .. no other guys attached to me.  
1310 Audience: ((laughter))  
1311 J.S.: I've always been just the one guy.  
1312 Audience: ((laughter))  
1313 J.S.: I was best man at a wedding, one time,  
1314 that was pretty good.  
1315 I thought it was a little .. too much in the title,  
there.  
1316 "best man".  
1317 I think we ought to have the groom,  
1318 and a pretty good man.  
1319 Audience: ((laughter))  
1320 J.S.: I mean, if I'm the best man,  
1321 why is she marrying him?  
1322 Audience: ((laughter))  
1323 {beginning applause}

At the beginning of his joke Seinfeld gives his audience information about his private life and tells them that he is a single guy. Up to that point, nothing funny has happened. Nevertheless, his following line serves as the first punch line. He starts feigning misunderstanding and justifying what he has said before, adding "there's .. no other guys attached to me" (l.1309) and "I've always been

just the one guy" (1.1311). By revealing these punch lines, the audience becomes aware of the fact that Seinfeld is playing on the word "single" (1.1308). Seinfeld makes use of two different meanings of this adjective: "unmarried" on the one hand, and "unitary" on the other. In line 1311, it is obvious that he wants to refer to the meaning of "single" by explaining that he is just "the one guy".

In the following, he continues revealing more personal information when he tells the audience that he "was best man at a wedding, one time" (1.1313). This remark is already the build-up for his following punch line and it even contains the pivot term, which is in this case the term "best man". He plays with the expression by emphasizing that "it was a little .. too much in the title, there" (1.1315) and by repeating the term in line 1316. The audience immediately realizes that Seinfeld is taking the adjective 'best' literally, ignoring the usual meaning of the compound noun "best man" who, at the wedding, is the man who acts as an attendant to the bridegroom. This pretense of misunderstanding is proved by the following punch line in which he mentions that it would have been sufficient "to have the groom, and a pretty good man" (1.1317/1318). In order to enhance the audience's laughter, he adds a further punch line by asking the "obvious" question: "I mean, if I'm the best man, why is she marrying

him?" (1.1320/1321), which ends in laughter and beginning applause (1.1322/1323) because he further feigns his complete misunderstanding of the term.

To conclude this section, I want to emphasize that Seinfeld varies the use of wordplay and punning throughout the whole performance. Some examples provide classical use of punning, as shown in the previous example. There, he makes use of terms which have different meanings and creates humor out of playing with them. In other examples, however, he not only plays on the meaning of the terms as such, but combines the effect of wordplay with self-deprecation. In the first examples in this section (*Doctors* and *Horses*), he proves his skill in feigning misunderstanding of certain terms such as 'rhinoplasty' and 'horsepower'. The combination of misunderstanding while playing on words and self-deprecation intensifies the humor of the joke and therefore the audience's appreciation. It is often easier for them to understand wordplay than punning because the misunderstanding is overtly displayed and emphasized by the joke teller, whereas punning has to be discovered by the audience themselves.

#### **13.1.6. Disfluencies**

This section illustrates a number of interesting aspects of timing. I want to note here that pauses play a very

important role for Seinfeld throughout the whole performance even if he does not use them as often and as explicitly as Wright does (see section 13.2.6.). Seinfeld uses pauses either to gain some planning time, to increase the tension before revealing the punch line, or to give the audience time to react to his joke and calm down in order to concentrate on the next joke. At the beginning he provides the following example:

#### *Introduction*

9 J.S.: <well well well>  
10 (3.0)  
11 Audience: ((laughter))  
12 J.S.: I can't believe you made it.  
13 Audience: ((laughter))

The pause he introduces in line 10 is about three seconds long and allows him to gain time to continue and to encourage his audience to react with laughter (1.11).

In the following lines we may observe further examples of pauses that help him to gain time to plan the structure of his continuation.

24 J.S.: this is the Broadhurst Theater.  
25 it's a .. uh,  
26 ((clears his throat))  
27 legendary theater,  
28 I know .. nothing about it.  
29 Audience: ((laughter))  
30 J.S.: uh, I picked it because .. uh,  
31 Audience: {phone rings in the audience}

He tries to talk as casually as possible, as can be seen in line 25 when he stops with a pause filler after having

paused before for about half a second. Then he even clears his throat (1.26) before continuing with his performance. In addition, before revealing the last part of his statement, he even makes a brief pause in order to build up a certain tension that increases the reaction of the audience who is waiting for him to continue. This statement causes laughter (1.29). In the following line, Seinfeld uses a pause-filler at the beginning and repeats a further one at the end just before he gets interrupted by a phone ringing in the audience.

In the following, I mainly want to concentrate on the longer pauses Seinfeld uses. In general, it is obvious that Seinfeld does not use many long pauses during his performance. Rather, we find short interruptions of about half a second which mainly serve to find some extra time in order to continue effectively. Apart from that, he uses several longer pauses as, for example, in line 458. Seinfeld introduces a pause of about two seconds in order to give the audience the opportunity to calm down and to concentrate on what he will talk about in the following. The same is true for line 483 when he introduces a pause of about one second in order to stress the humor in the mantra "get candy" (1.482, 484) that he has already repeated several times before. It is interesting that Seinfeld does not introduce the pause before revealing the phrase, but

instead puts it in between (1.483). He wants to build up a certain tension and therefore provokes anticipation in the audience as to how he will continue. Seinfeld follows the same strategy in line 612. We realize that he pauses for about two seconds in order to build up tension and to make his audience laugh prior to actually giving any further explanation. In line 625, Seinfeld uses a pause of about a second in order to enhance the audience's curiosity about how he will continue and also to give them the opportunity to visualize what he is talking about. It is the segment in which he mocks the Halloween costumes and the pause mainly serves to increase the humorous effect of his description of what the costumes look like and to make the audience aware of a situation they can all easily relate to.

In the segment in which he talks about the thankless second place and the silver medal, he also uses pauses to enhance the audience's reaction to the ensuing punch line.

### *Olympics*

1618	I have a problem with that silver medal.
1619	I think if I was an Olympic athlete
1620	I would rather come in last
1621	(1.0)
1622	than win the silver,
1623	if you think about it.

The pause serves in this case to accentuate the content of the following line, which means that Seinfeld wants to clearly express his disdain of the second place and even

his preference for coming in last over getting the thankless silver medal.

As we have already seen in the section about repetition, it is important for the stand-up comedian to have different strategies at his disposal allowing him to gain some additional time in order to think of the continuation of his program. This is the reason for the overall importance of timing. As demonstrated in some of the examples, comedians use pauses to stall for planning time. Other examples displayed the function of building up tension before the delivery of the punch line. This is a further crucial strategy which allows the comedian to keep up the audience's interest and attention. In addition, the extracts have proved that it is essential to allow the audience to calm down after their reaction to the end of a joke so that they have enough time to concentrate on the next joke.

#### **13.1.7. Direct Address to the Audience**

In general, I can confirm and want to stress that Seinfeld is a stand-up comedian who regularly establishes contact with his audience and integrates them in his performance. I want to mention an example found at the beginning of his performance. This extract provides a situation in which Seinfeld has to stop his own performance and demonstrates

spontaneity. Stand-up comedians always have to be able to respond to actual circumstances, as shown in this example in which he is interrupted by the unexpected noise of a mobile phone (1.31).

### *Phones*

31 Audience: {phone rings in the audience}  
32 J.S.: oh, let me get that,  
33 Audience: [(laughter)]  
34 J.S.: [let me get that]  
35 that's for me,  
36 I asked them to hold my phone.  
37 Audience: ((laughter))  
38 J.S.: that is so embarrassing, isn't it?  
39 Audience: ((laughter))  
40 J.S.: I'm surprised it doesn't happen more often though,  
41 because it's hard to  
42 ((whispering))  
43 "oh wait, put it on the vibrate only."  
44 oh the phones,  
45 what we have gone nuts with the phones, haven't we?  
46 we're crazy with the phones.  
47 this guy thinks he needs that phone.  
48 Audience: ((laughter))

Seinfeld immediately reacts to it, speaks even more quickly than before and wants to get the phone (1.32 and 34). He even repeats his remark, overlapping it with the audience's laughter and thus enhancing the mood. In the following, he starts creating an amusing atmosphere by pretending that the phone call is for him and that he wants the guy to hold the phone for him (1.35/36). With that bald on record strategy he creates a direct possibility for the audience to be shocked or embarrassed even if all the comments Seinfeld decides to make keep his audience laughing. In line 38, he even begins to laugh at them by considering the

fact that the phone has rung as embarrassing. It is interesting that he chooses an attribute perfectly fitting to the strategy he has planned to apply. The question tag with which Seinfeld finishes his remark gives his audience a new reason to stay attentive and feel a part of his performance. At the same time, Seinfeld expresses positive politeness because he moderates his former direct statement by introducing a question tag. It transforms his previous statement into an indirect remark and therefore softens his former brusque tone in order to minimize the threat to the hearers' face. In the following, he includes his audience by generalizing the situation with cell phones in public. He directly addresses the audience by using familiar language and the pronoun "we" when he says: "what we have got nuts with the phones, haven't we?" (1.45). In this sentence he uses not only the pronoun "we", but also a question tag with which he manages to involve the audience and express positive politeness through this rather indirect form of interrogative, as I have already mentioned for line 38. The use of the "we"-strategy strengthens the expression of solidarity through the revelation of their shared experience. He wants them to see that problems with phones are issues that concern everyone and that everyone is aware of them. This observation is the reason why I analyzed this joke in detail in section 13.1.1. and

classified it as shared ridicule. In line 46, he uses the pronoun "we" again in order to include everybody in his talk. In line 47, he refers to the man in the audience whose phone had been ringing and ridicules him, which provokes the audience's laughter. I might venture the following remark that after having dealt with this segment, I began to doubt if the phone ringing in the audience (l.31) was really accidental and wondered if it had not been planned before and was therefore part of his performance. I do not want to question Seinfeld's skill in reacting spontaneously, but in this case, it was amazing how quickly he was able to manage the situation and continue effectively.

I decided to choose the following example in order to emphasize that Seinfeld is not always able to address his audience effectively.

#### *Air Travel*

324 J.S.: then the stewardess has to come out,  
325 put on her little show ..  
326 with the emergency equipment,  
327 this whole performance  
328 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
329 J.S.: that they go through.  
330 you know, one of them is behind the curtain,  
331 reading the script,  
332 and the other one comes out front  
333 and acts it out,  
334 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
335 J.S.: you know.

In analyzing this segment, I realized that although Seinfeld directly communicates to his audience by using the discourse marker "you know" twice (1.330,335), the audience only reacts with weak laughter (1.334). The hesitant reaction is a sign that the audience does not really appreciate his performance, thus Seinfeld has to react quickly by changing his routine so as not to bore his listeners and lose their attention. As far as the discourse markers are concerned, it is interesting to observe that they have different functions even if they are the same. In the first case (1.330), it serves to introduce a further explanation of what Seinfeld has mentioned before and is meant to make the audience aware of a situation they all know. He uses the discourse marker at the beginning of his remark and continues with detailed information about what the stewardess does. In that case he makes use of the discourse marker to establish common ground and express solidarity in a gesture of positive politeness. The second discourse marker (1.335) only serves as a concluding remark which expresses that Seinfeld is sure that the audience shares the knowledge with him.

Another excellent example of direct address can be found in the segment in which Seinfeld makes fun of the relationship between men and women.

*Men & Women*

1436 J.S.: men are not developing.  
1437 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1438 J.S.: we're not improving.  
1439 we men know, no matter how poorly we behave,  
1440 it seems we somehow end up with women anyway.  
1441 look around this room,  
1442 look at all the men you see,  
1443 beautiful women, °men are with them°,  
1444 do you think these are special men?  
1445 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1446 J.S.: gifted, highly unusual, one-of-a-kind men?  
1447 these are the same jerks and idiots  
1448 that I'm talking about.  
1449 Audience: ((laughter))  
1450 {applause}

From line 1438 Seinfeld starts directly speaking to his audience. First he begins criticizing men's behavior (l.1438), but a line further down he makes the observation that men end up with women anyway (l.1440) and proves his statement by making the audience aware of all the men in the room who accompany beautiful women while using bald on record strategies (l.1441/1442: "look around this room, look at all the men you see"). It is interesting that Seinfeld does not criticize the men as a separate group but includes himself in order to express solidarity towards them when saying "we're not improving" (l.1438) and "we men know, no matter how poorly we behave, it seems we somehow end up with women anyway" (l.1439/1440). Seinfeld shifts his voice to a softer tone and directly addresses the audience when he asks: "do you think these are special men?" (l.1444). In that case Seinfeld uses a rather indirect strategy in order to convince the audience of his

point of view, which is that, of course, these men are not special. But by making use of indirectness he can express his conviction without being impolite. Although he obviously addresses these two questions to the women in his audience, it is purely rhetorical and he does not give them an opportunity to answer. Instead, he immediately answers for them and expresses power and directness when he tops it by calling men "the same jerks and idiots" (1.1447) he had been talking about before. The use of shared ridicule and self-deprecation makes the audience laugh and show their appreciation and solidarity for what he is talking about (1.1449/1450). Humor derives again from the free release of Seinfeld's aggression expressed by the insult "jerks and idiots" (1.1447). In terms of Freudian interpretations (1905/1960)<sup>35</sup>, Seinfeld can only use these labels for men to release his aggressive attitude towards men because he is telling a joke. In a normal conversation he would not have the right to express such informal and disrespectful remarks about men.

The section on direct address to the audience has shown that Seinfeld regularly includes his audience in his performance and is willing to express positive politeness strategies toward them. Even if he builds up mean humor

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<sup>35</sup> For further details see section 7.3.

towards certain groups of people, he primarily uses strategies such as hedges, hesitators, question tags, or modal verbs to mitigate the directness and rudeness of his point of view. Instead of presenting a humorous monologue he is determined to include his audience either actively or passively, as observed in segments in which he introduces rhetorical questions or discourse markers whose aim is to make the audience aware of their crucial role throughout the performance. Including the audience in his performance can be a delicate business because the performer must then be prepared to respond to his audience spontaneously. Seinfeld has demonstrated in numerous examples how he manages to reach this aim and has shown various strategies, such as the use of repetition, discourse markers, and pauses that allow him to prepare his following lines and pretend spontaneity. Besides, it might also be a delicate situation if a group of persons he ridicules is among the audience. An example can be found in his section about the cab drivers (cf. section 13.1.1. **Private ridicule**). On the one hand, Seinfeld obviously threatens the cab drivers' face by expressing power and mean humor towards them; on the other hand, the audience joins him with laughter and amusement, which reveals their solidarity with him.

### **13.1.8. Transitions**

In the final section of the analytical part on Seinfeld, I want to emphasize Seinfeld's use of transitions for switching from one topic to the next without making an abrupt change. It is a very interesting strategy that can be observed throughout his entire performance. I do not want to deny that Seinfeld sometimes completely and abruptly changes the topic without having prepared the new one by introducing a transition. Such abrupt changes can be found from line 67 onward, when Seinfeld switches from the topic about phones to the topic about cab drivers in New York. The same is true for his abrupt change of topic at line 1554, when he starts talking about the fast food chain McDonald's instead of continuing with the relationship between men and women. I noticed that Seinfeld always decides to make an abrupt change when he realizes that his audience is bored or is not reacting with laughter to his performance any longer. A change of topic is therefore a means to keep the audience attentive and interested in case the previous one finds little appeal. Other abrupt changes can be found from line 1611 onward when Seinfeld talks about his last stay in London during the World Cup, whereas he had been talking about Chinese people before, or from line 1934 onward, when he suddenly starts talking about his weird behavior of watching TV late at night even when he is

really tired and prefers to sleep. Also, he completely changes the topic in line 2066 when he starts talking about horse betting, and from line 2286 onward, when he informs the audience about his preference for living in hotels.

Nevertheless, most of the time I observed his ability to find an opportunity to link his topics or to switch from one topic to the next through the use of a brief transition section. A first concise example can be found from line 31 onward, when an audience member's phone is ringing. After having mocked the person, Seinfeld uses this incident as a transition to his next story in which he criticizes phones in general and subsequently, people's behavior while using them (1.44 ff.). This is a good way to maintain the flow of his performance and prepare the audience for the next story. Seinfeld also switches from the topic of taking a cab to traveling at the airport. We can see that he wants to move from the first topic to the second one because at the end of his section about cab drivers (1.165), he links it using the conjunction "but" in line 166. This conjunction allows him to reveal his own attitude and to stress that he loves traveling in spite of his previous segment on cabs. He even gives more detailed information when he informs the audience about his plans to go to Florida (1.167). This statement leads him to his talk about the situation at airports, which he deals with from line

172 onward. Within this segment, Seinfeld moves from the general situation at the airport to the exaggerated security measures in line 174. In line 222, he switches to the strange design of airport bathrooms before generalizing that "it's all a tiny world in the airport" (l.273). In line 289, Seinfeld gives notice using the adverb "then" that he will continue with topics about airports and airplanes and deals in detail with the pilots' (l.290 ff.) and the stewardesses' behavior (l.324 ff.). In line 419 he starts a new topic and deals with the state of Florida. But nevertheless, Seinfeld refers to the place he wished to travel to in line 167. In order to switch to a new topic, Seinfeld makes a transition from the story of the old people he had talked about before (l.426-470) to their behavior towards him, which reminds him of his childhood and brings him to a new story (l.472 ff.).

In the segment in which he talks about his addiction to candy, he switches to the topic of Halloween in line 519. After having dealt with Halloween and the ridiculousness of the costumes one wears just "to get candy", as he repeatedly admits, he comes to a more general topic in which he addresses food and people's behavior in the supermarket (l.729 ff.). In line 869, Seinfeld changes the topic and concentrates on the customers' behavior when buying milk. At the end of this segment (l.971 ff.), he

starts talking about situations that happen when one has finished the purchase and stands at the checkout. So we realize that Seinfeld has an elaborate routine in mind which allows him to link most of the topics he deals with. This is a crucial means of making the audience follow his routine and keeping them interested in what he is talking about. A further example of a successful transition is taken from the end of the segment about supermarkets and Seinfeld's immediate transition to drugstores and their great range of products (1.1068 ff.). From there, he moves on to commercials about the most different drugs (1.1101 ff.), to doctors and the time we pass in the waiting room (1.1197 ff.). Again Seinfeld pays attention to deal with trivial topics as in the previous case when he represents a tiresome situation that is known to everyone. After having ridiculed the doctor's behavior toward their patients (1.1244-1275), he uses this story to tell the audience about one of his friends who is going to have a nose job the following week (1.1276 ff.).

The next example of a transition is taken from the segment about marriages (1.1307 ff.), the end of which he uses to segue into one of the most debated topics in our society, the relationship between men and women (1.1343 ff.).

A further example can be found just after the segment in which Seinfeld talks about the success of McDonald's (1.1554 ff.) and uses this topic to move on to a new one in which he speaks about Chinese people. Seinfeld tries to link this topic to the last one, which becomes obvious in line 1593 when he says: "as long as we're on the subject."

In the segment in which Seinfeld informs us about the various sports disciplines which he finds quite bizarre, Seinfeld realizes at the end that the audience is not reacting to his last remarks (1.1747) and uses his previous topic about sports to move on to a new topic in which he describes his favorite sport, "scuba diving" (1.1749). At the end of this segment, he talks about the uselessness of helmets (1.1806-1842) and uses this topic to introduce a new one. He moves on from helmets as a part of clothing to the topic of clothing in general (1.1843 ff.). He again describes an everyday situation in this segment, when he speaks of the habit of clothing and verbalizes a situation which would not be funny as such; but by overstating it, the topic becomes funny.

In the next segment, Seinfeld directly speaks to the audience and even points to it with his finger in order to get their full attention. In the following lines, he builds up a new joke story by using his previous discussion about dry cleaning. He talks about a suede jacket which has spots

on it because he wore it in the rain and imitates the cleaner's reaction by saying: "there's nothing we can do. water ruins leather" (l.1896/1897). This funny story leads him to his absurd discussion about cows which have to be outside whether it rains or not (l.1898-1907). He then starts talking about warning labels and uses this information as a transition to his next segment when he starts talking about the warning labels on cigarettes (l.1912 ff.).

When dealing with Seinfeld's material, I considered the use of transitions to be one of the most interesting strategies throughout his work. They play a central role in the performance and therefore the creation of humor in Seinfeld's work. This should justify the fact that I dealt in detail with the transitions used and provided numerous examples in the previous section.

### **13.1.9. Summary**

The preceding analytical section on verbal humor in Seinfeld's *I'm Telling You for the Last Time* represents an attempt to gain insight into the creation of humor in stand-up comedy. As the preceding examples have illustrated, the creation of humor results from a varied interaction of numerous techniques and strategies. Seinfeld's performance demonstrates that stand-up comedy is

not only a string of different jokes for entertaining the audience; rather, it is a complex piece of art which starts with a carefully elaborated script. Nearly everything the speaker intends to say is scripted and therefore well thought out. The art is to perform and deliver the material in a way which exudes spontaneity and conviction. With Seinfeld I decided to choose an exceptional stand-up comedian whose stage persona is very close to his actual off-stage persona, which is further stressed by his outer appearance. Seinfeld always appears well-dressed and well-groomed during all his performances, indicating that he wants to convey a formal politeness. This way of performing allows him to make the audience feel enthusiastic about his natural delivery which is supported by the fact that he mainly deals with everyday topics all of us are familiar with. Throughout his whole performance, he is not afraid of directly contacting his audience even if this might be very risky for the performer. The stand-up comedian always has to be aware of the fact that the audience could intervene and always has to be able to continue his routine by taking note of heckling and incorporating it in his show. As a result, Seinfeld proves his skill in combining the presentation of planned material with spontaneity throughout his whole performance. Analysis of his work shows that he makes use of repetition and timing in order

to gain planning time in which he can reorganize his material and find his way back to his actual performance. As a selection of examples shows, Seinfeld's performance is mainly characterized by his use of ridicule. Most of his jokes serve to mock a specific group of opponents; he even uses himself as the butt of some of the jokes. The creation of solidarity with the audience seems to be one of his crucial aims when making use of ridicule. The deeper analysis of these jokes has shown that self-deprecation and shared ridicule often tend to go together in view of the fact that successful self-deprecation turns into shared ridicule, which presents an interesting topic for future research. As for the humor theories (cf. section 7), I investigated which of them cover Seinfeld's stand-up comedy material and came to the conclusion that most of Seinfeld's material is not explicitly covered by one specific theory, but falls under a combination of criteria taken from the incongruity and superiority theories. Concerning the audience's reaction to these jokes, I observed that it is mainly provoked by the recognition of incongruities and the feeling of superiority over certain others. Nevertheless, I have to stress that the audience's laughter does not necessarily depend on the punch line of the joke, but is often evoked by the comedian's style of performance. He uses and combines various rhetorical devices and specific

joke techniques to develop strategies that lead the audience to laughter without the punch line being of prime importance. Seinfeld embodies a comedian who frequently responds to his audience's reaction and engages interactively when continuing his performance. Whenever he realizes that a specific topic does not find much interest and appreciation, he either introduces paralanguage to strengthen the comic effect of the material or he completely changes the topic. Future research might focus on the extent to which the audience's reactions influence the comedian's performance. It would be interesting to compare different performances of one stand-up comedian over a period of time, which could help to give further information about that topic.

### **13.2. Analyzing Verbal Humor in Steven Wright's *I Have a Pony* and *I Still Have a Pony***

Wright is a comedian whose great success has developed due to his monotonous style of performing. It is impressive how he succeeds in making his audience appreciate everything he says although he seems to be a real "deadpan" comedian (Double 2005:286). Throughout his entire performance Wright remains a cold, expressionless comedian who does not convey any warmth or connection to his audience. His delivery is calm, quiet, and monotonous. Apart from a few examples in

which Wright remotely approaches a smile,<sup>36</sup> he generally retains his apathetic style of performing. Because he reduces his expressions and body language to a minimum, we realize by contrast how very much these techniques are used by other comedians such as Jerry Seinfeld in their performances. In addition, Wright's performances mainly consist of very short jokes which are often made up of just one line or "a chain of punch lines" (Attardo and Chabanne 1992:171). In contrast to Seinfeld, whose performances principally consist of longer joke stories that are funny because of their content, his technique, and his style of performing, Wright often makes himself the centre of derision and mockery and thus earns the audience's appreciation at his expense. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, Seinfeld's performance consists of telling about real-life situations. His joking material generally does not prove to be humorous due to its content. Seinfeld renders his material funny by presenting his own character and his own experience. Throughout the whole performance, he presents his off-stage persona without creating a specific on-stage persona. Wright, however, has a different strategy in that he tells of fake life situations he has never really experienced. In the course

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<sup>36</sup> I will deal with these examples in the section 13.2.4. (Intonation and paralanguage).

of his performance, he only pretends to speak about his off-stage persona; in reality, he invents situations and presents them as real experiences. As far as this difference is concerned, I want to refer to Freud (1905/1960), who distinguishes between innocent jokes and tendentious jokes.<sup>37</sup> According to Wilson (1979:160), innocent jokes might occur in two different ways. Either they occur without intention or design, or they result from the humorist's imagination. Wilson uses the terms "natural" and "contrived" jokes to describe them. Natural humor is said to present "things as they really are" and, therefore, reveals surprising aspects of reality. By contrast, contrived jokes present "things as they may be imagined to be". This is the case for Wright. He makes the audience appreciate his performance by describing impossible events and thus absurdities about a faked experience. Furthermore, he uses his appearance in support of a performance of absurd stories and jokes. In contrast to Seinfeld, who presents himself as a well-dressed New Yorker, Wright dispenses with formal politeness and expresses in-group thinking by establishing common ground. Wright's intent is to appear weird and strange on stage and he thus links his absurd material with his weird outer appearance and wants

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed analysis see Freud (1905/1960) and section 7.3.

to make the audience aware of the fact that they are alike and understand each other and, therefore, also share appreciation for his humorous stories.

As far as my analysis is concerned, I will follow the tracks on Wright's compact disc. In order to analyze his body language in further detail, I also consulted the television special *When the Leaves Blow Away* (2006) on DVD. When I cite sections from Wright's first performance *I Have a Pony*, I will indicate them by the acronym **(IHAP)**. When I cite sections from *I Still Have a Pony*, they will be indicated by the acronym **(ISHAP)**.

In the following sections, I will concentrate on various linguistic aspects of Wright's performance. I have to stress that Wright's programs are always characterized by his telling of completely absurd jokes in which he presents the situation from his own point of view. In some joking stories, Wright pretends to be the butt of the joke himself and reveals his overall stupidity towards the audience. Nevertheless, he rarely represents self-deprecatory humor but rather playing with popular notions. Most of the time, he creates humor by disappointing the audience's expectation and therefore achieves their appreciation of his jokes. Because of Wright's apathetic style of performing, intonation and paralanguage are reduced to a minimum in comparison to *Seinfeld*. The same is

true for the linguistic feature of repetition. Also, whereas Seinfeld is frequently inclined to address his audience in a direct manner, Wright is determined not to get into direct contact with his audience and presents a classical one-man show where all eyes are fixed on him. He entertains the audience with a monologue in which interaction is reduced to an absolute minimum and is restricted to the use of few discourse markers throughout the whole performance. In Wright's performances, pauses play a central role and serve as a means with which he controls his audience's reaction. Since that I have discussed the specific techniques and aspects of verbal humor in separate sections<sup>38</sup>, I will not explicitly give detailed information about research on the various techniques in the following, but will refer to the previous sections of my study.

### **13.2.1. Ridicule**

From the beginning, we may observe that Wright starts telling hilarious stories in the form of personal anecdotes and pretends to have experienced the absurdities of his stories himself. Nevertheless, self-deprecating humor can

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<sup>38</sup> See section 10: "Joke Techniques", section 11: "The Use of Figurative Language in Stand-up Comedy" and section 12: "Linguistic Features of Joke Telling".

only rarely be found in his performances. Most of the time he makes the audience laugh because of the incongruity delivered by the punch line. In contrast to Seinfeld, who actually speaks of his real ego and performs in exactly the way he really behaves, Wright has invented a stage persona when he pretends to be speaking about himself. In the following, I will first deal with selected extracts that represent a few examples of the use of self-deprecation. As in the previous section about Seinfeld, I will follow Wilson's model (1979: 189/190), but replace the expression "self-ridicule" by "self-deprecation" for reasons mentioned in section 10.2. (Ridicule).

### **Self-deprecation**

In the segment *Twin*, Wright begins with a series of very short jokes in which he uses self-deprecating humor.

#### *Twin (ISHAP)*

586 S.W.: I bought one walkie-talkie,  
587 Audience: ((laughter))  
588 S.W.: I didn't want anyone to hear  
589 what I was saying.  
590 Audience: ((laughter))  
591 S.W.: I'm addicted to placebos.  
592 Audience: ((laughter))  
593 S.W.: I could quit,  
594 but it wouldn't matter.  
595 Audience: ((laughter))  
596 {applause}

In the first story, he presents an excellent example of self-deprecation when he puts himself in a bad light by

claiming that he "bought one walkie-talkie" (1.586), which does not make any sense at all and already causes laughter (1.587) because the fact as such proves his complete stupidity. Lines 588 and 589 serve to confirm his stupidity when he reveals that he "didn't want anyone to hear what [he] was saying." This confirmation of his lack of wisdom makes the audience burst into laughter (1.590). He adds a further stupid story by revealing that he is "addicted to placebos" (1.591), but admits that he "could quit, but it wouldn't matter" (1.593/594). A placebo is only an inactive and fake medication or treatment so that it does not change anything whether you take such pills or not. This punch line makes the audience laugh and applaud (1.595/596) again because of the fact that Wright highlights his own stupidity in making such comments. Already this first example makes us recognize that Wright has a completely different style in comparison with Seinfeld. Whereas Seinfeld talks about real-life experiences, Wright fakes such situations and pretends that he has experienced them. But actually he just tells faked stories that are seldom longer than a few lines.

In the segment about *Shopping Carts (ISHAP)*, he provides a further example of self-deprecation when he tells the audience about his experience at the grocery store.

*Shopping Carts (ISHAP)*

965 S.W.:           when I go to the grocery store  
966                   and I see a guy pushing 30 shopping carts across the  
                  parking lot,  
967                   sometimes I say:  
968                   "you know,  
969                   somebody else might wanna use one of those."  
970 Audience:    ((laughter))  
971                   {applause}

He first tells his audience that he sees a man "pushing 30 shopping carts across the parking lot" (1.966), which is nothing special because we all have seen them when we do our shopping. But Wright provides a funny punch line by expressing aggressiveness and therefore superiority when he comments that "somebody else might wanna use one of those" (1.969) carts too. This statement serves again to call attention to a feigned ignorance and thus makes the audience react with laughter and applause (1.970/971).

In analyzing Wright's material I could not easily detect much pure self-deprecation. Most of the extracts provide examples of the creation of humor out of incongruous situations and move away from pure self-deprecation. One reason for this observation might be Wright's strategy of relating fake life situations he had never experienced in his real life. So incongruity necessarily assumes a crucial role in Wright's material. Before turning to private ridicule, I want to present some of the extracts in which Wright pretends to being the butt of the joke, but actually creates humor by playing with

popular notions and disappointing the audience's expectation.

*Introduction (IHAP)*

10                   I used to be a parking attendant in Boston at Logan  
                    Airport ..  
11                   I parked jets.  
12    Audience:    ((laughter))  
13                   {weak applause}  
14    S.W.:         they let me go though  
15                   because I kept locking the keys in them.  
16    Audience:    ((laughter))  
17    S.W.:         one day I was on an 86ft step ladder  
18                   trying to get in a window  
19                   with a coat hanger.  
20    Audience:    ((laughter))

In line 10 he starts a monotonous talk about what he did in the past and informs his audience that he "used to be a parking attendant in Boston at Logan Airport .." (IHAP, 1.10) before revealing the punch line in line 11 by saying: "I parked jets." These introductory lines do not present self-deprecation as such and only cause laughter (1.12) and even weak applause (1.13) because of the surprise effect they have for the audience. The introduction and the main part of the joke have evoked a certain expectation that is not fulfilled by the revelation of the punch line. Everybody first thinks of "cars", but Wright does not fulfill their expectations and, consequently, surprises them by mentioning "jets". This justifies the information he gave in line 10, when he adds that he worked at "Logan Airport". The surprise effect has provoked a sort of

discrepancy which is responsible for the audience's laughter and applause (1.12/13). As for the discrepancy predominant in the joke, we can classify it as belonging to the incongruity theory.<sup>39</sup> Wright pursues the same aim in the following lines when he continues talking about his job at the airport and emphasizes his complete stupidity by revealing in a monotone way: "they let me go though because I kept locking the keys in them" (1.14/15). This remark provides a further punch line and makes the audience laugh (1.16) more strongly than before. In this remark, Wright makes fun of the fact that people sometimes inadvertently lock their keys in cars but projects this idea onto his joke by pretending to have kept locking the keys in jets. So Wright uses a well-known aspect to create a funny story. In the following, Wright pretends not to understand the company's reaction and, therefore, makes his audience laugh further. Lines 17 to 19 refer to the content of line 15 when he describes that he tried "to get in a window with a coat hanger" (1.18/19). Again, Wright projects the well-known method by which people try to get their keys out of their cars onto his joke. Not only does the image of this

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<sup>39</sup> For further reference see Shultz (1972,1976), Freud (1905/1960), Wilson (1979), McGhee (1979), Kant and Schopenhauer in Morreall (1987), in Eastman (1922), Raskin (1985), Attardo (2001), Attardo and Chabanne (1992), Willmann (1940), Koestler (1969), Suls (1972,1977), Pepicello (1983).

absurd situation makes the audience laugh (1.20), but he also stresses the fact that he "kept locking the keys" (1.15) in the jets and does not find it a strange circumstance. Instead of concealing this absurd behavior, he reveals it in an overt manner in order to amuse his audience.

In the following, we may observe that Wright's performance often consists of an enumeration of joking chunks when he immediately continues telling personal anecdotes that make the people aware of certain situations they are all familiar with.<sup>40</sup> In the segment *Ants*, he starts talking about his childhood and reveals his madness with further personal anecdotes in which he uses further popular notions to create funny stories.

*Ants (IHAP)*

89 S.W.: when I was a baby  
90 I kept a diary.  
91 Audience: ((laughter))  
92 S.W.: recently I was rereading it  
93 it said:  
94 "day one:  
95 still tired from the move.  
96 Audience: ((laughter))  
97 {applause}  
98 S.W. day two:  
99 everybody talks to me like I'm an idiot."  
100 Audience: ((laughter))

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<sup>40</sup> The strategy of enumerating several joking chunks has already been explored by Attardo and Chabanne (1992) and was described as presenting "a chain of punch lines" (171).

From the beginning, Wright presents further discrepancies by offering impossible and therefore completely invented and imagined stories that cannot be reconciled with the audience's real-life experience. In the first line, he conjures the image of himself as a baby and immediately follows up with the punch line: "I kept a diary" (1.90). Everybody has to laugh because of the impossibility of Wright's description. No baby can keep a diary, but Wright tells it with such conviction that one could really believe it. This pretended reality makes the audience laugh (1.91). He even continues by claiming that recently he "was rereading it" (1.92) and thus implies that he had even been able to write at that age. Again this remark is built by incongruity, which is even emphasized by the next lines when he quotes "day one: still tired from the move" (1.94/95). He tells it as if it was real, although it is complete nonsense. This absurdity causes humor and elicits laughter and applause (1.96/97). Instead of stopping there, he even tops it by adding: "day two: everybody talks to me like I'm an idiot" (1.98/99). This last line not only builds on the absurd proposition of a baby writing a diary, but also makes fun of all the people who speak "baby talk" to little babies although these babies cannot really understand anything at that age. We can state that Wright uses this second punch line to express a certain kind of

aggressiveness towards other people. This means that the joke is not fully covered by the incongruity theory alone but rather fits a combination of criteria taken from both the incongruity theory and the hostility theory.

The two previous examples have shown that Wright mainly uses incongruity to create humor. Although he speaks in the first person singular and pretends to have experienced the situation he is talking about, we cannot classify these jokes as being self-deprecation because the main focus is on the disappointment of the audience's expectation rather than his own ignorance. In the analytical part on Seinfeld, I emphasized that successful self-deprecation tends to turn into shared ridicule. This cannot be confirmed by a study of Wright's material, which again results from the fact that he mainly deals with unreal and invented situations. The only story which shows a slight tendency towards shared ridicule is the last part of the extract in which he talks about the diary he kept when he was a baby (see analysis of line 99). Apart from this example we cannot find any shared ridicule in Wright's work.

### **Private Ridicule**

In the following, I want to deal with extracts that display the use of private ridicule. Wright does not primarily

target himself, but rather creates humor at others' expense.

In his second album *I Still Have a Pony*, Wright provides some examples of private ridicule. In the segment *Camera*, he implicitly makes fun of his mother, which can be seen in the following extract:

*Camera (ISHAP)*

438 S.W.: I bought an iPod  
439 that can either hold 5000 songs  
440 or one telephone message from my mother.  
441 Audience: ((laughter))  
442 {applause}

Wright starts by informing the audience of his iPod purchase and emphasizes its huge memory capacity so that it "can either hold 5000 songs or one telephone message from [his] mother" (l.439/440). Whereas lines 438 and 439 do not contain any hints for the joke to follow, line 440 serves as the immediate punch line and makes fun of his mother who apparently never stops talking as it is implied in Wright's statement. The audience reacts with laughter and applause (l.441/442).

In the segment *Hitchhiker (ISHAP)*, Wright starts a new story about the "seventy-year-old teacher" he had in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and whom he ridicules from the beginning on.

*Hitchhiker (ISHAP)*

770 S.W.: when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

771 I had a seventy-year-old teacher,  
772 and she could barely hear anything  
773 so she would turn the thermostat down to sixteen  
degrees  
774 so in case anyone talked  
775 she could see your breath coming out of your mouth.  
776 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright starts ridiculing her in line 772 when he claims that she "could barely hear anything", which was the reason that "she would turn the thermostat down to sixteen degrees so in case anyone talked she could see your breath coming out of your mouth" (l.773-775). The audience rewards this stupid story with laughter (l.776).

The last example of private ridicule is taken from the segment *My Grandfather (ISHAP)* in which Wright tells the audience about his grandfather by ridiculing him from the start.

*My Grandfather (ISHAP)*

891 S.W.: my grandfather had a special rocking chair built  
892 that would lean forward rather than backwards  
893 so he could fake interest in any conversation.  
894 Audience: ((laughter))  
895 S.W.: when I was little one Christmas  
896 he gave me a box of broken glass.  
897 he gave my brother a box of band-aids.  
898 Audience: ((laughter))  
899 S.W.: then he said:  
900 "now you two share."  
901 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright begins by claiming that his grandfather "had a special rocking chair built that would lean forward rather than backwards" (l.891/892). We can already recognize at this point in the text that Wright will use this invention

to build up the punch line that comes in line 893 when he reveals the reason for this invention is: "so he could fake interest in any conversation" (1.893). This punch line makes the audience laugh (1.894). Wright continues speaking of his grandfather and tells the story that one Christmas when he was a little boy his grandfather gave him "a box of broken glass" (1.896) and his brother "a box of band-aids" (1.897). In line 900 he imitates his grandfather saying: "now you two share". This nonsensical fiction makes the audience laugh again (1.901).

As far as private ridicule is concerned, the expression of superiority clearly dominates. By ridiculing other persons, Wright both achieves a feeling of superiority over them and expresses hostility towards them, so the selected examples are principally covered by the superiority and the release theory.

In conclusion, note that Wright only indulges in self-deprecation and private ridicule. In contrast to Seinfeld, we cannot find examples of shared ridicule. As I mentioned at the very beginning of section 13, it is not Wright's intention to establish contact with his audience. Whereas Seinfeld is always prone to directly address his audience, Wright avoids direct contact and uses his own persona as the basis for his stand-up comedy performances. His performance consists only of one long monologue, whereas

with Seinfeld we can even find segments in which the performance is similar to brief dialogues.

### 13.2.2. Hyperbole

As the analysis of Wright's material has shown, he mainly creates humor out of incongruous elements stemming from fictitious situations presented as his real life. Most of them make the audience laugh because of the absurdity and unreality involved. Wright strengthens the humorous effect of his jokes by making use of hyperbole to overstate the ridiculousness and the absurdity of his stories. This technique helps him to ensure that most of the audience will get the joke. An example of exaggeration can be found in the segment in which he talks about his friend Winny.

#### *Winny (IHAP)*

981 S.W.: all Winny did ...  
982 all day was practice limbo.  
983 he got pretty good.  
984 he could go under a rug.  
985 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright starts the two introductory lines with the pronoun "all" (l.981/982). It is obvious that Wright makes use of exaggeration in order to stress Winnie's monotonous daily routine. He stimulates laughter (l.985) by revealing Winnie's only absurd hobby, which is to practice limbo. In the following line Wright stops overstating for a moment

and uses an understatement when he adds "he got pretty good" (l.983). His intention is to make the audience keen to see how he continues. In line 984 he reveals a surprising punch line by overstating Winnie's skill when he stresses that he is so good at limbo that "he could go under a rug". This absurd and incongruent remark provokes the audience's laughter.

Wright uses hyperbole not only to heighten the humorous effect of his jokes, but also in order to build up tension and therefore to keep up the audience's interest in what will follow. An interesting example in which Wright pursues this intention is taken from his segment about Rachel.

*Rachel (IHAP)*

443 S.W.: it took me a year and a half to write that.  
444 Audience: ((laughter))  
445 S.W.: I didn't know how to word it.  
446 Audience: ((laughter))  
447 S.W.: {plays guitar}  
448 I don't know how to play this.  
449 Audience: ((laughter))  
450 S.W.: I'd like to play everything  
451 the Beatles ever recorded.  
452 Audience: ((laughter))  
453 S.W.: I won't do all of "Hey Jude"  
454 Audience: ((laughter))  
455 S.W.: what are these strings for?  
456 Audience: ((laughter))

In the introductory line of his song, Wright informs the audience about the length of time he needed to compose the song (l.443). Up to that point we do not have any concrete

indication that he did not need that much time. Wright wants to build up tension by throwing in various punch lines in which he steadily overstates the situation. The audience is well aware of the fact that he never took "a year and a half to write that" (1.443). This is the reason why they constantly react with laughter (1.444, 446, 449). Wright's strategy in this extract is to keep exaggerating (1.450/451, 453, 455) in order to make the audience curious about the song he wants to play. This is an important use of hyperbole in Wright's material. By overstating this situation, Wright maintains the audience's interest in his following performance.

To sum up, hyperbole plays a crucial role in Wright's performance. Because of the fact that he does not get into direct contact with his audience and thus does not directly involve them in his performance, it is important to have a technique that contributes to the maintenance of the audience's interest and appreciation in his show.

### **13.2.3. Wordplay and Punning**

As already shown in the preceding section, Wright makes use of figurative language in order to enhance the humorous effect of his material. In this section, I analyze various extracts in which Wright makes use of wordplay and punning in order to create humorous contexts which provoke the

audience's appreciation. In analyzing the various examples, I was able to observe that Wright uses wordplay and punning to pursue different aims. The first two examples display the use of wordplay in order to disappoint the audience's expectations. One of the most excellent examples can be found in Wright's story about the Stones.

*Cross Country (IHAP)*

846 S.W.: the Stones.  
847 I love the Stones.  
848 I can't believe  
849 they are still doing it  
850 after all these years.  
851 I watch them whenever I can.  
852 (1.0)  
853 Fred and Barney.  
854 Audience: ((laughter))  
855 {applause}

When Wright mentions the Stones in lines 846 and 847, we assume he is talking about the Rolling Stones. Even his remark in lines 848 to 851 does not reveal that he is thinking of someone different but merely makes us all the more determined to believe that he is talking about the Rolling Stones. So Wright plays both with language and with the audience's expectation and delays the surprise effect until the revelation of his punch line in line 853 when he says: "Fred and Barney". This remark makes the audience therefore burst into laughter and applause (1.854/855) when he pretends not to have been referring to the Rolling Stones but rather to the Flintstones.

Besides using wordplay in order to disappoint the audience's expectation, Wright also uses this strategy in order to feign misunderstanding and thus emphasizes his own stupidity. An excellent example can be found in the segment in which he informs his audience about the fact that he wants to buy a plasma television.

*Camera (ISHAP)*

466 S.W.: I'm thinking of buying a plasma television  
467 in case I need a blood transfusion,  
468 Audience: ((laughter))  
469 S.W.: that way I can mainline 150 channels right into my  
arm.  
470 Audience: ((laughter))  
471 S.W.: that way they can do my autopsy via satellite.  
472 Audience: ((laughter))  
473 S.W.: I have a CD burner:  
474 my fireplace.  
475 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright starts his short story in line 466 and tells the audience that he is considering "buying a plasma television in case [he] need[s] a blood transfusion" (l.466/467). Whereas the first line does not reveal any abnormal content, Wright creates humor with his following remark by playing on the different meanings of the word "plasma" as a flat panel display on the one hand, and a liquid component of the blood on the other hand. In lines 469 and 471, he even continues with further punch lines which both serve to top the preceding one and continuously enhance the audience's laughter (l.470, 472). In lines 473 and 474, he throws in a one-liner by saying that he has a CD burner,

which is his fireplace. Again he plays on the word "burner" in its low-tech and its high-tech meanings, which provokes the audience's laughter (1.475).

Wright provides a further example of misunderstanding in the segment in which he talks about the game "Monopoly".

*Monopoly (ISHAP)*

602 S.W.: I think it's wrong  
603 that only one company makes the game Monopoly.  
604 Audience: ((laughter))  
605 {applause}

He uses the game "Monopoly" (1.603) in order to set up his punch line. He plays with the Greek prefix "mono" which forms the first part of the composite noun by claiming that he thinks "it's wrong that only one company makes the game Monopoly" (1.602/603). Wright misinterprets the name of the game in that he thinks it expresses the fact that the company Parker Brothers has exclusive rights to market the game. This misinterpretation makes the audience laugh and applaud (1.604/605).

Before concluding the section as a whole, note that Wright also uses wordplay and punning to render his joking stories just more ridiculous. Sometimes he plays with opposite terms as in the following one-liner.

*Ants (IHAP)*

123 S.W.: right now  
124 I'm having amnesia

125                           and déjà vu at the same time.  
126 Audience: ((laughter))

In this case, he begins to play with two mutually exclusive terms when he pretends to be "having amnesia and déjà vu at the same time" (1.124/125). This combination of incongruent terms causes the audience's reaction with laughter (1.126). Wright's monotone delivery stresses the ridiculous effect of his statements and reinforces the success of this absurd remark.

As a final example, let's consider the following extract which shows that Wright also deals with serious topics. In line 490 he tells the audience that he was in a restaurant named "Bulimia's".

*Camera (ISHAP)*

489 S.W.:           last night,  
490                   I was in a restaurant called Bulimia's.  
491 Audience: ((laughter))  
492 S.W.:           the line for the bathroom was incredible.  
493 Audience: ((laughter))  
494                   {applause}

The name already makes us aware that he is about to ridicule a serious problem in his following statements. This is immediately proved by his punch line (1.492) when he says that "the line for the bathroom was incredible". Although it is a sensitive and delicate topic that he is making fun of, the audience joins in with laughter and

applause (1.493/494) and demonstrates their solidarity with his hostile attitude towards people suffering from bulimia.

The analysis of the previous examples has shown that Wright uses wordplay and punning in order to pursue different intentions which all lead to the aim of keeping up the audience's interest and appreciation. We have seen that the use of wordplay and punning enables him to create humor from different perspectives. In some examples, he pretends misunderstanding and thus creates humor by ridiculing himself, whereas in other examples, he plays with the audience's expectation and disappoints it by delivering surprising punch lines.

#### **13.2.4. Intonation and Paralanguage**

Even though Wright's performances are almost always characterized by his monotonous and apathetic style of speaking, there are examples in which he changes his intonation and body language.

First of all, I want to focus on extracts in which Wright uses gestures to enhance the humorous effect of what he is talking about. The technique allows his audience to visualize certain aspects of his stories and therefore serves to render his performance more dynamic even as he keeps his face expressionless. In the segment *Hitchhiking* (IHAP), he tells of some of his experience with the police

and uses gestures for the first time during his performance.

*Hitchhiking (IHAP)*

278 S.W.: I had the photograph on my license  
279 taken out of focus on purpose  
280 so when the police do stop me  
281 they go  
282 ((imitates a policeman squinting uncertainly at the  
license, then handing it back to the driver))  
283 Audience: ((laughter))  
284 S.W. "here,  
285 you can go."  
286 Audience: ((laughter))  
287 {weak applause}

These lines reveal Wright's miming skill when he imitates a policeman who squints uncertainly at his license before he hands it back to the driver and allows him to go on. Wright not only provokes laughter (l.283, 286/287) with the fact that he had a photograph that was "taken out of focus on purpose" (l.279), but also with the policeman's reaction who even accepts this photo and allows him to go (l.284/285).

In his second album, I found a further example when he ridicules his friend who is a pilot. Wright makes fun of him by revealing that his friend needs 45 minutes to back out his car and provides a further example of excellent gesticulation on stage (*Camera (ISHAP)*). In his television special, it can be seen that he even turns his head to imitate his friend looking right and left in order to leave his parking lot. This pantomiming enhances the humorous

effect of the story and therefore the audience's reaction to it (1.481).

In the segment in which he informs the audience that he once "got off the plane" (*My Grandfather (ISHAP)*, 1.945) but "forgot to undo [his] seatbelt" (1.946), he can enhance the audience's appreciation, which can be seen in the DVD performance. He not only tells them about his own absurd behavior, but even renders it somewhat graphic with his pantomime of running and dragging the plane behind him.

With regard to the previous examples, note that they only became interesting when watching the DVD performance. While listening to them it often proved to be difficult to comprehend the audience's reaction because the content does not seem to be extraordinarily funny; but in combination with his gestures the humorous effect is greater. This observation justifies the conclusion that the use of gestures proves to be of overall importance in successful stand-up comedy.

Before concluding the section, I want to offer an interesting observation concerning his body language on DVD. Although his performances are characterized by an extremely monotonous and apathetic style, and although Wright generally does not change his facial expression even when he uses gestures and intonation changes, I found an exception in line 414 while watching the DVD performance.

For the first time in both performances, Wright smiles a bit after the audience has reacted with laughter to his punch line in line 414 (*Camera (ISHAP)*). Another example in which Wright has to laugh himself can be found in the segment *Twin (ISHAP)* when he mentions his teacher having a nervous breakdown because of his stupidity (1.541-556). In the television special, we notice for the first time that Wright bends his head and hides his face in order to suppress his own laughter and to regain his concentration.

In conclusion, consider the importance of intonation and paralanguage for Wright's performance because they allow him to change the monotony of his style at least at regular intervals. This guarantees that the audience reacts with appreciation because he gives them the opportunity to visualize some situations he is talking about. This is a phenomenon that could also be observed in Seinfeld's performance.

### **13.2.5. Repetition**

When analyzing Wright's performance, it is obvious that he does not use repetition as often and as regularly as Seinfeld does. Whereas Seinfeld often repeats words or whole phrases in order to enhance the laughing response, Wright reduces this strategy to a minimum. He does not often explicitly repeat the same word, but works either

with parallel structures or with the adverb "again", which also has the function of injecting humor into his stories and thus raising the level of laughter.

An example in which Wright makes use of a repetitive structure in the form of parallelism can be found in his program *I Still Have a Pony*.

*Quote (ISHAP)*

15 S.W.: lots of my friends have babies,  
16 but I don't have any babies,  
17 but I have lots of friends.  
18 babies don't have any friends.  
19 Audience: ((weak laughter))

He tells this story in a sort of a rhyme and with a parallel structure and delivers the punch line in line 18 by saying: "babies don't have any friends." Wright uses the same structure for the end of the first two lines and the end of the last two lines. In both cases, the lines end with the same word. Lines 15 and 16 end with the word "babies" and lines 17 and 18 end with the word "friends".

Wright uses the same strategy from line 292 onward when he starts counting and resumes a few lines further down (l.297-301). So we can see that the parallel structure serves to enhance the funniness and therefore the laughter (l.302).

*The Store (ISHAP)*

289 I looked at a can of peas

290                   and I started counting the peas  
 291                   that were on the label of the can  
 292                   forty-four, forty-five, forty-six  
 293                   I'm wondering  
 294                   if they had a meeting  
 295                   on how many peas should be on the label of the can.  
 296 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
 297 S.W.:           forty-seven is too many,  
 298                   forty-five is not enough,  
 299                   all in favor of forty-six,  
 300                   okay,  
 301                   it's forty-six.  
 302 Audience:       ((laughter))

The next example shows that Wright also uses anaphora as a repetitive structure at the beginning of several sentences.

*The Store (ISHAP)*

334 S.W.:           then I'm driving around  
 335                   and I'm thinking:  
 336                   "alright I'm still alive,  
 337                   now what am I gonna do.  
 338 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 339 S.W.:           so I figured I'd go down  
 340                   and rent a movie  
 341                   so I go out to the video store  
 342                   and I can't remember the title of the movie I want  
 343                   so I'm describing the movie to the guy.  
 344                   I say:  
 [...]

It is interesting to see the accumulation of the personal pronoun "I" and the parallel structure of the sentences. They almost always start with a conjunction (*so* or *and*) or an adverb (*then* or *now*) and continue with the personal pronoun "I" and a verb form (l.334-344). Another example of the accumulation of the personal pronoun "I" (l.931, 933-937) can be found at the end of his performance.

*My Grandfather (ISHAP)*

931 S.W.: I remember  
932 when he died  
933 I was a little boy  
934 and I went to the wake with my aunt  
935 and I was kneeling down at the casket  
936 and I was looking at him inside the casket  
937 and I started thinking about my flashlight.  
938 Audience: ((laughter))  
939 S.W.: I started thinking about the batteries inside my  
flashlight.  
940 and I said to my aunt:  
941 "maybe he's not dead,  
942 maybe he's just in the wrong way."  
943 Audience: ((laughter))  
944 {applause}

We discover that Wright uses parallelism and anaphora throughout the whole segment, which can be seen in particular from line 934 to line 937 and in lines 941 and 942. The first repetitive structure (l.934-937) serves to enhance the audience's interest in what will happen and thus increases their reaction to the first punch line in line 937. The anaphoric use of the adverb "maybe" serves to increase the funniness of his second punch line (l.942).

As a final example, let's consider an extract that can be found in his story about what kind of presents he got from his grandfather.

*My Grandfather (ISHAP)*

895 S.W.: when I was little one Christmas  
896 he gave me a box of broken glass.  
897 he gave my brother a box of band-aids.  
898 Audience: ((laughter))  
899 S.W.: then he said:  
900 "now you two share."  
901 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright works again with parallelism that serves in this case to make the audience aware of the fact that the punch line has to follow immediately because both kinds of presents are totally absurd and remote from reality.

Having dealt with repetition in Wright's performance, I observed that he uses it in a different way than Seinfeld does. Whereas Seinfeld uses repetition to realize different intentions, such as providing a rhythmic pattern in his jokes, or as a means to gain planning time, or to pretend spontaneity, these strategies cannot be observed to that extent in Wright's performance. Wright only uses repetition to lend his jokes a rhythmic pattern and in some extracts to enhance the audience's reaction. In neither performance does he use repetition to gain some additional time. This emphasizes the differences in the way these two comedians organize their material. Whereas Seinfeld has to rely on repetition to establish contact with his audience and pretend to be reacting spontaneously, Wright does not need repetition as a technique to gain planning time because he is not interrupted by his audience and does not directly interact with them. So we can consider repetition to be a linguistic aspect of joke telling that emphasizes the difference between the two comedians' approaches, as far as the organization of their performances is concerned.

### **13.2.6. Disfluencies**

As I have already mentioned in the introduction of section 13., pauses play a central role in Wright's performance and therefore represent a central joking technique in his performance. Seinfeld also uses pauses as a strategy to make his audience calm down, to make them wait in curious anticipation of the following punch line, and to gain planning time. The same is generally true for Wright. Nevertheless, Wright permanently makes use of pauses, whether short ones or longer ones. The main function of pauses in Wright's performance is to raise the tension and make the audience wait for what he will say next. I decided to pay particular attention to these pauses and to indicate the exact period of time in brackets because of their overall importance in Wright's performance. They allow him to control his audience and the continuation of his program without establishing direct contact with the audience. Pauses of one-half second or less are indicated by a truncated ellipsis. Pauses of just over a half second up to one second are indicated by an ellipsis.

First, I will concentrate on Wright's use of longer pauses whose exact length is indicated in brackets. Wright provides an example in the moment following the segment about his birthday presents.

*Ants (IHAP)*

112 S.W.: it was my birthday recently.  
113 for my birthday  
114 I got a humidifier and a dehumidifier.  
115 Audience: ((laughter))  
116 S.W.: put them in the same room  
117 and let them fight it out.  
118 Audience: ((laughter))  
119 S.W.: then I filled my humidifier with wax  
120 now my room's all shiny.  
121 Audience: ((laughter))  
122 (10.0)  
123 S.W.: right now  
124 I'm having amnesia  
125 and déjà vu at the same time.  
126 Audience: ((laughter))

In this case, Wright decides to make a long pause of about ten seconds in order to give the audience time to recognize and to understand the joke's punch line. Furthermore, it serves to calm down the audience after their reaction and to concentrate everyone on the beginning of the following program. Wright uses the pause as a hint that a new story will begin. He follows the same strategy after the following extract:

*Ants (IHAP)*

210 S.W.: it's kind of an insane case  
211 6000 ants dressed up as rice  
212 and robbed a Chinese restaurant.  
213 Audience: ((laughter))  
214 {weak applause}  
215 S.W.: I don't think they did it.  
216 Audience: ((laughter))  
217 S.W. I know a few of them  
218 and they wouldn't do anything like that.  
219 (6.0)  
220 years ago,  
221 I worked in a natural organic health food store  
222 in Seattle, Washington

Wright uses a long pause of about six seconds (1.219) that allows the audience to recognize the conclusion of the joke, calm down, and then concentrate on the continuation of his performance.

Wright uses long pauses not only to prepare his audience to switch from one topic to the next. He also makes use of shorter pauses in order to enhance the tension before revealing the punch line. Pauses before the punch line make the audience curious about what will follow and encourage them to think of possibilities so that they build up expectations that are usually not fulfilled. This disappointment effect, caused by the surprise punch line, is the reason for humor in numerous jokes. But I also want to stress that the longer the pause lasts between the delivery of the build-up section and the conclusion, the more likely the recipient is able to predict the punch line and therefore to lessen the joke's incongruous effect. It is obvious that the audience's amusement is reduced when they have correctly predicted the punch line.<sup>41</sup> This is also stressed by Goldstein (Goldstein and McGhee 1972:134) who found that "jokes rated as more humorous had shorter

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<sup>41</sup> Wilson (1979) deals with the mechanisms by which jokes evoke amusement and provides a model of the various processes by which the form and the content of jokes evoke amusement.

latencies of response. [...]. A riddle or joke that drags on too long is not considered funny."

Wright presents this strategy in his introductory segment when he talks about what happened when he walked once in the forest. In this extract, Wright plays on a riddle, even a sort of Zen koan, all Americans know. He bases his joke on a specific joking structure so that the audience can make the association to the familiar expression he implies in his joke.

*Introduction (IHAP)*

27 S.W.: I was once walking through the forest alone  
28 and a tree fell right in front of me ..  
29 and I didn't hear it.  
30 Audience: ((laughter))  
31 {applause}

In line 28 he delivers the information that "a tree fell right in front of" him and makes a short pause before providing the punch line. Wright bases his joke on the old logical question "If a tree falls in the forest and nobody hears it, does it make a sound?" The audience can therefore realize the allusion he wants to make with his joke and can build up a certain expectation about the following punch line during the short pause. At the same time, the pause enables him to build up the tension while they are waiting for the delivery. When he says: "and I didn't hear it" (l.29), the audience bursts into laughter and applause

(1.30/31) because he plays with the actual former joke and ridicules it by inventing his own punch line.

In another story, he informs his audience that he worked in a pet store during his high school years. This extract not only contains short pauses but also pause fillers.

*Monopoly (ISHAP)*

641 S.W.: when I was in high school  
642 I worked in a pet store  
643 and they fired me  
644 because, uh..  
645 what happened was, uh..  
646 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
647 S.W.: they had three snakes in there  
648 and, uh, one day I braided them.  
649 Audience: ((laughter))  
650 S.W.: I tried to pass it off  
651 as one snake with three heads.  
652 Audience: ((laughter))  
653 S.W.: oh, yes,  
654 it's very rare  
655 it's from Connecticut.  
656 Audience: ((laughter))

Wright uses three pause fillers and two short pauses (1.644/645, 648) in this section in order to enhance the audience's mood. The audience immediately starts to laugh (1.646) because they know that the pauses serve to prepare the revelation of the punch line. Wright provides the punch line in line 648 when he reveals that he "braided" (1.648) the "three snakes" (1.647) one time in order to try "to pass it off as one snake with three heads" (1.650/651). The audience laughs heartily at both punch lines (1.649, 652) and their laughter is even reinforced in line 656 when

Wright tops it once more by claiming that "it's very rare it's from Connecticut" (1.654/655).

Throughout the whole performance, Wright repeatedly makes use of short pauses whose function is always to build up tension and to make the audience wait for the revelation of the punch line. In contrast to Seinfeld, Wright does not seem to use pauses in order to gain planning time. Since he does not address the audience and is not interrupted by heckling, we can assume that the pauses he uses are part of the planning stage of his program. In the following examples, Wright makes use of pauses in order to enhance the tension and therefore the audience's curiosity before the revelation of the punch line. In contrast to the selection of excerpts above, Wright decides to make longer pauses in the following extracts:

*Ants (IHAP)*

164 S.W.: I'm saving money though  
165 because I'm planning a trip to Spain.  
166 so I bought an album  
167 that teaches you the language  
168 you put the album on  
169 you put headphones on  
170 you learn the language  
171 while you're sleeping  
172 (3.0)  
173 during the night the record skipped.  
174 Audience: ((laughter))  
175 S.W.: I got up the next day  
176 and could only stutter in Spanish.  
177 Audience: ((laughter))  
178 {weak applause}

Wright provides again a long introduction in which he informs his listeners that he is saving money in order to go to Spain. He tells the audience that he bought an album with which you can learn Spanish "while you're sleeping" (1.171). Wright introduces a pause of three seconds (1.172) which is meant to enhance the audience's interest in what will follow. One can imagine that his last remark will be the basis for the following punch line, but without knowing the joke, the audience cannot come up with the correct follow-up. Wright then continues by saying that "during the night the record skipped" (1.173). This statement makes the audience laugh (1.174) because they can imagine that the following lines will be funny even if Wright holds back the punch line. Lines 175 and 176 provide a surprising punch line that nobody had anticipated: he "got up the next day and could only stutter in Spanish."

The following extract provides a further example when he talks about a trip with his friends.

*Cross Country (IHAP)*

856 S.W.: last summer I drove cross country  
857 with a friend of mine.  
858 we split the driving  
859 we switched every half mile  
860 Audience: ((laughter))  
861 S.W.: the whole way across  
862 we only had one cassette tape to listen to  
863 (1.0)  
864 I can't remember what it was.  
865 Audience: ((laughter))

He mentions the fact that they "only had one cassette tape to listen to" (1.862) and makes a short pause (1.863). This pause makes the audience aware of the fact that Wright will provide the punch line in the following lines, and everybody thinks that he will express his annoyance at having heard the same music over and over. So the pause puts the audience on the wrong track, which is evidenced by the audience's reaction to the punch line in line 864. Humor derives from disappointment and surprise triggered by the punch line.

Before turning to a new section, I also want to mention Wright's use of cut-offs. From time to time, he uses them to introduce a new hilarious one-liner as in the following example.

*Introduction (IHAP)*

60                   about four years ago I was-  
61                   no, it was yesterday.  
62    Audience:    ((laughter))  
63                   {applause}

He continues with nonsense talk and corrects himself, which displays his mock stupidity and an inability to keep his facts straight. He introduces a sentence with "about four years ago I was-" (1.60), then cuts it off in order to correct himself and reveals that "it was yesterday" (1.61). This correction provokes laughter and applause (1.62/63).

In line 532 Wright uses the same strategy as he used in lines 60 and 61.

*7's and museums (IHAP)*

532                   today I was-  
533                   no that wasn't me.  
534 Audience: ((laughter))  
535                   {applause}

He starts a sentence and then abruptly cuts it off in order to correct himself and make the audience laugh and applaud because of his confusion (l.534/535).

To sum up, pauses play an important role in Wright's performance. They represent one of his major joking techniques and principally serve to raise the tension and the audience's curiosity about what is to come. In contrast to Seinfeld, Wright does not use disfluencies to gain planning time. His performances consist of well-prepared material which is not intended to include the audience. The pauses he uses serve to control his audience and the highly-structured course of his performance.

**13.2.7. Direct Address to the Audience**

In this section, I examine the excerpts in which Wright establishes direct contact to his audience with the use of discourse markers and politeness strategies. In general, I have to admit that Wright keeps his use of discourse markers to a minimum and does not often direct his comments

to the audience. This behavior is in stark contrast to that of Seinfeld but probably results from the fact that Wright's material for the most part consists of absurd and unreal stories that are not based on experience and knowledge that his audience could share with him.

In his program *I Have a Pony*, he introduces a new remark with the discourse marker "well" in line 49.

*Introduction (IHAP)*

49 S.W.: well,  
50 you can't have everything  
51 where would you put it?  
52 Audience: ((laughter))  
53 {applause}

Wright uses the discourse marker in this case to create a feeling of shared knowledge when he continues with a statement everybody can accept. Wright directly addresses the audience for the first time when he says: "you can't have everything" (1.50). What follows is the immediate punch line in form of a question: "where would you put it?" (1.51). Wright's first remark strikes us all as absolutely correct. Everybody agrees with the fact that we cannot buy everything. He knows this and wants his audience to laugh at the surprise and absurdity of his punch line in form of a question. Instead of mentioning financial obstacles to trying to have everything, he is worried about the space it

would require. This unexpected punch line causes the audience's laughter.

Another example of the use of a discourse marker can be found only at the end of his first program. This justifies the observation that Wright does not frequently make use of them.

*Jiggs Casey (IHAP)*

757                    "you know,  
758                    you're the kind of guy  
759                    I'd really like to hang around with."  
760 Audience: ((laughter))

He starts with the discourse marker "you know" (1.757). When we analyze this segment we see that he does not use it to directly address his audience but the guy he pretends to speak to. Wright introduces it in this case as a positive politeness marker that he uses to pretend having contact with the man. He then continues his talk and can even get the audience to laugh (1.760). Wright uses the discourse marker "you know" in the same sense at the end of his second program (1.968) when he directly addresses the guy at the grocery store who was "pushing 30 shopping carts across the parking lot" (1.966).

*Shopping Carts (ISHAP)*

965 S.W.:            when I go to the grocery store  
966                    and I see a guy pushing 30 shopping carts across the  
                     parking lot,  
967                    sometimes I say:  
968                    "you know,

969                    somebody else might wanna use one of those."  
970 Audience:    ((laughter))  
971                    {applause}

In the segment in which he talks about his Shetland pony Nikkie, Wright uses the discourse marker "you know" (1.1077) for the first time in order to directly address his audience before revealing that his pony "was involved in a bizarre electrolysis accident" the previous summer (1.1082).

*Apt. (IHAP)*

1070 S.W.:        I have a Shetland pony named Nikkie.  
1071                I like to ride him around the apartment,  
1072                if I have to flip an album,  
1073                I ride him over to the stereo,  
1074 Audience:    ((weak laughter))  
1075 S.W.:        if I wanna make a sandwich,  
1076                I ride him into the kitchen,  
1077                you know,  
1078                but sometimes his hooves slide on the tiles  
1079                and he falls down.  
1080 Audience:    ((weak laughter))  
1081 S.W.:        last summer  
1082                he was involved in a bizarre electrolysis accident.  
1083 Audience:    ((laughter))  
1084 S.W.:        all the hair was removed  
1085                except for the tail.

The absurdity predominating in this segment makes the audience react with laughter (1.1083). The discourse marker has only the function of introducing a gap filler before he finally continues with his story.

In his program *I Still Have a Pony*, Wright addresses his audience more often than before. In lines 72 and 82

(Quote (ISHAP)), he uses the discourse marker "you know" and in line 79 even an imperative.

*Quote (ISHAP)*

63 S.W.: I did Jesus and Santa Claus on a seesaw.  
64 Audience: ((laughter))  
65 {weak applause}  
66 S.W.: I had Jesus on the low end  
67 even though he weighed less.  
68 Audience: ((laughter))  
69 S.W.: because he's Jesus  
70 Audience: ((laughter))  
71 S.W.: Jesus pissed off a lot of people  
72 you know,  
73 "will you stop turning the water into wine,  
74 I'm trying to take a shower."  
75 Audience: ((laughter))  
76 S.W.: what did Jesus ever do for Santa Claus on his  
birthday?  
77 Audience: ((laughter))  
78 {applause}  
79 S.W.: don't think about it,  
80 it doesn't mean anything.  
81 Audience: ((laughter))  
82 S.W.: you know,  
83 the New Testament is pretty old.  
84 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
85 S.W.: I think  
86 they should call them  
87 the Old Testament and the Most Recent Testament.  
88 Audience: ((laughter))  
89 S.W.: you know,  
90 when you look at a star,  
91 it may not even be there anymore  
92 because it takes so long for the light  
93 to get from there to here.  
94 it may be gone,  
95 it just looks like it's still there.  
96 that's how I see my old girlfriends.  
97 Audience: ((laughter))

The discourse marker in line 72 only serves as a gap filler whereas the one in line 82 is supposed to express shared knowledge and make the audience aware of the fact that he is talking about some kind of world knowledge everybody can comprehend. It is rare for Wright to use the discourse

marker in that way because he usually creates absurd stories that do not lead the audience to the phenomenon of shared experience. The imperative in line 79 is a means to increase the effect of his following punch line (l.80) and thus enhances the audience's reaction (l.81). In line 89 he addresses the audience again with the discourse marker "you know" in order to show that he is directly addressing them and speaking of shared knowledge. This accumulation of discourse markers could not be observed during his first program *I Have a Pony*.

In line 765 (*Water (ISHAP)*), we find another interesting example in which he refers to the unexpected ending of his previous story (l.757-764) by directly addressing the audience and asking: "what the hell did you think was gonna happen?".

#### *Hitchhiker (ISHAP)*

765 S.W.:            what the hell did you think was gonna happen?  
766 Audience:       ((laughter))  
767                    {beginning applause}  
768 S.W.:            you people are crazy.  
769 Audience:       ((laughter))

This direct address resulting from the use of bald on record strategies gives rise to further laughter and applause (l.766/767) because it is unusual for Wright to contact his audience so frankly. He ends his story with one further direct remark in which he claims that "you people

are crazy" (1.768), which makes the audience laugh once more (1.769).

Before finishing with this section, I want to compare the end of Wright's programs to Seinfeld's because they yield further information about their contrasting characters and behavior towards the audience. Seinfeld feels enthusiastic and repeatedly thanks his audience (Q + A, 1.2353-2363) before he even starts with a question-answer segment in which he directly addresses his audience. At the end of this segment, he starts thanking them again (1.2527) and even calls them "a wonderful audience" (1.2528) before finishing his thanks. Wright finishes his show *I Have a Pony* by thanking his audience (*Babies and skiing (IHAP)*, 1.1163-1166) and emphasizing that he "appreciated it" (1.1166). Whereas Seinfeld enjoys the audience's standing ovations and even offers an extra question-answer segment at the end of his program, Wright rapidly leaves the stage after both programs. Wright's behavior, compared to Seinfeld, is relatively introverted. Nevertheless, he enjoys as much success as Seinfeld, who candidly approaches his audience during his performances. Seinfeld expresses the conventional formal politeness. He comes on stage, is well dressed and cares about the appearance he makes in front of the audience, which is an aspect of negative politeness. Besides, it is obvious that

Seinfeld addresses the audience with positive politeness strategies because one of his aims is to integrate the audience by building solidarity and sympathy for the topics he talks about. Even if Seinfeld expresses hostility and aggression about specific "adversaries", he uses positive politeness strategies, such as modal verbs or hedges and hesitators in order to minimize the threat to the hearers' face. With Wright, however, we find a different technique for establishing solidarity. He does not care about formal politeness. At first glance, one could have the impression that he is not interested in his audience, but that turns out to be not the case. He is ultimately less threatening, because he creates solidarity not through conventional politeness but by establishing common ground. His main aim is to show the audience that they are alike and share the same sort of humor by expressing in-group thinking, which is a component of positive politeness. In contrast to Seinfeld, he does not connect with the audience via the "we"-strategy or direct address and integration, for example, but rather through a different form of solidarity and sympathy creation.

#### **13.2.8. Transitions**

Whereas Seinfeld always tries to find a link between one story and the next, Wright constantly talks about topics

which are unrelated. Nevertheless, we can find a few examples of transitions in his work, as, for example, from line 180 (*Ants (IHAP)*) onward. Wright uses his previous mention of his trip to Spain (1.164 ff.) to bring up his habit of flying. This is the first real transition during his performance. However, the next segment provides a new story and Wright stops talking about his flying habits.

In the segment in which Wright speaks about his contacts (*7's and museums (IHAP)*), he finally introduces a sentence which serves as a transition to his next topic when he says that he keeps the contacts on his desk next to the typewriter (1.546) which becomes the central part of his next story.

As for his second program, Wright does not use any transitions at all. With regard to the minimal use of transitions in his first program and the complete absence of them in the second program, I would like to reiterate that Wright's style of performing differs enormously from that of Seinfeld, for whom transitions are among one of the most important characteristics of his performances.

### **13.2.9. Summary**

The preceding analysis of Wright's material is an attempt to gain insight into the comedian's work and the organization of his material and his performance. As the

preceding chapters have demonstrated, Wright has a large and varied repertoire of techniques for creating successful verbal humor. In my analysis, I have decided to concentrate not only on one stand-up comedian, but to present the contrasting style of performance of two of the most important comedians in the stand-up comedy scene. Whereas Seinfeld wins his audience over not only with the content of his jokes, but also with his natural style of performance, Wright chooses a completely different strategy to make the audience appreciate his performance by establishing common ground and in-group thinking. Seinfeld presents himself and his experience in his performances, whereas Wright presents invented and well-prepared material. He tells invented stories while steadily pretending to be speaking about his off-stage persona and, therefore, creates most of his verbal humor out of absurdities and incongruous situations. He does not get involved in interaction with his audience.

Although Wright principally presents himself as the butt of his jokes, it is rare for him to present pure self-deprecation. Most of the time, his humor tends to be evoked by the use of incongruities and therefore moves away from pure self-deprecation. One reason for this observation might be Wright's style of performing in presenting fake life stories which are obviously absurd as such, and thus

contain incongruity as a crucial characteristic. This leads us to examine our previous observation that successful self-deprecation tends to turn into shared ridicule. Whereas this is certainly true for Seinfeld's work, we cannot find any example in Wright's work that confirms this observation. In his entire performance there are no explicit examples of shared ridicule, which can further be seen as a proof that he is not prone to contacting his audience, in contrast to Seinfeld. Wright captivates with his monotonous and apathetic style of performance and uses various techniques to render his material funny and his performance dynamic.

Three of Wright's most important joking techniques are the use of hyperbole and wordplay and punning. Throughout his performance, he makes use of hyperbole in order to heighten the humorous effect not only by the content of his jokes, but also by completely exaggerating and overstating the ridiculousness of his stories. The technique ensures that the audience gets the joke and is therefore a means to control his audience's reaction. Wordplay and punning create humorous contexts that provoke the audience's appreciation either by disappointing their expectations or by pretending to misunderstand a certain expression and thus presenting his own stupidity. One further central joking technique is the use of disfluencies in the form of

pauses. Seinfeld also makes use of pauses to calm his audience down, to build up tension, and make them wait for the what is about to follow, and to gain planning time. Nevertheless, he does not use pauses to the same extent than Wright does. For him, pauses become a means to control his audience without having to contact them in a direct manner.

Having dealt in detail with both comedians, I can conclude that both possess extraordinary skill in comedy performance even though they are very contrastive characters.

#### **14 Development of Humor in Stand-up Comedy**

Having dealt in detail with two of the most important stand-up comedians, I want to address the question as to how well the various theories of humor cover stand-up comedy. In my research, I have confined myself to the essentials of the incongruity theory, the hostility theory, and the release theory. As already pointed out in section 7.4. (The General Theory of Verbal Humor), the semantic script-based theory of humor (SSTH) and the general theory of verbal humor (GTVH) by Raskin were not at the center of my focus because they attempt to explain the mechanisms of humor found in joke text rather than joke performance as it occurs in stand-up comedy. Raskin's theory is not a general theory. It only addresses scripts based on written words and therefore does not examine the various strategies that underlie the essential features of stand-up comedy performances. It is limited to verbal humor, but excludes "non-verbal humor" in that it does not take into consideration paralanguage and prosody. This is why I considered it crucial to look at linguistic features such as disfluencies, discourse markers, pauses, and paralinguistic elements, because research on that topic is still very scant or even entirely non-existing. In my point of view, performance in stand-up comedy means linguistic behavior. Therefore, my data has to be a live performance

and not a written text in which essential linguistic features of an oral performance are completely omitted. Throughout the analytical part of my study, I have emphasized that most of the jokes create humor by the incongruity that the punch line expresses. An essential strategy of the humorist is to build up a joke with the intention of leading the audience to a false expectation. In revealing the punch line, they provide an unexpected outcome and thus confront the audience with a surprise ending. This play with expectation and surprise, which is often born of complete absurdity, expresses incongruity and therefore causes the audience's amusement. This observation is in concurrence with the view of Koestler's (1969:91), who stated that

humour depends primarily on its surprise effect: the bisociative shock. To cause surprise the humorist must have a modicum of originality - the ability to break away from the stereotyped routines of thought.

However, we cannot consider stand-up comedy to be completely covered by the incongruity theory<sup>42</sup>. In the same way that Freud's theory represents a comprehensive model combining different humor theories, the mechanisms of

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<sup>42</sup> For further reference see Shultz (1972,1976), Freud (1905/1960), Nerhardt (1977), Wilson (1979), McGhee (1979), Kant and Schopenhauer in Morreall (1987), in Eastman (1922), MacHovec (1988), Raskin (1985), Attardo (2001), Attardo and Chabanne (1992), Willmann (1940), Koestler (1969), Suls (1972,1977), Pepicello (1983).

stand-up comedy can only adequately be described by a combination of incongruity and hostility theories. In a few cases I could even refer to release theories when the comedian brought up taboo topics.<sup>43</sup> These examples were very rare, though, in both comedians' work. Wright and Seinfeld prove with their performances that ridicule serves as the essential technique of stand-up comedy. Their material consists of a combination of self-ridicule, private, and shared ridicule; cf. Wilson (1979). This technique allows them to express hostility, superiority and social criticism without overtly having to attack the target of their jokes. They confine themselves to verbal attacks and win the audience's solidarity as expressed by their reaction in form of laughter and applause. Comedians use self-deprecation to focus the attention on themselves and it allows them to continue their monologue without being interrupted by the audience. This proves that the direct contact with the audience is not an essential aspect of stand-up comedy. As for Seinfeld, I have to admit that the direct address to his audience represents one of the most important strategies of his performance, but in general it cannot be considered essential. Wright succeeds

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<sup>43</sup> See Wright's joke about a restaurant called "Bulimia" (*Camera* (ISHAP), 1.489-494) and his joke about his grandfather's death (*Grandfather* (ISHAP), 1.931-944).

without overtly contacting his audience. Private and shared ridicule<sup>44</sup>, however, offer the opportunity to passively include the audience without having to contact them in a direct manner. With this strategy, comedians are demanding the audience to share their attitude. They principally achieve this feeling of solidarity, expressed by the audience's laughter, through the use of shared knowledge.

Further, I want to emphasize that setting up incongruity and expressing superiority are the only means by which humor is created in stand-up comedy. The comedians' stage persona and their style of performing (their timing, their facial expressions and body language, their voice quality) contribute to a great extent to the success of their delivery. Although their material is generally scripted and rehearsed, they have to master spontaneity, imagination, inventiveness, originality and flexibility. It is obvious that every performance is different and has to be altered according to the audience's reaction. I have shown to what extent Seinfeld and Wright make use of timing in order to control their audience and to ensure their amusement. Furthermore, they must always be prepared for heckling, which I have demonstrated with

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<sup>44</sup> Whereas Wright reduces the use of self-deprecation and shared ridicule to a minimum, Seinfeld makes frequent use of all three subcategories (cf. and compare sections 13.1.1. and 13.2.1.).

several extracts taken from Seinfeld's performance. None of the humor theories have taken any of these features into consideration. Whereas performance in conversational joke telling proves to be important and contributes to the success of the joke, I consider it to be essential and of utmost importance in stand-up comedy. In stand-up comedy the comedians rarely address their audience in order to build up a rapport; their presentations mainly consist of monologues. It is evident that they must be able to sustain the audience's amusement through a combination of funny material and the presentation of their own stage persona. As demonstrated with Seinfeld, much of his material does not point to the presence of humor in the text itself. In this case he has to create it through his performance and his skill in getting the audience to join him in a consequence through the use of shared knowledge. Comedians achieve their aim mainly through the use of various joke techniques, such as paralanguage, ridicule, and power relations and politeness strategies.

To conclude this section, I want to present various schematic diagrams<sup>45</sup> developed from the observations made in the analytical parts of both comedians' material. They

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<sup>45</sup> In the diagrams I will use different sorts of arrows to clarify the relationships focused on: "—————>" = consists of; "----->" = leads to; "-.-.-.->" = results from.

illustrate that stand-up comedy represents a combination of various criteria taken from the humor theories and the presentation of a certain stage persona who makes use of several linguistic features in order to create a successful performance.

Fig.1

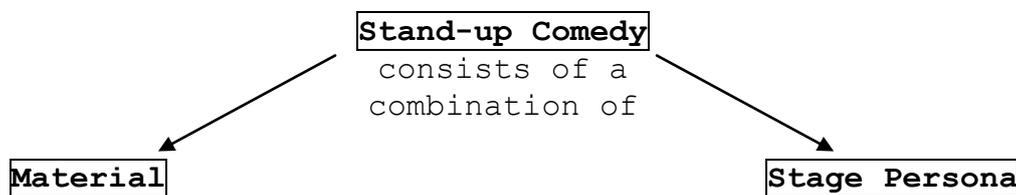
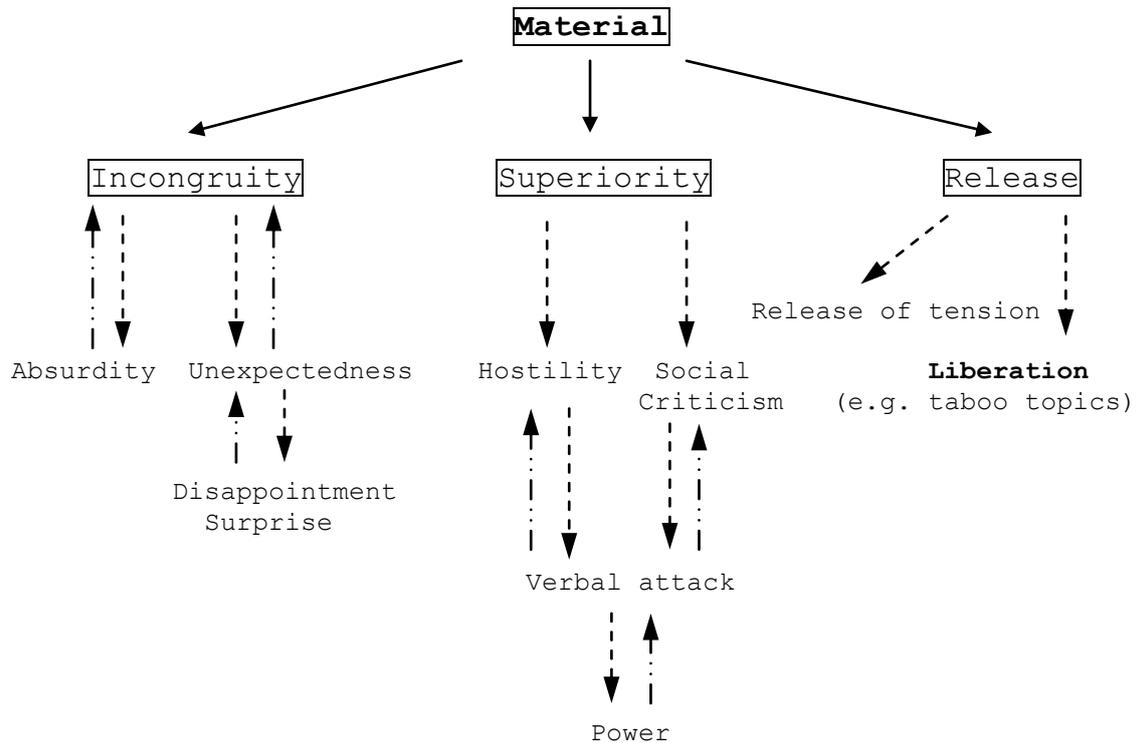


Figure 1 presents the basic and therefore the most important pillars of stand-up comedy, which consists of the stand-up comedian's material as well as their stage persona. As both analytical parts have demonstrated, the comedians have to create a certain stage persona which with they can deliver their material in order to present a successful performance. As I have shown with Seinfeld and Wright, there is no one particular type of stage persona that will spell success. Seinfeld's and Wright's stage personae are not similar in the least. Nevertheless, they can be considered to be two of the most successful stand-up comedians. Whereas Wright concentrates on an apathetic style of performing in which he tells about fake situations, Seinfeld tries to present his off-stage persona

and captivates his audience with everyday topics and stories of his real life. The importance in stand-up comedy lies in the successful performance of the material. As the analysis of Seinfeld's material has shown, he even succeeds with material that is not at all funny, presenting as he does everyday topics most of the time. But the way he ridicules himself as he performs it makes the audience aware of their own foibles and shortcomings and therefore renders it humorous. Wright, however, does not play with shared knowledge, but invents material that describes incongruous situations so that he mainly creates humor out of the combination of absurd situations and his monotonous and completely apathetic way of performing. Besides, whereas Seinfeld displays negative politeness with his attention to formal politeness (black suit, tie), Wright creates solidarity not so much through politeness but by establishing common ground and in-group thinking. In that way, Wright can even be considered more polite than Seinfeld because he wants to express sympathy with his audience through shared humor and a feeling of being alike.

The following diagrams will provide a closer look at the main pillars of stand-up comedy. Figure 2 illustrates the branch 'Material' in detail.

Fig.2



The above diagram is a detailed analysis of what I observed when dealing with Wright's and Seinfeld's material. It starts with the assumption that the material consists of a combination of criteria taken from the incongruity, superiority and the release theories. Incongruity is expressed either by the inherent absurdity of the stories presented by the comedians, or by the intention of the humorists to lead to something unexpected resulting from surprising punch lines. Superiority is principally expressed by hostility and aggression towards specific opponents (cf. Seinfeld: *Cab Drivers*), or by social criticism (cf. Seinfeld: *Phones*). Although social criticism has to be considered less aggressive than hostility, both

can be classified as a verbal attack because they express the speaker's power over their specific opponents. Criteria of the release theory can hardly be found in Seinfeld's and Wright's material. The few examples found (cf. Wright: *Camera*) show that the use of humor in that situation leads to a release of tension and a liberation, particularly when speaking about taboo topics such as serious illnesses, as presented in Wright's example. Of course, it is important to mention that this diagram does not equally apply to both comedians. The analytical part has demonstrated that both comedians build their ridicule jokes on the expression of incongruity and superiority. But within these subcategories I was able to determine differences. Seinfeld, for example, reduces joking stories in which humor is created out of absurdities to a minimum, whereas Wright's jokes nearly always evoke humor by the absurdity of its contents. Among the few examples in which Seinfeld makes use of absurdity, we can mention one extract in the segment *Supermarkets* in which he tells about the desperate customers who are not sure if they have milk at home and yet may be confronted with the opposite problem of not knowing what to do with all the milk they have (1.869-970). It is a clear example of incongruity created by the absurdity and the hyperbole of his following punch lines when he starts dramatizing the situation by speaking of "a race against the clock with the

expiration date" (1.919). Then, he continues describing further absurd scenarios in which one might be eating "giant punch bowls of cereal, three meals a day" (1.922/923) or using the milk to wash one's face (1.925) or bringing "cats in from all over the neighborhood" (1.927) and begging them in panic: "hurry up and drink it [...] come on, it's almost time" (1.928,930). Another example can be found in the segment *Horses* when he misinterprets the expression "horsepower" (1.2216-2235). In Wright's material absurdity plays a central role, which can be explained by the fact that he does not tell real stories but fake ones he pretends to have experienced. I just want to present one example to prove his general use of absurdities.<sup>46</sup> In the segment *Ants (IHAP)*, he comments that "6000 ants dressed up as rice and robbed a Chinese restaurant" (1.211/212). In his next comment, he even tops the absurdity by admitting that he does not "think they did it" (1.215), making himself the center of ridicule. Wright offers up his own foolishness and ignorance with this remark and pretends not to have realized the impossibility of what he is talking about. In line 217 he even stresses his stupidity when he pretends to have known a few of the ants and assures the audience in a serious tone that "they wouldn't do anything

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<sup>46</sup> For further examples refer to section 13.2.

like that" (1.218). He pretends not to realize the absurdity of his descriptions and constantly invents new situations that elicit appreciation by virtue of their incongruity. This strategy can be found throughout his entire performance. Wright also creates humor by delivering punch lines in which the audience's expectation is not fulfilled. Consequently, they suffer a moment of disappointment and this elicits laughter from the surprise effect the punch lines reveal. Examples can be found in the segment *Introduction (IHAP)* when he claims to have parked jets while his audience is thinking he means cars (1.10-20), or in the segment *Cross Country (IHAP)* when he aims for the surprise effect by delivering a punch line most of his audience is not expecting (1.856-865). Instead, he emphasizes his hopeless stupidity by admitting that he cannot remember the one music cassette he had heard over and over while crossing the country: "I can't remember what it was" (1.864). Further, he continues creating incongruity expressed by unexpectedness when he misinterprets the policeman's question when crossing the border (1.879-886).

As far as the expression of superiority is concerned, the analysis has shown that both comedians use ridicule to express power over specific opponents. But Seinfeld makes greater use of it than Wright because he uses more examples of shared and private ridicule than Wright does. Both

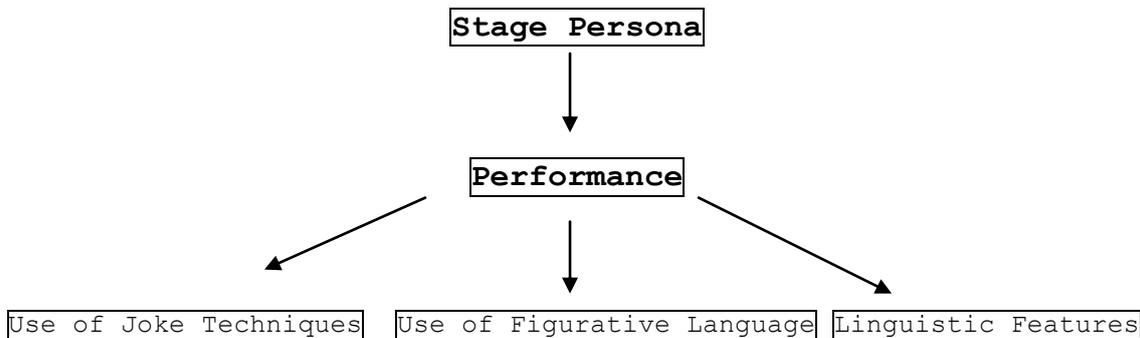
mainly express hostility in their jokes, as for example in Seinfeld's cab driver's story (l.67-165) and in his McDonald's story (l.1554-1590). As for Wright, we should mention the overtly aggressive behavior he shows towards claustrophobic persons when he uses their illness to make fun of himself (*Camera (ISHAP)*, l.385-388).

The adoption of superiority to express social criticism can only be found in Seinfeld's routine on the unnecessary use of phones (*Phones*, l.44-66) when he talks about a problem we are all aware of. Wright does not explicitly express social criticism in his jokes, which can be mainly explained by the fact that he does not include everyday topics in his material.

As far as the expression of release and the liberation of taboo topics is concerned, I can state that neither comedian offers frequent examples of these phenomena. One explicit example could be found in Wright's performance when he talks about a restaurant by the name of "Bulimia" (*Camera (ISHAP)*, l.489-494). In this extract he signals the audience that he is about to ridicule a serious problem but continues by commenting that "the line for the bathroom was incredible" (l.492). In this case Wright presents a sensitive and delicate topic which is normally off limits within the context of entertainment.

The following diagram illustrates the examination of stage personae and their performance.

Fig.3



The analytical part of my study has shown that each comedian has created an individual stage persona.

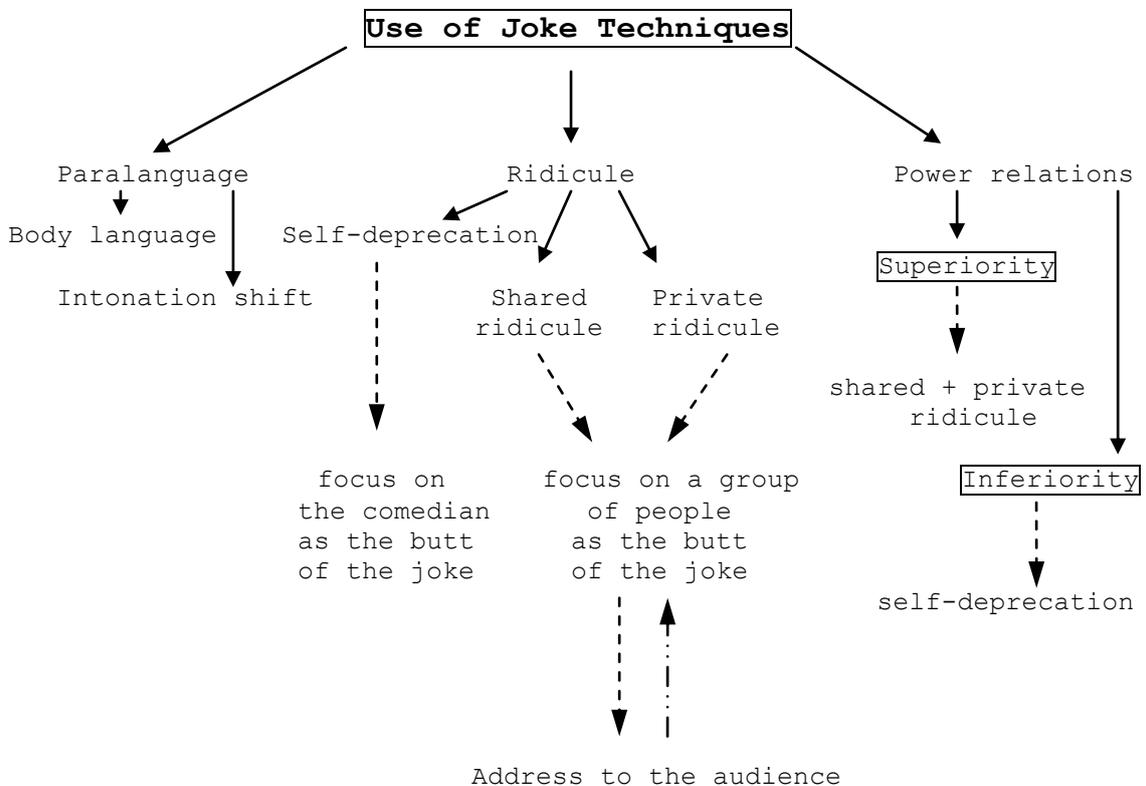
Seinfeld retains his own natural speech patterns and has developed a stage persona which is very close to his off-stage persona, and the close identity of these two personae is reflected in his very normal on-stage appearance. This allows him to make his delivery as natural as possible. He knows exactly how to display his personality in front of his audience, which is the reason why he can deliver humor from the most well-known everyday topics and make the audience aware of their own foibles.

Wright has created an individual style which can be characterized by his deliberately slow and particularly monotonous style of presentation, which mainly consists of hilarious one-liners and short jokes. He does not talk

about everyday topics as such, but fakes everyday life and invents stories during his performances. His apathetic style is known as "deadpan delivery" (Double 2005:286) and has become unique in the stand-up comedy scene.

Although these two comedians represent such contrastive stage personae, both principally make use of the same joke techniques, figurative language as well as various linguistic features of joke telling that guarantee the success of their performances. The following diagram illustrates the theoretical relationships among various joke techniques.

Fig.3.1.



As the analysis of both comedians has shown, ridicule represents the major joking technique Seinfeld and Wright use in their performances. Seinfeld constantly presents self-deprecation and shared ridicule, which leads to the observation that successful self-deprecation even tends to turn into shared ridicule because he makes the audience aware of their own vices and weaknesses while presenting his own ones. One excellent example is found in the segment *Late TV* in which Seinfeld describes his own behavior when he is tired and wants to go to bed, but forces himself to stay awake. This example clearly shows that self-deprecation does not serve to express superiority but rather inferiority and is a form of ridicule that helps to express sympathy. By relating embarrassing personal stories, Seinfeld openly admits to not being perfect himself and allows the audience to laugh at his expense; cf. Freud (1905/1960). At the same time, he makes them aware of their own odd behaviors, which enhances their reaction and serves to turn self-deprecation into shared ridicule. In that case he keeps his power over his "adversaries" by making them laugh at their own foibles that are to be generalized for all human beings.

As the analysis has shown, Wright does not use shared ridicule at all, which can be explained by the fact that he does not talk about everyday topics which could remind the

audience of their own foibles. Furthermore, he avoids direct contact with the audience and therefore does not bring up any topics that could serve as a link between his behavior and that of the audience. As far as self-deprecation is concerned, I have discovered that it is rare to find pure self-deprecation. In most cases, the extracts provide examples of the creation of humor out of incongruous situations and move away from pure self-deprecation. I justified this observation with the fact that Wright only tells of fake life situations he never really experienced. So incongruity necessarily takes on a crucial role. Therefore the observation that successful self-deprecation tends to turn into shared ridicule would not be valid for Wright's material. That can be put down to the fact that he only talks about unreal and invented situations and does not intend to integrate the audience in the same way as Seinfeld does.

As far as private ridicule is concerned, we can state that both comedians make use of it in order to express their hostile feelings and, therefore, superiority over the group of people that is intended to be disparaged. The audience's reaction in form of laughter and applause proves their agreement and solidarity and strengthens the power relation expressed by the punch line of the joke.

As far as the use of paralanguage is concerned, it is obvious that both humorists make use of body language and intonation shifts to keep their performances lively and enhance their funniness. While dealing with the comedians' material, I noticed that many jokes are not funny when they are merely heard as an audio or read as an transcript, because listeners or readers do not have access to essential paralinguistic features. This is why I took live performances and also DVD material into consideration in order to be able to interpret the audience's reactions in the correct way.

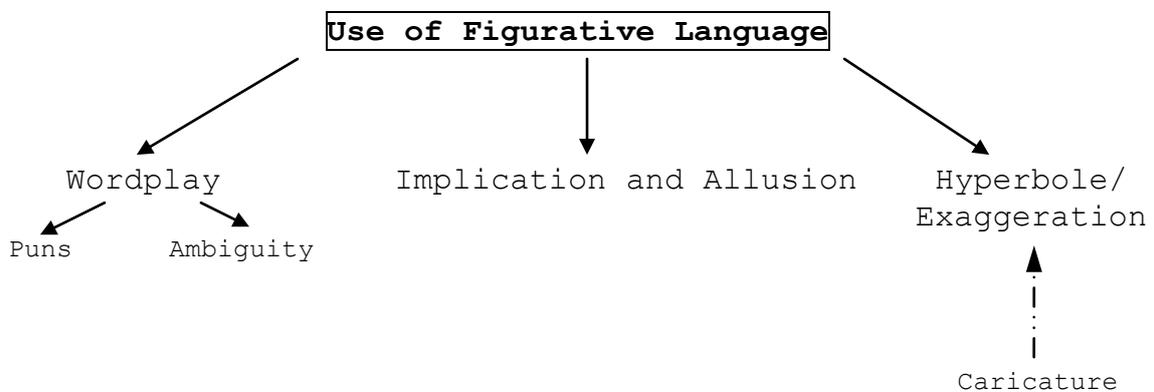
To conclude, we can state that both comedians make use of the same joking techniques even if there are quantitative differences, as shown in the above section. These differences go back to the different identities the two comedians present. Seinfeld is constantly willing to integrate his audience and uses himself to make the audience aware of their own foibles. His outer appearance presents him as a normal citizen who identifies himself with the audience sitting in front of him. That is why his stage persona is very close, if not even identical to his real self. Besides, the choice of exclusive everyday topics shows his connection to the audience and everyday life. Although that material is not funny as such, he is successful because of the way he presents the material and

the fact that he tells stories he has probably experienced himself. Wright, however, creates a different identity by inventing fake life stories. He does not want to integrate the audience via the stories he tells. His intention is completely different, even contrary to Seinfeld's. Wright makes his outer appearance part of his humor; he does not care about formal politeness. By presenting himself weirdly with his shaggy hair and hat, he uses his identity as a means to create humor. The contrast between their identities is also expressed through their divergent use of politeness strategies. Seinfeld expresses formal politeness. He comes on stage and is well dressed with a black suit and a tie. He cares about his outer appearance and therefore shows negative politeness. As far as his performance is concerned, it is constantly marked by positive politeness strategies, such as the creation of solidarity by the use of the "we"-strategy, hesitations, hedges, question tags and modal verbs. Wright, however, only rarely applies politeness strategies within his stories, in which he principally invents fake life situations that do not allow the audience to recognize shared knowledge. But he builds up solidarity in a different way. He does not care about his outer appearance and therefore rejects formal negative politeness. His aim is to create solidarity and sympathy by establishing common

ground. He wants to show the audience that they are alike in sharing and also appreciating his funny stories. He works more with positive politeness strategies.

The following diagram lays out some categories of figurative language.

Fig.3.2.



My analysis has demonstrated that both comedians make use of figurative language in order to enhance the humorous effect of their material. In most of the jokes, we can observe the use of hyperbole and exaggeration to render the humor more obvious and thus to increase the laughter response. This can be seen when Seinfeld jokes about why he does not like using other people's showers (*Bathroom*, 1.2286-2314). He overstates the situation when he comments that one "can never adjust the temperature right" (1.2301) and claims that "sometimes a 16<sup>th</sup> of an inch is a thousand degrees" (1.2304). As the audience's reaction proves, the use of hyperbole has even raised the level of laughter. In

his segment *Supermarkets*, we find a further example when he muses over ways to consume the milk before the expiration date (1.869-970). As far as Wright's use of hyperbole is concerned, we can observe that it serves to completely exaggerate and overstate the ridiculousness and the absurdity of his stories. He uses hyperbole to make sure that his audience gets the punch line of his jokes whose humor mainly results from the clash of incongruities. An example can be found in the segment *Winny* (*IHAP*, 1.981-985), when he tells the audience about his absurd hobby of practicing limbo. Wright exaggerates in the following remark when he stresses Winnie's skill by commenting that he is so good at limbo that "he could go under a rug" (1.984). In the introductory line of his song *Rachel* (*IHAP*, 1.443-456) he informs the audience about the length of time he needed to compose the song (1.443). Up to that point, there has not been any concrete indication that he did not need so much time. Wright wants to build up tension by throwing in various punch lines in which he completely exaggerates so that the audience is well aware of the fact that he never took "a year and a half to write that" (1.443).

To conclude the discussion of hyperbole, I want to mention caricature as a special case of hyperbole that I found only in Seinfeld's material. He used it mainly to

express his superiority over the persons ridiculed, as I have already stressed in Fig.2. Hyperbole in the form of caricature is mainly used in combination with paralanguage and intonation shifts that serve to enhance the audience's reaction and appreciation of the joke. This can be proved by various extracts taken from his material. Examples can be found in his mocking of the pilot's behavior when he informs the passengers in detail about what he is going to do (*Air Travel*, 1.290-301) and when he mocks cab drivers' work (*Cab drivers*, 1.94-122). To continue his mockery of the tiresome tasks on board, Seinfeld also overstates the stewardesses' work (*Air Travel* 1.324-364) and describes it sarcastically as their "little show" (1.325) and "this whole performance" (1.327). His strategy is to present them as ridiculous by explaining their work as a sort of theater or entertainment. Seinfeld decides here to introduce a part in which he sings, which serves to brighten up the mood and to enhance the ridiculous effect of his presentation. Seinfeld often enhances his audience's reaction through the strategy of using body language. Sometimes he makes gestures and facial expressions, as, for example, when he dances while imitating what the stewardess says. The use of paralanguage helps him to exaggerate aspects of what he is talking about and thus supports the humorous effect of his performance. Wright, on the contrary, does not use any

caricature at all in his joking material and does not use intonation and paralanguage as frequently as Seinfeld does, which results from his rather apathetic and monotonous way of performing. Nevertheless, I was able to find some examples in which he uses gestures to enhance the humorous effect of what he is talking about. In the section *Camera* (*ISHAP*, 1.476-481), for example, he makes fun of his pilot friend by revealing that he needs 45 minutes to back out his car and he starts making gesticulations on stage. He even turns his head to imitate his friend looking right and left as he backs out. This visualization enhances the humorous effect of the story and therefore the audience's reaction to his story (1.481).

Besides the use of hyperbole, both comedians also make use of wordplay and punning throughout their performances. In analyzing their material I discovered that they use this technique to pursue different aims. Seinfeld uses wordplay in the sense of pretending misunderstanding or a misinterpretation of words, as for example in the segment *Doctors* (1.1276-1306), in which he plays with the term "rhinoplasty" and wants to imply that he thinks of a "rhino" in the sense of a "rhinoceros". The same is true for his example in the segment *Horses* when he pretends to misunderstand the term "horsepower" (1.2216-2235). Seinfeld uses punning in a few examples when he plays with the

different meanings of a word within his joke, as for example in the segment *Men & Women*, when he plays with the expression "best man" (1.1307-1323) and in the segment *McDonald's* when he plays on the different meanings of the word "spoon" (1.1600-1610). Wright uses wordplay to disappoint the audience's expectation and to create humor out of surprise and unexpectedness. This can be seen in the segment *Cross Country (IHAP)* when he first speaks of the Stones and deliberately misleads his audience to assume he is referring to the Rolling Stones, only to explicitly refer to the Flintstones later in a punch line (1.846-855). In the introductory segment of his first performance (*Introduction (IHAP)*, 1.80-88), Wright pretends to misunderstand the policeman's question in lines 82 and 83. He misinterprets the term "miles per hour" and gives it a second meaning by thinking of how many miles he has to go in one hour. In the segment *Hitchhiker (ISHAP)*, Wright makes use of punning when he plays on the double meaning of the word "foot" and pretends not to understand the correct meaning but instead interprets the term "foot" as the unit of measure (1.740-743).

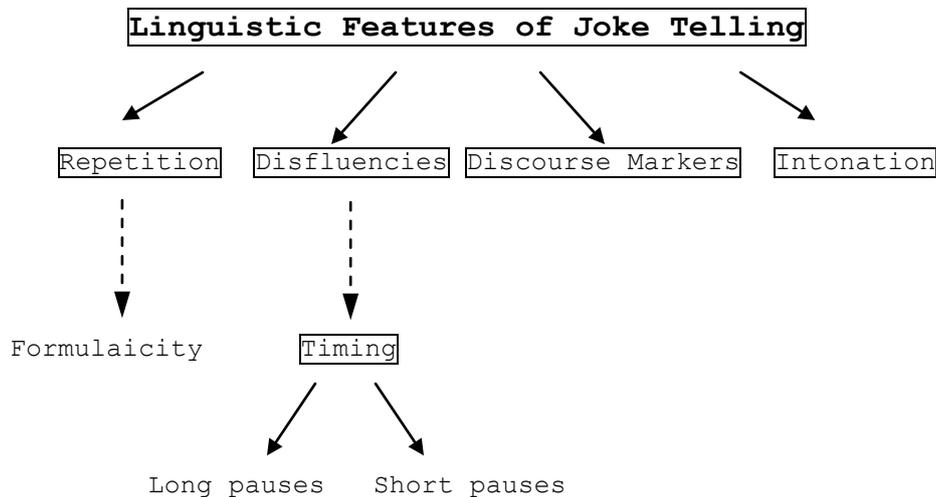
As far as implication and allusion are concerned, it is obvious that both comedians repeatedly make use of these techniques because they allow them to express some points of view in an indirect way. Seinfeld, for example, uses

implication in his joke about the cab drivers (*Cab Drivers*, 1.67-165) to express his aggressive attitude and his hostile feelings towards them. When he comments that "all you need is a face" (1.141), he implies that cab drivers do not have to be intelligent in order to do their job. So anybody could do it without problems. In line 143 he even calls the "face" (1.141) "their big qualification" (1.143) for doing their job. So both statements and their implications emphasize Seinfeld's strategy of expressing power and portraying cab drivers as inferior to him and his audience. He also uses allusion, as shown in the example in which he plays on the word "rhinoplasty" (*Doctors* 1.1276-1306). Seinfeld wants to make the audience aware of the fact that he thinks of a "rhino" in the sense of a "rhinoceros" when he repeats it twice in the text. This allusion makes the audience laugh (1.1285). Wright does not use implication and allusion as frequently as Seinfeld. Nevertheless, we can find examples as in the segment *Camera (ISHAP)*, when he speaks of a restaurant named "Bulimia's" (1.489-494). By revealing this name, he alludes to the serious disorder and makes the audience aware of the fact that he will ridicule a serious problem in his following comments.

In the following, I want to conclude the section by presenting a final diagram that should clarify the use of

various linguistic aspects of joke telling in stand-up comedy.

Fig.3.3



In analyzing Seinfeld's and Wright's material, it is noticeable that they make use of various linguistic features in order to present their jokes and to enhance their humorous effect. Seinfeld often makes use of repetition in order to gain planning time and to prepare a spontaneous reaction. He also uses repetition to provide a rhythmic pattern in his jokes, as in the extracts *Air Travel* (1.166-173) and *Supermarkets* (1.764-768). Apart from this purpose, repetition also serves to stress the humorous effect, as in the *Halloween* segment (1.477-531) when he constantly repeats the need to "get candy". Wright does not use repetition as often as Seinfeld does. Most of the time

Wright uses repetitive structures in the form of parallelism and the adverb "again". Nevertheless, there are also extracts in which he uses it to increase the laughter and to strengthen the rhythmic pattern. Also, examples for the use of parallelism and anaphora can be found in the segments *Quote* (ISHAP, 1.15-19) and *My Grandfather* (ISHAP, 1.931-944).

As far as disfluencies are concerned, we have to stress that pauses represent one of the main joking techniques in Wright's material. He often uses them to make the audience calm down as in the extract *Ants* (IHAP, 1.112-126). He also makes use of pauses to control the audience's reaction when he wants them to wait in anticipation of what is to follow. This strategy can be observed in the segments *Monopoly* (ISHAP, 1.641-656) and *Ants* (IHAP, 1.164-178) when he deliberately waits before delivering the punch line. In contrast to Wright, Seinfeld also uses pauses to gain planning time and to pretend to be continuing his performance spontaneously.

As for the use of discourse markers, I observed that Wright uses them as a means to establish contact with the audience. Although he rarely uses them, we can find some examples in the segments *Apt.* (IHAP, 1.1077), *Quote* (ISHAP, 1.72, 79, 82), and *Water* (IHAP, 1.757, 762). Generally, we can conclude that Wright uses them more often in his second

album. Seinfeld also makes use of discourse markers to enhance the audience's anticipation of his next remark and thus to increase the resulting laughter. This can be seen, for example, in the segment *Supermarkets* (1.769-777). Apart from that, he uses discourse markers to establish contact with the audience or to stall for planning his next remark.

In conclusion, note that intonation proves to be an important joking technique to render a performance lively and varied. This can be demonstrated by the analysis of the segment *Phones* (1.40-43) in Seinfeld's performance. It also serves to enhance the humorous effect, which can be seen in the segment *Air Travel* (1.237-258). As for Wright, it is interesting that he also changes his intonation on occasion, although his general style of performing is apathetic and monotonous.

## 15 Conclusions

In this study, I have investigated linguistic aspects of verbal humor in stand-up comedy and focused primarily on the ways in which successful stand-up comedians organize and perform their material. As stand-up comedy can be considered a very young genre of humor, I first portrayed the importance of humor for our society in general, before presenting a brief overview of the history of stand-up comedy, which mainly had its roots in the *commedia dell'arte* of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although I focused on the American stand-up scene, I also outlined the development of stand-up in Great Britain and in Germany in order to present a more complete overview of this genre.

Next, I briefly introduced the most important stand-up comedians of my study, Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright. Their real and recorded material served as the main data for this study and thus formed the basis for the analytical part. I characterized their personalities and their techniques for performing their material by examining their contrasting styles and stage personae. Having had a closer look at them has proved that both stand-up comedians have excellent skills in performing and eliciting laughter, even if they have invented completely different stage personae. Nevertheless, the analytical part has also shown that they work with similar or even the same strategies and joke

techniques (the use of ridicule, paralanguage, and power relations), albeit with different frequencies. The analysis of their material therefore emphasizes that stand-up comedy does not rely on standard stage personae any more than it does standard audiences. Every comedian provides an individual stage persona and has to cope with an individual audience. Each audience reacts differently to the humorist's performance, which is a reason why spontaneity and performance skills, such as direct address to the audience, the use of transitions, and the use of politeness strategies, reveal themselves to be essential characteristics of a successful stand-up comedian.

Prior to the analytical part I outlined the various humor theories and started my investigation by referring to the very beginning of humor research with its roots in the classical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. First of all, I dealt in detail with the incongruity theory and its main founders and supporters, as for example Kant, Schopenhauer, Freud, Spencer and Koestler. I also referred to Raskin, who played a crucial role in the development of the incongruity-resolution theory. Further, I examined the hostility theories and dealt with their founders, particularly Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Bergson. As far as the release theory is concerned, I have put the main emphasis on its most influential proponent Freud, who

invented the psychoanalytic theory of humor. When dealing with Freud, I came to the conclusion that his theory can be considered a synthesis of release, hostility and incongruity theories, and therefore provides a more comprehensive model. To conclude the discussion about humor theories, I also introduced the general theory of verbal humor. However, I emphasized the important fact that this theory was developed on the basis of humor in script form and is therefore not fully applicable to stand-up comedy because it does not deal with essential features such as body language and intonation changes. As far as stand-up comedy is concerned, I investigated the application of the various humor theories and came to the conclusion that none of them covers all the relevant characteristics of stand-up comedy. Therefore, it is impossible to form a real synthesis of incongruity, superiority and release theories. Rather, stand-up comedy consists of an overlap of single criteria taken from these three theories.

In the following chapters I presented a general discussion of various genres of humor and characteristic forms of jokes in order to establish the basis for the analytical part of the present study. Since my study concentrates on verbal humor in stand-up comedy, I wanted to stress the differences we encounter when comparing it to conversational joke telling. That is why I have provided a

short discussion in which I have revealed the differences between dialogues in conversational joke telling and monologues in stand-up comedy and dealt with the importance of performance (concentration, timing, intonation, material) and the audience's central role in stand-up comedy (heckling, laughter). I have also looked at various joke techniques that stand-up comedians use in designing and delivering their material, and focused on paralinguistic elements (gestures, facial expressions), the use of ridicule, and the use of figurative language. I have considered the use of wordplay and puns, implication and allusion, and hyperbole as important pillars of successful stand-up comedy and brought them in connection with various linguistic aspects of joke telling, such as repetition, disfluencies, discourse markers, and intonation changes. It is obvious that research on texts played a central role over centuries; however, research on verbal humor in form of aspects of timing, intonation changes, paralinguistic elements as we are find in Gumperz' interactional sociolinguistics theory, was not taken into account. Such features are completely omitted in written texts, which is why I concentrate on the analysis of live performances. The main part of my study has contributed to the analysis of Seinfeld's and Wright's authentic material and has investigated to what extent they employed linguistic

features and figurative language examined in the theoretical part of my study. In particular, I have concentrated on the presentation of ridicule (private and shared ridicule, and self-deprecation), paralinguistic choices, repetition, hyperbole, wordplay and punning and disfluencies in Wright's and Seinfeld's performances. In addition, I have examined the role of the audience and the comedian's direct address to the audience. Depending on the different stage personae these comedians represent, some features may be more significant and predominant than others. Some may be absent altogether, such as shared ridicule or transitions in Wright's material. This absence might be explained by the fact that Wright principally creates humor out of absurd, surreal stories, and pretends to have experienced these fake life situations that do not allow the audience to find shared knowledge and experience in his material.

Taking into consideration the overall investigation of my data, I consider stand-up comedy to be a highly demanding comedy field in which the art of performance is of the utmost importance. As the examples of Seinfeld and Wright have confirmed, there are highly varied strategies that can be pursued to create a certain stage persona. Wright and Seinfeld demonstrate that these stage personae are individual and vary from one comedian to another.

Nevertheless, their organization often contains the same or at least very similar strategies and techniques even if their characters diverge wildly. I observed numerous similarities in the use of ridicule and intonation and paralanguage. Nevertheless, I have also presented differences, as for example the material these comedians use. The data has shown that Seinfeld principally uses situations we are all familiar with to create humor, whereas Wright mainly provides fake life stories and causes humor through the incongruity revealed in his material. As far as ridicule is concerned, I have argued in the analysis of Seinfeld that self-deprecation has a tendency to turn into shared ridicule, a general rule that turns out not to apply to Wright's data, which is a further interesting observation that deserves mention.

Having dealt in detail with these two characters and their creation of humor, I come to the conclusion that a large number of their techniques can be assigned to general categories. Although Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright were initially different, even contrastive, I was able to determine similarities between them as far as their use of certain strategies and techniques is concerned. So it turns out that they nevertheless use the general techniques to create humor, which is the reason they may be applied to other stand-up comedians' performances.

Finally, I discussed the development of humor in stand-up comedy and addressed the question of the extent to which the various theories of humor cover stand-up comedy. In order to render the results of my analytical study visually, I designed various diagrams (cf. Fig.1: Stand-up Comedy, Fig.2: Material, Fig.3: Stage Persona, Fig.3.1.: Use of Joke Techniques, Fig.3.2.: Use of Figurative Language, Fig.3.3.: Linguistic Features of Joke Telling) that are meant to clarify the creation of humor in stand-up comedy and reveal the various elements responsible for a successful performance. I have come to the conclusion that most of the jokes analyzed create humor through the incongruity expressed by the punch line, which indicates the comedian's intention to confront the audience with unexpected and disappointing situations in order to increase their attention and appreciation.

Furthermore, these diagrams demonstrate that the findings can be generalized because one could apply the various types of performances to other stand-up comedians. Classifying Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright on a scale of politeness, we observe that Jerry Seinfeld tends more toward "negative politeness" (formal dress, real/realistic stories), whereas Steven Wright tends toward the opposite direction of "positive politeness" (shaggy hair, lack of attention to formal politeness, fake life stories).

Nevertheless, their different types of performances can be applied to other comedians, such as Dave Chappelle for example. As far as his material is concerned, we could classify him in between. His material is a mixture as compared to Seinfeld's and Wright's. Dave Chappelle often starts with real stories (as does Jerry Seinfeld), but ends in unreal, even ridiculous and absurd stories (comparable to Wright's material). It must be noted that there are aspects of performances that do not fit (such as visualizations or imitations), but I was able to observe that the techniques often stay the same. Prosody does not cover imitations, and an interesting question would be whether Jerry Seinfeld could present Steven Wright's material and vice versa. People do imitate other people's material. Dave Chappelle, for example, is famous for imitating white people in his shows. Nevertheless, I would consider it difficult for Jerry Seinfeld and Steven Wright to present each other's material because of their contrastive characters. Seinfeld is the realistic New York business type who deals with familiar, everyday topics, whereas Wright does not even care about formal politeness and even uses his awkward outer appearance to strengthen the absurdity of his fake life stories. Their characters are too dissimilar and there is only overlap as far as their general techniques are concerned.

To conclude this study, I want to provide an outlook for future research in this comedy field. As I mentioned above, self-deprecation has a tendency to turn into shared ridicule, a phenomenon which could be observed in Seinfeld's material. However, this observation was not corroborated by Wright's data. I would consider this issue to be a basis for further research when analyzing the material of various stand-up humorists.

Also, future research could envisage examining the work of further stand-up comedians who tend to have a similar style of performing. It might be interesting to see how much they influenced the work of Seinfeld and Wright and the extent to which their work was influenced by the verbal humor of Seinfeld and Wright.

In addition, research should not neglect the audience's reaction and could examine to what extent their appreciation depends on the comedian's direct address to them and how their reactions in turn influence the comedian's performance.

Taking into consideration the different stage personae Seinfeld and Wright represent, these developments offer a challenging research context in which to continue examining the various features with which humorists create their identities and integrate them in their humor performances. Closely connected with the identity of the stand-up

comedians, it might be worth examining the different power relations humorists display towards their audience and investigating which reactions they provoke on the audience's side.

In conclusion, a complete analysis of stand-up comedy requires further research within that relatively young and unexplored genre in order to provide a more comprehensive analysis. In this sense, this thesis should be considered an attempt to gain insight into the stand-up comedian's work and the organization of their material and performance.

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## 17 Appendix

### 17.1. Transcription Conventions

she's out.	A <b>period</b> shows <b>falling tone</b> in the preceding element, suggesting <b>finality</b> .
oh yeah?	A <b>question mark</b> shows <b>rising tone</b> in the preceding element (cf. yes-no question intonation).
so, now,	A <b>comma</b> indicates a level, <b>continuing intonation</b> , suggesting <b>non-finality</b> .
bu- but	A <b>single dash</b> indicates a <b>cut-off</b> (often with a glottal stop), including truncated intonation units.
DAMN	The use of <b>capitals</b> shows <b>heavy stress</b> or indicates that <b>speech is louder than surrounding discourse</b> .
°dearest°	<b>Utterances spoken more softly</b> than the surrounding discourse are framed by <b>degree signs</b> .
says "oh"	<b>Double quotes</b> mark speech set off by a <b>shift in the speaker's voice</b> .
(2.0)	<b>Numbers in parentheses</b> indicate <b>timed pauses</b> .
..	If the duration of the pauses is not crucial and not timed: A <b>truncated ellipsis</b> is used to indicate <b>pauses of one-half second or less</b> .
...	An <b>ellipsis</b> is used to indicate <b>pauses of more than a half second</b> .
ha:rd	The <b>colon</b> indicates the <b>prolonging of the prior sound or syllable</b> .
<no way>	<b>Angle brackets pointing outward</b> denote

	<b>words or phrases</b> that are <b>spoken more slowly</b> than the surrounding discourse.
>watch out<	<b>Angle brackets pointing inward</b> indicate <b>words or phrases spoken more quickly</b> than surrounding discourse.
[and so-] [WHY] her?	<b>Square brackets</b> on successive lines mark <b>beginning and end of overlapping talk</b> . Multiple overlap is marked by aligning the brackets. <sup>47</sup>
and= =then	<b>Equal signs on successive lines</b> show <b>latching</b> between turns of different speakers. They can also indicate that the turn of one speaker continues e.g. backchannels of interlocutors. <sup>48</sup>
H	<b>Clearly audible breath sounds</b> are indicated with a <b>capital H</b> .
.h	<b>Inhalations</b> are denoted with a period, followed by a <b>small h</b> . Longer inhalations are depicted with multiple <i>h</i> 's as in .hhhh
H	<b>Exhalations</b> are denoted with a <b>small h without a preceding period</b> . A longer exhalation is denoted by multiple <i>h</i> 's.
.t	An <b>alveolar suction click</b> is indicated by a <b>small t preceded by a period</b> .
( )	In case <b>utterances cannot be transcribed</b>

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<sup>47</sup> Overlapping talk principally occurs in conversational joke telling. Because of the fact that stand-up comedy mainly represents a humorous monologue, square brackets as used for indicating overlapping talk will not be found. I will use square brackets only in case the comedian's talk overlaps with the audience's laughter.

<sup>48</sup> As in the previous remark, latching is a further characteristic of conversational joke telling and will therefore not be found in my transcript of stand-up comedy.

	<b>with certainty, empty parentheses</b> are employed.
(hard work)	If there is a <b>likely interpretation</b> , the <b>questionable words</b> will appear within the <b>parentheses</b> .
/ /	Slashes are used for phonetic transcriptions.
((laugh))	Aspects of utterance, such as <b>whispers, coughing, and laughter</b> , are indicated with <b>double parentheses</b> .
{points at board}	<b>Nonverbal behavior</b> , such as <b>movements and looks</b> , are indicated with <b>braces</b> .

## 17.2. Transcript Jerry Seinfeld: *I'm Telling You for the Last Time*

1     Presenter: ladies and gentlemen..  
2                 Jerry Seinfeld.  
3     Audience: {applause}  
4     J.S.:       [okay]  
5     Audience: [{applause}]  
6     J.S.:       "good night,  
7                 good night everybody"  
8     Audience: ((laughter))  
9     J.S.:       <well well well>  
10                (3.0)  
11    Audience: ((laughter))  
12    J.S.:       I can't believe you made it.  
13    Audience: ((laughter))  
14                I don't even know how you got tickets.  
15    Audience: ((laughter))  
16    Man:        broker.  
17    J.S.:       "broker"  
18    Audience: ((laughter))  
19    J.S.:       not a very good one, I see.  
20    Audience: ((laughter))  
21                {applause}  
22    J.S.:       my guy got me right on stage.  
23    Audience: ((laughter))  
24    J.S.:       this is the Broadhurst Theater.  
25                it's a .. uh,  
26                ((clears his throat))  
27                legendary theater,  
28                I know .. nothing about it.  
29    Audience: ((laughter))  
30    J.S.:       uh, I picked it because .. uh,  
31    Audience: {phone rings in the audience}  
32    J.S.:       oh, let me get that,  
33    Audience: [((laughter))]  
34    J.S.:       [let me get that]  
35                that's for me,  
36                I asked them to hold my phone.  
37    Audience: ((laughter))  
38    J.S.:       that is so embarrassing, isn't it?  
39    Audience: ((laughter))  
40    J.S.:       I'm surprised it doesn't happen more often though,  
41                because it's hard to  
42                ((whispering))  
43                "Oh wait, put it on the vibrate only."  
44                oh the phones,  
45                what we have gone nuts with the phones, haven't we?  
46                we're crazy with the phones.  
47                this guy thinks he needs that phone.  
48    Audience: ((laughter))  
49    J.S.:       >the thing that amuses me the most about the phone  
50                machine is the-<  
51                how often we call people now,  
52                trying to get the machine.  
53    Audience: ((laughter))  
54                [{beginning applause}]  
55    J.S.:       [that's what's happened now with the machine]

55 if it's the person that picks up,  
56 then you're ...  
57 "oh, uh ..  
58 Audience: ((laughter))  
59 {applause}  
60 J.S.: I, uh ...,  
61 oh I didn't- I didn't think you would be there.  
62 Audience: ((laughter))  
63 J.S.: I - I just wanted to leave a message saying:  
64 Audience: ((laughter))  
65 J.S.: sorry I missed you".  
66 Audience: ((laughter))  
67 J.S.: so what's with the cab drivers and the B.O.?  
68 Audience: ((laughter))  
69 J.S.: how long are these shifts?  
70 Audience: ((laughter))  
71 J.S.: do they ever stop  
72 or do they just get in the cab  
73 and just drive 'till they're dead?  
74 Audience: ((laughter))  
75 J.S.: that's what it's starting to smell like in some of  
these cars.  
76 Audience: ((laughter))  
77 J.S.: you're in the back there  
78 and you're going "oh man"  
79 and then  
80 ((laughs))  
81 they give you that ..  
82 they have that cherry stuff ...  
83 the cherry "pop-it" on the dash,  
84 you know,  
85 so you get the cherry B.O.,  
86 Audience: ((laughter))  
87 J.S.: which is supposed to be some sort of improvement I  
guess,  
88 I don't know,  
89 I can't imagine even ...  
90 fruit going that long without showering.  
91 Audience: ((laughter))  
92 J.S.: and the way they're driving, they're so insane,  
93 you could see they're upset  
94 I don't know what it's like to drive a cab,  
95 it must be very difficult  
96 because they're very upset, these people.  
97 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
98 J.S.: >and some times you just wanna lean - lean over that  
seat and go  
99 "what is happening in your life, in your mind,  
100 that is making you drive like this?<  
101 Audience: ((laughter))  
102 J.S.: take it easy."  
103 to me - to me the really funny thing about New York  
cabs is  
104 that you never get that much scared  
105 °when you're in the cab°.  
106 I don't know why,  
107 something about being in Manhattan.  
108 no matter how dangerous it seems  
109 it's all quite amusing in the back of that cab,

110 Audience: [((laughter))]  
111 J.S.: [isn't it?]  
112 he's flying around the road,  
113 Audience: ((laughter))  
114 J.S.: he's .. doing 90 up a one-way,  
115 and you're going  
116 ((amused))  
117 "I've never tried that in my car."  
118 Audience: ((laughter))  
119 {applause}  
120 J.S.: it's all a huge joke  
121 it's your life.  
122 Audience: ((laughter))  
123 J.S.: and somehow it's ALL happening on TV there,  
124 it's ALL not quite real.  
125 the dumbest thing  
126 you can think in the back of a taxi cab is  
127 "well I'm sure the man knows what he's doing."  
128 Audience: ((laughter))  
129 J.S.: have you ever thought that?  
130 "he is driving fast.  
131 and quite recklessly.  
132 on bald tires.  
133 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
134 J.S.: but after all he's a professional.  
135 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
136 J.S.: I guess he does this all the time.  
137 he's got a license,  
138 I can see it right there."  
139 I don't even know what it takes  
140 to get a cab driver's license.  
141 I think all you need is a face.  
142 Audience: ((laughter))  
143 J.S.: this seems to be their big qualification.  
144 Audience: ((laughter))  
145 J.S.: "that's the law now,  
146 no blank heads are allowed to drive cabs."  
147 it also helps to have a name  
148 with like, eight consonants in a row.  
149 Audience: ((laughter))  
150 {applause}  
151 J.S.: what - what is that "o" with the line through it?  
152 Audience: [((laughter))]  
153 J.S.: [what letter is that?]  
154 I don't remember that letter in school.  
155 Audience: ((laughter))  
156 J.S.: you need a chart of the elements  
157 if you wanna report the guy.  
158 Audience: ((laughter))  
159 J.S.: "yes officer, his name was Ammal,  
160 and then this symbol for boron.  
161 Audience: ((laughter))  
162 J.S.: I believe.  
163 I had the periodic chart with me at the time,  
164 Audience: ((laughter))  
165 J.S.: I'm quite certain it was not manganese."  
166 but I love to travel,  
167 >I'm supposed to go down to Florida<.. after this.  
168 and I might.

169 {claps hands}  
170 I might go,  
171 I might not.  
172 but I just love to fly,  
173 I love going in the airport.  
174 always feel safe ... °in the airport°.  
175 thanks to the high caliber individuals  
176 we have working at x-ray security.  
177 Audience: ((laughter))  
178 J.S.: how about this crack squad of savvy motivated  
personnel?  
179 feel pretty good with them at the helm.  
180 the way you wanna set up your x-ray security is:  
181 you want the short heavy set woman at the front with  
the skin-tight uniform.  
182 Audience: ((laughter))  
183 J.S.: that's your first line of defense.  
184 Audience: ((laughter))  
185 J.S.: you want those pants sprayed on.  
186 Audience: ((laughter))  
187 J.S.: you want them so tight  
188 the flap in front of the zipper has pulled itself  
open,  
189 you can see the metal [tangs]  
190 [hanging on for dear life.]  
191 Audience: [((laughter))]  
192 [{applause}]  
193 J.S.: then you got that other genius  
194 down at the other end,  
195 looking in the .. TV screen.  
196 this Einstein has chosen to stand in front of x-rays  
14 hours a day.  
197 Audience: ((laughter))  
198 J.S.: as his profession ...  
199 ((imitates x-ray machine))  
200 rrrr rrrr rrrr.  
201 he's looking in the TV set.  
202 I - I always look in the TV set,  
203 I - I cannot make out one object.  
204 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
205 J.S.: I don't know what this guy is doing.  
206 Audience: ((laughter))  
207 J.S.: it's my own bags,  
208 I can't understand one thing:  
209 Audience: ((laughter))  
210 J.S.: "what was that?"  
211 he's going "what is that,  
212 a hairdryer with a scope on it?  
213 that looks okay,  
214 keep it moving."  
215 Audience: ((laughter))  
216 J.S.: "some sort of bowling ball candle?  
217 that's fine,  
218 just we don't want you to hold up the line,  
219 Audience: ((laughter))  
220 J.S.: don't hold up the line."  
221 Audience: ((laughter))  
222 J.S.: when I go in the bathroom at the airport,  
223 now I don't know who designs

224 and makes these decisions,  
225 but why is it that we're not allowed  
226 to have an actual "twisted-on,  
227 twisted off" human-style faucet,  
228 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
229 J.S.: in the bathroom?  
230 is it too risky for the general public  
231 to be in charge,  
232 Audience: ((laughter))  
233 J.S.: of the water flow?  
234 they have to always put in those one-handed spring-  
loaded pain-in-the-ass Alcatraz-style faucets?  
235 Audience: ((laughter))  
236 {beginning applause}  
237 J.S.: do you know the ones I mean,  
238 when you gotta go  
239 >"hey, I got a little water there"<  
240 Audience: ((laughter))  
241 {applause}  
242 J.S.: >oh, oh, another couple of drops"<  
243 Audience: ((laughter))  
244 J.S.: what- what is it that they think we would do  
245 if we could have the faucet?  
246 just turn them all on full,  
247 run out into the parking lot,  
248 laughing, pushing each other >into the bushes?<  
249 Audience: ((laughter))  
250 J.S.: "COME ON, THE WATER'S ON, let's go.  
251 Audience: ((laughter))  
252 {applause}  
253 J.S.: I turned it on full blast"  
254 Audience: ((laughter))  
255 J.S.: "you idiot, we're businessmen,  
256 we're gonna miss our plane  
257 WHO CARES? WATER"  
258 Audience: ((laughter))  
259 J.S.: that's what they think we'll do.  
260 do the people that work in these little shops in the  
airport  
261 have any idea what the prices are  
262 every place  
263 Audience: [((laughter))]  
264 J.S.: [else in the world?]  
265 what do they think,  
266 that they have their little country out there?  
267 Audience: ((laughter))  
268 J.S.: "tuna sandwich, 13 dollars,  
269 Audience: ((laughter))  
270 J.S.: that's what we ...  
271 tuna's very rare, here.  
272 Audience: ((laughter))  
273 J.S.: it's all a tiny world in the airplane, isn't it?  
274 there's always that  
275 tiny table there,  
276 tiny computer,  
277 °everyone's° in a little cramped seat,  
278 tiny food,  
279 tiny utensils,  
280 tiny liquor bottles,

281 tiny bathroom,  
282 tiny sink,  
283 tiny mirror,  
284 tiny faucets.  
285 so it's a small problem,  
286 gonna be a slight delay,  
287 we're gonna be a little late.  
288 Audience: ((laughter))  
289 J.S.: then you get on the plane.  
290 the pilot's always got to come on the P.A. system.  
291 give you his whole thing of what he's gonna do.  
292 Audience: ((laughter))  
293 J.S.: "and here's how I'm gonna do it ...  
294 I'm gonna take it up to 20 000.  
295 Audience: ((laughter))  
296 J.S.: then I'm gonna make a left by Chicago.  
297 ((laughter))  
298 J.S.: then I'm gonna go south by..  
299 and we're all back there going"  
300 "yeah, fine"  
301 Audience: ((laughter))  
302 J.S.: it's .. you know,  
303 just do whatever the hell you gotta do,  
304 Audience: ((laughter))  
305 J.S.: I don't know what the hell is going on here  
306 just ... end up where it says on the ticket,  
307 Audience: [((laughter))]  
308 J.S.: [okay?]  
309 can you do that?"  
310 Audience: ((laughter))  
311 {applause}  
312 J.S.: >do I bother him, telling him what I'm doing,  
313 knocking on the cockpit door<,  
314 "I'm having the peanuts now.  
315 Audience: ((laughter))  
316 J.S.: yeah that's what we're doing back here.  
317 I'm not gonna have them all now.  
318 Audience: ((laughter))  
319 J.S.: I'm gonna have a few.  
320 Audience: ((laughter))  
321 J.S.: I don't wanna finish it  
322 because it's such a big bag."  
323 Audience: ((laughter))  
324 J.S.: then the stewardess has to come out,  
325 put on her little show ..  
326 with the emergency equipment,  
327 this whole performance  
328 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
329 J.S.: that they go through.  
330 you know, one of them is behind the curtain,  
331 reading the script,  
332 and the other one comes out front  
333 and acts it out,  
334 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
335 J.S.: you know.  
336 ((singing))  
337 "we have seat-belts,  
338 oxygen masks and things for you to use."  
339 Audience: ((laughter))

340 J.S.: they show you how to use a seat-belt,  
341 in case you haven't been in a car since 1965.  
342 Audience: ((laughter))  
343 J.S.: "oh we lift up on the buckle, OH,  
344 I was trying to just break the metal apart.  
345 Audience: ((laughter))  
346 J.S.: I thought that's how it works.  
347 I was going to attempt to tear the fabric part..  
348 Audience: [((laughter))]  
349 J.S.: [of the belt.]  
350 I thought if I could just get it started."  
351 Audience: ((laughter))  
352 J.S.: then she's gotta close that first class curtain,  
353 you know.  
354 Audience: ((laughter))  
355 J.S.: before it takes off,  
356 and they - they always give you that little look too..  
357 Audience: ((laughter))  
358 J.S.: "maybe if you'd worked a little harder..  
359 Audience: ((laughter))  
360 {applause}  
361 J.S.: I wouldn't have to do this"  
362 Audience: ((laughter))  
363 {imitates curtain being closed}  
364 J.S.: shhhhh.  
365 I'll tell you what place I like in the plane,  
366 it's that little bathroom.  
367 I go in there, even if I don't have to go.  
368 Audience: ((laughter))  
369 J.S.: I like it in there,  
370 that's like your own little apartment on the plane.  
371 Audience: ((laughter))  
372 J.S.: you go in there,  
373 you close the door,  
374 the light comes on after a second,  
375 it's always like a little surprise party.  
376 Audience: ((laughter))  
377 J.S.: I feel good in there.  
378 I feel like I look good in that mirror, too.  
379 is that me, am I crazy?  
380 I think that's a flattering mirror, in the airplane  
bathroom.  
381 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
382 J.S.: I don't know,  
383 °it's something with the lighting or something°.  
384 and they have so much equipment in that little place,  
385 with virtually everything  
386 that you would have in a normal bathroom  
387 is in that teeny weenie tiny bathroom.  
388 including some things  
389 that nobody has.  
390 like the slot for used razor blades.  
391 Audience: ((laughter))  
392 J.S.: have you seen this?  
393 I have seen this in every ...  
394 single airplane bathroom I have ever been.  
395 who is  
396 Audience: [((laughter))]  
397 J.S.: [shaving on the plane?]

398 first of all,  
399 and secondly,  
400 shaving so much that they're using  
401 Audience: [((laughter))]  
402 J.S.: [up razor blades], I mean  
403 I - I just don't know why they had to install that.  
404 "make sure that every bathroom ..  
405 has a place,  
406 because they're gonna be doing a lot of shaving."  
407 Audience: ((laughter))  
408 J.S.: ((laughs))  
409 I mean, is the Wolfman flying  
410 Audience: [((laughter))]  
411 J.S.: [in there or who'd ...?]  
412 on the full moon,  
413 just goes  
414 ((imitates Wolfman))  
415 "aaarrrrrr  
416 click click click  
417 aaarrrrr  
418 click click click".  
419 yeah, so Florida,  
420 "I don't know" ...  
421 Audience: {weak applause}  
422 J.S.: folks live down there,  
423 as you would assume.  
424 you know,  
425 they live in those minimum security prisons,  
426 that's where they put all the old people.  
427 what's with all the security there,  
428 with the guard, gay,  
429 with the arm coming down,  
430 everybody's got a uniform, guns..  
431 are the old people trying to escape,  
432 Audience: [((laughter))]  
433 J.S.: [or]  
434 are people stealing old people,  
435 what is the security problem?  
436 I get very innerved  
437 by the way they drive down there,  
438 that's why I don't like being in those communities,  
439 because they drive slow, they sit low.  
440 Audience: ((laughter))  
441 J.S.: that's their model.  
442 Audience: ((laughter))  
443 J.S.: the state flag of Florida should be  
444 just a steering wheel with a hat and two knuckles on  
it.  
445 Audience: ((laughter))  
446 {applause}  
447 J.S.: I mean, there is nobody in the car  
448 sometimes you just see cars going by,  
449 "why there is nobody in that car?"  
450 it is a completely empty car"  
451 Audience: ((laughter))  
452 J.S.: always with the left turn signal on,  
453 from when they left the house that morning.  
454 Audience: ((laughter))  
455 J.S.: that's a legal turn in Florida,

456 it's known as an "eventual left."  
457 Audience: ((laughter))  
458 J.S.: (2.0)  
459 what is the age that old people reach  
460 where they decide ..  
461 when they back out of the driveway,  
462 they're not looking any more?  
463 Audience: ((laughter))  
464 J.S.: do you know how they do that, they just go  
465 "well, I'm old ...  
466 and I'm coming back.  
467 Audience: ((laughter))  
468 {applause}  
469 J.S.: I've survived,  
470 let's see if you can."  
471 Audience: ((laughter))  
472 J.S.: one thing I do like of being down there  
473 with the old people is  
474 that it makes me feel like  
475 I'm little again,  
476 like a little kid.  
477 and when you're a kid,  
478 you can eat amazing amounts of food.  
479 and all just candy,  
480 that's all I ate when I was a kid.  
481 the only thought I had, growing up,  
482 was "get  
483 (1.0)  
484 candy."  
485 Audience: ((laughter))  
486 J.S.: that was my only thought, in my brain,  
487 for the 10 years of human life.  
488 just >get candy, get candy, get candy, get candy, get  
489 candy, get candy.<  
489 family, friends, school,  
490 these were just obstacles in the way of getting more  
491 candy.  
491 Audience: ((laughter))  
492 J.S.: that's why you had to teach kids  
493 not to take candy from strangers  
494 if they're playing in a playground.  
495 and they can barely understand it.  
496 "don't ..."  
497 "no candy?  
498 from .. strangers?  
499 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
500 J.S.: alright.  
501 candy, strangers, no candy.  
502 alright, because otherwise I'm taking the candy,  
503 anywhere I can get it."  
504 Audience: ((laughter))  
505 J.S.: there's such candy moron, idiot brains,  
506 "if this man has candy  
507 >I'm going with him, goodbye,  
508 don't care what happens to me.  
509 Audience: ((laughter))  
510 J.S.: [get candy, get candy, get candy.]<  
511 Audience: [[(laughter)]]  
512 J.S.: "no, don't go, they'll torture you,

513 they'll kidnap you!"  
514 "it doesn't matter,  
515 he has an 'oh Henry',  
516 I have to take that chance.  
517 Audience: ((laughter))  
518 J.S.: get candy, get candy, get candy."  
519 so the first time you hear the concept of Halloween,  
520 when you're a kid,  
521 remember the first time you even heard about it,  
522 it's like .. your brain can't even ...  
523 "what is this?  
524 Audience: ((laughter))  
525 J.S.: who's giving out candy,  
526 someone's giving out candy?  
527 Audience: ((laughter))  
528 J.S.: who is giving out this candy?  
529 everyone that we know is  
530 Audience: [((laughter))]  
531 J.S.: [just giving out candy?]  
532 I gotta be a part of this,  
533 take me with you, I - I wanna do it,  
534 I'll do anything that they want ...  
535 I can wear that  
536 Audience: ((laughter))  
537 {applause}  
538 J.S.: I'll wear anything that I have to wear.  
539 °I'll do anything I have to do°.  
540 I will get the candy from these FOOLS,  
541 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
542 J.S.: that are so STUPIDLY giving it away."  
543 so the first couple of years  
544 I made my own costume.  
545 they of course, sucked.  
546 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
547 J.S.: ghost, hobo, no good.  
548 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
549 J.S.: so I'm begging the parents  
550 "you gotta get me one of the ones from the store,  
551 the cardboard box,  
552 the cellophane top.  
553 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
554 J.S.: so one year, third year, finally got a Superman  
costume ...  
555 not surprisingly.  
556 Audience: ((laughter))  
557 J.S.: "mask included in the SET."  
558 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
559 J.S.: >remember the rubber band,  
560 on the back of that mask,  
561 that was a quality item there, wasn't it?<  
562 Audience: ((laughter))  
563 {applause}  
564 J.S.: that was good for about 10 seconds,  
565 before it snapped out of that cheap little staple  
566 they put it in there with.  
567 Audience: ((laughter))  
568 {applause}  
569 J.S.: the thinnest grey rubber in the world.  
570 you go to your first house

571 "trick or -snap- it broke,  
572 Audience: ((laughter))  
573 J.S.: I don't believe it".  
574 "wait up, I gotta fix it, you guys.  
575 come on.  
576 wait up".  
577 that's a kid thing,  
578 "wait up".  
579 kids don't want other kids to wait,  
580 they must "wait up".  
581 Audience: ((laughter))  
582 J.S.: "would you wait UP?"  
583 Audience: ((laughter))  
584 J.S.: because when you're little,  
585 life is up,  
586 you're growing up,  
587 everything is up.  
588 "wait UP, hold UP, shut UP"  
589 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
590 J.S.: "ma, I'm all cleaned up."  
591 "let me stay up"  
592 Audience: ((laughter))  
593 {applause}  
594 J.S.: parents, of course, it's just the opposite,  
595 "just calm DOWN!"  
596 Audience: ((laughter))  
597 J.S.: "slow DOWN"  
598 Audience: ((laughter))  
599 J.S.: "come down here,  
600 sit DOWN,  
601 put that DOWN"  
602 Audience: ((laughter))  
603 J.S.: "you are grounded"  
604 Audience: ((laughter))  
605 J.S.: "keep it down in there"  
606 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
607 J.S.: so I had my Superman Halloween costume,  
608 I was physically ready,  
609 I was mentally prepared.  
610 and I assumed, when I put this costume on,  
611 I would probably look exactly  
612 (2.0)  
613 Audience: ((laughter))  
614 J.S.: like the Superman I had come to know  
615 on television and in the movies.  
616 now you remember these costumes,  
617 it's not exactly the super-fit..  
618 Audience: ((laughter))  
619 J.S.: that you are hoping for  
620 you look more like  
621 you're wearing Superman's pajamas,  
622 Audience: [((laughter))]  
623 J.S.: [it's what you look like.]  
624 it's all loose, and flowing  
625 (1.0)  
626 neck line kinda comes down to about there.  
627 Audience: ((laughter))  
628 J.S.: ((laughs))  
629 and you got that flimsy little ribbon string

630 holding it together in the back  
631 of course my mother makes me wear my winter coat over  
the costume anyway.

632 Audience: ((laughter))  
633 {applause}

634 J.S.: "I don't recall Superman wearing a jacket."  
635 Audience: ((laughter))

636 J.S.: so you're going out there,  
637 you know,  
638 and the mask keeps breaking,  
639 so the rubber band keeps getting shorter,  
640 and keeps making it

641 Audience: [((laughter))]  
642 J.S.: [tighter and tighter on your face]  
643 you can't even see  
644 you're trying to breathe through that,  
645 remember that little hole,  
646 it gets all sweaty in there,

647 Audience: ((laughter))  
648 J.S.: ((imitates very deep breath))  
649 Audience: ((laughter))

650 J.S.: and the mask starts slicing into your eyeballs,  
651 "I can't see,  
652 I can't breathe,  
653 but you gotta get the candy,  
654 let's keep going."

655 Audience: ((laughter))  
656 J.S.: about a half-hour into it,  
657 you take that mask,  
658 "oh, the HELL with it"

659 Audience: ((laughter))  
660 J.S.: ((imitates doorbell))  
661 "bing bong",  
662 "it's me,  
663 gimme the candy"

664 Audience: ((laughter))  
665 {applause}

666 J.S.: "I'm Superman, look at the pant legs,  
667 Audience: ((laughter))

668 J.S.: whatta hell is the difference"  
669 Audience: ((laughter))  
670 {applause}

671 J.S.: remember those last few Halloweens,  
672 getting a little too old for it.

673 Audience: ((laughter))  
674 J.S.: just kind of going through the motions.  
675 Audience: ((laughter))

676 J.S.: "bing bong",  
677 "come on lady, let's go.  
678 Halloween, doorbells, candy,  
679 let's pick up the pace in there."

680 Audience: ((laughter))  
681 J.S.: they come at the door,  
682 they always ask you those same stupid questions:  
683 "what are you supposed to be?"

684 Audience: ((laughter))  
685 J.S.: "I'm supposed to be done by now,  
686 you wanna move it along,  
687 Audience: [((laughter))]

688 J.S.: [the three musketeers?]  
689 Audience: {applause}  
690 ((laughter))  
691 J.S.: I got 18 houses on this block alone.  
692 Audience: ((laughter))  
693 J.S.: you just hit the bag,  
694 we hit the road,  
695 that's the routine,  
696 Audience: ((laughter))  
697 J.S.: let's just pick it up."  
698 sometimes they gave you that little white bag,  
699 twisted on the top,  
700 you know that's gonna be some crap candy.  
701 Audience: ((laughter))  
702 J.S.: it's gotta have those official Halloween markings on  
it.  
703 "hold it lady, wait a second,  
704 what is this,  
705 the orange marshmallow shaped like a big peanut?  
706 do me a favor,  
707 you keep that one.  
708 Audience: ((laughter))  
709 J.S.: yeah, we got all the door-stops we need already,  
710 thank you very much.  
711 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
712 J.S.: we're going for name candy only, this year."  
713 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
714 J.S.: and I think about how I used to eat,  
715 when I was a kid.  
716 how I - I remember Halloween I would get,  
717 you know,  
718 I would have like a punch bowl,  
719 and I would fill it  
720 with candy.  
721 the top of it would be curved,  
722 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
723 J.S.: that's how much candy.  
724 I would consume that entire punch bowl,  
725 that night  
726 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
727 J.S.: next day, feel fantastic.  
728 Audience: ((laughter))  
729 J.S.: food isn't that much easier now, though.  
730 see people in the supermarket,  
731 just struggling,  
732 reading things,  
733 looking around.  
734 everyone's all upset in the supermarket.  
735 °what do I eat, what am I supposed to eat°?  
736 °the protein, the carbohydrate°...  
737 °fat content°  
738 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
739 J.S.: ((laughs))  
740 people just see fat content.  
741 "fat content  
742 it's fat, there's fat in it  
743 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
744 J.S.: it's gonna be in me"  
745 Audience: ((weak laughter))

746 J.S.: people just going up to people,  
747 "you look okay, what are you eating?  
748 maybe I'll eat that."  
749 Audience: ((laughter))  
749 J.S.: the whole supermarket is designed  
750 to break down your sense of having any kind of life  
outside the supermarket.  
751 it's like a casino.  
752 you know,  
753 there's no windows, no clocks,  
754 no easily accessible exits.  
755 have you ever knocked by anything in the supermarket  
756 and tried to get out of there?  
757 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
758 J.S.: there's no way out.  
759 Audience: ((laughter))  
760 J.S.: you can't get out.  
761 people walk up to the supermarket,  
762 they really have a sense of purpose, don't they?  
763 they're walking down there,  
764 >"I'm gonna get this,  
765 I'm gonna get that,  
766 I'm gonna pay for it,  
767 I'm gonna get out of here  
768 and get back to my real life".<  
769 you see that same person 10 minutes later,  
770 just  
771 (2.0)  
772 Audience: ((laughter))  
773 J.S.: "why did I come up this aisle, anyway?  
774 Audience: ((laughter))  
775 J.S.: this is a different aisle  
776 than I've ever been in before."  
777 Audience: ((laughter))  
778 J.S.: always noticing something new  
779 "oh, they got them in mesquite flavor, now."  
780 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
781 J.S.: what is mesquite?  
782 wonder if it's made from mosquitoes"  
783 Audience: ((laughter))  
784 J.S.: there's so many subtle insults in a lot of these  
products,  
785 what the hell is "chicken-of-the-sea tuna?"  
786 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
787 J.S.: there's no chickens in the sea  
788 Audience: ((laughter))  
789 J.S.: what do they think,  
790 they're afraid to tell us it's a fish?  
791 Audience: ((laughter))  
792 J.S.: afraid we won't understand?  
793 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
794 J.S.: "just put chicken on the can.  
795 they'll think it's chicken that lives in the sea."  
796 Audience: ((laughter))  
797 J.S.: "I don't want any chickens that live in the sea  
798 chickens on the land,  
799 fish in the sea,  
800 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
801 J.S.: don't put chickens in the sea"

802                   that Oscar Mayer's section is creepy too.  
803                   this guy is inventing meat.  
804 Audience:       ((laughter))  
805 J.S.:            there's no olive-loaf animal as far as I know.  
806 Audience:       ((laughter))  
807 J.S.:            I've never seen a pig with little pimentos in the  
                    side.  
808 Audience:       ((laughter))  
809 J.S.:            and that other one, head-cheese, WOW..  
810 Audience:       ((laughter))  
811 J.S.:            ho ho, I don't think so.  
812 Audience:       ((laughter))  
813 J.S.:            I've always felt the words "head" and "cheese"  
814                   should never be that  
815 Audience:       [ ((laughter)) ]  
816 J.S.:            [close together for any reason.]  
817 Audience:       ((laughter))  
818                   {applause}  
819 J.S.:            produce is tricky too,  
820                   I don't know what's the deal with the produce.  
821                   I mean, you're supposed to know,  
822                   that's why you have to just fake it.  
823 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
824 J.S.:            yeah, that's a good one,  
825 Audience:       ((laughter))  
826 J.S.:            glad I found that one"  
827 Audience:       ((laughter))  
828 J.S.:            cantaloupes, they're rolling  
829 Audience:       [ ((laughter)) ]  
830 J.S.:            [them down the aisle, you know]  
831                   "see the way that's fading left,  
832                   that one's not ready,  
833                   I'm not gonna get that one."  
834 Audience:       ((laughter))  
835 J.S.:            very impressed with that seedless watermelon  
                    development.  
836                   that was quite an accomplishment.  
837                   seedless watermelon  
838                   they did it  
839                   it's done.  
840 Audience:       ((laughter))  
841 J.S.:            we have it now.  
842 Audience:       ((laughter))  
843 J.S.:            what are they planting  
844                   to grow the seedless watermelon,  
845 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
846 J.S.:            I wonder(...)  
847                   water?  
848                   I mean, it's gotta be something.  
849 Audience:       ((laughter))  
850 J.S.:            they haven't got the melons humping now, have they?  
851 Audience:       ((laughter))  
852 J.S.:            and what kinds of scientists do this kind of work,  
                    anyway?  
853                   you know,  
854                   other scientists working on AIDS, cancer, heart  
                    disease,  
855                   these guys are going  
856                   "no, I wanna focus more on ... melon.

857 Audience: ((laughter))  
858 J.S.: I think that's the important area.  
859 sure, thousands are dying needlessly,  
860 but this ...  
861 ((makes sound))  
862 that's gotta stop"  
863 Audience: ((laughter))  
864 {applause}  
865 J.S.: and have you ever tried  
866 and pick a wet one off the floor?  
867 it's almost impossible.  
868 Audience: ((laughter))  
869 J.S.: milk is a big problem for people on the supermarket.  
870 they're never quite sure if they have it,  
871 if they need it,  
872 they bury it way in the back, in the supermarket.  
873 you gotta find it,  
874 you gotta back your way through all the displays,  
875 "ah, there it is.  
876 there is the milk.  
877 do we have any milk?"  
878 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
879 J.S.: people are never really sure if they have milk.  
880 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
881 J.S.: "I think we have milk,  
882 we might have °milk°.  
883 I know there's a carton in there,  
884 °I don't know how much is in it°."  
885 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
886 J.S.: "well, what should we do?"  
887 because you wanna be sure.  
888 there's nothing worse  
889 than thinking you have milk  
890 and not having it.  
891 you know,  
892 you got the bowl setup,  
893 the cereal,  
894 the spoon,  
895 the napkin,  
896 the TV,  
897 the newspaper,  
898 everything is ready to go.  
899 you're gonna lift up the carton  
900 and it's too light  
901 "ah"  
902 Audience: ((laughter))  
903 {applause}  
904 J.S.: "oh no  
905 too light"  
906 or sometimes you think you need milk,  
907 "hey, we better pick up some milk."  
908 like many of you are thinking right now.  
909 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
910 J.S.: "you know he's right,  
911 maybe we should pick up some milk."  
912 Audience: ((laughter))  
913 J.S.: so you'll pick up some milk on the way home.  
914 and then you'll discover you already had milk.  
915 Audience: ((weak laughter))

916 J.S.: and now you got way too much milk.  
 917 Audience: ((laughter))  
 918 J.S.: that's no good either,  
 919 now it's a race against the clock with the expiration  
 date.  
 920 Audience: ((laughter))  
 921 J.S.: that freaky thing.  
 922 now you're eating giant punch bowls of cereal,  
 923 three meals a day.  
 924 Audience: ((laughter))  
 925 J.S.: you're washing your face with milk.  
 926 Audience: ((laughter))  
 927 J.S.: bringing cats in from all over the neighborhood,  
 928 ["hurry up and drink it]  
 929 Audience: [((laughter))]  
 930 J.S.: come on, it's almost time"  
 931 Audience: ((laughter))  
 932 J.S.: how do they know that  
 933 that is the definite exact day?  
 934 you know,  
 935 they don't say "it's in the vicinity",  
 936 "give or take",  
 937 "roughly"  
 938 (1.0)  
 939 they brand it right into the side of the carton  
 940 ((imitates hot-branding))  
 941 -sssss-  
 942 Audience: ((laughter))  
 943 J.S.: "that's your God-damn day right there,  
 944 Audience: ((laughter))  
 945 J.S.: oh don't screw with us.  
 946 Audience: ((laughter))  
 947 J.S.: we know what day is the FINAL day  
 948 and then it is so over ..."  
 949 Audience: ((laughter))  
 950 J.S.: ever had milk the day after the day?  
 951 scares the hell outta you, doesn't it?  
 952 Audience: ((laughter))  
 953 {applause}  
 954 J.S.: the spoon is trembling  
 955 as it comes out of the bowl,  
 956 "it's after the day,  
 957 Audience: ((laughter))  
 958 J.S.: I don't know what the hell I'm doing here,  
 959 I don't know why I'm doing this,  
 960 Audience: ((laughter))  
 961 J.S.: I smelled it,  
 962 you smell it,  
 963 what is it supposed to smell like?  
 964 I never smelled milk"  
 965 Audience: ((laughter))  
 966 J.S.: maybe the cows tip them off  
 967 when they're milking them  
 968 "July 3<sup>rd</sup>."  
 969 Audience: ((laughter))  
 970 {applause}  
 971 J.S.: so you go to that check-out line,  
 972 I really appreciate the rubber divider sticks  
 973 that are ... available at check-out lines,

974 I think this is a nice supermarket feature.  
 975 because you want your items  
 976 and you want a little property there, too.  
 977 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 978 J.S.: I don't want other people's items  
 979 fraternizing with my carefully selected items.  
 980 put your sticks down.  
 981 there's two ways to use a rubber divider stick,  
 982 you can put them on the conveyer belt,  
 983 or you can hold it there on your hand,  
 984 it also works like that.  
 985 just go  
 986 >"excuse me,  
 987 those potato chips are getting a little close to my  
 box of doughnuts over there.<  
 988 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 989 J.S.: see the corner of that bag kind of curling against the  
 side of the box,  
 990 I'm a little worried about that.  
 991 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 992 J.S.: ((imitates hitting with stick))  
 993 you paying attention to me?"  
 994 Audience: ((laughter))  
 995 J.S.: so there was a young lady in front of me, the other  
 day.  
 996 her total was three dollars.  
 997 she chose to pay by the use of the CHEQUE.  
 998 Audience: ((laughter))  
 999 J.S.: what is with the chicks and the checks?  
 1000 women are using way more checks than men.  
 1001 are you aware of this, guys?  
 1002 uh, outside, I think, bills,  
 1003 men write two, three checks a month.  
 1004 women go through, like, a book a day.  
 1005 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1006 J.S.: and you know how you are  
 1007 when you're on the supermarket line, anyway,  
 1008 you see the person in front of you pull out a check,  
 1009 and you're ...  
 1010 ((shows great boredom and blows on the microphone))  
 1011 but, if it is a woman in front of you  
 1012 that's writing out the check,  
 1013 you will not be waiting long.  
 1014 because women write out so many checks,  
 1015 they're so fluent in the procedures,  
 1016 of checking and check writing,  
 1017 it takes them two seconds  
 1018 and they're out of there.  
 1019 it's the one thing in their purse  
 1020 they can find immediately.  
 1021 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1022 J.S.: it's the check book.  
 1023 most difficult thing for a woman  
 1024 to find in their purse .. is keys.  
 1025 they have no idea where the keys are.  
 1026 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1027 J.S.: sometimes they have to dump it out,  
 1028 rake through it.  
 1029 Audience: ((laughter))

1030 J.S.: but the check book, they got that,  
1031 that comes out of a holster,  
1032 "who do I make it out to?  
1033 ((speaks monotonously)  
1034 there's my ID.  
1035 see you later."  
1036 you don't see men doing that.  
1037 °men are totally intimidated by the check°.°  
1038 to a man,  
1039 a check is like a note from your mother,  
1040 that says "I don't have any money,  
1041 but if you contact these people ..  
1042 they'll stick up for me.  
1043 I gave my money to these people here.  
1044 and then they gave me these  
1045 (2.0)  
1046 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1047 J.S.: is that worth anything at all?  
1048 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1049 I put my name on it.  
1050 and the amount of money I wish I had."  
1051 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1052 J.S.: you gotta beg this guy to trust you.  
1053 and even if he does trust you,  
1054 how much do you trust him in return?  
1055 not very much,  
1056 because when you write down  
1057 the dollar amount on the check,  
1058 you always put that long line,  
1059 all the way there.  
1060 Audience: ((laughter))  
1061 J.S.: so he can't write in  
1062 "and a hundred million dollars too."  
1063 Audience: ((laughter))  
1064 {applause}  
1065 J.S.: I think if you don't finish the line  
1066 you have to pay that money.  
1067 Audience: ((laughter))  
1068 J.S.: the drugstore is even tougher than the supermarket,  
1069 because now you have no idea  
1070 what the hell you're looking at.  
1071 I went in a drugstore last week for a cold medicine,  
1072 >I was totally overwhelmed by it.<  
1073 I'm trying to break it down,  
1074 I mean, "there's 6000 products here  
1075 that are perfect for me".  
1076 Audience: ((laughter))  
1077 J.S.: it's not easy,  
1078 you know,  
1079 "oh, this one is quick-acting ...  
1080 but this one is long-lasting.  
1081 Audience: ((laughter))  
1082 J.S.: when do I need to feel good?  
1083 now or later?"  
1084 Audience: ((laughter))  
1085 J.S.: that's a hard question.  
1086 ever catch yourself  
1087 reading ingredients in the drugstore,  
1088 "oh, 03 tetra-hydrozilin.

1089 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1090 J.S.: it's a good amount of that".  
1091 they know, they know we don't know  
1092 they make up words,  
1093 ((one woman laughs))  
1094 J.S.: they always tell us on TV,  
1095 "now, with an extra drop of retsin"  
1096 Audience: ((laughter))  
1097 J.S.: like we're all going  
1098 "well, finally we're getting some more retsin."  
1099 Audience: ((laughter))  
1100 J.S.: they always tell you  
1101 how the medicine works on TV,  
1102 you know the commercials,  
1103 that's my favorite part  
1104 where the guy says uh,  
1105 "here's the human body."  
1106 so here's this guy,  
1107 no face, mouth open,  
1108 this is how drug companies see the public.  
1109 Audience: ((laughter))  
1110 J.S.: he's always got the tube coming down here,  
1111 and then the circle area.  
1112 these are the complex inner-workings of the human  
body, I assume.  
1113 I'm sure when you go to medical school,  
1114 they put that up on the board the first day,  
1115 "okay everyone,  
1116 now remember you've got your tube,  
1117 coming down from the mouth ...  
1118 and that goes into your circle area.  
1119 Audience: ((laughter))  
1120 J.S.: that's pretty much all we know.  
1121 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1122 J.S.: that's it for today.  
1123 don't miss tomorrow,  
1124 we're gonna practice making people wait in a little  
room in their underwear ...  
1125 Audience: ((laughter))  
1126 J.S.: and then you'll all be doctors.  
1127 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1128 J.S.: that's all there is to it.  
1129 then they have to show you the pain,  
1130 you know that part where they say  
1131 "here's where you hurt."  
1132 pain is usually represented by some sort of lightning,  
1133 attacking the guy.  
1134 glowing redness is popular,  
1135 sometimes parts of the guy's body will just burst into  
flames,  
1136 Audience: ((laughter))  
1137 J.S.: sometimes the whole guy is like out of focus,  
1138 Audience: ((laughter))  
1139 J.S.: I never had a doctor say to me:  
1140 "are you having any pain?"  
1141 "yes I am"  
1142 "are you having any lightning  
1143 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1144 J.S.: [with the pain?]

1145 have you been in a fun-house mirror at any time?"  
1146 Audience: ((laughter))  
1147 J.S.: then they tell you about the pain-relieving  
ingredient,  
1148 that's my "other favorite part of the commercial".  
1149 it's always  
1150 "extra-strength"  
1151 there is no more "strength" any more.  
1152 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1153 J.S.: you can't even get "strength"  
1154 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1155 J.S.: "strength" is off the market.  
1156 it's all "extra-strength"  
1157 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1158 J.S.: "I need extra"  
1159 "what's extra?"  
1160 "well, it's more."  
1161 Audience: ((laughter))  
1162 J.S.: we're gonna give you a little,  
1163 you know,  
1164 send a little extra your way,  
1165 Audience: ((laughter))  
1166 J.S.: don't say anything about it".  
1167 Audience: ((laughter))  
1168 J.S.: some people aren't satisfied with "extra" they want  
"maximum"  
1169 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1170 J.S.: "gimme the maximum strength  
1171 give me the maximum allowable human dosage  
1172 Audience: ((laughter))  
1173 J.S.: that's the kind o' pain I'm in,  
1174 Audience: ((laughter))  
1175 J.S.: figure out what will kill me,  
1176 and then back it off a little bit."  
1177 Audience: ((laughter))  
1178 {weak applause}  
1179 J.S.: and why does that pharmacist have to be two and a half  
feet higher than everybody else?  
1180 who the hell is this guy?  
1181 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1182 J.S.: "clear out everybody,  
1183 I'm working with pills up here."  
1184 Audience: ((laughter))  
1185 J.S.: I can't be down on the floor with you people  
1186 I'm taking pills from this big bottle  
1187 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1188 J.S.: [and then I'm gonna put them in a little bottle]  
1189 Audience: ((laughter))  
1190 {applause}  
1191 J.S.: and then I gotta type out on a little piece of paper,  
1192 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1193 J.S.: it's really hard."  
1194 it's that little bit of arrogance in the medical  
community,  
1195 I think we could all live without.  
1196 like when you go to see the doctor,  
1197 you don't see the actual doctor first ...  
1198 you must wait in the waiting room.  
1199 there's no chance of not waiting,

1200 that's the name of the room.  
1201 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1202 J.S.: and you sit there,  
1203 you pretend  
1204 you're reading your little magazine,  
1205 you're actually looking at the other people.  
1206 "I wonder what he's got,  
1207 Audience: ((laughter))  
1208 J.S.: that guy is a goner."  
1209 Audience: ((laughter))  
1210 J.S.: then they call you,  
1211 get excited when they call you,  
1212 because you think  
1213 now you're gonna see the doctor.  
1214 but you're not.  
1215 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1216 J.S.: now you're going into the next, smaller .. waiting  
room,  
1217 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1218 J.S.: now you don't even have your magazine.  
1219 now you got your pants around your ankles,  
1220 you're sitting on that  
1221 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1222 J.S.: [butcher paper  
1223 they pull out over the table]  
1224 Audience: {applause}  
1225 sometimes I bring a pickle with me  
1226 and I put it next to me right there on the table.  
1227 Audience: ((laughter))  
1228 J.S.: I don't know  
1229 in case the doctor wants to fold the whole thing up  
for a "to go" order.  
1230 Audience: ((laughter))  
1231 J.S.: but I hate the extra waiting that I have to do.  
1232 so sometimes I mess around with his stuff,  
1233 "maybe I'll turn that up a little bit,  
1234 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1235 J.S.: whatever the hell that does.  
1236 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1237 J.S.: take all the tongue-depressors out,  
1238 lick them all,  
1239 put them  
1240 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1241 J.S.: [all back in.]  
1242 two can play at this waiting game"  
1243 Audience: ((laughter))  
1244 J.S.: doctor always wants you to take your pants off,  
1245 "take your pants off and get in there  
1246 I'll speak to you with no pants.  
1247 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1248 J.S.: you take your pants off  
1249 and then I'll tell you  
1250 what I think about everything.  
1251 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1252 J.S.: I speak to no one wearing pants."  
1253 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1254 J.S.: it's a little psychological leverage for him  
1255 in any difference of opinion,  
1256 "pants" always beats "no pants"

1257 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1258 J.S.: just once I'd like to say to that doctor  
1259 "you know what,  
1260 I'm not ready for you yet,  
1261 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1262 J.S.: yeah, why don't you go back into your little office,  
1263 I'll be in it in a minute.  
1264 and get your pants off too."  
1265 Audience: ((laughter))  
1266 {applause}  
1267 J.S.: what does he need that little office for?  
1268 I guess he doesn't people to see him looking stuff up.  
1269 "what the hell was that?  
1270 Audience: ((laughter))  
1271 J.S.: Jesus Christ that was kinda gross.  
1272 Audience: ((laughter))  
1273 J.S.: I'm in big trouble here,  
1274 that wasn't the tube or the circle.  
1275 Audience: ((laughter))  
1276 J.S.: a friend of mine is going in for a nose job  
1277 ... next week.  
1278 guy.  
1279 Audience: ((laughter))  
1280 J.S.: rhinoplasty,  
1281 that's what they call it.  
1282 you've heard that term.  
1283 rhinoplasty.  
1284 rhino.  
1285 Audience: ((laughter))  
1286 J.S.: is that necessary?  
1287 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1288 J.S.: the person, obviously, is aware there's a problem.  
1289 Audience: ((laughter))  
1290 J.S.: they made the appointment.  
1291 Audience: ((laughter))  
1292 J.S.: do we really need to compare them to a God-damn  
rhinoceros,  
1293 Audience: ((laughter))  
1294 J.S.: for Christ's sake?  
1295 when you go in for a hair transplant,  
1296 they don't say  
1297 "we're going to perform a cueball-ectomy  
1298 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1299 J.S.: [on you, Mr. Johnson.]  
1300 we feel that the chrome-domia has advanced,  
1301 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1302 J.S.: to a point that we call skin-headia.  
1303 Audience: ((laughter))  
1304 J.S.: these are technical terms,  
1305 you don't really °need to bother yourself with°.  
1306 Audience: ((laughter))  
1307 J.S.: I, uh, I'm not married,  
1308 I am a single guy,  
1309 there's .. no other guys attached to me.  
1310 Audience: ((laughter))  
1311 J.S.: I've always been just the one guy.  
1312 Audience: ((laughter))  
1313 J.S.: I was best man at a wedding, one time,  
1314 that was pretty good.

1315 I thought it was a little .. too much in the title,  
there.  
1316 "best man".  
1317 I think we ought to have the groom,  
1318 and a pretty good man.  
1319 Audience: ((laughter))  
1320 J.S.: I mean, if I'm the best man,  
1321 why is she marrying him?  
1322 Audience: ((laughter))  
1323 {beginning applause}  
1324 J.S.: had to get the tux-  
1325 a design of clothing  
1326 that I think was invented by women.  
1327 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1328 J.S.: "well, they're all the same,  
1329 we might as well dress them all the same."  
1330 Audience: ((laughter))  
1331 J.S.: the tuxedo also functions  
1332 as a wedding safety device for the bride,  
1333 in case the groom chickens out,  
1334 everybody else just takes one step over,  
1335 Audience: ((laughter))  
1336 J.S.: and the ceremony continues.  
1337 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1338 J.S.: that's why they don't say  
1339 "do you take .. Dave Wilson to be your lawfully wedded  
husband",  
1340 they say  
1341 "do you take .. this man."  
1342 Audience: ((laughter))  
1343 J.S.: men and women will never understand each other,  
1344 my advice to you is to just stop thinking about it,  
1345 you're not gonna figure it out.  
1346 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1347 J.S.: just forget it.  
1348 I know I'm not gonna understand women.  
1349 I will never understand  
1350 how you can take boiling - hot wax,  
1351 Audience: ((laughter))  
1352 J.S.: pour it on to your upper thigh,  
1353 Audience: ((laughter))  
1354 J.S.: rip the hair out by the root ..  
1355 and still be afraid of a spider.  
1356 Audience: ((laughter))  
1357 {applause}  
1358 J.S.: I'm not wasting any more time thinking about that.  
1359 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1360 J.S.: because I'm not getting anywhere.  
1361 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1362 J.S.: and I know women are curious about men.  
1363 women wanna know what men are thinking.  
1364 I know women are looking at me,  
1365 right now.  
1366 and you're wondering  
1367 "I wonder what goes on in that little brain of his."  
1368 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1369 J.S.: I could tell you the truth,  
1370 if you would like to know  
1371 what men are really thinking.

1372 would you like to know?  
1373 Audience: ((laughter))  
1374 {applause}  
1375 J.S.: I will tell you.  
1376 nothing.  
1377 Audience: ((laughter))  
1378 {applause}  
1379 J.S.: we're not thinking anything.  
1380 we're just walking around ..  
1381 looking around.  
1382 Audience: ((laughter))  
1383 J.S.: this is the only natural inclination of men.  
1384 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1385 J.S.: we like women.  
1386 we want women.  
1387 but that's pretty much as far as we've thought.  
1388 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1389 J.S.: that's why we're honking car horns,  
1390 yelling from construction sites,  
1391 these are the best ideas we've had so far.  
1392 Audience: ((laughter))  
1393 J.S.: we're working on some new programs,  
1394 but it's not easy when your mind's a blank.  
1395 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1396 J.S.: honking the car horn to me ..,  
1397 that's the lowest level.  
1398 this is the last living brain cell,  
1399 comes up with this one.  
1400 what is this?  
1401 he's in the car,  
1402 she's on the street,  
1403 "bip bip brrrrrrr."  
1404 Audience: ((laughter, gets even stronger))  
1405 {applause}  
1406 J.S.: what- what does he think,  
1407 "well, I guess I made my point."  
1408 Audience: ((laughter))  
1409 J.S.: what is she supposed to do,  
1410 kick off the heels,  
1411 start running after the car.  
1412 Audience: ((laughter))  
1413 J.S.: grab on to the bumper.  
1414 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1415 J.S.: the car comes to a stop,  
1416 "it's a good thing you honked  
1417 I had no idea how you felt"  
1418 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1419 J.S.: why do men do these things?  
1420 why are they acting these ways?  
1421 why are men rude, obnoxious, getting drunk,  
1422 screaming out, peeling out rubber,  
1423 making kissing noises, why?  
1424 why?  
1425 telling awful jokes,  
1426 why do men behave so badly?  
1427 I know what you ladies are thinking,  
1428 "no no, not my guy,  
1429 I'm working with him,  
1430 he's coming along."

1431 Audience: ((laughter))  
1432 J.S.: no he's not.  
1433 Audience: ((laughter))  
1434 J.S.: he's tricking you.  
1435 Audience: ((laughter))  
1436 J.S.: men are not developing.  
1437 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1438 J.S.: we're not improving.  
1439 we men know, no matter how poorly we behave,  
1440 it seems we somehow end up with women anyway.  
1441 look around this room,  
1442 look at all the men you see,  
1443 beautiful women, °men are with them°,  
1444 do you think these are special men?  
1445 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1446 J.S.: gifted, highly unusual, one-of-a-kind men?  
1447 these are the same jerks and idiots  
1448 that I'm talking about.  
1449 Audience: ((laughter))  
1450 {applause}  
1451 J.S.: they're doing fine.  
1452 men, as an organization,  
1453 are getting more women than any other group,  
1454 working anywhere in the world, today.  
1455 wherever women are,  
1456 we have men looking into the situation, right now.  
1457 we explored the Earth looking for women.  
1458 even went to the Moon,  
1459 just to see if there was any woman there.  
1460 that's why we brought that little car,  
1461 why would you bring a car,  
1462 unless there's some chance of going on a date?  
1463 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1464 {applause}  
1465 J.S.: what the hell are you doing with the car on the God-  
damn Moon?  
1466 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1467 J.S.: I never was able to figure that out.  
1468 you're ON THE MOON  
1469 isn't that far enough?  
1470 Audience: ((laughter))  
1471 J.S.: there was no more male idea in the history of the  
universe,  
1472 than "why don't we fly up to the Moon  
1473 and drive around?"  
1474 Audience: ((laughter))  
1475 {applause}  
1476 J.S.: that is the essence of male thinking right there.  
1477 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1478 J.S.: here's the thing on men,  
1479 I'm gonna give it to you now.  
1480 all men think of themselves  
1481 as kind of low-level super-heroes ..  
1482 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1483 J.S.: in their own environment.  
1484 when men are growing up  
1485 and they're reading about Batman, Spiderman, Superman,  
1486 these aren't fantasies.  
1487 these are options.

1488 Audience: ((laughter))  
1489 J.S.: this is the way men really look at their own lives  
1490 I'm not even supposed to be telling you this.  
1491 Audience: ((laughter))  
1492 J.S.: I'll give you a perfect example of  
1493 what I'm talking about,  
1494 did you ever see a guy ..  
1495 moving a mattress tied to the roof of his car.  
1496 he's out on the highway with this thing  
1497 ((laughs))  
1498 he's - he's always got the arm  
1499 Audience: [((laughter))]  
1500 J.S.: [out the window, holding the mattress too, right?]  
1501 Audience: ((laughter))  
1502 {applause}  
1503 J.S.: whatever - whatever he's rigged up there,  
1504 he's always helping along with the arm.  
1505 this is classic male idiot super-hero thinking.  
1506 Audience: ((laughter))  
1507 J.S.: this moron actually believes  
1508 that if the wind catches this huge rectangle at 70  
miles an hour,  
1509 "I got it,  
1510 I got it.  
1511 Audience: ((laughter))  
1512 {applause}  
1513 J.S.: don't worry about it.  
1514 I'm using my ... arm"  
1515 Audience: ((laughter))  
1516 J.S.: but what about the date,  
1517 there's dating going on, on this room, right now.  
1518 we can all feel that little bit of tension.  
1519 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1520 J.S.: what is a date, really,  
1521 but a job interview that lasts all night?  
1522 Audience: ((laughter))  
1523 J.S.: only difference between a date and a job interview  
1524 is not many job interviews is there a chance you'll  
end up naked at the end of it.  
1525 Audience: ((laughter))  
1526 J.S.: >"well Bill, the boss thinks you're the man for the  
position,  
1527 why don't you strip down  
1528 and meet some of the people you'll be working with"<  
1529 Audience: ((laughter))  
1530 J.S.: dating is not easy,  
1531 sex is not easy.  
1532 women have two types of orgasms,  
1533 the actual one  
1534 and the ones that they make up on their own.  
1535 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1536 J.S.: and I can give you the male point of view on this,  
1537 which is .. we're fine with it.  
1538 Audience: ((laughter))  
1539 {applause}  
1540 J.S.: you do whatever the hell you gotta do.  
1541 Audience: ((laughter))  
1542 J.S.: we will do what we have to do.  
1543 Audience: ((laughter))

1544 J.S.: ((laughs))  
1545 to a man, sex is like a car accident, anyway.  
1546 and determining a female orgasm is like being asked  
1547 "what did you see after the car went out of control?"  
1548 Audience: ((laughter))  
1549 J.S.: "well, I remember I heard a lot of screeching noises,  
1550 I was, uh, facing the wrong way at one point,  
1551 Audience: ((laughter))  
1552 J.S.: and in the end my body was thrown clear."  
1553 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1554 J.S.: why is McDonald's still counting?  
1555 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1556 J.S.: how insecure is this company?  
1557 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1558 J.S.: forty million,  
1559 eighty jillion, billion zillion, killion tillion  
1560 is anyone really impressed anymore?  
1561 "oh, 89 billion sold  
1562 alright, I'll have one.  
1563 Audience: ((laughter))  
1564 J.S.: I'm satisfied."  
1565 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1566 J.S.: °who cares°?  
1567 I would love to meet the chairman of the board of  
McDonald's,  
1568 to just say to him,  
1569 "look, we all get it.  
1570 okay? you've sold a lot of hamburgers.  
1571 whatever the hell the number is.  
1572 ((laughs))  
1573 just put a sign  
1574 "McDonald's - we're doing very well.  
1575 Audience: ((laughter))  
1576 J.S.: we are tired of hearing about every God-damn one of  
them."  
1577 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1578 J.S.: what is their ultimate goal,  
1579 to have cows just surrendering voluntarily or  
something?  
1580 Audience: ((laughter))  
1581 J.S.: showing up at the door,  
1582 "we'd like to turn ourselves in,  
1583 we see the sign.  
1584 we realize we have very little chance out there.  
1585 Audience: ((laughter)),  
1586 {beginning applause}  
1587 J.S.: we'd like to be a Happy Meal,  
1588 if that's at all possible.  
1589 Audience: ((laughter))  
1590 {applause}  
1591 J.S.: I'll tell you what I like about Chinese people.  
1592 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1593 J.S.: as long as we're on the subject.  
1594 Audience: ((laughter))  
1595 J.S.: they're hanging in there with those chopsticks.  
1596 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1597 J.S.: still using chopsticks.  
1598 you know, they've seen the fork.  
1599 Audience: ((laughter))

1600 J.S.: oh they're well aware that we have the fork.  
1601 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1602 J.S.: and the spoon.  
1603 I don't know how they missed it  
1604 Chinese farmer, getting up working in the field with a  
shovel all day ...  
1605 "hello, shovel  
1606 Audience: ((laughter))  
1607 J.S.: there it is."  
1608 Audience: ((laughter))  
1609 J.S.: you're not plowing 40 acres with a couple of pool  
cues.  
1610 Audience: ((laughter))  
1611 J.S.: I was in London .. about a month ago.  
1612 the World Cup was going on.  
1613 I enjoy any sporting event  
1614 where nations .. get involved,  
1615 I find that the most exciting.  
1616 the Olympics is really my favorite .. sporting event,  
1617 although I think  
1618 I have a problem with that silver medal.  
1619 I think if I was an Olympic athlete  
1620 I would rather come in last  
1621 (1.0)  
1622 than win the silver,  
1623 if you think about it.  
1624 you know, you win the gold,  
1625 you feel good.  
1626 you win the bronze,  
1627 you think "well at least I got something."  
1628 but you win that silver,  
1629 that's like "congratulations, you .. almost won".  
1630 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1631 J.S.: "of all the losers,  
1632 you came in first of that group."  
1633 Audience: ((laughter))  
1634 J.S.: "you're the number one loser."  
1635 Audience: ((laughter))  
1636 J.S.: "no one lost ahead of you."  
1637 Audience: ((laughter))  
1638 J.S.: and they don't lose by much,  
1639 you know,  
1640 these short races,  
1641 three hundreds of a second,  
1642 two hundreds of a second,  
1643 I don't know how they live with that  
1644 the rest of their lives,  
1645 because you gotta tell the story.  
1646 everyone wants to hear the story:  
1647 "wow, congratulations, silver medal,  
1648 did you trip,  
1649 >did you not hear the gun go off,  
1650 tell us what happened"<  
1651 Audience: ((laughter))  
1652 J.S.: "it's a hundredth of a second,  
1653 what was the difference in the - in the marching,  
there?  
1654 what was it?"  
1655 "well, it was like from now ...

1656 from now, n-now, now, n-now,  
1657 Audience: ((laughter))  
1658 J.S.: n-n-now, n, n, eh.  
1659 Audience: ((laughter))  
1660 J.S.: that was it.  
1661 it's was it, eh, oh"  
1662 Audience: ((laughter))  
1663 J.S.: "I trained,  
1664 I worked out,  
1665 I exercised my entire life,  
1666 I never had a date,  
1667 I never had a drink,  
1668 I never had a beer,  
1669 I was doing push-ups since I was a fetus ..  
1670 I flew half way around the world,  
1671 everybody I knew in my whole life was there,  
1672 the guy shot off the gun and then .. oh"  
1673 Audience: ((laughter))  
1674 {applause}  
1675 J.S.: and they always have that photo-finish,  
1676 you know the photo-finish is always "silver .. gold".  
1677 Audience: ((laughter))  
1678 J.S.: "greatest guy in the world .."  
1679 never heard of him.  
1680 Audience: ((laughter))  
1681 {applause}  
1682 J.S.: you know, the guy's gotta be thinking  
1683 "if I had a pimple,  
1684 I would have won."  
1685 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1686 J.S.: so many events of the Olympics don't make sense to me,  
1687 I don't understand their connection to any reality  
like, uh,  
1688 like in the winter Olympics,  
1689 they have that Biathlon,  
1690 you know that one?  
1691 that combines cross-country skiing with shooting a  
gun?  
1692 how many alpine snipers are into this?  
1693 Audience: ((laughter))  
1694 J.S.: to me it's like combining swimming  
1695 and strangle a guy,  
1696 why don't we have that?  
1697 Audience: ((laughter))  
1698 J.S.: that makes absolutely as much sense to me,  
1699 just put people in the pool  
1700 at the end of each lane for the swimmers.  
1701 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1702 J.S.: and that other one, the, uh,  
1703 that I love is the luge.  
1704 you know the luge,  
1705 where the guy wears the slick suit.  
1706 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1707 J.S.: this is on the bobsled run,  
1708 but it's not even a sled.  
1709 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1710 J.S.: it's just bob.  
1711 Audience: ((laughter))  
1712 J.S.: it's just ...

1713 a human being hanging on for their life,  
1714 Audience: ((laughter))  
1715 J.S.: this is the whole sport.  
1716 Audience: ((laughter))  
1717 J.S.: just ahhhhhhhhh  
1718 Audience: ((laughter))  
1719 J.S.: "oh he pointed his toes ..  
1720 oh, this guy is a tremendous athlete."  
1721 Audience: ((laughter))  
1722 {applause}  
1723 J.S.: the luge is the only sport  
1724 I've ever seen  
1725 that you could have people competing in it against  
their will.  
1726 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1727 J.S.: and it would be exactly the same.  
1728 Audience: ((laughter))  
1729 J.S.: you know,  
1730 if they were just picking people off the street,  
1731 "hey hey hey, what is this?  
1732 Audience: ((laughter))  
1733 J.S.: I don't wanna be in the luge".  
1734 you know,  
1735 you put the helmet on them,  
1736 you wouldn't really hear them screaming, just:  
1737 purrrrrrr  
1738 Audience: ((laughter))  
1739 J.S.: "you're in the luge, buddy"  
1740 "ahhh ahhh ahhh ahhh .. aaahhh"  
1741 Audience: ((laughter))  
1742 J.S.: "world record.  
1743 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1744 J.S.: didn't even wanna do it"  
1745 Audience: ((laughter))  
1746 J.S.: I wanna see that event next year,  
1747 the involuntary luge.  
1748 I consider myself something of a sportsman.  
1749 been scuba diving.  
1750 another great activity  
1751 where your main goal is to .. not die.  
1752 Audience: ((laughter))  
1753 J.S.: that's pretty much all I thought about that day, just:  
1754 ((singing))  
1755 "don't die, don't die, don't die, don't die"  
1756 Audience: ((laughter))  
1757 J.S.: >"there's a fish, there's a rock  
1758 who cares, don't die.<  
1759 ((singing))  
1760 I don't wanna die, don't let me die,  
1761 let's swim and breathe and live.  
1762 because living is good  
1763 and dying ... not as good."  
1764 Audience: ((laughter))  
1765 {applause}  
1766 J.S.: they had me all setup with the scuba guy,  
1767 that has all the ..  
1768 you know, stuff for ya.  
1769 made sure that I bought a nylon wallet,  
1770 water-proof wallet,

1771 in case we run into a sea turtle that can  
break a fifty,  
1772 Audience: ((laughter))  
1773 J.S.: I guess.  
1774 Audience: ((laughter))  
1775 J.S.: water-proof watch,  
1776 that's important,  
1777 "gee, I'm completely out of oxygen,  
1778 and look at the time,  
1779 Audience: ((laughter))  
1780 J.S.: now I'm dead and I'm late."  
1781 Audience: ((laughter))  
1782 J.S.: but I've also gone hang-gliding,  
1783 I've gone sky diving,  
1784 I like things that are a little scary,  
1785 I don't know, maybe that's why I do this.  
1786 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1787 J.S.: I read a thing  
1788 that actually  
1789 speaking in front of a crowd is considered  
1790 the number one fear, of the average person.  
1791 I found that amazing.  
1792 number two was death  
1793 number two.  
1794 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1795 J.S.: that means, to the average person,  
1796 if you have to be at a funeral,  
1797 you would rather be in the casket  
1798 than doing the eulogy.  
1799 that's what that means.  
1800 Audience: ((laughter))  
1801 {applause}  
1802 J.S.: sky diving was definitely the scariest, uh, thing  
1803 I've ever done.  
1804 let me ask you this question,  
1805 in regards to the sky diving,  
1806 what is the point of the helmet,  
1807 Audience: ((laughter))  
1808 J.S.: in the sky diving?  
1809 (2.0)  
1810 I mean, can you .. kinda make it?  
1811 you jump out of that plane  
1812 and that .. chute doesn't open,  
1813 the helmet is now wearing you for protection.  
1814 Audience: ((laughter))  
1815 J.S.: later on, the helmet is talking with the other  
helmets,  
1816 going "it's a good thing he was there,  
1817 or I would hit the ground directly"  
1818 Audience: ((laughter))  
1819 J.S.: there are many things  
1820 that we can point to as proof  
1821 that the human being is not smart.  
1822 the helmet .. is my personal favorite.  
1823 the fact that we had to invent the helmet.  
1824 now why did we invent the helmet?  
1825 well, because we were participating in many activities  
1826 that were cracking our heads.  
1827 Audience: ((weak laughter))

1828 J.S.: we looked at the situation,  
1829 we chose not to avoid these activities,  
1830 Audience: ((laughter))  
1831 J.S.: but to just make little plastic hats,  
1832 so that we can continue our head-cracking life styles.  
1833 Audience: ((laughter))  
1834 J.S.: the only thing dumber than the helmet  
1835 is the helmet law,  
1836 the point of which is to protect a brain  
1837 that is functioning so poorly,  
1838 Audience: ((laughter))  
1839 J.S.: it's not even trying to stop the cracking of the head  
that it's in.  
1840 Audience: ((laughter))  
1841 J.S.: at least the helmet is functional clothing,  
1842 I appreciate that.  
1843 clothing to me, for the most part,  
1844 is just a tremendous pain in the ass.  
1845 if you think of the amount of time,  
1846 mental effort, physical energy,  
1847 that goes into your clothes ..  
1848 picking them, buying them,  
1849 °"does that go with that"°,  
1850 °"I don't think I can wear that"°,  
1851 °"I'm missing a button"°,  
1852 °"this is dirty"°,  
1853 °"I gotta get something new"°,  
1854 °"that's up my ass"°,  
1855 °"can't wear this"° ...  
1856 Audience: ((laughter))  
1857 J.S.: I think we should all wear the same exact clothes.  
1858 because it seems to be what happens eventually,  
anyway.  
1859 any time you see a movie or a TV show  
1860 where there's people from the future,  
1861 or another planet,  
1862 they're all wearing the same outfit.  
1863 Audience: ((laughter))  
1864 J.S.: I think the decision just gets made,  
1865 "all right everyone, from now on,  
1866 it's just gonna be the one-piece silver suit with the  
V-stripe and the boots.  
1867 Audience: ((laughter))  
1868 {beginning applause}  
1869 J.S.: that's the outfit.  
1870 we're gonna be visiting other planets,  
1871 we wanna look like a team, here.  
1872 Audience: ((laughter))  
1873 J.S.: the individuality thing is over.  
1874 the dry cleaner, I can't stand.  
1875 because I don't think he's doing it.  
1876 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1877 J.S.: I don't know what goes on back there,  
1878 but I cannot conceive of such a thing is actual dry  
cleaning.  
1879 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1880 J.S.: we all accept it  
1881 because we see the stores everywhere.  
1882 but think about it, dry?

1883 what is dry?  
1884 you can't clean something dry  
1885 what do they do,  
1886 tap it, shake it, blow on it,  
1887 there's gotta be some kind of a liquid back there.  
1888 Audience: ((laughter))  
1889 J.S.: did you ever get something on your clothes  
1890 and get it off with the finger nail?  
1891 that's dry cleaning.  
1892 Audience: ((laughter))  
1893 J.S.: that is the only dry cleaning ...  
1894 I brought this guy in .. a suede jacket,  
1895 got spots on it because I was in the rain,  
1896 says "there's nothing we can do.  
1897 water ruins leather."  
1898 now, .. aren't cows outdoors, a lot of the time?  
1899 Audience: ((laughter))  
1900 J.S.: when it rains,  
1901 do the cows go up to the farm house,  
1902 "hey, let us in,  
1903 we're all wearing leather out here.  
1904 Audience: ((laughter))  
1905 J.S.: hey open up man, I'm suede"  
1906 Audience: ((laughter))  
1907 J.S.: "dry clean only",  
1908 I - I would say though,  
1909 is the only warning label  
1910 that human beings do respect.  
1911 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1912 J.S.: you know what I mean, cigarettes:  
1913 >"this will give you cancer",  
1914 "it will definitely kill you",  
1915 "babies, everything ..."  
1916 "screw it, I'll do whatever the hell I want"  
1917 ((blows smoke))  
1918 pffffff-<  
1919 "don't take this medicine  
1920 and operate heavy machinery"  
1921 >"ah, glug-glug-glug,  
1922 that's for beginners,  
1923 people who don't know  
1924 what the hell is happening,  
1925 I've been working on this job for 20 years"  
1926 but if you have something  
1927 that says "dry clean only"  
1928 and someone tries to put it in the washing machine<,  
1929 "don't put it in the washing machine  
1930 it's dry clean only  
1931 are you crazy out of your mind"  
1932 Audience: ((laughter))  
1933 {applause}  
1934 J.S.: I'm always irritated by that  
1935 (2.0)  
1936 effect of, uh, watching TV late at night,  
1937 I do this most nights.  
1938 I'm watching TV,  
1939 tell me if you have,  
1940 if this happens to you,  
1941 you're watching TV,

1942 it's getting late.  
1943 you're getting tired,  
1944 you're starting to fall asleep.  
1945 you think to yourself,  
1946 I could get into bed  
1947 and go to sleep right now.  
1948 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1949 J.S.: but I don't.  
1950 I don't go to bed,  
1951 I fight ... sleep,  
1952 and continue searching for entertainment.  
1953 Audience: ((laughter))  
1954 {applause}  
1955 J.S.: >"no, I gotta find a car blowing up,  
1956 somebody naked,  
1957 I don't care what it is, I gotta fight"<  
1958 Audience: ((laughter))  
1959 J.S.: what is this?  
1960 go to bed  
1961 the finger that hits the button on the remote control  
1962 is the last part of the human body to fall asleep.  
1963 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1964 J.S.: you're out cold,  
1965 that finger's still going,  
1966 it's still looking.  
1967 Audience: ((laughter))  
1968 J.S.: it is amazing what people will believe.  
1969 I watch these infomercials late at night,  
1970 I start to believe them.  
1971 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1972 J.S.: I don't know what the hour is,  
1973 there is an hour,  
1974 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1975 J.S.: that I'm watching,  
1976 and I start thinking "you know,  
1977 (1.0)  
1978 I don't think  
1979 I could cut through a shoe with any of my knives.  
1980 Audience: ((laughter))  
1981 J.S.: that does look pretty good."  
1982 Audience: ((laughter))  
1983 J.S.: there is nothing about my life  
1984 that I could tell you,  
1985 that is more embarrassing  
1986 than the fact  
1987 that I have actually spoken the words  
1988 "I would like to order the Ginsu knife."  
1989 Audience: ((laughter))  
1990 J.S.: I wish I was making all this up.  
1991 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1992 J.S.: I actually own the Ginsu knife.  
1993 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1994 J.S.: "I'm gonna get this knife  
1995 and cut my shoes up."  
1996 what's a rip off ...  
1997 we all try and prevent ourselves  
1998 from getting ripped off,  
1999 we all think, uh,  
2000 we all think we're very clever,

2001 °you know°.

2002 we think we can out-think the crooks ..

2003 you know.

2004 go to the beach,

2005 go in the water,

2006 put your wallet in the sneaker,

2007 "who's gonna know?

2008 Audience: ((laughter))

2009 J.S.: what criminal mind could penetrate this fortress of security?

2010 Audience: ((laughter)),

2011 {beginning applause}

2012 J.S.: I put it down by the toe,

2013 they never look there.

2014 Audience: ((laughter))

2015 J.S.: they check the heels,

2016 they move on."

2017 Audience: ((laughter))

2018 J.S.: so feeble, the things we come up with,

2019 to foil crooks.

2020 like the "wanted" posters at the post office

2021 you're there, you got your package,

2022 you're trying to mail something,

2023 this guy is wanted in 12 states ..

2024 "yeah, now what, okay."

2025 Audience: ((laughter))

2026 J.S.: you know, I check the guy

2027 standing in line behind me,

2028 Audience: ((laughter))

2029 J.S.: if it's not him,

2030 that's pretty much all I can do.

2031 why don't they just hold on to this guy

2032 when they're taking his picture?

2033 Audience: ((laughter))

2034 {applause}

2035 J.S.: the guy's there with you

2036 >"come out from behind the counter

2037 and grab him"<

2038 Audience: ((laughter))

2039 J.S.: "no, we don't do that,

2040 we take their picture, we let them go.

2041 Audience: ((laughter))

2042 J.S.: that's how we get the front and side shot,

2043 the front is his face,

2044 the side is him leaving"

2045 Audience: ((laughter))

2046 J.S.: why don't they put the pictures of the criminals on the postage stamps?

2047 let the postman look for him,

2048 he's out there walking around all day.

2049 Audience: ((laughter))

2050 {beginning applause}

2051 J.S.: he's got the uniform on,

2052 can't he do something?

2053 Audience: ((laughter))

2054 J.S.: "ah, we got a letter for you here, Mr. Joh-

2055 Audience: ((laughter))

2056 J.S.: hey, wait a second"

2057 Audience: ((laughter))

2058 J.S.: when you're - when you're on the road,  
2059 which I'm not now,  
2060 you, uh, you have to do  
2061 what everybody suggests  
2062 to do for that day,  
2063 because  
2064 (1.0)  
2065 you gotta do something.  
2066 a couple of weeks ago we were in Pittsburgh,  
2067 we went, uh, to the track,  
2068 bet on the horses.  
2069 this is idiotic.  
2070 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
2071 J.S.: I think it's fun,  
2072 but I never would think for a second  
2073 that I could figure out  
2074 what horse is going to win,  
2075 I don't even think the horses know  
2076 that they're racing.  
2077 Audience: ((laughter))  
2078 J.S.: do they?  
2079 I mean, are they walking back to the stable  
afterwards,  
2080 going "I was third",  
2081 "I was fifth",  
2082 "I was ninth."  
2083 Audience: ((laughter))  
2084 J.S.: "you cut me off, watch that."  
2085 Audience: ((laughter))  
2086 J.S.: "I'll kick your ass next time."  
2087 Audience: ((laughter))  
2088 J.S.: I think more likely, they're thinking,  
2089 ((singing))  
2090 "oat bag,  
2091 Audience: [((laughter))]  
2092 J.S.: [I get my oat bag now.]  
2093 oat bag time for me."  
2094 Audience: {applause}  
2095 J.S.: I mean, I'm sure the horses have some idea  
2096 that the jockey is in a hurry.  
2097 Audience: ((laughter))  
2098 J.S.: I mean, he's on him,  
2099 he's urging him,  
2100 he's hitting him,  
2101 "come on, come on",  
2102 you know, so,  
2103 "this is important  
2104 that I get somewhere for this guy .. quick",  
2105 but they must get to the end and go  
2106 ((breathing deeply))  
2107 "we were just here,  
2108 Audience: ((laughter))  
2109 J.S.: what was the point of that?  
2110 Audience: ((laughter))  
2111 J.S.: this is where we were.  
2112 Audience: ((laughter))  
2113 J.S.: that was the longest possible route  
2114 you could take  
2115 to get where you wanted to be.

2116 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2117 J.S.: why don't we just stay here?  
 2118 I would've been first."  
 2119 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2120 {applause}  
 2121 J.S.: I'll tell you one thing  
 2122 the horses definitely do not know,  
 2123 they do not know  
 2124 if you should accidentally trip  
 2125 and break your leg,  
 2126 at any point during the race,  
 2127 we're gonna blow your brains out.  
 2128 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2129 J.S.: I think they're missing that little tidbit of  
 information.  
 2130 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2131 J.S.: if they knew that,  
 2132 you'd see some mighty careful stepping  
 2133 coming down that home stretch.  
 2134 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2135 J.S.: "easy, fellas, easy.  
 2136 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2137 {beginning applause}  
 2138 J.S.: you win,  
 2139 I'll place,  
 2140 whatever it is.  
 2141 it's all the same oat bag, fellas.  
 2142 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2143 J.S.: the important thing is your health."  
 2144 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2145 {applause}  
 2146 J.S.: I've tried horseback riding,  
 2147 I can't really do that.  
 2148 and, uh, they don't really give you the good horses  
 2149 (1.5)  
 2150 when you're not good at it.  
 2151 I found that out.  
 2152 the guy says  
 2153 "what level of rider would you say that you are?"  
 2154 I go "I don't know,  
 2155 zero, nothing, whatever the system is.  
 2156 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2157 J.S.: I can't do it,  
 2158 is that clear enough for you?  
 2159 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2160 J.S.: I'm going where the horse wants to go, okay?  
 2161 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2162 J.S.: that's my .. level"  
 2163 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2164 J.S.: of course, they hear that,  
 2165 they start looking around,  
 2166 "all right, is Glue-Stick back yet?  
 2167 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2168 J.S.: how about Almost-Dead,  
 2169 why don't you saddle him up?"  
 2170 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2171 J.S.: so I get on this U-shaped ..  
 2172 lightning-quick steed I got here ..  
 2173 I had the only horse

2174                   you could put your feet flat on the ground  
 2175                   while you're riding him.  
 2176 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2177 J.S.:             I'm riding the Hammock, here.  
 2178 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2179 J.S.:             looking up at my friends,  
 2180                   "I don't feel like  
 2181                   we all got the same kind of horse."  
 2182 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2183 J.S.:             it was kind of a secure feeling,  
 2184                   I could just kind of walk along with them there,  
 2185                   you know.  
 2186 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2187 J.S.:             and the horse isn't too thrilled with having me,  
                     either.  
 2188                   the horse knows,  
 2189                   they may be dumb,  
 2190                   but they know you can't ride.  
 2191                   and they don't like it.  
 2192                   they just stop, you know,  
 2193                   and they look up at you,  
 2194 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
 2195 J.S.:             with that frightening horsy face, you know,  
 2196 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2197 J.S.:             with those huge nostrils,  
 2198                   and that - that big bowling ball eye.  
 2199 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2200 J.S.:             "chill out, hop-along, I know the trail.  
 2201 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2202 J.S.:             yeah, I'm here every God-damn day, okay?  
 2203 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2204                   {beginning applause}  
 2205 J.S.:             and I really appreciate the kicking while  
 2206 Audience:       [ ((laughter)) ]  
 2207 J.S.:             [I'm taking a leak, too.]  
 2208                   yeah, thanks a lot,  
 2209                   that really improves the already wonderful life  
 2210                   that I have.  
 2211 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2212 J.S.:             people either are sitting on me  
 2213                   or kicking me while I'm peeing.  
 2214                   I've got a really sweet gig here at the ranch."  
 2215 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2216 J.S.:             get out of a car that has 300 horsepower  
 2217                   to sit on an animal that has one.  
 2218 Audience:       ((laughter))  
 2219 J.S.:             why - why do we use the term horsepower?  
 2220                   is that also to insult the horse?  
 2221                   the space-shuttle rocket boosters,  
 2222                   each one ... has 20 million horsepower.  
 2223                   why are we still comparing it with the horse?  
 2224 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
 2225 J.S.:             any chance we're gonna get back to using horses,  
 2226 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
 2227 J.S.:             for rockets, trying to keep track of  
 2228                   how many we're going to need?  
 2229 Audience:       ((weak laughter))  
 2230 J.S.:             "hey horse, the rocket engine just broke down,  
 2231                   can you get 20 million friends together really fast?"

2232 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2233 J.S.: "20 million, that's a lot."  
 2234 ((laughs))  
 2235 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2236 J.S.: they do make glue out of horses,  
 2237 I have no idea how they do it  
 2238 (1.0)  
 2239 or who even saw that potential.  
 2240 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2241 J.S.: that's a brainstorm in my book.  
 2242 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2243 J.S.: what are you, working in a stationary store,  
 2244 you see a horse walk by the window.  
 2245 Audience: ((slight laughter))  
 2246 J.S.: "wait a minute."  
 2247 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2248 J.S.: I think he ... could be glue"  
 2249 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2250 J.S.: "are you sure?"  
 2251 "I'm positive"  
 2252 "how do we pick out the really sticky ones?"  
 2253 "you leave that to me"  
 2254 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2255 J.S.: "what about that one over there,  
 2256 he's weaving around,  
 2257 he looks like he's out of his mind"  
 2258 "he'll be crazy-glue"  
 2259 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2260 {applause}  
 2261 J.S.: to me the toughest part of the horses' life is the  
 horse trailer.  
 2262 I don't know who designed that.  
 2263 is that the best way  
 2264 to move a horse out on the highway?  
 2265 is that what we all need to see,  
 2266 their huge, fat, disgusting asses?  
 2267 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2268 J.S.: right in my face?  
 2269 is it good for the horses?  
 2270 they're probably standing in the back going  
 2271 "do you feel a draft, Bill?"  
 2272 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2273 J.S.: I can't see anything back there,  
 2274 but it's awfully breezy, isn't it?  
 2275 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2276 J.S.: you don't think our  
 2277 Audience: [((laughter))]  
 2278 J.S.: [huge fat asses are hanging out the back of this  
 truck, do you?]  
 2279 why the hell would they do that to us?  
 2280 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2281 J.S.: they already ride us around  
 2282 and kick us while we're peeing.  
 2283 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2284 J.S.: what's the point of sticking our ass out of the  
 truck?"  
 2285 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2286 J.S.: I like staying in hotels,  
 2287 I enjoy hotels,

2288 I, uh, like tiny soap.  
 2289 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2290 J.S.: I pretend that it's normal soap  
 2291 and my muscles are huge.  
 2292 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2293 J.S.: can always tell when you're in a fine quality,  
 2294 luxury hotel,  
 2295 when the TV is bolted to a solid steel beam,  
 2296 and welded into the wall.  
 2297 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2298 J.S.: I don't like staying at people's houses,  
 2299 on the road.  
 2300 don't like other people's showers.  
 2301 I can never adjust the temperature right,  
 2302 I don't know the ratios on the dials.  
 2303 you know,  
 2304 sometimes a 16<sup>th</sup> of an inch is a thousand degrees  
 2305 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2306 J.S.: you gotta get out of the way of the water.  
 2307 there's always that little hair,  
 2308 stuck on the wall of somebody else's shower.  
 2309 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2310 J.S.: you wanna get rid of it,  
 2311 but you don't wanna touch it.  
 2312 I don't know how it got up that high,  
 2313 in the first place.  
 2314 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2315 J.S.: maybe it's got a life of its own,  
 2316 I don't wanna get involved.  
 2317 so you gotta aim the shower head at the hair  
 2318 (3.0)  
 2319 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2320 J.S.: that never works,  
 2321 you gotta get a pool of water from under the shower  
 2322 and over to the hair.  
 2323 you get it down, a foot at a time, like this.  
 2324 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2325 J.S.: the hair is hanging on.  
 2326 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2327 J.S.: but we have to fight these battles,  
 2328 we're all alone in the bathroom.  
 2329 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2330 J.S.: whatever goes wrong,  
 2331 you have to handle it.  
 2332 did you ever go to a big party,  
 2333 go in the bathroom,  
 2334 flush the toilet,  
 2335 and the water starts coming up?  
 2336 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2337 J.S.: this is the most frightening moment  
 2338 in the life of a human being right here.  
 2339 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2340 {applause}  
 2341 J.S.: you will do anything to stop this.  
 2342 ((laughs))  
 2343 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2344 J.S.: you'll lose your mind,  
 2345 start talking to the toilet,  
 2346 "no please, don't do this to me, come on.

2347 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2348 J.S.: you know this is not my fault  
 2349 I'll get you the blue thing,  
 2350 the man in the boat,  
 2351 just let me off the hook this one time"  
 2352 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2353 J.S.: thank you very much,  
 2354 I hope you had a good time, tonight.  
 2355 Audience: {applause}  
 2356 {standing ovations}  
 2357 J.S.: thank you.  
 2358 thank you very much,  
 2359 thank you.  
 2360 Audience: {applause}  
 2361 J.S.: thank you.  
 2362 I - I appreciate that very, very much,  
 2363 that's really, really nice,  
 2364 I did not want to come back.  
 2365 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2366 J.S.: you made me do it.  
 2367 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2368 J.S.: I don't know what it is  
 2369 you expect me to do at this point.  
 2370 I appreciate your standing up,  
 2371 I know that's not easy to do.  
 2372 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2373 J.S.: and I know there's always a few people  
 2374 that don't really wanna do it.  
 2375 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2376 J.S.: I have often been one of those people.  
 2377 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2378 J.S.: if you have any questions for me,  
 2379 I'll be more than happy  
 2380 to entertain your curiosity.  
 2381 (1.0)  
 2382 Man: what do you do for fun?  
 2383 J.S.: what do I do for fun?  
 2384 well, right now I'm gonna try  
 2385 and do this, for some fun.  
 2386 I don't know,  
 2387 I wanna - I wanna get into surfing,  
 2388 that's what I wanna do.  
 2389 I think surfing is fun.  
 2390 I'm serious,  
 2391 ((laughs))  
 2392 I'm gonna do that.  
 2393 I think surfing is cool.  
 2394 I like - I think it's funny all the trouble  
 2395 that people go to,  
 2396 to get into the ocean,  
 2397 and that really,  
 2398 the ocean is just constantly throwing us out of there.  
 2399 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 2400 J.S.: that's what surfing is.  
 2401 the ocean throwing us out.  
 2402 Man: why won't you make a movie?  
 2403 J.S.: I don't know about a movie,  
 2404 I mean .. most of the movies  
 2405 you see aren't .. very good, these days.

2406 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2407 J.S.: and they're very complicated,  
 2408 you know, I mean,  
 2409 you go see some piece of junk  
 2410 and it's ... you know,  
 2411 100 million dollars and two years in the making  
 2412 I mean, you - you go to a bad movie,  
 2413 it's two hours,  
 2414 you're in a bad movie,  
 2415 it's two years.  
 2416 I'd uh -I'd be afraid  
 2417 that I'd be in the movie,  
 2418 looking out at the audience,  
 2419 going "this sucks, doesn't it?"  
 2420 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2421 J.S.: I can't get out of this thing,  
 2422 they got me under contract.  
 2423 Man: what's your favorite cereal?  
 2424 J.S.: what is my favorite cereal?  
 2425 I - I like any cereal,  
 2426 I like the idea of just eating and drinking with one  
 hand,  
 2427 without looking.  
 2428 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2429 {applause}  
 2430 J.S.: I find that experience very neat.  
 2431 Woman: what's your favorite Seinfeld episode?  
 2432 J.S.: do I have a favorite Seinfeld episode?  
 2433 well, I get this question quite often,  
 2434 uh, I don't really have a favorite,  
 2435 they're all kind of my babies,  
 2436 I did the best I could with each one.  
 2437 Audience: {applause}  
 2438 J.S.: you know, comedy ...  
 2439 comedy is kind of a survival industry.  
 2440 you know,  
 2441 comedians are very much into just surviving.  
 2442 it's like if I were to ask you  
 2443 what is your favorite breath of air,  
 2444 that you've ever taken.  
 2445 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2446 J.S.: you would say  
 2447 "whichever one I'm taking  
 2448 that gets me to the next one."  
 2449 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2450 J.S.: excuse me?  
 2451 Woman: it's my birthday.  
 2452 J.S.: it's your birthday,  
 2453 well happy birthday.  
 2454 which, uh, which birthday is it?  
 2455 Woman: I ain't saying...  
 2456 J.S.: oh, okay.  
 2457 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2458 J.S.: so you want attention,  
 2459 but not too much attention.  
 2460 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2461 {applause}  
 2462 J.S.: I noticed your first couple of birthdays in life  
 2463 and your last couple of birthdays in life are very

similar.  
 2464 in both cases,  
 2465 you don't really even know it's your birthday.  
 2466 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2467 J.S.: people have to tell you  
 2468 "these are your friends.  
 2469 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2470 J.S.: they've come to help you celebrate your birthday".  
 2471 and you need a little help with the cake blow .. in  
 both cases.  
 2472 what else?  
 2473 excuse me?  
 2474 Man: are you from Massapequa, Jerry?  
 2475 J.S.: yes I am from Massapequa.  
 2476 Massapequa is a town on Long Island,  
 2477 I'm sure you may have heard of.  
 2478 Audience: {applause}  
 2479 J.S.: Massapequa is an Indian name,  
 2480 it means "by the mall".  
 2481 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2482 J.S.: it's amazing  
 2483 (1.0)  
 2484 that even the native tribes could sense  
 2485 that the retail is gonna be a natural lust,  
 2486 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2487 J.S.: once we build up the suburban environment.  
 2488 Woman: Jerry?  
 2489 J.S.: yes, we know who it is,  
 2490 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2491 J.S.: just go with the question.  
 2492 what else?  
 2493 Man: hello Newman  
 2494 J.S.: give you a "hello Newman"  
 2495 well, sir,  
 2496 there is a lot more to a "hello Newman"  
 2497 than meets the eye.  
 2498 you don't just ..  
 2499 you don't just say "hello Newman".  
 2500 first, you must open the door properly for Newman.  
 2501 you'll notice,  
 2502 whenever I open the door for Newman,  
 2503 is different than the way  
 2504 I opened it for everybody else,  
 2505 you wanna get the wide swing  
 2506 you wanna open that door all the way ..  
 2507 because you wanna reveal Newman  
 2508 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2509 J.S.: in all his Newman.  
 2510 and also, you wanna give him the opportunity  
 2511 to take his little  
 2512 (1.0)  
 2513 step,  
 2514 that he always does, right?  
 2515 Audience: ((laughter))  
 2516 {applause}  
 2517 J.S.: and then,  
 2518 when he comes in and then he looks at you  
 2519 and he stands there, and he waits ..  
 2520 he waits, for his "hello Newman".

2521                   and he looks at you  
2522                   with those beady little eyes.  
2522                   and you must think of all the evil in the world  
2523                   and then you must say to him:  
2524                   "hello Newman".  
2525 Audience:       {applause}  
2526                   ((laughter))  
2527 J.S.:            thank you very much,  
2528                   you've been a wonderful audience.  
2529                   thank you for coming.  
2530 Audience:       {applause}  
2531                   ((laughter))  
2532                   {standing ovations}

### 17.3. Transcript Steven Wright: *I Have a Pony*

1     Presenter: ladies and gentlemen.  
2                please welcome  
3                (1.0)  
4                from Boston, Massachusetts,  
5                Steven Wright.  
6     Audience: {applause}  
7     Man:        okay.  
8     Audience: {applause}  
9     S.W.:       thanks.  
10               I used to be a parking attendant in Boston at Logan  
               Airport ..  
11               I parked jets.  
12    Audience: ((laughter))  
13               {weak applause}  
14    S.W.:       they let me go though  
15               because I kept locking the keys in them.  
16    Audience: ((laughter))  
17    S.W.:       one day I was on an 86ft step ladder  
18               trying to get in a window  
19               with a coat hanger.  
20    Audience: ((laughter))  
21    S.W.:       I was arrested today  
22               for scalping low numbers at the deli.  
23    Audience: ((laughter))  
24               {weak applause}  
25    S.W.:       sold a number 3 for twenty-eight bucks.  
26    Audience: ((laughter))  
27    S.W.:       I was once walking through the forest alone  
28               and a tree fell right in front of me ..  
29               and I didn't hear it.  
30    Audience: ((laughter))  
31               {applause}  
32    S.W.:       I used to be a narrator for bad mimes.  
33    Audience: ((laughter))  
34    S.W.:       I live in a house  
35               that's on the median strip of a highway.  
36    Audience: ((weak laughter))  
37    S.W.:       a very nice grassy area  
38               I like it.  
39               the only thing I don't like about it is  
40               when I leave my driveway  
41               you have to be going 60mph.  
42    Audience: ((laughter))  
43    S.W.:       I have a microwave fireplace.  
44    Audience: ((laughter))  
45    S.W.:       you can lay down in front of the fire  
46               for the evening in 8 minutes.  
47    Audience: ((laughter))  
48               {applause}  
49    S.W.:       well,  
50               you can't have everything  
51               where would you put it?  
52    Audience: ((laughter))  
53               {applause}  
54    S.W.:       sometimes you can't hear me.  
55               it's because  
56               sometimes I'm in parentheses.

57 Audience: ((laughter))  
58 S.W.: are there any questions?  
59 I'm feeling kinda hyper  
60 about four years ago I was -  
61 no, it was yesterday.  
62 Audience: ((laughter))  
63 {applause}  
64 S.W.: I went to the hardware store  
65 and bought some used paint.  
66 Audience: ((laughter))  
67 S.W.: it was in the shape of a house.  
68 Audience: ((laughter))  
69 S.W.: I also bought some batteries  
70 but they weren't included.  
71 Audience: ((laughter))  
72 {weak applause}  
73 S.W.: so I had to buy 'em again.  
74 Audience: ((laughter))  
75 S.W.: I had trouble going home from there  
76 because I parked my car in a tow-away zone  
77 and when I came back  
78 the entire area was gone.  
79 Audience: ((laughter))  
80 S.W.: one time the police stopped me for speeding  
81 and they said:  
82 "don't you know  
83 the speed limit is 55 miles an hour?"  
84 I said  
85 "yeah, I know.  
86 but I wasn't gonna be out that long."  
87 Audience: ((laughter))  
88 {applause}  
89 S.W.: when I was a baby  
90 I kept a diary.  
91 Audience: ((laughter))  
92 S.W.: recently I was rereading it  
93 it said:  
94 "day one:  
95 still tired from the move.  
96 Audience: ((laughter))  
97 {applause}  
98 S.W. day two:  
99 everybody talks to me like I'm an idiot."  
100 Audience: ((laughter))  
101 S.W.: I remember turning  
102 from one year(s) old to two years old.  
103 I was real upset  
104 because I figured in one year  
105 my age doubled.  
106 Audience: ((laughter))  
107 S.W.: if this keeps up  
108 by the time I'm six  
109 I'll be 90.  
110 Audience: ((laughter))  
111 {weak applause}  
112 S.W.: it was my birthday recently.  
113 for my birthday  
114 I got a humidifier and a dehumidifier.  
115 Audience: ((laughter))

116 S.W.: put them in the same room  
117 and let them fight it out.  
118 Audience: ((laughter))  
119 S.W.: then I filled my humidifier with wax  
120 now my room's all shiny.  
121 Audience: ((laughter))  
122 (10.0)  
123 S.W.: right now  
124 I'm having amnesia  
125 and déjà vu at the same time.  
126 Audience: ((laughter))  
127 S.W.: a friend of mine named Dennis,  
128 his parents are midgets  
129 (3.0)  
130 but he's not a midget  
131 he's a midget dwarf.  
132 Audience: ((laughter))  
133 S.W.: he's this big.  
134 Audience: ((laughter))  
135 S.W.: he's the guy  
136 who poses for trophies.  
137 Audience: (laughter)  
138 {applause}  
139 S.W.: I used to work for the factory  
140 where they make hydrants  
141 but you couldn't park anywhere near them.  
142 Audience: ((laughter))  
143 {applause}  
144 S.W.: I used to be a proof reader for a sky-writing company.  
145 Audience: ((laughter))  
146 S.W.: I'm entering the 'strangest sweepstakes'.  
147 it's a contest.  
148 you pay 50 cents  
149 and you get a little card  
150 that has a number on it  
151 and then you go up to any stranger  
152 and you scratch a penny on his head.  
153 Audience: ((laughter))  
154 S.W.: if the number under there  
155 matches the number you have,  
156 Audience: ((laughter))  
157 S.W.: you win one hundred dollars.  
158 Audience: ((laughter))  
159 S.W.: I won twice.  
160 Audience: ((laughter))  
161 S.W.: I was beat up eleven times.  
162 Audience: ((laughter))  
163 {applause}  
164 S.W.: I'm saving money though  
165 because I'm planning a trip to Spain.  
166 so I bought an album  
167 that teaches you the language  
168 you put the album on  
169 you put headphones on  
170 you learn the language  
171 while you're sleeping  
172 (3.0)  
173 during the night the record skipped.  
174 Audience: ((laughter))

175 S.W.: I got up the next day  
176 and could only stutter in Spanish.  
177 Audience: ((laughter))  
178 {weak applause}  
179 S.W.: when I go,  
180 I'm flying - I'm flying Air Bizarre.  
181 it's a good airline  
182 you buy a combination one-way round-trip ticket.  
183 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
184 S.W.: they leave any Monday  
185 and they bring you back the previous Friday.  
186 Audience: ((laughter))  
187 S.W.: that way you still have the weekend.  
188 Audience: ((laughter))  
189 {weak applause}  
190 S.W.: I went to court for a parking ticket  
191 I pleaded insanity.  
192 Audience: ((laughter))  
193 {beginning applause}  
194 S.W.: I said:  
195 "your honor.  
196 why would anyone in their right mind  
197 park in the passing lane?"  
198 Audience: ((laughter))  
199 {beginning applause}  
200 S.W.: then I asked him  
201 if he knew what time it is  
202 and he told me  
203 and I said:  
204 "no further questions."  
205 Audience: ((laughter))  
206 {weak applause}  
207 S.W.: I'm going to court next week  
208 I've been selected for jury duty.  
209 Audience: ((laughter))  
210 S.W.: it's kind of an insane case  
211 6000 ants dressed up as rice  
212 and robbed a Chinese restaurant.  
213 Audience: ((laughter))  
214 {weak applause}  
215 S.W.: I don't think they did it.  
216 Audience: ((laughter))  
217 S.W. I know a few of them  
218 and they wouldn't do anything like that.  
219 (6.0)  
220 years ago,  
221 I worked in a natural organic health food store  
222 in Seattle, Washington  
223 one day a man walked in  
224 and he said  
225 "if I melt dry ice,  
226 can I swim without getting wet?"  
227 Audience: ((laughter))  
228 {applause}  
229 S.W.: I said:  
230 "I don't know.  
231 let me ask Tony."  
232 Audience: ((laughter))  
233 S.W.: two days later

234 I was fired for eating cotton candy  
 235 and drinking straight Bosco on the job.  
 236 Audience: ((laughter))  
 237 S.W.: so I figured I'd leave the area  
 238 (3.0)  
 239 because I had no ties there anyway  
 240 except for this girl I was seeing  
 241 we had conflicting attitudes  
 242 I really wasn't into meditation  
 243 she wasn't really into being alive.  
 244 Audience: ((laughter))  
 245 S.W.: I told her  
 246 I knew when I was gonna die  
 247 because my birth certificate has an expiration date on  
 it.  
 248 Audience: ((laughter))  
 249 {applause}  
 250 S.W.: I decided to leave  
 251 and go to California  
 252 so I packed up my Salvador Dali print  
 253 of two blindfolded dental hygienists  
 254 trying to make a circle on an etch-a-sketch.  
 255 Audience: ((laughter))  
 256 S.W.: and I headed for the highway  
 257 and began hitching  
 258 within three minutes  
 259 I got picked up  
 260 by one of those huge trailer trucks  
 261 carrying twenty brand-new cars.  
 262 I climbed up the side of the cab  
 263 and I opened the door  
 264 and the guy said:  
 265 "I don't have much room in here  
 266 why don't you get into one of the cars in the back?"  
 267 so I did  
 268 and he was really into picking up people  
 269 because he picked up nineteen more.  
 270 Audience: ((laughter))  
 271 S.W.: we all had our own cars.  
 272 Audience: ((laughter))  
 273 {applause}  
 274 S.W.: then he went ninety miles an hour  
 275 and we all got speeding tickets.  
 276 Audience: ((laughter))  
 277 {applause}  
 278 S.W.: I had the photograph on my license  
 279 taken out of focus on purpose  
 280 so when the police do stop me  
 281 they go  
 282 ((mimes a policeman squinting uncertainly at the  
 license, then handing it back to the driver))  
 283 Audience: ((laughter))  
 284 S.W. "here,  
 285 you can go."  
 286 Audience: ((laughter))  
 287 {weak applause}  
 288 S.W.: one night I stayed up all night  
 289 playing poker with tarot cards.  
 290 Audience: ((laughter))

291 S.W.: I got a Full House  
 292 and four people died.  
 293 Audience: ((laughter))  
 294 {applause}  
 295 S.W.: I have a telescope on the peep hole on my door  
 296 so I can see  
 297 who's at the door for 200 miles.  
 298 Audience: ((laughter))  
 299 S.W.: "who is it?"  
 300 Audience: ((laughter))  
 301 S.W.: "who is it gonna be  
 302 when you get here?"  
 303 Audience: ((laughter))  
 304 S.W.: I got an answering machine for my phone now.  
 305 when I'm not home  
 306 and someone calls me up  
 307 they hear a recording of a busy signal.  
 308 Audience: ((laughter))  
 309 {applause}  
 310 S.W.: I lost a button hole.  
 311 Audience: ((laughter))  
 312 {applause}  
 313 S.W.: I broke a mirror in my house  
 314 and I'm supposed to get seven years bad luck,  
 315 but my lawyer thinks he can get me five.  
 316 Audience: ((laughter))  
 317 {applause}  
 318 S.W.: I like to skate on the other side of the ice.  
 319 Audience: ((laughter))  
 320 S.W.: I like to reminisce with people  
 321 I don't know.  
 322 Audience: ((laughter))  
 323 {weak applause}  
 324 S.W.: granted it takes longer.  
 325 Audience: ((laughter))  
 326 S.W.: I like to fill my tub up with water  
 327 then turn the shower on  
 328 and act like I'm in a submarine  
 329 that's been hit.  
 330 Audience: ((laughter))  
 331 {beginning applause}  
 332 S.W.: I hate  
 333 when my foot falls asleep during the day  
 334 because that means  
 335 it's going to be up all night.  
 336 Audience: ((laughter))  
 337 {applause}  
 338 S.W.: when I get real, real bored,  
 339 I like to drive downtown  
 340 and get a great parking spot  
 341 then sit in my car  
 342 and count  
 343 how many people ask me if I'm leaving.  
 344 Audience: ((laughter))  
 345 {applause}  
 346 S.W.: recently  
 347 I was walking my dog around my building ...  
 348 on the ledge.  
 349 Audience: ((laughter))

350 S.W.: a lot of people are afraid of heights,  
351 not me,  
352 I'm afraid of widths  
353 Audience: ((laughter))  
354 {applause}  
355 S.W.: I have a three-year-old dog.  
356 I named him Stay.  
357 Audience: ((laughter))  
358 S.W.: he was a lot of fun  
359 when he was a puppy  
360 because when I called him  
361 I would say  
362 "c'mere, Stay  
363 c'mere, Stay."  
364 Audience: ((laughter))  
365 S.W.: then he would go.  
366 Audience: ((laughter))  
367 S.W.: he's a lot smarter than that now ..  
368 now when I call him  
369 he'll just ignore me  
370 and keep on typing.  
371 Audience: ((laughter))  
372 S.W.: he's an East German shepherd.  
373 Audience: ((laughter))  
374 S.W.: very, very disciplined.  
375 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
376 S.W.: last night I was in a bar  
377 and I walked up to this beautiful woman  
378 and I said:  
379 "do you live around here often?"  
380 Audience: ((laughter))  
381 S.W.: she said:  
382 "you're wearing two different colored socks."  
383 I said:  
384 "yes,  
385 but to me they're the same  
386 because I go by thickness."  
387 Audience: ((laughter))  
388 {applause}  
389 S.W.: then she said:  
390 "how do you feel?"  
391 and I said:  
392 "well,  
393 you know,  
394 when you're sitting on a chair  
395 and you lean back  
396 so you're just on two legs  
397 and then you lean too far  
398 and you almost fall over  
399 but just at the last second  
400 you catch yourself?  
401 I feel like that all the time.  
402 Audience: ((laughter))  
403 {applause}  
404 S.W.: I have a map of the United States.  
405 it's actual size.  
406 Audience: ((laughter))  
407 S.W.: it says:  
408 "one mile equals one mile."

409 Audience: ((laughter))  
 410 S.W.: when people ask where I live  
 411 I say E5.  
 412 Audience: ((laughter))  
 413 S.W.: last summer I folded it.  
 414 Audience: ((laughter))  
 415 {applause}  
 416 S.W.: my girlfriend has a queen size bed  
 417 and I have a court jester size bed.  
 418 Audience: ((laughter))  
 419 S.W.: it's red and green  
 420 and has bells on it.  
 421 Audience: ((laughter))  
 422 S.W.: the ends curl up.  
 423 Audience: ((laughter))  
 424 S.W.: I woke up one morning  
 425 she asked me  
 426 if I slept good  
 427 I said:  
 428 "no, I made a few mistakes."  
 429 Audience: ((laughter))  
 430 S.W.: I got a postcard from my best friend George.  
 431 it was a satellite picture of the entire earth.  
 432 and on the back he wrote:  
 433 "wish you were here."  
 434 Audience: ((laughter))  
 435 {applause}  
 436 S.W.: alright now  
 437 I'd like to do my imitation of bowling  
 438 ((he drags the microphone along the floor,  
 439 then lifts it))  
 440 gutter.  
 441 Audience: ((laughter))  
 442 {applause}  
 443 S.W.: it took me a year and a half to write that.  
 444 Audience: ((laughter))  
 445 S.W.: I didn't know how to word it.  
 446 Audience: ((laughter))  
 447 S.W.: {plays guitar}  
 448 I don't know how to play this.  
 449 Audience: ((laughter))  
 450 S.W.: I'd like to play everything  
 451 the Beatles ever recorded.  
 452 Audience: ((laughter))  
 453 S.W.: I won't do all of "Hey Jude"  
 454 Audience: ((laughter))  
 455 S.W.: what are these strings for?  
 456 Audience: ((laughter))  
 457 S.W.: why don't I tell you about the girl  
 458 I'm seeing now.  
 459 I - I met her in Macy's in New York City.  
 460 she was buying clothes  
 461 and I was putting slinkies on the escalators.  
 462 Audience: ((laughter))  
 463 S.W.: {starts playing the guitar}  
 464 the girl I'm seeing now,  
 465 her name is Rachel  
 466 (1.0)  
 467 she is a very pretty girl,

468 she has  
469 (1.0)  
470 emerald eyes  
471 and  
472 (1.0)  
473 long flowing plaid hair.  
474 Audience: ((laughter))  
475 S.W.: the last week in August,  
476 we went camping .. way up in Canada  
477 we were laying around in the woods  
478 and stuff and  
479 (1.0)  
480 I don't know how she did it  
481 but ... Rachel got poison ivy on her brain.  
482 Audience: ((laughter))  
483 S.W.: and the only way she could scratch it was  
484 if she .. thought about sandpaper.  
485 Audience: ((laughter))  
486 S.W.: {still plays the guitar}  
487 she's a rich girl,  
488 (2.5)  
489 she's from somewhere else  
490 and her father is an incredible millionaire  
491 (3.5)  
492 you know how he made his money?  
493 (3.0)  
494 he's the guy  
495 who designed that little diagram  
496 that shows you  
497 which way to put batteries in something.  
498 Audience: ((laughter))  
499 S.W.: ((sings))  
500 hey, hey ...  
501 Rachel dear,  
502 how I wish  
503 you were here.  
504 Audience: {claps hands}  
505 S.W.: hey, hey  
506 I can almost see you ...  
507 ((stops singing))  
508 having sex with Rachel  
509 (2.0)  
510 is amazing.  
511 Audience: ((laughter))  
512 S.W.: it's like going to a concert  
513 it really is.  
514 she yells a lot.  
515 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
516 S.W.: she throws Frisbees around the room.  
517 Audience: ((laughter))  
518 S.W.: and when she wants more  
519 she lights a match.  
520 Audience: ((laughter))  
521 S.W.: ((sings))  
522 hey, hey ... Rachel dear,  
523 how I wish  
524 you were here.  
525 hey, hey  
526 I can almost see you

527 {finishes his song}  
528 Audience: ((laughter))  
529 {applause}  
530 S.W.: that was fun.  
531 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
532 today I was -  
533 no that wasn't me.  
534 Audience: ((laughter))  
535 {applause}  
536 S.W.: yesterday  
537 I saw a subliminal advertising executive  
538 but just for a second.  
539 Audience: ((laughter))  
540 S.W.: I finally went to the eye doctor.  
541 I got contacts  
542 but I only need them when I read  
543 so I got flip-ups.  
544 Audience: ((laughter))  
545 S.W.: keep 'em on my desk  
546 right next to my typewriter.  
547 I have the oldest typewriter in the world.  
548 it types in pencil.  
549 Audience: ((laughter))  
550 S.W.: under my bed  
551 I have a shoebox full of telephone rings  
552 whenever I get lonely  
553 I open it up just a little bit  
554 and I get a call.  
555 one time  
556 I dropped the box all over the floor  
557 and the phone wouldn't stop ringing.  
558 Audience: ((laughter))  
559 S.W.: so I had to have it disconnected.  
560 I got another phone  
561 though I didn't have much money  
562 so I had to get an irregular phone  
563 (3.0)  
564 it had no five on it.  
565 Audience: ((laughter))  
566 S.W.: I was walking down the street  
567 and I bumped into a good friend of mine.  
568 and he said:  
569 "how come you never call me anymore?"  
570 I said:  
571 "I can't call everyone I want.  
572 my phone has no five on it."  
573 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
574 S.W.: he said:  
575 "that's really weird."  
576 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
577 S.W.: he said:  
578 "how long have you had it?"  
579 I said:  
580 "I don't know ...  
581 my calendar has no sevens."  
582 Audience: ((laughter))  
583 {applause}  
584 S.W.: I got up the other day  
585 and everything in my apartment had been stolen

586 and replaced with an exact replica.  
587 Audience: ((laughter))  
588 {weak applause}  
589 S.W.: I couldn't believe it  
590 (2.0)  
591 I called my friend  
592 and said:  
593 "look at this stuff,  
594 it's all an exact replica.  
595 what do you think?"  
596 he said:  
597 "do I know you?"  
598 Audience: ((laughter))  
599 S.W.: it's a small world,  
600 but I wouldn't want to paint it.  
601 Audience: ((laughter))  
602 S.W.: I just got out of the hospital.  
603 I was in a speed-reading accident.  
604 Audience: ((laughter))  
605 S.W.: I hit a bookmark.  
606 Audience: ((laughter))  
607 S.W.: flew across the room.  
608 I'm doing a lot of painting lately,  
609 abstract painting,  
610 extremely abstract...  
611 no brush, no canvas.  
612 Audience: ((laughter))  
613 S.W.: I just think about it.  
614 Audience: ((laughter))  
615 S.W.: one time I went to a museum  
616 where all the work in the museum  
617 was done by children.  
618 they had all the paintings up on refrigerators.  
619 Audience: ((laughter))  
620 {applause}  
621 S.W.: I also went to a museum  
622 where they had all the heads and arms from the statues  
623 that were in all the other museums.  
624 Audience: ((laughter))  
625 {applause}  
626 S.W.: I left there  
627 and I was walking down the street  
628 and I saw a man  
629 who had wooden legs and real feet.  
630 Audience: ((laughter))  
631 {weak applause}  
632 S.W.: he asked me  
633 if I knew what time it is  
634 I said:  
635 "yes but not right now."  
636 Audience: ((laughter))  
637 Man: yeah.  
638 (7.0)  
639 S.W.: I like my dental hygienist,  
640 I think she is very pretty  
641 so whenever I go to have my teeth cleaned  
642 while I'm in the waiting room  
643 I eat an entire box of Oreo cookies.  
644 Audience: ((laughter))

645 {applause}  
646 S.W.: sometimes  
647 they have to cancel all the rest of the appointments.  
648 Audience: ((laughter))  
649 S.W.: I got up this morning  
650 and couldn't find my socks,  
651 so I called information.  
652 Audience: ((laughter))  
653 S.W.: I said:  
654 "hello, information?"  
655 she said:  
656 "yes."  
657 I said:  
658 "I can't find my socks."  
659 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
660 S.W.: she said:  
661 "they're behind the couch."  
662 Audience: ((laughter))  
663 S.W.: and they were.  
664 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
665 S.W.: I'm tired of calling up the movies  
666 and listening to that recording  
667 of what's playing  
668 so I bought the album.  
669 Audience: ((laughter))  
670 S.W.: last time we went to the movies  
671 I was thrown out  
672 for bringing my own food in.  
673 my argument was  
674 the concession stand prices are outrageous.  
675 besides,  
676 I haven't had a barbecue in a long time.  
677 Audience: ((laughter))  
678 {applause}  
679 S.W.: I went to the cinema.  
680 it said adults \$5.00, children \$2.50.  
681 I said:  
682 "alright,  
683 give me two boys and a girl."  
684 Audience: ((laughter))  
685 S.W.: one time I went to the drive-in in a cab.  
686 Audience: ((laughter))  
687 S.W.: the movie cost me \$95.  
688 Audience: ((laughter))  
689 {applause}  
690 S.W.: I went into a place to eat,  
691 it said  
692 breakfast anytime.  
693 so I ordered French toast during the Renaissance.  
694 Audience: ((laughter))  
695 {applause}  
696 S.W.: one time right in the middle of a job interview  
697 I took out a book  
698 and I started reading.  
699 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
700 S.W.: the guy said:  
701 "what the hell are you doing?"  
702 I said:  
703 "let me ask you one question.

704 if you were in a vehicle  
705 and you were traveling at the speed of light  
706 and then you turned your lights on,  
707 would they do anything?"  
708 Audience: ((laughter))  
709 S.W.: he said:  
710 "I don't know."  
711 I said:  
712 "forget it, then.  
713 I don't wanna work for you."  
714 Audience: ((laughter))  
715 {applause}  
716 S.W.: every night I go home  
717 and I stare at my rug  
718 and I try to move it using telekinesis  
719 doing that every night for eight years  
720 the rug hasn't moved an inch  
721 the rest of the house is gone.  
722 Audience: ((laughter))  
723 S.W.: a while ago,  
724 I was in Las Vegas  
725 I was at the roulette table  
726 having a furious argument  
727 over what I considered an odd number.  
728 Audience: ((laughter))  
729 {applause}  
730 S.W.: it's pretty funny.  
731 I bought some powdered water  
732 but I don't know what to add.  
733 Audience: ((laughter))  
734 S.W.: I spilled spot remover on my dog.  
735 now he's gone.  
736 Audience: ((laughter))  
737 {applause}  
738 S.W.: I got on an elevator  
739 and this old guy got on with me.  
740 I was over near the buttons  
741 I pushed no.4  
742 and I said:  
743 "where are you going?"  
744 (1.0)  
745 he said:  
746 "Phoenix."  
747 Audience: ((laughter))  
748 S.W.: so I pushed 'Phoenix'.  
749 Audience: ((laughter))  
750 S.W.: doors opened,  
751 two tumbleweeds blew on.  
752 (1.0)  
753 we stepped off,  
754 we were in downtown "Phoenix".  
755 (1.0)  
756 I said:  
757 "you know,  
758 you're the kind of guy  
759 I'd really like to hang around with."  
760 Audience: ((laughter))  
761 S.W.: he said:  
762 "well,

763 I'm going out to the desert  
764 you wanna go?"  
765 I said:  
766 "sure."  
767 so we hopped in his car  
768 and started driving out to the desert.  
769 he told me  
770 he spent most of his life  
771 working on a research project for the government  
772 trying to find out  
773 who financed the pyramids.  
774 Audience: ((laughter))  
775 S.W.: he worked on it 30 years  
776 and they paid him an incredible amount of money  
777 he told them  
778 he was pretty sure  
779 it was a guy named Eddie.  
780 Audience: ((laughter))  
781 {weak applause}  
782 S.W.: we get out to his house  
783 500 miles in the middle of the desert.  
784 the phone rings,  
785 he says:  
786 "you get it."  
787 so I run over  
788 and I picked it up,  
789 the man says:  
790 "Steven Wright?"  
791 I said:  
792 "yes"  
793 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
794 he said:  
795 "this is Mr. Haynes,  
796 your student loan director from your bank."  
797 Audience: ((laughter))  
798 S.W.: I said:  
799 "yeah?"  
800 he said:  
801 "you're 62 bank payments behind.  
802 found out today from the institute you attended  
803 that they received none of the 17 thousand dollars  
804 we loaned you.  
805 we'd really like to know  
806 what you did with it."  
807 I said:  
808 "well Mr. Haynes,  
809 I'm not gonna lie to you.  
810 I gave the money to my friend Jiggs Casey  
811 and he built a nuclear weapon with it.  
812 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
813 S.W.: and I'd really appreciate it  
814 if you wouldn't call me anymore.  
815 Audience: ((laughter))  
816 {applause}  
817 S.W.: I have several hobbies  
818 which I enjoy to the fullest  
819 I have a large seashell collection  
820 which I keep scattered on the beaches all over the  
world.

821 Audience: ((laughter))  
822 {applause}  
823 S.W.: maybe you've seen it.  
824 Audience: ((laughter))  
825 S.W.: I also collect rare photographs.  
826 I have two very rare photographs.  
827 one is a picture of Houdini  
828 locking his keys in his car.  
829 Audience: ((laughter))  
830 S.W.: the other one is a rare photograph  
831 of Norman Rockwell  
832 beating up a child.  
833 Audience: ((laughter))  
834 {applause}  
835 S.W.: there is a museum of Natural History in New York,  
836 accidentally,  
837 I walked into the ladies' room,  
838 I said,  
839 "sorry I thought this was an exhibit."  
840 Audience: ((laughter))  
841 S.W.: they got all upset,  
842 women - can't live with 'em,  
843 can't shoot 'em.  
844 Audience: ((laughter))  
845 {applause}  
846 S.W.: the Stones.  
847 I love the Stones.  
848 I can't believe  
849 they are still doing it  
850 after all these years.  
851 I watch them whenever I can.  
852 (1.0)  
853 Fred and Barney.  
854 Audience: ((laughter))  
855 {applause}  
856 S.W.: last summer I drove cross country  
857 with a friend of mine.  
858 we split the driving  
859 we switched every half mile  
860 Audience: ((laughter))  
861 S.W.: the whole way across  
862 we only had one cassette tape to listen to  
863 (1.0)  
864 I can't remember what it was.  
865 Audience: ((laughter))  
866 S.W.: we were in Salina, Utah,  
867 when we were arrested  
868 for not going through a green light.  
869 we pleaded "maybe".  
870 Audience: ((laughter))  
871 S.W.: but for absolutely no reason,  
872 we went to Canada.  
873 I was feeling good  
874 I had just received my degree in calcium anthropology.  
875 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
876 S.W.: the study of milkmen.  
877 Audience: ((laughter))  
878 {weak applause}  
879 S.W.: when we were driving over the border

880 back into the United States  
881 they asked me  
882 if I had any firearms.  
883 I said:  
884 "what do you need?"  
885 Audience: ((laughter))  
886 {applause}  
887 S.W.: I was traveling with my friend George.  
888 some people think George is weird  
889 because he has sideburns behind his ears.  
890 Audience: ((laughter))  
891 S.W.: I think he's weird  
892 because he has false teeth  
893 but he has braces on them.  
894 Audience: ((laughter))  
895 {weak applause}  
896 S.W.: George is a radio announcer  
897 and when he walks under a bridge  
898 you can't hear him talk.  
899 Audience: ((laughter))  
900 {applause}  
901 S.W.: when I first moved into my house  
902 there was a switch on the wall  
903 that didn't control any lights or anything  
904 I'd just flick it up and down  
905 every once in awhile  
906 then about a month later  
907 I got a letter from a woman in Germany.  
908 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
909 S.W.: saying:  
910 "cut it out."  
911 Audience: ((laughter))  
912 S.W.: Friday,  
913 I was in a bookstore  
914 I started talking to this very French-looking girl.  
915 she was a bilingual illiterate  
916 she couldn't read in two different languages.  
917 Audience: ((laughter))  
918 {applause}  
919 S.W.: I left the store  
920 and I went down the street to my bus  
921 till my bus came  
922 and I got on  
923 I sat down beside this beautiful blond Chinese girl.  
924 Audience: ((laughter))  
925 S.W.: I said:  
926 "hello."  
927 and she said:  
928 "hello."  
929 and I said:  
930 "isn't it an amazing day?"  
931 and she said:  
932 "yes it is,  
933 I guess."  
934 "I said:  
935 what do you mean 'you guess'?"  
936 she said:  
937 "well things haven't been going too well for me lately  
938 I said:

939 "like what?"  
 940 she said:  
 941 "I can't tell you  
 942 I don't even know you."  
 943 I said:  
 944 "yeah,  
 945 but sometimes  
 946 it's good to tell your problems  
 947 to an absolute total stranger on a bus."  
 948 she said:  
 949 "well I've just come back from my analyst  
 950 and he's still unable to help me."  
 951 I said:  
 952 "what's the problem?"  
 953 and she paused  
 954 and said:  
 955 "I'm a nymphomaniac  
 956 and I only get turned on by Jewish cowboys."  
 957 but she said:  
 958 "by the way my name is Diane"  
 959 and I said:  
 960 "hello, Diane,  
 961 I'm Bucky Goldstein."  
 962 Audience: ((laughter))  
 963 {applause}  
 964 S.W.: for a while I lived in Vermont  
 965 with a guy named Winny.  
 966 we lived in a house  
 967 that ran on static electricity.  
 968 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 969 S.W.: if we wanted to cook something  
 970 we had to take a sweater off real quick.  
 971 Audience: ((laughter))  
 972 S.W.: we wanted to run a blender,  
 973 we had to rub balloons on our head.  
 974 Audience: ((laughter))  
 975 S.W.: I thought  
 976 I was a procrastinator  
 977 until I met Winny.  
 978 Winny got a birthmark  
 979 when he was eight.  
 980 Audience: ((laughter))  
 981 S.W.: all Winny did ...  
 982 all day was practice limbo.  
 983 he got pretty good.  
 984 he could go under a rug.  
 985 Audience: ((laughter))  
 986 S.W.: people would come over to me and say:  
 987 what's that?  
 988 I'd say that's Winny.  
 989 about six months  
 990 after we were living there  
 991 I looked outside my window  
 992 and I saw a bird wearing sneakers  
 993 it had a little button on it that said:  
 994 "I ain't flying nowhere."  
 995 Audience: ((laughter))  
 996 S.W.: so I opened the window,  
 997 I said:

998 "what's your problem buddy?"  
 999 he said:  
 1000 "I'm sick of this stuff  
 1001 every year it's the same thing:  
 1002 winter here,  
 1003 summer there,  
 1004 winter here,  
 1005 summer there.  
 1006 he said:  
 1007 I don't know who thought this up,  
 1008 but it certainly wasn't a bird."  
 1009 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1010 S.W.: I said:  
 1011 "well,  
 1012 I was just making breakfast,  
 1013 come on in.  
 1014 do you want some eggs? ..  
 1015 sorry."  
 1016 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1017 {applause}  
 1018 S.W.: the ice cream truck in my neighborhood  
 1019 plays "Helter Skelter"  
 1020 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1021 (3.0)  
 1022 S.W.: a couple of nights ago  
 1023 I came home very late ...  
 1024 it was the next night.  
 1025 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1026 S.W.: I was having a little bit of trouble  
 1027 getting into my apartment.  
 1028 I accidentally took out a car key  
 1029 and I stuck it into the door  
 1030 and turned it  
 1031 and the building started up.  
 1032 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1033 S.W.: so I drove it around for a while.  
 1034 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1035 S.W.: went too fast  
 1036 and the police pulled me over,  
 1037 they said:  
 1038 "where do you live?"  
 1039 I said:  
 1040 "right here."  
 1041 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1042 S.W.: then I parked it in the middle of a highway  
 1043 and I ran out the front door  
 1044 and yelled at all the cars  
 1045 to get the hell out of my driveway.  
 1046 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1047 {applause}  
 1048 S.W.: nobody who lives in the building noticed  
 1049 that the building had been moved  
 1050 because everybody who lives in the building  
 1051 is absolutely insane.  
 1052 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 1053 S.W.: the man who lives above me  
 1054 designs synthetic hairballs for ceramic cats.  
 1055 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1056 S.W.: the woman who lives beside me

1057                    tried to rob a department store ..  
1058                    with a pricing gun.  
1059 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1060 S.W.:             she walked in  
1061                    and said:  
1062                    "give me all of the money in the vault,  
1063                    or I'll mark down everything in the store."  
1064 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1065                    {applause}  
1066 S.W.:             it's a good apartment to live in  
1067                    because they allow pets.  
1068                    I have a pony.  
1069 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1070 S.W.:             I have a Shetland pony named Nikkie.  
1071                    I like to ride him around the apartment,  
1072                    if I have to flip an album,  
1073                    I ride him over to the stereo,  
1074 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
1075 S.W.:             if I wanna make a sandwich,  
1076                    I ride him into the kitchen,  
1077                    you know,  
1078                    but sometimes his hooves slide on the tiles  
1079                    and he falls down.  
1080 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
1081 S.W.:             last summer  
1082                    he was involved in a bizarre electrolysis accident.  
1083 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1084 S.W.:             all the hair was removed  
1085                    except for the tail.  
1086                    now I rent him out to Hare Krishna family picnics.  
1087 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1088 S.W.:             one night  
1089                    I couldn't sleep  
1090                    so I got up  
1091                    (2.0)  
1092                    I got hungry so I went down to this store  
1093                    that I know is open 24 hours  
1094                    and when I got down there  
1095                    there was a guy outside locking it up.  
1096                    he said:  
1097                    "sorry, we're closed."  
1098                    I said:  
1099                    "what do you mean 'you're closed'?  
1100                    the sign says 'open 24 hours'."  
1101                    he said:  
1102                    "not in a row."  
1103 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1104                    {applause}  
1105 S.W.:             last night  
1106                    I had a dream  
1107                    that all the babies  
1108                    prevented by the pill showed up.  
1109 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1110 S.W.:             they were mad.  
1111 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1112                    {weak applause}  
1113 S.W.:             angry babies all over the place.  
1114 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1115 S.W.:             I was Caesarean born

1116                   you can't really tell  
1117                   although whenever I leave the house,  
1118                   I go out through the window.  
1119 Audience:       ((laughter))  
1120                   {applause}  
1121 S.W.:            years ago,  
1122                   I was skiing in England.  
1123 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
1124 S.W.:            it was a rare package deal:  
1125                   two weeks in England,  
1126                   one night in Connecticut,  
1127                   two weeks in England.  
1128 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1129 S.W.:            I said:  
1130                   "yeah,  
1131                   I'll take it."  
1132                   I got on this chairlift with this guy  
1133                   I didn't know.  
1134                   we went half way up the mountain  
1135                   without saying a word.  
1136                   then he turned to me  
1137                   and said:  
1138                   "you know,  
1139                   this is the first time  
1140                   I've been skiing in ten years."  
1141                   I said:  
1142                   "yeah,  
1143                   why did you take such a long time off?"  
1144                   he said:  
1145                   "I was in jail."  
1146 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
1147 S.W.:            he said:  
1148                   "you wanna know why?"  
1149                   I said:  
1150                   "no, not really."  
1151 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1152 S.W.:            then I said:  
1153                   "alright,  
1154                   you better tell me why."  
1155                   and he said:  
1156                   "I pushed a total stranger off a Ferris wheel."  
1157 Audience:        ((weak laughter))  
1158                   {weak applause}  
1159 S.W.:            I said:  
1160                   "I remember you."  
1161 Audience:        ((laughter))  
1162                   {applause}  
1163 S.W.:            thank you very much.  
1164                   thank you all.  
1165                   thanks for coming.  
1166                   I appreciated it.  
1167 Audience:        {applause}

#### 17.4. Transcript Steven Wright: *I Still Have a Pony*

1 Presenter: good evening.  
2 please welcome from Boston  
3 Steven Wright.  
4 Audience: {applause}  
5 S.W.: thanks.  
6 Audience: ((laughter))  
7 S.W.: when I was a little kid,  
8 I wish the first word  
9 I ever said was the word "quote",  
10 so right before I died,  
11 I could say,  
12 "unquote".  
13 Audience: ((laughter))  
14 {weak applause}  
15 S.W.: lots of my friends have babies,  
16 but I don't have any babies,  
17 but I have lots of friends.  
18 babies don't have any friends.  
19 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
20 S.W.: they all have those baby monitors  
21 so they can hear the baby from the other room  
22 which I consider a form of wire tapping.  
23 Audience: ((laughter))  
24 S.W.: someday is gonna be a really smart baby  
25 next to a fake recording  
26 of some fake baby noises.  
27 Audience: ((laughter))  
28 S.W.: gonna crawl out the window  
29 and go to Italy.  
30 Audience: ((laughter))  
31 S.W.: I need one of those baby monitors  
32 from my subconscious to my consciousness  
33 so I can know  
34 what the hell I'm really thinking about.  
35 Audience: ((laughter))  
36 {weak applause}  
37 S.W.: sometimes I talk to myself fluently  
38 in languages I'm unfamiliar with.  
39 Audience: ((laughter))  
40 S.W.: just to screw with my subconscious.  
41 Audience: ((laughter))  
42 S.W.: it's a good thing  
43 a lot of people speak foreign languages,  
44 otherwise those people would have no one to talk to.  
45 Audience: ((laughter))  
46 {applause}  
47 S.W.: when I was in first grade,  
48 the teacher told us  
49 that the president was married to the first lady  
50 and all I could think of was  
51 "wow, I wonder  
52 if she ever saw any dinosaurs."  
53 Audience: ((laughter))  
54 S.W.: she told us about Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel  
55 and that day I went home  
56 I was laying at the top of my bunk bed  
57 looking at the ceiling

58 and I'm thinking  
59 "why not?"  
60 my brother's pushing the bed around  
61 "give me more aqua."  
62 Audience: ((laughter))  
63 S.W.: I did Jesus and Santa Claus on a seesaw.  
64 Audience: ((laughter))  
65 {weak applause}  
66 S.W.: I had Jesus on the low end  
67 even though he weighed less.  
68 Audience: ((laughter))  
69 S.W.: because he's Jesus  
70 Audience: ((laughter))  
71 S.W.: Jesus pissed off a lot of people  
72 you know,  
73 "will you stop turning the water into wine,  
74 I'm trying to take a shower."  
75 Audience: ((laughter))  
76 S.W.: what did Jesus ever do for Santa Claus on his  
birthday?  
77 Audience: ((laughter))  
78 {applause}  
79 S.W.: don't think about it,  
80 it doesn't mean anything.  
81 Audience: ((laughter))  
82 S.W.: you know,  
83 the New Testament is pretty old.  
84 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
85 S.W.: I think  
86 they should call them  
87 the Old Testament and the Most Recent Testament.  
88 Audience: ((laughter))  
89 S.W.: you know,  
90 when you look at a star,  
91 it may not even be there anymore  
92 because it takes so long for the light  
93 to get from there to here.  
94 it may be gone,  
95 it just looks like it's still there.  
96 that's how I see my old girlfriends.  
97 Audience: ((laughter))  
98 S.W.: imagine if light bulbs worked like that.  
99 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
100 S.W.: I thought I told you to shut that light off.  
101 Audience: ((laughter))  
102 S.W.: I did.  
103 it should be out by Friday.  
104 Audience: ((laughter))  
105 S.W.: the universe is expanding,  
106 that should help ease the traffic.  
107 Audience: ((laughter))  
108 S.W.: imagine Pulitzer prize fighting.  
109 Audience: ((laughter))  
110 {applause}  
111 S.W.: see two writers  
112 beating the shit out of each other.  
113 Audience: ((laughter))  
114 S.W.: imagine how weird phones would look  
115 if your mouth was nowhere near your ears.

116 Audience: ((laughter))  
117 S.W.: imagine Osh Kosh straitjackets for little insane  
children.  
118 Audience: ((laughter))  
119 S.W.: oh stay away from Jimmy.  
120 Audience: ((laughter))  
121 S.W.: I met this woman  
122 and I really liked her as soon as I met her  
123 all I could think of was-  
124 I was wondering  
125 if there was such thing  
126 as the opposite of restraining order.  
127 Audience: ((laughter))  
128 S.W.: I liked her 'cause she wasn't normal  
129 she liked to dance  
130 really fast to very slow music.  
131 Audience: ((laughter))  
132 S.W.: which I found very erotic.  
133 Audience: ((laughter))  
134 S.W.: due to a head injury as a small boy,  
135 Audience: ((laughter))  
136 S.W.: I was playing Jacks way too fast.  
137 Audience: ((laughter))  
138 S.W.: her eyes were a little bit too close together  
139 like the headlights on a Jeep.  
140 Audience: ((laughter))  
141 S.W.: I used to call her AC,  
142 almost Cyclops.  
143 Audience: ((laughter))  
144 {beginning applause}  
145 S.W.: in her spare time she liked to waste time.  
146 Audience: ((laughter))  
147 S.W.: she was a mail order bridesmaid,  
148 Audience: ((laughter))  
149 S.W.: she would drink so much  
150 she would slur her pauses.  
151 Audience: ((laughter))  
152 S.W.: she lived in a beautiful house  
153 had cathedral floors.  
154 Audience: ((laughter))  
155 S.W.: you walk in,  
156 you just fall right down into the middle.  
157 Audience: ((laughter))  
158 S.W.: we went out for about six months  
159 then she left,  
160 she went back to school in Seattle,  
161 she was studying, uh .. Forensic Astronomy.  
162 Audience: ((laughter))  
163 S.W.: she wrote me this beautiful letter  
164 and I read it.  
165 in the bottom I crossed her name off  
166 and I wrote my own name  
167 and I sent it back to her.  
168 Audience: ((laughter))  
169 S.W.: and I never heard from her ever again.  
170 Audience: ((laughter))  
171 S.W.: apparently,  
172 she didn't like what she wrote.  
173 Audience: ((laughter))

174 {applause}  
175 S.W.: the reason I'm so laid back is  
176 'cause in high school  
177 I smoked a lot of Ritalin.  
178 Audience: ((laughter))  
179 S.W.: my problem is  
180 I was reincarnated  
181 without ever having been alive the first time.  
182 Audience: ((laughter))  
183 S.W.: my nephew has HDADD  
184 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
185 S.W.: high definition attention deficit disorder.  
186 Audience: ((laughter))  
187 {applause}  
188 S.W.: he can barely pay attention  
189 but when he does  
190 it's unbelievably clear.  
191 Audience: ((laughter))  
192 {applause}  
193 S.W.: I saw an advertisement for some invisible fences  
194 I thought  
195 that'll be perfect for my invisible dogs.  
196 Audience: ((laughter))  
197 S.W.: I live in Massachusetts  
198 I didn't shovel a driveway once this past winter  
199 since I bought the flamethrower.  
200 Audience: ((laughter))  
201 S.W.: you know,  
202 the earth is bipolar,  
203 Audience: ((laughter))  
204 S.W.: so I've been emailing my answering machine  
205 which has been sending faxes  
206 to my cellular subconscious  
207 which has call waiting  
208 so in case I'm thinking about something else,  
209 I can get back to myself later.  
210 Audience: ((laughter))  
211 {applause}  
212 S.W.: it's out of control now  
213 don't you think?  
214 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
215 S.W.: I heard  
216 soon they're gonna have digital numbers.  
217 Audience: ((laughter))  
218 S.W.: my dog has a website.  
219 Audience: ((laughter))  
220 S.W.: all it is  
221 is naked cats.  
222 Audience: ((laughter))  
223 {weak applause}  
224 S.W.: so last night as I was downloading  
225 pornographic bootleg Sponge Bobs.  
226 Audience: ((laughter))  
227 S.W.: sent to me from a hairdresser  
228 I know in Argentina.  
229 I noticed  
230 that I had no milk for tomorrow's coffee,  
231 so I looked at the car keys  
232 which had been strategically

233 placed under the short leg of the kitchen table  
 234 so the soup wouldn't spill  
 235 and I had to make a decision  
 236 do I walk to the store  
 237 or do I drive  
 238 and spill the soup.  
 239 Audience: ((laughter))  
 240 S.W.: after half an hour on my hands and knees  
 241 I delicately removed the car keys  
 242 from under the table  
 243 and the soup didn't spill  
 244 which pissed me off so much  
 245 that I whipped it against the wall.  
 246 Audience: ((laughter))  
 247 {applause}  
 248 S.W.: then I tried to wash it off  
 249 with my machine gun squirt gun  
 250 which was full of another kind of soup  
 251 and I kinda liked the pattern I made  
 252 so I took photographs of it  
 253 intending to do paintings of the photographs  
 254 which I would sell back to myself later  
 255 since I am a private collector.  
 256 Audience: ((laughter))  
 257 {weak applause}  
 258 S.W.: then I got outside  
 259 I get in my car  
 260 and I'm driving out to this store.  
 261 and my mind is skipping around  
 262 I'm wondering  
 263 how my life would have been different  
 264 had I been born one day earlier.  
 265 then I'm thinking:  
 266 "maybe it wouldn't have been different  
 267 other than I would've asked that question yesterday.  
 268 Audience: ((laughter))  
 269 {applause}  
 270 S.W.: so I go in the store  
 271 and no one's behind the register  
 272 and I'm thinking  
 273 I should go behind the register  
 274 so when people come in  
 275 they can ask me questions  
 276 and I can say:  
 277 "what do I look like, I work here?  
 278 Audience: ((laughter))  
 279 S.W.: then I went to the back of the store  
 280 where they keep the milk  
 281 and out of the corner of my eye  
 282 I saw this seventeen-year-old girl  
 283 come out of the back room  
 284 and go behind the register  
 285 and I'm wondering  
 286 what was she doing in the back room,  
 287 and then I tried to distract myself  
 288 from my own imagination.  
 289 I looked at a can of peas  
 290 and I started counting the peas  
 291 that were on the label of the can

292 forty-four, forty-five, forty-six  
 293 I'm wondering  
 294 if they had a meeting  
 295 on how many peas should be on the label of the can.  
 296 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 297 S.W.: forty-seven is too many,  
 298 forty-five is not enough,  
 299 all in favor of forty-six,  
 300 okay,  
 301 it's forty-six.  
 302 Audience: ((laughter))  
 303 S.W.: then I took the milk  
 304 and I went up to the register  
 305 and I said:  
 306 "hey, how are you?"  
 307 and she said:  
 308 "would that be all?"  
 309 and I said:  
 310 "no.  
 311 I wanna buy this."  
 312 Audience: ((laughter))  
 313 {applause}  
 314 S.W.: then I tried to read her mind  
 315 but I couldn't  
 316 'cause I can barely read my own mind.  
 317 Audience: ((laughter))  
 318 S.W.: then I was imagining me and her  
 319 running naked across Fenway Park  
 320 holding hands  
 321 and the crowd cheering:  
 322 "go, go, gooo."  
 323 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 324 S.W.: then I said to her  
 325 "do you like baseball?"  
 326 and she said:  
 327 "what?"  
 328 I said:  
 329 "do you sell lighter fluid by the case?"  
 330 Audience: ((laughter))  
 331 S.W.: she got all nervous  
 332 so then I left.  
 333 Audience: ((laughter))  
 334 S.W.: then I'm driving around  
 335 and I'm thinking:  
 336 "alright I'm still alive,  
 337 now what am I gonna do.  
 338 Audience: ((laughter))  
 339 S.W.: so I figured I'd go down  
 340 and rent a movie  
 341 so I go out to the video store  
 342 and I can't remember the title of the movie I want  
 343 so I'm describing the movie to the guy.  
 344 I say:  
 345 "yeah,  
 346 you know,  
 347 it's that black-and-white movie  
 348 it's on colored film.  
 349 Audience: ((laughter))  
 350 S.W.: I think it stars Nicolas Cage and Hayley Mills.

351 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
352 S.W.: it's that movie  
353 where the country loses the war  
354 'cause they accidentally made the submarines out of  
Styrofoam  
355 and they won't go under the water.  
356 Audience: ((laughter))  
357 S.W.: the guy's just blankly looking at me.  
358 Audience: ((laughter))  
359 S.W.: as I'm saying this to him  
360 I'm realizing  
361 this is not a movie I saw,  
362 this is a dream I had.  
363 Audience: ((laughter))  
364 {applause}  
365 S.W.: I'm thinking:  
366 "my God.  
367 I'm trying to rent one of my own dreams."  
368 Audience: ((laughter))  
369 S.W.: which would be pretty cool actually.  
370 Audience: ((laughter))  
371 S.W.: then the guy says to me:  
372 "that's not a movie you saw  
373 that's a dream you had."  
374 and I said:  
375 "how do you know?"  
376 and he said:  
377 "'cause you were in here last week  
378 trying to rent the same thing."  
379 Audience: ((laughter))  
380 {applause}  
381 S.W.: then I said:  
382 "alright let me know when you get it in.  
383 Audience: ((laughter))  
384 (3.5)  
385 S.W.: next week I'm gonna have an MRI  
386 to find out whether or not I have claustrophobia.  
387 Audience: ((laughter))  
388 {weak applause}  
389 S.W.: in school they told me  
390 'practice makes perfect'  
391 then they told me  
392 'nobody is perfect'  
393 so then I stopped practicing.  
394 Audience: ((laughter))  
395 S.W.: here are some of my answers  
396 to some everyday questions:  
397 "excuse me sir,  
398 do you know what time it is?"  
399 "no,  
400 I'm not from around here."  
401 Audience: ((laughter))  
402 S.W.: "excuse me,  
403 do you know where the train station is?"  
404 "probably near the tracks."  
405 Audience: ((laughter))  
406 S.W.: sometimes when I'm over at someone's house  
407 and no one is in the kitchen,  
408 I like to write things on that 'to do' list

409                   they have on their refrigerator.  
410 Audience: ((laughter))  
411 S.W.: memorize distances to all other planets.  
412 Audience: ((laughter))  
413 S.W.: adopt baby,  
414                   then sell on black market.  
415 Audience: ((laughter))  
416 S.W.: ever notice when a house burns down  
417                   the only thing left standing  
418                   is the fireplace and the chimney?  
419 Audience: ((laughter))  
420 S.W.: how is that for evidence.  
421 Audience: ((laughter))  
422 S.W.: I bought a new camera.  
423                   it's very advanced.  
424                   you don't even need it.  
425 Audience: ((laughter))  
426                   {applause}  
427 S.W.: why are the pictures square  
428                   if the lens is round?  
429 Audience: ((laughter))  
430 S.W.: I bought a new phone.  
431                   the first thing I did was push redial.  
432 Audience: ((laughter))  
433 S.W.: the phone started having a nervous breakdown.  
434 Audience: ((laughter))  
435 S.W.: the phone was twitching like this  
436                   I don't have this information.  
437 Audience: ((laughter))  
438 S.W.: I bought an iPod  
439                   that can either hold 5000 songs  
440                   or one telephone message from my mother.  
441 Audience: ((laughter))  
442                   {applause}  
443 S.W.: they say  
444                   you're not supposed  
445                   to put metal in a microwave oven,  
446                   they were right.  
447 Audience: ((laughter))  
448 S.W.: I'm missing a wall in my kitchen.  
449 Audience: ((laughter))  
450 S.W.: today I was talking to myself  
451                   I was very polite and cordial  
452                   but I could tell I was lying.  
453 Audience: ((laughter))  
454 S.W.: under my breath I said:  
455                   "you're full of shit."  
456                   then I said:  
457                   "what?"  
458                   then I said:  
459                   "nothing."  
460 Audience: ((laughter))  
461 S.W.: you know  
462                   if heat rises  
463                   heaven might be hotter than hell.  
464 Audience: ((laughter))  
465                   {applause}  
466 S.W.: I'm thinking of buying a plasma television  
467                   in case I need a blood transfusion,

468 Audience: ((laughter))  
469 S.W.: that way I can mainline 150 channels right into my  
arm.  
470 Audience: ((laughter))  
471 S.W.: that way they can do my autopsy via satellite.  
472 Audience: ((laughter))  
473 S.W.: I have a CD burner:  
474 my fireplace.  
475 Audience: ((laughter))  
476 S.W.: a friend of mine is a pilot.  
477 we were gonna go somewhere in his car  
478 and for absolutely no reason  
479 he waited 45 minutes  
480 before he backed out of his driveway.  
481 Audience: ((laughter))  
482 S.W.: I have another pair of pants  
483 just like these  
484 (2.5)  
485 except they're red with green stripes  
486 and they're shorts.  
487 Audience: ((laughter))  
488 {beginning applause}  
489 S.W.: last night,  
490 I was in a restaurant called Bulimia's.  
491 Audience: ((laughter))  
492 S.W.: the line for the bathroom was incredible.  
493 Audience: ((laughter))  
494 {applause}  
495 S.W.: {he plays with his guitar}  
496 this is a song I wrote  
497 when I was three.  
498 Audience: ((laughter))  
499 S.W.: oh I think the kitten is trying to kill me.  
500 Audience: ((laughter))  
501 S.W.: I'd better kill him first.  
502 Audience: ((laughter))  
503 S.W.: good thing mommy's sleeping.  
504 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
505 S.W.: where are the big scissors.  
506 Audience: ((laughter))  
507 S.W.: here, kitty,  
508 here, kitty,  
509 here, kitty  
510 Audience: ((laughter))  
511 S.W.: we're gonna play a different funny kind of game  
512 nothing is ever gonna be the same.  
513 {stops playing the guitar}  
514 Audience: {applause}  
515 S.W.: I have a half-twin,  
516 Audience: ((laughter))  
517 S.W.: I also have a Siamese-stepson  
518 a friend of mine is on the Ouija board of directors.  
519 Audience: ((laughter))  
520 {weak applause}  
521 S.W.: my doctor told me  
522 I shouldn't work out any more  
523 until I'm in better shape.  
524 Audience: ((laughter))  
525 S.W.: I said:

526 "alright,  
527 don't send me a bill  
528 until I pay you.  
529 Audience: ((laughter))  
530 S.W.: I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade  
531 when they told me  
532 there was a skeleton inside of me  
533 and it freaked me out.  
534 Audience: ((laughter))  
535 S.W.: from then on  
536 every Halloween I went door to door naked,  
537 Audience: ((laughter))  
538 S.W.: don't think of the skin,  
539 don't think of the skin  
540 Audience: ((laughter))  
541 S.W.: that was the same year  
542 she asked us  
543 if we could be any animal in the world  
544 what animal we'd wanna be.  
545 and I raised my hand  
546 and I said:  
547 "a bird."  
548 and she said:  
549 "why?"  
550 so you could fly?"  
551 I said:  
552 "no, so my shit would be white."  
553 Audience: ((laughter))  
554 {weak applause}  
555 S.W.: the teacher started crying.  
556 Audience: ((laughter))  
557 S.W.: one of my grandfathers died  
558 when he was a little boy.  
559 Audience: ((laughter))  
560 S.W.: lately I've been trying to feel healthier  
561 so I've been eating a lot of vitamins  
562 but I don't know  
563 I - I don't know.  
564 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
565 S.W.: how many vitamins you hafta eat  
566 before you feel full.  
567 Audience: ((laughter))  
568 S.W.: one good thing about it though,  
569 the color of my urine is amazing,  
570 Audience: ((laughter))  
571 S.W.: it's like going to a laser show.  
572 Audience: ((laughter))  
573 S.W.: I go in there,  
574 I shut the lights off,  
575 I put Pink Floyd on and...  
576 Audience: ((laughter))  
577 {applause}  
578 S.W.: so I called up the airline  
579 to make a reservation.  
580 they said:  
581 "how many will be traveling?"  
582 I said:  
583 "how do I know,  
584 it's your plane."

585 Audience: ((laughter))  
586 S.W.: I bought one walkie-talkie.  
587 Audience: ((laughter))  
588 S.W.: I didn't want anyone to hear  
589 what I was saying.  
590 Audience: ((laughter))  
591 S.W.: I'm addicted to placebos.  
592 Audience: ((laughter))  
593 S.W.: I could quit,  
594 but it wouldn't matter.  
595 Audience: ((laughter))  
596 {applause}  
597 S.W.: I'm also part of the Jehovah's Witness Protection  
Program.  
598 Audience: ((laughter))  
599 S.W.: I have to go door-to-door  
600 and tell everybody I'm somebody else.  
601 Audience: ((laughter))  
602 S.W.: I think it's wrong  
603 that only one company makes the game Monopoly.  
604 Audience: ((laughter))  
605 {applause}  
606 S.W.: I'm writing an unauthorized autobiography.  
607 Audience: ((laughter))  
608 S.W.: when it comes out,  
609 I'm going to sue myself.  
610 Audience: ((laughter))  
611 S.W.: 24 hour banking?  
612 I don't have time for that.  
613 Audience: ((laughter))  
614 S.W.: a friend of mine has a trophy wife  
615 but apparently  
616 it wasn't first place.  
617 Audience: ((laughter))  
618 {applause}  
619 S.W.: I'm exhausted from trying to believe  
620 unbelievable things.  
621 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
622 S.W.: all my friends tell me stories  
623 and at the end they say:  
624 "isn't that unbelievable?",  
625 then I say:  
626 "I guess so"  
627 then I try to believe it,  
628 then I'm exhausted.  
629 Audience: ((laughter))  
630 S.W.: and I have to be asleep by one in the morning  
631 because my dreams are gonna start  
632 whether I'm sleeping or not.  
633 Audience: ((laughter))  
634 S.W.: which can make for some pretty strange conversation  
635 if I'm still awake.  
636 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
637 S.W.: I thought those were your rickshaws.  
638 Audience: ((laughter))  
639 S.W.: what the hell are you talking about?  
640 Audience: ((laughter))  
641 S.W.: when I was in high school  
642 I worked in a pet store

643 and they fired me  
644 because, uh..  
645 what happened was, uh..  
646 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
647 S.W.: they had three snakes in there  
648 and, uh, one day I braided them.  
649 Audience: ((laughter))  
650 S.W.: I tried to pass it off  
651 as one snake with three heads.  
652 Audience: ((laughter))  
653 S.W.: oh, yes,  
654 it's very rare  
655 it's from Connecticut.  
656 Audience: ((laughter))  
657 S.W.: I asked my girlfriend  
658 if she ever had sex with a woman,  
659 and she said:  
660 "no."  
661 and I said:  
662 "you should try,  
663 it's fun."  
664 Audience: ((laughter))  
665 S.W.: and she did.  
666 now she's gone.  
667 Audience: ((laughter))  
668 {applause}  
669 S.W.: you never see advertisements for string,  
670 Audience: ((laughter))  
671 S.W.: they make string  
672 but they never advertise.  
673 Audience: ((laughter))  
674 S.W.: if I ever did a commercial,  
675 it would be for string.  
676 hi, if you need to get some string  
677 get this string,  
678 Audience: ((laughter))  
679 S.W.: it's the greatest string in the world.  
680 it's almost rope.  
681 Audience: ((laughter))  
682 S.W.: but it's not,  
683 it's string.  
684 Audience: ((laughter))  
685 S.W.: and you can cut it up into different lengths  
686 and tie stuff up with it and stuff.  
687 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
688 S.W.: I don't know  
689 what you're gonna do with it,  
690 just get it.  
691 Audience: ((laughter))  
692 S.W.: yesterday,  
693 I returned a movie.  
694 the people at the theatre were pissed.  
695 Audience: ((laughter))  
696 S.W.: so I rented a movie  
697 and I put it in the DVD player  
698 and before the movie starts,  
699 it says:  
700 "uh, this film has been modified to fit your  
television."

701 Audience: ((laughter))  
702 S.W.: can you imagine if it wasn't?  
703 Audience: ((laughter))  
704 S.W.: all you'd see is like a knuckle.  
705 Audience: ((laughter))  
706 {weak applause}  
707 S.W.: so I'm driving  
708 down the highway,  
709 there's a guy hitchhiking  
710 he's holding a sign  
711 that says 'heaven'.  
712 so I hit him.  
713 Audience: ((laughter))  
714 {applause}  
715 S.W.: probably he went there,  
716 he looked like a nice guy.  
717 Audience: ((laughter))  
718 S.W.: I got a new dog,  
719 he is a 'paranoid retriever',  
720 Audience: ((laughter))  
721 S.W.: he brings back everything  
722 because he is not sure  
723 what I threw him.  
724 Audience: ((laughter))  
725 S.W.: sometimes I like to go into a waiting room  
726 and just sit there and wait,  
727 Audience: ((laughter))  
728 S.W.: nurse comes out:  
729 "do you have an appointment?"  
730 "no,  
731 just waiting."  
732 Audience: ((laughter))  
733 S.W.: "what are you waiting for?"  
734 "nothing, just avoiding the moments"  
735 Audience: ((laughter))  
736 S.W.: "would you like to see the doctor?"  
737 "I don't know.  
738 what kind of a doctor is he?"  
739 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
740 S.W.: "he's a foot doctor."  
741 (5.0)  
742 "I'd like to see a man that tall"  
743 Audience: ((laughter))  
744 S.W.: a few minutes later a 12 inch guy walks out into the  
waiting room,  
745 Audience: ((laughter))  
746 S.W.: he says:  
747 "take off your shoes and socks".  
748 I take 'em off  
749 he looks at me and says:  
750 "there's nothing wrong with you."  
751 I say:  
752 "take off your shoes and socks."  
753 he said:  
754 "what do you think?"  
755 I said:  
756 "I don't know.  
757 I've seen bigger feet on a bird."  
758 Audience: ((laughter))

759 S.W.: then he started dancing,  
760 really fast  
761 and whistling really loud  
762 and then I left.  
763 Audience: ((laughter))  
764 {beginning applause}  
765 S.W.: what the hell did you think was gonna happen?  
766 Audience: ((laughter))  
767 {beginning applause}  
768 S.W.: you people are crazy.  
769 Audience: ((laughter))  
770 S.W.: when I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade  
771 I had a seventy-year-old teacher,  
772 and she could barely hear anything  
773 so she would turn the thermostat down to sixteen  
774 degrees  
775 so in case anyone talked  
776 she could see your breath coming out of your mouth.  
777 Audience: ((laughter))  
778 S.W.: that was the same year I had a globe  
779 that lit up  
780 and I used to use it as a night light,  
781 put it on the floor in my bedroom  
782 which was pretty cool except some nights  
783 I'd wake up in the middle of the night  
784 all freaked out  
785 thinking I was floating in outer space.  
786 Audience: ((laughter))  
787 S.W.: then in 1969  
788 a teacher showed us pictures of the Earth  
789 taken from the Apollo.  
790 and she said:  
791 "does anyone know what this is?"  
792 and I said:  
793 "yes, that's the floor in my bedroom."  
794 Audience: ((laughter))  
795 S.W.: when I was seven,  
796 my parents had a party  
797 and I went around to all the guests with a glass of  
798 water  
799 and I said:  
800 "here, drink this.  
801 this is a magic glass of water.  
802 if you drink this,  
803 you all get a little bit taller."  
804 and they all drank some  
805 and they thought,  
806 "oh, isn't this a weird kid?"  
807 and when they all drank some  
808 and went back to what they were doing,  
809 I went to the room  
810 where they keep all the coats,  
811 and I hemmed all the sleeves two inches.  
812 Audience: ((laughter))  
813 S.W.: they were all freaking out  
814 when they left.  
815 Audience: ((laughter))  
816 S.W.: I'm a tired man.  
817 (3.0)

816 I went to high school in London  
817 because we moved around a lot  
818 because my father thought  
819 he was in the military.  
820 Audience: ((laughter))  
821 S.W.: then we came back to Massachusetts  
822 where I lived and went to school in Massachusetts  
823 but in the summers  
824 I worked in Toronto in a Planetarium.  
825 nine of us worked there,  
826 we had our own softball team,  
827 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
828 S.W.: we would play other Planetariums in the area.  
829 Audience: ((laughter))  
830 S.W.: when no one was inside the Planetarium  
831 we would practice inside the Planetarium  
832 and I played second base  
833 so I stood right under Saturn  
834 and the shortstop stood under Jupiter  
835 and the third baseman stood under Mars.  
836 one time we tried the same set up outside  
837 but everybody was just way too far away from each  
other.  
838 Audience: ((laughter))  
839 {applause}  
840 S.W.: I was just standing in the middle of Utah like this,  
841 Audience: ((laughter))  
842 S.W.: in high school I went out with two different girls.  
843 one was like the girl next door  
844 if you live next door to a whore house.  
845 Audience: ((laughter))  
846 S.W.: the other one was an angel on earth.  
847 she had little bumps on her back  
848 where her wings used to be.  
849 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
850 S.W.: apparently,  
851 at one point she also had wings on the front.  
852 Audience: ((laughter))  
853 S.W.: I went to take her out,  
854 her father said  
855 I want her home by 8-15.  
856 I said:  
857 "in the middle of August?  
858 that's cool."  
859 Audience: ((laughter))  
860 S.W.: that was the first time  
861 I was ever in love,  
862 and I learned a lot.  
863 before that,  
864 I never even thought about killing myself.  
865 Audience: ((laughter))  
866 {applause}  
867 S.W.: sometimes at night  
868 we would go up to the Planetarium  
869 and lay down on the roof  
870 and look up at the stars.  
871 Audience: ((laughter))  
872 S.W.: it was like being in a galaxy sandwich.  
873 Audience: ((laughter))

874 S.W.: I'd bring my harmonica  
875 and I had a pair of glasses.  
876 I painted lines across the lenses  
877 so when I looked at the sky  
878 the stars would become notes on the lines  
879 and I would play the sky.  
880 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
881 S.W.: one time a shooting star went by,  
882 I almost broke my neck.  
883 Audience: ((laughter))  
884 S.W.: I said:  
885 "Lucinda, will you always love me?"  
886 she said:  
887 "I doubt it.  
888 I don't even love you now."  
889 Audience: ((laughter))  
890 {applause}  
891 S.W.: my grandfather had a special rocking chair built  
892 that would lean forward rather than backwards  
893 so he could fake interest in any conversation.  
894 Audience: ((laughter))  
895 S.W.: when I was little one Christmas  
896 he gave me a box of broken glass.  
897 he gave my brother a box of band-aids.  
898 Audience: ((laughter))  
899 S.W.: then he said:  
900 "now you two share."  
901 Audience: ((laughter))  
902 S.W.: one time he said:  
903 "Steven, how old are you?"  
904 I said:  
905 "I'm five."  
906 he said:  
907 "when I was your age,  
908 I was six."  
909 Audience: ((laughter))  
910 S.W.: then he cackled madly  
911 and threw a spoon against the window.  
912 Audience: ((laughter))  
913 S.W.: he was an odd man.  
914 Audience: ((laughter))  
915 S.W.: he once carved a turkey out of a chicken.  
916 Audience: ((laughter))  
917 S.W.: his will was on IOU.  
918 Audience: ((laughter))  
919 S.W.: he told me  
920 sometimes when you lose,  
921 you really win  
922 like if you were playing musical electric chairs.  
923 Audience: ((laughter))  
924 {beginning applause}  
925 S.W.: one time I told him a dream I had  
926 and I said:  
927 "what do you think that means?"  
928 and he said:  
929 "it means you were sleeping."  
930 Audience: ((laughter))  
931 S.W.: I remember  
932 when he died

933 I was a little boy  
 934 and I went to the wake with my aunt  
 935 and I was kneeling down at the casket  
 936 and I was looking at him inside the casket  
 937 and I started thinking about my flashlight.  
 938 Audience: ((laughter))  
 939 S.W.: I started thinking about the batteries inside my  
 flashlight.  
 940 and I said to my aunt:  
 941 "maybe he's not dead,  
 942 maybe he's just in the wrong way."  
 943 Audience: ((laughter))  
 944 {applause}  
 945 S.W.: so I got off the plane  
 946 and I forgot to undo my seatbelt  
 947 and I'm pulling the plane through the terminal,  
 948 Audience: ((laughter))  
 949 S.W.: and the wings are knocking people over.  
 950 then I said:  
 951 "oh, I'm sorry,  
 952 I didn't notice."  
 953 then I almost broke both my arms  
 954 trying to hold open a revolving door for someone,  
 955 Audience: ((laughter))  
 956 S.W.: then I tried to hang myself with bungee cord.  
 957 Audience: ((laughter))  
 958 S.W.: I kept almost dying.  
 959 Audience: ((laughter))  
 960 S.W.: I have a paper cut from writing my suicide note.  
 961 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
 962 S.W.: it's a start.  
 963 Audience: ((laughter))  
 964 {applause}  
 965 S.W.: when I go to the grocery store  
 966 and I see a guy pushing 30 shopping carts across the  
 parking lot,  
 967 sometimes I say:  
 968 "you know,  
 969 somebody else might wanna use one of those."  
 970 Audience: ((laughter))  
 971 {applause}  
 972 S.W.: last time I went to the grocery store  
 973 I caused a lot of commotion  
 974 because I tried to buy that thing at the register  
 975 that separates your food from the other guy's.  
 976 Audience: ((laughter))  
 977 S.W.: "no I NEED this."  
 978 Audience: ((laughter))  
 979 S.W.: you don't know  
 980 what it's like where I live.  
 981 Audience: ((laughter))  
 982 S.W.: I went into a store  
 983 and I asked the woman  
 984 if she had anything to put underneath the coasters.  
 985 Audience: ((laughter))  
 986 S.W.: I told her  
 987 my coasters are marking up my tables.  
 988 Audience: ((laughter))  
 989 S.W.: the woman started crying.

990 Audience: ((laughter))  
 991 S.W.: then I went into another store  
 992 and I asked them if they had any maps  
 993 that weren't aerial views.  
 994 Audience: ((laughter))  
 995 S.W.: that guy was weeping openly.  
 996 Audience: ((laughter))  
 997 S.W.: then I said to him:  
 998 "was the blue the sky or the water?"  
 999 he said:  
 1000 "just get out of my store."  
 1001 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1002 S.W.: when I was little my grandmother said:  
 1003 "Steven come over here."  
 1004 I said:  
 1005 "what do you mean?"  
 1006 she said:  
 1007 "you know,  
 1008 you're over there  
 1009 now come over here."  
 1010 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1011 S.W.: she said:  
 1012 "here's five dollars and  
 1013 don't tell your mother  
 1014 that I'm giving this to you."  
 1015 I said:  
 1016 "it will cost you more than that."  
 1017 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1018 {weak applause}  
 1019 S.W.: I remember  
 1020 when I was a fetus  
 1021 I used to sneak out at night  
 1022 when my mother was sleeping.  
 1023 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1024 {applause}  
 1025 S.W.: I thought to myself:  
 1026 "you know,  
 1027 now's the time  
 1028 you should start stealing some stuff.  
 1029 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1030 S.W.: now that I don't have any finger prints."  
 1031 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1032 {weak applause}  
 1033 (4.0)  
 1034 {applause}  
 1035 S.W.: {plays the guitar}  
 1036 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1037 S.W.: "ooh"  
 1038 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1039 S.W.: I said:  
 1040 "ooh"  
 1041 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1042 S.W.: I was "ooh"  
 1043 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1044 S.W.: yes I aaam  
 1045 Audience: ((laughter))  
 1046 S.W.: sooh, yes I am sooohhh  
 1047 A man: yeah.  
 1048 S.W.: {stops playing the guitar}

1049 Audience: ((laughter))  
1050 {applause}  
1051 S.W.: it was very hard for me to write that song.  
1052 Audience: ((laughter))  
1053 S.W.: I had to barely press down with the pen on the paper.  
1054 Audience: ((laughter))  
1055 S.W.: when I was a little boy  
1056 we had a dog and uh  
1057 I don't know why  
1058 but the dog was born with two vaginas,  
1059 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1060 S.W.: and we named it Snatches.  
1061 Audience: ((laughter))  
1062 {weak applause}  
1063 S.W.: {starts playing the guitar and sings}  
1064 "why can't I find a girl like you?"  
1065 Audience: ((laughter))  
1066 {applause}  
1067 S.W.: this next song doesn't go something like this.  
1068 it goes exactly like this.  
1069 Audience: ((laughter))  
1070 {applause}  
1071 S.W.: {starts playing the guitar and sings}  
1072 Eddie was a friend of mine.  
1073 he was killed playing checkers.  
1074 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1075 you know that term 'King me',  
1076 the other guy wasn't sure what he said.  
1077 Audience: ((laughter))  
1078 (5.0)  
1079 Phil was a friend of mine.  
1080 and he was killed walking into a walk-in closet.  
1081 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1082 S.W.: he was walking way too fast and way too far.  
1083 Audience: ((laughter))  
1084 (5.0)  
1085 Dennis was a friend of mine.  
1086 he was killed breaking a wishbone.  
1087 nobody knows  
1088 if it was an accident or suicide  
1089 they don't know  
1090 what he was wishing for.  
1091 Audience: ((laughter))  
1092 (4.0)  
1093 S.W.: Bob was a friend of mine.  
1094 (2.0)  
1095 nothing happened to him.  
1096 Audience: ((laughter))  
1097 S.W.: Warren was a friend of mine.  
1098 he used to play the guitar down in the subway.  
1099 and then he decided to go electric  
1100 and he plugged into the third rail  
1101 and he died.  
1102 Audience: ((laughter))  
1103 S.W.: like my daddy used to say  
1104 "if worse comes to worse  
1105 we're screwed."  
1106 Audience: ((laughter))

1107 {weak applause}  
1108 S.W.: he told me to think of the sunset  
1109 from the sun's point of view.  
1110 Audience: ((laughter))  
1111 S.W.: he told me  
1112 I was born eight and a half months premature.  
1113 Audience: ((weak laughter))  
1114 S.W.: Paul was a friend of mine.  
1115 he was killed playing tag.  
1116 it wasn't really tag  
1117 it was push.  
1118 Audience: ((laughter))  
1119 (4.0)  
1120 S.W.: near the Grand Canyon.  
1121 Audience: ((laughter))  
1122 S.W.: when I was a little kid  
1123 I had a pet possum.  
1124 and he would never ever ever play dead.  
1125 and it pissed me off  
1126 so much that I killed him.  
1127 Audience: ((laughter))  
1128 S.W.: do you think that maybe,  
1129 maybe I am crazy?  
1130 on a scale of 1 - 10,  
1131 six being the highest.  
1132 Audience: ((laughter))  
1133 S.W.: like my daddy said  
1134 my guardian angel must be an alcoholic.  
1135 Audience: ((laughter))  
1136 S.W.: he told me  
1137 that wind chimes were for stupid people  
1138 so they'd know  
1139 when there's a breeze.  
1140 Audience: ((laughter))  
1141 {applause}  
1142 S.W.: thank you very much.  
1143 thanks a lot.  
1144 Audience: {applause}

### 17.5. German Summary

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird *Stand-up Comedy*, welche im Deutschen dem Stegreifhumor entspricht, anhand linguistischer Aspekte verbalen Humors analysiert. Das Hauptaugenmerk wird dabei auf die Analyse der Art und Weise gelegt, mit der erfolgreiche *Stand-up* Komiker ihr Material planen und vorführen. Zu Beginn der Arbeit wird die Bedeutung von Humor in unserer Gesellschaft dargelegt, bevor ein Überblick über die Entwicklung von Stegreifhumor, mit Schwerpunkt auf amerikanischem *Stand-up*, gegeben wird. Daneben wird auch ein kurzer Abriss über die Geschichte des Stegreifhumors in Großbritannien und Deutschland geliefert. Die Anfänge der *Stand-up Comedy* gehen zurück ins 16. und 17. Jahrhundert und führen zur italienischen *commedia dell'arte*. Die frühesten Formen des amerikanischen Stegreifhumors gehen auf die Varietéshows im 19. Jahrhundert zurück. Im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts erfreute sich das Genre besonderen Zuspruches und gewann dank zunehmender Auftritte von Komikern in Fernsehsendungen hohe Beliebtheit. In dieser Arbeit stehen die beiden *Stand-up* Komiker, Jerry Seinfeld und Steven Wright im Mittelpunkt der Analyse. Ihr Material wurde transkribiert und diente als Basis für den analytischen Teil der Arbeit. Beide Komiker fallen durch ihre hervorragenden Fähigkeiten auf, ihr Material zu präsentieren, wenngleich ihre

Persönlichkeiten auf der Bühne sowie auch ihre Präsentationstechniken weitläufig gegensätzlich sind. Dennoch wird im analytischen Teil bewiesen, dass sie mit sehr ähnlichen, wenn nicht sogar gleichen Witztechniken arbeiten, diese jedoch in unterschiedlicher Häufigkeit verwenden.

Vor dem eigentlichen Analyseteil wird der Fokus auf die verschiedenen Humorthorien gelegt, die im Laufe der jahrhundertelangen Forschung von einflussreichen Philosophen und Linguisten aufgestellt wurden. Die Anfänge der Humorforschung liegen in den Arbeiten der beiden Philosophen Aristoteles und Platon, die, wie Hobbes, von der Annahme ausgehen, dass alles Komische auf einem Gefühl der Überlegenheit beruht. Dieses Gefühl bildet sich dann, wenn man über die Nachteile oder die Niederlage anderer lacht (Überlegenheitstheorie). Des Weiteren wird die Inkongruenztheorie mit ihren Hauptvertretern Kant und Schopenhauer diskutiert, die das Komische als Resultat zweier unvereinbarer Bedeutungsebenen versteht. Dabei wird das vom Zuhörer bzw. Leser Erwartete nicht erfüllt, und er wird in seiner Erwartungshaltung somit enttäuscht. In diesem Zusammenhang wird auch auf Raskin verwiesen, der eine zentrale Rolle in der Entwicklung der Theorie zur Auflösung der Inkongruenz spielt. In Bezug auf die Erleichterungstheorie wird das Hauptaugenmerk auf die

Philosophen Spencer und Freud, den Begründer der psychoanalytischen Humortheorie, gelegt. Beide gehen davon aus, dass das Lachen eine Art Befreiung der im Körper gesammelten Energie ist, die sich vor allem bei der Beschäftigung mit Tabuthemen anstaut. Freuds Studie kann im Gesamten betrachtet als eine Synthese von Erleichterungs-, Überlegenheits- und Inkongruenztheorie bezeichnet werden. Zum Abschluss der Auswertung diverser Humortheorien wird die allgemeine Theorie verbalen Humors von Raskin diskutiert, die auf der Basis von Skriptoppositionen beruht. Dabei gelangt man jedoch zu dem Schluss, dass diese Theorie nicht vollständig auf die Analyse von Stegreifhumor angewandt werden kann, weil dafür essentielle Aspekte, wie zum Beispiel Körpersprache und Intonationswechsel, keine Berücksichtigung finden.

Im Anschluss werden als Vorbereitung zum analytischen Teil verschiedene Humorgenres und charakteristische Witzformen näher betrachtet. Auch wird der Unterschied zwischen Stegreifhumor (monologische Präsentation) und dem Erzählen von Witzen innerhalb einer Gruppe mit mehreren Gesprächsteilnehmern (dialogische Präsentation) offen gelegt. Dabei wird vor allem die Bedeutung der Art und Weise der Präsentation des Komikers und die zentrale Rolle der Zuhörer innerhalb der Stegreifkomik diskutiert. Im Besonderen werden die einzelnen Humortechniken analysiert,

die die Komiker anwenden, um ihr Material zu planen und zu präsentieren. Zu den Techniken zählen paralinguistische Elemente, wie Gesten und Gesichtsausdrücke, aber auch die Anwendung figurativer Sprache. Vor allem Wortspiele, Implikationen, Anspielungen und Übertreibungen können als Hauptsäulen der Entwicklung erfolgreichen Stegreifhumors angesehen werden. Diese werden in Zusammenhang mit zahlreichen linguistischen Aspekten, wie Wiederholungen oder der expliziten Verwendung von Pausen und Intonationswechseln, gebracht. Der Hauptteil der Arbeit dient der Analyse von authentischem Material der beiden *Stand-up* Komiker, Jerry Seinfeld und Steven Wright, und ihrer Verwendung der im theoretischen Teil vorgestellten Humortechniken und linguistischen Aspekte, sowie dem Einsatz figurativer Sprache. Auch die Rolle der Zuhörer und das direkte Eingehen des Komikers auf die Zuhörer wird im Detail untersucht. Bedingt durch den sehr gegensätzlichen Präsentationsstil der beiden Komiker stehen teils unterschiedliche Aspekte im Vordergrund ihrer Analyse. Durch die detaillierte Auswertung des Materials der beiden Künstler wird verdeutlicht, dass Stegreifhumor ein sehr komplexes Humorgenre ist, das höchste Konzentration und Fähigkeit seitens der Komiker voraussetzt. Höchst unterschiedliche Strategien führen zur Kreation einer individuellen Persönlichkeit auf der Bühne, wie im Falle

der untersuchten Humoristen herausgestellt wird. Seinfeld hat auf der Bühne eine Persönlichkeit entwickelt, die äußerst natürlich ist und sehr seinem wirklichen Charakter gleichkommt. Wright hingegen stellt eine sehr monotone, teils sogar apathisch wirkende Bühnenpersönlichkeit dar, und gibt stets nur vor, von seinem eigentlichen Charakter zu sprechen. Nichtsdestotrotz werden oft ähnliche, teils sogar gleiche Strategien und Techniken innerhalb der Organisation ihrer Präsentationen angewandt. Darunter fallen die Präsentation des Lächerlichen, die Intonation und der Einsatz nonverbaler Aspekte. Aber auch Unterschiede werden herausgestellt, wie zum Beispiel die Inhalte des von den Komikern verwandten Materials. Seinfeld bezieht sich ausschließlich auf Themen, die den Zuhörern geläufig sind, und erzeugt häufig Humor durch das Bewusstmachen bestimmter Gewohnheiten auf Seiten der Zuhörer. Dadurch bildet er eine Beziehung zu den Zuhörern auf, die ihr eigenes Verhalten in bestimmten Situationen wiedererkennen können und Solidarität zeigen, indem sie zum einen Seinfelds Programm schätzen und zum anderen auch über sich selbst lachen können. Wright hingegen erfindet Geschichten über Dinge, die er vorgibt, selbst erlebt zu haben und erzeugt Humor hauptsächlich durch die darin hervorgebrachte Inkongruenz. Beide Komiker unterscheiden sich auch im Hinblick auf positive und negative Höflichkeitsstrategien. Während

Seinfeld großen Wert auf negative Höflichkeit (Auftreten mit Anzug und Krawatte) legt, spielen diese formalen Höflichkeitsaspekte für Wright keine Rolle. Er schafft Solidarität dadurch, dass er den Zuschauern das Gefühl vermittelt, dass sie den gleichen Sinn für Humor haben und somit auf einer Ebene angesiedelt sind.

Die im letzten Kapitel entworfenen Diagramme dienen der bildlichen Darstellung der Entwicklung von Humor in der Stegreifkomik und setzen die unterschiedlichen Elemente, die für eine erfolgreiche Präsentation verantwortlich sind, in Beziehung zueinander.

Abschließend lässt sich anmerken, dass Humor in dem von mir ausgewerteten Material hauptsächlich aus Inkongruenz, welche sich in der Pointe der einzelnen Witze spiegelt, geschaffen wird. Dadurch wird unterstrichen, dass beide Komiker die Absicht verfolgen, die Erwartungshaltung der Zuhörer zu täuschen und sie durch Bewusstmachung eben dieser Täuschung zum Lachen anzuregen.

*Failure is the foundation of success,  
and the means by which it is achieved.*

Lao Tzu, *The Way of Lao Tzu*,  
Chinese philosopher  
(604 BC-531 BC)

# Lebenslauf

## Persönliche Daten

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